

RETRIEVING THE IGBO FEMALE VOICE IN THE NOVELS OF FLORA NWAPA**¹SIVA PRAKASH YELLUMAHANTI, ²S. PRASANTHI SRI**¹Research Scholar, Department of English, Adikavi Nannaya University, MSN Campus, Kakinada District, Andhra Pradesh, India²Professor, Department of English, Adikavi Nannaya University, MSN Campus, Kakinada District, Andhra Pradesh, India--

ABSTRACT: Flora Nwapa is a pioneer African female writer who blazed the trail in portraying the feminist principles and African cultures in her literary creations. The women lives, problems, and worries with traditional Igbo culture have been significantly explored by Flora Nwapa. It is impacted by British colonization. She want to participate women fully as human beings, not simply in the roles traditionally provided them as wives, mothers and workers, so, she says the women's demands for change, choice, and acceptance within a community. She examines and analyzes many features in her tribal group. Nwapa's creative enterprise had a dual task – artistic (contributing to the literary field) and feminist (salvaging the female experience and giving real voices to the women). She was an interesting in writing the novels on women. The disparaging image of women is corrected by her, which is written by male authors. She begins at the bottom, strictly enforced by norms and traditions with masculine supremacy by her female characters in the village enviroment, where gender roles and relationships.

This paper presents Igbo Female Voice in the Novels of Flora Nwapa. *Efuru* (1966), *Idu* (1970), *Never Again* (1975), *One is Enough* (1981), *Women are Different* (1986) named five novels are used in this paper which is published by Flora Nwapa. The dual burden of women in integrating tradition and modernity in modern-day Nigeria by depicting unyielding heroines, Flora Nwapa expressed the resonance of Oguta Igbo culture.

KEYWORDS: Flora Nwapa, Igbo culture, feminist, Efuru, Idu, Never Again, One is Enough, Women are Different, The Lake Goddess.

I. Introduction

Flora Nwapa's is the first published female novelist in Nigeria to write in English. She has outstanding collection of novels, short stories, children's books, and poems. In a courageous act, she established her own publishing house.

Flora Nwapa Books Ltd., and supported it with a printing press, Tana Press Ltd. she restored the voice of African women through her unique goal in this publishing effort, because of criticism and

underestimation of African women writers by critics and publishers [1].

Nwapa believes that African women are articulate, possess strength, independence and competence to perform well in any sphere of life [2]. In this connection, she constructs positive images of African women and how they develop themselves in the patriarchal society and their contributions to development of their society that are played down or neglected in works of the male writers.

Nwapa's interest in the exploration of women's concerns stems from the negative depiction of the African woman [3]. The fictional representation of women were constructed by male writers from the beginning, because society was male centred and controlled by patriarchy for a long time. A great number of male writers scripted patriarchal focused stories, by placing men at the centre of notable stories as well as in their literary canons; while women were out rightly degraded or reduced to second class beings in literary creations [4]. This brought about stereotypes, biases, one sided appeal, negative representation and condemnation of woman to the advantage of men.

In modern-day Nigeria through her depictions of unyielding heroines, Flora Nwapa captured the resonance of Oguta Igbo culture and the double burden of women in integrating tradition and modernity. By using her creativity and gender-sensitive writings, Nwapa has established a unique identity and image for African feminine characteristics. The representatives in race and gender in Nwapa's writings for the Igbo women [5]. Nwapa in her writings complexity, ambiguities, and discrepancies surrounds the African canon of femininity, motherhood, marriage, heterosexuality, and gender polemics.

In response to the undesirable and negative representation of female characters in the African novels, writers like Nwapa in their literary creations set out to correct the disparaged image of women in male authored novels. African women have fought to

liberate themselves from patriarchal oppression and subjectivity their depict women in their fiction in favorable light. Women writers will marginalize women in their writing and give women important roles in their works, compared to their male colleagues. The women is empowered by using literature, African women writers have addressed the existing state of affairs [6]. An intelligent and autonomous rather than controlled and underprivileged, these female character are achieved by this presenting. These female writers with their realistic representation of the female situation have unquestionably displayed more tangible unanimity with women than the so called feminists, as they have followed the high ideals of womanism in their portrayal of the necessities of women to correct sexist injustices against women as weak and subservient, by substituting it with women's strength, competence and courage [7].

