

## **DIMENSIONS OF A SELF ASSERTED WOMAN ENTREPRENEUR FROM IGBO CULTURE: A STUDY OF FLORA NWAPA'S ONE IS ENOUGH**

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### Abstract:

This paper describes how an African Nigerian woman is empowered and become a successful business woman with the economical independence in the traditional Nigerian Igbo settings. It has two main objectives. First, Amaka, the central character of the present novel *One is Enough*, presents her as a strong and individualized woman who emerges successfully from all the burdens of the patriarchal society and stepping beyond the institution of marriage. Second, Amaka is interpreted as revolutionary in the sense of getting economical independence and get success in trade in the city Logos where she gets more opportunities. For when a woman is financially independent, she becomes a different person; the sole architect of her financial future, often more confident, more assertive and a more vocal member of society.

**Key Words:** Self Assertiveness, Economical Independence, Trade, Patriarchal society, empowerment,Igbo culture.

Flora Nwapa's *One Is Enough* (1981) is a compelling story of a woman Amaka, who struggles to find an independent and fulfilling life of her own as a successful business woman. Amaka is the protagonist in the novel, she is a strong and competent woman who is initially childless but very good at business. Amaka worked as a teacher before the civil war, later she preferred to do trade. She represents both the traditional woman of the market place and a modern woman who is supplying timber, sand and food.

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The author Flora Nwapa incorporates several elements in this novel *One Is Enough* to preserve and promote the culture of the people as it was and may never be in our modern age. Nwapa writes to show African women's potentiality, independence through the character of Amaka. As Nwapa's novels progressed over time, her women seem more and more liberated and happy with choices they make even though the community may not be completely satisfied. The women also recognize that happiness comes from within. The search of female characters for self-healing and happiness in a world in which they encounter innumerable traditional, cultural, political, and emotional roadblocks continues in the novel *One Is Enough*.

Amaka, who represents the younger and educated generation, accepts motherhood but does not believe it is the only goal in life and does not think the lack of motherhood should detract from a person as a worthwhile individual. However, Amaka's aunt does seem to understand the importance of education, for she tells Amaka how she educated her children from the profits she earned from her business. She also makes it evident that women must have their own businesses and never depend entirely on husbands. The aunt says, "Never slave for him. Have your own business no matter how small, because you never can tell" (OIE: 9). The above statement supports Carole Davies' *Introduction. Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature* reviews about African Feminism. Davies reminds the reader that the African woman is aware of the inequities and limitations in traditional society, a view espoused by Amaka's mother, who explains why she did not marry for love and what she did when she had had enough children by her husband. Amaka's mother and aunt also support Davies' fifth characteristic of feminism, which focuses on women's being self-reliant and never depending completely on the husband.

However, the reader should remember that Amaka's sole ambition is to be like a wife and a mother. Amaka struggles a lot to fulfil her life's ambition. Amaka's life struggle begins with the rejection of her marriage with Obi. While grieving her loss of Obi and trying to move forward with her life, Amaka, who is only sixteen years old, meets Isaac, who seems like a perfect mate. Isaac is slow to propose marriage. After Amaka and Isaac date for a year, people in the community begin to question Amaka, causing her great embarrassment.

Amaka refuses to take their advice even though she really wants to get married. It is clear the community voices are supporting marriage. Then tragedy enters Amaka's life again: Isaac is killed in a car accident. Amaka begins to wonder what fate is doing to her. During this period of bereavement, she meets playboy Bob, who does not take time to get to know her. He proposes within record time. Because marriage is a family event and Amaka has some doubts about Bob, she consults her aunt before accepting his proposal. After her aunt researches Bob's family, she tells Amaka that Bob has not properly cared for his mother and advises Amaka not to marry him. Bob

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also has impregnated his mother's young servant girl, refused to marry her, and demanded that she has an abortion. Her aunt advises Amaka that,

A good man will come. But let me make it clear to you. Please don't bottle yourself up. You are not going to be in a nunnery. What is important is not marriage as such, but children, being able to have children, being a mother (OIE: 8).

