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Portrayal of Oppression and Resistance in Nigerian Women's Prose Fiction: A Generational Study of Amaka Azuike's Violated and Other Selected Short Stories

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Abstract

This paper discusses Amaka Azuike 2019 collection of classic short stories to commemorate the historic 1995 global demand for gender equality and development as ascertained in the Beijing Declaration of the 4th World Conference on Women. The creative writer joins her global counterparts to assert women's rights by challenging the male status quo and overall position of women in the society. Azuike's Violated, as situated in womanist discourse, as argued by Chikwenye Ogunyemi and Mary Kolawole is set to break the culture of silence on the daily oppression of women as wives, lovers, sisters, daughters and staff. In Violated and other selected short stories, her female protagonists are depicted as vulnerable and victims of male oppression and violence. The five stories treated in this paper highlight sexual molestation / abuse, incestuous crime, harassment, physical abuse and emotional blackmail among others. While emphasizing the consequences of being a woman in an abusive relationship as tantamount to losing vital privileges such as education and financial security; Azuike's collection of short stories depict real life events that have eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigerian, and of course other African societies where women are raised to be dependent and submissive. While incest, marginalized voices, cultural expectations physical abuse and disempowerment become cultural phenomena that abuse relationships entail thus engendering women as victims who consequently remain in bad situation with no means of financial support. The creative strategies of encouraging comprehensive education and professional skills as a weapon against masculine abuses, amplify the prose writer's voice in proffering negotiation or defiance to engender a meaningful balance where both male and female should be accorded their fundamental full respect as homo-sapiens.

Keywords: Oppression, Resistance, Patriarchy, Gender, Violence

Introduction

The subject of female reconstruction attained an incredible level of philosophical significance in the scholarship of literature, politics, culture, and economy in the twenty-first century. It is now unacceptable to trivialize the reading of the female personality in line with the outdated assumptions such as male's patriarchy and female's surrender to the whims of subservience. Rather, the cultural reading of the female person is becoming ultra-scientific such that, considerations are given to a closer psychodynamic reading of female subject beyond the purview of mere sociological and political demands. This cursory reading of the female subject gives us insight into the psychological forces that underlie behaviours, emotions, attitudes, conscious and unconscious motives that help us understand how the mind works. Female creativity is a product of the socio-cultural context of the female and some male writers of the third-generation in Nigerian literature. Catherine Sanderson (8) in *Social Psychology* describes socio-cultural perspective as "people's behaviour and mental processes as shaped in part by their social and or cultural contact including race, gender, and nationality". The dynamics of an era presuppose the mind of the author; he or she is either attuned to, or opposed to, the agenda of that era. Nigerian pioneer female writers dealt specifically with the prevalent issues that were peculiar to the socio-cultural context of their time. Flora Nwapa and her contemporaries: Zulu Sofola, Mabel Segun, Adaora Lily Ulasi and the likes challenged the myth of silence and weakness in women which were prevalent at that time, while Mary Kolawole's *Womanism and African Consciousness* (1997, p.24) contended the myth of African women voice lessness with the claim that

the women voices have been ignored over the years hence her argument for womanism with the emphasis on "self-expression, self-retrieval, self-assertion in positive cultural way".

Awoyemi - Arayela (2013, p.8) observes that "the first phase encompasses the first generation of female writers whose works began to appear shortly before Nigeria's Independence, to the end of the civil war which almost ripped the nation apart". The second - generation writers emboldened by the dynamics of the female literary influence of the first - generation writers who were versatile and more bearing in their writings. They built on the premises of the first-generation, that writers were more daring in their writing. They built on the premises of the first generation, while the aesthetics of female bonding accounted for their strong impressive female characterization. These writers include Buchi Emechetta, Zaynab Alkali, Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, Helen Obiagiele, and the likes. Amaka Azuike, whose short stories constitute a template upon which this paper is built, and her contemporaries: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Sefi Atta, Chika Unique, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, Ayobami Adebayo, Yejide Kilanko, Safiya Ismaila Yero and importantly some male writers like Habila Hello, Okey Ndibe, Ayodele Arowosegbe, Ben Okri, Elnathan John, Chuma Nwokolo, Tolu Ogunlesi among others are recent writers who write differently. They are more versatile and daring as they employ new thematic pre-occupations in their writings. The conditions underlying their narratives differ due to technology, newer ideologies, freedom of opinion among others. Their creativity skills were channeled towards the complete integration of women in all aspects of the society. They define the twenty-first century feminism space in the society and empower their characters differently. They create feminist characters who are non-conformist and rebellious expressing their opinions and questioning societal perceptions of women in ways that differ from those of earlier writers. To Chinedu Oko and Ukachu,(2010, p.166) "their works have cultural undertones, as well as variegated thematic concerns, which have been conditioned by post-independence realities".

