

## **SECTION F: APPENDIXES**

# 1

## NWOKENESS: A JOURNEY INTO A DISTURBED IGBO PHILOSOPHY OF MASCULINITY

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### **Introduction**

I know that I am taking a risk by choosing to speak on this kind of topic. But, of course, risk-taking is perfectly in agreement with being *nwoke* in Igbo culture. I strongly suspect that when I submitted the topic of my lecture to Ezenwa-Ohaeto Foundation, I must have created a disturbance on many fronts. First, the formation of the word “Nwokeness” from an amalgamation of an Igbo noun and an English suffix signified an in-betweenness that is typical of performances of hybridity, the neither-here-nor-there, being-with-own-values-and-being-with-the-values-of-the-other. For many, it would appear as an absurdity, a mongrel invention that could only amplify the laughable in the linguistic and cultural identity of whoever uses it, or to the group whose life it speaks about. This concern is understandable, for it would seem as if one is trying to elevate and celebrate the ridiculous when such tendency should be seriously discouraged. And it is being discouraged really in Igbo cultural discourses, even if it has come to signify a posture or strategy in humouring the self. The late Igbo highlife musician, Oliver Akanite, popularly known as Oliver de Coque, used this orientation to linguistic hybridization as the theme of one of his albums, “Engligbo,” a rousing and didactic performance in which he advises, “Onye asụzina Engligbo!” Oliver de Coque, in that lead song, provides examples of the “Engligbo” that he discourages.

Projects that focus on saving Igbo language from dying could also view the playfulness in *nwokeness* as one of those symptoms that suggest the endangered nature of the language. These fears about what the coinage might suggest are well focused. But one is borrowing from that symptom to draw attention to a far greater disturbance in Igbo values about being “nwoke” (roughly translated as “being a man”). The closeness of the language to the ailment somewhat helps in the representation of the reality of the problem.

What do I mean by *nwokeness*? If *nwokeness* the same as masculinity, why not just use the English equivalent and stop acting Zebrudaya or even Osuofia? I use the term *nwokeness* (playfully) to capture the unique Igbo cultural idea of being a man, which does not necessarily resemble other understandings of masculinity, either in Western epistemology or those of other African societies. Being a man who is at peace with his *chi*, and wrestles with the world in confidence; a man whose life is ruggedness and industry, and who says “yes” for his *chi* to say “yes;” a man who is a man who is a man who is a man, to the nth time. Thus Igbo masculinity (or more properly, *nwokeness*) is not the same as Fulani masculinity, and certainly not the same as Western masculinity. *Iche eme ka ugo!* For *iche* the parrot will continue to be *iche* and *ugo* the eagle will continue to be the *ugo*. The use of a term like “Igbo masculinity” might appear appropriate, given the modification “Igbo” that is attached, but it does not afford much as semiotic force as the world around the word “nwoke” and the violence that I could further enact by extending the historical context through affixation. Thus, *nwokeness* enters as well as represents the multiple contextuality and double-toned expression in contemporary Igbo social philosophy. Masculinity is a shared semiotic (one could find masculinity in both *nwokeness* and masculinity in Western gender discourse), but there is the peculiar contextual meaning that needs to be understood as an underlying philosophy in Igbo that features in gender politics, economics, leadership, education, etc. Thus, the Igbo *nwoke* needs to be allowed to exist as *nwoke* and not forced to become something else. *Nwoke* has to be monitored too – by culture and tradition, by family, by community, by age grade, etc – so that it would achieve its goals and not go off course to squander its energies fighting himself in the *nwaanyi* the woman.

There is yet another dimension of the disturbance that must have been created by the strange topic. Why focus on *nwoke* and leave out *nwaanyi*? Is it a deliberate attempt to continue the marginalization or even erasure of *nwaanyi* in considering the values of the Igbo? In fact, by focusing on *nwoke* one might be inviting attention indirectly to *nwaanyi*. But for the purpose of this talk, in which I make efforts to deviate a bit from the usual academic conventions in expression and theorisation, I am concerned with the Igbo idea of *nwoke* specifically and what has become of it in recent times. I will from time to time in my talk make references to the Igbo *nwaanyi*ness as a way to explaining the

patterns of the challenge to *nwokeness* in contemporary Igbo life, not as a way of indicating what *nwokeness* is not as one would find in stereotypical representations of masculinity and femininity.

There is a great interest on women and women's issues globally, and scholars in Africa, for various reasons (especially the need to secure patronage from the West) have devoted a lot of attention to womanhood, both in the real and the fictional African world. Check the various departments of English or Literary Studies and Cultural Studies, and you would find a deluge of projects about how women are persecuted or misrepresented in this or that literary work. In a way, scholarship on gender in our higher institutions already indirectly creates the victimhood of men, not just in terms of the justified and unjustified attacks in those works, but by ignoring critical issues about how African societies think about authentic masculinity and femininity, and how these values might be harnessed for the developmental and social transformation in the contemporary period. Of course, there have been some commendable efforts by scholars like Ifi Amadiume, Obioma Nnaemeka, and Catherine Acholonu to move away from Western thinking womanhood and how it applies to African societies. Amadiume's *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* (1987) and Acholonu's *Motherism* (are examples of significant attempts to rethink womanhood in Africa (from indigenous frameworks). Yet, the attraction to feminist reading of gender in Africa has remained in the African academy. This lecture does not align with those hard-line, anti-patriarchal positions; neither does it clench the fist in a counter-reading, as seen in Chinweizu's fiery *Anatomy of Female Power*. It rather calls attention to the need for African scholarship on gender to focus on very valuable aspects of indigenous models of masculinity (and femininity). Western feminist ideas about gender have almost succeeded in destroying the family in the West and the West is desperate, even through grants and many baited favours, to export this anarchy to Africa, just like other expired or *tokunbo* products.

Further, it is important that I reflect on *nwokeness* at a time that being *nwoke* in the Igbo society seems to have come under serious threat (in my thinking) in many fronts more than ever before. In one regard, Igbo people, currently geographically identified as citizens of south-eastern Nigeria, are massively questioning their membership of a country created by a colonial invader, asking for their rights to decide whether to remain a part of this colonial project. At the forefront of this demand are such groups as the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB), Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and Lower Niger Congress. Several unarmed Igbo youths have so far been slaughtered by Nigeria's security agents, as confirmed by media and Amnesty International reports. Indeed, at the heart of this struggle is the undying Igbo cultural idea that the real *nwoke* must not surrender his father's *obi* to an outsider, what more an invader. Those who shoot these young men do not understand the philosophy of self-determination that they

proclaim, that it has roots in their culture and cannot be extinguished by an opportunity to possess and use military force.

There have also been invasions of Igbo communities by cattle militia (for instance, in Enugu State), with several indigenes slaughtered in cold blood and means of livelihood destroyed. I pay particular attention to the invasion of communities in Enugu State because it brings out another threat to Igbo *nwokeness* and an expression of local young men to rise and defend their communities in accordance with a cultural expectation of *nwokeness*. It is also on record that these young men who rose up to defend their communities were arrested by security agents and detained for their action, something that amazed many, for it was expected that it was the invaders of their communities that should have been so treated. For a while, it seemed that major public voices (in Alaigbo and the federal level) kept silent for reasons best known to them. Just insert that arrest and humiliation of those who rose to defend their community in the colonial context of the resistance and detention of the men of Umuofia in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and you would realise that things have continued to fall apart in the presence of our past. Think also about the unfortunate silence of Nigeria's political elite, particularly Igbo elite, when these incidents occurred and how an Okonkwo would have reacted, in exchange of our factuality for his fiction. Was it not that kind of response that would force someone like Achebe's Okonkwo to do something drastic and hang himself afterwards? Perhaps, underlying that silence was the conviction that "it is from the house of a coward that someone points to the house of a brave man and says 'a brave one used to live there, but he was foolish and is now no more.'" Consider this imagined voice and you would understand that, already in indigenous Igbo thought, there are competing philosophies of *nwoke*, at least in terms of putting such *nwokeness* into action in community life.

