



## **Gender Study of Flora Nwapa's One is Enough and Ifeoma Okoye's Behind the Clouds**

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### **Abstract**

This paper carefully examines the victimization and marginalization of women by their fellow women, it examines the role of other women play in aiding the oppression of their fellow women in modern African novels: *One is Enough* and *Behind the Clouds* by two female literary icons in Nigerian literary space, Flora Nwapa and Ifeoma Okoye respectively: Amaka, the central character in *One is Enough* suffers dehumanizing treatment from her mother-in-law. In the novel *Behind the Cloud* the oppression of women by women was also amplified by the inhumane treatment of Ije by her mother-in-law and her husband's mistress Virginia. The present paper depart from the existing ideologies and argues that the elimination of men will not stop the oppression and victimization of women. The article uses the feminist theoretical framework consenting on the Liberal feminist theory as it examines the victimization and oppression of women by women, as it proposes self-development and growth by the oppressed woman as the only solution for the oppressed female self-realization; Amaka's self realization lead to her independence and to a large extent, freedom; this can also be said of Ije, her self-realization after being thrown out of her husband's house. Moreso, the concept of women oppressing women has not received serious scholarly attention, let alone been investigated along the axis of liberal Feminism. The alarming rate at which women oppress themselves is major problem in the society today. The significance of this paper is that it has proposed self-development and financial independence as a way of curbing the challenge. Findings shows that female characters suffered oppression and victimization in the hands of their fellow women. Most men may not have been oppressive towards their wives if they were not negatively influenced. The paper concludes and recommends that women should serve as each other's keeper and that a re-orientation of women against female discrimination and victimization be done so that women can feel safe in the presence of the fellow women.

**Keywords:** Gender, Feminism, Feminist, Oppression, Liberal

### **Introduction**

There are so many indication that women have been oppressed in every society they find themselves. Africa as a highly patriarchy society traditionally created a system where women can only be seen and not heard. There is this general societal ideology that the affairs of state should be managed by the man not woman. According to Nwanjo: "Women take up the bulk of the labour in subsistence farming, growing all sorts of plants cereals, and vegetables to keep their families going"(362). Despite the effort of these women, they are continuously relegated to the background not just by men but also by their fellow women. From *Efuru* and *Second Class Citizen* by Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta respectively, portrays how women are made to be object of redicle by their fellow women, particularly as it concern their marriages. From Efuru's husband abandoning her and her child to warm the bed of another woman across the river to Trudy's extramarital affairs with Francis, Adah's husband, all shows women oppressing women. Also, it pertinent to note that female writers are aware and tend to agree that the oppression and subjugation women in Africa had gone through should not be limited to men alone; infact it will be unfair to limit the victimization and oppression of African women to men alone. Most sufferings, marital ills and societal redicles on women are initiated and carried out by their fellow women. Society does not exist in a vacuum, there are different individuals and institutions that make up the society; in other words, individuals run these institutions in the society, to limit female oppression and subjugation to men will be turning a blind eye to the other individual that exist in the same society and that individual is the woman.

In a nutshell, one must fail to acknowledge the resilient and determination of the victims of oppression (the women) in the both novels (*One is Enough* and *Behind the Clouds*) to save themselves and rise above oppression and their oppressors, thereby moving the characterization from a position of victims to victors. From Amaka's subjection into a common childless wife to her eventual rise to a business tycoon and Ije's pathetic condition of been thrown out of her matrimonial home to been able to stand on her feet, sums it all.

*One is Enough* is a 1981 Nigeria novel by Flora Nwapa which informs the reader of the challenges a woman go through in life (both in marriage and outside marriage). Amaka discovers that her husband Obiora plans to marry another woman who has already borne him two sons after 10 years of "happy" marriage. Rather than staying with her unfaithful husband, she goes to Lagos and starts a new life with the help of her friend Adaobi; she becomes a successful business woman in Lagos, she gets involved in an affair with a Catholic priest and bears twin children. However, she has to make a decision whether to continue living alone, or have another man (the Priest) as a husband. When he declares his intentions to marry her, Amaka's rejection is a clear indication of he desire to be free and remain free regardless of societal pressure: "I don't want to be a wife...A mistress, yes, but not a wife... As a wife, I was never free, I am almost a shadow of myself. As a wife, I am almost impotent. I am in prison, unable to advance in body and soul" (132).

