

39

A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS REPRESENTATION OF AMOSU PHENOMENON AND THE VICTIMHOOD OF ELDERLY AND POOR WOMEN IN ENUGWU-UKWU, SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA

Onyinyechi P. C. Wariboko

Abstract

The categorization of certain elderly and impoverished women in Enugwu-ukwu, within the Igbo cultural context in Nigeria, as "amosu" (witches) represents a form of gender-based violence, manifesting an implicit reinforcement of asymmetry in social and gender dynamics. This labelling not only dehumanizes these women but also disrupts social harmony, fostering conflicts within the community. Grounded in Catherine Acholonu's 'motherism,' this ethnographic study interrogates the intricate relationship between women's longevity, poverty, and accusations of witchcraft in Enugwu-ukwu. Utilizing observations, in-depth unstructured interviews, focus group discussions, and existing publications, analyzed through the narrative analysis method, the research explores the complicity of factors such as religion, poverty, gender injustice, ignorance, and physical aging blemishes in perpetuating the victimhood of these women. It also scrutinizes the active involvement of women in accusing and oppressing their elderly counterparts, questioning the approach of indigenous feminist theories concerning witchcraft-related violence against women. The study advocates for a novel indigenous feminist theory that comprehensively addresses the unique challenges faced by Igbo women. It emphasizes the interconnectedness between African (Igbo) realities and ongoing gender injustices in a contemporary Igbo community. Furthermore, it calls for gender justice, respect for women, particularly in the context of motherhood, and social responsibilities towards aged women to foster social cohesion in Enugwu-ukwu. This research significantly contributes to the enrichment of feminism (womanism) in Africa and specifically within the Igbo cultural context.

Keywords: gender-based violence, witchcraft accusations, indigenous feminist theory, social cohesion, Igbo culture, motherhood, poverty.

Introduction

In Africa, resolute efforts against gender inequity, injustice, and oppression have emanated from scholars, women's rights activists, and disenfranchised rural women. Yet, a glaring silence shrouds the pervasive *amosu* (witchcraft) accusations targeting elderly and impoverished women, particularly among the Igbo in south-eastern Nigeria. Labelling individuals, especially elderly women, as witches (*amosu*) in many Nigerian communities is dehumanising, representing a form of cultural violence shrouded in silence. The accusation and victimhood of poor elderly women among the Igbo highlight a distressing gender issue seldom explored in the extensive literature on African women's oppressions. This challenge may stem from the reluctance to question this deeply rooted phenomenon of Igbo culture.

Despite the persistent advocacy for gender justice and the principles outlined in International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the victimhood of these women persists. Ironically, women are often the accusers and persecutors, perpetuating the dehumanization of women and undermining the

revered concept of motherhood (Wariboko, 2020) in Igbo culture. This situation disrupts social cohesion and harmony, engendering conflicts in society.

In Enugwu-ukwu, a prominent town in Anambra State, south-eastern Nigeria, evidence abounds of this gender-based violence against senior female citizens. This practice, constituting an implicit endorsement of disparity in social and gender relations, turns the blessing of aging into a nightmare for elderly women. Unfortunately, this age-old issue persists, seemingly impervious to the influences of civilization, education, or religion. Arguably, religion fans its embers.

Grounded in Catherine Acholonu's Afrocentric feminist theory, 'motherism,' this ethnographic study interrogates the *amosu* phenomenon. Utilizing observations, interviews, focus group discussion and publications, it explores the interconnectedness between women's longevity, poverty, and accusations of witchcraft in Enugwu-ukwu. It interrogates the spate of witch accusations, hunt and persecution of some elderly and poor women in the community and instantiates the strain of assumptions and unsubstantiated claims in the construction and expression of *amosu* vis-à-vis social and gender relations among the people. The study also scrutinizes the role of fellow women in accusing and oppressing their elderly counterparts, examining the lax deportment of indigenous feminist models on witchcraft-related violence against women, as well the impact of hybrid African Christianity in perpetuating this anomaly.