I am delighted, nevertheless, to be speaking about Igbo philosophy of *nwokeness* (as a broad domain) in celebration of the life and achievements of the late Ezenwa-Ohaeto, a bosom friend and colleague who, I must say, worked tirelessly, demonstrating an admirable Igbo intellectual *nwokeness* in exploring and presenting aspects of the Igbo Mind to the world. Ezenwa-Ohaeto, in his time as a scholar, was almost in every volume of critical essays in African literature, a voice of the night masquerade, harnessing Igbo cultural energies brilliantly. Was he not traversing the land, speaking with a voice of the mother spirit that had not for a long time been heard before, invoking mystic light in a crippling Nigerian postcolonial night in which different kinds of invading *ahụ* are witnessed?

In the subsequent section, I explore certain scenarios of the framing of Igbo *nwokeness* philosophy, using them in preparing the grounds for a discussion on some modern paradigms that require critical attention.

### The Idea of *Nwoke Bụ Nwoke*

When a man makes love to his wife, gets her pregnant, and she eventually gives birth to a baby, his kinsmen would gather to rejoice with him and would congratulate him, saying: "*ị bụ nwoke!*" (You are a *man!*). Is it that, until then, they had not observed that he had anatomical features associated with maleness? Or has he just proved his maleness by showing his penis? Is that they merely want to reiterate his maleness? A sentence logician would easily dismiss "You are a man" addressed to someone who could easily be identified as a man as an empty or uninformative sentence. But from the cultural pragmatic standpoint, the Igbo people congratulating their kinsman with that statement are invoking and consolidating a form of cultural assumption or theory about masculinity, a form of cultural knowledge that would easily pass as a source of stereotypes about manhood and its power in the society. To someone who does not understand how this connotative semiotic of *nwoke* functions in Igbo discourse, it would appear redundant that someone who has eyes and has seen a man would turn to him and say, "*ị bụ nwoke*" (You are a man). But that expression is actually inviting its addressee to a deeper level of discourse where *nwoke* means more than just an entity having male sex organs. Indeed, the man so congratulated is elated that his sexual *nwokeness* has been affirmed by his kinsfolk. If he had been addressed as "*ị bụ nwaanyi!*" (You are a woman), that would have been understood in the culture as a serious form of insult and denigration. Not because it is bad to be *nwaanyi*, but *nwokeness* and *nwaanyiness* are valued when they are appropriately applied or displayed. Both *nwokeness* and *nwaanyiness* are valued as combinatory expressions of *Chukwu-Onye-Okike* the Creation in the mystic manifestation and continuation of life in the universe.

Chukwukadibia E. Nwafor, in his stimulating book, *Leopards of the Magical Dawn: Science and the Cosmological Foundations of Igbo Culture* (2014), explains that the foundation of Igbo thought on gender is that Chukwu Okike created the female first and that female, signified by *Ala*, remains the strongest force in Igbo understanding of creation, even though patriarchy has tried to subvert it.

Chukwu's original first born was a female (*Ube Olisa*) not male (*Oji Eze Enu*) as strictly symbolized by the said egg-laying *Okpoko*. The demotic Igbo word *Akwa* or egg is made up of two *Afa* words namely *Akwu* and *Ora* lit. Nest of the Sun or Light, in reference to the golden yolk nested in the white shell (*Nne Okpoko's* spot of resurrection) which symbolizes *Ogbolodo* – the brightest star in the sky – or the birth star of the universe. Another *Afa* variant for this first Sun of the universe is *Aka Ora* (Ancient Sun) or *Ora Odii* (Concealed Sun). (2014:159)

Nwafor, like many scholars, reinforces the idea of the complementarity of the male and the female – which I understand as dialogic expressions of experimental *okike*.

An extreme and, of course, offensive deployment of “*ị bụ nwoke*” and “*ị bụ nwaanyị*” is witnessed in Okonkwo’s snide remark in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*,

‘Looking at a king’s mouth,’ said an old man, ‘one would think he never sucked at his mother’s breast.’ He was talking about Okonkwo, who had risen so suddenly from great poverty and misfortune to be one of the lords of the clan. The old man bore no ill-will towards Okonkwo. Indeed, he respected him for his industry and success. But he was struck, as most people were, by Okonkwo’s brusqueness in dealing with less successful men. Only a week ago a man had contradicted him at a kindred meeting which they held to discuss the next ancestral feast. Without looking at the man Okonkwo had said: ‘This meeting is for men.’ The man who had contradicted him had no titles. That was why he had called him a woman. Okonkwo knew how to kill a man’s spirit. (19)

Okonkwo has just drawn from the practice of cultural presuppositions in discourse in his society, in the context of *njakiri*, but deploying the notion of *nwokeness* as an opposing signifier to *nwaanyiness*, instead of the perception of the symbiosis of both, as explained earlier. Indeed, Okonkwo’s insulting remark clearly indicates that the problem is not sex (*oke* and *nwunye* or maleness and femaleness) but gender – the social or cultural values that are attached to being male or female. How we deploy distinctions of sex in our discourses in given contexts is really where the problem lies. People sometimes make bad use of good values and establish such bad use gradually as a norm. In the case cited above, Okonkwo makes such bad use of an enduring value of industry and *ikpata akụ* (wealth acquisition) in authentic *nwokeness*. That does not in any way cancel out *igba mbọ* and *ikpata akụ* as bad pursuits. In fact, one could view the insult as an indirect way *nwannadi* energises a fellow citizen through critique. The fellow ridiculed by Okonkwo would go back and work harder to defeat want and climb the social ladder as *mmadu ọmụ ruru n’okwu*. Is that not the same way that Okonkwo himself felt a sense of shame in his inherited poverty and low estate and had to do something laudable to become *mmadu ọmụ ruru n’okwu*?

When a man defeats another man in a wrestling bout and beats up another, he is also congratulated for having proved to the other fellow that he is truly

a man. Masculinity is thus constructed as an ability to subdue the other, which is also why men have to discard all fear for personal safety and concern for the consequences of physical violence on themselves and the other when they rise and go to war. Men who refuse to go to war, or are afraid of war and bloodshed, are laughed at and referred to as women in the traditional Igbo society, a cultural outlook that Chinua Achebe very effectively represents in Okonkwo's orientation to war and violence in *Things Fall Apart*, and Tony Ubesie's representation of Obinna's refusal to go to war in *JùỌ Obinna*. Young boys growing up in the traditional Igbo society are taught the ways of curing their fear through initiation into groups like the *mmanwu* cult, Ekpe society, etc. They are taught to grow up to become men who can confront anything in their environment that threatens their survival and the survival of their communities.