It can be deduced that the oppression of Amaka by her mother-in-law (Obiora's mother), the insults of Obiora's new wife and the domestic violence of Obiora led to the above conclusion, Particularly, the attitude of her mother-in-law: "I was asking her to forgive me, not to throw me away" (2).

Amaka is heard severally apologizing for doing no wrong to her mother-in-law; and in return, her mother-in-law's reactions to her apologies are usually very insulting: "And so my son should suffer, should continue to suffer because of your ill-luck, because of your stubbornness, because of your stupidity" (3).

Flora Nwapa's above characterization of Amaka's mother-in-law and later Obiora's new wife, clearly portrays the oppression and victimization of women by their fellow women as seen in this extraction: "My son's wife and mother of his son's wanted you thrown out of this house" (15).

Also in Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds*, she creates a character in Ije Apia who goes through the same childless ordeal with the character Amaka in *One is Enough*. Ije's mother-in-law (Dozie's mother) is a thorn in her flesh, as she constantly looks for new ways of painting and rubbing Ije's childless situation on her face every time she has an opportunity to do so: "is your madam still sleeping?... I don't blame her. Why can't she sleep for hours on end? Has she any work to do? Had she any children to look after?" (58).

Ije was eventually thrown out of her home by Mama and Dozie's mistress Miss. Virginia Ujo, who claims to be pregnant for Dozie. However, after a while, the quarrel between Dozie and Virginia later reveals that Dozie is not the one responsible for Virginia's pregnancy and him (Dozie) is incapable of impregnating a woman; this implies that Dozie and not Ije is responsible for the childlessness in the marriage.

It is important to note that, to limit the victimization and oppression of women to the male alone will be unfair to the men generally. Women are also their major agent of oppression and victimization as seen in Obiora's mother and his new wife to Amaka and Dozie's mother and Miss Virginia Ujo to Ije Apia in *One is Enough* and *Behind the Clouds* respectively.

### Literature Review

The questions of women oppression and victimization is no longer an issue of less importance, as women all over the globe particularly Nigeria has continued to write against what Nwachukwu describes as: "women expected to be seen not heard" (39). However, different research has over time limited societal oppression and victimization to men alone completely forgetting that the men are just a part of the society and women also constitute the other part. Although, Eluke pointed out that: "Early creative productions and writing done by Nigerian male authors have painted negative pictures of the woman" (118). Eluke reacting to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* posits that: "He portrays the women as lackluster, voiceless, timid, backbenchers, objects of procreation and weaklings or weaker sex. In the said novel, Okonkwo the protagonist cum tragic hero beats up his wife, Ojiugo in a week of peace, a sacrilege against femininity (the earth goddess)" (118).

However, Helen Chukwuma has proven that women play complementary role rather than subordinate: "Men and women are created equal in essence and design. They are different and complementary with assigned roles..."(7). The major turning point for the redemption from the poor presentation of females in Nigerian Literature was in 1966 when Flora Nwapa came up with her first novel, *Efuru*. Eluke quoting Charles Nnolim captures this historical moment: " Our female writers initially led by Flora Nwapa but now led by Bunchi Emecheta, have formed their own "school", radical in Orientation and feminist in contemporary literary parlance. Flora Nwapa launched this school with tentative thesis: to redeem the disparaged and debased image of Nigerian women as depicted by Nigerian writers"(240).

Furthermore, Ogbazi posist that: " in the novel *Behind the Clouds*, Ifeoma Okoye creates a woman-centered world and goes on to weave out interactions and relationships which her major character Ije Apia goes through because of her being childless. It is the process of these interactions and relationships that defines the characteristics of her heroine"(57). The oppression of women by women was also portrayed in Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*; we see Trudy, who is in charge of the Day-care Adah's children(Titi and Vicky) attends having an affairs with Adah's husband Francis(120).

