

IGBO MAN'S TRAITS IN NWAOUZUZU'S *NKE M JI KA* AND NWANA'S *OMENUKO*: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This paper examines the traits of a typical Igbo man as portrayed through the protagonists of selected Igbo literary texts. In contemporary society, it has become worrisome that the Igbo man is gradually losing grip on those admirable qualities for which he is traditionally known for. This study seeks to reawaken the consciousness of the Igbo man in alignment with the Igbo saying, “*a mụọ nwoke ya buru nwoke*,” which literally means that a man ought to behave like a man. The aim of the paper is to revisit the past in order to identify those personality traits historically associated with the Igbo man. The research adopts a descriptive approach in analyzing the traits embodied by the protagonists in the selected texts. Gender Schema Theory is employed as the analytical framework. Two Igbo literary texts were selected for analysis—a novel and a drama text. Findings reveal that the authors portray their protagonists as individuals who possess admirable qualities that approximate those of the typical Igbo man. Onyekwere in *Nke M Ji Ka* makes reasonable attempts to uphold his ideals, although he is challenged by conservatism, civilization, and impatience. Conversely, Omenuko in *Omenuko* successfully navigates the circumstances surrounding him and maintains his identity through diplomacy and dynamism.

Keywords: Personality, Gender Schema Theory, Novel, Drama, Igbo people, Comparative Analysis, Protagonist

Introduction

Literature communicates in diverse ways through language. The message of a writer is passed down through the language of his text. Literature uses language expressively to impart feelings, attitudes and emotions. Culture they say is the peoples' way of life. People of the same culture tend to behave alike. That is to say that the character or behavior of someone quickly tells another, where he is coming from. A person's culture is mostly seen in his behavior. In an Igbo setting, statements and references are made about some men who are becoming females whereas they are physically masculine. These statements are not careless ones or the ones that could be easily swept under the carpet. Whenever allusions like such are made, the Igbo person looks critically at the individual that is being referred to. This could probably mean that he is not living up to expectation. In view of the above, the question of who is an Igbo man, arises. This question cannot be answered without first re-examining the personality traits that an Igbo man possesses. When these startling traits are identified, the consciousness of the Igbo man to guide and protect his identity will be re-awakened.

A person tends to stand out because of the uniqueness of his character. This paper stands for those traits that make an individual or group of people, unique or distinguished from one individual or group of individuals which comes as a result of previous experience (s), and or acclimatization with an environment which has been acquired from time immemorial.

Concept of personality

Personality as a word, is derived from the Latin word “Persona” meaning “Mask” which the Greek actors wear to cover their faces before presenting themselves to the audience. It is pertinent to state that some people tend to claim or have an intuitive understanding of the meaning of the above mentioned concept. Uba (1987: 5) has argued that “personality is a multiphase termed with the result that it is difficult to define and has as many definitions as there are shades of opinion; schools of thought as well as theorists in personality studies”. Here, Uba sees personality as a term which is broader and lacks a compressed definition but can only be defined based on the context it is used. From a different perspective, Edward (1972:313) gave a definition of personality as “the characteristic pattern of behavior, emotions, motives, thoughts, and attitudes of an individual”. This definition appears direct and concise. It indicates that there are physical, observable cum unobservable components and intangible aspects of personality. These are what are put into one whole structure known as the ‘personality of an individual’. On what could be regarded as a more comprehensive definition of the term personality, Derville (1966:131) says;

Personality refers to as the individual's whole psychological make-up. It includes his temperament, character, intelligence, statements, attitudes, interests, beliefs, ambitions, and ideas. It also entails that an individual's personality is shown by his disposition and by the way in which these dispositions are organized.

The definition above, is emphatic. It talks about an individual's appraisal of himself as what defines the personality of such individual. This implies that one's personality deals with one's thought and behavior which are equally viewed by other individuals. Still on this, and from a closer analysis of the concept of personality, Nkwocha, Onyemerenkeya, Ekeada, Ogwudire & Emenogu (1996:145) state,

individuals are not born with a particular personality trait, rather in the course of human growth and development, the genetic materials a person inherited from his parents at conception integrate in a dynamic manner with forces operating in his social environment to form his personality".