*Egwugwu* the ancestral spirit makes it clear to Uzowulu, who has come to settle a dispute with his in-laws over his alleged battery of his wife, in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, that "It is not bravery when a man fights with a woman" (93). The traditional Igbo system cannot recognize wife beating as a show of bravery and actually sees such an act as a devaluation or denial of authentic *nwokeness*. A man who is a man should test his *nwokeness* with his fellow men, because *dike na ibe ya zu n'ụzọ, ha ewere igba naa aka!* When two stalwarts meet, whether in their dream or in real life, we should see the stuff they are made of. Similarly, a *nwaanyị* that is truly *nwaanyị* should compete with her fellow women on the high ideals of *nwaanyịness*. A man that uses a woman to learn bravery has got his theory of *nwokeness* wrong, says the Igbo ancestral voice. That's still male chauvinism, seen from a Western perspective; isn't it? Well, it signifies male pride, but would you prefer that husbands and boyfriends batter the women they are teamed up with, as one has been reading lately, in order not to promote masculinism?

If a man can defeat the life of want and build wealth that lasts, his kinsmen also shake hands with him, look into his eyes, and tell him that he is a man, and that is one trajectory of the *nwokeness* philosophy that Okonkwo aligns with. It is indeed, a very strong philosophy in the Igbo society. It is not bad in itself, but when it is used as a means of humiliating other people, the attitude is deplored. Oliver de Coque, the Igbo highlife musician would, in one of his songs, says: "Oke ita afufu n'eluwa na ubiam adirọ mma" (Too much suffering and a life of want are not desirable). The musician is propagating that important Igbo philosophy which, interestingly, a real man is expected to utilize and wage war against penury. Chinua Achebe articulates captures the condition of the Igbo after the war in the following lines in *There Was a Country*: "Nigeria had not succeeded in crushing the spirit of the Igbo people, but it had left us indigent, stripped bare, and stranded in the wilderness" (228). Thus, given not more than twenty pounds by the Nigerian government

in exchange for thousands he had in the Biafran currency after the Nigeria-Biafra war, and his houses tagged "abandoned" in areas like Port Harcourt, the Igbo nwoke waged another war against state-imposed poverty and, with *Chukwu-Abia-Amuma* on his side, soon rose to dominate the economic space in the country. Oliver de Coque, in that his lovely tune, would say:

*Gaa n'obodo fụ ife ndi be anyị na-artụ n'aka!*  
*Gaa n'ime obodo fụ ife ndi be anyị na-artụ n'aka!*  
*Anyị nwere nchekwube, ife ga-adị mma!*  
*Ife dī ọkụ ga-ajụ oyi,*  
*Mana ọ chọrọ ndidi o!*

Thus, the Igbo would view the ability to provide for one's family and for oneself, instead of begging or depending on others, as another measure of a man. Authentic manhood, for them, is not defined by dependency. Thus, a man that cannot provide for his family is not *nwoke*!

A man is also expected to have a wife; celibacy is abnormal in the traditional Igbo thought. When a man lives his full life and dies without marrying, his burial gives a testimony about the disgrace that he has been: the *ogirigisi* -- that sacred tree used in marking his grave -- is given his table knife (alternatively referred to as "kitchen knife" in rural Igbo discourse) -- to hold for him! This is a mockery which suggests that he should have left a widow who would hold her "kitchen knife." A man who is a man does not hold *mma ekwu* the "kitchen knife" in the Igbo culture. His wife -- who does the cooking -- is the one to own and hold that knife. A real nwoke has to hold his machete and join his fellow men in their male-specific tasks. The indigenous Igbo society depended mainly on an agricultural economy. Such an economy featured metaphors from which one could understand how *nwokeness* was highly valued and coveted. A man who was truly *nwoke* was expected to have *ubi* and *ọba* and eloquently tell the world that he is truly *di ji* through the quantity of yams he had. Ji, the yam, is considered a man's crop among the Igbo and is highly elevated just as the *nwoke* is. A man is eulogised as *di ji* (the husband of yams) or *eze ji* (king of yams) -- praise/title names sometimes adopted as personal names -- because he has distinguished himself in yam farming and not as *di akpụ* (husband of cassava) or as *di ede* (husband of cocoyam). *Akpụ* and *ede* are considered women's crops among the Igbo, even though changes in Nigeria's economy has forced men to go into cassava cultivation today. In fact, men in traditional Igbo societies were so very protective of the yam they had planted that they prevented their wives from planting any other crop like maize and cassava early on the same farm until their yams had grown adequately and would not be in disadvantaged position in competing for nutrients with these other crops. That, of course, was the case in mixed cropping, especially when they did not have enough plot of land

for single crop farming. In many cases, cassava, the woman's crop, either came later into the farm to share space with the yam during the farming season, or is assigned the remaining part of the farm called *olori*; in the latter case, where the family had not got enough yam seedlings for the whole farm. If the family had enough yam seedlings, then cassava must wait till the yam had grown sufficiently. If the family had enough plot of land for farming, then cassava must go to a different plot called *otapuru* which is entirely controlled and cultivated by the man's wife.

This association of *ji* and its cultivation with *nwokeness* shows that the Igbo look for or try to define *nwokeness* from the activities that are vital for the survival of their communities – in this case, agriculture. That means that the semiotics of *nwokeness* may change as Igbo people experience other cultural or professional engagements in their history. In other words, competition among occupations may force *nwokeness* into the semiosis of another activity. What is crucial, however, is that the signification of *nwokeness* essentially foregrounds the fact that *nwokeness* is more of a responsibility than a privilege. The *Diji* or the *Ezeji* as a title has an obligation of continuing to provide to live up to his name as someone who has conquered hunger in his family and community. He is essentially a model for other men in his community.

Does the *nwoke* in *Alaigbo* become *Eze ji* or *Di ji* with tubers of yam bought from the market? Does he become *Eze ji* or *Di ji* when he is *Enwe ubi enwe oba*, when he has no farm and no barn and cannot walk into his farm and dig out a tuber of yam that recognises him as *di ji*? Does a man become *Diji* or *Ezeji* when he cannot differentiate the *ekpe* type of yam from the *abii*, or the *akitikipo* from the *nwankeri*? Does he become *Diji* or *Ezeji* when he does not know the direction the *ji* climbs on the stake as opposed to the *ona*, or when he does not know how to tie the tuber of yam on the barn? Definitely, NO. The *Diji* is a recognition of the agricultural excellence of the *nwoke* in an agrarian Igbo society, indeed a recognition that even his yams could testify (through their number and enormous sizes) that he has, metaphorically speaking, “husbanded” them.

A man that takes a wife takes a challenge to prove his manhood through providing for her and her children and also being able to govern his family. A man cannot be a man when he has no voice in his family, when his wife determines what has to be done. Not that his wife cannot offer useful advice on matters. But the *nwoke* is supposed to demonstrate humane leadership starting with his homestead! This, in modern Western thinking, is an unacceptable male chauvinism. Why should one talk about *his homestead*? But in the Igbo cultural setting, it is not so. Wives – perhaps because they have been taught by culture to accept it as normal -- would require that their

husbands be in charge, that their husbands be able to prove that they are real *nwoke* by making rational decisions, defending their families and providing their needs. Thus traditionally, Igbo women avoid marrying men understood to be weaklings. They consider themselves safer under domineering and no-nonsense husbands than being with husbands who cannot protect them.

