



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## THE PROCESS OF AWAKENING IN *ONE IS ENOUGH* BY FLORA NWAPA

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### ABSTRACT

*Africa contains the complex history of traditional society. During the period of imperialism, Africa has created areas of political influence and domination which naturally produced a far-reaching influence in the growth of African literature and it predominantly begins with oral literature, pre-colonial writing, colonial African literature and post-colonial literature. The scholars rose up out of Africa after colonization, spoke to the genuine idea of Africa and its great past. Flora Nwapa is one among those novelists, who had effectively depicted the genuine nature and culture of Africa through her books. The words and activities of characters in Flora Nwapa's tale One is Enough is with regards to customary traditions and convictions directed by Igbo society. Nwapa's emphasis upon choice and discovery and cognizance of self, enables the peruser to pick up understanding into Igbo culture and furthermore portrays how profoundly imperialism had infiltrated the way of life of Africa and obliterated its qualities. Flora Nwapa has attempted to draw out the contentions in the general public through her conflicting female characters. This paper provides an answer to the above preoccupation in One Is Enough. In the novel, it is proved that Amaka is not barren but there is a problem of compatibility with her husband. That is Amaka is fertile but "she needed a special man to make her do so [That is to beget a child]"*

(Nwapa, 1981:22). Accordingly, Amaka got twins with Father Mclaid, out of wedlock. This proves that the process of awakening and the way of men hold women alone as responsible for procreation is quite unfortunate and it is an indication of the one-sidedness of a culture that ignores men's role in it.

**Key words:** Oral literature, pre-colonial writing, colonial African literature Colonization, modification in culture, Igbo society and awakening.

*One is Enough* (1981) is Nwapa's 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 *One is Enough*, the protagonist, Amaka is married only once and after she rejects marriage as reflected by the title: *One is Enough*. What is more, while in *Efuru* the society is right that Efuru is barren and can no more bear a child, in *One is Enough* the society and even better the doctors are proved wrong because in opposition to their predictions, Amaka got twins out of wedlock. This proves to the whole society of Amaka that women are wrongly accused of barrenness, which men do not even investigate if ever there is compatibility in the couple or not. The narrator's voice informs us that Amaka "has come to the conclusion that apart from Obiora her husband, another man, any man could make her pregnant" (Nwapa, 1981:60). What is more, female sexuality is no more condemned as opposed to the community of Efuru. Ayo, Amaka's sister, states that she has "four children without a husband..." (Nwapa, 1981:127).

In the text Amaka is detested by her in laws due to her lack of ability to produce off spring. 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.

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 subtextual. 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 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 fact, in *One is Enough*, Amaka has no child in her marriage with Obiora, but the latter has two sons by another woman out of wedlock. This is certainly what has made Obiora's mother, upon discovering that her son is "fertile", speak to Amaka in such a term: "if my son heard me, if he listened to me, his house would have been full of children by now" (Nwapa, 1981:13). However, Nwapa's didacticism does seem to raise certain questions, as Obiora is not married to the woman with whom he conceived, is there any evidence that he is really the father of the sons? Especially when we know that female sexuality is not condemned within the society as we learn through Amaka's mother when she advises her daughter to leave her husband: "I told you, four years ago, to leave him, or if you did not want to leave him, to go to other men and get pregnant" (Nwapa, 1981:32). Then can we say that Amaka is barren knowing that she is faithful to her husband while the latter is a womanizer? It is then true that in the community of Amaka: "A wife took the blame for her husband's failure in business or in life generally" (Nwapa, 1981:17).

Nwapa, esthetically, provides an answer to the above preoccupation in *One Is Enough*. In the novel, it is proved that Amaka is not barren but there is a problem of compatibility with her husband. That is Amaka is fertile but “she needed a special man to make her do so [That is to beget a child]” (Nwapa, 1981:22). Accordingly, Amaka got twins with Father Mclaid, out of wedlock. This proves that the way men hold women alone as responsible for procreation is quite unfortunate and it is an indication of the one-sidedness of a culture that ignores men’s role in it. That is certainly why, Ezeigbo reads Nwapa’s *One is Enough* as a “forthright encouragement of childless women to look for other ways of living a self-fulfilled and profitable life.” (1998:65)

Thus, following the discussion, *One is Enough* is certainly the outcome of the old adage: “Once bitten twice shy” (Nwapa, 1981:142). This is because the society is very critical of women both in marriage and childbearing. In marriage, women don’t have a say at all and when confronted with barrenness they are to support the blame. This is because, in the community of Amaka, a blessed marriage is a marriage arranged by parents and a happy marriage is certainly a marriage blessed with children. Such state of affairs has made Nwapa, as a committed writer, to say that enough is enough. However, Nwapa is not against marriage but advocates marriage where there is love, mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence. She is not as well against childbearing but she strongly stands against compulsory childbearing. For instance, for Amaka, a “child will come in God’s own time” (Nwapa, 1981:53) and this is really what happens to her in the novel.

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 remarry and gains economic freedom.

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