The huge ethnic groups different from women position in pre-colonial Nigeria, among them is Igbo in Nigeria. The ethnic group known as the Igbo, and it is historical to south-eastern Nigeria and modern-day south-central, and Igbo people are largest ethnic groups in Africa. A woman's position is determined by role of women in the economic structure of the society and the group's kinship structure. The majority of Igbo people are farmers, traders, and craftsmen in rural Nigeria. The different economic activities that the societies reserved for women were common factors among women of various ethnic groups have domestically oriented jobs. Women had a complimentary status to men

in societies, although patriarchal and matrilineal family patterns predominated in Nigerian societies before immigration.

European colonial ideas have been patriarchal and based on notions of hierarchical man/woman relationship where man is the privileged one, the provider and the decision-maker whereas the woman is his subordinate and confined to the domestic realm with the house and household responsibilities circumscribing her entire life [8]. Simone de Beauvoir, the French feminist theorist, had argued long back in 1949 in *The Second Sex* that the ideas that women are inferior, are weaker and subordinate to men are actually socio-historically constructed. This social division and construction of gender roles had actually taken away the freedom and power women possessed in earlier times are the cause of all the oppression. With the advent of colonialists in Africa, the very same notions were imposed upon the indigenous soil, notions that were in conflict with the traditional African culture. Till now, in Nigerian societies in pre-colonial indigenous of woman's traditional duty was to support her family financially. Therefore, she had to be financially independent, along with many members of the extended family, not just the mother, assisted in raising the children.

II. Igbo Female Voice in the Novels of Flora Nwapa

Retrieving the Igbo Female Voice in the Novels of Flora Nwapa is the main goal of the paper. *Efuru* (1966), *Idu* (1970), *Never Again* (1975), *One is Enough* (1981), *Women are Different* (1986) named five novels are used in this paper. In modern-day

Nigeria by depicting unyielding heroines have dual burden of women in integrating tradition and modernity, and Flora Nwapa communicated the resonance of Oguta Igbo culture.

1. *Efuru*:

Thus, *Efuru* is main character of novel whose name novel carries as title. She is beautiful, as Omirima, the gossip, confesses to Amede: “Your daughter in law is beautiful”. With regard to her beauty, one often goes as far to say that after one has seen *Efuru*, “one hisses when one sees one’s wife”. What is more, *Efuru* is the daughter of a well-known and mighty man of valor, Washike Ogene. She is self-willed. No one can persuade her against what she wants to do. For instance, she marries Adizua, a man from an unknown family and as opposed to the society’s basic requirement on marriage, without seeking permission from her father and without her husband paying the customary bride wealth. To bring her back to ‘reason’, her father, unsuccessfully, sends her two important missions. However, after hardship and abandonment, *Efuru* quits her husband, Adizua, but this does not last for long because she contracted a second marriage with Eneberi, a convert baptized Gilbert. Here, too, her marriage is not successful because not only she fails to have a child but her sickness is said to have come from an adulterous action as Omirima says to Amede in these terms: “Your daughter in law will die. She is guilty of adultery”.

Ajanupu is Ossai’s eldest sister. She is also an industrious woman, but she is more concerned about traditional knowledge

relating to women's health and wellbeing. Because of her knowledge of the culture and tradition of her people, she is viewed as a reflection of the image of the traditional African woman. She loves Efuru as genuinely as her sister Ossai does. Ajanupu is also highly experienced in cultural and even spiritual matters. For instance, by just observing Efuru at a dance ceremony, she is able to know that Efuru is pregnant before Efuru, herself, recognizes it.

Next to Ajanupu, Nwapa creates Ossai who is Adizua's mother, a sister to Ajanupu, and a mother in law to Efuru. Ossai is a passive character or even better, a very patient sufferer. Despite the extent of love and faithfulness that she devoted to her husband when the latter abandons her, she still remains a good wife. Even after her husband passes away, she refuses to marry out of self-pride. She is a static character whose life does not change because she does not question the validity of her tradition.

Our fourth character under discussion is Nwabata. She is Ogea's mother and the wife of Nwosu and a relative to Ossai. Through Nwabata, Nwapa confirms to us that in the traditional Igbo society certain women have resorted to keeping silence either because they accept their conditions as normal or because they lack economic independence. The second to the last character under the discussion is Amede. She is Gilbert's mother and Efuru's latest mother in law. She is also a sister to Omirima, the poisonous tongue. So, Nwapa wants to show us that women themselves contribute to worsening the situation of their fellow women through

the archaic belief that infertility resides only in women.

