

DYNAMICS OF FORCED MARRIAGE IN IGBO SOCIETY: PERSPECTIVES FROM *UKPAKA MIIRI ONYE UBIAM*

By

Ujubonu Juliet Okide, Ph.D.

Department of Linguistics, African and Asian Studies
University of Lagos, Akoka, Yaba, Lagos
08023024067; ujuokide@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

In all societies, marriages are contracted based on the consent of the two principal partners. However, in some cases, a young man or woman may be forced into marrying someone they do not love for one reason or another. This study therefore examines the practice of forced marriage in Igbo society. This is to explore the basis of conflict, the underlying rationale, forms of coercion and effects of forced marriage on the individual concerned and the society. The Family Power Theory was used as a guide for the study. Tony Ubesie's *Ukpaka Miiri Onye Ubiam* was purposively selected based on its thematic thrust on the subject matter. The result shows that the basis of conflict in the family of Nna Chinyere was that he wanted her daughter - Chinyere to marry a rich old man, named Emeodi against her own will, instead of a younger man named Amadi who did not have a good means of livelihood. The rationale for the father's choice was friendship with Emeodi's father, his daughter's comfort, and the sacrifices he had made in the past to train her. The forms of coercion he used on his daughter Chinyere include bribery, his fate on retirement, disowning her daughter, and threats to die. The adverse effects of the practice were seen in Chinyere's depression, shaming by her schoolmates, poor academic performance, withdrawal from society, and eventually her death. The novel exposes the wrong use of power in the family (in spousal selection) all for the interest of the holder, without consideration for the interest of the girl-child who is the prime target of marriage. It is recommended that, in matters of marriage and precisely spouse selection, the parents' input and guidance are required, but ultimately the son or daughter in question should be given ample freedom to make their choice, and not to be subjected to threats from parent(s).

Keywords: Dynamics; Forced Marriage; Igbo Society; Tony Ubesie; *Ukpaka Miiri Onye Ubiam*.

Introduction

In traditional Igbo society, choosing a marriage partner is a herculean adventure and therefore is usually undertaken by the entire nuclear family, and sometimes relations and friends. It is not a task left for the principal partners in the relationship. It is worth noting that, in traditional Igbo society, marriage is not contracted between individuals but between families. Before a young man or woman decides on whom to marry, the family is involved from the onset in the course of making the choice. The secondary reason for the involvement of family and kin in the affair is the shared understanding that each person is an integral part of the whole community. The kinsfolk are so deeply bonded that each person's concern is shared by the collective. The major reason for this involvement is the need for the principal actor (man or woman) to find a responsible spouse. It is for this reason that, in traditional Igbo Society, one of the essential marriage rites is the hunt for information about the target spouse which is termed *iba ohia ajuju* 'to go into the forest of inquiry'.

This rite is practised to gather information about the intended spouse in terms of family background, family history, character, the health status of the family, etc. Topping the scale of inquiry is ‘character’ which the Igbo value more than other human qualities, concerning marriage. Nwachukwu (2009) opines that, in traditional Igbo societies, the emphasis placed on the choice of a wife was not only based on the health and character of a woman but also all members of her descent group (Nwachukwu, 2009). Hence, the Igbo maxim, *agwa ka mma* ‘character is better than beauty’. Precisely on marriage, Igbo believe that *ugwu nwaanyi bu di ya* ‘the glory of a woman is her husband.’

The implication of this fact and practice is that the choice of a marriage partner in traditional and even contemporary Igbo society is premised on sundry factors and not just on love for the person. In other words, that you love a young man or lady is not sufficient reason to marry him or her; other extraneous factors are considered in the process as reasons for ensuring an enduring and sustainable marital relationship. The Igbo, like some other African societies, believe in family hierarchy where the husband is at the top; all other members of the family such as the wife(s), children and servants are under the authority of the husband. In as much as these other family members are not regarded as mere appendages, since they have their rights as legitimate members of the family, they do not share authority with the husband. This is why the Igbo endorse that; *ebe aka nwaanyi ruru ka o na-ekobe di ya*; ‘where the wife’s hands reach is where she holds her husband’, thus describing the lopsided position of the two main partners, where the husband enjoys superior position. It is therefore expected that, in choosing a marriage partner, a man identifies and chooses a woman who he feels will be submissive to him and who will live in peace with him.

However, in modern times, the erstwhile Igbo traditional system has witnessed certain changes. These changes are due to the impact of Christian religion and Westernization; Igbos presently do not live in one rural settlement but in diverse cities where they make contact with other cultures and peoples. This is in addition to the plethora of churches with diverse doctrines, most of which are averse to Igbo culture and worldview. One such change is that the community is no longer involved in the selection of a spouse, and the age-long custom of *iba ohia ajuju* is no longer as intense as before. A central factor in traditional Igbo marriage custom is the consent of the father who is the head of the family. It is believed that if the father, for one reason or another, does not approve of a spouse for his son or daughter, that marriage is in most cases invalid, whether it is contracted under Igbo custom or the Christian church. Therefore, irrespective of the impact of Westernization and Christianity, the power granted the father of the house by custom has not been obliterated. Fathers still hold the specter in matters of marriage and selection of spouse, and consequent authorization to marry in the family. Incidentally, as a result of the fact that the fathers or parents are more acculturated to the traditional systems than the children, there is sometimes conflict between a parent and child over the choice of a marriage partner. This conflict is especially evident where the father, for a reason, withholds his consent over his son’s or daughter’s choice of a partner or approves of a spouse that the son or daughter does not like. In this scenario, if the son or daughter abides by the dictates of the father against their wishes and interests, it results in what is generally termed forced marriage. Forced marriage therefore is marriage that is contrived without or against the will of one of the principal actors. It is based on this construct that this study examines the notion of forced marriage in Igbo Society from the perspective of an Igbo novel. The aim is to

evaluate factors involved in forced marriage and the consequences for the family and the entire society.

The Igbo

The Igbo are the third largest ethnic group in Nigeria, after the Hausa and the Yoruba. They are predominantly settled in the South-East geographical zone of the country; in the states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo, though portions of them are found in the South-South zones of Rivers and Delta States. Beyond these states, the Igbo are found in great numbers across the length of Nigeria, Africa, Europe and other spaces in the world. According to Ifemesia (1979: 15), “Igbo people have migrated, settled and lived in various parts of the country and beyond through the centuries.” The motivation for this pervasive migration is trade; Igbo are predominantly traders and therefore perceive every human habitation as a veritable ground and opportunity for trade. Socio-culturally, Igbo operates a patriarchal system where the male holds the scepter of authority in the affairs of the community, kin, and family. As the head of the family, the father runs the affairs of the home and plays a significant role in all matters, including birth, death, marriage, etc. Due to the foremost place marriage holds in Igbo society, the father is deeply involved in matters concerning the choice and selection of spouses for the children.

Concept of Marriage

Marriage is a universal phenomenon although with parametric dimensions according to the culture in question. In the way of many social terminologies, marriage is a difficult concept to define; consequently, scholars, sociologists, and psychologists have tried to define it from different perspectives and premises, resulting in the fact that there is no common definition. In its basic sense, marriage is a social, cultural and spiritual union whereby a man and woman come together to build a home. It is social because it centrally involves interaction between two people in a physical environment, and it is cultural because it is an acceptable way of life across societies the world over, and it is spiritual because it is ordained by the supreme being as a veritable means of procreation and sustaining the human race. From this angle, Ayisi (1997, p. 7) defines marriage as “the process whereby a man and a woman come together to form a union for procreation”. Similarly, marriage is defined as a rite of passage that brings two opposite sexes together from different families to live together, procreation and ensure the continuity of community life (Ogbeide, 2011). This is corroborated by the views of The Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference that; an essential characteristic of marriage is the biological fact that a man and a woman can join together as male and female in a union that is orientated to the generation of new life, which provides for the continuation of the human race and the development of human society (The Irish Catholic Bishop’s Conference, 2015).

In the conception of Macalex-Achinulo (2021), marriage is a contract entered by two mature adults with a mutual agreement to live together as a couple for private consummation of conjugal rights and specific responsibilities after completing all the traditional and legal rites until death do them part. In this view, adherence to customary and legal requirements is what validates a marriage. In a broad view that recognizes different shades and dimensions of the subject, Waya and Okanume (2017), define marriage as a social contract in which a person of either sex has a subsisting claim to the right of sexual access to his/her partner(s) in which it is culturally acceptable for children to result. In the view of Anderson (2013), marriage exists to bring a man and a woman together as

husband and wife to be father and mother to any child their union produces. According to them, marriage is based on three facts; the anthropological fact that men and women are different and complementary, the biological fact that reproduction depends on a man and a woman, and the social fact that children need both a mother and a father.