Ogbazi examines the structural composition of the novel and how childless women are unfairly treated in many African societies. It is worthy to note that, Ogbazi may have unintentionally among others highlighted female oppression and victimization by fellow women in pointing out Ije's visit to the village: "A little later Ije went into the kitchen to help her but she turned down her help a little unkindly. All the same, Ije did not leave the kitchen. She sat down on a low stool and watched her mother-in-law"(40).

Going further to comment on the chief character's attitude, Ogbazi opines that: "Ije's stance and peaceful deposition highlights a central issue that is embodied in the mission statement of African feminists"(61). This mission statement is explained by Ogunyemi in this way: "The Nigerian (African) novel by women is part of this palaver tradition. Ensconced in it, is a conciliatory spirit, in spite of the controversies, the palaver. Women have to buttress the cause of peace and progress in Nigeria, be ause, when all is said and done, we still have to live our fathers, uncles, husband's, sons, friends, lovers, and other male relations"(106).

Another important aspect is that women play important roles in the oppression and victimization of women; in most cases, they are the "origin" for their "unseen" nature, they are in most cases the oppressors particularly used to oppression their fellow women. However, we see women not seeking comfort in oppression and also speaking out against their oppressors. We find this in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, when the mistreated Tambu, expresses her anger over her brother who is sent to school while she is asked to go to the farm: "I was not sorry when my brother died. Nor was I apologizing for my callousness as you may define it, my lack of feelings..."(90). Tambu's tone is a product of her society.

Also, in Ted Elemeleforo's *Child of Destiny*, we also see Lizzy's refusal to pay Ebiko's salary while working her as a salesgirl, presents the oppression and victimization orchestrated by women against their fellow gender.

Finally, recent studies have always discussed the marginalization and victimization of women by the society, particularly men; however, going by the treatment of Amaka and Ije by their respective mother-in-laws, Ebiko's oppression by Lizzy and that of Adah by Trudy: very little has been done by researchers in examining the oppression of women by women.

### Methodology

This research work adopted the qualitative research method; with close reading and text analysis in light of the following: themes, character and characterization, settings, plot, language and style. Nwapa's *One is Enough* and Okoye's *Behind the Cloud* uses the conventional regular plot arrangement, which is beginning, middle and end. The both novels also make an interesting reading as they are both easy to read and understand.

### Theoretical Review

In the words of Enwere: " Feminism has as its ultimate goal the triumphal emancipation of the woman as a unique distinct individual with a mind, uncluttered by patriarchal beliefs and abusive submission to tradition"(42). Whereas, Ikechi posists that: " Feminist movement also seen as women's Liberation Movement is a social movement that seeks equal rights for women as men, giving them equal status with men and freedom to decide their own careers and life pattern"(90). Nwachukwu opines that: "...it's goal is to emancipate women from their subjugated position in their respective societies"(41). However, this study is anchored on liberal feminist theory. The liberal feminism is one of the points of feminism; a movement and political ideology, which gives attention on achieving gender equality through political and legal reform within. The structure of liberal democracy. It has its origin in 19th century first wave feminism that prioritizes women's right to vote and accessibility of education.

Also, feminist writers associated with this feminist theory include John Taylor, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, Rebecca Walker etc.

### **Synopsis of the novel: *One is Enough***

Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough* is a novel that tells the story of Amaka, the chief character who is victimized and oppressed by her wicked mother in-law, husband's second wife as well as her husband for not giving birth to a child after many years of marriage. She struggles for self-realization and self – fulfillment throughout the marriage. After many years of marriage without a child, her mother in-law send her out of her house supported by Obiora her husband who had already married another wife through the influence of his mother. As a result of betrayal of love, Amaka leaves for Lagos and starts a new life. This makes the narrator says: ' for Amaka to become a successful business woman in Lagos, she gets involved in an affair with a Catholic Priest and bears twin children' ' (64). The author therefore writes to encourage African men and women to be faithful in their marriage.

