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SUMÁRIO

WALW ADEGBITE & AYO KEHINDE

Discourse Features of Feminism in some of Flora Nwapa's Novels 5

GÉRARD ET PIERETTE CHALENDAR

Poesie et Anthropologie dans l'oeuvre de Ruy Duarte de Carvalho 21

VALÉRIA COSTA E SILVA

Mar Português: Percursos e Meandros de um Mito Nacional 29

EMERSON TIN

As *Cartas Familiares* de D. Francisco Manuel de Melo:
Edições e Crítica 45

JONAS DE ARAÚJO ROMUALDO

Fernando Pessoa: Lugares 71

PATRÍCIA VIEIRA

Diálogo, tradução e hibridismo em *Terra Sonâmbula* 79

NOTAS, RESENHAS E COMENTÁRIOS

ADMA FADUL MUHANA

VOCABULARIO PORTUGUEZ E LATINO, de Raphael Bluteau 101

SUPLEMENTO LITERÁRIO

ELIANA KEFALÁS DE OLIVEIRA 109

PAULA SENATORE 111

Publicações recentes, recebidas através de Permutas 115

**DISCOURSE FEATURES OF FEMINISM IN
SOME OF FLORA NWAPA'S NOVELS**

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ABSTRACT

This study describes the discourse features of feminism in some of Flora Nwapa's novels, while focusing on two of them, *Efuru* (1966) and *Women are Different* (1981). The study identifies the discourse features in the texts and describes them under relevant discourse categories. Lastly, it interprets the messages of the texts by relating them to the social context of the Igbo/African reader. The findings of the study reveal several features pertaining to narrative technique, interaction, transaction, presence/absence/silence, turn taking and contributions of characters, moves and acts. For example, they reveal the following features under the narrative technique: the third-person omniscient narrator, collective heroism and documentation/historicization. The above features and others which present control, dominance, as well as sex and social roles in the texts are illustrated, and some of them are discussed in order to foreground the literary-linguistic and feminist consciousness of Nwapa.

INTRODUCTION

This paper describes some discourse features of feminism in some of Flora Nwapa's novels, using *Efuru* and *Women Are Different* as a launching pad. It has two main objectives. First, it identifies the discourse features and describes them under relevant categories of discourse analysis. Second, it interprets the messages

of the texts (represented by these features) by relating them to the social context of the Igbo/African reader. The model of analysis is the 'critical discourse' model, which will be explained shortly.

Nwapa, a foremost African writer, occupies the unique position of being the first Nigerian female English-medium novelist whose work was published. Among her numerous novels are four full-length ones: *Efuru* (1996), *Idu* (1971), *One Is Enough* (1981) and *Women Are Different* (1981/1992). The first and last novels here are focused in this paper, with occasional references made to the other two. To a great extent, *Efuru* and *Women Are Different* are representative of the other novels. For instance, *Efuru* and *Idu* have similar settings and themes, while *Women Are Different* not only has many feature similarities with *One Is Enough* but also is more elaborate stylistically than the latter. Together, the two selected novels are located differently in time and space, and they represent different perspectives of Nwapa's writing.

Just as Nwapa's novels are familiar to general readers and have been considered by scholars (Emenyonu, 1970, 1975; Ezeigbo, 2000; Nnolim, 2000) to be highly successful in the Nigerian classroom, numerous writings, both critical and non-critical, also abound on these novels in journal articles and books. Suffice it to say, however, that most of these writings describe the literary and feminist qualities of her novels (Mojola, 1989 and Kolawole, 1996), while a few make additional superficial comments on the language qualities (Umeh, 1997). On the contrary, the study of Nwapa's works from the discourse perspective is very rare, maybe because the few available discourse analysts who can understand them are yet to show interest in them. This study attempts to fill this gap with the belief that a discourse study of Nwapa's novels will not only illuminate the novels by bringing out their language, literary and feminist features, but it will also elucidate their discourse traits. In fact, the features identified in the work will exemplify the relevance of discourse theory in the criticism of African fiction.

