



EXPLORING REBELLION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF REBELLIOUS FEMALE CHARACTERS IN FLORA NWAPA'S *WOMEN ARE DIFFERENT* AND *ONE IS ENOUGH*

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Abstract

Flora Nwapa, a renowned Nigerian author who is known for her bequest as a forerunner to a generation of African women writers & mother of modern African literature. Nwapa was not happy with the portrayal of women as merely prostitutes and unhappy wives in the works of contemporary male writers. Writing novels on her own gave her liberty to re-fashion African femininity through complex and multi-faceted characters. Her novels *Women are Different* and *One is Enough* portraying the female characters who are strong, independent and are ready to fight and rebel against the said norms of the traditional Igbo society. Both the novels explain the female characters who at the end emerge as an image of New African Woman who is independent and leads life in her own way.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Feminism, multi-faceted , oppression, rebellious, Igbo, vivacious

Introduction

Flora Nwapa, renowned Nigerian author who is known for her bequest as a forerunner to a generation of African women writers & mother of modern African literature. She was the first of many women who made an attempt to break up the boy's club, which was the African literary community of the age. Nwapa's novels proved as an intervention in African literary culture. Women were always portrayed from male point of view and treated secondary. She made her novels, a way to think of African femininity beyond the idea of victimization.

Nwapa was not happy with the portrayal of women as merely prostitutes and unhappy wives in the works of contemporary male writers. Writing novels on her own gave her liberty to re-fashion African femininity through complex and multi-faceted characters.

Flora Nwapa's novels mainly speak about empowerment of women and other people deprived in the society. All the leading characters in her novels are female, who are modern, confident, courageous & rebellious. Her novels talk about Igbo culture & Igbo life. Quest for identity is one of the prominent themes in Nwapa's works.

Since patriarchal values play a major role in putting women down and limiting their capacity to contribute to societal and national development and literature texts, including the African literature. To promote these values, there is need to use the literary works to interrogate patriarchy and portray the strengths and potentials in the African women. Flora Nwapa is one of the early African female writers who have made giant strides to remedy the distorted image and underrepresentation of the African woman in African literature.

Flora's works depict women as strong individuals with promising mindsets and a constructive thought process. Almost all her heroines, major female characters are independent while making decisions and many of them are even good business minds. While describing Efuru in her work she repeatedly states that she is the one who has golden hands, in whatever she trades she earns profits. She is caring and good with her mother-in-law yet is free to take her decisions on her own without anyone's influence.

African Literature and Womanism:

In the realm of African literature, some female writers felt that traditional feminism didn't fully capture their unique experiences and concerns. They believed that feminism was often seen through the lens of white women and didn't adequately address the specific challenges faced by African women.

In response to this, African female writers introduced a new perspective called "womanism" or "African feminism." Womanism is a term coined by Alice Walker, and it emphasizes the intersectionality of race, gender, and class within the African context. This perspective sought to confront patriarchal attitudes and empower black women by acknowledging their strength, competence, courage, and sense of responsibility.

Unlike radical feminism, which may emphasize conflict between genders,

womanism aimed at fostering a meaningful union between black women, black men, and black children. The focus was on building solidarity and understanding within the African community. This shift in perspective allowed for a more inclusive and nuanced approach to addressing gender issues within the African context.

Quest for Identity: The Concept

The quest for identity is a theoretical concept that encompasses a range of ideas and perspectives from various academic disciplines, including psychology, sociology, philosophy, and literature. It refers to the human desire and process of seeking to understand, define, and construct one's sense of self and personal identity. This concept explores the fundamental questions of "Who am I?" and "What makes me unique?" and it delves into the complex interplay of individual, cultural, and societal factors that contribute to the formation of an individual's identity.

The theme of women in search of their identity is not a recent development but has existed throughout human history. Women's awareness of their gender and their quest for self-identity have been present since the earliest days of humanity. In ancient times, women held diverse roles in society, including positions as queens, warriors, fortune tellers, and businesswomen. Feminists today aim to reclaim and highlight these roles, which have often been marginalized and exploited by men.

Women are Different:

In her novel *Women are Different*, Nwapa portrays the changes that are brought into African society with the introduction of European education and values. It tells the life journey of three friends Agnes, Rose and Dora. In order to disapprove the erroneous notion that women are weak, dependent, and hopeless without a husband, she creates different women; women who are not really concerned about courtesy or morality, break social norms, customs and tradition with impunity.

The protagonists in the novel, Rose, Agnes and Dora express their rebellious views, they believed in the saying -the hand that rocked the cradle ruled the world. The first instance of rebelliousness is witnessed when boys couldn't come for debate because of vehicle failure. These girls decided to go to their school for debate by canoe. Comfort is rebellious spokesperson, when Agnes is writing to Ernest and he is not replying to her letters on time, she tells to Agnes:

"A boy must have the responsibility to reply to her letters on time. The person, boy or girl who will ignore me has not been born."

These three main characters like Rose, Agnes and Dora are fighting individuals. They do not accept things as they come their way. They fight to change their fate. Nwapa through this work emphasizes that there is no better way than to empower women with education. Patriarchy is the prime obstacle to women's advancement and development. Consequently, women are victims of multiple oppression such as forced marriage. A father can arrange a marriage for his daughter. Agnes is forced into marriage yet she manages to continue her education, she understands that the only way to get rid of oppression of forced marriage is education, with which she will get a good job and freedom. She is aware that the only weapon she has to fight against the traditional norms of patriarchy is education. Thus, Agnes as a woman in the post colonial era breaks the patriarchal rules and becomes financially independent. Agnes leaves her husband and gets a job which gives her luxuries like a flat, car, money etc. Agnes being determined overcomes all the obstacles laid in her path by traditional society.

