

VOICES OF TRADITION AND VICISSITUDES IN *IDU***¹V. Dinesh Rajkumar****Ph.D Research Scholar****Department of English****Rathnavel Subramaniam College of Arts and Science****Sulur, Coimbatore.****Email: dineshkumarveluchamy@gmail.com****²Dr. K. Nagarathinam****Associate Professor & Head,****Department of English****Rathnavel Subramaniam College of Arts and Science****Sulur, Coimbatore.****Email: nagarathinam@rvsgroup.com****ABSTRACT**

Colonization is an antique that changed the idea of the whole world.

*Colonization in Africa can be followed by the change; it has expedited the nation, their way of life, qualities and custom. The scholars rose up out of Africa after colonization, spoke to the genuine idea of Africa and its great past. Flora Nwapa is one among those novelists, who had effectively depicted the genuine nature and culture of Africa through her books. The words and activities of characters in Flora Nwapa's tale *Edu* is with regards to customary traditions and convictions directed by Igbo society. Nwapa's emphasis upon choice and discovery and cognizance of self, enables the peruser to pick up understanding into Igbo culture and furthermore portrays how profoundly imperialism had infiltrated the way of life of Africa and obliterated its qualities. Flora Nwapa has attempted to draw out the contentions in the general public through her conflicting female characters. This paper centers around Flora Nwapa's depiction of the ideological disarray, political arousing, material sustaining, and spiritual development*

in the colonized Africa where the way of life has been altogether changed by the colonial power through her novel.

Kew words: *Colonization, modification in culture, Igbo society, discovery and consciousness, ideological confusion, political awakening.*

Like *Efuru*, *Idu* analyzes the customs, conditions, and beliefs of traditional Igbo society, exploring not only the problems encountered by women but those encountered by men, not only motherhood but parenthood. The characters' words both internal questioning and dialogue and actions in *Idu* are more clearly in conflict with traditional cultural customs than in *Efuru*. Both novels portray conflict, a need for change, and a double standard that tends to blame women more often than men. Thus, there are significant parallels between the two novels, but *Idu* is much more complex with interesting differences.

Idu appears to begin as a somewhat more traditional novel than *Efuru* since the major character chooses early on to follow tradition in terms of marriage. However, *Idu* examines how law and order have broken down. This study will focus more on the first and third subjects, child bearing problems and the barrenness of society and the stream as a meeting place to discuss ills of society. It will also discuss the way in which Nwapa describes not just illness and deaths but moral laxity in the community and catastrophic natural events as further evidence of the disorder in a community attempting to redefine itself.

The concept of marriage is not a major problem in *Idu*. There are several types of marriages, but there is no major cultural dispute about following tradition before marrying. *Idu* and *Adiwere* have a very good marriage and prefer a monogamous

relationship. The text does not say, but it appears that they married following traditional customs. But there are not only traditional marriages in *Idu*; a few marriages do not follow the usual cultural format.

The opening voices in the novel *Idu* represent tradition in the Igbo community. They speak of joy and peace and they honor the young married couple; but they also express concern because the couple does not have children, spends too much time together, and is well off financially. The first problem of the novel, childlessness, is addressed in the second and fourth characteristics of African feminism presented by Carole Boyce Davies. The second focuses on the consciousness of women that there are inequities and limitations in society due to traditional customs as well as those introduced and reinforced by colonialism. Thus, *Idu* and *Ojiugo* are aware that society expects them to find avenues to make motherhood possible. Motherhood is mandatory. The fourth attribute examines the concept of motherhood for its positive and negative effects. It respects motherhood but questions obligatory motherhood. It sees utility in the positive aspects of the extended family and polygamy.

The custom of the Igbo people is to marry and have children, and the tradition provides several alternatives to ensure that all families have children. Men are expected to marry several wives if the first wife cannot produce children, but the man must talk to his wife first since the added woman or women will be part of a large family and share responsibilities. The concept of woman marriage also exists, permitting the women to marry by paying a bride price for another woman and asking the husband to carry out the arrangements for them. Some even believe that Igbo women enjoy polygyny because it allows them to work their businesses and reduce their domestic and marital responsibilities.

It is clear that the community's beliefs have a serious effect on the actions of characters and the outcome of events. Nwapa describes both lapses in moral behavior and natural catastrophes to further emphasize changes within the Igbo community. When one considers that the Bini kingdom experienced chaos but concluded with moral equilibrium, one can perhaps anticipate peace and balance emerging from the confusion and chaos in *Idu*; but Nwapa does not describe this balanced condition at the end of the novel. Some of the disturbing events she does describe are thefts, murders, an eclipse, and fires.