Close to the above character is Omirima who is known as the town gossip. She is, surely, created to play the hypocritical side of the Igbo society. She is a traditionalist who finds no value in a marriage that is not productive. She is really known to be 'Madame Problems'. Even the little Ogea is very critical of her. Upon hearing her voice from a distance, Ogea says: "she is coming, the gossip...she has never in her life said anything good about anybody. I wonder who is going to be her next victim. Omirima is always running people down".

Nwapa in *Efuru*, deals with the circumstances of women in her traditional Igbo society with importance on their estimated roles as wives and mothers within the community. The novel clearly depicts women who regain consciousness to improve their material and psychological disposition in spite of intense difficulties posed to them from the male centred society. An additional message that Nwapa conveys through *Efuru* is to prompt African women to be conscious of the roles they play in the society and redress distorted situations. That is why her characters are industrious, businesslike and economically independent.

2. Idu:

She chooses to follow her deceased husband to the afterlife, as Idu is an image for the protagonist's faces personal complexity, emotional and cultural. Adiewere and Idu opens story by gossiping with Uzoechi and

Nwasobi, it reveals their unexplainable love.

“Sometimes when I see them, I am filled with happiness. Have you ever seen two people so happy before?” “No, I never have. God created them as good people and God gave them to each other. You never see them quarrel; don’t they ever quarrel?” Adiewere echoes the above statements: “... God meant us for each other and we were lucky to find each other”. Uzoechi and Nwasobi tell us, when Adiewere is ill again: “... well if something happens to Adiewere, Idu will be finished. God created the two of them together and said they must be husband and wife. Do you know that if one is sick the other one becomes sick too. It is strange ...”. This indicates the death of Adiewere and, consequently, Idu. Even she tells her husband about his immoral encounters with Izukanane. “Leave it, my wife, forgive me, We men are like that ... I want peace”. as he demonstrates his affection for her feelings are apologized her for love and mutual respect and understanding.

She will be living without Adiewere after learning of her husband's passing, as Idu has mixed anxiety-depressive disorder. As a result she will be shock and loss of weight

It offers a number of options to guarantee that every family has children; Igbo people marry and have children as part of their custom. Males are expected to marry several wives incase first wife is unable to bear children. First man must speak with his present wife, the additional woman or women will be part of a big family and share responsibilities. Women like Onyemuru,

assumes that if a guy does not take a second wife, then wife is not receptive to the solution, it is viewed as a bad and selfish person in community particularly. Although Idu Adiewere is against this tradition, men are never perceived as being against it, and narrator claims that Adiewere is not fundamentally a polygamist. He only desires a decent wife and kids. Adiewere lets Idu encourage him to take a second wife so that the family will have children and she won't be viewed as a cruel woman, she will maintain neighborhood. He has no desire for anybody else and he pays attention to his wife. The second wife is unhappy with Adiewere's treatment of her, and Idu's pregnancy is soon revealed. The second wife does not behave in a dependent manner. Idu as the elder wife, she does not respect either Adiewere as her husband. She won't be treated like a maid by Idu and Adiewere.

Village women expresses traditional belief, it is investigated by Idu. The women's voices examine whether their behavior is legally correct or if western influences have caused times to change. The established traditions are disobeying by number of characters both male and female. As a result, the tribe youngster's voices are not sure for what they expect. Even, they wonder if it is just to pass severe judgment on them.

After the legendary Idu n' Oba of the ancient Bini kingdom, the main character of Idu is named. The location where chaos reigns are moral equilibrium will always overcomes in the end that according to Ogunyemi. The "Queen Mother" is the word for "Bini", she is represented as senior chief and compared

to a man as it represents the authority behind the throne, and traditional excludes her. To represent the authority Nwapa is undoubtedly intended her female figures. The feeling of "exile" the woman may feel when she differs from traditional Igbo customs.

Both Idu and Ojiugo create any kind of balance, much less moral equilibrium, in their communities. The Readers will undoubtedly disagree the decisions made by two of the women in Idu. These decisions are highly at odds with normal communities although not necessarily moral equilibrium, I detect a sense of equilibrium.

The community has a significant impact on how characters behave and how events turn out are beliefs of their community. The death is a better option than living among the locals and their views on widowhood and manhood is decided by both Amarajeme and Idu. The society considers appropriate and maintains that their behavior within the bounds by Wilentz. Nwapa is, in their opinion, requesting that the community change some of its more traditional expectations. By giving people a number of options, some of which may depart from previous expectations.

3. *Never Again:*

Flora Nwapa's *Never Again* catalogues the events of the war from a feminist perspective and reflects the real nature of women. Women are the war's unsung heroes as women struggled against the forces of starvation, diseases, air attacks in addition with physical and moral rape. As males are engaged in militarized battle with guns and cannons.