The above assertion opines that social environment of an individual and generic factors that govern an individual is contributory to a person's make-up.

Furthermore, psychologists are in agreement of the following basic facts that govern personality:

- i. That each individual is unique. This means that there are virtually no two persons that are exactly the same; identical twins, inclusive.
- ii. That personality is a product of its own functioning. To concur, Russell (1955) says,

Every individual expresses his personality through everything he does, whether it is a visible or invisible action. A personality can be judged by his postures and gestures-by his actions alone and in public-his reactions when he wins or loses a game-his appreciation or lack of interest in cultural things-his generosity, friendliness or selfishness and a host of other visible evidence of his character.

This is to say that personality boils down to different behaviors an individual exhibits that may be visible or invisible but are what truly define that individual. Those behaviors, though inward speak volume when it comes to who a person is.

Theoretical Framework

There are so many literary theories that could be used to analyze literary texts. Some of them are; feminist theory, social learning theory of gender studies, queer theory, gender schema theory, Marxist theory, reader-response theory, gender schema theory, and so on. Among all the theories mentioned above, Gender Schema Theory is chosen for this analysis because it has merits that aid the examination of how a particular gender understands what is required of him or her in terms of behaviour and responsibility, which is the focus of this paper.

The term "schema" refers to patterns of thought. This implies that a gender schema is a pattern of thought where individuals associate information with a certain gender, either male or female. In other words, a child at a young age will learn his or her own gender as well as the societal expectations of men and women through his or her observations in the world. This means that there is an unconscious learning state in this theory which broadens the knowledge of individuals at a very tender age, so as to differentiate left from right.

Gender Schema Theory was formally introduced by a psychologist Sandra Bem in 1981 as a cognitive theory to explain how individuals become gendered in the society and also, how sex-linked characteristics are maintained and transmitted to other members of a culture and was later expanded by Carol Martin and Charles Halverson in 1983.

It is a cognitive theory of gender development that states that gender is a product of the norms of one's culture. This tends to define why a particular set of people exhibit some behavioral traits in them. This is as a result of their way of life which has been in existence from time immemorial. This further explains why this theory seeks to explain how

children learn and adopt gendered characteristics and behaviors. It went ahead to state that during childhood development, that many individuals develop a gender schema or an organized set of gender-related beliefs which goes a long way to influence their behavior. According to this theory, immediately children have in any way formed a basic gender identity, they start developing gender schemas. The gender schemas are based on children's interactions and observations of others, their environment and the culture. In other words, this theory is trying to emphasize that the key points of this theory are; interactions, observing other individuals, observing their environments and observing their culture. This also means that a child's lifestyle is sharpened and organized based on his or her societal norm or culture.

How The Theory Works:

A child who lives in a very traditional culture may grow up to believe that a woman's role is in the caring and raising of children while that of the man is in work and industry. It is through all these observations that children quickly form schema relating to what men and women can and cannot do.

Again, a five year old baby boy might have a schema which stores information about which type of dressings are for females and what types are for males. This will automatically guide him in every stage of his or her growth. Reshaping behavioral lifestyle is not left out here.

Portraying the Igbo Man in the Characters of Onyekwere and Omenuko in *Nke M Ji Ka* and *Omenuko*, respectively

This topic needs the attention it deserves and in order to give it the desired attention, it would be gainsaying to first, find out the basic things that determine a personality. This is to say that two persons who grew up in the same or even different environments can behave somehow different from each other, is not a mere say. On this, Obimba (2003:15) examines two basic factors which are classified as heredity and environment. Further throw of light on these two would aid better understanding. Heredity simply means those traits, qualities or characteristics that are passed on, from parents to their offspring. That is to say, it is a genetic inheritance that includes all those natural traits (passed through genes) in which an individual gets from his parents, through conception. Some of such traits include but are not limited to; height, colour of the eyes, colour of the hair, facial features, body chemistry like the blood group in most cases and so on.