To signify his readiness to watch over his family, to be the first to confront all the troubles that invade the home, this *nwoke* builds his *iba* (sometimes called the *obi*) right in front of the main house, facing the *uzo ama* through which visitors walk in. His *iba* is a *panopticon* from which the spirit of *nwokeness* observes the goings-on in the homestead and keeps these within the ambit of acceptable practice in the culture. The *iba* is undoubtedly a centre from which power, symbolically, flows to the rest of the homestead. The *iba* is a fortress against *ajọ umunnadi*, the disruptive politics of other kinsmen (sometimes used to describe kinsmen who are not well-wishers of the homestead). A man who is a man must be ready to confront the *ajọ umunnadi*; he does not just do so from his *iba* where he receives visitors, but is himself the *iba* that holds the *ọfọ*, the *iba* in which these *ajọ umunnadi* must first enter and deal with before they can deal with the homestead. This *nwoke* confronts the *ajọ nwannadi* or *ajọ umunnadi* with his trained speech, with his actions, even with his silence sometimes. And so, anyone that enters that homestead would later nod his or her head and agree that *nwoke nọ na ya*, a man is there!

A man who is *nwoke* is expected to be found among his fellow men and from them learn the ways of *nwokeness*. “A man who prefers the company of women, who stays too long with women (*no denigration of nwaanyiness intended here*), soon begins to behave like a woman,” my late father once told me. Not that a man cannot interact with women, to learn certain things about life from their own angle; no, a man that does not interact with women cannot know them fairly well, cannot know how to live with them. Even male chauvinism recommends that a man that wants to control and dominate women needs to get closer to them, to know how to play and exploit their emotions, even pretending to be in defence of their interests! Ultra-male chauvinism – the type displayed by Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* -- advances the logic that when a man follows a woman up and down, and often loses his head when he is in the company of women, he soon loses his *nwokeness*!

A man who is not just *oke* (male) but *nwoke* is, again, supposed to be *unpredictable*, especially by women. He must not bare his mind but know how to keep secrets. To ensure that this is so, the Igbo would initiate men into exclusively all-male secret cult. A man who divulges the secrets of the cult to his woman is not worthy.

As a man, why wouldn't I be fascinated with this theory of masculinity as the fortress and the *panopticon*, a theory that my father, my uncles, and even my

mother, spent all my growing years trying to inculcate in me through various narratives and cultural engagements? How does anyone expect me to forget these so easily, in the name of unlearning "an unacceptable primitive African thought"? It is not that easy, for the same system of knowledge rightly says that one does not learn how to use the left in performing tasks much later in one's old age. It is just so easy to imbibe this philosophy of *nwokeness* because it is the privileged mode of thinking and indeed the centre of one's cultural education!

As a boy growing up in the Igbo culture and also receiving Western education that tries to discourage male chauvinism, I found myself totally at crossroads as to which model of masculinity to fit into and live by. I needed to stand before my kinsmen and show that I am "nwoke" who could rise and go to war with other men if the need arose; a man who could kill and not the type that would invite his wife to slaughter a rooster or a goat for the family during a festival period, or worse still send for an aboki to kill a goat for him during a New Yam festival; a man who could afford to sacrifice himself for his family; a man who is not even afraid of spirits; a man who is in charge; in short, a man who is a man.

With these cultural understandings of what it means to be *nwoke* discussed above, which many Igbo men like me have received as part of their indigenous education in a patriarchal culture, can we really say that such individuals would not have an issue to settle with gender in my workplace, family life, exploration of ideas and representation of reality, reading of texts that involve interaction between men and women, and even in their spiritual life? Would they not be struggling to reconcile the traditional Igbo idea of *nwoke* and the modern Western *nwoke* who is not in charge of his *obi*, and who, if he resides in the United States or any other place called Igbo diaspora, could be prevented from even entering his *obi* if his wife should report that he is threatening her for keeping a boyfriend. As the Igbo increasingly become diasporic, the greater the trouble they experience in reconciling their idea of *nwokeness* and the Western idea of *nwokeness*, of knowing what to do with their indigenous cultural education on *nwokeness* and *nwaanyiness*. They may be required to unlearn Igbo cultural *nwokeness* in order to fit into the Western society or to benefit from it. For some, it may be quite easy to sacrifice or dispense with such cultural education as economic refugees; for some, it may be just a matter of repressing their Igbo cultural *nwokeness* for a while, to play the tortoise as long as the show lasts. But for some, it may be traumatising and even lead to unfortunate killing of the spouse or suicide, the type that have been recorded severally in among Nigerian couples in the US.

A scenario of ambivalence is what develops in the way many Igbo men have tried to deal with their troubled *nwokeness* (both in the homeland and in the diaspora), identifying with Igbo notions of *nwoke* when it is profitable and

convenient for them, and sometimes identifying with the Western notion, especially because they have to be seen to be above traditional African ways of looking at the world, or because they still need Western or external support for their professional growth and sustenance. In that case, they suppress their orientation to Igbo *nwokeness* in order to be globally approved of as a “learned” person. In other words, living a false life before their kinsfolk and before their Western patrons and friends! Does it not look like sheer hypocrisy for one to present conference papers and write powerful books that criticise patriarchy, just to gain promotion on the university job, but later in church nod the head in consent when the pastor reads from the Holy Book, “Wives, be submissive to your husbands,” and even raise an inspiring chorus as to indirectly applaud the pastor? It is likely that many male Igbo scholars who have grown up in the Igbo cultural setting but have had exposure to Western ideas on gender, would, in that moment of being truthful to oneself, acknowledge that they have to deal with conflicting voices in responding to *nwokeness*. One would like to read narratives about how Igbo male intellectuals try to deal with this problem.

Having noted how exposure to dominant Western attitude to gender in recent times threatens the appreciation and application of Igbo *nwokeness*, it is important that I address some emergent paradigms of *nwokeness* (which are corruptions) that have emerged over time in the Igbo society, the historical circumstances of their emergence, and how they shape thinking in Igbo life.

### Some Paradigms and Corruptions of Nwokeness

#### *Ike-Keta-O-Rie as Nwokeness*

After the Nigeria-Biafra War, the economic life of many in Igbo communities was devastated. Many young Igbo men had to find their way out of their villages to the urban areas like Onitsha and Aba which, even before the war, signified a great future for young people who had to abandon moonlight plays and masquerading in their communities to search for the good life that was supposedly guaranteed by *orụ oyibo* (which, interestingly, included menial jobs like being a gardener, a domestic servant, a porter (the *onye buru*), even being a *nightsoilman* alias *onye buru nsị!*). What was important was that once in a while the person returned with city things – modern dressing, new Raleigh Bicycle, a modern box, gramophone, etc) to prove that he has an *orụ oyibo*. Aba, particularly, had been metaphorised as the context of transition from poverty to affluence, as seen in the nicknaming of the commercial city as “Onye jee, *o baa!*” which proceeds from a play with the Igbo syllable “ba” (literalized as a morpheme as in “*ịba,*” to become wealthy”). Aba and Onitsha were centres of economic attraction for hustlers (as they still remain today) and were sharply contrasted with other towns imagined to entrap people in backwardness, for instance Okigwe and *ọlụ* (Orlu) (its original could have

been an Ibibio record album, as suggested by Prof. Obi Oguejiofor), which were targeted in the following *njakiri* song in those days:

*Obodo niile emepechaala*  
*o fọ ndi Okigwe na o lu*  
*Ndi a na-anakpọ Okigwe amarọ akwukwọ*

....  
 Whereas Aba and Onitsha helped in improving the fortunes of the Igbo after the war through genuine engagements in the typical Biafran resourcefulness, they also provided opportunities for criminal acquisition of wealth. Thus an ordinary cart puller (the popular “truck pusher”) pulled (or rather pushed) his way to *ike keta o rie* fortune in other illegal ways, euphemising these engagements as “Ike keta, o rie.”