The contestations of this study therefore are: Why are elderly and impoverished women accused of *amosu* in Enugwu-ukwu? Why do fellow women play a role in accusing and oppressing their elderly counterparts, perpetuating this dehumanization despite calls for gender justice? How does hybrid African Christianity contribute to sustaining this anomaly?

Employing qualitative and inductive research methods, the article aims to address this significant gap in literature and scrutinize the intricate interplay of factors such as religion, poverty, gender injustice, and the active involvement of women in the oppression of their elderly counterparts in the Igbo cultural context. Thus, underscoring the urgent need for a more comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges faced by Igbo women, advocating for a novel indigenous feminist theory to address this pervasive issue and promote social justice and harmony. Data is analysed, using the narrative analysis method.

The rest of this paper takes the following layout: theoretical framework; a brief discussion on Enugwu-ukwu, the study area; *amosu* phenomenon among the Igbo of south eastern Nigeria; a socio-religious representation and gender dimension of *amosu* phenomenon in Enugwu-ukwu; *amosu* phenomenon and desecration of motherhood institution in Enugwu-ukwu, vis-à-vis, indigenous feminist theories; vanguarding the reverence for motherhood and gender justice in Enugwu-ukwu. At this point, conclusions will be drawn.

Theoretical Framework

This research, exploring religion and gender in Africa, applies 'motherism,' an Afro-centric feminist theory developed by Catherine Acholonu, as a guiding framework (Acholonu, 1995). This indigenous theory emphasizes reverence for African women, particularly those in rural areas, as both biological and metaphorical mothers, making it pertinent to the study.

Acholonu advocates for motherism as an alternative to feminism, proposing an Africa-conceived theory to elucidate women's roles on the continent. Drawing on gender roles in Nigeria's patriarchal society, she accentuates the rural woman's significance as a

connection to mother earth, embodying the indispensable mother essence (Acholonu, 1995, p. 118). Wang'ondy (2019, para 3) echoes a similar sentiment, asserting that motherism is "a maternal form of feminism that sees rural women as performing the necessary task of nurturing society." Despite its limitation of excluding urban women who are active in the gender inclusiveness struggle (Ezeigbo, 2012), motherism values motherhood in alignment with cultural feminism, emphasizing its ecocentric nature and the connection between motherhood and the earth.

This study is particularly interested in motherism due to its indigenous and cultural feminist roots, suggesting that women's ways of being may contribute to a just society (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2014). Examining the Enugwu-ukwu *amosu* phenomenon through the lens of motherism, the research aims to substantiate its theoretical assumptions in a typical African society. There is hardly uniformity of values, thoughts and lifestyle of all African nations, so this 'afro-centric' feminist theory needs to be validated in particular African communities. Addressing a limitation of the generalization of Afro-centric feminist theory, the insider perspective validates the theory within the Enugwu-Ukwu traditional society. By investigating the intricacies of this specific community, the research seeks to substantiate the theoretical propositions of 'motherism' while acknowledging the necessity of considering local variations in values and lifestyles across African communities. This approach addresses the limitation of generalization, ensuring the applicability and relevance of the theoretical framework to the unique sociocultural dynamics of Igboland.

Enugwu-ukwu: Historical and Social Index

Enugwu-Ukwu, meaning 'top of a high hill,' holds a pivotal place in Igbo history. Widely recognized as the first son of Nri, the mythical progenitor of the Igbo people (Eri), Enugwu-Ukwu's status as the paternal head is subject to debate. Regardless, a substantial portion of Igbo communities acknowledges its significance as a shared progenitor.

Topographically, Enugwu-Ukwu is perched on a high hill, boasting of natural features such as streams, lakes, and springs with distinct ontological significance. The geographical coordinates are 6°10'0" North, 7°0'0" East (Maplandia.com, 2016). The town comprises eighteen villages, including Akiyi, Avomimi, Awovu, Enuagu, Ire, Orji, Orofia, Osili, Umuakwueze, Umuatulu, Umuatuorah, Umuokpalaeri, Urualor, Uruekwu, Urukpeleke, Urunnebo, Uruogbo and Uruokwe, each contributing to its cultural and historical richness. The population estimates for Enugwu-Ukwu vary widely ranging from 450,000 to 600,000. The community is known for its enterprising spirit which has engendered both growth and migration.