A common thread that runs across these narrow and broad conceptions of marriage is that it is a relationship between two people, male and female, in the traditional sense. However, although marriage is practised in every culture, there are variations in the way and manner it is contracted across cultures. The reasons for these marked variations are attributable to religious, social, geographical, and cultural norms and variables that subsist in each society involved. In the Igbo society, marriage is one of the cardinal customs that mark the Igbo as a distinct cultural group, hence it is stated that marriage occupies a prime position in the Igbo social economy (Uko, 2019). Due to its need as the precursor for a new family, it is couched in many customs and sealed with many conventions and rules. Ayisi (1997) posits that in African societies marriage is inseparably tied to family such that in the absence of marriage, there is no family. Across Africa, marriage is not a union of two individuals but the coming together of two communities and a tool for building communal networks and alliances (Ojo, 2016).

Undoubtedly, the Igbo conceive of marriage as one of the most important rites of passage in life, in contrast with birth, death, etc (Uko, 2019). According to him, in the traditional Igbo world, marriage is not contracted between two individuals, (man and woman) but between two families or two extended families (*umunna*), and in some cases between two clans (Nwabude, 2022). The outcome of this engagement is a close-knit relationship amongst families, *umunna n* (Kinsfolk) and clans thus enhancing peaceful co-existence and camaraderie amongst the communities involved. Eventually, members of the two families become in-laws (*ogo*) to each other, thus extending the erstwhile dual heritage. The two earlier heritages are the father's place and the mother's place. Upon marriage, the spouse enacts a new heritage in-law. This is why the Igbo say that *ogo bu ikwu ato* 'the in-law is the third heritage'.

The Concept of Forced Marriage

In simple terms, forced marriage is a system whereby a spouse is imposed on someone, man or woman, especially women, for the sake of marriage. According to Shirley, Sarah, Sanjana, and Amna (2011), forced marriage is the union of two persons at least one of whom has not given their full and free consent to the marriage. According to them, a forced marriage takes place when people are coerced into a marriage against their will and under duress, through the use of physical and emotional pressure. A breakdown of this definition amplifies the terms of force and consent. Thus, in forced marriage, violence or coercion is applied to manipulate an individual to cede or agree to a marriage. In terms of consent, the marriage occurs without the full and free consent of both parties to the marriage or one party to the marriage. In other words, freedom of choice for the individual is denied (Hester et al., 2007). Shirley et al. (2011) identify various types of forced marriage such as the following: forced marriage by religious leaders, forced marriage in conflict zones, trafficking for forced marriage, kidnapping for forced marriage, adoption for forced marriage, forced marriage through hereditary slavery, and forced marriage by a partner. However, they stress that the most common type of forced marriage occurs when parents or other family

members force one or both participants into the marriage. This type of forced marriage is usually supported by the surrounding community, thereby making it difficult to avoid or escape.

Rights of Women (2013), a women's advocacy group, states that forced marriage involves situations where a person feels pressured to the point where they agree to marry someone, but only because they feel they did not have the choice to say no, and they would not have consented had the pressure not been placed on them. In their position, women and girls often describe a 'feeling' or just 'knowing' that they could not say no to a marriage, and that if they did, there would be some kind of consequence if they tried to resist being married to a certain man. In their definition, South Asia Women Center, SAWC contrasted forced marriage with arranged marriage; while suggesting that forced and arranged marriage are often inaccurately conflated with each other, they explained that, in an arranged marriage, parents, friends or community members seek a compatible match for both individuals and a mutual agreement is reached with full, free and informed consent from both parties before proceeding with the marriage. On the reverse, a forced marriage occurs when either spouse is coerced into the marriage, whether physically, psychologically, or emotionally (South Asia Women Center, SAWC, 2014). The ideal requirement for full and free consent of the principal parties is voided when the individual is manipulated to obtain consent. Thus, consent is eventually given by the man or woman, but under duress.

The trend whereby a family member, friend or member of the community forces or attempts to force an individual into marriage can stem from a host of reasons. Such reasons include marriage as an exchange of favor or settlement of financial debts, the creation of matrimonial alliances between families to preserve family wealth and/or status and reneging such alliances can be very damaging to a family's reputation (South Asia Women Center, SAWC, 2014). According to Shirley et al. (2011), forms of coercion include pushing someone to uphold the family's reputation by getting married, stressing that if the person says no, it will affect their parent's health and wellbeing, being told that refusing will affect their siblings' future chances of getting married, threats from a parent, a sibling or a close family member to kill or harm themselves if the marriage does not take place (Shirley et al, 2011). Other reasons include appealing to the individual's responsibility and religious, social, and economic duty to one's family, being ostracized from the community (South Asia Women Center, SAWC, 2014), being told that refusal will disgrace the family, and even being physically harmed (Rights of Women, 2013). All these forms represent physical, emotional, and psychological blackmail.

Shirley et al. (2011) identify various indicators of forced marriage, as follows: missed appointments due to distractions, the individual appearing scared or anxious, the individual is always accompanied by someone when attending a consultation, injuries are inconsistent with the explanation of the cause of the accident, one partner or the parent appears aggressive and overly dominant; the individual is passive and afraid, worsening academic performance, absence or poor attendance at school or work, depression, self-harm, eating disorders, regular visits to health care professionals with no obvious illness or reason, attempted suicide.

On the whole, forced marriage features prominently in historical and contemporary accounts of gender relations throughout sub-Saharan Africa, and affects millions of Africans, predominantly women and girls (Bunting, Benjamin & Richard, 2016). At the epicenter of forced marriage is the

role of the family in matters of spousal choice, as practiced in some African societies, including the Igbo. Ojo (2016) opines that, since marriage is considered a mandatory rite of passage, it is bound to be abused and often used as a means of exploiting certain people, especially women, when forced to marry or marry particular men against their will (Ojo, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

This study deploys the Family Power Theory. It is a framework proposed by McDonald that assesses the power relationship among parents, siblings, and kin in the family (McDonald, 1977). It is generally concerned with who is in control of the family. In this framework, according to Magee (2009), power is grouped into three categories as follows: designated, distributive, or integrative. Designated power arises from a position held in the hierarchy. Distributive power is described as power which focuses on dominance in the family or power that enables the holder to force others into a lower or submissive position (Siefkes, 2010). Integrative power is described as beneficial to all concerned in the family (Dunbar & Abra, 2010). In integrative power, the power is used to benefit both parties and those involved achieve something or are helped in the relationship. In general terms, the theory of family power is concerned with who has the power, who ought to have power, how power is achieved, how people misuse power, how justified they feel in trying to gain more power for themselves (Hocker & Wilmot, 2017). Thus, the core of the theory is how power is managed or (mis)used in the family by those who hold it. Ordinarily, power is used beneficially to enhance and facilitate life for the sake of acquiring the essential things that uphold the collective in the family, as well as protecting the interests of family members.

The concept of relational power is viewed by many in different ways. Pierro, Cicero, and Raven (2008) view power as instinctive, consisting of both positive and negative dimensions. Torelli and Shavitt (2010) add that power is a result of political skill and manipulation, and that when power is used positively; it can solve problems, breed better relationships among family members, and create balance during interaction, and conflict management. Dunbar and Abra (2010) believe that just as it is difficult for one not to communicate; it is also difficult for one not to use power. Power is meant to be used and exploited for certain ends, in every sphere including the family. The only question is how it is used by someone or others in a relationship. From the perspective of interpersonal relationships, social status rather than the quality of an individual is at the base of a relational theory of power. This is the reason why, in a family, the position of the father as the head of the family grants him higher status than other members of the family. This status is socially and culturally defined and entrenched for control and societal development.

In this vein, Guinote and Vescio (2010) affirm that power is not owned by an individual, rather it is defined by the relationship created by the power and the way it is distributed in a setting such as a family which is viewed as a product of the communication relationship. Thus, power is dependent on the relationship among people and the contextual significance of the relationship. As described by Raven and French (2006), the bases of power are reflected in examples such as reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert power. It is also asserted by Hocker and Wilmot (2017) that interpersonal power, as reflected in the family, is the ability of the power holder to influence other people in different ways, especially other people who are at the lower rung of the power relationship. It is about how to control other people and being in control of what someone needs in the relationship. In other words, interpersonal power is about the influence exerted by someone

over others in a less powerful position. Additionally, interpersonal power is also concerned with resisting the influence of the other person who is in a more powerful position by the one in a less powerful position. Individual power is defined as the value of the resources in the relationship. Power depends on having something that the individual needs. The theory of family Power is useful, as a guide in this study, due to its concern with the use of power in the family. The study is about the use of power reflected in force to put pressure on a family member to do something against her will and personal interest. To that extent, the Family Power Theory is germane to the thrust of this study.

Methodology

The three literary genres of novel, drama and poetry are covered in Igbo written literature, and they are inclusive of variegated themes in the society. Out of the lot, Tony Ubesie's (1975) *Ukpaka Mijiri Onye Ubiam*, a novel was purposively selected for this study. The novel was selected because of its comprehensive portrayal of human realities and experiences. Ubesie's novel was selected based on its major theme, which is the choice and selection of a spouse for a family member. Through the novel narrative, we are presented with divergent views of the protagonists and other characters, the basis of their actions and the attendant consequences. The analysis of this study is textual-based. Only one text was selected for the study because the novel was found sufficient to extract adequate data for analysis. Secondly, since the study is not a comparative one, there is no compelling reason to include another text.

