

The Perpetuation Of Injustice Against Women: Reflections On Widowhood Practices In Africa And The Task Of The Writer In Challenging The Status Quo

Christine N. Ohale, Professor, Department of English, Foreign Languages and Literatures,
Chicago State University

Introduction:

There are so many neglected issues in African literary discourse but only few are as neglected as the problems associated with widowhood across much of the continent. Although death is one phenomenon that levels all humanity, Africans deem the subject taboo and too eerie and morbid to be openly discussed, often engaging in such discussions in hushed tones, as though death would hear and come for them. Yet Africans are perennially engaged in rituals and ceremonies associated with death, even as they feel uncomfortable discussing death itself. Since Africans live in dread of the cold, lethal grip of death, discussion of an aspect of death with respect to widowhood rites, has been abysmally neglected in literary discourse. This neglect seems to stem from certain aspects of the African culture. Why do we condone the plight of the widow? Why do we keep silent in the face of tyranny?

African women have continually endured exclusions and restrictions. The marginalization of women is global, but western societies tend to manage it more subtly than African societies. But by far the most unconscionable acts of injustice against African women appear to be the cruelty and restrictions that are handed out to them when they become widows. Although I have cast the title of this paper in broader terms, the focus will be on widowhood practices in Nigeria—and more specifically still—in Igboland, the society I know best, and the place of my birth.

Igbo synonymously refers to both the people and their language. The Igbo occupy a significant portion of southeastern Nigeria, including the Igbo on the west bank of the River Niger. Nigeria is made up of thirty six states, plus the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Igbo states are comprised of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, and a good portion of Delta and Rivers States. The region inhabited by the Igbo ranks as one of the largest in Nigeria, the Igbo being estimated at over 27 percent of the total population of Nigeria.

The Igbo Worldview:

The Igbo have unique cultural traits some of which are embedded in their basic beliefs and worldview and can be said to form the core of their existence. The Igbo base their conception of reality on their actual experiences and their imagination. They believe in life hereafter, in their ancestors, and in reincarnation. Central to the traditional Igbo religious thought is the concept of

deceased ancestors continuing to play an active part in the lives of their descendants (Ohale 62). Geoffrey Parrinder observes that among the Igbo, “The spiritual world is so real and near, its forces intertwining and inspiring the visible world that...man has to reckon with things invisible to mortal sight” (qtd. in Ohale 62). In the Igbo imagination, life essentially comprises three dimensions—the ancestor, the living, and the unborn—all of which play a crucial role in their understanding of life. All the same, the Igbo are clearly aware of the distinction between mortal beings and the ancestral and unborn spirits and recognize the division between the mortal and spiritual realms. This divide serves as a constant reminder of man’s powerlessness in the mortal state. Osadebe maintains that all three dimensions unite to form one sequence of existence and that to live only on the mortal dimension means to be unable to tap all the resources of power available to man (cited in Ohale 26). Victor Uchendu sums up the Igbo worldview thus: “To know how a people view the world around them is to understand how they evaluate life; and a people’s evaluation of life, both temporal and non-temporal, provides them with a “chatter” of action, a guide to behaviour [sic]” (qtd. in Ohale 63).

Also embedded in the Igbo worldview is the concept of reincarnation which the people recognize as their means of preserving their lineage. This explains their deep-rooted belief in the ever present link between the living, the dead, the spirit and the unborn kin. This is exemplified by Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* as Okonkwo, still agonizing over the loss of his first son, Nwoye, to the Christians, calls together his other sons to instill in them the gravity of their brother’s decision to abandon the religion of his forefathers:

You have all seen the great abomination of your brother. Now he is no longer my son or your brother. I will only have a son who is a man, who will hold his head up among my people. If any of you prefers to be a woman, let him follow Nwoye now while I am alive so I can curse him. If you turn against me when I am dead I will visit you and break your neck. (172)

Related to this is the widespread belief among the Igbo that the dead should be accorded a befitting burial so as to hasten their return to the world through reincarnation. Failing to do this will cause them to be restless and compel them to haunt their progeny in the human world. At the present time, the Igbo have mostly become adherents of the Christian faith and this belief is at odds with the Christian teaching which contends that death is the end of the physical life and the beginning of afterlife or eternity, a life in which every spirit reaps what it sowed during its sojourn on earth.