TOWARDS A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF NWAPA'S NOVELS

The term 'discourse' defines the construction of language as a process of interaction. In this interactive process, language is constructed with dynamic meanings in social and institutional settings. The discourse is a shared vocabulary of meaning. According to Humm (1995: 194), the discourse of a novel includes the languages as well as the social messages represented by particular vocabulary. The novelist constructs a stretch of language that is unified, meaningful and purposive, and the reader/analyst interprets the social meanings expressed by

analyzing the linguistic structures in the light of their interactional and wider social contexts (Fowler and Kress, 1979).

* The interpretation of discourse of a novel may be critical or uncritical. An interpretation is uncritical if it aims only at what a text says and how it means at a superficial level; whereas it is critical if it seeks further to know why a text means. A critical interpretation usually requires an understanding of how language serves to construct relationships of power between identities and cultural discourse and how it perpetuates or disrupts everyday ideologies (Fairclough, 1989 and 1992). A review of previous discussions on critical interpretation (e.g. Lewison et al, 2002) reveals a synthesis of four major dimensions presented by Muise (2003) as: a disruption of the commonplace, an interrogation of multiple viewpoints, a focus on sociopolitical issues and a taking up action and a promotion of social justice. A critical reading is performed by a reader/analyst who is politically committed to a particular ideological orientation (Burton, 1982). Such an interpretation concentrates on the reader's understanding of the novel as influenced by factors integral to his or her background. Writing further on the procedure of this kind of interpretation, Birch (1989: 43) says:

... the status of the writer is deprivileged and the role of the reader, governed by institutional and social discourses, is given a much more prominent role in the construction of meaning.

The political commitment of this study is sexual politics, with particular reference to the theory of 'feminism'. Tong (1989) in a simple way describes feminism as a lamentation of the ways in which women have been oppressed, repressed and suppressed and a celebration of the ways in which women have taken charge of their own destinies and encouraged one another to live, love, laugh and be happy as women. Notwithstanding the basic concerns of feminism stated above, feminists' approaches differ greatly; thus we can recognize various perspectives of feminism such as the liberal, radical, Marxist, psychoanalytic, lesbian, motherist, black and womanistic among others.

The ideological orientation of interpretation in this study is that of 'womanism'. In the main, Womanism is a principle that underlies the perspective from which African women, with a rich knowledge of African experience and culture, speak out for themselves and other women or write down their experience in order to free themselves from marginalization and subjugation in a male-dominated society (cf. Hudson-Weems, 1993, Kolawole, 1996, George Ritzer, 2000). We assume in this study that Nwapa's novels are feministic in nature by virtue of certain features they possess which do not accurately reflect African experience (cf. Cameron

Deborah, 2003:187). We then believe that suggestions can be made to re-think some of these features so that the subsequent novels of Nwapa can reflect a commitment of Africanness in her future projection of women's image.

Meanwhile, it is common in discourse studies to discuss the socio-semantic notions of control and dominance by analyzing discourse features under such categories as interactions, transactions, exchanges, moves, acts, contributions, interruptions and silence (Aries 1982, Huls 1989 and Akindede 1991). Previous analyses in this direction have shown that the superior speaker will normally initiate (or open) information exchanges, interrupt or challenge moves, and s/he will advise, direct, threaten, abuse and warn in transactions (Adegbite, 1994). On the contrary, the inferior speaker will initiate greetings, keep silent and seek permission before speaking or request for advice or assistance. The traditional indices of superiority in the African society are seniority of age, position and sex (men are rated higher than women). In the modern times, however, wealth is becoming recognized, while sex is being interrogated and subordinated as an index.

FEMINIST DISCOURSE FEATURES OF SOME OF NWAPA'S NOVELS

The features identified in the novels are described below under six subheadings: narrative technique, interactions, transaction, presence/absence/silence, contributions and interruptions, and moves and acts.

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

Nwapa uses the third-person omniscient narrative technique in her novels. The third-person position not only allows the author to make her own descriptions and subjective comments, it also makes the characters to speak out their experiences in the text through either direct or indirect speech. The omniscient perspective of the writer allows her to describe both the inner and outer experiences of characters in details. A few examples will suffice:

Ex. 1

What pleasant times the girls had in their school!
What good relationship existed between the staff
and the girls! Rose could remember when she first
menstruated. Because she had no mother, she was
not warned...(18).