For some people in the local communities, there was nothing wrong in *Ike-keta-orie*, given that one just needed to survive in a society where uncertainty had become the norm. Such conditions, they believed had been created by the war, which itself witnessed some forms of hustling at airports and relief centres or merchandising with some among the enemy and in what was regarded as “*Ahija ataaki*” (Attack market), named after the very fact that the hustling business took place in the risky atmosphere of bombing and strafing by Nigerian fighters and bombers. Thus sacrificing ethical values, the *ike-keta-o-rie* of *ahija ataaki* attacked their own Biafran interests, sometimes killing fellow Biafrans, reselling the stolen relief items, and getting famous as the *nwoke* of the time.

Just as hardship forced some Igbo people to dispense with ethical values in the war and immediately after the war, there has been a growing orientation to hustling by Igbo youths, not only in Igbo urban areas, but also outside Nigeria, especially in Asia, South Africa, Ghana, etc. From drug business to kidnapping, from working as thugs to working as contract killers (usually euphemised as “*ikwatu mmadu*,” literally “Pushing someone down”), the *ike keta-o-rie* among the Igbo as among other Nigerian groups, has greatly dented *nwokeness*. Many in the local communities seem to have increasingly found it difficult to distance themselves from ill-gotten wealth; for them, what seems to be important is that the *ike-keta-o rie* has shown “gallantry” by getting the money from someone out there and bringing it to the local community to dazzle everyone. Some, filled with either admiration or envy, would push their own children out to go out there, preferably outside Nigeria, armed with fake visa, to do “what their mates are doing”!

#### **Egonaachi as Nwokeness**

With the unfortunate silent endorsement of *ike-keta-o-rie* came a related model of *nwokeness* as being armed with money. One who is armed with

money is the ruler of others who do not have, or who have less. *Onye nwee ego, o nwee ọnụ okwu*: one that has money has the say, or the right to say. *O nwere akụ nwe mba*: the one that has wealth has the command and the scolding voice! Those who do not have just have know that *ego na-achi*: money rules. *Ego bụ mma nwoke*: money makes a man handsome (which presupposes that such money is a means of covering up the man's ugliness (of character)! One of my kinsmen once had "Egobụmma" as his *aha ntutu* (a salutation name) and through that onomastics frequently drew the attention of his kinsmen to the complex nature of aesthetics in the articulation of a philosophy of *nwokeness*. Physically, Egobụmma was an ugly person and he was conscious of the fact that members of the community took notice of it and laughed at his expense. What was his option than a deconstruction of *mma nwoke* (the beauty of a man) rethinking it as a slippery semiotic that we could only (re)invent with material possession? On the one hand, a man who has ego gets admirers whose perception about ugliness becomes immediately displaced or even obscured by the glitter of gold and the shine of silver. The *mma nwoke* shifts from him as primary locus to the secondary locus of what he owns (that incidentally metonymically represents him). In other words, he is re-identified with what he is associated with. On the other hand, *nwoke* that has *okpogho* (originally a dialectal rendering whose variant was *ikpeghu* but much later adopted as a slang word for *ego* or money in Igbo) has the advantage of using it to reshape self physically. (It should be noted that *ikpeghu*, which came after cowrie shells, was itself a kind of money, now regarded as the dialectal name for money!) The good food, good wine, pleasant environment, etc that he enjoys could change his physiology and physiognomy. The physical beauty of an individual may be naturally suppressed and endangered by poverty and intense suffering. Such thinking has always been there right from the ancient medical traditions of semiotics that paid attention to symptoms of ailment and wellness. Egobụmma as an Igbo construct reminds us that Igbo people, in constructing and reconstructing theories of *nwokeness*, have also been interested in its signification at various levels.

*Akụmụba* could help *nwokeness*, but it is not synonymous with *nwokeness*. *Akụmụba* or affluence is, in fact, given value by *nwokeness*, especially if the *nwoke* has earned it. *Akụmụba* that is in the hands of *onye ọfọ ogeri* who has not merited it is like a jewel in a pig's snout, to borrow a saying from the *Holy Bible*. *Akụmụba* could also ruin *nwokeness*, if it is not handled carefully. Which is why our ancestors also said, "Akụ na-emebi nwoke," even when they also knew that *akụ na-edozi obi* and *akụ na-esi obi ike*, or that *nwoke* who is *dibịa ụlọ* should strive to banish poverty from his household and aim at giving everyone around him the good life.

A strand of the articulation of the *Egonaachi* paradigm is the signification of the *nwoke* who has *akunuba* as *onwa*, the Moon, a pervasive metaphor used by many Igbo musicians in recent times in singing the praises of wealthy Igbo people from whom they have received favours. Representing the *nwoke* as *onwa* presupposes, among other things, the prevalence of a night. Night is one of the archetypal metaphors of fear. Human beings naturally long to be delivered from such source of fear and thus symbolically express their hope for the lumen or light. They hope for a dawn, but until it comes, the *onwa* remains a source of consolation. Since *onwa* is consolatory, anything that challenges or militates against it is imagined as an enemy. One who appropriates the *onwa* identity therefore indirectly invites his admirers to consider anyone that is not on his side of the semiotic as the enemy. Naturally, we cannot have two *onwa* shining in the night. Any other luminary that may want to shine as bright as *onwa* is understood as *Gbuere m onwa* (literally, "Kill the moon for me," incidentally, that is the Igbo name for the Northern Star or Morning Star!).

Ironically, the *onwa*, in many Igbo communities today, would want the night to continue so that they would continue to shine and have admiration as well as dominance in the physical world and mental semiospheres. In other words, the *onwa* as a semiotic and ideology, is not entirely a very positive paradigm for *nwokeness*. It rather constructs *nwokeness* as an ideology that elevates selfishness and domineering spirit in the community.

#### *Aguneechemba as Nwokeness*

Another paradigm of *nwokeness* that is very closely related to that of *Egonaachi/onwa* is the one that is constructed from the fearful animal semiotic of the lion. Of course, *aguneechemba* (the leopard that guards the community) has positive values in Igbo cultural semiotics: the lion is assumed to be playing an altruistic and patriotic role. In other words, the *nwoke* is a guardian who should be ready to defend and even die for his community. Thus, any *nwoke* that cannot view his *nwokeness* through this frame is not viewed as true *nwoke*. It is true that the *nwoke* has the cultural role of protecting his homestead and his community as indicated earlier. But this role implicitly has its abuse in its lion semiotic. The leopard is understood culturally as a powerful large cat of the jungle by virtue of the fact that it terrorises some other animals. How appropriate is it, therefore, as a semiotic of *nwokeness*? Is *nwokeness* a model of oppression and terrorism? Is *nwokeness* more of a principle of physical strength than that of the mind?

Incidentally, the *Aguneechemba* paradigm is visually communicated by some Igbo *nouveaux riches* in the architectural designs of their mansions. In some typical cases I saw in Mbaise, the gate to the residence of the rich man is

designed as the head of a leopard or a lion (variants of the design also show the head of a tiger). Thus, entering the premises or the mansion is analogous to entering the belly of the beast! Symbolically, the kinsmen of this *nouveau riche* that come under the influence of his money have been devoured and/or swallowed up. They are in the belly of their kinsman the beast! Is this not frightening? It may appear as an innocuous artistic design but it alerts us about how Igbo communities may have come under the terrible feudalism of those who have money, such that only these *Agunechemba* could be nominated and voted for in elections; others who are not rich dare not raise their fingers! How can you raise your finger; you want to die?

*Agunechemba* thus also becomes *Aguneerimba* (the leopard that devours the community!) How could one be happy with such a terrorist model of *nwokeness*?