Enugwu-ukwu people are markedly religious. Their worldview is characterized on the belief in the Supreme Being, *Chukwu*, and myriads of male and female deities - *Ngene* and *Ogwugwu*. There is also the strong belief in ancestor veneration, necromancy, totemism, reincarnation, priesthood, witchcraft, and soothsaying (Agwuna, 2005). While a considerable number of Enugwu-ukwu's inhabitants identify as Christians, there is a nuanced syncretism in their religious practices. The fusion of traditional beliefs with Christianity reflects the dynamic cultural landscape.

The people of Enugwu-ukwu are also characteristically enterprising. In pursuit of better opportunities, a substantial number of Enugwu-ukwu indigenes have migrated to major cities within Nigeria and globally. This migration contributes to the diasporic index and complexity to the social fabric of the society. Essentially, Enugwu-ukwu stands as a

rich tapestry woven with historical significance, geographic splendour, cultural diversity, and a dynamic interplay of traditionalism and modernity.

The Phenomenon of *Amosu* in Igboland

The *amosu* phenomenon among the Igbo in southeastern Nigeria is a longstanding socio-cultural aspect integral to their culture (Agbakoba, 2012; Okpalike, 2016). Etymologically, Ifesieh (1989) references “*aja amaghi me osu*” (sacrifice to atone for wrong deeds to *osu*), suggesting that *amosu* has evolved from “*amaghi me osu*” (wrong deeds to *osu*) (p. 241). *Osu* signifies a caste dedicated to the *arusi* (oracle) among the Igbo, distinguished from free borns and feared for their supposed mystic power linked to the oracle. The assumption is that an *osu* is *amosu*. Nwamu (2019, para 5) emphasizes that “a witch is not *amosu* in Igbo,” challenging the conventional view.

Nwamu’s (2019) perspective on *amosu* differs from the prevailing belief that associates it with individuals possessing malignant magical powers, capable of transforming into animals such as a bird, cat, rat or an insect, attending nocturnal meetings and causing havoc. It is in this latter sense that Mbiti (1976), Idowu (1973) and other academic sages of African Traditional Religion consider witchcraft in Africa. Okpalike (2016) acknowledges the complexity of understanding witchcraft among the Igbo, asserting that *amosu* has become an explanation for anything perplexing, discouraging further exploration of root causes in challenging life situations. Despite semantic nuances such as; *ita amosu*, *iri amosu*, *ida amosu* and *ima amosu*. Okpalike concludes that even though *amosu* does not always connote evil, the idea of *amosu* remains malevolent among Africans.

In contrast, witchcraft in the Western world is often viewed as benign, with the term connoting ‘craft of the wise’ and accrediting quintessence in specific fields, skills or talents. Wizards, both elsewhere and among the Igbo, are not actively pursued and are associated with positive connotations, such as ‘computer wizard’ or ‘football wizard.’ Unlike women accused of witchcraft among the Igbo, men hardly face similar dire consequences. Nwamu (2019) humorously notes the contrast in perspectives during a conference on witchcraft in 2019 at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where he sarcastically attributes the live streaming of the conference on Facebook to witchcraft, aligning with the positive idea of wizardry. This juxtaposition highlights the cultural variations in perceptions of witches (female) and wizards (male), emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding.

Igbo Nwere Mmadu Worldwide (2020) asserts that the concept of *amosu* was foreign to ancient Igbo people; hence, *afa* (Igbo divination) does not provide any insights into it. According to Igbo Nwere Mmadu Worldwide (2020), the understanding of *amosu* among the Igbo lacks certainty.

Nevertheless, individuals identified as *amosu* among the Igbo are often accused of causing misfortunes, including bad luck, barrenness, miscarriage, impotence, accidents, premature deaths, natural disasters, drought, poverty, or calamities in both rural and urban areas (Okpalike, 2016; Eboiyehi, 2017; Atata, 2018; Nwamu, 2019; Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020). In Okpalike’s words (2016),

among the Igbo like other African peoples, witchcraft is the most decried in all the causes of human problems. They are most likely to attribute sicknesses, failure in businesses, strained relationships, failure in examinations, scanty harvests and even natural disasters to the menace of witchcraft. (p. 61).