Different features of third-person narration are used to describe the characters in the text. For example, both the author and characters in the novel mention the positive qualities of Efurú. She is born of good parentage - by none other than the revered Nwashike Ogene, 'who single handed, fought against the Aros when they came to molest us' (11). Efurú is described as a beautiful woman (12), a faithful wife (58), a good cook (125), good (77), great (153), notable (70), gentle and resourceful. But she is barren. Her only child died very young; and after her two unsuccessful marriages and fruitless efforts in search of another baby, she has to resign herself to the call of Uhamiri, the wealthy and beautiful but childless woman (goddess) of the lake, who has chosen her as one of her worshippers.

In her own case, Ajanupu too is described as an experienced mother of children, a responsible housewife, ubiquitous, dependable, loving and caring, observant, wise and strong-willed. As Efurú remarks of her, she talks too much but she is good. She has a good heart (122). Her frankness embarrasses a man (122), while her fearlessness scared away some thieves (178).

In contrast to these, the narrator presents Adizua and Gilbert, both Efurú's husbands, as adulterous and unreliable. Nwosu is presented as a careless husband and a chronic debtor. In *Women Are Different* Chris, Dora's husband, is presented as selfish and irresponsible. In addition to taking bribe, he is also a betrayer. That his wife decides to take him back at the end of the novel, in spite of his earlier desertion of her, shows sheer magnanimity on her part. Chris is a hard-core sexist as he would not work under a woman, not even when his wife offers to put him in charge of her company, as managing director.

Ernest, the deserted lover of Rose, is nothing other than an immoral exploiter and a crook; no wonder then that he is apprehended as a drug trafficker towards the end of the story. Mark deceives Rose by getting married to her under false pretence. He later cheats her out of her money and abandons her. Apart from Dr. Uzarú, whom Efurú confides in casually towards the end of the novel, only Efurú's father is presented in good light (see above), perhaps to boost the image of the protagonist. The description of characters, in the novel through the third person, is a common feature of Nwapa's novels, but all the occurrences cannot be taken here.

Another narrative technique, which Nwapa uses, is that of 'collective heroinism'. While Efurú is the sole protagonist in *Efurú* and Amaka in *One Is Enough*, Agnes Dora and Rose are joint protagonists in *Women Are Different*. Nwapa uses their collective stories to reinforce the theme of the novel. First, she presents them together from their early school days. She later presents their experiences individually, before she links them again through visits and conversations at a later date.

The last narrative technique observed in our analysis is the use of the documentary style/historicity. *Women Are Different* is replete with historical facts as well as facts of reality. The facts mentioned include real names of persons mentioned, viz - Mazi Mbonu Ojike and Dr. Nwafor Orizu; actual dates - January 1966 and July 1966 (military coups in Nigeria); July 1967 and January 1970 (the period of the Biafra civil war), etc; names of places - University of Ibadan, Archdeacon Crowther Memorial Girls' School, etc., Benin, Ibadan, Lagos, London, Germany, etc; phenomena - examinations and politics; newspapers – *Daily Times* and *The West African Pilot*.

Despite the above documentation, the account is a parody of historical events and not a real account. What we have is a pastiche made up of historical facts and literary fiction (faction), which is a feature of the post-modernist theory (Humm 1995). Meanwhile, the documentary technique adds a factual dimension to the creative work so that it is not trivialized.

INTERACTIONS

Conversational interactions take place between four groups in Nwapa's novels: women-women, women-men, women-children and men-men. Women-women conversation is to a great extent the most prominent in the novels. Here we observe women share their subjective and objective experiences in two-party or multi-party discourse in their diverse social settings. Women across the novels discuss marriages, matrimony, motherhood and nurturing, feasting (female-circumcision rituals), pregnancy, discussion on children, breast-feeding, expression of sympathies during condolence visits, etc. In the early novels of *Efuru* and *Idu*, interaction is somehow communal as women greet and talk with anybody they meet on the way. Interaction becomes restricted to relations in *One Is Enough* and to friends in *Women Are Different*.