On the other hand, Amaka is presented in the novel as a woman who is obsessed with barrenness, the heroine wishes to live a normal life like most Nigerian married woman with children, but fate has driven her into a different course and against a new socio-economic and cultural background in modern Nigeria. A pure case of this rash treatment is demonstrated when Amaka reminds Obiora of her contribution in buying him a car, supplementing food, money and other necessities at home, buying a plot of land for building a house as well as giving herself and her resources unreservedly to her husband. The author says, instead of Obiora being appreciative of his wife' s love and care, Obiora is rather rash because of the influence of his mother. He says to Amaka:

You are being senseless. How many mouths were we feeding? You barren and senseless woman! You forget that you are childless. You would not raise your voice in this house if you were sensible. You should go above your business quietly and not offend anyone because if you do, one would be tempted to give you one or two home truths (19). Despite this heavy blow on Amaka, Obiora does not feel for her, instead he goes further to threaten Amaka saying: But let me warn you that if you step out of this house in protest when my wife and my two sons arrive, you stay out forever. You must not comeback (20). In fact, Obiora' a sudden inconsiderate disposition towards Amaka, his harsh attitude to her as well as his infidelity to their matrimonial vows worsen Amaka' s agony. Amaka' s agony in marriage is not just because she is childless but her husband who is supposed to be her companion and consoler is now her chief tormentor. The author says:

He always finds reasons to beat her on inflict injuries on her. On one of the occasions, knowing that he is guilty of adultery and infidelity, Obiora shifts the blame on the poor woman saying, what you have been doing behind my back (26).

In the end, Amaka' s cares and efforts are turned down by Obiora' s mother because of childlessness. According to the author, she leaves to Lagos where she can have more time to run her business, especially so because she will be a way from her husband and the traditional obligations of her community. She met her friend Adobi, her sister Ayo and other persons who work in the related offices in Lagos.

As well, there is a wide world for her to establish relationships with men and make use of their influence and contacts to boost her business. To a great extent, Amaka seems to follow her mother' s teaching by making children and never mind who the father is. Through this she can have children, secure her name, be satisfied as a woman and wins more contracts and deals for her business.

### **Gender Issues in Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough***

In African society, women have always received a chunk share of the woes in their marriages; in most cases, women who are unable to "take-in" are tagged to be witches eating up their children, some are called barren; that is not having a woman and lacking the capacity to bear children. However, the perception of patriarchal society where men are painted as the instigators and proponders of oppressions paints an unfair portrait of men in the society. Consequently, most husbands are described as tyrant and abusive because of the aforementioned description. But, female writers (Flora Nwapa) paints a different picture, a portrait of men being influenced by their mothers(women) to oppression their wives. To buttress this view, the chief character Amaka suffers maltreatment and wickedness from first her mother-in-law before her husband, Obiora because of her inability to get pregnant and produce children. It is also pertinent to note that, Amaka lived with her husband Obiora for six (6) years without any serious issue of contention; in other words Amaka did not suffer maltreatment and unkindness until her mother-in-law showed up: "It was six in the morning when Amaka knocked at the door of

her mother-in-law's room. She asked Amaka to come in as if she'd been expecting her. Amaka was not sure what her offence was but her mother-in-law had been so rude to her the night before that she'd been unable to sleep" (1).

Obiora's mother becomes a thorn in Amaka's flesh. She acted as the chief antagonist of the marriage using Amaka's inability to produce children as a yardstick to intimidate, oppression and victimize her. With this, Chukwuma asserts that; " in a way, it is the women who led an edge to the maltreatment and subjugation of their fellow women by man"(51). Amaka's mother-in-law becomes a rodent in Amaka's home and becomes the "voice" and "mirror" with which Amaka is constantly reminded of her barrenness. Many readers may view Obiora's mother as being a minor oppressor, whereas, she is the chief instigator and oppressor.

Furthermore, it is important to point out the role played by Amaka's mother-in-law in bringing another woman for her son Obiora as a wife, who already had two children for Amaka's husband. Also note that, this woman who is aware of Obiora's marital status, took advantage of Amaka's predicament to give Obiora the children that Amaka could not provide. This newly introduced wife intends to quickly assert her authority, as she intends to send Amaka packing: " My son's wife and mother of his son's wanted you thrown out of this house"(15).

