

**EZENWANYI AS A METAPHOR FOR RELIGION:
CHARACTERISATION AND NARRATIVE ACTIONS**

Ijeoma Precious Obiyor

Department of English, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria

presh1973@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: Most critical analysis of the character of Ezenwanyi in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols* (2005) read her from the feminist perspective as a strong woman. This is Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's way of challenging the patriarchal structure in the Christian religion and as a bridge in the gap between the traditional African religion and the Christian religion. However, discourse on Ezenwanyi's character from a different perspective other than feminist theory, sociological theory, and socio-linguist-structuralist theory are yet to be considered. Therefore, this paper attempts to study Ezenwanyi's character under the topic, Ezenwanyi as a Metaphor for Religion: Characterisation and Narrative Actions in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols*. (2005) from the perspective of Jacques Derrida's theory on Deconstruction. The aim is to do a deconstructive reading of the character portrayal of Ezenwanyi in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols* (2005) in order to present a re-reading of her character presentation as it modifies the understanding of religious practices having in mind the religious strife in our society. The theoretical framework of deconstruction forms the basis of the analysis of the text. Emphasis is laid on the significance of her character and actions in understanding the essence of Traditional African Religion and Christian Religion as to eradicate dissensions among religious groups. The findings reveal Ezenwanyi as a metaphor for religion unravelling the disconnection of modern Africans from their root and ignorance as the cause of the seeming difference in religions. And that religion practiced with a self-adaptive and dynamic mindset promotes peaceful communal living.

Keywords: Christian Religion, Deconstruction, Ezenwanyi, Metaphor, Traditional African Religion.

INTRODUCTION

Literary works of most African female writers and criticism on these African female writers' works present patterns and phases of the feminine revolution. Extant studies on Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trilogy* reveal varied representations borne out of the various critical yardsticks with which the text is measured. A cursory look at the various critical submissions displays various readings that portray representations of the interactions between Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's text and/with the critical world. Such representations are seen in the various essays in *Issues and Perspective* (Oloko, 2008).

In her essay, Susan Arndt (2008) portrays Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones* in the light of its 'ambivalent relationship to Igbo orature' (p.15). There, Susan Arndt highlights how Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo is able to bring into her narrative the Igbo narrative techniques in portraying her themes and characterisation. Writing in his essay, Patrick Oloko, (2008) presents the relationship of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Agaracha Must Come Back* to Christ's parable of *The Prodigal Son* revealing how Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo is able to connect this text from a different cultural environment- Western culture- to the plot of her novel

with a view to revealing certain themes and giving them a structure in a familiar social environment-African culture. Stephanie Newell, (2008) employing the feminist perspective draws attention to how Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo in *The Last of the Strong Ones* presents good female qualities inherent in the traditional African society that serve as models for the modern African woman. She highlights in the analysis of the characterisation of the novel, strong character representations of women in the novel who live out their daily lives and emphasises on Akachi's portrayal of these women. Harry Olufunwa (2008), in his essay, reveals how Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo treats the theme of marriage in relation to how the first- and second-generation female writers portray the theme of marriage. Olufunwa posits, in *House of Symbols*, that marriage, for Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, reflects the society. Its success or failure depends on the prevailing social attitude in the society. Shreya Bhattacharji, (2008) reads *The Last of the Strong Ones* to reveal how Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo challenges "the colonial myth of the African woman" (p.6). In her essay, she presents how Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, portrays the theme of the re-presentation of the African woman in the structure instituted by the British colonial masters and presents the place of the African woman in the social structure of the traditional African society before the intrusion of the British coloniser. Emeka Ekemezie, (2008), reading Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols*, analyses the myth inherent in some of the female characters in the novel as the society of the novel undergoes cultural change. Ofure Aito, (2008), posits that Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trilogy* reveals how Akachi brings the past to the present revealing some traces of the past across generations. Mojisola Shodipe, (2008), analysing Akachi Adimora's *The Last of the Strong Ones* emphasises Akachi's presentation of the female character, her leadership qualities and strength. These various critics' analyses confront, as they were, the issues or realities of contemporary African society. Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trilogy* portrays the African society's communal and individual experiences bringing to the fore an understanding of the changes in development which cut across traditional and modern Africa. She is able to draw from social issues in the past to portray those social issues as themes as they relate to African women and the larger society in contemporary modern Africa.