Brief Synopsis of the Novel - *Ukpaka Mijiri Onye Ubiam*

The events in the novel *Ukpaka Mijiri Onye Ubiam*, took place in one family consisting of Nna Chinyere (the father), Nne Chinyere (mother), and Chinyere, their only daughter and child. They lived in Enugu, the former capital of The East Central State of Nigeria, and the present capital of Enugu State, where Nna Chinyere worked as a civil servant. At the beginning of the story, Chinyere was about to enter high school but could not due to a lack of funds. Her father's resources or income as a civil servant were not sufficient to fund her secondary education. Consequently, Chinyere decided to study nursing as a profession and become a nurse. It was in the course of taking steps toward realizing her ambition that a young man named Amadi came to seek her hand in marriage. The marriage was negotiated and arranged by Nna Chinyere and Nne Chinyere until Chinyere gave her consent based on her avowed love for Amadi.

However, as a result of Chinyere's insistence on completing her nursing training, it was agreed, among both families that, Amadi would not pay the bride price until Chinyere completed her training as a nurse. Eventually, a second suitor, Mr Emeodi entered the scene. Emeodi was a wealthy man but old enough to be the father of Chinyere. Due to pecuniary interests, Nna Chinyere opted for Mr Emeodi and wanted Chinyere to drop Amadi, the younger man and marry Emeodi. But Chinyere objected to her father's choice and directive mainly because she was in love with Amadi and not Emeodi. To have his way, Nna Chinyere used different threats and force to push Chinyere into marriage with Emeodi, until Chinyere succumbed, despite the intervention of her mother, Nne Chinyere. In the end, Chinyere married Emeodi to please her father, but when the marriage was about to be consummated, Chinyere mysteriously took her life, and eventually Nna Chinyere died of what could be termed heart failure.

Data Analysis

The data will be presented in four major phases, as follows: the bases of conflict, the rationale for coercion, forms of coercion, and the effects of coercion.

The Basis of Conflict

The premise of conflict in the family of Nna Chinyere was premised on vested interests. Through the arrangement of the parents, Chinyere met Amadi and eventually fell in love with him and desired him as a husband, as shown in the excerpt below:

Chinyere hụrụ Amadi n'anya. Ihe gbasara Amadi maliteremgbe Amadi b́jara na be ha mgbe mbụ chuwe ya ụra. Ọ chọọ ka ọ za ya ihe ọ juru ugbugba, ikekwe ihere agaghị ekwe ya zaa ihe bụ uche ya...Amadi wee sị ya na ọ bụrụ na o kwere na ya ga-alụ ya, nke nne ya na nna ya agaghị enye ya nsogbu, n'ihia na okwu na-adabara ya na nne na nna Chinyere (pp. 14-15)

Chinyere loves Amadi. Her interest in Amadi started from the first time Amadi came to their house. If she attempted responding to his inquiry, possibly, she would be too shy to say her mind...Therefore, Amadi told her that, if she agreed to marry him, her parents would not be a problem, because he has a good rapport with Chinyere's parents. This excerpt took place on the day Amadi proposed marriage to Chinyere after her parents had arranged for the two to meet in a neutral setting. It was obvious that Chinyere had fallen in love with Amadi, even before they met, going by her appraisal of Amadi when he came to see the parents, in keeping with the Igbo traditional system. Chinyere's response to Amadi's proposal is a veiled consent to marry him, which is later concretised after her father approves of their marriage, as seen in the next excerpt:

Nne Chinyere maara na okwu enweela isi, ebe ọ bụ na Chinyere ekwetela na Amadi ga-alụ ya. Onye kwetere na a ga-ebi ya ọma, ekwetela na aga-esusu ya ọnu (p. 21)

Nne Chinyere knew that an agreement had been reached since Chinyere had given her consent that Amadi would marry her. A person who agreed to be hugged has also agreed to be kissed. In response to her mother's inquiry about Amadi, Chinyere stated implicitly that she would marry Amadi, but on two conditions, the approval of her father and the completion of her training as a nurse, before the wedding. Chinyere presented the second condition (training as a nurse) as a secondary issue because Amadi had already passed the primary test, which is the test of love. She loved him and looked forward to the time she would be his wife. In reaction, her mother used the proverb - *Onye kwetere na a ga-ebi ya ọma, ekwetela na aga-esusu ya ọnu*'she who accepted to be hugged has also accepted to be kissed' to show that the conditions put forward by Chinyere were just formalities since she had consented to marry Amadi. The result of this mutual agreement among the parties is joy and peace in the family of Nna Chinyere, *nna ya na-enwe obi anurị ugbugba. Nne ya na-eme ya ka nwa ọhuru. Obi anurị na-adibe ha mgbe ọbula* 'Her father is happy now. Her mother handles her like a baby. There is joy in their family all the time' (p.22). However, the joy in Nna Chinyere's family was short-lived. On the arrival and visit of a second suitor for Chinyere named Emeodi, things took a different turn. The author's introduction of Emeodi depicted him as a rich and ugly man, as seen in the next excerpt:

Nwoke ahụ sụ agbada ọcha n'ahụ, sụrụ akpukpukwu ọcha...Ọ kwọchara isi ntakiri n'etiti isi. Ọ kabeghi nka, ma ọ hụla oriri ji ọhuru otutu ugboro na ndu ya.

Ọ chĩa ọchi, ọ jọọ njọ karia ka ọ jorọ na mbu. Ma onye lee ya anya n'ahu, ọ mara na o ji ego. Ọ na-eri ego, o nwere, ọ na-aputakwa ya n'ahu (p. 29)

That man wore a white agbada and white shoes...His hair receded a little at the centre of his head. He was not old, but he had seen many new yam festivals in his life. When he laughs, he looks more ugly than normal. But if a person looks at his body, he will know that he has money. He enjoys his money, and it reflects on his body.

By his physical disposition, it is apparent that Emeodi is a rich man, although no longer young and also ugly. Portraying him as clothed in flowing white agbada and white shoes to match; which is popular among the affluent in Nigeria; showed that he belonged to the rich upper class in the community. However, he was a mature adult as seen in his receding hair *Ọ kwochara isi ntakiri n'etiti isi* 'his hair was receding at the centre', coupled with the antithetical expression that *Ọ kabeghi nka, ma ọ hula oriri ji ohuru otutu ugboro na ndu ya* 'he was not yet old, but he had witnessed several new yam festivals in his life'. The implication of relating his age with the Igbo new yam festival which is celebrated once a year is to suggest that, since he had seen many of such events, he was no longer a young man. Aside from age, he was shown to be ugly in looks *Ọ chĩa ọchi, ọ jọọ njọ karia ka ọ jorọ na mbu* 'when he laughs, he will become uglier than he is'. This is a way of showing the degree of Emeodi's ugliness; ordinarily, when someone laughs, they appear better, but in this case, laughter heightens the man's bad looks. The entrance of Emeodi upset the peace in Nna Chinyere's family as he (Nna Chinyere) reasoned that he (Emeodi) would be a worthier in-law, on account of his wealth, than Amadi who was just an upstart. Thereafter, Emeodi presented to Nna Chinyere a catalogue of the financial needs he would handle if Nna Chinyere accepted him as a son-in-law. Such needs include taking care of Nna Chinyere and Nne Chinyere, building a house for Nna Chinyere in the ancestral home, taking care of Nna Chinyere after he retires from civil service, and funding Chinyere's secondary school education. These are very tempting proposals that Nna Chinyere found difficult to reject as shown in the next excerpt:

Atumatu nwoke ahụ dị omimi karia ka Nna Chinyere si hụ ya.

Nwoke ahụ ejirila ego wee jide Nna Chinyere. Nna Chinyere ga-eji onu okwu ya na ike ya dika Nna Chinyere, mee ka Chinyere kweta na nwoke ahụ ga-alu ya; ma Chinyere achoro ya ma ọ bu na ọ choghi ya. Nna Chinyere erielala ihe o ribeghi, kweta na ya ga-eme ihe o mebeghi (p. 36).

The man's proposal was deeper than Nna Chinyere's expectation.

