ONE IS ENOUGH: REJECTION OF VOICELESSNESS
AND A QUEST FOR SELF ASSERTION

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There was growing awareness of the fact that African female characters were projected through the conventional stereotype and that a negative image was given by most male writers like Achebe, wa Thiong, Ngugi, Senghor and other male writers. African female writers, on the other hand, attempted to give a definite and positive image of women. Their commitment to female realistic portrayal shows the vital role of women and the complexities of African women’s own world. Several African female writers emerged and began to play a prominent role by portraying a truthful image of women like Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Bessie Head, and Mariama Ba’s and others. They started to make their suffering voice heard by giving fuller accounts of women's situation. They endeavored to depict women abandoned by their husbands, ill-treated by their fathers, disempowered or abused by men, and their reaction to all these forces. The oppression of the black woman is even more poignant considering the double yoke of colonialism and patriarchy that is enforced on her strangling her.

The transition of the African woman from the groveling wife to the independent entity can be traced in a women authored works such as Flora Nwapa’s One Is Enough. Flora Nwapa's fame is attributed to her being the first African woman writer to publish her fiction in English. She became a pioneer of African women writers when she published her first novel, Efuru in 1966 which was followed by several other novels and short stories. In all her novels, she addresses the problems encountered by women: financial independence, rewarding career, marriage, childless woman, and women bringing up children without the help of men.

One is Enough (1981) is Nwapas’ fourth novel which tells of a woman’s struggle to lead a life of her own. After six years of happy marriage, though without children, Amaka discovers that her husband plans to marry another woman who has already borne him two sons in secrecy. As a result, rather than staying with her unfaithful husband, she goes to Lagos and starts a new life. To become a successful businesswoman in Lagos, she gets involved in an affair with a
Catholic priest and bears twin children. In the end, she has to decide whether to continue living alone and stand the society's criticism, or have another man as husband and be respectable, or be content with one husband, as the title of the novel implies.

In the text Amaka is detested by her in laws due to her lack of ability to produce offspring. When her husband Obiora takes a second wife without her knowledge, Amaka rejects her husband and leaves for Lagos, where she becomes a prosperous business woman. She even gains twin boys in a relationship with a priest. When he declares his wish to marry her, Amaka's rejection is crystal clear, “I don’t want to be a wife… A mistress, yes, but not a wife… As a wife, I am never free. I am a shadow of myself. As a wife, I am almost impotent. I am in prison, unable to advance in body or soul” (OIE, 132).

The problem that Amaka confronted as a wife – the stigma of barrenness -is a major calamity that could befall a woman in early African societies. Infertility is a major topic of discussion in many women-authored novels such as Efuru by Nwapa and Joys of Motherhood by Emecheta. And if a couple is childless, the woman is ipso facto at fault. In such traditional societies, the inability to conceive is nothing short of a crime, and such a woman is better off dead than alive. The novel also addresses several other issues facing African women; including wives of unfaithful polygamous husbands, the issue of having children in African communities and the blame that befalls wives when they fail to bear them, woman’s role in oppressing her own sex, their capability to run business; and above all women's financial independence.

An interrogation of tradition takes place in Flora Nwapa’s novel One is Enough, which has a female character challenging patriarchal hegemony, So One is Enough is feminist discourse on woman as ‘other’. Amaka, the protagonist of Nwapa’s novel shows a desire for transcendence; crossing over to relocate herself, exiting domesticity in order to participate in the public sphere which she not only achieves, but exceeds society’s expectations as well.