Having seen the various critiques of Akachi-Ezeigbo's *Trilogy*, and the liberty critical theories offer in literary discourse, the paper seeks to read Akachi-Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols* (2005) from the theoretical background of Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction in order to reveal "Ezenwanyi as a Metaphor for Religion: Characterisation and Narrative Actions." The theme of religion is a delicate issue in our contemporary African society and needs to be explored in literature if conflict is to be minimised. However, this reading will try to give an insight into the place of the traditional African religion and the Christian religion in our contemporary African society by doing a deconstructive reading of the text.

This paper explored Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols* (2005) from the theoretical framework of Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction, a poststructuralist reading that favours the interpretation of texts as language, to investigate the characterisation and actions of Ezenwanyi that reveal her as a metaphor for religion. In other words, it is aimed at describing how Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo projects the relationship between the Traditional African and Christian religions using the character of Ezenwanyi. The objectives of the paper are to identify the significance of Ezenwanyi's character and actions in the understanding of traditional African and Christian religions. It is also to explain the seeming difference in both religions with the view to clear the illusions, and suspicions that trigger strife in both religions. And then identify what Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo presents as the essence of religion.

Typically, most African women's narratives have been viewed or read in the light of their relation to feminine discourse. This has generated a lot of attention in criticism. Although, projecting a positive image of the African woman and her transformation towards societal development has been the major commitment of African female writers. This portrayal of the African woman's transformation challenges the imbalance in the social structure created by patriarchy as it relates to the issues of marriage and sexual exploitation. Great works have been done on Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's novels in terms of the role of women in traditional African society, questions on some patriarchal assumptions, and interrelationships between fact and fiction. Also, there are works on her narrative style as well as the survival of the woman in the African patriarchal society. (Patrick Oloko, 2008).

But this study sought to do a poststructuralist reading of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *House of Symbol* (2005) from the theoretical perspective of Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction to examine the dissensions between the African Traditional and Christian religions focusing on the character representation of Ezenwanyi. This will reveal how an understanding of both religions will create a better understanding and practice of both religions in modern Africa and consequently, throw more light on the various assumptions and illusions that are the core points of friction among members of the different religious sects.

Synopsis of *House of Symbols*/Definition of Terms

House of Symbols (2005) is the second in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trilogy*. The story recounts the lives of various women and the challenges they face as women in African society. The novel also redefines the religious consciousness of modern African society in the light of the traditional African religion to reflect what should be the objective of any form of religion. This is portrayed in the character of Ezenwanyi, the prophetess, who combines both traditional and Christian principles in her religious practice. Projecting her character traits, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo reveals the major preoccupation of her narratives, which is, social transformation towards a better society.

Definition of terms

Characterisation: A description of the distinctive nature or feature of someone.

Christianity: The religion based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, or its beliefs and practices.

Deconstruction: A method of critical analysis of philosophical and literary language which emphasises the internal workings of language and conceptual systems, the relational quality of meaning.

Post-structuralism: An extension and critique of structuralism.

Traditional religion: A set of highly diverse beliefs that include various ethnic religions.

Theoretical Framework

The choice of deconstruction, an offshoot of poststructuralism, as the theoretical framework for the paper springs from the significance of the theory as one that favours multiple interpretations of text. Deconstruction, according to Jacques Derrida in his *Of Grammatology*

(1997, p.20), means any interpretation of the text to the point of revealing the supposed contradictions and internal oppositions. He proposes a reading that identifies the oppositions between the intended meaning of the text and the structural unity of the text. Poststructuralism motivates a dynamic role of the reader in the reading and interpretation of the text. Julian Wolfreys posits that,

Reading suggests a manner of interpreting our world and the text which comprise that world. Poststructuralism becomes identified as simply this process of reading which emphasizes the fragmentary and discontinuous rather than the organic, the unified and the homogeneous. (Wolfreys 2001, p. 142)

She further states that deconstruction as a multiple form of reading should engage in very clear and careful attempt to trace what has not been read, what remains unread or unreadable within the explanation of the text. Jacques Derrida, in his *Of Grammatology*, (1997) states that language as a system of signs and words, according to Ferdinand Saussure, only has meaning because of the contrast between these signs. He states that a context must be understood in the context of its opposite. Thus, the first task of deconstruction is to find and overturn the oppositions inside a text. Geoffrey, Bennigton. (2000), suggests that "... no one reading will ever be able to claim to have exhausted the textual resources available in the text being read." Meaning is not total or complete. J. Hillis Miller, (2001) describes deconstruction as "not a dismantling of the structure of a text, but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. Its apparently solid ground is no rock, but thin air." Hence, a deconstructive reading of a text will look at what has not been said in the text as against what is said. It is the above premise that informs the pattern of reading the paper embarks on.