Amaka, who after acquiring the 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: 49).

Amaka struggles to maintain some semblance of friendship with her age-group and maintain her sense of dignity while continuing with her contracting business. Even her mother encourages her to buy land and become wealthy because a husband will appreciate her wealth and treat her better. Her mother, just like her aunt, encourages motherhood at all cost with or without a husband. Finally, Amaka's singleness come to an end: "she meets Obiora when he transfers home from the North to work as an executive officer in one of the Ministries" (OIE:11). He is described by the narrator as "quiet and gentle" (OIE: 12). Obiora makes the proper preparations with Amaka's and his family. Courtship and marriage are difficult for Amaka because of traditional expectations in the community.

After marrying, Amaka and Obiora appear happy with each other, with their jobs, and with their friends, but there is no sign of the pregnancy expected by traditional Igbo standards. Six years after marriage, Obiora and Amaka still do not have a child, and the situation has created some friction between them.

To complicate matters, Obiora mother insists "Obiora must have an heir because all his brothers and sisters have an heir" (OIE: 12). Amaka feels unfulfilled and tries to find a way to satisfy her mother-in-law. She tries to make her mother-in-law believe that she has an appointment with a medical doctor, but the mother-in-law knows the truth. To further humiliate Amaka, the mother-in-law blurts out that Obiora has two sons by another woman, and the woman and her sons are coming to live with Obiora and Amaka. How is Amaka to overcome such hostility and emptiness at the same time? Amaka begins to wonder if she is useless to the world because she was childless. "Was she unfulfilled because she had no child?" (OIE: 22).

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Amaka is the epitome of the new-breed-woman who bargains her position beyond the margins of power into the centre, where she now speaks and exerts her monopoly of power. The pathos of Amaka's conversation with her mother-in-law breaks the reader's heart at the very outset of the novel.

Mother, forgive me, she heard herself saying, It will not happen again. I should not have replied to what you said. I am very sorry, mother. Please, don't throw me away, Mother (OIE: 1).

Amaka goes through a period of confusion because she remembers the missionaries who appeared happy. She wonders who will take care of them in their old age. Amaka is trying to find herself according to traditional expectations. She is trying to develop an independent nature in order to find security and happiness within herself and within the community. Without being one she runs the risk of being a social outcast. Thus, the real reason why her marriage broke down is because Obiora could not impregnate her.

She runs away to the big city, Lagos, leaving her husband. As 'motherhood' is common for a woman to survive in her community. And in absence of it the marriage ends and displacement begins. Amaka's search for self-fulfillment continues after she leaves Obiora and moves to Lagos. While Amaka is adjusting to life in Lagos, she meets Alahji. It is the turning point in her life. She starts her successful business journey by taking the help of Alhaji by getting the first contract by him. The Alhaji liked Amaka very much and had made advances. But Amaka again did not feel up to it. The Alhaji had helped her secure more contracts and execution of them. Amaka had told him about the three thousand naira she made on the toilet roll deal, but all he said was, "Thank God, it is all yours" (OIE: 66).

Amaka finds her sense of independence and self-worth as a woman after she is introduced to Alhaji, who is instrumental in helping her get contracts. Through these contracts, she is able to become financially secure and rent her own apartment, buy a car, build a house in her hometown, and divorce her husband legally and traditionally as well as give money to family members. These steps represent freedom and opportunities for Amaka

It is suggested that the expectation in the jungle is for the one who has won power, to consume the other, or to marginalize their profit. But the Alhaji is different. Nwapa repeatedly suggests that the Alhaji's personality is imbued with an admirable quality of humility and dignity. He is not just like any other player who makes it a business to win and profit in every trade that they engage in. And to stress this point, the narrator reaffirms that Alhaji actually, "liked Amaka very much and never asked Amaka what profit she made" (OIE: 66). What is remarkable, therefore, is that while Alhaji is driven to Amaka for romantic love, Amaka, on her part, is driven completely by her narcissism and the inordinate ambition for money and power.