#### **The Perception of Nwokeness as a Struggle against *Nwaanyification***

I had earlier in this presentation drawn attention to the tension between the expressions/pursuits of *nwokeness* and *nwaanyiness*. It is often the poor comprehension of the goals of *nwokeness* and *nwaanyiness* that leads to their conflict in culture. Both ought to be perceived as forms of responsibility. It is admirable and challenging to be nwoke, just as it is to be nwaanyi. Where *oworosu* comes in is when someone has been created as nwoke but is not allowed to grow in the ways of *nwokeness*, or the *nwaanyi* not given an opportunity to develop and know *nwaanyiness* as a worthy construct of personhood.

There are thus two significant but conflicting orientations one notices sometimes in the parenting (especially the mothering) of boys in Igbo homes: in the first place, many Igbo mothers, filled with the pride that they have got sons, would like to encourage their sons to engage in activities associated with *nwokeness*. In fact, most of the time, mothers are those that would make sure their sons become members of the *otu ogbọ* (or *ogbe*) (age grade) where they begin to learn how to protect their rights as nwoke in the land. Many mothers in the Igbo culture would be very angry with their sons for allowing another *nwata nwoke* that is younger (in the age grade or in the community) to take an *oke* (or share) before her own son does (for the Igbo culture authorizes a gerontocracy which, among other things, requires that the person who is older should take his share before the younger takes). That, for her, would mean that her son has lost his birthright in the community. It is even worse when her son takes the matter casually, or does not do something apart from getting annoyed about the infraction. That, clearly, could break her heart, sending her the painful message that *o mụtaghi nwa*, or that *aturu muru ebule gba aka nwa*. Fathers that know the value of *nwokeness* would be terribly distraught too.

Sometimes, however, a mother, in an attempt at getting a loyalist in what has unfortunately become the husband-wife struggle for power in the family, tries to give her son the impression that she is his sympathizer, supporter, and protector in his experience of disciplinary measures from his father. Ndiigbo would call this *igba ọgụ nwa*, a protectiveness that most of the time backfires, which was why Mike Ejeagha the philosophical Igbo performer of *akụkọ neegwu* advises in one of his songs:

*Nwaanyị na-agba ọgụ nwa wepụ aka enwe n'ofe*  
*Nwaanyị na-agba ọgụ nwa biko wepụ aka n'ofe*  
*O mee ghọọ aka mmadụ do o o!*

Naturally, the person who sympathizes with you or tries to protect you in the face of what you perceive as mistreatment is the person you would want to align with or copy. Mother and son thus forge an alliance against an imagined tyrannical father. The consequence, it is believed in the Igbo culture, is always grievous. The male child in such a situation most of the time becomes the main casualty, as he experiences conflicts is his orientation to nwokeeness much later in life. Igbo traditional ethics would capture this in a proverb that is both an assertion and a warning: *Nkịta nwaanyị zuru na-ata akwa* (A dog trained by a woman steals eggs). Indeed, *nkịta nwaanyị zuru* has come to be used in Igbo discourses as an insulting referential metaphor for men who do not exhibit nwokeeness in their involvement in social action or processes. For some people, the proverb and the metaphor of *nkịta nwaanyị zuru* are to be seen as clear manifestations of how men use language as a weapon for denigrating women and consolidation masculine control of the society. Of course, language has always featured as a site where both *nwokeeness* and *nwaanyiness* engage signifying practices to pursue their specific (ideological) interests. It is just one of the several semiotic systems through which both *nwokeeness* and *nwaanyiness* are constructed and maintained.

Families that understand that their survival and growth depend on the training given to their children would not want to trifle with the idea of creating appropriate conditions for their sons and daughters to grow up properly skilled in, and proud of, their nwokeeness and nwaanyiness. In this regard, mother and father do not need to be in any competition at all on the matter of raising their boys in the values of Igbo *nwokeeness*. They both have a responsibility to the training of their sons and daughters, showing them good examples, disciplining them when they go astray. Where a boy is raised by his mother and father without a mutual commitment to his acquisition of sound orientation to *nwokeeness*, there is a big problem for the family and the community as a whole.

Indeed, it takes the whole community to raise a child; so it is also no surprise that in the normal Igbo cultural practice, every adult member of the community once in a while tries to act as a parent to a child of a neighbour, supporting such a child with ideas and values of the community and even taking disciplinary measures on behalf of the real parents when necessary. As the Igbo would say, *Nwa bu nwa oha niile* (A child belongs to the whole everyone in the community) and also caution in a proverb: *Onye huru okuko ka o na-abo nsi, ya chupu ya maka na o maghi ma o bu ga-emecha taa okpa ya* (Anyone that sees a chicken scratching and scattering faeces should drive it away from the faeces, for the person can never be sure of not being the person who would eventually eat its limbs). Thus, one cannot really restrict nwokeness training to only the father of a boy in the Igbo society. It is also futile for a father to struggle to be the only influence on his son's life. This is not to deny that, as well recognized in the Igbo society, the failure of a man in achieving *nwokeness* is principally blamed on his father and not his mother. In this case, the idea of *nkita nwaanyi zuru* is also indirectly an indictment of the father. People would normally wonder where the father was when the mother was training that *nkita!* Even though a mother has some contribution to make in ensuring that her son grows up to be worthy of being called *nwoke* (instead of giving her a *nwaanyiness* orientation), a father in Igbo culture is seen as having a greater responsibility in this *nwokeness* education. In a sense, men understand the ways and values of men better than women do, just as women understand what it takes to be an excellent *nwaanyi* better. This being the case, it is quite natural that fathers have to have time for their sons, and mothers time for their daughters. In growing as the father's student and mentee, a son has a greater advantage of knowing what it means to be *nwoke*. One can thus understand the worry that Okonkwo has about his son Nwoye in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. It is not just that Okonkwo has a low opinion about *nwaanyiness*; it is rather that his son has not tried to imbibe *nwokeness*, and, in Okonkwo's thinking, the father's model of *nwokeness* – a model that has struggled to displace the shameful Unoka model. And who would be the main person people would blame for Nwoye's failure to achieve authentic Umuofia *nwokeness*? Many fathers in the Umuofia community would want their sons to resemble them, to have them as a model of *nwokeness*. When Okonkwo looks at Nwoye and cannot see himself, he is terribly worried, indeed angry. I can imagine him muttering in frustration, *Agu amuola ngwere ikpo. Tufiakwa!* Again in Achebe's *Arrow of God*, this new Igbo man, this *ngwere ikpo* that faces foreign influences from colonialism and Christianity, emerges as Oduche who would be very active as a convert in church activities but without much to display in the Igbo idea of a *nwoke* that must contribute in the preservation of the pride of his community. When Oduche imprisons eke the sacred python in a box, is it not himself as a new colonized individual and his values that have imprisoned? And who is really the agent of this cultural and ontological being-in-the-box? The colonized self,

of course! Perhaps, Achebe has not just given us, in the sub-texts of *Nwoye* and *Oduche*, pictures or cases of Igbo fathers looking for nwoke in their sons, both a disturbing narrative about a future generation of the Igbo taking over from another in the face of foreign interference without a strong disposition for nwoke. It is as if Achebe wants to ask: "Has the colonized Igbo man not culturally castrated himself? Is he not principally responsible for his endangered nwoke?" Are the present-day *Ndiigbo* not that generation that Achebe has written about? Is *nwoke* not scarce in our Igbo communities today?