Amaka begins the journey towards self–realization from a position where the community attributes great importance to the fertility of women. The story begins with Amaka apologizing for something she does not do. It is narrated that “… at six in the morning, she had decided to apologize to her mother-in-law, for what she did not know” (OIE, 1). In fact, the reason for her apology is that she has been married to her mother-in-law’s son, Obiora, for six years without bearing a child. For that very same reason her husband and his mother hold her in contempt. Her husband becomes ill–tempered, and almost inattentive to whatever she may have to say. Since she is a barren woman and has failed to meet the expectations of her community, Amaka becomes haunted by her community’s attitude. She does every possible thing to prove that she can be pregnant by visiting every gynecologist in the area.
Nwapa clearly states the position of woman in an Igbo society is predictable: she is meant to marry and procreate. Personal independence within a value system that ultimately supports the community and the men who live within it must be limited to the good of the family. Even a woman’s money from her own trade business, which Amaka has, may benefit family members. Initially Amaka accepts these values which are also the cause of her negative self image and her willingness to maintain her marriage to Obiora despite his cruelty and arrogance. In fact she was so successful in her trading activities that she used to earn more than her husband and had even gifted a Peugeot car to her husband. But her husband did not want to make it known to his family and friends that the car had been purchased by his wife, so to save his reputation and also to appear superior to his wife he declared to everyone that he had purchased the car. Amaka did not want any issues to come into her relationship with her husband so she did not tell the truth and went along with her husband in whatever he wanted.

Amaka’s childlessness serves as a symbol of her societal and ultimately her own self-abasement. Cursed by her in-laws for having had no child in six years of marriage, Amaka kneels in front of her mother-in-law as if seeking forgiveness from an angry parent. This pre-coherent stage of Amaka’s development is both ironic and sub textual. Her efforts to assimilate-to be the wife that the community sanctions- are met with violence and physical abuse from her husband and derision from her mother-in-law. Amaka’s attempts to avoid the curse of being a “he” woman, one who challenges her husband in an argument, results in the confirmed belief that she is this dreaded social pariah.

Amaka's progress towards emancipation is not an easy task. “She was going to show everybody that a woman’s ambition was marriage, a home that she could call her own, a man she would love and cherish, and children to crown the marriage” (OIE, 1). However, Amaka’s wishful dream is shattered when her marriage to Obiora comes to an end; and she is thrown out of the home that she calls her own by her mother-in-law. She discovers that her beloved husband has an affair with another woman who has born him two children. Because she is barren she is regarded an outcast by the society, especially her husband and mother-in-law. Nwapa attempts to show that in Amaka’s society, every married woman will be haunted by the idea of barrenness until she becomes pregnant. Women are made to think that marriage means children, and Amaka is not different. When she was young, she had the same idea, since she was socialized in a patriarchal society.

After being thrown out of her home in Onitsha by her mother-in-law, Amaka says farewell to marriage and heads for Lagos, where she tries to break her own ground. Her life in Lagos witnesses her rise to power as she has a previous experience in attack trade during the war.
In Lagos she goes through some experiences that are reckoned to affect women’s life in a changing urban society. Her attractiveness and good looks make influential men fall in love with her and help her. In such a society, if a woman aspires to become financially prosperous, sexual bargaining is an open and guaranteed choice. Therefore, Nwapa makes Amaka scarify to pave her way for success. Encouraged by her sister who is a mistress of a Nigerian business man, she prospers.

Berrian comments that having being thrown out of her home while functioning as a dutiful wife, Amaka no longer sees the world through her communities’ eyes. In a conversation with her friend Adaobi, she thus describes life in urban Lagos: “You know Lagos. No man can do anything for a woman, without asking her for her precious possession—herself. I must confess to you, I have slept with the Alhaji” (OIE, 68). Nwapa shows that when Amaka entertains Alhaji she does not do that as a prostitute; rather, it is because she finds herself in a society where it is the only means by which a woman can achieve her goals.

One of the routes for women’s empowerment is trade. Traditionally the market place was the exclusive preserve of women. According to Kamene Okonjo, “In traditional Igbo society marketing was the woman’s domain…” (Okonjo, 189). For this reason, the women engage in dynamic activities of trade; buying, selling, producing and contracting businesses, both legal and illegal, as exemplified in the “attack trade” (trade activities during the war period) that has created new stages of power for the elevation and promotion of the (in)famous “Cash Madam Club”. Another route that Nwapa's women take to advance social mobility is western Education. Nwapa reaffirms this paradigm in the strong sisterhood of Amaka-Adaobi-Ayo, with the “Cash Madam Club”. Western education is only the stepping stone to power and economic independence but it is the trading activity that is swift in ensuring the desired economic freedom and independence for women. And this fact is illustrated in the character of Amaka, who even from the age of sixteen and even after acquiring education and becoming a teacher, makes a professional shift into the trading and contracting business,

Amaka went on with her business in Onitsha, supplying timber, sand and food. She was a contractor, one of the numerous female contractors who had sprung up during and at the end of the war. Before the war, she had been a teacher. At the end of the war, because she took part in the “attack trade” she rediscovered herself (OIE, 4).