Going by the cosmic affiliations of the Igbo, one may begin to understand why there are strict rules governing the behavior of the people and measures of social control to encourage observance of these rules. John Beattie postulates that “To maintain an orderly system of social relations people have to be subjected to some degree of compulsion; they cannot, all the time, do exactly as they like. For often, self interest may incite behaviour [sic] incompatible with the

common good, and so it is that in every society some rules, some kind of restraint on people's behaviour, [sic] are acknowledged and, on the whole, adhered to" (qtd. in Ohale 67).

Traditional societies are not necessarily governed by the use of force but by "customs." Cultural norms, together with the formal and informal sanctions for enforcing them, constitute the system of social control in a society. Most people do not want to be considered "non-conforming" by the standards of their communities and so they conform to the prescribed norms, and any deviation from these norms invites punishment. To further instill fear in the people, the belief is fostered that a person's transgression has the potential to bring down the whole family and, depending on its severity, even the whole community. Again, in *Things Fall Apart*, Obierika tactfully admonishes his friend, Okonkwo, for participating in the execution of his 'son' Ikemefuna, telling him: "What you have done will not please the earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families" (67).

With all this in mind, one can imagine the countless number of rituals, cleansings and purifications associated with death in Igbo culture and how they become a factor in their widowhood practices. Igbo traditions and customs derive from their cosmology and this has a great influence on their human practice and fosters the social injustices that women, particularly widows, endure. Many aspects of the Igbo worldview resurface in their death rites, rituals and widowhood practices, and the widow is inextricably entwined in them.

Widowhood Practices in Igbo Culture

The four core Igbo states of Nigeria—Abia, Anambra, Enugu and Imo—present widowhood practices that individually vary in their approach but collectively highlight the social injustices meted out to widows. All the different groups that make up the Igbo tribe appear united in their marginalization of the widow—some more so than others—and so the responsibility of a cultural change should rest squarely on the shoulders of every Igbo. The root cause of the problem stems from society's low perception of women as a whole, as women have no rights to anything. In her book, Pat U. Okoye reiterates: "By tradition, the Nigerian woman has no right to inheritance and none to land ownership. Consequently, like the mere appendages to men, women must, of cultural necessity be, the widow's only hope and claim to the fruits of the couple's joint labour [sic] is through her male offspring" (5). The situation of the Igbo widow is dire, the widow being the most marginalized of women in the culture. In this culture where no one ever seems to die a natural death, the widow is often accused, usually by her deceased husband's relatives, of killing her husband or at least hastening his death. Once this accusation takes root, the widow is completely at the mercy of her husband's relatives and is hardly offered a platform on which to prove her innocence. She has to absorb this accusation in silence and wallow in her anguish. In the not too distant past, such a widow is "forced to drink the water with which the corpse of her husband is washed, as proof that she had no hand in the man's death" (Okoye 4).

The Igbo widow is often subjected to unutterable cruelty to which she is expected to fully comply. It must be mentioned, however, that the combined effects of education and Christianity on the people's social life have, over time, had a huge influence on some of the dehumanizing widowhood practices in Igbo culture. But even though new social values have evolved with respect to these atrocious practices, much still remains to be addressed as widows are still subjected to ritual seclusions and isolations for varying periods of time. Below is an overview, by no means exhaustive, of the lot that befalls the Igbo widow:

In most areas of Igboland, as soon as a husband dies, culture dictates that his widow must sit on the bare floor, neither taking a bath nor changing her clothes. This is to remind her that her husband's death has lowered her status even more. Hannah Edemikpong's account of widowhood practices in some other parts of Nigeria presents the widow's situation as dire, such that if she is seen "secretly attempting to attend to her personal hygiene, she might be whipped, spat upon or reprimanded that she is attempting to beautify herself so as to attract men" (34). The widow is not allowed to talk until her husband's corpse is buried, but if she must say anything, it must be in whispers. Her movement is restricted and she must not eat anything cooked for the funeral of her husband.