Key issues discussed in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's works are feminism/gender issues, culture and aesthetics. These issues have been read from, the feminist theory, sociological theory, socio-linguist-structuralist theory and other different theoretical perspectives.

However, in the light of her presentation of Ezenwanyi in *House of Symbols*, Ekemezie Emeka (2008) states:

Ezenwanyi... assumes a formidable role of conscience of society, the spiritual searchlight that beams into the interstices of the human soul to reveal hidden thoughts. She is one of the gatekeepers of Umuga traditional practices. She is also the rebuilder of the breaches on the ramparts of traditional life. "She fuses the seminal aspects of both Christian and the traditional religions. Ekemezie (2008,p.7)

Ekemezie here considers Ezenwanyi as one that upholds the traditional African religion as well as the light revealing the supposed difference between the Christian religion and Traditional African Religion. Ima Usen (2014), sees Ezenwanyi as one of Adimora-Ezeigbo's female strong characters, "...strong women who appreciate the realities of the past, the present and who own private property and express public and private concerns about the future." He equally reads her as one that mediates between the realm of the living and the dead, setting her name as symbolic of a neuter gender "authoritative and powerful." (p.34) He sees her as a bridge between the two religions; "the gap between traditional religion and Christian religious practices by combining both in healing the sick and in the spiritual cleansing of the

community....” Odoemelam (2011), in her unpublished M.A long essay, equally sees Ezenwanyi as a bridge builder between the two religions. Odoemelam (2011) portrays Ezenwanyi as one that “strikes a balance between traditional practices and foreign cultures represented by Christianity...a symbol of the amalgamation of old and new.” Opara, (2004) projects the same image of Ezenwanyi as a bridge builder between the dead and the living in her essay.

However, according to Ekemezie, (2008), “reading is like a journey. It always yields uncanny experience and unexpected turns.” (p.25) Thus, this paper undertakes a re-reading of the text that presents the characterisation and the narrative actions of Ezenwanyi to portray her as a metaphor for religion. This presentation reveals that there is no difference between traditional and Christian religions but as reflected in the Igbo adage, “*Nku di na mba na-esiri mba nri*”, that is, the firewood in a community is enough to cook the food in the community. Ezenwanyi illustrates that as there are fire woods that burn very well and cook fast so also there are ones that burn with heavy smoke in the process of burning giving rise to the need for them to be discarded. This assertion points to the underlying factor behind the positive and negative reflections found in religious practices. She reveals that the difference in the cultural platform of operation of both African traditional religion and Christianity annul the basis of difference, disequilibrium, or discrepancies inherent in both religions. There are principles in both religions that exude tolerance hence the need to sustain such principles. And there are those that promote intolerance hence the need to discard them too. Adimora-Ezeigbo also portrays that it is the selfish attitudes and ignorance of some of the members of the religious sects that are the root of religious strife in modern Africa.

APPLICATION/ANALYSIS

Ezenwanyi, the prophetess, is portrayed by Adimora-Ezeigbo as a religious teacher and a trailblazer. Her character presentation as a teacher and guide in the paper reveals the misconceptions in some religious practices and the practical steps to eradicating religious strife and killings inherent in Nigerian society. Religion, according to Wikipedia, “is a cultural system of behaviours and practices, world views, sacred texts, holy places, ethics, and societal organisation that relate humanity to what anthropologist has called “an order of existence.” The paper analyses “cultural system of behaviours and practices” in relation to “order of existence”. Ezenwanyi’s character portrayal and actions expose the missing link between the system of behaviours and practices to the order of existence. It reveals this missing link as what generates religious dissensions and killings. Ezenwanyi’s narrative actions in the novel reveal that the inability of the individual members of the society to understand their cultural inclinations as Africans is the missing link. She notes that a journey through self-discovery will bridge the gap. And ultimately produce peaceful co-existence among the various religious sects.