The Nigerian Civil War can be found in *Never Again* eyewitness account of women's active involvement. The first-person narration of Kate embodies her personal experience as well as the stories of the active involvement of several other women. The central motif is built around journeys and focuses specifically on the mass exodus of Igbo people from one part of Biafra to relatively more secure places. The more significant exodus of Igbos from other parts of Nigeria remains in the background as well. As several women flee with their families, Nwapa presents women's active voices and dynamic actions at the core of the socio-political upheaval. The protagonist Kate is a woman of tremendous strength, insight, and foresight. Her wise counsel is initially resisted by her husband and his friend, Kal. She perceives impending danger of the war ahead of actual manifestation, which her husband Chudi and his impulsive friend cannot see: "I knew the game was up. I had told Chudi that Port Harcourt was in great danger, and would fall at any time. This was about two months before it actually fell. He was so upset that he threatened to hand me over to the Civil Defenders or the Militia" (NA: 1). Kate's sense of judgment undermines the more emotional reactions from her husband and she probes the war propaganda instead of being credulous like Kal. She is seen as a traitor to the cause but she actually approaches the crisis in a pragmatic way and is always vindicated.

Nwapa's female characters more self-styled independent, and resolute in her work. They lot of the changes that Nwapa writes about evident that colonialism is to blame. In the

middle of the 1840s, introduction of Christianity and western education, which started but later moved to Igbo villages, is partly to blame for the changes. Individuals, families, and the entire society experienced tension and ambiguity. As a result, traditional Igbo values, beliefs, and customs are the concepts and practices taught in schools frequently.

4. *One is Enough:*

In *One Is Enough*, Nwapa once again reveals that a woman should be ambitious and economically independent because only these would provide her recognition and respect.

In *One Is Enough*, the protagonist Amaka is a strong woman, who manages herself even in the face of her delayed fertility and attendant abuse by her mother in law. She rejects the insulting bond of matrimony and fearlessly walks out of the marriage to begin life anew. At first, Amaka's is barren and her relationship with her husband is one of ideal love, devotion, and respect. Later, Amaka's proposing to find a second wife for her son, her mother-in-law upset the family's harmony. By title of senior wife, she can remain at home. But she will be helpless with Obiora's secondary sexual partner. The family's primary provider, her success in the public sphere will not improve her status as a housewife and mother in the private sphere for limitations that placed on Amaka threaten her identity, and without children, she faces social ostraction.

Amaka runs away to big city Lagos where she recounts her mother's advice with her

friend Adaobi that she should have taken the steps of her elder sister, Ayo, who left her unfaithful husband and let herself „kept“ by a Permanent Secretary. Ayo started her life with the man whose wife went to abroad for her studies for four years. In the mean time, Ayo had four children and bought her a house from her „husband“, and As the lady of the secretary unexpectedly returned then she moved into her new house with her kids, unlike Amaka's extended stay with her husband who was unable to conceive her. Ayo broke her marriage bondage quickly enough to create her own life plan was adored by Amaka's mother. She made the decision to move to Lagos to start over after learning that "a childless marriage cannot last in the Nigeria of today." Amaka learned a lot from her mother during her short stay.

Amaka was able to relocate into a new apartment with the three thousand naira income from her first contract. She understood how difficult it is to acquire contract jobs these days as at time war and all relocated to Lagos because of certain army occupations (known as attack trade). Ayo, they introduced a group of young women who had lost their partners. Lagos was becoming a place where women could be autonomous and achieve economic independence. As a result, she is the leader of female bonding and organized women's networks. At the same time, Nigeria's Holocaust situation is taken advantage for the patriarchal idea of sexuality was challenged by women's flexible attitude toward sexual advances.

The women and children are the primary victims of war. Nwapa's positive representation of women as more than sex objects confirms the naturally resilient nature of women. The main motivation in war is to leave long-lasting scars on the bodies and that minds of natives survive by any means, forcing them to adopt conflictual and controversial trades. In war women situations as prostitutes whose characterization is crippled by benign moral lapses and instead recreates women as independent, assertive, resilient, and Nwapa rejects the status quo. As an advanced politics of survival rather than prostitution, she views selling one's body to the best bidder. Despite of the traditional roles for breadwinner, caretaker, and nurturer. The women are a key source of hope for society's regeneration believes by Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo. The forces of destruction, hunger, and starvation are countered their energy. They devote their energies as agents of survival by their survival strategies(Umeh 492). The determinations of Igbo women are successful by their various trade methods and economic. As a result, One is enough successfully shows the enormous strength.