Major features of *amosu* among the Igbo include ripe old age, poverty, scary facial structure, physical blemishes, and mental disturbances. They are believed to transform into birds or animals and feast on victims' blood through cracks they make on the skin. They are thought to employ magic to cause various misfortunes. They are also said to be responsible for scientifically described phenomenon like sleep paralysis, a temporal condition of semi-conscious helplessness of people while sleeping or trying to wake up. Stupendously wealthy individuals are occasionally labelled as *amosu*. For the few well-to-do individuals who are accused of witchcraft, it is assumed that they magically exchange people's fortunes through 'charitable' acts. More so, illnesses that defy medical intervention are attributed to activities of witches, as well as most deaths among the Igbo.

Universally, it is believed that both men and women can be witches or wizards, but the victims of accusations are predominantly older women who are often poor (Eboiyehi, 2017; Adinkrah, 2004; Jell-Bahlsen, 2011; Platzer, 2018; Nwamu, 2019; Muller & Sanderson, 2020). Nwamu (2019, para. 1) notes that "a witch is often a poor old widow who turns into a bird or other dangerous creature in search of innocent people to harm as they slept in the dead of night."

Identification methods for those labelled *amosu* include ludicrous and unreliable means such as: mere suspicion, aging signs such as wrinkled face, 'rapid eye movement' sleep, dementia, weird or anti-social behaviour, confession (sometimes, arising from 'trial by ordeal' or mental illness), 'prophecies' by religious leaders, or identification by native doctors or 'fellow witches' (Kunhiyop, 2015; Bissada, 2019; Nyabwari & Kagema, 2014; Okpalike, 2016; interviews). Those identified through these processes face persecution, social oppression or even death (Eboiyehi, 2017; Atata, 2019; Nyabwari & Kagema, 2014; Schnoebelen, 2009; Encyclopedia.com, 2020; Okpalike, 2016; Dehm & Millbank, 2018; Igbo Nwere Mmadu Worldwide, 2020).

People across all classes and persuasions in Igboland are ensnared in the web of witchcraft paranoia due to their strong belief in the phenomenon (BBC News, 2019; Egwu, 2020; Encyclopedia.com, 2020; interviews; personal observation). Nwobodo (2021) notes that Igbo communities are fast transiting from communalism which they were known for, to individualism as a result of witchcraft suspicions. Religion appears to fuel this phenomenon among the Igbo (Igwe, 2004). However, Nwamu (2019) contends that ground breaking anthropological research demonstrates that witchcraft does not exist; what exists is the belief in witchcraft, which he considers a mirage. He criticizes the persistent refusal of Africans to outgrow this belief. Therefore, he sarcastically observes that in attendance at the 2019 conference on witchcraft at the University of Nigeria Nsukka that evoked trepidation and outcry on campus and in the entire city, were "witches" which comprised of Professors, members of the Christian clergy and many researchers.

In a nutshell, the *amosu* phenomenon reflects a complex interplay of cultural, social, and religious elements, prompting ongoing debates about its existence and impact.

The Socio-religious Representation and Gender Dimension of *Amosu* Phenomenon in Enugwu-ukwu

The people of Enugwu-ukwu, like other Igbo clan groups, hold a belief in the existence of *amosu*. F. Nwogor (personal communication, October 10, 2021) suggested that certain individuals in Enugwu-ukwu are considered *amosu* based on occurrences such as the death or stagnation of their offspring or siblings. Physical indicators, including unattractive facial

features, peculiar expressions, rapid eye blinking, anti-social behavior, and health conditions like sleep apnea and mental illness, are associated with being *amosu*. Additionally, extreme relationship traits, whether exceptionally nice or unfriendly, can lead to accusations of *amosu* in Enugwu-ukwu.