In yet some areas, the widow is put in a cage. This practice ensures "that the woman is totally ostracized from society while she gets the full impact of the dehumanising [sic] punishment meted out to her by the different groups among her husband's kith and kin and the community at large" (qtd. in Okoye 93). The widow must let out and sustain a loud wail at specific times every morning until her husband is buried, as a sign of respect to him. This public show of grief is for the benefit of the deceased and for the appeasement of his relatives, a way of proving to them that his widow has nothing to do with his death. Culturally, it is believed that the omission of these ritual practices interferes with the journey of the deceased to join the community of his ancestors. Oftentimes, the widow is judged by the loudness and duration of her wail. On the day of her husband's burial her hair is shaved clean, including her pubic hair, by the *Umuokpu* or *Umuada* (daughters of the lineage); the terms vary depending on local dialects. After the burial, the deceased husband's family swoops on his property, leaving the widow utterly destitute. For one full year—the duration and restrictions now vary in some areas due to the influence of Christianity—the widow dresses in no other color but black, and must refrain from wearing makeup.

But in more recent times, particularly among the Christians, the mourning period has been shortened to just one year and, depending on the town, even six months. Although some Christians have maintained their allegiance to their new religion, they still feel conflicted when it comes to widowhood rites. During her mourning period, the widow is homebound, and largely depends on her family, friends and community for support, tending her farm and buying and selling for her. At the end of her mourning period, some rituals are performed and the widow can then shed her mourning clothes. Anything bright and colorful for the widow at this period invites

condemnation by the community. She can now go to select places but must make it back home by nightfall.

The Igbo widow is taboo. People who come to commiserate with her must not place their monetary gifts in her hands but must drop them in a plate or shallow basket kept on the floor close to her. She must look sombre at all times; there must be no laughter or any expressions of joy or excitement for the widow. She must abstain from sex during her period of mourning. Any deviation from this societal expectation instantly provokes condemnation by the community, causing them to view her as a prostitute and making her the subject of raucous satire.

In all, widowhood spells hardship, a period of untold deprivation, seclusion and impurity. At the end of the official mourning period, the widow is subjected to the ritual of a cleansing bath where she must walk to the village stream virtually naked with only a piece of cloth round her waist. This ritual is “born out of the contention that the widow is impure and contaminated and thus needs purification” (Edemikpong 34). After her cleansing, if she is deemed worthy by her deceased husband’s family, she is customarily inherited by one of her brothers-in-law, or she may choose to stay in the family and be on her own or return to her natal family. If she agrees to be inherited by any of her brothers-in-law, since she is already the property of her deceased husband’s family, her new husband does not have to pay another bride price but takes token gifts to her family in the form of a goat, yams, cola nuts, and so on. Of course, details of these widowhood rites vary from state to state, from town to town and from one local government area to another.

It is interesting that the perpetrators of these barbaric widowhood rites are unmindful of the extent of the widows’ human rights violations as these cruel treatments are reserved for widows, and widows only. Why are widowers not subjected to the same stiff cultural expectations and burial rites, one may ask? Sossou’s exposé illuminates it all:

The behavior surrounding mourning is inherently gendered. Rituals are more to do with exalting the position of the dead man than allowing a real outlet for the widow’s grief. Women are expected to grieve openly and to demonstrate the intensity of their feelings in formalised [sic] ways. Far more restrictions are placed on a widow than on a widower. It is widows, not widowers, who must endure the most humiliating rituals in relation, for example, to dress codes, eating, personal hygiene and sexual activity. (202)

The parochial nature of society’s expectation with respect to widows and to the exclusion of widowers is mind boggling. Sossou goes on to cite Amadiume who, in her turn, reiterates that “In the Nnobi traditional [Igbo] society of Nigeria, and even in the present day, there are hardly any taboos surrounding a man’s mourning of his wife. A man is said to be free to remarry soon after he has buried his wife and this is usually 36 days after the burial” (205). This is proof that the cruel treatments unleashed on widows are part of the patriarchal conspiracy to keep women bowed in subjugation. Mabel Segun maintains that the disparity surrounding the sexes is “neither a biological given nor a divine mandate but a cultural construct,” and implores the female writer to “deconstruct gender and the social paradigms that support it” (301).