That man had used the money to cage Nna Chinyere. Nna Chinyere will use word of mouth and power as the father of Chinyere to make Chinyere agree to marry that man, whether Chinyere likes it or not. Nna Chinyere had eaten what he never ate and agreed that he would do what he never did. According to the narrator, Emeodi's proposal was too strong, overwhelming, and irresistible to Nna Chinyere. He bowed to the financial power of Emeodi who had promised to grant him all that he was finding difficult to acquire or undertake by himself. Emeodi had succeeded in using his wealth to woo Nna Chinyere into accepting him as a son in-law. In the view of the narrator, the onus now lies on Nna Chinyere to prepare the mind of his daughter to accept to marry Emeodi whether she liked him or not, *ma Chinyere achoro ya ma ọ bu na ọ choghi ya*. This is the crux of the matter and the sum of the conflict in the novel. On the premises that, Chinyere was in love with Amadi, and had consented to marry him, Nna Chinyere understood that it would be a herculean task to bend Chinyere's tender emotions in the direction of Emeodi. The narrator opines that the only option left

for Nna Chinyere is to utilize his position and power as the head of the family to make Chinyere marry Emeodi - *Nna Chinyere ga-eji onu okwu ya na ike ya dika nna Chinyere, mee ka Chinyere kweta na nwoke ahụ ga-alu ya*. The implication of using his power as the father is the application of force and every coercive instrument at his disposal to achieve his inglorious objective. The maxim, *Nna Chinyere erielā ihe o ribeghi, kweta na ya ga-eme ihe o mebeghi* 'Chinyere's father had eaten what he never ate, and agreed to do what he never did' is used to underline the great challenge before him, because he knew that Chinyere was already in love with Amadi, and more importantly, he knew that Chinyere did not like Emeodi and will not give her consent. This is shown in the narrator's exposure to Chinyere's mind as seen in the next excerpt:

Ma nwoke ahụ na-abia be ha anaghị eche Chinyere uche, n'ihī na ọ maara nke oma na o nweghi ihe ga-eme ka ya hapu Amadi sị na ọ bu nwoke ahụ ga-alu ya. O na-abia ilu ya nke gini na gini? Akpachaghianya Nna Chinyere na nwoke ahụ nwere ike buru ogbo. O na-abia ilu Chinyere ka Chinyere bia fochawa ya awo di ya n'isi, ka ọ bu ka o nyere ya aka kowa oko juru ya ike (p. 33).

But Chinyere is not perturbed by the constant visit of that man in their house, because she knows that nothing will make her leave Amadi and decide that it is that man that will marry her. Is he coming to marry her for what and for what reason? If care is not taken, Nna Chinyere and that man may be age mates. Is he coming to marry Chinyere so that Chinyere will be pulling out his white hair, or to help him scratch his bum full of gnats?

In this except, Chinyere makes a decision never to abandon Amadi for Emeodi because both of them did not match in certain demographic indices, especially age. The fact that Chinyere was not bothered in the least about the coming of Emeodi; *nwoke ahụ na-abia be ha anaghị eche Chinyere uche*; is an indication that he (Emeodi) was not an option, despite his wealth that he exhibited and the promises he had made to her father. The first rhetorical question; *O na-abia ilu ya nke gini na gini?* 'Is he coming to marry her for what and what?' shows that there is no logical reason Emeodi should desire to marry Chinyere given the great disparity in their age. From the perspective of Chinyere; *Akpachaghī anya Nna Chinyere na nwoke ahụ nwere ike buru ogbo*; 'if care is not taken this man would be the same age with her father', indicating that Chinyere found it repulsive to consider marrying such a fellow. The next rhetorical question indicates that Emeodi is so old that Chinyere would end up attending to his age-related needs and challenges; *ka Chinyere bia fochawa ya awo di ya n'isi, ka ọ bu ka o nyere ya aka kowa oko juru ya ike* 'so that Chinyere will start plucking his white hairs or scratching his bum full of gnats'. The reference to white hairs was targeted at his age while the reference to gnats was targeted at Emeodi's habit of scratching his bum which Chinyere detested. This fact is later reiterated and confirmed by Nne Chinyere after Nna Chinyere presented the matter to her as seen in the next excerpt:

Nna Chinyere gbupu aso mmiri di n'onu iji kwuo ihe a. Kedu uzọ o si dakooro ya na Chinyere? Nwoke a joro njo mmadu, Chinyere mara mma. Gi na nwoke a chowara ibu ogbo, ma Chinyere ka bu nwata. Ya na Chinyere soro na-aga n'uzo, Chinyere a ga-asị ndi mmadu na nwoke ahụ bu nwanne ya, ka ọ bu di ya, ka ọ bu nna ya? (p. 41)

Nna Chinyere, spit out the saliva from the mouth you used to say that thing. In what way is Chinyere and this man compatible? This man is ugly, but Chinyere is beautiful. You and this man are nearly

age mates, but Chinyere is still a child. If he and Chinyere are walking on the road, will Chinyere tell people that the man is her brother, or husband, or her father?

In this excerpt, Nne Chinyere confirms Chinyere's position that she and Emeodi were grossly incompatible. The idiomatic expression *Nna Chinyere, gbupu aso mmiri di n'onu iji kwuo ihe a* 'Nna Chinyere, spit out the saliva from the mouth you used to say this thing' is used to tell her husband to cancel and reject the suggestion of preferring Emeodi to marry Chinyere. Nne Chinyere's stance is almost as if it was abominable for her husband to take that position. The first rhetorical question *Kedu uzọ o si dakọrọ ya na Chinyere?* 'How does anything match between him and Chinyere? This is a clear statement that the two were not compatible in physical looks *Nwoke a jorọ njo mmadu, Chinyere mara mma* 'This man is ugly, Chinyere is beautiful.' And age *Gị na nwoke a chowara ibu ogbọ, ma Chinyere ka bu nwata* 'You and this man may be age mates, but Chinyere is still a child'. In comparison to Emeodi's age, Nne Chinyere's use of *nwata* 'child' to qualify Chinyere's age is to state in clear terms that the two belong to two different generations in time. The second rhetorical question *Ya na Chinyere soro na-aga n'uzo, Chinyere a ga-asị ndi mmadu na nwoke ahụ bu nwanne ya, ka o bu di ya, ka o bu nna ya?* 'If they are walking on the road, would Chinyere tell people that the man is her brother, or her husband or her father? This question underscores the embarrassment and challenge Chinyere will face in the course of trying to introduce her husband to people. Definitely, due to the communal nature of the Igbo society, it is expected that people will ask questions regarding the relationship between the two. Nne Chinyere's feeling is that Chinyere will be hard put to introduce Emeodi as her husband due to the sharp contrast in age. It will be easier to introduce him as her elder brother or father because it will be difficult for people to believe that Emeodi is Chinyere's husband.

In summary, the conflict arising from spousal selection or choice in Nna Chinyere's family is on account of different interests among the parties in the family. While Chinyere and Nne Chinyere prefer Amadi based on the love they share, Nna Chinyere prefers Emeodi due to selfish interests stemming from what he stands to gain from the relationship.

Rationale for Choice of Emeodi by Nna Chinyere

First, Nna Chinyere established that Emeodi is from a good family, as he was acquainted with his (Emeodi's) father when he was alive, as seen in the next excerpt:

*Nne Chinyere, muna nna nwoke a bu enyi mgbe m na-arụ ọrụ bekee n'Onitsha.
Nna ya bu ezigbo mmadu nke ukwu. O na-enyere ndi mmadu aka mgbe o no ndu
(p. 40)*

'Nne Chinyere, this man's father and I were friends when I was working in Onitsha. His father is a very good man. He helped people when he was alive. In this case, Nna Chinyere presents two reasons for opting for Emeodi. The first one is that he was a friend of Emeodi's father when he was working in Onitsha. This reference was purposefully made to show the relationship and degree of attachment he had with Emeodi's family. Being a friend and well connected with them implies that he had good knowledge of their family which is a very important consideration in choosing a life partner among the Igbos. It can also be interpreted as an attempt to recreate old alliances that are beneficial to him. The second reason is that Emeodi's father is a very good man as he was known as a philanthropist when he was alive. Equating or associating Emeodi's family with good character is a strong way of endorsing him as a potential son-in-law. Igbo promote good character or a good

name as one of the greatest human virtues, hence the maxim *ezi aha ka ego* ‘good name is better than money’. In the quest for a spouse, the most sought-after virtue is good character. Consequently, presenting Emeodi as a man from a good family means that, by extension, he is also a good man and therefore qualifies to marry Chinyere based on morality. However, despite the strong reasoning, he fails to convince his wife to shift ground, and so he shifts to the side of Amadi and presents him as a bad person from a bad family as shown in the next excerpt:

O wee si Nne Chinyere...otu enyi m nwoke huru Amadi ubochi o na-abia ebe a, juo m ihe o na-abia ebe a. Mgbe m kooro ya o si mu ekwekwala ka nwa m jee di ebe ahụ, n'ih na nwanji adighi ebinwu na be ha...N'ih ihe m choputara maka ezi na ulo Amadi ha, o bughu uche m na Amadi ga-alukwa Chinyere ozọ...Obughu ezigbo omume ka ha na-eme (p.41).

Then he told Nne Chinyere...one of my friends saw Amadi the day he came here and asked me why he is coming here. When I told him, he told me not to allow my daughter to marry in that family, because women do not thrive in their family...Due to what I discovered in Amadi's family, it is no longer my choice that Amadi will marry Chinyere... They are not even good people.