B. Nwuzor (personal communication, December 28, 2022) noted that unfounded ‘visions’ and ‘prophecies’ from African Christian pastors contribute to identifying *amosu*, serving as an excuse for the pastors’ inability to control outcomes through prayer. Some of these pastors employ blame game on the mothers, mothers-in-law, fathers-in-law, aunts, uncles, sisters or brothers of their members whose expectations from their prayers are not met. In Enugwu-ukwu, a certain young lady who patronizes one of the ‘prophets’ in a nearby community insisted that her mother-in-law is a witch and is responsible for her childlessness. On further inquiry, she claimed that she first had a premonition and her ‘prophet’ confirmed her suspicion. This way, some African pastors and prophets ruin relationships and filial ties. Perhaps, these pastors/prophets see an opening in Igbo people’s allusion to *amosu* as responsible for most perturbing life situations and always fills it up with their unfounded prophecies.

O. Okoye (personal communication, April 6, 2021) categorized the *amosu* phenomenon into three types: *ili amosu* (eating witchcraft), *ita amosu* (witch biting), and *ida amosu* (falling on or pressing an individual through witchcraft). *Ili amosu* (eating witchcraft) indicates that witches eat the substance that empowers them to become *amosu* by mouth. Okoye however claims that *amosu* could be eaten advertently or inadvertently. *Ita amosu* (witch biting) is used among Enugwu-ukwu people to describe how *ndi amosu* (*amosu* in plural) who are believed to be vampires bite and then suck the blood of their victims. *Ita amosu* can also be used for any other obnoxious activities and mode of oppression of *ndi amosu*. Nonetheless, *ida amosu* (falling on or pressing an individual through witchcraft) describes exactly what is scientifically known as sleep paralysis, a situation where one seems to be overpowered or pressed by an external force inhibiting one from waking up or talking from a semi-conscious state for a couple minutes. In Enugwu-ukwu, it is believed that the temporal sleep paralysis is an activity of *amosu* trying to strangle a victim.

Furthermore, oral data support the stance of a great deal of scholars earlier referenced that while men as well as women can be *amosu* among the Igbo and elsewhere, the prevalence of accusations lean towards females in Enugwu-ukwu (F. Nwogor; B. Nwuzor; O. Okoye and E. Aniago, personal communications, December 28, 2022). Scholars, as well as participants of this study maintain this stance without corresponding explanation. N. Okoye (personal communication, January 5, 2022) noted that an old and underprivileged woman, appearing scary due to poverty, ill health or stress represents a typical example of *amosu* in Enugwu-ukwu.

N. Okonkwo (personal communication, January 6, 2022) validated N. Okoye’s position. Instances of blaming elderly women for misfortunes in Enugu-ukwu abound. In June 2022 for instance, a young lady slumped and died while in the bathroom in one of the villages in Enugwu-ukwu and all accusing fingers went to her mother-in-law who people claimed, ransomed her life in the witchcraft coven with that of the young lady who was her daughter-in-law. In another development, a fierce looking bird was killed somewhere in the community. Shortly after, an elderly woman in that same community died. For some individuals in the community, that was a confirmation that the elderly woman translated to

the bird or that the bird housed her spirit, hence her death shortly after. These claims, though popular in the community, remain unverifiable and lack validation.

The question arises, whether poverty and old age confer *amosu* status on Enugwu-ukwu women. This query was tactically avoided by respondents of this study or acknowledged as predisposing factors to becoming *amosu*. In Enugwu-ukwu, “known” or “confirmed” witches, mostly elderly women with low economic power, face accusations and grapple with a great deal of direct and indirect vituperations as well as other graver penalties, often mainly spurred by ‘visions’ and ‘prophecies,’ among other weird reasons. Once suspected, these women are accused and deserted by the community and sometimes, even family members. This is usually followed by other subtle or obvious forms of oppression such as treating them despicably at the instance of perturbing situations such as; disaster, miscarriage, infertility, natural disaster, illness, death or failure in the family or community. They are also usually castigated in repugnant songs, mostly by fellow women – kith and kin, daughters-in-law or other women in the community. Women in Enugwu-ukwu, paradoxically, lead the accusation and persecution of fellow women deemed *amosu*.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to argue against the existence of *amosu* especially when *isa asisa* (voluntary confession) is made by some people claiming to be *amosu* which do not necessarily arise as a result of ‘trial by ordeal’ which is sometimes the case, or mental illness. While acknowledging the existence of *amosu*, the socio-religious construction of accusations against elderly and poor women in Enugwu-ukwu lacks veracity. It is therefore disturbing that women who are mothers – biological or metaphorical – and are, according to Acholonu’s motherism, connected to the mother earth essence and human flourishing in the community are singled out for oppression. This gender-based oppression is deeply rooted, with women participating in their own subjugation, possibly influenced by cultural imbalances and a patriarchal environment. This long-standing anomaly demands attention both in academia and in practice, as it perpetuates a cycle of oppression against elderly and poor women, reinforcing the need to recognize it as a form of gender oppression.