In her collection of ten inter-connected short stories, Amaka Azuike has tried to look for a possible literary means in the periphery of female imagination to correct the mistakes of indoctrinating readers while visualizing the world from a patriarchal perspective. She succeeds in creating new women archetype, who are vulnerable and susceptible to gender oppression and violence, her female protagonist are empowered young adults created to make responsible choices in life. (Wola Thomas, 2019). She critiques patriarchal norms in Nigerian society by exploring the versatile themes of gender inequality and domestic violence within marriage. Feminist interest in the "women problem" is conspicuously identified in Azuike's "Violated", "Rosanna", "Nanret", "Broken Hearted" and "Unholy Alliance" which are purposively selected as samples of fictional works through which the author exercises her human right to express her concerns. In line with other third - generation female writers, she has taken up feminist struggles to challenge women's oppression through social protest, giving voice to new trends in the fight against opposition and subjugation of women. In Nigerian literature, female writers who explore themes of dehumanization of the female gender in their works are interested in how women are presented or represented. They reconstitute the social realities of the women folk by presenting female points of view and concerns. Azuike, as an advocate of comprehensive sexuality education, casts a satiric light on the cultural norms that exist to repress female potentials. In her stand as one of the voices of the female gender of her generation, she aims at subverting oppressive structure of the society. This paper is hereby situated in the womanist discourse as argued by Ogunyemi (1996) and Kolawole (1997).

Purpose of the study

The study aims to examine how Nigerian challenge social cultural constrained assert their agency in a Nigerian female prose fiction. The paper set out to achieve the following objectives:

- To analyse the depiction of different forms of oppression women encounter in their every day life in the selected Nigerian prose fiction.
- To explore the creative strategies female characters' use against social and cultural limitation place on them in the selected prose fiction.
- To highlight how education and professional skill become powerful tools for women to claim their independence and empowerment.
- To show how strategic resistance of courage, self-expression and self-retrieval, seeking legal justice and collective solidarity are used to inspire strength in the course of life challenges.

Research Questions

- How do the selected Nigerian female prose fiction writer portray the different forms of oppression experienced by women?

- In what ways do fictional female characters resist patriarchal and cultural constraints in the selected short stories?
- How are formal education and professional skill represented as pathways to women empowerment in the fictional work?
- What role do courage, legal justice, self-expression, self-retrieval, and collective solidarity play in shaping women responses to oppression?

African Feminism/Womanism

The advocacy of women's rights and sexual education has gained ground from the late 19th century to the present in Europe and America emerging at a time when women were regarded as inferior to men; they were barred from voting, professional careers and better educational opportunities. The chains of oppression that women were subjected to under the system of patriarchy gave way to feminist movements in the western world. These people are so called because they stand out to fight for changes in women's condition in association with the class struggle. Pioneers of the movement were Mary Wollstonecraft in United Kingdom, Sara M-Grimke in United States, Helene Cixous from France and Tori Moi from Norway, among others. These pioneers of feminist movement have used literary organs to propagate the message of equality of both sexes. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Sarah M. Grimke's (1838) *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes* and the *Condition of Woman*, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) were fearlessly written to demand for women's rights to financial independence, education, and entry into the professions. Upon this foundation, Elaine Showalter (1977, p.41) posits that "gender has become an analytic category whether the concerns are representation of sexual difference, (re) shaping masculinity, building feminine values or exclusions of female voice from the literary canon". D'Almeida (1994, p.52) believes writing by women is "a weapon to destroy the ideas that perpetuate subjugation and inequality" which celebrated female writers have used to expunge women's marginal position(s).