In this excerpt, Nna Chinyere states that, based on information he gathered from a friend, Amadi is from a family where married women do not thrive *nwanji adighi ebinwu na be ha*. He said this to show that men in Amadi's family are so wicked and terrible that they do not take good care of their wives, and so the wives would naturally run away after marriage. This argument is tactful for two reasons. First, Nna Chinyere knew that his wife would not want her only daughter and child to enter a family where she would be maltreated or abused by a man. Second, no parent likes the idea of a daughter running back to the father's house after marriage. It is seen as an abomination and brings shame and scorn to the father's family. In Igbo tradition, marriage is for good, and divorce is not easily acceptable or an easy option; once a girl marries, she is not expected to come back because there is no place for her in the father's compound. The place of a woman is in her husband's house and family. By contrasting the two families to show the two extremes of good and evil, Nna Chinyere thought that his wife would be moved, but she understood her husband's real intentions and did not shift from her position. Thereafter, Nna Chinyere presents yet another for insisting that Chinyere should marry Emeodi, as seen in the next excerpt:

O bu eziokwu na anyi ekwela na Amadi ga-alu ya, ma ndi be anyi na-ekwu okwu si na chi na-efo, ihe a na-agbanwe. Nnunu si n'ala je bere n'elu mkpu, n'ala ka o ka nokwa. O buruna anyi asi ka o hapu ita ahuhu, kekwa ya di ebe o ga-ata ahuhu, di anyi kere ya abaghi uru. Ebe o bu na anyi chorọ ike ya di, o kwesiri na onye nwere ego ga-alu ya, ka anyi wee hu na o ga-abara ya uru, bakwaara anyi uru, n'ih na utaba si na o rututu imi, o tuturu anya (Pg 43).

We have indeed agreed that Amadi will marry her, but our people say that as the day breaks, things change. A bird that rose from the ground to perch on a molehill is still on the ground. If we have decided to save her from suffering and still allow her to marry in a place where she will suffer, the marriage is useless. Since we want her to marry, it is a rich man that should marry her, to ensure that it will be beneficial to her, and beneficial to us. Because tobacco said that if it reaches the nose, it will also reach the eyes.

In this instance, Nna Chinyere acknowledged that he had earlier given his consent for Amadi, but he used the maxim *chi na-efo ihe a na-agbanwe* 'as day breaks, things change' to justify his change of mind on the subject since change is the only constant thing in life. Secondly, he used the proverb; *Nnunu si n'ala je bere n'elu mkpu, n'ala ka o ka nokwa* 'a bird that flies from the land to the top of a mole hill is still on the land.' This adage is used to prove that if Chinyere married Amadi, her material condition would not be different from her condition were she not to marry at all. Traditionally, Chinyere's parents (who did not have a male child) had the right to prevent Chinyere from getting married so that she would remain in her father's house and give birth to a male child and heir who would carry on the family name. However, the parents agreed, on humanitarian grounds, to bear their lot in life and allow their only innocent daughter to marry and be happy with her life. Her father argues that, if they desired the happiness of Chinyere, it is pointless marrying her into a family where she would suffer. Therefore, it is wiser to give her off to a rich man such as Emeodi who has the resources to make her happy. The impression given by Nna Chinyere is that he is concerned about the welfare and interest of her daughter - *o kwesiri na onye nwere ego ga-alu ya, ka anyi wee hu na o ga-abara ya uru*. He presented his interest as an appendage *bakwaara anyi uru* 'and be beneficial to us also' to give the impression that the welfare of his daughter is uppermost in his mind. In response, Nne Chinyere did not accept this reasoning and counters that, aside from wealth, Amadi was far better than Emeodi with respect to physical outlook, age and character, and was in the best position to make Chinyere happy since Chinyere loved him. Out of frustration, Nna Chinyere lamentably presents another reason for preferring Emeodi to Amadi, as shown in the next excerpt:

O wee malite kwuwe okwu n'oku n'oku, na-eme ka o na-aba mba, ka o mara ma okwu a ga-esi n'ebe ahụ biere ya. O korọ maka ahụhụ niile ya tara na ya na-azu Chinyere n'ulo akwukwo... wee ruo ugbua o kwesiri na ya ga-esi n'aka ya nwetewe ihe, ya na nne ya wee ju (p.45).

And he started talking with temper, as if he was making a reprove, to know whether that means will help his case. He recounted his sufferings while training Chinyere in school, until now he expected that he would reap something through her, but she and her mother refused. The reason presented here by Nna Chinyere is that he deserves a return on his investment in Chinyere. He recounted his sufferings and the sacrifices he made in the course of training Chinyere in school and expected that his daughter's marriage was a good opportunity to reap. Evidently, Nna Chinyere perceives Chinyere's marriage as a venture from which he will harvest a fortune. Contrary to his earlier disposition, it is apparent that his self-interest overrides the welfare and happiness of his daughter. He is desperate to satisfy his wanton desires at the expense of his daughter's marital fulfilment. The use of harassment by Nna Chinyere; *O wee malite kwuwe okwu n'oku n'oku, na-eme ka o na-aba mba, ka o mara ma okwu a ga-esi n'ebe ahụ biere ya*; was a deliberate ploy to intimidate his wife to submit to his will, as the narrator indicated.

Forced Marriage and Forms of Coercion applied by Nna Chinyere

The novel accounts for varying forms of coercion applied by Nna Chinyere to pressure Chinyere into submitting to his will to marry Emeodi against her will and consent. These coercive acts ranged from mild and subtle to threats. The data is presented below:

Reward

The initial tactic used by Nna Chinyere is to make Chinyere feel loved and special by giving her things capable of inducing her to change her mind and reciprocate the gesture and consent to marry Emeodi, as shown in the next excerpt:

*Nna Chinyere wee kpoo Nne Chinyere, si ya were afere gutara ya eke okuko ahụ.
O wee guta ya. O si Nne Chinyere ya gunyere Chinyere eke okuko ahụ ka o taa.
Ihu toro Chinyere ochi (p. 57)*

Chinyere's father then called Chinyere's mother and asked her to use a plate to bring the gizzard. She brought it. He asked Nne Chinyere to give that gizzard to Chinyere to eat. Chinyere was amused.

Here, Nna Chinyere offers Chinyere the gizzard of a chicken to make her happy and possibly use that gift to change her mind about Amadi. This is a tactful move by Nna Chinyere. According to the author, in Igbo custom, elders do not share the gizzard of a fowl with anyone, except if the father loves a child so much to consider sharing it. The point is that, in Igbo culture, the gizzard is exclusively for the father and no one else including the mother. In this context, it is apparent that offering the gizzard to Chinyere is a means of inducing her to feel special and reconsider her stand on marrying Emeodi. Chinyere was excited about the offer *Ihu toro Chinyere ochi* and she started nursing some sympathy towards her father.

Parental Authority

The second tactic employed by Nna Chinyere is to use his power as the head of the family to intimidate Chinyere into his will in the matter, as shown in the next excerpt:

Chinyere, abụ m nna gi. Inweghi nna ọzọ...na-ege ndi muru gi nti ma ha na-agwa gi okwu, n'ih na anyi buuru gi uzọ wee puta uwa. Onye buuru mmadu uzọ siwe ite na-aka ya na-enwe mkpomkpọ ite na eju. Ji nne gunyere nwata n'aka enweghi mgbe o ji na-ahụ ya oku... (p. 59).

Chinyere, I am your father. You do not have another father...you should pay attention when your parents are talking to you because we came into the world before you. The person who first started cooking has more broken pots and utensils. The yam that a mother puts in the hands of her child will never burn her hands...

In this excerpt, Nna Chinyere imposes himself on Chinyere based on fatherhood. The force of the expression *abụ m nna gi* 'I am your father' is not just to remind Chinyere that he is the father but to announce his authority over her. It is required, therefore, that the daughter should submit to the father willy-nilly. This stance is the outcome of an earlier meeting with his friend Nna Ekeoma, who advised him to use his authority as the father to compel his wife and daughter to abide by his rule in the matter. The first proverb he used; *Onye buuru mmadu uzọ siwe ite na-aka ya na-enwe mkpomkpọ ite na eju*; 'he who started cooking before another has more broken pots' is to register the fact that, in matters of marriage, he is more experienced than his daughter, hence Chinyere should kowtow to his dictates. The second proverb he used; *Ji nne gunyere nwata n'aka enweghi mgbe o ji na-ahụ ya oku*; 'the yam a mother put in the hand of a child will never scotch her' is meant to show Chinyere that what she is asked to do (marry Emeodi) although seemingly

challenging is in her best interest, and not intended to hurt her. Put differently, if a parent asks a child to undertake a painful task, it is ultimately for the good of the child. Incidentally, at the end of the interaction, Chinyere boldly declared that she would not marry Emeodi as her father desired. Thereafter, Nna Chinyere applied the next tactic.