This implies that, Amaka who has been the wife of Obiora for Six years, suddenly became a visitor in her matrimonial home by virtue of the introduction of her husband's new wife and children. The oppression and victimization of women in the society should not first be attributed to men or said to be initiated by men always even though the motivation of these oppressive women (Amaka's mother-in-law and Obiora's new wife) metamorphosis into domestic violence carried out by Obiora: "...he used brute force. Amaka was afraid that he was going to kill her. She raised the alarm, and by the time neighbours gathered...he begged neighbours to leave them alone"(27).

The introduction of domestic violence into the equation led to Amaka leaving her marriage and headed to Lagos for a new beginning. One must not fail to note that for every action there is a motivation, those who stirred and motivated Obiora's abusive attitude towards his wife are women.

### **Synopsis of the novel: *Behind the Clouds***

Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds* is a story that shows the childlessness of a woman " Ije" . Ije has been married to her husband Dozie for years but they had no issue. She went to virtually all the hospitals to know to see if the reason for her childlessness can be solved.

On the other hand, Dozie' s mother never liked her and adding to the fact that she was childless heightened the whole issue. She kept on persuading her son to take a second but because of the love Dozie had for the wife Ije, he refused heeding to his mothers advice.

They kept managing their lives until another woman came in, who claimed that Dozie got her pregnant and she would stay with the father of her baby. Virginia succeeded in talking Dozie into allowing her stay in his house, things fell apart for Dozie and Ije but thank God for Ugo Ushie, Ije' s friend who stood by her.

It was later found out that the baby of Virginia was not Dozie and he sent her out of his house and then pleaded for the forgiveness of his trip which shows is the cause of their childlessness and they thought of a better way of solving it.

### **Gender Issues in Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds***

The novelist Ifeoma Okoye creates her chief character Ije Apia to be in similar circumstances with Nwapa's character Amaka. Ifeoma Okoye creates a character that suffers oppression and victimization, not from her husband but her mother-in-law and also Virginia, her husband's girlfriend. Ije sees herself as a failure for not being able to get pregnant. In the characterization of the minor character "Beatrice", one could see what Ije is going through: "She told Ije about the many quarrels she had with her husband because of her childlessness. She talked about her mother-in-law pouring abuses on her"(4-5).

Readers can also see Ije Apia being thrown into a state of segregation when she paid her mother-in-law a visit in the village: "A little later, Ije went into the kitchen to help her but she turned down her help a little unkindly. All the same, Ije did not leave the kitchen. She sat down on a low stool and watched her mother-in-law"(40).

In the above extract, the readers find an educated, enlightened and decent young woman being subjected to a state of common individual I a family she is part of. One can also see Ije's friend Patience portraying some level of oppression in her conversation with Ije: "I haven't seen your children, Are they out or sleeping? She had been told by Uju that Ije had no children but she wanted to prove Uju right and wrong. Ije's face suddenly became sullen. Then, bracing herself, she told Patience that no child had blessed her marriage yet. I'm very sorry to hear this, Ije. I am really very sorry, Patience said in a tone that expressed more triumph than Sympathy"(25).

The characterization of the character Patience symbolizes "mockery" carried out by female on other females. Patience goes further to assert her perceived dominance over Ije: " She was pleased to discover that Ije did not have everything. It would have been just too unfair if she had, she reasoned"(25).

Also, a critical examination of Dozie's mother attitude towards Ije because of her childlessness even when Ije tries to be nice to her: " Ije, is a good-natured woman by any standard, had tried her best to bring the cold war between her and mama to an end, but had not succeeded. She gave Mama the foodstuffs she had brought for her, although she knew from experience that she would receive little or no gratitude for her trouble"(39).

This further strengthen the suggestion that women are their very own agent of oppression. Dozie, the husband of Ije has been having peaceful deposition towards his wife, but the influence of his mother changes this. Despite the protagonist social and economic value to the husband, the influence of his mother has relegated all that she has done for Dozie to the background.

Also, the eventual arrival of Virginia, Dozie's girlfriend to the home of Ije: "By the way, I'm Mrs. Apia, Ije introduced herself. I don't think we've met before? The visitor said rudely, I'm Mrs. Apia too. I'm carrying Mr. Apia's baby and I've come to take my rightful place in his house"(75).