The ideology to remove all hindrances on the path of the women in realization of their potentials became acceptable to African women both in diaspora and in Africa, though with a difference. Davies and Grave (1986, p.9) disclose that "African feminism is not antagonistic to African men but it challenges them to be aware of certain salient aspect of women's subjugation which differ from the generalized oppression of all African people". In the same vein Elizabeth Oginni (1996, p.23) submits "the struggle for the improved status of women is likened to the fight against racism because oppression of the black race was similar to that of women in their society". She thereby concludes that African females are to be treated fairly, empowered at different levels to build a harmonious society. African women warmly embraced feminist ideology since they were also passing through a chain of oppression under the system of patriarchy, but they equally draw a line by adopting the concept of womanism which recognizes that the needs of the black woman are not the same as those of her western counterpart. Oginni (1996, p.24) clarifies the difference thus:

The white woman only experienced inequality in deprivation of sound education, job and property. The black woman is faced with other numerous cultural problems like arranged marriage, polygamy, sexist Islamic and Christian tenets. In a further contrast of the two categories, Chioma Opera in "Towards Utopia" specifies that a Victorian-age house-wife complains of boredom, while her African counterpart is burdened with a double-day and works like a slave on the farm besides producing children, cooking and doing the house work.

African females' love for children, home and family life makes womanism as a variant of black feminism more desirable. Buchi Emecheta describes herself as a feminist with small "f", which Mariam Ba also affirms of herself in her criticism of men who abandoned their children all because of their inordinate desire for sexual gratification. They, among others, believe that women need men. This is the stand of womanism in African setting.

Womanism

Womanism refers to an Afrocentric form of feminism that does not only take concerns of gender but includes class, race, politics, ethnic relationships, religious intolerance, colonialism and neo-colonialism in their consciousness. Its ideology, according to Ogunyemi (1996), is mother-centred with its focus on caring family, communal, national and international outlook. It depicts the feminist effort of black women to celebrate African womanhood, her strength and experiences to push for a change. Mary Kolawole (2004) on the other hand believes in the metaphoric use of "Arere" a Yoruba concept with which she represents woman body, resilience and community in her concept of womanism is rooted in an African woman's "self-expression, self-retrieval, and self-assertion..."

Alice Walker's book (1983), *In search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* introduced the concept of womanism. The main concerns of the womanist in Africa is that man and woman should be in harmony in the home and in the society at large because Africans hold marriage and family life in high esteem. To Mariama Ba (1985, p.10), "there could be no self-fulfillment outside the couple situation" as expressed in her *So long A letter*. Nonetheless, the idea of planting the female in domestic space as wife and mother solely has culminated in the institutionalization of male dominance. This cultural practice negates the idea of an egalitarian society that contemporary African nations need to promote which makes a Nigerian literary critic, Chikwenye Ogunyemi in Adeleke (1996) who argue that she will "incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic and political considerations" in her literary works in recognition of her stand as a womanist who seeks to promote the joint struggle between black women and men for the liberation of both groups from the dominant people's oppressive tendencies. A womanist is tasked to relate the concept and practice of feminist ideology as elaborated by western women into a local developing country of the Third World. Thus, Amaka Azuike's collection of stories project womanist ideology because she is not an extremist, a man hater, she only tries to correct the society by highlighting the needs and vulnerability of her female protagonists to enhance an egalitarian society that Nigerian needs.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative textual analysis of based and close reading of five selected interconnected, creative short stories by a Nigerian female writer, whose thematic concerns elucidate portrayal of female oppression and their strategic actions for self-liberation. The short stories are selected using the parameters of subject matter and unified thematic preoccupation portraying female oppression and strategic resistance of all the female protagonists involved. Secondary sources consist of other literary works such as journals and other relevant materials from the traditional or e-library to strengthen the paper.