The *Amosu* Phenomenon and Desecration of the Institution of Motherhood in Enugwu-ukwu

The *amosu* phenomenon and the desecration of the institution of motherhood in Enugwu-ukwu, in relation to indigenous feminist theories, are significant issues. The accusation of witchcraft against elderly and poor women in Enugwu-ukwu creates disharmony in the community, posing a threat to peaceful coexistence. This labelling of women as *amosu* not only breeds animosity but also fosters gender oppression and social injustice, disrupting the society’s stability.

The illogicality inherent in this phenomenon raises questions about the reliability of hybrid African Christian pastors who propagate ‘visions’ and ‘prophecies’ indicting these poor mothers as *amosu*. Consequently, the *amosu* phenomenon becomes a hindrance to progress, unity, and the overall well-being of humans in Enugwu-ukwu.

Moreover, the allegations against and victimization of poor and elderly women in Enugwu-ukwu undermine the revered place of motherhood in the community. This contradicts Acholonu’s theoretical model of ‘motherism,’ which advocates for the valorization and protection of mothers as models and links to mother earth. Ironically, Enugwu-ukwu’s indigenous religion and culture secure the place of motherhood and women. The saying, ‘*Enugwu nnem*’ literally, ‘Enugwu, my mother’ is used to refer to the

town as mother or trace affinity with other people from Enugwu-ukwu especially when the meeting is far away from home. Wariboko's (2020) treatise on *Enugwu nnem* is instructive. Enugwu-ukwu is referred to as a mother of all her indigenes and culturally valorizes mothers and women generally. However, the *amosu* accusations against women in Enugwu-ukwu disregard the religious and ontological essence of women, further emphasizing the need to address these unfounded allegations.

Despite the existence of indigenous feminist theories such as Acholonu's 'Motherism', Ezeigbo's 'Snail-sense feminism', Nnaemeka's 'Nego-feminism', Ogundipe's 'Social Transformation Including Women in Africa (STIWA)', Hudson-Weem's 'Africana Womanism', Opara's 'Femalism' and so on (Nnaemeka, 2004; Ogundipe, 1994; Acholonu, 1995; Ezeigbo, 2012; Ogunyemi, 1985), there remain a gap addressing the specific gender oppression represented by *amosu* accusations in Igboland. These existing models highlight the conspicuous plight of African women, either descriptively, analytically or prescriptively address gender injustice in the continent, and recommend ways to navigate unjust patriarchal terrains. Indigenous feminist theories in Africa have been largely about fairness, complementarity, harmonious co-existence, and peacebuilding in African societies. However, issues beyond the conspicuous, such as the religious and ontological essence of women, 'spiritual legitimacy' of women's oppression such as *amosu* accusation and victimization as well as the active role of fellow women in oppressing women beg for attention. This study therefore advocates for a more holistic indigenous feminist model that delves into the religious, ontological and spiritual aspects of women's oppression, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive approach in African gender discourse.

Vanguarding the Reverence for Motherhood and Gender Justice in Enugwu-ukwu

The imperative for proper gender education and sensitization of Enugwu-ukwu community members regarding the illogicality and injustice inherent in randomly accusing elderly women of being witches cannot be overstated. This challenging task falls upon individuals of goodwill and gender activists.