In the particular society setup, women are expected to give more to their husbands than what they receive from them. Comfort is portrayed as a woman who thinks and analyses men's mentality. She understands the men, their

behaviour, their mentality, and their intentions better than other girls or women around her.

Nwapa highlights the rebellious nature of African women not only through leading characters but also through other female characters also. All Dora, Rose and Agnes are new African women. They are active and have fighting spirit, because of schooling and economic independence. Dora's daughter Chinwe represents the new generation of African women, she refuses to go to school after the civil war, instead going to school, she prefers to start her own business and make money. Chinwe wants to be financially independent. She wants to be free from male independence. She marries her second husband 'only for his wealth'. This new generation of Chinwe has lost morals in this greed of economic independence:

"The girls give their bodies, their youth and their vitality to the filthy sugar bodies(Idem)".

Chinwe wants to earn money so; she starts a beer-parlour business and even indulges in prostitution. Chinwe leaves her husband when she learns that her husband is the father of an unexpected baby. Chinwe doesn't accept the other girl as co-wife. She knows that she is independent, capable of running her own business and she is not barren. She can make her own decisions, she is a self confident woman. She has learnt from her mother's problems as how her father mistreated her mother.

One is Enough:

Next novel *One is Enough*, explores how women should act and speak to discover self-identity and happiness. Through the proceedings of the novel and characterization it becomes evident that colonialism has introduced new ideas of love, marriage, motherhood, education and career.

In the novel female characters display a new spirit acquired by post-colonialism. These women take charge of their own life and bring happiness to their life, in doing this might be

they break some rules of traditional Igbo society. Through the course of the novel, development of Amaka's character is seen. The Novel begins in a small village called Onitsha and ends in a large, modern city, Lagos. Though Onitsha has some effects of post-colonialism, people are still remaining dedicated to old Igbo expectations and traditions.

In Nwapa's *One is Enough* the main character, Amaka is portrayed childless. Amaka has an ideal relationship with her husband in the beginning of their marriage. They have love, respect and devotion in their relationship though they don't have the child. She is illustrated by her husband and her mother in law for the reason that she could not bear a child even after six years of her marriage.

Nwapa tries to focus on the society's perspective towards women as women are created only for reproduction, if she is not productive she should not be valued. On the other hand, man is referred to as a symbol of power. At this instance Nwapa depicts Amaka as a strong and defiant woman. She stands against the patriarchal societal norms and her husband. She refuses to be silent and accepts the situation rather than confronts him. Amaka is a brave woman who speaks out her pain and suffering. She tells her husband:

"It beats me how you should do all behind my back, be involved with a woman, have sons, marry her without breathing a word to your wife. You have changed a good deal, my husband. I could change, you know." (P27)

Amaka clearly tells her husband that she can express her identity, she is also eligible for change as she believes and trusts her own capabilities. When Amaka tries to convince Obiora, he tries to beat her but this time she protects herself. Nwapa says that 'a woman is forbidden to be beaten twice'. Amaka revolts for herself and hates her husband and her people for oppressing women and hence she decides to start a new life in Lagos. She starts her new life in a society that is comparatively free from

patriarchal way of thinking. She starts following the footsteps of her sister Ayo.

Amaka in her new journey of life travels to various places, meet many new people. In Lagos she understands the market and lifestyle quickly and extends her talents as a contractor. She uses her beauty to seduce men for her purpose, for getting contracts. She gets into two relationships, one with Alhaji which is purely sexual and is for financial benefits and one with father Mclaid where she is emotionally involved. She decides to enjoy her life, earn money and not to have a husband after being disappointed in a marriage.

She wants to lead her life by her own choice, on her own terms without any restriction or stress. She believes in having men in life but not husbands as the title itself suggests one marriage experience is enough for her. She aspires to become a business woman.

In Lagos, Amaka lives a free and open minded life. Amaka is portrayed as a woman who knows her mistakes and learns from her mistakes. Through Amaka's character, Nwapa intends to convey that a woman must have a clear vision of her life and business. Amaka wants to have children, but not necessarily through the bondage of marriage.

Amaka is viewed as a successful woman, she has her house, car, money and her own business. She is financially independent and uncontrolled by her husband. Though the father of her kids is reading and pleading with her to marry him she is firm on her decision.... *One is Enough*. She now doesn't want to be a slave of anyone's expectations but wants to lead a happy and free life with her kids.

Conclusion

Thus, through *One is Enough* Nwapa gives a message that a woman doesn't need to marry second time to gain respect in the society. She rejects the tradition as it relates to a woman. At the end of the novel, Amaka has become a famous business woman and a mother. Rather,

she seems to send a message to the reader; that is the inevitability of transformation, and the possibility of creating a new image or identity for women; despite the strong grip of their patriarchal and the dominance of men. Before independence, Igbo women were treated as instruments of fulfilling desires of men but after independence they became active and rebellious. They also became symbolic sites for three events; struggle, appropriation and re-affirmation. Amaka at the end of the novel is the same as other traditional women, but different because she leaves her husband, refuses to remarry and gains economic freedom.

Through *Women are Different* Nwapa raises various issues faced by women in Nigeria, like: arranged marriages, child marriages, poverty, the importance of girl-child education, prostitution, spinsterhood, betrayed love etc. Nwapa has portrayed all these issues through the lives of Dora, Rose, Agnes and Comfort from their high school days to their late motherhood days. The girls' different personalities and opinions about life were basically a microcosm of the opinions and lives of other women in Nigeria. Comfort's character is portrayed differently, as she is shown vivacious and fearless- typical of Nigerian women!

In short Nwapa's female characters are strong, independent and are ready to fight and rebel against the said norms of Igbo society.

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