Ostracisation

Out of desperation, Nna Chinyere told Chinyere that if she insisted that she would not marry Emeodi, he would disown her, as shown in the next excerpt:

Okwu anyị a abughị ihe a ga-ewere be dibia. Ugbua ụzọ ihe abụọ chere gi n'ihu. I sị na Amadi ga-alụ gi, ikpòkwala m nna gi ọzọ. Soro ya gawa, ma mmadu jụọ gi onye bụ nna gi, sị onye ahụ na inweghi nna; na nna gi ajula gi (p. 61).

This discussion is not something that warrants consulting a medicine man. Now, you have two options. If you say that Amadi will marry you, do not call me your father anymore. Go with him, but if anybody asks you about your father, tell that person that you don't have a father, that your father has rejected you.

On a note of finality, Nna Chinyere declared that the basis of a further father-daughter relationship with Chinyere is her consent to marry Emeodi, despite that she did not like him. Otherwise, she will be disowned or ostracized from the family. His initial statement *Okwu anyị a abughị ihe a ga-ewere be dibia*; 'this our matter is not something that needs consulting a native doctor' implies that he was not prepared for any further consultation over the matter, even to higher powers that knew better. He had made up his mind and made an irreversible decision. If Chinyere did not comply and marry old Emeodi, he ceases to be her father and contrariwise, she ceases to be his daughter, as he said, *na nna gi ajula gi*; 'your father has disowned/rejected you'. This is a threat not only to the social image of Chinyere but also to the balance and equilibrium of the family upon which so much depends. Understandably, if a child severed ties with the father, they have by extension severed ties with the lineage and the clan. Ostracisation is outright rejection of a person, and the person so rejected becomes an outcast in society. An outcast in Igbo society is not only alone and cut off from community in life; even in death, it is believed that they will not be received by the ancestors, but that their spirits will be roaming about aimlessly. This is a grave threat meant to pressure Chinyere to succumb and marry an old man she did not like. However, Nne Chinyere put forward a strong response and defence of her daughter by pointing out the irrationality of disowning one's daughter because of a stranger. In reaction, Nna Chinyere applied the next coercive tactic.

Death

The final stroke applied by Nna Chinyere after the earlier threats failed is the threat of death, as shown in the next excerpt:

Achoghị m ogologo akukọ. Ọ bụrụ na Chinyere asị na nwoke a agaghị alụ ya, aga m ezi ụmuokpu ka ha bịa ka m gwa ha na ọ bụ Chinyere gburu m, tupu m nwuo. Okwu ọzọ adighị ya... (p. 62)

I don't want a long talk. If Chinyere said that this man will not marry her, I will send for our married daughters so that I will tell them that it is Chinyere that killed me, before I die. There is nothing more to say.

The excerpt demonstrates the level of desperation on the part of Nna Chinyere to get what he wants in the matter of Chinyere's spouse selection. The threat is not just that he will die naturally, but that it is Chinyere that killed him. That is, it was Chinyere's insubordination and refusal to marry Emeodi that led to his death. His desire to invite the *umuokpu* 'married daughters of the land' as witnesses shows that he is determined to prove to the community that Chinyere is responsible for his death. His final words *Okwu ozọ adighi ya;* 'there is nothing more to say;' implies that he is not ready to entertain any other opinion on the matter, except to have his way. This extreme reaction by Nna Chinyere put Chinyere in a huge dilemma. She did not want her father to disown her, and neither did she want him to die. Simultaneously, she still did not want to marry Emeodi to please her father. This dilemma is ably captured in the anecdote used by the narrator:

Nshiko si na chi ya na ogo ya rioro ya oru otu ubochi. Ya gawara ogo ya oru, hapu chi ya, chi ya ewere ndu ya. Ya gawa nke chi ya, hapu nke ogo ya, ogo ya akporo nwunye ya. N'ih nke a nshiko wee nwee isi abuo ka o ga-abu otu isi gawa na be chi ya, nke ozọ agawa na be ogo ya (p. 64).

The crab said that his god and his in-law asked him to work for them on a particular day. If he goes to work for his in-law and leaves his god, his god will take his life. If he goes to work for his in-law and leaves his god, his in-law will take back his wife. Because of this, the crab developed two heads so that one head would go to work for his god and the other head would go to work for his in-law.

The anecdote of the two-headed crab is used to show Chinyere's confusion; just like the crab that is presented with two equal options to demonstrate his loyalty *Ya gawara ogo ya oru, hapu chi ya, chi ya ewere ndu ya. Ya gawa nke chi ya, hapu nke ogo ya, ogo ya akporo nwunye ya* Chinyere was torn between pleasing her father and marrying a man she did not like on the one hand, and marrying her heartthrob and risking losing her father or being ostracized on the other hand. If she married Emeodi to please her father, she would have sacrificed her own pleasure and happiness. If she chose her happiness and insisted on Amadi, her father would not be happy and may die. Unfortunately, unlike the crab that developed two heads to please both parties *N'ih nke a nshiko wee nwee isi abuo ka o ga-abu otu isi gawa na be chi ya, nke ozọ agawa na be ogo ya,* Chinyere can't please her father and herself simultaneously.

Effects of Coercion and Outcomes of Forced Marriage

The narrator showed several outcomes of forced marriage on the protagonist Chinyere, such as depression, evasive behaviour and withdrawal from society, deception, and eventually suicide. The data is presented below.

Depression

Consequent upon the insistence of Nna Chinyere that Chinyere will marry Emeodi against her will, Chinyere lapsed into depression, as shown in the next excerpt:

Chinyere dī ndū nwuọ ọnwu. Ọ na-akpọ nkụ n'ike n'ike. Ihe oriri adighi ekwe ya eri... Ọ buru na ọ huru uto ọ ga-esi mee onwe ya ka ọ joo njo, ọ gara ime onwe ya, ka ọ mara ma nwoke ahụ aga-ahapu ya chowa onye ozo... N'ih i nke a tupu mmadu enweta Chinyere n'ulo, ọ na-adị ka esiri n'okụ (p. 67)

Chinyere is alive but dead. She is progressively drying up. She finds it difficult to eat... If she knew of a means to make herself ugly, she would have done it to see if that man would leave her and look for another person... Because of this, it is very difficult to find Chinyere in the house.

The author aptly captures Chinyere's present state of mind by stating that *Chinyere dī ndū nwuọ ọnwu* 'Chinyere is alive but dead'. The paradox is used to show that, like the living dead, she is sick of life and does not find any reason to be alive anymore. This is exemplified by her continual and progressive loss of weight *Ọ na-akpọ nkụ n'ike n'ike* 'she is drying up fast', as a result of loss of appetite for food; *Ihe oriri adighi ekwe ya eri*. Factually, one of the side effects of depression is a lack of appetite for food due to emotional turbulence. Part of that emotional disturbance is her wish to alter her looks; *Ọ buru na ọ huru uto ọ ga-esi mee onwe ya ka ọ joo njo, ọ gara ime onwe ya, ka ọ mara ma nwoke ahụ aga-ahapu ya chowa onye ozo*; 'If she had her way, she will make herself ugly to see whether the man will leave her and look for another person'. This wish represents the height of the emotional turbulence within her; since her feeling is a mere wish that cannot be realized, she knew that she is helpless in her situation or at the mercy of society. Another side effect of her depressed condition is being outdoors most of the time instead of indoors as was her custom. Being outdoors is a ploy by Chinyere to stay clear of the environment that oppressed her mind. It is an escapist measure that consists of physical and emotional flight from the source of her anguish and agony.

Evasive Behaviour

Since Chinyere did not want to marry Emeodi, she was not comfortable with him and she did not want people, especially her schoolmates, to see her with Emeodi. Consequently, she devised a means of ensuring that her schoolmates did not see her with him, after she paid a temporary visit to Emeodi's house, as arranged by her father:

Na be di ya ka Chinyere no ugbua. Onye ga na-eje azutara ya ihe n'ahia? Onye ga na-eje ekutere ya mmiri ọ ga-eji na-esiri di ya ihe? Onye ga na-aruru ya oru dijiri ya ma ọ na-ano naani n'ime ulo ka umu akwukwo ha ghara ihu ya? (p. 117)

Chinyere is in her husband's house now. Who will be going to buy something for her in the market? Who will be fetching water for her in the house with which to cook for her husband? Who will be doing her house chores if she stayed indoors to avoid seeing her schoolmates?