A Binocular Exploration of The Selected Short Stories

"Nanret"

Escaping neglect, poverty and oppression with special reference to want is a vision expressed by Azuike in "Nanret". The female protagonist, Nanret, though a graduate with two degrees in Literature and Psychology is assigned by her husband to be available to run errands, keep the husband's bed warm, cook his meals and pick up the children from school rather than be allowed to earn money, the end result is the lamentation of the protagonist as she discloses, "my troubled marriage had robbed me of all dignity. I needed to regain that immediately..." (58). Nanret's economic disempowerment orchestrates from her husband's jealousy of her academic achievement that leads to "lack of basic needs (62) while the husband "never lacked female company nor spared cost in ensuring that they were entertained and catered for... (*Violated*, 62). This patriarchal heritage is not only oppressive but equally a means of weaponizing poverty. Adebayo Aduke negates this intellectual waste claiming "there cannot be global progress if more than half of the population does not realise its potentials because of problems that are neither innate nor incorrigible" (3). With "Nanret", Azuike stands as an apostle of militant women who crave for the transformation of African society where men and women build a harmonious society.

Nanret's troubled marriage has robbed her of all dignity, her lawyer could neither eat nor sleep well for an entire weekend due to the monstrous, brutish, despicable way Iyke portrays himself at her encounter with him. The wife has no choice on the long run than to end the fifteen years old marital relationship where the court awards the custody of the children to her. Thus, heading Emecheta's (2007, p.553) submission that "I have no sympathy for a woman who deserts her children, neither do I have sympathy for a woman who insists on staying in a marriage with a brute of a man, simply to be respected... Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* strongly affirms Nanret decision to quit the marriage and take the children with her.

"Broken Hearted"

This short story emphasizes the emotional and moral consequences of how involvement with a married man cost an erudite lawyer herself dignity, trust and sense of direction as she regrets in retrospect stating,

The more I thought about what Iyke and I had done, the more I realised that, back then, I had been selfish; only concerned about myself. Pious church goers would have called Iyke an adulterer and me, a home wrecker. They would have been right. (*Violated*, 76).

Fortunately, the remorse lawyer is not on intentional mission to wreck the home but a victim of emotional turmoil born out of the loss of her intended marriage partner who died prematurely. Her regret is obviously shown as she suffers "sleepless nights with a weird pain" at the discovery of adding to another woman's marital unhappiness.

Her sense of shame is so personal and its ripple effects so agonising that the reader is overwhelmed with the moral consequences and price of crossing boundaries when infidelity is not intentional.

"*Nanret*" is interconnected with "Broken Hearted", where the story writer criticizes men for selfish bestiality connected with sex. Iyke, Nanret's husband is a male prostitute who goes from one woman to another without finding satisfaction. Though the issue of the children needing their home is of paramount importance to their mother, the husband does not consider it as of any consequence to his lifestyle to the extent that the lawyer wonders, "was he concerned at all for the children?... (81). The lawyer employed by the wife tries to remind him of the effect of his promiscuity on his children, but he would not hear of it. Men who live for themselves alone are not only arrogant, domineering, dehumanizing with a feeling of superiority, they are also described by Barbara Smith (1982, p.3) as being "purely egoistic – a core of selfish, limited self-aggrandizing behaviour that in reality constitute a disastrous ignorance of self". The effect is said to be corrosive for a developing nation. A woman is also flesh and blood whose human feeling can be affected as a man too.

The idea of planting the female in domestic space as wife and mother solely has culminated in the institutionalization of male dominance. This cultural practice negates the idea of an egalitarian society that contemporary African nations need to promote. Though women may be considered physically weaker than men, suffice it to say that they tend to have a triple burden of social production of the labour force. They assume responsibilities for the health, education and socialization of the children. The two inter-linked stories of "*Nanret*" and "*Broken Hearted*" then are not to encourage divorce and wantonness but the expression of true readiness of women to achieve self-liberation from conjugal doom.