In *House of Symbols* (2005), Ezenwanyi’s character as a teacher is seen in how she applies various teaching techniques to guide her clients through self-discovery. This she does pragmatically. The first step she takes is to ensure that the members of her religion have open mindset. She helps them to clear their mind from any destructive thoughts. This they do by spending quality quiet time thinking about nothing. This session of soul cleansing helps the members of Ezenwanyi’s religious sect to channel their thought process to the right cultural behaviour and practices. After which they progress into soul searching through self-discovery. The session launches them into an understanding of who they are which helps to put them in their rightful place in the order of existence. The essence of this step Ezenwanyi takes with

her members is made clear when we see the character of Okwudiba as revealed as the plot unfolds. The plot of the story reveals that Okwudiba though old is yet to discover who she is, she told her daughter “I am an old woman on the brink of self-discovery, at transition’s threshold.” (*Adimora-Ezeigbo 2005, p.2*). Her statement reveals that she is not happy with her environment and with the new religion. She does not understand the need to open her heart to her environment and accept the transformation in Umuga community. The presence of *Kosiri* bothers her. She wonders why she has to accept the change in the society. Her character portrayal reflects the implication of not accepting change. And because she could not allow her mind to accept the change brought by *Kosiri* she was unable to understand her environment. She dies with a cultural behaviour that encourages communal discord. “For many years Okwudiba led the group that resisted change in Umuga.” (*Adimora-Ezeigbo 2005:66*)

Ezenwanyi’s actions reveal that lack of understanding of one’s environment has made the issue of religion in modern Africa to displace man in the order of existence giving rise to animalistic behaviours borne out of religious fanaticism. She also, discloses that “the state of one’s mind is a result of what one feeds the mind.” (*Adimora-Ezeigbo 2005, p.83*). She made it her mission to address this fanaticism and ignorance by assisting her clients cum religious members to educate their minds with the acceptable standard of truth-love- thereby liberating them from religious fanaticism. Adimora-Ezeigbo develops Ezenwanyi’s character to reflect the right religious practice. Ezenwanyi’s character portrays an understanding and a discovery “that one’s journey on this side of existence can be re-invigorated with visions of self-remembrance and other remembrances.” (*Adimora-Ezeigbo 2005, p.51*). She also notes:

How hard it is for some people to see into the life of things! By their denseness, many souls have lost their way and journeyed into the wilderness, into a darkness that repels light. In that state, they cannot find the truth. (*Adimora-Ezeigbo 2005, p.24*)

From the above excerpt, Ezenwanyi in her relationship with the other characters exemplifies the need to find peaceful co-existence in religion through an understanding of the truth based on experience and not an apriori concept. An experience that comes from developing “a mind armed with self-adaptive responses to the continuously changing world we live in and the spiritual forces that control it.” (*Adimora-Ezeigbo 2005, pp.51-52*). In other words, a mind, through experience produces dynamic insight into one’s ontological and metaphysical environment. This form of truth, according to Spinoza cited by Christopher Norris (1990), is seen:

as the highest object of all philosophical enquiry, and which offers the only reliable means to criticize erroneous habits of belief. ...it signifies the capacity of reason to examine such claims, whatever their source, and determine whether or not they meet the required standard of truthful (adequate) ideas. “*Criticism*” (Norris 1990, p.30)

Hence, Ezenwanyi’s teacher approach in assisting her clients into an inward reflection of the mind eliminates the ‘denseness’ in their souls. And they are able to see clearly the path to take in finding the required standard of truth. And, from the above excerpt, that required standard of truth, is a definition of the mind that promotes peaceful co-existence and development. This is why Ezenwanyi is at peace with all forms of religious sect as shown in the excerpt below:

Do you receive people from different religious groups and sects? Yes. There is no discrimination at all. Even Alakuba people find their way to this place. Here no faith is regarded as superior to another. (*Adimora-Ezeigbo 2005,p.52*)

Ezenwanyi's character as a teacher becomes her way of showing the Umuga community the right attitude to any religious practice. She further explains:

I assist people to translate their thoughts into deeds. ... excavates the mines of hearers' or seekers' silences filled with all manner of precious stones found in their crude or unpolished forms. Ezenwanyi then fills the empty spaces in seekers' souls through reflections about local and universal truths, wisdom and other forms of knowledge. Failures and shortcomings receive frank and incisive dissection. (*Adimora-Ezeigbo 2005,pp.41-43*)

A reading of the above excerpt reveals an image of a miner in a mining field seeking for precious stones and polishing them with knowledge. This mining field is symbolic of the human mind and the individual is the miner. The excerpt invariably says that developing an acceptable behaviour that exudes peace is a personal quest, although the individual can be guided. She uses images as her instructional material to guide her clients in the quest. These instructional materials are embedded in the content of her teachings and her relationship with her clients. The images stand as what Derrida (1997, p.155) calls, "the sign, the image, the representation, which comes to supplement the absent presence"

We see the image of the child which represents innocence. Ezenwanyi says to Eagle woman; "Give me the child". This line can be read to indicate Ezenwanyi's demand of the child in her client. This image of the child is the absent presence in every individual, a reflection of a clear and open mind devoid of any prejudice or discrimination. Ezenwanyi's actions indicate that such a mindset is a basic requirement from her clients that will help her in her role as a teacher-guide. She wants them to listen to her as would a child and can only see the path to the required standard of truth with the mindset of a child. Such is the mindset that affords her the opportunity to re-orient their mind into embarking on the mining quest for self-discovery. This is because physical attitudes are reflections of the issues of the mind and these issues of the mind are what the mind is fed with. It equally says that they are required to approach every experience with a child's mind, ready and willing to learn from the experience in order to "receive insights into the true meaning of existence" (*Adimora-Ezeigbo 2005, p.51*) Eaglewoman's contact with Ezenwanyi brings her to that state of mind and she is able to delve into the mining quest of self-discovery.

Eaglewoman sits, immobile like a post. Her attention is completely surrendered to the act of listening. Her mood swings from disbelief to outrage to admiration and then to astonishment. She tells herself that common sense teaches that self-knowledge is the beginning of understanding. (*Adimora-Ezeigbo 2005, p.51*)

Ezenwanyi is also portrayed as a trailblazer. This is seen in her construction of a new road in Umuga community. The road is a symbol of the right mindset required for the appreciation of

both religions. Ezenwanyi's character as a trailblazer comes as a result of the communal discord created by the intrusion of *Kosiri* in Umuga community.

During that period, communal discord erupted in the town. Discordant opinions sounded like unpleasant musical notes. The quarrel festered like yaws on the skin of an orphan. Untreated it rotted, infecting the whole town. Even Umuga in *Diaspora* were not spared. They tasted the bitter herbs of the conflict. (*Adimora-Ezeigbo 2005, p.58*)

From the above excerpt, the Umuga community is at a time when the traditional African society finds itself metamorphosing rapidly into a modern African society. This brought in a lot of changes to the community. They lost their footing on their tradition and culture. The internal rift divided the Umuga community into the *Oshiedi* and the *Awigu*. This disagreement created by the intrusion of *Kosiri* is what Derrida (1997) calls:

to break presence, the co-presence of citizens, the unanimity of "assembled people", to create a situation of dispersion, holding subjects so far apart as to be incapable of feeling themselves together in the space of one and the same speech. (*Derrida 1997, p.138*)

This affected the cultural practices and behaviours of the Umuga community of which religion is one. Thus, it gave rise to prejudice and discrimination among members of the traditional African religion and the Christian religion. It also affected the peace among members of the different Christian religious sects in Umuga community. It encourages religious wrangling, strife and verbal wars. This is seen in the excerpt below:

Prejudice and discrimination are the big problems between many religions in the world. Indeed, they are the greatest source of rift or quarrel in Christian churches today. Rivalry and division, like termites, infest the church and eat away its unity. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) do not gather wood from the same forest nor do they drink from the same spring. They are at each other's throats. Their paths face different directions. (*Adimora-Ezeigbo 2005, p.52*)

The cultural behaviour recounted above deviates from the core value of religion which has to do with a cultural system of behaviours and practices that connects humanity to the order of existence. Ezenwanyi as a trailblazer reveals a path, by way of insight, to the people of the community. She takes them back to the past for them to understand their present. "A people without a past are a people who have lost their memory; they have no sense of how to construct today or shape tomorrow" and "this past must be confronted and interrogated in the forging of present and future ways." (*Adimora-Ezeigbo 2005:51*). Thus, the misunderstanding between both religions is in effect a misunderstanding of the cultural system of modern Africa. This also could be seen to relate to lack of understanding of their past.