Factors that Sustain Widowhood Practices in Igbo Culture:

A number of factors have contributed in sustaining the cruelty associated with widowhood practices in Igbo culture. Some of these factors have been identified as the low perception of women and their subsequent voicelessness, patriarchy, the extended family/the *Umuokpu* or *Umuada* (daughters of the lineage), inheritance/marriage laws, denial of rights to an education, and so on. Let us briefly discuss these factors:

The Low Perception of the Igbo/African Woman:

The plight of the African girl begins at her birth. First of all, her birth rarely commands the excitement and enthusiasm that the birth of a male child instantly commands. She is conditioned from early childhood to accept her subordination without question, and this is imparted in such a manner as to make her accept this burden as her natural lot. Okonjo puts it succinctly in the following words:

She learns early that her major goal in life is marriage and to have children and that her husband is her boss and she must adopt a low and subordinate profile to him. Her subordinate status is underscored firstly by the knowledge that her husband reserves the right to take other wives besides herself and, secondly, by a bride price (pegged sometimes very high in Igboland) which puts her squarely in her place and makes it oftentimes difficult for her to disengage from an unsatisfactory union. Those resources which she is endowed with by nature, such as beauty, native intelligence and industry, are sometimes made [the] most of by her kin during the process of the fixing of the bride price and this makes her look like a commodity on sale to the highest bidder. (Okonjo 189)

This situation is fraught with problems, making it difficult for the woman to cultivate self esteem, not to talk of challenging the institution that put it in place. The low perception and belittling of women permeate the entire spectrum of Igbo society. The legal system does not recognize women either. Okoye observes that “Women are so downtrodden that, by and large, under the law they are regarded as minors...In Nigerian police stations a woman is not allowed to bail a prisoner. A female corporate manager or top executive is often asked by brash policemen to go and get a man, even if he is the lowest male in her employ, such as her gardener, to perform this function on her behalf” (4). Educated Nigerian women find this objectionable, but it is backed by the law.

Perhaps the most insightful and telling example of the low perception of women in Igbo culture is captured, albeit anecdotally, in a paper presented by Opatá entitled “Onye Mma Gbugi na Nwanyí Gburu: Beyond Male Chauvinism or Towards the Essentialism of Women?” In this paper a boy informs his father of his intention to get married. His father gives his approval and the next day goes to the market and buys three young pigs and asks his son to care for them, telling him that when the pigs grow and mature they would be sold and that the money realized

from the sale would be used to marry him a wife. But, alas, the boy finds an excuse to kill the pigs one after the other in quick succession, citing some flimsy aggravation by the pigs as a reason for methodically killing all three. As a consequence of his actions his father said to him:

Look here, son, when you came and told me that you wanted to get married I did not oppose the idea. Consequently, I bought pigs and asked you to look after them so that when they are grown we sell them and use the money realized to marry you a wife. Now you have killed all three for one alleged misbehaviour [sic] or the other. I now want to tell you that you are not yet mature enough to have a wife, because a pig is better behaved than any woman, your mother inclusive. Allowing you to get married now is to get a murder case on my hands. (qtd. in Adigwe 141)

This condescending portraiture of women is a tragedy; unfortunately, it is supported by patriarchy.

Patriarchy in Igbo Culture:

The Igbo world is notorious for its prominent masculine character. The intensely patriarchal nature of traditional African cultures puts women in a world in which the man is everything and the woman is nothing. Rose Mezu concurs with Adrienne Rich whom she cites for vividly capturing all the nuances of the African traditional milieu in her description of patriarchy as “The power of the fathers: a familial, social, ideological, and political system in which, by direct pressure—or through tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education, and division of labor—men determine what parts women shall or shall not play, and the female is everywhere subsumed by the male” (qtd. in Mezu 2). The problem has been exacerbated by the European colonial encounter about which there is a consensus among literary critics that colonialism did not serve African women’s interests but chose to build its systems on men, thereby empowering them and increasing the passivity and marginalization of their womenfolk. Ada Azodo, echoing other writers, reiterates that “...there existed a complementarity of male and female roles in pre-colonial African societies and that it is during and after colonization that the downfall of the African woman from a position of power and self-sovereignty to becoming man’s helper occurred” (201). This statement confirms the position of women in pre-colonial African societies. Mezu maintains that “Colonial rule merely aggravated the situation by introducing a lopsided system in which African men received a well-rounded education while, like their European counterparts before the mid-nineteenth century, African women received only utilitarian, cosmetic skills in Domestic Science Centers—the kind of skills that only could prepare them to be useful helpmates of educated, premier nationalists and professionals....” (1).