In *Efuru*, a close-bond relationship exists between Efuru and Ossai, Efuru's mother-in-law, as well as between Efuru and Ajanupu who is Ossai's sister; conversations between the last pair are unrestricted, and there is no limit to the issues they discuss at various times and places. Below is one of such conversations.

Ex. 2

'Ajanupu, Idenu, welcome. I am in. I heard your voice.'
'How are you my daughter. Is everything well with you, my daughter, and Ogonim, is she well?'
'Ogonim is well. I am trying to stop breast-feeding her.'

Stop breastfeeding her? Who will feed on your breast if you stop breastfeeding her? Are you pregnant?' No, I am not pregnant Ajanupu.' (56).

In *Women Are Different*, Comfort, Agnes, Dora and Rose share experiences on their personal and matrimonial lives.

Women-men conversations also occur in the novel between lovers, wives and their husbands, sometimes between acquaintances and relations. In most of the conversations, women control and dominate men, unless the participant relationship is hierarchical (i.e. between woman and her father or a woman and a dibia-fortuneteller).

Women converse with children while nurturing them. In the early novels, nurturing is a communal affair whereby any adult can train and discipline a child, whereas nurturing is a private affair in the later novels. Moreover, conversations between parents/guardians and their children/wards are fewer in Nwapa's later novels than in the earlier ones.

Men-men conversations are very few in Nwapa's novels. Even when such take place, the discussions centre on women, usually the protagonist(s). In *Efuru*, Gilbert and his friends talk about Efuru, while some gossiping farmers talk about Efuru and her husband. In *Women Are Different*, the discussion between Agnes' husband and her father centres on Agnes, while that between Chris and his co-workers centres on Chris' wife, Dora.

TRANSACTIONS

Transactions here refer to the issues raised and negotiated in interactions. The major issue that cuts across Nwapa's novels is the centrality of women in both traditional and modern societies of Nigeria. Other social issues are woven around this in order to describe aspects of social life in an African community. We shall discuss a few of the other issues briefly below with relation to the central theme.

First is the issue of sex-roles assigned to men and women. In *Efuru*, sex roles assigned to men and women are defined rigidly by conventions, and characters play the roles expected of them as male and female. The man is seen as the breadwinner and head of the family, most often a farmer. In contrast, the women perform domestic duties like cooking, child rearing and housekeeping; they also trade or, sometimes, accompany their husbands to farm. Some sexist stereotypes mentioned in the novel indicate the social perception of the sexes:

Ex. 3

- (i) What can a woman do? (22, 175)
- (ii) I am only a woman (175)
- (iii) A woman has no say in these things (39)
- (iv) A girl is something, even though a boy is preferred (72)
- (v) Besides, I am a man and you cannot break kola in my presence (85)
- (vi) I don't want to be accused of being a male woman (104)
- (vii) A man and a woman (i.e. husband and wife) should not be seen together (139)
- (viii) Women are complicated human beings (148)
- (ix) What woman was not susceptible to flattery. Especially if it comes from a man she loves (173)
- (x) What is annoying is when some women have about six children and all of them are girls (184)
- (xi) It is a good thing you're sending her to school, but it's a waste (191).

What is surprising about the above examples is that women in the novel, which shows the extent to which they have imbibed the ideas in the society, say most of them.

Unlike in *Efuru* where sex roles are well defined for the male and female characters, roles are flexible for both sexes in *Women Are Different*. It is observed, for instance, that education exists for both sexes rather than being an exclusive preserve for one. Both Agnes and Rose serve as civil servants before they become executive members in business firms. Dora engages in the bakery business, which used to be reserved for men. On the part of the men, Nwapa writes in *Women Are Different*, for example, about the domesticity of Mark and Tunde who are considered as good cooks.