"Unholy Alliance"

Another heart-breaking story is that of Roli, a 16-year-old girl who is impregnated by her step-father, Obioma in the story "Unholy Alliance". Obioma's amorous relationship with his teenage step-daughter is unknown to his wife who believes him to be a loving, doting, and God-fearing husband; unlike Roli's true perception of "a serial womanizer and a compulsive liar who makes money from pimping young girls like her or sleeping with them" (87).

The plight of the African women in a patriarchal society like Nigeria cannot be gainfully discussed without recourse to women as senseless victims of men's selfish sexual freedom. In a patriarchal society, the natural conception of a woman is that of a sex object, she is seen as an individual purposely structured to fulfill men's sexual desire. Men in Africa, especially men with financial means, exploit the vulnerability of young girls who fall cheaply to their philandering. Unfortunately, Roli and Obioma's illicit relationship is a reflection of a society that is full of sexual violence, domestic and gender-related molestation and insecurities.

Azuike's "Unholy Alliance" beams a search light on events that have eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian society. Sexual harassment is an unwelcome cankerworm, for this sexual overture from a person is mostly to elicit unwanted sexual relations from another person. Its major consequence makes the victim (mostly females) to drop out of school, promising career, become isolated, nurse constant fear for personal safety and have low self-esteem which may prevent the victim from achieving her maximum potential.

Needless to say, all these are experienced by Roli Alexandra in "Unholy Alliance". Saddled with an unclaimed male child, Gabriel, she has to run away from home due to her compromised status, she applies for a cleaning job with her Senior Secondary School Certificate in a nation that has a greater percentage of her graduate roaming the streets looking for work. Her inability to pay for her one room rent makes her a prey to the landlord who forcefully takes advantage of her. The trauma of her alienation from decent society and maternal care provokes revulsion and hatred towards her former and current defilers. In her mind, she wishes for "a serrated knife" to cut the throat of her step-father. This state of mind is an evident of a psychiatric disorder which can only trigger murder without thinking of its consequences. But it is not always the offending male that should be blamed in a typical pathetic evil narrative of Roli's dilemma. Her naivety is such that she did not resist her promiscuous step father's advances because he promised to marry her. Her foolishness in believing such blatant lies cause her a life time of sorrow as she runs away from her docile, on assuming mother.

Azuike's interest in the "*woman problem*" is further highlighted in a childless woman in the same story, the nameless woman is regularly battered by her husband for her failure to conceive and bear him a son (86). In cases of childlessness, people do not think and share the woman's agony – rather, such woman is seen as a hard-hearted betrayer who fails in her duty to bring to life children. The woman in this story is never pitied whenever

the husband is physically or verbally abusing her "no one give a hoot about her and his constant bickering with his wife" (85).

No wonder, Nwapa's *"The Child's Thief"* employs all kinds of deceit to keep her marriage, she finally resorts to stealing a baby from the hospital. The traumatized woman in "Unholy Alliance" stared at Roli and her son, Gabriel as they walked away, "her eyes became misty. She wished Gabriel was hers, she wished she could give up everything she owned just to have a son like him" (86)

Blaming a woman for childlessness is injustice when associated with a woman body for the alternative is unthinkable. That unthinkable alternative is what Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds* exemplifies to the reader. The misplaced abuse of the female gender whenever there is problem of childlessness is addressed in this masterpiece of a novel. The plight of a childless woman could breed infidelity in the man, excuse polygamy, and leads to sexual promiscuity generally.

"Rosanna"

The story of Rosanna reveals that rural women are socialized to believe that oppression and inequality are normal, they therefore accept inequality of family life. Rosanna's mother is a facilitator of the patriarchal oppression female. She practically sold her fatherless, sixteen years old daughter into prostitution to satisfy her crave for alcoholism. Deceived into thinking the pimp tagged "uncle" will help her to further her education in the city, Rosanna submits to the lie only to be taken to a five-star hotel to become a sex worker. Her rural upbringing never prepared her for the illicit trade, despite her disappointment, it never crosses her mind to seek redress legally until it is almost too late.