To avoid making contact with her schoolmates who lived in the same area as Emeodi, Chinyere decided to restrict her movement by staying indoors always. The fear is that if she stepped out for any reason, she would expose herself. The narrator used rhetorical questions to show the implausibility and impracticability of staying indoors permanently. Going to the market to buy foodstuffs, fetching water from the pump, and engaging in other domestic chores are some of the fundamental duties of a wife in Igbo culture, all of which require engaging the exterior. The rhetorical questions implied that no one else could undertake those assignments for her. To

overcome this hurdle, Chinyere devised the means of fetching water at night and going to the market hidden in taxis to avoid exposure. Eventually, one fateful day, her tactic failed, and she was seen by one of her schoolmates when she stole out to throw away her laundry water. On inquiry by her schoolmate about her presence there she lied; *abịara m ịnonyere nwanne nna m ntakiri oge* 'I came to stay with my uncle temporarily'. On another occasion, when the schoolmates came to visit and inquired about Emeodi's wife, again Chinyere lied *Chinyere wee gwa ha na nwunye ya jere ahia* 'Chinyere told them that his wife went to market'. The evasiveness and falsehood demonstrated by Chinyere was, of course, prompted by her unwillingness to be associated with a man she despised with passion, but who was thrust on her by force.

Deception

In the desperate bid by Nna Chinyere for Chinyere to marry Emeodi, he issued threats of disowning Chinyere and death. These threats put Chinyere in a difficult position, as she did not know the right course of action to take. In the end, Nne Chinyere provided a solution to the problem as shown in the next excerpt:

Anyi ga-iji nkirika nkata buru ibu diiri anyi...Onye ga-alu gi bu Amadi. Ma, anyi ga-iji agadi nwoke ahụ na-esi onwu nweta ihe anyi chorọ. O kwuru si na ya ga-azu gi n'ulo akwukwo ukwu. Anyi ga-asị ya na ikwerela na o ga-alu gi. Ma, unu agaghị agba kwukwo ruo mgbe i si n'ulokwukwo ukwu puta. O zuchaa gi, i nweta ezigbo oru. I nweta oru, na-enye nna gi ihe nke oma...I si na i chokwaghịga di o gaghi enye gi nsogbu... (p. 71 - 72).

We shall use a tattered basket to carry our load...The person who will marry you is Amadi. But we shall use that stubborn old man to get what we want. He said that he would fund your secondary education. We will tell him that you have agreed to marry him. But you will not wed until you graduate from secondary school. After training you, you will get a good job. When you get a job, you will start taking care of your father...then, if you say that you are no longer interested in the marriage, he will not disturb you...

Nne Chinyere contrived a scheme for Chinyere to "agree" to marry Emeodi; *Anyi ga-asị ya na ikwerela na o ga-alu gi* but on the condition that they will not wed until Chinyere completed her secondary education from Emeodi's sponsorship. The proverb; *Anyi ga-iji nkirika nkata buru ibu diiri anyi*; 'we shall use a tattered basket to carry our load' was used by Nne Chinyere to show that, the measure she proffered is not genuine but a false means of realizing their objective. The plan, as she stated was that, after Emeodi had funded Chinyere's education, expectedly, Chinyere would find a good job and then be in a position to take care of her father; *O zuchaa gi, i nweta ezigbo oru. I nweta oru, na-enye nna gi ihe nke oma*. At that point, if Chinyere opts out of the marriage with Emeodi, her father will not complain since his needs (which is the basis of contention) would have been met by her daughter; *I si na i chokwaghị iga di o gaghi enye gi nsogbu*. The picture of Nna Chinyere painted here by Nne Chinyere is that the man is greedy and money-conscious, and can change his mind if presented with money. The idea that he may no longer trouble Chinyere to marry Emeodi if she starts taking care of him is evidence that he lacks integrity and decorum. This deceptive measure, proffered and initiated by Nne Chinyere was an outcome of the pressure mounted by Nna Chinyere to make his daughter marry a man she despised. The deceptive scheme relieved Chinyere and brought back peace in their home, as Chinyere played along with Emeodi.

But it suffered a setback after the death of Nne Chinyere, and Emeodi seized the opportunity of her absence to pressure Nna Chinyere to organize the wedding, otherwise, he would withhold the sponsorship of Chinyere's education.

Poor Academic Performance

Chinyere was a brilliant student, but her academic performance suffered due to distractions occasioned by the pressure from her father to marry Emeodi against her will, as shown in the next excerpt:

Ozugbo o ruru ụlọ akwụkwọ ha, o buuru akwụkwọ ya gbagowe ebe ha na-anọ agu akwụkwọ. Nke mbụ bu na ihe dịrị ya ekweghi ya guo akwụkwọ na nke gara aga. N'ihia ya, ọ daghi ada. Ma ihe o detara n'ule ejughị ya afọ... Ọ chọrọ imalite n'oge ugbu a guwa akwụkwọ ...Ma n'ebe ahụ ọ nọ, ọ nweghi ihe ọ ga-asị na ya na-eme. Akwụkwọ ekweghi ya agu. Uche ekweghi ezu ya ike. Ebe ahụ ọ nọ bu ahụhụ ka ọ na-ata onwe ya (p. 123).

Immediately she reached school, she took her books to the place where they studied. Firstly, her situation did not permit her to study in the previous term. Consequently, she did not fail but she was not satisfied with her performance... She wanted to begin now to study... But where she is, she would not say what she was doing there. She could not read. Her mind was restless. She was just punishing herself where she was.

In this excerpt, it is apparent that Chinyere desired to study, but she could not as a result of the emotional disturbance arising from her marital situation. As stated by the narrator, in the penultimate term, she did not fail but was not satisfied with her performance; *ọ daghi ada. Ma ihe o detara n'ule ejughị ya afọ* 'she did not fail, but she was not satisfied with her performance'. The implication is that she dropped in performance. Her marital condition adversely affected her study, and the outcome was an average performance in the examination. Despite her resolve to study this time around, not minding her emotional condition, she still could not muster the strength to study; *Akwụkwọ ekweghi ya agu* 'she could not study' because she was mentally restless *Uche ekweghi ezu ya ike*. According to the narrator *ahụhụ ka ọ na-ata onwe ya*; 'she is punishing herself' meaning that the attempt to study was akin to self-immolation, hence a total waste of energy and time.

Shaming and Mockery

A bitter effect of this forced involvement with an old man Chinyere did not consent to marry is the reaction of her schoolmates. Her schoolmates found the entire episode absurd and snatched the opportunity to mock her as shown in the next excerpt:

O wee lee anya n'ebe a na-edere ha ihe, hụ ihe ụmụ akwụkwọ sere n'ebe ahụ... Ha sere otu nwa agboghọ mara mma nke ukwu... Ma n'onnyinyo ahụ nwa agboghọoma ahụ sụ uwe agbam akwụkwọ... Esekwara otu agadi nwoke ha abụọ na-agba akwụkwọ. Nke mbụ, nwoke ahụ ruru n'obodo a na-eke njọ. Nke abụọ, ọ nwere isi nkwocha... Ọ sere ukwu ya ọ di ka mkpuru azịza abụọ... A bịaara n'okpuru ihe ahụ e sere dee, "ọ laala na be di ya" (p. 128)

Then she glanced at their blackboard and saw what her classmates drew there... They drew a beautiful young girl... In that drawing, the young girl wore a wedding gown... There was also a drawing of an old man who wedded the young girl. Firstly, that man reached the land where

ugliness is shared. Secondly, he had receding hair...His legs were drawn to be like two broomsticks...Underneath the drawing was inscribed "She had gone to her husband's house."

The drawing on the blackboard by Chinyere's classmates was a caricature of Chinyere and Emeodi meant to mock Chinyere. Some of the classmates attended the wedding ceremony and saw the gross disparity in the couple concerning age and physical outlook. In the drawing, Chinyere is depicted as extremely beautiful while Emeodi is depicted as extremely ugly, which is a bipolar representation of reality. The idiom, *nwoke ahu ruru n'obodo a na-eke njo*'that man visited the land where ugliness is shared' was used to portray the depth of Emeodi's ugliness. The contrast in the caricature of the couple showed that, in physical terms, they were not compatible. Beyond mockery, the caricature was meant to Chinyere that her school mates did not approve of her "choice" of a life partner; in fact, the union was an embarrassment to them. In reaction, Chinyere felt rejected by her mates, rejected by society, and equally rejected by God because she reasoned that *olu mmadu bu olu Chukwu* 'the voice of man is the voice of God' (p. 128).

Withdrawal from Society

Consequent to the reaction of society towards Chinyere's "choice" of a life mate, Chinyere decided to withdraw to herself, as shown in the next excerpt:

Site ugbua gawa n'ihu, Chinyere enweghi enyi, o nweghi onye iro. Mmeko ya na ndi mmadu anaghi adako. Ebe i huru ya, o na-agara onwe ya. Ndu ya ugbua di ka onye a juru aju (p. 125)

From now onwards, Chinyere did not have a friend and did not have an enemy. She did not have a cordial interaction with people. Wherever you see her, she is walking alone. Her life presently is like a rejected person.