The changing roles assigned to characters in *Women Are Different* are complementary to the few sexist stereotypes in the novel, in contrast to the large number in *Efuru*. Even the few stereotypes are challenged immediately they occur by either a character or the author herself. For example, the topic of a debate 'The education of a girl is a waste of money' (13) is followed by the authorial comment: 'Rose thought this was silly'. Similarly, the author comments that everybody has overruled the comment of a teacher that 'Boys should take risks' (14). In contrast to the paucity of sexist comments in *Women Are Different*, some radical feminist comments are made in the work, e.g.: 'Marriage for me will not be for better or for worse' (30); '... women have options ... Marriage is not the only way' (118).

Another social issue raised in the novels is that of courtship and marriage. Although all women characters of Nwapa see marriage as a social necessity, their different orientations to this necessity are observed in the various novels. In *Efuru* and *Idu*, marriage is normally preceded by traditional ceremonies, e.g. engagement. It is a matter of 'For better for worse', because the society frowns upon divorce or separation. It also scowls at adultery from either man or woman. Although husband

and wife support polygamy, the husband can have many wives; the wife must be fidel to one man. In *One Is Enough* and *Women Are Different*, marriage is contracted in the modern way, e.g. in the church, and it is monogamous. Couples divorce or separate from each other, and they even commit adultery. However, despite Rose's apparent success, economically and position-wise, she still feels unfulfilled because she could not get married. In her own words in the novel, she expresses her belief thus:

Ex. 4

I have always believed that it is better to marry and be divorced, than not marry at all; it is better to have a bad husband than none at all ... One should rather have a husband and a lover. (99)

In the traditional setting, marriage is expected to be fruitful. A couple must be blessed with children, whom they should also nurture. A barren woman is a social misfit; thus we see Efuru, Idu and Amaka (*One is Enough*) suffer and worry a lot for their lack of productivity in the novels. It is not only seen as a curse if one does not have children, but it is annoying not to have male children (*Efuru*, 184). Thus, we see Amaka's seeming fulfillment in *One is Enough* when she bears a set of twin boys for Father McLaid but refuses to marry the latter even when the he renounces his priesthood for that purpose.

The issue of ambition is raised in Nwapa's novels as she seeks self and social development for women. Despite the fact that women are hardworking in *Efuru* and *Idu*, they are not as ambitious as the women in *One is Enough* and *Women Are Different*. But even when some of them are, the society makes no provision for them. In *Women Are Different*, the education received by Comfort, Agnes, Dora and Rose through social development and self-improvement assists greatly in their social uplift and achievement of enhanced social status.

On religion and morality, we observe that traditional religion informs the attitude of women in *Efuru* and *Idu* to abhor all forms of immoral behaviour such as adultery, prostitution and corruption. Besides, the society in which these women live frowns at such social vices. In *One is Enough* and *Women Are Different*, the protagonists, despite the moral training in Christianity received from school, cannot escape the influence of corruption, adultery, immorality, extreme materialism and sexual promiscuity from living in a modern society that is ridden with social ills. As far as Comfort is concerned in *Women Are Different*, 'the society was rotten and she was not going to be an angel among devils' (115).

PRESENCE, ABSENCE AND SILENCE OF MEN

Post-structuralism has made us aware of ways in which men and women are absent from or included in representations, depending on who owns or speaks the language of representation (Humm, 1995). Critics in this direction have studied the portrayal of presence, absence or silence of men and women in African literature. For instance, Achebe has been criticized for his creation of women's absence and silence in his early novels (Cobham 1991, Akindele 1991 and Adegbite, 1994), and his inclusion of women in his *Anthills of Savannah* has been noted (Adegbite, 1994). In Nwapa's novels, the representation of men has followed a consistent pattern of denigrating, absencing and silencing men. The prominent male characters who are present in Nwapa's novels are cheats, nonentities, irresponsible and exploitative individuals. Some of these have already been described above.

The absence of men is portrayed in Nwapa's novels in several ways. Men of good qualities who have a promising future for their wives die early and suddenly, thus shattering the hopes of their wives, for instance, Adiewere in *Idu* and Ayo Dele in *Women Are Different*. In *Efuru*, one misses the presence of the husband of a dynamic and responsible woman like Ajanupu. Ajanupu only makes a cursory reference to him in the novel. Furthermore, the attendance of an all-girls' school by the protagonists in *Women Are Different* is another ploy to exclude men from the scene. Apart from the brief 'documentary' mentioning of the two historical figures, Mazi Mbonu Ojike and Dr. Nwafor Orizu, we only witness the encounter of boys and girls when the girls go for a debate in a boys' school.