By the time Rosanna had turned seventeen she has become a chief sexual comforter of men. The tragedy of a female like Rosanna serves as an eye opener to the reason behind increase in prostitution. Any lack in the life of an average female in Nigeria is an opportunity for exploitation and oppression by all and sundry. The realities of women who form a greater percentage of the populace undergoing so much dehumanization, subjugation and molestation partly attest to why Africans have not lived up to their given potentials. Exploitation of defenseless female teenagers is not peculiar to Nigeria alone, Amma Darko's *Faceless* has similar story of Fofo and her sister Baby T who suffer sexual violation, suffering and scandalous unconventional premarital sex simply because of lack of parental responsibility. If female children can only survive as prostitute – brutalized and street children because of the loss of a parent, then the society's socio-political foundation is faulty. The offspring of such indecent affairs can only be distortive. The "why and therefore" of urchins that abound under the bridge in Nigeria's major cities come to limelight. Rosanna's two-year sojourn in Ritz Hotel is rewarded with a three months pregnancy. Although, another journey into single parenting, modern polygamy and indigent street children thus emerged. At least the unwilling sex worker retraces her step by seeking protection from her detractors when she visits a barrister at law to narrate her ordeals. She secures the desired asylum but at a price: as a broken, pregnant girl without a legal source of income.

"Violated"

Of all the ugly incidences and traumatic experiences of the female protagonists, "Violated" tops the list of a sample of fears and pains of African women in print. Azuike's "Violated" reflects the spate of sad happening in a motherless home. The protagonist, Isioma, is sexually abused by her father at the age of 10 after her mother left her matrimonial home due to infidelity and physical abuse of her spouse. This pathological liar and sociopath, who beats women and violate minors, sees incest as tantamount to "a consensual sex" being enjoyed by a bleeding teenager. The intervention of a good barrister in a court of law brings an end to the incestuous relationship after ten years of enduring agony. Justice is served to the peadophile as he is sentenced to "twenty years without parole" (17). The afflicted daughter suffers ten agonising years incestuous conjugation without help because of her fear of societal rejection and "who will believe me (3) mentality. Providence, through the moral support of a childhood friend, leads her to a female lawyer, a human right activist who abhors moral decadence with passion.

The need to struggle against powerlessness and dehumanization of women is evident in the five interlocking stories. As Virginia Woolf once opined on women writing that "what so many women write explains much and tells much and that is certain" (n.p) is true of Amaka Azuike's short stories where all the protagonists are female, vulnerable and susceptible to gender oppression and violence (Wola Thomas 2019).

Summary Table

Story	Salient Themes	Strategic Resistance
Nanret	Infidelity, Physical Abuse, Female Subjugation through economic disempowerment.	Emotional endurance, Legal divorce.
Broken Hearted	Regret over a forbidden love affair.	Education, Repentance, Redress through the law.
Unholy Alliance	The price of sexual abuse of perverted love affair, Childlessness, Menace of Poverty.	Aggressive retaliation, Revolt, Confrontation.
Rosanna Violated	Prostitution, Betrayal of trust. Incest, Physical Abuse.	Self-retrieval, Repentance. Legal Justice; Self-expression Collective Solidarity.

Womanistic Elements in The Selected Short Stories

Nigerian female writers and a few of their male counterparts have doggedly fought against all forms of social and cultural oppression meted out to women by the society. In doing so, they fervently struggle to Africanise the term “feminism” as generally used in the West by the marginalised western female writers / intellectuals engaged in similar struggles. Most Nigerian women writers align themselves with the concept of womanism which disavows the natural conception of women as sex object, a figure purposely structured to fulfill men's inordinate affection. The creation of Barrister Olanna Okala in the short story “Violated” is a proof of African women moving from the margin to the centre where they can make their own decisions, be their own critics and evolve viable taxonomies of socio-cultural, political and economic patterns by which womanhood may be perceived. Azuike deploys the sexuality of the vivacious Olanna Okala to articulate the changing position of the contemporary African woman. Olanna is a career oriented erudite criminal lawyer who empathies with and readily defends the young and the vulnerable that seek for her professional services. She has a passionate flair for human rights, values and justice, and her vigorous resistance to oppression is second to none. To her record, she never lost a legal battle. This is the type of women Buchi Emecheta (2007, p.553) advocates for as she confesses “I want very much to further the education of women in Africa, because I know that education really helps the woman. It helps them to read and it helps them to rear a generation...”