This notwithstanding, it is pertinent to note that environment affects people. Again, facilities with which individuals interact with in the environment, influence the said individual. Truth be told, in the course of the interaction, the individual's characteristics, qualities or traits are influenced. The two sub-divisions of the word "environment" which are; intrauterine environment and postnatal environment are relevant here for emphasis. The healthy being of a pregnant mother and the nature of food and drugs she takes affect the fetus positively or negatively with a percentage of about 80%. This also, affects the type of person the fetus will eventually become in life. This is the first stage. The second stage of the environmental factor is the influence of home, the school, the community and the society at large which connotes the general culture where a child is trained in. All these are major determinants of a child's personality. Regarding this, it is to be noted that one can say that natural factors acquired via heredity and cultural factors from an environment have a whole impact on the type of personality in which eventually forms a person. Based on aforementioned, the personalities of Onyekwere in *Nke M Ji Ka* by Nwaozuzu and Omenuko in *Omenuko* by Nwana will be clearly examined as true representatives of the personality of a typical Igbo man. This will be done using the following as guide:

- i. Polygamous;
- ii. Hard work ;
- iii. Patriotism;
- iv. Courage;
- v. Ambition;

Polygamous

The Igbo man is a being that is polygamous in nature. It is one of the criteria for taking a prestigious title like *ozo* title in Igbo land, hence the need to marry more than one wife. It is not a child's play to marry more than one wife, so it is believed that any man who is capable of marrying and maintaining more than one wife could be trusted with serious and many other responsibilities. When it comes to taking up leadership roles in the traditional rating, a monogamous Igbo man is not allowed to play or take part in the community. It is seen and considered a thing of experience. If a

monogamous man has not been in a polygamous lifestyle, how then will he be able to gather the experience to lead a community or function well in a leadership position in the community.

There are other reasons why a typical Igbo man marry more than one wife. One of which is since it is a way of exhibiting affluence. Again, one could easily notice the relevance of marrying more than one wife from some of names the Igbo people bear, which depict having many children. One woman may not be able to give birth to numerous children. This is a clear indication that a typical Igbo man can go to any length as marrying more than one wife in order to get a child especially the male child. Another essentiality of embracing polygamy is for agricultural purposes. This is for sustenance in the Igbo traditional setting. The more hands, the better when it comes to farming. Work production is also enhanced, so polygamy provides the much needed hands for the polygamist.

In view of these and from the texts, Onyekwere in *Nke M Ji Ka* and Omenuko in *Omenuko* have this resemblance as both of them are husband of more than one wife and also lived with them. By applying the gender schema theory here, both men knew their responsibilities as polygamist and as Igbo husbands and carried them out effectively.

Hard work

A typical Igbo man is known for hard work. Laziness in the life of an Igbo man is considered a taboo in Igbo land. Come to think of it, the Igbo proverbs like; *onye gbaa bọl ọ rachaa oroma*, aka *aja aja na-ebute ọnyụ mmanụ mmanụ*, and *ụkwụ gbara apiti na-eri ihe oma* all indicate that the antidote for failure is hard work, hence the need to start early in life to achieve success. The writers of these texts understand and portrayed the chief characters as men who know what it means to be a hardworking Igbo man in order to stand out and stand for what they represent. Onyekwere in *Nke M Ji Ka* exhibits this trait by being a hardworking king for his people; the people of Umueleme. From the way he rejected and fought the missionaries so as to protect his people could be attributed to hard work. He hated what his people hated. This is because of being referred to as a weakling king or a loafer. His people believed in him. From the way he provides for his family which shows that they didn't lack, indicates how hardworking of a man he is. One can easily tell a hardworking husband from his family.