5. *Women are Different:*

In *Women Are Different*, Nwapa narrates the experiences of four friends: Rose, Agnes, Dora and Comfort, from their youthful days as classmates in a Christian missionary girls high school to adult life experiences as modern women in different professions and businesses. Agnes has a stepmother and is sent to a boarding school until they find a suitable husband is mentioned as example in this narration. The person who is elderly and

wealthy finds as her husband in family. She eventually married him because she was unable to resist her father's insistence, so Agnes's to married him.

After completing nursing school, Dora, Agnes' friend married to a man named Chris. As her husband doesn't try to apply in any higher education program. As his marriage appears set to fail right from the start of the book because Chris enjoys the nice things in life, including wearing nice clothes, and he dislikes working a lot. The "reversal of the gender roles" may be seen in Dora and Chris' marriage. Since Dora is the breadwinner and family's head in reality. For kids and Dora, Chris is an escapist who avoids his responsibilities, even stops writing letters when she divorces Chris a month after returning from Hamburg, according to local law and custom. The scene serves as yet another illustration of the reversal of gender roles, so, woman initiates the divorce action. As a result, women are not obedient and passive ones but they are active decision-makers.

It is necessary to examine not only Dora but also her friend Rose for better understands the issues and lives of Nigerian women. Dora and main character of the book, Rose, attends the same school. Nwapa (1992: 24) describes her as "a serious minded girl and she knew why she was in the school." She faced many struggles with mark at school and improves at writing stories in Ibo. To influence her father, she even uses her political beliefs. Her father shares her belief in Nigeria's freedom by following her first two years of education.

Throughout the story, she has feelings on a boy named Ernest, and she thought that after attending Yaba Higher College, Ernest will study medicine. By gender-based educational backgrounds, Ernest travels overseas for further medical study and Rose took admission at University College, Ibadan. But Ernest didn't give any updates to her. After that Rose begins to take Mark seriously and married him. After he is accepted to Harvard, then she takes all of her funds and gave him all her money. Finally, she finds that Mark is lying to her. Even she decided that their marriage is false. She was disrespected financially and psychologically by Mark. After losing contact with Ernest then she lost contact with Mark. Whenever she puts her trust in men, then Rose will be betrayed by them. Again, Rose started a relationship with businessman named Olu.

"Olu was accomplished" by the book, and Rose was instantly attracted with him. But she needed to exercise careful following Mark (Nwapa 1992: 86). Because of his high level of intellectual growth, Rose chooses to have a child from Olu. In patriarchal civilizations, motherhood is imposed on women. As Rose unconsciously attempted to fit in with the norms. One day Rose's was threaten by Olu's wife and asks her to leave Olu, when Olu's wife visited Rose's office. Then she never sees Olu again, even because of this shock she lost her baby similar to her old boy friends. With a man named Tunde, Rose makes another attempt. Therefore in this story, he was unable to move on, because he lost his wife in a traffic accident.

The story emphasizes the reactions of new Nigerian women to the challenges of changing values of modernity, highlighting their difficulties, successes and failures. Focusing on the influence of Christianity and Western education, the novel provides insights into the nature of Nigeria's colonial and post-colonial society. Specifically, it identifies nationalist struggles for independence, urbanization, Nigerian civil war, the militarization of politics and the oil boom economy, as the major driving forces in Nigeria's socio-political and economic development in the period of study. Nigerian women are expected to conform to patriarchal norms while being physically, psychologically, and economically exploited by males, are examples presented in the novel. However, with the help of positive discrimination policies, good education, and the awakening of consciousness in the minds of people will change the women's status in Nigeria .

III. CONCLUSION

In this paper, Igbo Female Voice in the Novels of Flora Nwapa. *Efuru* (1966), *Idu* (1970), *Never Again* (1975), *One is Enough* (1981), *Women are Different* (1986) named five novels are used in this paper which is published by Flora Nwapa. Igbo is native to modern-day south-central and south-eastern Nigeria is known by an ethnic group, it is the one of Africa's largest ethnic groups by the Igbo people. The group's kinship structure determined a woman's position, and role of women in the economic structure of the society. The majority of Igbo people are farmers, traders, and craftsman in rural Nigeria. The resonance of Oguta Igbo

culture and the dual burden of women are integrated tradition and modernity in modern-day the Nigeria will present unyielding heroines are communicated by Flora Nwapa.

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