Contemporary African women writers are not only establishing the new woman who is free to love and express love as they essentially surmount all sexist depictions to attain a catalysm for self-discovery, self-assertion and a holistic redefinition. Azuike's short stories operate fully within the setting of what could cautiously be called “a woman's point of view” as she describes the delicate emotional balancing point on which women must poise between commitment to others and preservation of themselves. The writer gives a truer and more balanced portrayal of the African woman in Barrister Olanna who though an accomplished, dedicated and successful professional is not created as flawless. This image of verisimilitude makes the interconnected stories a factual women's struggle for survival. The indomitable barrister falls prey to the deceitful Iyke (in Broken Hearted) and has a fling with him that ends with shame, guilt and agony when she discovered that she allowed a married man to fondle her. Suffice it to say that Azuike's characters also vindicate the womanistic point that both sexes have complementary duties to perform for the good of humanity. There are male characters who are positively inclined towards the female gender. Olanna does not only have a caring, responsible father who remains so till death, but she also has a promising loving male who could have made a responsible marriage partner but for his untimely death. In essence, Amaka Azuike's *Violated* is not an undesirable discourse that insists solely on African women's victimization and their helplessness in the hands of men, but it also says strong positive men who respect the female exist in real life. Amaka Azuike's stand as a Womanist confirms Kolawole assertion that:

The African woman writer is generally not a hater of men, but a woman singing her song and the song of the society as she sees it. She may sing a dirge or a war song every now and then, but she sings songs of hope, love, redemption and the possibility of justice, coalition, self-respect, and empowerment for her gender as well. (20)

Thus, the selected short stories call for a meaningful balance, where everyone should be accorded the needed respect and allowed to enjoy the fundamentals rights due to all.

Conclusion

This position paper attempts a portrayal of oppression and resistance in five of Azuike's collection of short stories in *Violated* with a view to establishing a Womanist presentation peculiar to the author. Azuike's stories are crafted to subvert oppressive structure in Nigerian society. She, as one of the voices of the female gender, cries for the weaker vessels tag women as she narrates their ugly experiences in life. Her use of sarcasm, satire, faction and gender discourse to resist female subjugation highlight women empowerment through formal education culminating in professional skill as a weapon. Azuike's characters are successfully given dignified positions as they come out of the cross fire of incest, sexual immorality and marital infidelity. The prose work establishes the social realities of Nigerian women who strive to keep their home, endure all hardship for their children's sake but when pushed to the wall can bite, chew and if need be vomit the regrettable unchewable elements encountered in the marital month margin. Despite cultural expectation of salience around rape victim, the stigma attached to divorced, and the shame of the jilted lover, the tenets womanism has propagated by Mary Kolawole and Chikwenye Ogunyemi encourage the strategic ways forward. Hence, the women in the selected stories are not portrayed as perpetual victims; rather, they all emerge as agents of change, practically liberate themselves from their subjugated positions. The fictional narratives thus send a signal of hope to the afflicted gender: there is power in education, female solidarity, and self-expression - if only the affected will arise and use the available legal instrument. To enhance the findings of this paper, future researchers are encouraged to explore the works of other contemporary Nigerian women's writers whose fictions address similar concerns, particularly in the depicting of the experiences of urban and rural women in combating oppressive gender forces.

Ethical Considerations

Finally, the researcher's respect for survivors' dignity, cultural sensitivity, and positionality is all evident in the intentional efforts to avoid trivializing the traumatic experiences of fictional characters, while empathizing with survivors of similar lived reality. By utilizing the womanist perspectives of Mary Kolawole and Chikwenye Ogunyemi, the study accommodates Nigerian communal benefits in family, female resilience, and negotiation in navigating marital struggles.

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