On the other hand, Omenuko in *Omenuko* worked hard by serving his master, Omemgboji diligently. This hard work of his, triggered blessing and good wishes from his master. He also worked hard to get commendation from Eze Mgborogwu, when he was in exile. This request was granted and he was made a regent despite being a sojourner. Same hard work, gave him recognition in the eyes of the District Commissioner who made him the leader and spokesperson of the kings that attended the court.

Patriotism

This is another trait found in a typical Igbo man. He remembers where he is coming from. No matter what, he never forgets his home or his people. He finds a way of improving situation for the sake of his people. The Igbo man is known for carrying out his community duties by himself for his community development purposes. No wonder the saying; *akụ ruo ụlọ*... This is a short form of saying that when wealth gets home, it says who owns it. This is a clear indication that a typical Igbo thinks home first when he becomes a 'man'.

In the case of the selected texts, the writers didn't portray the characters as wealthy rather they portrayed them as the typical Igbo man who thinks about home or community first in every situation or circumstance.

In *Nke M Ji Ka*, Onyekwere exhibited his patriotic quality as a king representing Umueleme in several occasions where he brought honour to his people by standing firm to reject the missionary lifestyle which their forefathers didn't practice even when the missionaries were not giving up. Also, as a patriot, he fought the missionaries who came to invade his community with every strength in him, to the extent that he sends his servant Echefu to get information that would help him protect his people from the missionaries. When he discovered that he (Onyekwere) misfired by maliciously damaging the properties of the missionaries, he was jailed. Despite this, he never failed to put the interest of his people first. When he finished serving his jail term, he came out, he realized his mistakes and sought for his people to tell carry them along with his intentions for them and made sure he had their acceptance.

On the other hand, Omenuko in *Omenuko* equally portrayed the patriotic qualities. He discovered that the offence he committed by selling some of his servants and porters hindered his progress and peace in his life. He did not stop, rather he sought for ways of solving this problem. He did this by making peace with his people as well as appeasing the gods of the land. He paid back the token he collected from the slave dealers and recovered the ones he sold into slavery. He made sure to settle them comfortably, built houses and also established them.

Courage

If one wants to see a typical fearless being, then such person should go find a typical Igbo man. The Igbo man is a courageous being who controls his fears, faces them and tackles them, no matter the danger, pain and opposition, involved. He at every time, take his destiny in his hands to make sure that he is not marginalized. This is the reason why their presence is recognized in every part of the world and hence they are referred to as *ndị Igbo*.

Onyekwere the protagonist of the play was hunted by fear and intimidation of failure as well as fear of being regarded as a weakling king. Kings are answerable to their decisions. This guided the decision he took but because of that trait of courage which he exhibited as a typical Igbo man, he stood his ground and faced the missionaries that invaded his community. He insisted that his forefathers were resolute and never accepted any 'foreign body'. For instance, in order to exhibit his fearlessness for himself and his people, he sent some young males to go and burn down the church where the missionaries occupy since they do not want to leave the easy way.

Eze: ... *ihe m zịgara ụmụ okorobia m na-achị ka ha jee kpọọ
okụ bụ ụlọ ụka. Ya ka ha mere.* (pg. 80)

Eze: ...what I sent the boys who I rule to burn down was the church.

That's what they did.

Conscious of what has befallen him when he was in prison for this act, he still did not regret his actions. He courageously admitted what he did and insisted that they stop tormenting his people.

As for Omenuko in *Omenuko*, he equally exhibited some traits of courageousness. He manifested this trait when he lost his wares at *Igwu River*. He, though cunningly and courageously sold some of his servants and porters due to frustration. This is because his future was at stake and for him to move to the next level in life. Again, it was out of courage that he (Omenuko) took his family to *ikpa oyi*. This place is more or less a no man's land because it is a place designated to people who died abominable deaths. If not for courage, he wouldn't have dared it. In the same light, it was out of courage that Omenuko and his people were able to wage war against the 26 villages that came to fight them in their land. This is a typical Igbo man in action who does not allow circumstances to push him around. For the gender schema theory, a man knows that it is his sole responsibility to take care and protect his family from any form of danger. He leads and his family follows. He takes his family to a safe place and comes out to confront his challenges. This was seen in Omenuko's life. He took his family to a 'safer' place not minding how awkward the place is.