The Extended family:

In Igbo culture, the involvement of the extended family in a member's marriage can be problematic. The Igbo wife is expected to assume a subordinate status to her husband and to every member of his immediate and the larger, extended family. This is not exclusive to the Igbo and does extend to include other Nigerian and African societies. In the Senegalese novel, *So Long a Letter*, Mariama Bâ's discussion of Ramatoulaye's experiences during her widowhood is insightful:

This is the moment dreaded by every Senegalese woman, the moment when she sacrifices her possessions as gifts to her family-in-law; and, worse still, beyond her possessions she gives up her personality, her dignity, becoming a thing in the service of the man who has married her, his grandfather, his grandmother, his father, his mother, his brother, his sister, his uncle, his aunt, his male and female cousins, his friends. Her behaviour [sic] is conditioned: no sister-in-law will touch the head of any wife who has been stingy, unfaithful or inhospitable. (4)

But the most powerful force within the extended family in Igbo culture is the association of *Umuokpu*. Ironically, Igbo women wield enormous power and influence in their natal families after their marriage and are accorded great respect by family members, such that they are invited to arbitrate in serious and difficult family disputes. When this is the case, their power is unrivalled and their decision must be upheld. These lineage daughters exercise their power the most during the funeral of their male relatives or "brothers."

Sossou maintains that these "sisters of the deceased husband retain intense influence over what happens in their family, and this means near-tyrannical power over the women married by their brothers. The power of the sisters-in-law is really displayed during the death of their brothers" (Sossou 204). In certain situations the *Umuokpu* may decide that the widow has not complied with the cultural stipulations of widowhood and so refuse to touch her hair. The implication of this is that such a widow would mourn indefinitely until the *Umuokpu* back down and come to her rescue, usually after imposing heavy monetary and other fines on the erring widow. They often exact this punishment when they accuse a widow of maltreating her husband. The complete control of the *Umuokpu* over funerals may explain to an extent the vigorous rituals of widowhood and why they are known as "the scourge of widows" (Okoye 114).

Inheritance/Marriage Laws:

In Igbo culture only sons can legally inherit their father's property, so one can imagine the situation of the childless widow or the one who has only daughters. The people assume that every woman is naturally endowed with the ability to bear children and that she is solely responsible for the sex of her child. Among the Igbo, it is a great honor for a woman to bear a son since she stands to be blamed if she bears only daughters or none at all. In this culture it is just not enough to have children; the sex of the children is equally important.

A woman's self-realization and self-worth hinge almost totally on her ability to procreate and bear a son. She is expected to produce sons or, at its very worst, a son, and perpetuate her husband's lineage. Lineage is traced through the man, and every man is expected to found a lineage. Again, this expectation is not exclusive to the Igbo. With the exception of some matrilineal cultures, most African cultures put a high premium on the male child. This is given expression in the names their sons bear. Such names as *Obiajulu* (My soul is at peace), *Afamefuna* (May my name not be lost), and *Ifeanacho* (That which we have been looking for), are typically given to male children, particularly in circumstances where a string of females preceded their births.

The longing for a male child never dims, even among the most sophisticated and educated. Since the expectant mother is clearly aware of the worth or, should I say, worthlessness of her unborn baby, she may sometimes decide to exploit her condition, while it lasts, by taking liberties and making what is considered 'high class' demands on her husband. One hilarious example is given in a paper in which Helen Chukwuma, discussing society's gender preference, presents a pregnant wife who exploits her condition by claiming that she is carrying a male child and asking her husband to provide her with some long-craved delicacies. The song below captures that sentiment:

Dia Dim e e
Dia Dim e e
Ime Bomboy emewelem O
Azuta Ovatio
Azuta bred O
Dia Dim ime Bomboy emewelem O

The above stanza roughly translates as:

My dear husband e e
My dear husband e e
I am in labour [sic] and it is a boy
Let Ovaltine be bought
Let bread be bought
My dear husband, I am in labour [sic] and it is a boy. (27-28)

Perhaps, the only way that this expectant wife's cravings may be satisfied is by her audacious claim to a male child. The point is that an Igbo husband will be more disposed to please his pregnant wife if he is given the slightest assurance that she is carrying a male child. One can imagine the rest of the story when the baby is actually born and it is not a boy.

The Task of the Writer in Challenging the Status Quo and Hastening Change:

The task of the writer must be to focus on raising the consciousness of women to the depth of their subjugation and to those aspects of the culture that militate against their interests and development. The writer must strive to save women from succumbing further to cultural rape by constantly reminding them of the human rights violations perpetrated against them in the name of culture and tradition, a culture that has conditioned them to actually believe that they are solely responsible for the sex of their children, even when they are in a position to know better. The writer must aim at bringing awareness to widows by recreating the human rights violations that they endure, and encouraging them to resist all forms of cruelty that are meted out to them.