Amaka’s journey into the single life, beyond the limited geographical and cultural space of her community, is also a spiritual and psychological journey inward. In pursuing self created goals, amaka achieves a clarity of inward vision that she had not explored. For the first time, she is able to act on her own behalf without the restrictions of a husband or mother-in-law. She extends her talents as a contractor in Lagos, supplying materials and equipment to government
ministries and the military. Within three years she acquires land outside of Lagos and in Onitsha; she builds on both sites, hires a maid and driver and divorces Obiora according to custom and civil Law. While her wealth allows her an independence she has never known she gradually understands that actual freedom comes from a liberation of the soul, an acceptance of the core self without pretense or influence.

In Lagos she has two affairs; one is fleeting while the other one is serious. Amaka’s relationship with Alhaji is only to receive contracts, and there are no real feelings involved. But her relationship with Father Mclaid though started for the same reasons i.e for material gains becomes a meaningful relation for both of them. As has been related, “She wanted just one thing from him at the time, a base where she would gain contract jobs, make money and live an independent life. Her association with the priest was not motivated by any feeling of affection, least of all love, at the beginning” (OIE, 102).

In the beginning Amaka was very disturbed and confused because deep at heart, she feels that she is trapped between missionary values and her mother’s teaching. The missionary teaches her the importance of chastity, marriage and children. While her mother teaches her to be independent and have children whether inside or outside marriage. In the initial phase, Amaka is attached to missionary teaching, but in the end she scraps it out and follows her mother’s advice.

She takes Izu as her lover because he is able to give her pleasure, converse with her on a respectful level, and be the intermediary to obtain her building contracts. She describes how Amaka feels, “She neither wanted to be a wife any more, nor be a mistress, or even a kept woman. She wanted a man; just a man and she wanted to be independent of this man, pure and simple” (OIE, 100). Sengupta correctly posits that, even though the novel does not deal with sex, per se, sexuality plays an important role in enabling Amaka to fuse the domestic and public domain. Sengupta also believes that the novel is not about female “philosophical sadness about life,” but the heroine’s desire, her “successful purposefulness” in democratic and public sphere, with the aid of progressive materialism”. (Sengupta, 561).

Father Mclaid was an orphan who had been adopted by the Irish family and he had never been able to forget this first betrayal of being abandoned by his own family. He feels that he has found his soul mate in amaka and falls deeply in love with her. Amaka becomes pregnant and delivers twins. When father Mclaid comes to know about the same he is overjoyed and is even ready to relinquish his church duties so that he could marry Amaka and become a family man. Hearing about the same Amaka’s mother also feels that she should get married to Father Mclaid. But Amaka firmly refuses to adhere to Izu’s proposal and also to her mother’s suggestion. To her, marriage is a personal and not social concern. Therefore, she chooses to remain unmarried.
She has achieved self-fulfilment. She has rejected the deep rooted social traditions, including marriage and accepted the challenge of leading a life of her own. According to Ezeigbo, One is Enough is Nwapa’s “forthright encouragement of childless women to look for other ways of living a self-fulfilled and profitable life” (Ezeigbo, 65).

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. One is Enough’s central message is that a woman does not need to marry a second time, in order to regain respect; it rejects tradition, as it relates to women. The British have left, but female subjugation continues. During colonial times, Igbo women were passive objects of desire, from a male perspective. After political independence, they became active and rebellious subjects; they also became symbolic sites for three events; struggle, appropriation and re-affirmation. The first involves gender clash, the second is about using wealth to gain power and the third, the birth of twins, means Amaka accepts motherhood as a major component of Igbo cultural reality. She is, therefore, the same as other traditional women, but different because she leaves her husband, refuses to remarried and gains economic freedom.

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