Lastly, men's silence is portrayed by the control and domination of women over them in the texts. In the description by Mojola (1989:20), 'women tower over men in mental and material achievements', while men are often seen as nothing more than instruments of procreation. We see the overbearing nature of women over men at various places in the novels; some of these are shown below.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND INTERRUPTIONS

It is clear in Nwapa's novels that women 'contribute' far more than men. Since they are involved in more interactions than men, their contributions are more. Some women characters make short contributions, while some make long ones, depending on the circumstances. In *Efuru*, Ajanupu's contributions are not only frequent but also very long. She seems to have so many issues to raise and a lot of things to say on each issue. When on one occasion Ossai (Efuru's mother-in-law) teases her about talking too much, Ajanupu replies:

Ex. 5

Who wants to be quiet these days? Don't you know that if you don't lick your mouth the harmattan will lick it for you? (*Efuru*, 33).

On the few occasions that men are allowed to make long contributions, such contributions are made in deference to women. Two examples will suffice here. In *Efuru*, Nwosu makes a long contribution when he is requesting a loan from Efuru (39). He has to convince her of the need for the loan and his modalities for repayment. Also, the long contribution of Ernest in *Women Are Different* is an apology expressed to Rose for forgiveness of his earlier misdemeanor. In any case, the contributions of men mentioned above are exceptions to the norm created by women's contributions. It is the tasks of Nwapa to make her women speak out in the novels so that they can be heard.

Talking about interruptions in mixed-sex interactions, it is observed that these features are not common in Nwapa's novels. Although women dominate the texts and control the men, they do not use interruptions as a means of such control. The interruption observed in *Women Are Different* is in fact made by Chris in his conversations with Dora. First, when Dora levels accusations against him on account of his misdeeds:

Ex. 6

You have been taking bribes. You didn't have to do it.
How do you think I paid for the presents I sent to you when you were in school?
Oh, my God! And I thought I knew you, I...
We don't have much time now ... (70).

On another occasion, Chris interrupts again:

Ex. 7

But Chris, I wrote you, I...
You did, but I did not say come. (77)

It is observed in *Women Are Different* that Dora, despite her economic achievement, is still submissive to Chris; she voluntarily allows him to control her.

MOVES AND ACTS

In most of the male-female interactions in the novels, the women control men by opening/initiating discussions with them and challenging men's moves while the men support their moves. The women also perform various acts in the process of this control. Efuru almost always initiates the discussions that take place between

her and Adizua, Gilbert and Nwosu. She uses directives, assertions, accusations, disagreement and advice acts in the interactions. We observe that whenever Efuru disagrees with Adizua or Gilbert, either of the men yields to her advice or pleads to her in the end. On one occasion, Efuru abuses both Nwosu and his wife who are her debtors thus:

Ex. 8

... You don't know value of goodness
... Poverty does not affect the reasoning power or the innate goodness of human beings.
Poor people do not behave foolishly... (*Efuru*, 170).

Efuru also challenges the initiation move of her cousin who accuses her of walking late in the night by refusing to support (give favourable response) to his move, e.g.:

Ex. 9

It's late, Efuru, where are you coming from?
Don't you see the moon?
Is that the reason why you should come home so late?
I shall tell you father.
I don't care whom you tell (7).

In *Women Are Different*, we see Agnes initiates the discussion between her and Johnson. She accuses and threatens him to the extent that the latter gets worried over the encounter. Mr. Johnson is the business associate of Zizi, Agnes' daughter, and Agnes believes he must have had negative influences over her daughter.