The writer, in this case the feminist writer, must be the forerunner in the task of re-education and regeneration that must occur. African feminist writers must take radical strides toward empowering women, widows in particular, and ending all forms of oppression that still plague African women's lives by launching a massive campaign in both the print and electronic media. Segun suggests that it is important that female writers "take into consideration the problem of illiteracy and the lack of a reading culture in Nigeria. This poses the challenge of reaching out, perhaps in novel ways, to a potential audience. Writers must utilize the communication potency of the mass media in disseminating their works. They must become evangelists, drawing other women into the fold..." (301).

Despite the failure of the early African novels to address women's issues, we know that gender issues remain integral to nationalist causes. Andrea Powell insists that "In order for African nationalism to serve all Africans, women's issues must make their way into public discourse and, ultimately, women must take part in the actual formation of African nations" (167). African feministic writers have a duty to create cultural change by speaking out against oppressive and unconscionable widowhood practices. They must stand united in working toward the empowerment of all women. Illiterate and underprivileged African women suffer a peculiar handicap, being generally silenced by traditional patriarchy and by the legacy of colonialism.

Education remains a *sine qua non* in African women's empowerment and has in actuality opened doors of opportunity for women beyond their wildest imagination. Examples abound in the writings of African female authors of women who have transcended limitations by virtue of their education. These women have used that precious weapon to secure their individual empowerment at critical periods in their lives. In Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough*, Amaka's education helps to propel her to achieve financial independence and emboldens her to walk away from a compromised marriage; in Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*, Adah's education thrusts her in a position of strength and helps her to outsmart her in-laws by formulating a strategy that enabled her to join her husband in England; in Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter*, Aissatou's education becomes her only weapon against the emotional onslaught waged by her husband and mother-in-law, her education becoming instrumental to finally facilitating her relocation to North America and to limitless opportunities.

The importance of an education for African women cannot be overstated. Segun, however, warns the female writer to guard against the type of literature that ignores or degrades women or, even worse, praises them “for such virtues as obedience, meekness and humility. It is difficult for a woman to struggle against male domination when her mind has been conditioned into thinking that she is inferior. Ideas that a person carries in her head have a force that propels her in certain directions for good or ill” (301).

The patriarchal nature of African societies has encouraged the vilification of feminists and feministic writers as people who go against the grain. They are accused of poisoning the minds of otherwise innocent and contented African women with their caustic literature. Feministic writing has helped to shed some light on the plight of women in Africa in general, but very serious issues remain unresolved in the struggle of African women to combat their marginalization. As Azodo observes, “A univocal theory of global feminism does not address the special conditions in which African women find themselves. Rigid traditions discriminate against African women, who are seen as perpetual children and second class citizens. Endemic sexism, patriarchal attitudes, and the force of blinding tradition bond African men in a hegemonic system that nourishes and protects their interests” (201).

Conclusion

The situation of widows in Igbo culture requires the intervention of all people of goodwill. Writers, more so feminist writers, women’s organizations, human rights organizations, advocacy groups, and the international community must collaborate to be widows’ advocates and stem the tide of cruelty that widows endure. It is no longer an issue of civil rights but that of human rights. We all have a responsibility to draw attention to the plight of widows. So much still remains to be done to salvage the African widow from overwhelming cultural impositions.

It is by no means my intention here to suggest that the Igbo discard their cultural practices; rather, my point is that they be prevailed upon to revisit and modify some of them, particularly in relation to widowhood practices. As Francis Cardinal Arinze contends, “The correct attitude is to review the Igbo culture in order to see what should be retained, what should be modified, purified or elevated, and what should be rejected” (qtd. in Ohale 127). That will pave the way for the elimination of the cruel and unorthodox widowhood practices of the Igbo.

We must look to the writer to recapture in practical terms what has happened to the widow, and place the burden of guilt on the society by reminding its members that it is time to put an end to certain cultural impositions. Attention must be brought to the harm that women inadvertently inflict on themselves. African women generally tend to be reluctant to publicly discuss important issues that affect their lives in order to appease their men folk. Women must be encouraged to speak firmly for themselves. The kind of autonomy and self respect that African women need and seek can never be achieved until women themselves ‘do something’ about their

subordinate status. Women must be their very own advocates and must take the center stage for any meaningful transformation to take place.

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