Furthermore, there is a need for new indigenous feminist models that can instigate attitudinal changes toward this socio-cultural malady in contemporary Enugwu-Ukwu and among the Igbo in south eastern Nigeria. This serves as a clarion call to African indigenous gender scholars to broaden their scope and be more inclusive in considering and articulating indigenous feminist models. These innovative models should also denounce women championing the oppression of fellow women in any form.

Moreover, to ensure the effective and smooth functioning of Igbo communities, women must refrain from self-aspersion, disdain, and infighting. Strengthening sisterhood and valorization, rather than victimization of women in society, especially by women themselves, fosters processes for socio-religious harmony in Africa and in Igbo societies particularly (Oguonu, 2013; Acholonu, 1995; Oluyemi-Kusa, 2009; Mutunga, 2009; Oduyoye, 2002).

Conclusion

In Enugwu-ukwu, numerous cases exist of elderly and impoverished women accused of witchcraft, subjected to ridicule, abuse, rejection, desertion, and other indignities. This level of insensitivity breeds chaos in the community, inflicting untold hardships on the victims or

leading to their premature transition to the grave. This long-standing state of affairs remains untouched by civilization, religion, or education in contemporary times. Instead, religion fans its embers. Enugwu-ukwu, considered the paternal head of many Igbo clan groups and a prototype of Igbo culture, amplifies the repercussions of any tolerated incongruity beyond the community. It is no surprise that the prevalence of witchcraft accusations against women in other parts of Igboland is seemingly no different.

By examining the victimhood of women accused of *amosu* through the lens of Catherine Acholonu's motherism, this paper advocates for an Afrocentric theoretical model that addresses gender bias and violence rooted in obscure claims. The paper also calls for a model that focuses less on the broader society and more on women as both disproportionate contributors to and perpetrators of their own victimhood, as well as agents of their own liberation.

References

- Acholonu, C.O. (1995) *Motherism: The Afrocentric alternative to feminism*. Abuja: Afa Publications.
- Adinkrah, M. (2004). Witchcraft accusations and female homicide victimization in contemporary Ghana. *Sage Journals: Violence Against Women* 10(4), 325-356. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801204263419>
- Agbakoba, J.C.A. (2012). Belief and action systems: An examination of the efficacy and effects of paranormal phenomena. In J.O. Oguejiofor and T. Wendi (Eds.). *Exploring the Occult and Paranormal in West Africa*. (pp. 2032). <https://books.google.com.ng/books?id=s5WN2HcwpNoC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>
- Agwuna, O. 2005. *Igu Aro*. Address presented at Obu Ofo Nri palace Enugwu-ukwu on January 5, 2005.
- Atata, S.N. (2019). Aged women, witchcraft, and social relations among the Igbo in South-Eastern Nigeria. *Journal of Women and Aging* 31(3), 231-247. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2018.1436415>
- Bissada, A. (2019). *Nigeria's elderly suffering from dementia, not witchcraft says activist*. <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20190310-nigerias-elderly-suffering-dementia-not-witchcraft-says-activist>
- Dehm, S. and Millbank, J. (2018). Witchcraft accusation as gendered persecution in refugee law. *Sage Journals: Social and Legal Studies* 28(2), 202-226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0964663917753725>
- Eboiyehi, F. (2017). Convicted without evidence: Elderly women and witchcraft accusations in contemporary Nigeria. *Journal of International Women's Studies* 18(4), 247-265.
- Egwu, P. (2020). Nigerian Christians divided by conference on witchcraft. *National Catholic Reporter*. <https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/nigerian-christians-divided-conference-witchcraft>
- Encyclopedia Britannica (2020). *Witchcraft in Africa and the world*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/witchcraft/Witchcraft-in-Africa-and-the-world>