Ambition

An average Igbo man has a target at all times. He sets a goal that he tends to achieve this is because he believes that his destiny is in his own hands. This is why they are in almost all parts of the world in search of greener pasture. His motivation is always his peers. Just a typical Igbo man, Onyekwere and Omenuko were heroes who believed in their capacity and judgement. Onyekwere is from a royal family hence he had an ambition which is to maintain his forefather's traditions and protect them with everything in him. He didn't mind if his acts in the process would land him into trouble or not. He didn't allow the missionaries to weigh him down despite their threats and persistency. His ambition was to continue with the legacy his forefathers left behind. This made his people to believe in him.

On the other hand, Omenuko who is from a poor background, had a humble beginning. This is seen on how he started his apprenticeship with Omemgboji to enable him get settled and begin his own trade. He did everything he could, to succeed hence the need to achieve his goal. He never allowed his low family background to push him down, instead he tried to live above his father.

This is a typical Igbo man in action. The Igbo man believes that a child should be greater than his father especially in everything good. An *ozọ* title name like; *Nnamefọ*... which literary means that if there is anything that the father didn't accomplish, that the son should. This boils down to the ambitious nature of an Igbo man who at every point in time, wants to achieve more than the father.

A Study of Onyekwere in *Nke M Ji Ka* and Omenuko in *Omenuko*: A Comparative Analysis

It is without doubt, that no two persons are the same, identical twins not exempted. In the selected Igbo texts, the protagonists Onyekwere and Omenuko were portrayed as true representatives of who a typical Igbo man is. Despite the above, there are discrepancies in the way with which they represent, as captured in the texts. These discrepancies would be treated in a nutshell based on; rash in decision making, dynamism and tactfulness and adjustment to arising situation.

i. Rash in Decision Making

Omenuko could be termed an Igbo philosopher who thinks outside the box. He took a drastic cum rash decision in selling some of the servants entrusted to his care, to slavery simply because of misfortune that befell him.

On the other hand, Onyekwere took a rash decision by causing malicious damages that could cause a breach of peace on the properties of the missionaries just to show unacceptance.

ii. Dynamism, Tactfulness and Adjustment to Arising Situation

Here, Omenuko seems to have shown more qualities of the above mentioned than Onyekwere. He (Omenuko) was faced with a challenge and he quickly changed with it in order to survive and keep moving. While life became tough for him and he needed to appease the land, he quickly changed his mind set and did the needful. Omenuko was very dynamic. He welcomed the coming of the white man and equally worked and participated very well in his administration.

On the other hand, Onyekwere was faced with what he considered a 'challenge' but he didn't manage it well until it landed him into jail. He didn't navigate tactfully rather he wanted to prove a point. He didn't welcome the missionaries rather he was compelled to. In his decision making, he was rigid in his decisions as well as his actions and belief system. He was a core traditionalist.

Findings and Conclusion

From the above analysis, several traits of a typical Igbo man have been examined as portrayed by Nwaozuzu and Nwana in their texts *Nke M Ji Ka* and *Omenuko*, respectively. The protagonists in these Igbo literary works depict the various qualities traditionally associated with an Igbo man who is truly "a son of the soil." Findings indicate that many contemporary Igbo men have lost their track. A trait that is good and enviable is worth holding in high esteem; however, due to the vices eating deep into society, many Igbo men are no longer identified with the admirable qualities they were once known for.

The authors of the selected texts effectively present true heroes and the values they represent through their protagonists. Gender Schema Theory was employed to analyze the roles played by the male characters, highlighting the traits that a typical Igbo man traditionally embodied as reflected in the selected texts.

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