Amaka is out to play her own game of profit with a vengeance as she manipulates and exploits the man to execute her contracts, and buy the suit for her own prospective home. Thus in ignorance, the Alhaji becomes trapped by Amaka to pay the price of her growing power. But what is even more significant is that after becoming suspicious of Amaka's scheme, and that she will not yield any ground to reciprocate his affection, Alhaji still drifts towards her, as if she had cast a spell on him. In the end, Amaka proves herself a parasite she siphons all for her own needs of empowerment and profit, and dumps Alhaji as waste. Once the women have made their profit, they dump the men as Amaka does with Alhaji as if he were mere toilet roll or waste paper. Amaka sets out from the beginning to use Alhaji just as she would use and dispenses with toilet paper: She wanted a man in her life. All women should have men in their lives . . . The men could be husbands or lovers . . . she did not want him as a lover but she could not yet make a clean break with him. He was precious to her just then. She needed him more than he needed her (OIE: 66).

Having abused and exploited Alhaji, Amaka dumps him and moves to another object. Her new target is Fr.Mclaid. Amaka's man handling of the Rev.Fr.Mclaid is, perhaps, the most classic and pathetic example of men who become trapped in this new tragic ethos. What is particularly significant about Fr.Mclaid's tragic experience in Amaka's hands is that, unlike Alhaji who at some point became suspicious of Amaka's insincerity, The Man of God is acutely ignorant of the treacherous "ways of the world" and, more so, of the sinful snares of women like Amaka. Like the post-modern? Ananse-spider, Amaka spins her webs to entrap the priest.

Amaka seduces him to get contracts. Further, her freedom to live the single life allows her the opportunity to date and meet Father McLaid, who unwittingly helps Amaka to achieve her most desired goal motherhood but this relationship produces twin boys. Mc Laid, a priest, develops an intimate relationship with her. She is quite surprised to learn that she is pregnant because she thought she was barren; however, she is very happy. Both apologize to each other for manipulating each other for selfish purposes. McLaid admits,

Darling Amaka, I knew what I was doing. You did not use me. I rather used you. I have no regrets. The baby must be born. I am responsible. All I ask is that you keep this secret until I sort things out. . . . There are times in one's life when one is left with a choice (104).

Nwapa describes Amaka's joy upon discovering that she is pregnant and not barren as thought by her former mother-in-law. The most important indication of Amaka's freedom, I think, occurs when she decides she does not want to and will not marry Father McLaid just because she has children by him, even though he wants to marry her to save his moral reputation with the public. Amaka's words express her freedom:

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 and soul. Something gets hold of me as a wife and destroys me. . . . No, I am through with husbands. I said farewell to husbands the first day I came to Lagos (OIE: 127).

*One Is Enough* reveals many changes in Igbo family structure and the behaviour patterns of both traditionally married and single life, with European customs remain to have an important influence. These changes are most noticeable when individuals leave rural towns and move to cities like Lagos; the customs are most acceptable to individuals who have studied abroad or who have received educational training based on European standards. Increasingly, women are comfortable being single and increasingly they pursue financial independence.

Lagos represents freedom, opportunities for women, and female solidarity. Nwapa explains that “Amaka has come to Lagos to look for her identity and have a clean break” (45). A clean break implies a new beginning without limitations but with many expectations. Wayne Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) observes the implied Nwapa’s views on single life as well as “the moral and emotional content of all actions and sufferings of characters” (Booth: 73).

Each woman explains the importance of being free from a husband’s expectations and engaging in business ventures that make her economically independent of her husband. This approach supports Carole Davies’ *Second Characteristic of Feminism*, that “an African feminist consciousness focuses on the inequities and limitations of traditional societies, while indicating that colonialism may have reinforced them and introduced others” (Davies: 9).

However, *One Is Enough* actually ends with a satisfied female character and reveals that a woman should be economically independent in whatever means possible who gets success in trade or business.

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