Dozie's attitude remains unchanged towards Ije until the introduction of Virginia's pregnancy into the picture. The victimization and oppression received by women from men are motivated by other women. Dozie's mother instigated Dozie against his wife by using her influence as his mother, Virginia also instigated Dozie against Ije his wife with influence of her pregnancy. It is imperative to note that; Dozie would have remained patient and loving without the influence of his mother and to some extent Virginia's pregnancy. The effect of Virginia's intrusion into Ije's marriage is devastating: "Ije, who had a violent headache and was weak with tears and the traumatic experience of the night..."(81).

The attitude of Virginia after her intrusion further shows the situation of women comfortably oppressing their fellow women; "Those who knew the Apias visited them in order to verify the story. Virginia, inger attempt to establish her position, made sure that each visitor saw her. She stayed in the sitting-room most of the time or come to the room on hearing a visitor came in"(83).

The position of these women provides us with the idea that women are the main source of their own marginalization, victimization and oppression: and in most cases, these are as a result of childlessness on the part of the oppressed.

### Conclusion

At the end of the both novels (*One is Enough* and *Behind the Clouds*), Amaka the chief character in the first novel becomes a successful business woman and a mother; while in the latter novel, Ije successfully got a job and after medical examination, it was discovered that Dozie has a treatable medical condition that has made him unable to get his wife pregnant. The both happy ending in the novels were devoid of the presences of their antagonists; Obiora's mother and his new wife for Amaka and Dozie's mother, Patience and Virginia for Ije. It is also necessary that the readers do not limit the victimization and oppression of these female characters to patriarchal and dominance of men: although one cannot completely exempt the role of men in the oppressed unfavorable conditions. But the role of these men were mainly motivated by women. Amaka and Ije's continuous effort in trying to please their mother-in-laws through unwarranted apology(Amaka to Obiora's mother) and Ije buying gifts and food items, goes to an extent to show that their respective husbands (Obiora and Dozie) ordinarily were willing to some extent to be patient with them but for the influence of their mother-in-laws. In Nwapa's *One is Enough*, we see Amaka's barne in her mother-in-law and her co-wife, while Okoye's *Behind the Cloud* Ije's nemesis are her mother-in-law and Virginia, her husband's mistress. These oppression led to self-discovery and various degrees of accomplishments, although initially, the protagonists in the different novels face great challenges and also suffering inhumane treatment. Also, further studies should be carried out on the comparative analysis on feminism on Nigeria texts with other African texts.

### **Key Instances of Female-On-Female Oppression in *One is Enough* and *Behind the Cloud***

<b><i>One is Enough</i></b>	<b><i>Behind the Cloud</i></b>
Amaka's mother-in-law continuously disturbed her for not having a child.	Ije's mother-in-law also disturbed her for her childlessness.
Amaka's mother-in-law welcomed the woman who claimed her children is that of Obiora.	Ije's mother-in-law also gave Virginia a rousing welcome, when she claims she was pregnant for her husband
Amaka's co-wife made life unbearable for her.	Virginia made the house uncomfortable for Ije.
Amaka's mother-in-law alongside the co-wife succeeded in driving Amaka's out of her matrimonial home.	Ije's mother-in-law and Virginia also drove Ije out of her matrimonial home.

### **Findings**

The findings of this study are as follows:

1. Women are most times their chief oppressors as seen in Amaka's mother-in-law in *One is Enough* and Ije's mother-in-law and Virginia in *Behind the Clouds*.
2. Most cases of female oppression and victimization are motivated by women as seen in Obiora's new wife attitude towards Amaka and that of Virginia towards Ije Apia.
3. Most men may not have been oppressive towards their wives if they were not negatively influenced.

### **Recommendations**

The gender issue of women oppressing women have received little or no scholarly attention; this paper recommends that more scholars should carry out more studies in this area. This paper also recommends that women should serve as each other's keeper and that a re-orientation of women against female discrimination, oppression and victimization be done so that women can feel safe in the presence of the fellow women.

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