The withdrawal syndrome was aimed at avoiding people and reducing the rate of their contact and intrusion into her private affairs. The expression *Chinyere enweghi enyi, o nweghi onye iro*; 'Chinyere did not have a friend, she did not have an enemy' implies total disconnection from the community. In other words, she had become a pariah as seen in *Ebe i huru ya, o na-agara onwe ya* 'Wherever you see her, she walks alone'. Her decision to dissociate from society was the outcome of her belief that society had rejected her. The danger in her disposition is not really that the society had rejected her, or that she rejected the society, but that she had also rejected herself. This self-rejection/abnegation is at variance with Igbo ideology that one who is rejected should not reject him/herself. The Igbo believe that, although every person is connected to the community, ultimately life depends on the individual, hence, *onye kwe chi ya ekwe*; 'if you are positive, your god will be positive'.

Suicide

Chinyere could not imagine herself living with Emeodi as his wife because she did not like him. As a result, she started entertaining the thought of death, as shown in the next excerpt:

Chinyere wee si ya "I si ebe a lawa, i laa na be nna gi...Ma mu onwe m si ebe a bilie...m lakwuwe otu agadi nwoke...ka o je luwa m. Nke ka njo bu na onweghi mgbe m ji hu nwoke ahu n'anya. Onweghi mgbe o ji buru uche m na nwoke ahu ga-ahu m. Nna m ejirila akpiri ego wee kwanye m isi n'onwu. O-O-O! Ewo! O bu ka uwa a di? (p. 144)

Chinyere told her "If you leave here to your house, you will go to your father's house...But if I rise from here...I will go to meet an old man...so that he will marry me. The worst thing is that I never loved the man. It had never been my choice for that man to marry me. My father had driven my head to death because of his lust for money. Alas! Is this how this world is?"

This excerpt shows the first time Chinyere would confide in someone, a schoolmate she met in her new school during their graduation ceremony. It was like the confession of someone in the throes of death. She could not contemplate packing her properties, after the end of school; to go and live with an old man such as Emeodi till death did them part. She lamented that, out of greed and lust for money, *akpiri ego*, her father pushed her into a certain death. The metonymical expression *kwanye m isi n'onwu*: 'pushed my head into death' showed that Chinyere likened marrying Emeodi to death. The heart-rending exclamation she rendered *O-O-O! Ewo!* 'Alas!' is a total expression of grief, disappointment and disgust at the fate that befell her. The rhetorical question: *Ọ bu ka ụwa a di?* 'Is this how this world is?' implies that the world and life are meaningless and there is no reason to continue to live in it. This is not the kind of life she desired and not the kind of world in which she wanted to live. The undercurrent is that she would rather be elsewhere than in this present world where she has been robbed of her right to be happy. In the end, she died in a way that left people speculating about the means she applied as shown in the next excerpt:

Mgbe abali ato gara, a huru ozu Chinyere. Ọ dighi onye maara ihe gburu ya. Ụfọdu si na o kpooro ogwu ụra nufee ya oke ka o gbuo onwe ya. Ụfọdu si na ọ bu obi mgbowa. Ụfọdu chorọ imalite gbawa asiri na ọ bu ime ka o jere isikwo... (p. 147).

After three days, Chinyere's corpse was seen. Nobody knew what killed her. Some said that she took an overdose of sleeping pills to kill herself. Some said it was heartbreak. Some gossip tried to say that she went to have an abortion...

It is evident that, Chinyere killed herself secretly, and in a way that nobody knew. Although she wrote letters to people including her father and her late mother through her father, the content of her letters was not disclosed by the narrator. The mystery and secrecy of her death led some people to speculate that she took an overdose of sleeping pills; *Ụfọdu si na o kpooro ogwu ụra nufee ya oke ka o gbuo onwe ya*; some suggested that she died of heartbreak: *Ụfọdu si na ọ bu obi mgbowa*, while some thought she died in the process of abortion: *Ụfọdu chorọ imalite gbawa asiri na ọ bu ime ka o jere isikwo*. While the abortion case is completely ruled out by the narrator for reasons of her marriage, thus the legitimacy of her child, it is also ruled out because there is no indication that the marriage was consummated. Chinyere continued evading Emeodi till the end when, instead of going back to Enugu to finally join her husband, she left for Onicha for no reason and ended her life there. Going by the mindset of Chinyere as has been established by the narrator, the conclusion is that she took her own life in one way or another. Suicide is not a normal death in Igbo world. It is an abomination for one to take their own life. In traditional Igbo society, such a person is not buried nor mourned, but thrown into the evil forest. The understanding is that the person had desecrated the land by taking the life they did not own and thus rejected by the land. The narrator uses Chinyere's suicide to underline the far-reaching effect of forced marriage on the victim. Her suicide also represents a protest; her way of protesting the imposition of a detestable husband on her.

The study has thrown up the effect of power play on the vexed issue of selecting a spouse in a family or what Macalex-Achinulo (2021) termed family politics which bordered on who to marry, where to marry, including the economic status of the parties. Needless to say, politics is power play over resources in the society among individuals. In the present study, the antagonist Nna Chinyere (mis)used his power as the head of the family to pressure his only daughter to marry against her will and in the end she took her own life. According to the Family Power theory, the person who is in control or the one who wields influence over others coupled with how power is utilized goes a long way to determining the success or otherwise of that family. In this study, Nna Chinyere used his power as the head of the family to intimidate his daughter and manipulate her into marrying a man she did not like. He succeeded in his quest because his daughter and wife were relatively in a less powerful position compared to him. He used such means available to him to push his daughter into doing his will, at the expense of her happiness.

Family power or politics as seen in this study pits the family into disparate camps and creates unrest. In Nna Chinyere's family, the politics of spouse selection divided the family into two; the father on one side with the second suitor Emeodi, and the daughter with her mother on the other side with the first suitor Amadi. The division in an erstwhile peaceful home upsets the order and balance in the family. Nna Chinyere's major concern is to exploit his daughter's marriage to advance his material and economic interests. In contrast, his daughter and wife were only concerned about the long-term interest of Chinyere. Thus, there is a clash of interest between the immoral and the moral. Like in every conflict, there are bound to be casualties; in this case, all the immediate parties were casualties, except the secondary parties, Amadi and Emeodi. Chinyere committed suicide, and her father died of what seemed to be heart failure upon witnessing her daughter's death. The mother had earlier died, though naturally, since her death was not connected to the politics of selecting Chinyere's spouse.

The study has shown that the person who had and wielded power is Nna Chinyere, but the question, based on Family Power Theory is, who ought to have power in this matter? Ideally, it is the person who is to be married that should exercise power in this context because she is the one that would bear whatever transpires in the marriage, good or bad. Chinyere is the one who ought to make a choice and her father ought to respect her choice. Nna Chinyere's overbearance is not in tandem with the Igbo culture. Traditionally, the parents, especially the father would have his say, but the onus rests on the son or daughter to consent or not. The initial arrangement made by Chinyere's parents in the case of Amadi that took cognizance of Chinyere's will is the ideal situation in Igbo culture. In the end, all parties were happy. But in the case of Emeodi, the result was a conflict that culminated in family unrest and death. It is expected that Nna Chinyere should have respected the right of her daughter to determine who marries her because even though he is the head of the family, it is the daughter who should exercise the power in this sensitive case.

It is noteworthy that Nna Chinyere had his reasons to exercise power in this matter. The reasons mainly bordered on the economy, such as the challenge of taking care of himself after retirement, funding Chinyere's education, and building a befitting house in the ancestral home. These are the effects of living in a modern, Western and capitalist world separated by the haves and the have-nots. In traditional Igbo society, there wasn't such a wide chasm between the rich and the poor; as a matter of fact, there was hardly any poor person as is seen in contemporary society. Every person belonged to a family and families had lands and economic trees on which they thrived all through

life. All people had their houses and they were satisfied with them. It was the Westernisation of society that created social needs such as formal education and civil service, thus the challenge to meet those needs. It is based on these needs that Nna Chinyere misused his power to coerce his daughter to marry a man she did not want. Far from justifying his inordinate ambition, this study is of the view that parents should cede authority or power to their sons or daughters in the matter of choice of a life mate, even in the contemporary world with all the economic and material challenges confronting people.

Conclusion

It is immoral to use power in the family in a way that disadvantages a family member, especially the vulnerable ones such as the girl child. In patriarchal societies such as the Igbo, the men rule the family and the community. Women are not involved in decision-making in the family because their place is not in their father's house but in their husbands' family, among other reasons. However, in matters regarding the life, future, and destiny of the girl child, she should be granted freedom to have her say and way. In terms of choosing a life partner, a girl should be allowed to determine her choice because it is her life and her future that is at stake. The Igbo say that: *mmadu anaghi a bu nwata n'anụ o gburu*: a person cannot be called a child over an animal they killed' implying that, if a girl is mature enough to have attracted the attention of a man, the girl should not be denied the right and power to give her consent or otherwise in the matter. Since nature is in a state of flux and culture is dynamic, it is expected that traditional Igbo marriage customs will continue to evolve with time, but such evolutions should be on the positive side that enhances the culture, and takes the overall interest of all family members into account.

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