In her own encounter with Ernest, Rose uses initiation and challenge moves in which she cautions and advises him, while Ernest appeals, requests and proposes to her. The following example from *Women Are Different* also illustrates how Rose challenges the move of another lover by disagreeing with him, while the lover supports her

Ex. 10

I respect Dora very much ... Very few women will do what she has done.
Many will, Tunde. We women are different from men in many ways.
If you say so, ... (137).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Humm (1995:4) claims that feminism has a double agenda: the task of critique (attaching gender stereotypes) and the task of construction. In performing the first task, does a feminist need to de-construct sexist stereotypes only to replace these

with feminist ones? Also, should the second task of construction aim at creating the superior female and subordinate male, or instead create a male-female relationship imbued with self and mutual respect between the sexes? Many critics frown at Nwapa's use of the destructive-male model which substitutes male silence for women's silence in her works. The manner in which the author denigrates almost all the male characters and emphasizes the frailties of men is shocking. Afro-centric feminism has to be embracing, not isolationist; otherwise the consent of the male sex cannot be assumed. Friedan (1981) claim, for example, that the 'man-hating' portrayal is unwarranted because not only do many men like and love women, many women like and love men. Furthermore, Ojo-Ade (1996), in the extreme, sees the pursue of women's liberation in Africa as diversionary since there are more embracing problems (of poverty, mass illiteracy, corruption and injustice) in the continent that exert pressures on everybody alike and thus have to be jointly pursued by both sexes.

Nwapa writes in *Efuru* (201) thus:

The spot could be very calm or very rough, depending on the mood of Uhamiri, the owner of the lake, and Okita, the owner of the Great River. The two are supposed to be husband and wife, but they governed different domains and always quarreled.

What is the cause of their constant quarrelling? Could it be the fight for supremacy between them? On the construction of equality between men and women, another issue arises as to whether the male-female relationship should be hierarchical, parallel or integrative. The hierarchical relationship can at once be rejected, for the subordination of one sex to another cannot be the goal of feminism. For the womanist, the noble goal should be to seek equality with rather than dominate men. Integrative equality refers to the fusion of maleness and femaleness. One instance of this fusion is Showalter's (1977) and Wilson's (1993) vision of androgyny. Frank (1984:41) describes androgyny as 'a compelling, attractive, but ultimately unrealizable illusion'. She maintains that the world of the African novel tends to be a sexually defined, even sexually polarized one, and with rigidly decided sexual roles that deny androgynous transcendence.

Frank (1984:44) further observes that even though many African novels by male authors celebrate traditional life, before the incursion of the white men, with nostalgia, this vision of a lost golden age is absent in the works of some female writers. One wonders why the 'problem' and 'suffering' motifs have consistently dominated Nwapa's works, leaving no room for the expression of pleasure or happiness. In another vein, the creation of the immoral female revolutionist in Nwapa's novels has been criticized. A number of scholars believe that making

wealth by dubious means cannot be the yardstick for determining the emancipation of women. Mojola (1989:24) considers a 'generation of sober self-respecting, industrious and determined women' to be appropriate models of feminism. Chukwuma (1989:15) opines: "... feminism need not degenerate to immorality and sexual promiscuity as a means open to women to attain their life's desires."

Lastly, one fundamental problem that seems to face the contemporary African fictional heroine, according to Katherine Frank (1984), is that the heroine is torn between two antagonistic identities: her communal-bred sense of herself as an African, and her feminist aspirations for autonomy and self-realization as a woman. Feminism, by definition, is a profoundly individualistic philosophy: it values personal growth and individual fulfillment over any larger communal needs or good. African society, of course, even in its most westernized modern forms, places the values of the group over those of the individual with the result that the notion of an African feminist almost seems a contradiction in terms. The ability to reconcile African consciousness with feminist aspirations is the goal of Afro-centric feminism, and it is in a bid to remove the seeming contradiction in this reconciliation that the African stance now bears the tag of 'womanism' (cf. Walker 1984, Hudson-Weems 1993 and Kolawole 1996).

Having thus praised Flora Nwapa for her contribution to presenting women's voices in her novels, we shall then suggest that her future novels project the hitherto neglected aspects of womanism mentioned above, bearing in mind that womanism is:

- (i) not sex-isolating but accommodating;
- (ii) not only for self-realization, but also for family/group development;
- (iii) not sexually subordinating, but sexually parallel;
- (iv) self-respecting and group attracting.

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