Ezenwanyi's construction of the road portrays a new outlook on the two traditions towards a new tradition, the modern African society. The new road built by Ezenwanyi, therefore, becomes the epitome of the right mindset. She teaches that "we should gaze at our past for the purpose of learning from it, not reliving it." Ezenwanyi, even though a traditionalist by her

name and nature of her religious practice is equally addressed as ‘prophetess’ which is the outcome of her learning from her past. This is equally seen in her possession of a Bible, upholding the banner of the land, as her Bible is, “...a translated version in Umuga language.” (*Adimora-Ezeigbo 2005:44.*)

Ezenwanyi as a metaphor for religion shows that there is no difference in both religions. She notes that Umuga community evolves as a result of the presence of *Kosiri*, religion as a cultural concept should also evolve with it. What seems to be the difference between the traditional African religion and Christian religion is ignorance, and lack of understanding of the true meaning of religion by the members of the two religions. Ezenwanyi explains here;

Our ancestors and ancestresses worshipped the Supreme Creator. Then came the white people who converted our people to their own religion. They and their followers called our ancestors pagans or heathens who have no knowledge of the Supreme creator, Chukwu or Chineke- the name that becomes increasingly used by the converts. How far from the truth! What a distortion! Fabricated by people with deluded minds. They did not know that the Chukwu or Chineke the Christians worship is the same worshipped by our ancestors. There is no difference. (*Adimora-Ezeigbo 2005, p.47-48*)

From the excerpt above, it is noted that the focus of both religions is towards one direction and that is, the worship of the Supreme God. The assumption of the supremacy of the Christian religion over the Traditional African religion, Ezenwanyi sees, as an act of people who do not understand the principles of life.

Ezenwanyi as a metaphor for religion elucidates that religion is beyond the pulpit or the shrine. Ezenwanyi represents doctrine, principles, and pattern of worship that give knowledge to the believer; a form of religion that helps man in understanding self, self-examination, contemplation and obedience. Ezenwanyi is the epitome of such transformation. She is at peace with herself and appreciates the spiritual undertone of human existence. She is a strong spiritual force capable of adapting to the changing society. Adimora-Ezeigbo’s brief description of her place and pattern of worship is an indication that religion is not about the place of worship but about the state of the mind of the individual. Her combination of the traditional African religious symbols with that of Christianity reflects neutrality. Ezenwanyi’s reception and treatment of everyone, irrespective of belief, reflects what religion should be. She emphasises the development of the mind of an individual as the basic platform for any religion. The individual mind must develop to understand that there are certain principles of life that the rational mind cannot explain.

Conclusion

The study investigates Ezenwanyi as a metaphor for religion with particular emphasis on characterisation and narrative actions in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo’s *House of Symbols*. This is done using Jacques Derrida’s theory of Deconstruction; a form of poststructuralist reading that identifies contradictions in characters, text, events, and actions to pay attention to the meaning of words and assumed meaning.

Previous readings of the character of Ezenwanyi reveal a representation of the heroine as a religious arbiter. Her role as a bridge in the gap between the traditional African religion and the Christian religion is emphasized.

However, this paper explores a reading of the character of Ezenwanyi as a metaphor for religion with the objective of portraying the significance of her character and actions in understanding traditional and Christian religions. And to explain that the seeming difference in both religions is borne out of ignorance and fanaticism. The paper also identifies the essence of religion as that which develops the human mind to be self-adaptive and purpose-driven as seen in Ezenwanyi's characterisation and actions. The paper reveals that such a mindset defeats any form of prejudice and discrimination.

The paper portrays Ezenwanyi as a teacher and a trailblazer to reveal that there is no difference between the Traditional African religion and the Christian religion. The hierarchical structure and the Being of worship of both religions are the same except for the nomenclature which is a result of the cultural difference. Thus, we find that the religious strife in Umuga is not only between the *Amaala* and the Christians but also among the different denominations of the Christian religion.

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