### ***Nwoke Dị ụkọ in the Postcolonial Ilo.***

Theresa Onuoha of Egedege fame, sang about the importance of the presence of nwoke in a household. *Nnadị letịa anya, nwoke nọ ya!* When the *umunna* take their conspiratorial look into a household and see a man who is a man, they have no choice than to keep a distance. But *nwoke dị ụkọ*; yes it is hard to find men who are men in many Igbo communities these days. Isn't that why strangers would come from across the river and ravage Igbo states and local government areas and towns and wards and villages? Do we still have men there when the roads that lead to the local communities have turned to mere footpaths? Do we still have men there when little boys come and kidnap elderly people and turn to ask their relatives to buy their tortured, half-dead bodies back with millions of Naira? It does appear, painfully so, that many Igbo communities today are populated mainly by the type of individuals whom my late maternal grandmother would refer to as *mmadu-dị-ma-mmadu-akọ*. There are many individuals in those communities but human beings are lacking in them, especially the nwoke, especially *nwoke mgbe gboo* – the original nwoke that was born to master and improve his environment (not the current, polluted version of nwoke!).

Why would an Igbo man get a son and name him "Nwokedi," ("A man is available," or "There is a man (here)")? Does it mean that before the birth of the child, there was no man in the family? If there was none, then who fathered Nwokedi? Obviously, the boy's father is not suggesting a denial of paternity, or that there was no man in the family. He is rather expressing great joy over the availability of someone who is sufficiently qualified to succeed him. He is announcing his pride and confidence over the fact that, in the future, people would look at what is happening in his household and nod their heads and say, "Nwoke nọ ya" (There is (indeed) a man there). The great queen of Igbo traditional music, Theresa Onuoha, in one of her early Egedege albums, would say: "*Nnadị letịa anya, nwoke nọ ya*" (Opponents/adversaries would observe from a distance and know that there is a man there (in the family)). Is it not the hope of every responsible Igbo father that he gets a son whose presence would keep opponents, indeed enemies, of the family at bay?

The name "Nwokedị" also subtly reveals that there is a worry over the scarcity of the *nwoke*, as well as the fear that, if care is not taken, this scarcity might cause a real absence of *nwoke* in a family. Yet, it is one thing to get a male child (and name him Nwokedị) and another to have a real *nwoke* afterwards. The name, in inviting us to shift from a literal *nwokeness* to the metaphorical, overhauls the entire semiotic of *nwoke* as a term. Indeed, whereas the literal *nwoke* functions in everyday Igbo discourse in deictically distinguishing the male, there is a great attention paid to its metaphorical meaning in Igbo life. In fact, one could even say that the connotative uses of the term manifest significantly in Igbo celebration of the values of masculinity, particularly in commending bravery and achievement.

The semiotic of "Nwokedị" implicitly includes the worry that whereas there are many who possess penises, the real *nwoke* is scarce, or is not manifested. Quite rightly, some people in the Igbo society today look back into the past of their world for this authentic *nwoke*. That is to say that if the metaphorical *nwoke* has been scarce, this scarcity is even getting worse. Indeed, the struggle in many Igbo communities has included the preservation of the idea of the ideal *nwoke*, an idea that has suffered in the face of maladapted Western modernity and religion. Or, worse still, the metaphorical *nwoke* in Igbo discourse is changing, such that its meanings are now slippery and plural. A Christianized Igbo village may construct a *nwokeness* after Jesus of Nazareth or a local prophet. At an Igbo New Yam festival in recent times or community fund-raising ceremony, one is likely going to hear a song of adulation to Jesus Christ as the hero of the community, as in this one:

*Okorobịa dī mma*  
*Eze Jizọs okorobịa dī mma*  
*Anyị sokwagị n'azụ!*

There is nothing wrong in adopting Jesus of Nazareth as a model of the real *nwoke* in an Igbo community, provided that model is really at work in the affairs of the community and not a mere cosmetic appropriation. Let us also hope that the *nwokeness* in the Igbo convert has not been killed or replaced with the pastor whose voice rules from the pulpit to a man's obi. Is it not tragic when what the *dibịa ulo* says is not considered acceptable in the household but what the pastor (as the Man-of-God) says is? Or, when what the *dibịa ulo* says is acceptable only when the pastor says the same thing later at the pulpit? What makes the voice of the *dibịa ulo* valid these days? What one finds is that there is a power struggle, not really between *nwokeness* and *nwaanyiness*, but between the *nwokeness* of the Igbo man in his home or community and other invading voices of control and domination. The Igbo home and the community find themselves in a dilemma or divided loyalty in terms of deciding which voice to listen to.

An Igbo community that has been overrun and enslaved by rich local criminals may invent a *nwokeness* which celebrates terror as salvation. In this case, too, the voice of the real *nwoke* is terrorized into silence so that few rich or politically visible individuals pick themselves to speak for the community, upturning the whole Igbo idea of *ọnụ iru mmadụ n'okwu*. They, in their thinking, do not need to secure the consent of other members of the community to become their representatives. *Agwọ loro ibe ya!* Yes, a strange snake has swallowed another and we could see the victim's tale jutting out of the mouth of the other. And, indeed, *agwọ na ihe o loro awụsarala*. *Nwokeness* that swallows *nwokeness* cannot but lie uncomfortably in the terrible African sun. Above all, when *nwokeness* transforms into a snake, it has got a bad name and a bad end.

But these terrible changes in the semiotic of *nwoke* only further reinforce the idea that *nwoke dī ụkọ!* The real *nwoke* is scarce and continues to elude a society that has a false idea of *nwoke* imposed on it. Those who confiscate or control power in society would always try to interfere with its semiotic system, with its meanings; they must always try to manufacture or transform meanings and mass circulate them to change the thinking of the populations.

As I conclude this part of my presentation, I invite everyone to the question of the survival of the *nwoke mgbe gboo* -- the old-time or ancient *nwoke* -- who has to wrestle with his *chi* until this *chi* emphatically says YES; who would sit as a *panopticon* in his *obi* and confront the invading *umụnnadị*, the oppositional outsiders, local or foreign; who would compete with his peers on the art and science of leadership; who would stand up willingly when the community asks those who are men to identify themselves.

Chinua Achebe, from what I have noticed in reading his writings, especially *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, is concerned so much about the travails of *nwoke mgbe gboo* in the changing Igbo world. In doing so, he touches (or rather disturbs) an aspect of my Igboness that I cannot pretend does not run into problems as I wrestle with other models of *nwokeness* in a world that endlessly wages culture wars.

To be *nwoke mgbe gboo*, one has to have the courage to accept the label of being old-fashioned.

To be *nwoke mgbe gboo*, one has to choose to look at the betrayals of Igbo culture, leadership, priesthood, etc really get angry.

To be *nwoke mgbe gboo*, one has to deal with all the *ufu na egbeneke*, all the *ajambene*, all the akpankoro kpankoro, all the *ọfọgeri* in contemporary Igbo society without any compromise.

These are the days when criminals and those who do not understand or respect Igbo culture hijack chieftaincy titles and use such titles as licenses for making life in rural Igbo communities or in the so-called Igbo diaspora unbelievably abused.