- Encyclopedia.com (2020). *Witchcraft: African witchcraft*. <https://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopediasalmanacs-transcripts-and-maps/witchcraft-african-witchcraft>
- Ezeigbo, A.A. (2012). Snail-sense feminism: Building on an indigenous model. *University of Lagos monograph series 17*. Lagos: Faculty of Arts.
- Idowu, B. (1973). *African traditional religion: A definition*. London: SCM Press Ltd.
- Ifesieh, E.I. (1989). *Religion at the grassroots: Studies in Igbo religion*. Enugu: SNAAP Press.
- Igbo Nwere Mmadu Worldwide (August 24, 2020). *Amosu in Igboland: A Philosophical re-examination*. https://web.facebook.com/113219127144970/posts/amosu-in-igboland-a-philosophical-reexaminationamaosu-amosu-is-a-name-igbos-gave/132291765237706/?_rdc=1&_rdr
- Igwe, L. (Spring 2004). A skeptical look at African witchcraft and religion. *Skeptic (Altadena, CA)*. <https://www.questia.com/read/1G1-119898799/a-skeptical-look-at-african-witchcraft-and-religion>
- Jell-Bahlsen, S. (2011). Nneka: Is mother still supreme in Igboland? Reflections on the biography of eze mmiri, Madume Madame Martha Mberekpe of Orsu-Obodo, Oguta, 1934-2007. In A.O. Nwauwa and C.J. Korieh (Eds.), *Against all odds: The Igbo experience in postcolonial Nigeria*. (pp. 201-224). Owerri: Goldline and Jacobs Publishing.
- Kunhiyop, S.W. (2015). How witches are known. *Henry Center for Theological Understanding*. <https://henrycenter.tiu.edu/2015/06/how-witches-are-known/>
- Maplandia.com (2016). *Enugwu-ukwu map – Satellite images of Enugwu-ukwu*. <http://www.maplandia.com/nigeria/anambra/njikoka/enugu-ukwu/#:~:text=This%20place%20is%20situated%20in,of%20Enugu%20Ukwu%20in%20Nigeria.>
- Mbiti, J.S. (1976). *African religions and philosophy*. London: Heinemann.
- Muller, C. and Sanderson, S. (2020). *Witch hunts: A global problem in the 21st century*. <https://www.dw.com/en/witch-hunts-a-global-problem-in-the-21st-century/a-54495289>
- Mutunga, E. (2009). Gender and peace processes in Africa. In S.G. Best (Ed.), *Introduction to peace and conflict studies in West Africa*. pp. 365-382. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
- Nwamu, A. (November 27, 2019). On witchcraft. *The Cable News*. <https://www.thecable.ng/on-witchcraft>
- Nyabwari, B.G. and Kagema, D.N. (2014). The impact of magic and witchcraft in the social, economic, political and spiritual life of African communities. *International Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education* 1(5), 9-18.
- Oduyoye, M.A. (2002). *Daughters of Anowa*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books.
- Oguonu, C. (2013). Gender-based violence and women exclusion in conflict resolution. In M. Ikejiani-Clark (Ed.), *Peace studies and conflict resolution in Nigeria: A reader*. Pp. 339-350. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
- Okpalike, C.J.B.G. (2014). Amosu as life force in Igbo (African) mythology. *Ofo: Journal of TransAtlantic Studies* 4(2), 59-81.

- Oluyemi-Kusa, D. (2009). Gender, peace and conflict in Africa. In S.G. Best (Ed.). *Introduction to peace and conflict studies in West Africa*. pp. 205-233. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
- Platzer, M. (2018). Victimization of elderly women, “witches,” and widows. In P. Kratcoski and M. Edelbacher (Eds.). *Perspectives on Elderly Crime and Victimization*. Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-726823_11
- Ritzer, G. and Stepnisky, J. (2014). *Sociological theory 9th ed*. Singapore: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Schnoebelen, J. (2009). Witchcraft allegations, refugee protection and human rights: A review of the evidence. *New Issues in Refugee Research*, (169). Switzerland: Policy Development and Evaluation Service United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- Wang’ondy, M. (January 14, 2019). What is African feminism? An introduction. *Africa, Human Rights*. International Youth Coalition. <https://iycoalition.org/what-is-african-feminism-an-introduction/>
- Wariboko, O.P.C. (2020). *Enugwu nnem*: Valorizing the environment of Enugwu-ukwu as mother in a patrilineal community. *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 6(2), 105-113. DOI: 10.32051/erats.2020.032