*Nwoke dī, ma nwoke dī ụkọ.* There are men, but the real nwoke is very scarce, very rare to find. Show me a man around, and I would like him to prove his *nwokeness*. Show me that nwoke and let us find out whether he (still) understands what it takes to be *nwoke*, not just hanging a male organ as a sign. Show me a man that is man and can show it. Is it not when we find human beings that have penises but cannot see the *nwoke* in them that we realize that things have really fallen apart? *Nwoke dī ụkọ!*

While I join Okonkwo of Chinua Achebe's Umuofia to agonise over the scarcity of *nwoke* and *nwokeness*, I recognise that men who are men have strode the ilo in Igboland. I celebrate *nwokeness* in my remembrance of Dim Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu; I celebrate the *nwokeness* of Ogbuefi Chinua Achebe; I celebrate *nwokeness* of Maazi Mokwugo Okoye; I celebrate *nwokeness* in my memory of Maazi Mbonu Ojike; I celebrate the *nwokeness* of Ogbuefi Osita Osadebe and Chief Oliver de Coque; I celebrate *nwokeness* in my remembrance of Sam Mbakwe – *Dee Sam!*—and I celebrate it of course in Dick Tiger and Power Mike. Please, this is not a roll call. As Oliver de Coque, would sing, "Onye m akpọghị aha ya, ya ewela iwe; onye m chezoro ịkpọ aha ya, ya ewekwarala m iwe!" The names I mentioned are those that quickly raced to my mind as I recalled the wonderful times we the Igbo have enjoyed in the presence of gallant kinsfolk.

### Some Concluding Remarks

I endorse the *nwokeness* that recognises incompleteness without *nwaanyiness*, but that which flourishes in the best expressions of values for the individual and for community. How I use my *nwokeness* in the context of modernity is even far more important. Indeed, the true challenge for my *nwokeness*, I find, is to rise above this falsehood of being neither with my kinsmen nor with the West. I stick with Igbo *nwokeness*, knowing that I have a task of overhauling and enriching it with humane principles which, indeed, have always been there as part of Igbo culture. Fundamental to a humane understanding and use of *nwokeness* is an unreserved RESPECT for the *nwaanyi* as the very source of the *nwoke*. This RESPECT must begin from signification. Authentic *nwokeness* should feel uncomfortable with Okonkwo's *njakịrị*: "This meeting is for men." *Nwokeness* should even rethink the words that the *Egwugwu* addresses to Uzowulu and rather say, "It is not a test of authentic *nwokeness* to look down on women, or beat them up."

Today, the Igbo idea of *nwokeness* is under threat. It has been greatly abused and as such has become even confusing to many Igbo people. Given this confusing nature of what it means to be *nwoke*, young males born into Igbo families grow up without being given sound education to pursue *nwokeness* as an ideology. They grow up not having a grip of their cultural roles and responsibilities in their communities. That great American, Woodrow Wilson, was very right when, in his classic work, *When a Man Comes to Himself* (1915), he wrote that:

A man is the part he plays among his fellows. He is not isolated; he cannot be. His life is made up of the relations he bears to others – is made or marred by those relations, guided by them, judged by them, expressed in them. (p.6)

It is sad that troubles in the post-colonial and post-Nigeria-Biafra war have forced many Igbo men to shun community or become reluctant to interact with their kinsmen, preferring to isolate themselves, or even relocate to other parts of Nigeria where once in a while they are reminded that they are just strangers. Some that are on *ọrụ oyibo* in other parts of Nigeria as well as outside the country, especially the educated ones, would not want to join their Igbo community or town union meetings, offering one excuse or the other. There will always be excuses, but there is no excuse for not testing one's *nwokeness* against others of the same culture, especially in the context of educational, religious, professional, and other differences!

Some others in many Igbo communities today would construct high walls around their residences, symbolically suggesting not just the fear for their safety but also that they want little or no interaction with other people in their communities. "*O nwere onye na-achara m mmoto?*" they would say to register their preference for isolation and non-involvement in the life of their communities. The high wall is an ambiguous semiotic, incidentally; it may tell the owner of the compound who wants little or no interaction that it shields, but it also suggests that it imprisons the owner not just in a physical space but also at the level of imagination and thought! *A man learns to be nwoke, not by running away from ụmụnnadi but by facing them and becoming wiser in doing so.* Being with the ụmụnna, not necessarily because one is happy with everyone and everything, not necessarily that one experiences no challenges in doing so, helps one to learn to become a better nwoke. Thus, one could see *nwokeness* also as a form of education that a man must attend and continue to attend throughout his lifetime. *Nwokeness* is a process, even as one could recognise it as a state or condition in the way a man conducts his affairs. A man's life, my late father told me, is a testimony presented to his kinsmen and to the entire community, throughout that man's lifetime, for the Igbo sage says: *Nka bụ onye na-aka, ụmụnna ya ana-elele.*

The very idea of a man's kinsmen watching how he lives his life as *nwoke* and become witnesses of his *nwokeness* is traditionally demonstrated in the Uri traditional burial rite for a kinsman, with the symbolic ceremony of the *ebule na nkịta* (the ram and the dog). The ram symbolizes courage and is a symbolic statement that the dead kinsman has lived the courageous life of a true *nwoke*. The dog, on the other hand, symbolizes ferocious aggression, and is used in representing the dead kinsman's aggressive confrontation with the challenges of being. Life is war, in the indigenous social philosophy of *Nde Uri*, and in living, a man sometimes has to wag the tail of friendship, sometimes has to bark, and sometimes has to bite. *Ebule na nkịta* -- two mystic animals -- are presented as essential vehicles of the kinsman's soul that is ready to travel to the spiritworld. Perhaps, their choice is also linked with the way *nwokeness* is constructed in a warrior polis of *Nde Uri*. Historically, Uri was a warlike clan that fought several battles with their neighbours prior to British colonization. It was a nation on its own and fought these wars in the name of that distinct nationhood, proud of its those victories, as seen in the nickname given to it by its citizens – *Uri Egbu Ataji Nyịrị Abam* (Uri the destroyer that Abam warriors could not defeat). It fought with the British colonial forces in 1895 and was defeated, but not without the betrayal of their Ihiala neighbours, as Uri history says. The point then is that in ancient Uri nation, being a warrior is measure of a true *nwoke*. At death, therefore, this chivalric and patriotic attribute of *nwokeness* is signified in the ceremony of the *ebule na nkịta*.

With the descendants of Chinua Achebe's character Oduche now in reality rampaging and waging their wars against Igbo culture and tradition, the ceremony of the *ebule na nkịta* has almost been eradicated in Uri burials of their kinsmen, and of course the cultural semiotics associated with the ceremony is another casualty in the Igbo relentless struggle to forget themselves and their values. One could see an interesting parallel between the threat to *nwokeness* and the eradication of the semiotic culture that encodes Igbo *nwokeness*, at least in the Uri case.

The challenge that awaits Igbo parents, as we struggle for the place and survival of the Igbo in postcolonial Nigeria, is provide the appropriate cultural education to their sons. This, in fact, is part of what Kalu Idika Kalu beautifully refers to as the "rebuilding of the Igbo hearth" (2015: 272). Even though it is true that *anaghị abụ tara mmadụ nwoke abụ tara*, no one can become *nwoke* on behalf of another, parents and community members still have a duty in teaching their sons the way to authentic and enduring *nwokeness*. Igbo sons must not miss proper *nwokeness* education in their families, communities, and in formal schooling, even as they negotiate their way to modernity and presence in the global *ilo*. Grown-up Igbo men, too, should also not think that they have fully achieved *nwokeness*. Some, in fact, may have lost their *nwokeness* and need to recuperate it through various means, including

returning to their *umunna, otu ogbọ*, etc where some indigenous education still goes on in the the interaction of kinsperson with kinsperson. As the Igbo say, it is *ikwu amaghị, ibe ezi ya!*

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