Stealing is not the norm among the people of the village, but Nwapa describes several incidents in which money or other items are taken from the compound by individuals or groups. For example, Onyemuru accuses someone of stealing her hen, and she comes to Adiwere's compound to complain and ask for the return of her hen. After she refuses to name the thief, Adiwere asks her to leave. Onyemuru is not only a victim; she also steals yams from a woman at the market. She places a yam in her basket and attempts to leave the market without paying the trader or without negotiating with her. Onyemuru claims not to have changed her money and tells the woman to follow her home.

Unfortunately, the trader allows her to leave with the yam, and when she gets to Onyemuru's house, Onyemuru refuses to pay. Stealing by a group of thieves who attack families and villages becomes even more serious. In some instance the thieves kill people who refuse to obey their demands. One man outsmarts the thieves by leaving his compound and allowing the thieves to take what they can find; they put the stolen belongings in their canoe, but become greedy. They go back to find the liquor and then get drunk and sleepy. As a result, the man and his family are able to escape in the thieves' canoe with the family's belongings. This incident upsets the thieves the next

day, and they become bolder in their actions. People in villages begin to keep watch vigils to protect their villages. Most seriously, a band of robbers kills Okeke, the business friend of Idu and Adiwere. Okeke gives them his bicycle and money and begs for his life to no avail. Adiwere asks, “What we are going to do to these thieves is what is eating my inside out” (169). Peace is briefly restored to the village when several members of the group are jailed for murdering Okeke. Stealing is not an acceptable practice in Igbo society; and, according to Elechi Amadi, there are penalties based upon the reason for stealing and the quantity taken. Some thieves had to pay an exorbitant fee; others were sold into slavery.

A second natural disaster is a fire that destroys homes and property. The fire with the exact cause unknown quickly burns mud wardrobes, plants, floors, zinc roofs, and especially houses with thatched roofs. It is rumored that a woman has been cooking food for her men friends and her fire gets out of control, but instead of getting help, she flees the village. Some folk who are in town selling their products sense that a disaster has occurred and start towards home.

Not only do the people lose their homes and property, but Uzoechi is burned badly when she enters her house to retrieve a piece of fabric that she has not paid for. After the fire, some family members give their belongings to sympathizers, often relatives, for safe keeping, only to discover later that their friends and relatives have used them or simply refuse to return them. Clearly the community is disintegrating. Ogunyemi describes the incidents as cosmic mysteries that represent the “dislocation and disorientation of the entire body politic” (7). She reminds the reader that *Idu* was published right after the Nigerian Civil War that showed a fractured and divided country.

But often the stream appears to be linked with negative events in the characters' lives. When Adiwere's second wife returns from the stream with a pot of water, she asks Idu to help her with the pot and then disrespects Idu when Idu playfully asks what has taken her so long. She accuses Idu of treating her like a maid, not a wife, and says she will not tolerate the situation. In addition, when Amarajeme and Ojiugo spend time at the stream together, Amarajeme appears to think their relationship is healthy but discovers differently when Ojiugo is nowhere to be found at the end of that day.

In addition, Nwasobi and Idu witness the sad event described earlier in this chapter while at the stream. A young man whose father is considered mad splashes water on everyone, including the adults, while frightening the children, and runs around naked, very inappropriately considering his age. The young man's mother clearly does not see the stream as soothing; she says, "He lives in the stream. . . His own madness comes from the water. His head seems directed to the water" (123). Interestingly, Idu attempts to help the young man and his mother; thus, Nwapa places a person, not the stream, in a palliative role.

She suggest that the authorial voice of *Idu* is quietly suggesting to the Igbo community through the narrator's voice and innumerable verbal exchanges, both complementary and adversarial that everyone does not need to follow traditional rules to be happy, that there is room for different styles of life. People must be allowed to make individual choices, and such a change in expectations will bring healing to the community.

Critics have debated the meaning of the novel's conclusion. Joseph Asanbe offers a romantic perspective: Idu loves Adiwere so much that she chooses to die and be with him. Ogunyemi compares Idu to an Obanje because she chooses to go on a lonely journey to death. She "refuses to be subjugated by the claims of motherhood."

Ogunyemi believes Idu's actions, especially her death or unwillingness to live, are politically motivated: she sees Idu's suicide as a strategy to provoke the community to take a closer look at itself. She labels Idu an openly rebellious woman who makes her own choices and even suggests that Nwapa's name "Idu" is a pun on the pidgin sentence "E do": "It is enough," or, when uttered in exasperation, "Enough is Enough."

Ogunyemi suggests that Nwapa "is saying E do to the cruelty inflicted on women, children, and other helpless people in the society" (162).

Idu's actions support Carole Davies' second and seventh characteristics of African feminism. The second recognizes the inequities and limitations that exist in traditional societies as the crux of problems. Society's traditional expectations cause Idu to choose death instead of living and marrying Ishiodu and cause Ojiugo to publicly humiliate Amarajeme when she chooses motherhood at all costs. The seventh examines traditional and contemporary avenues of choice: women tell their own stories, and Idu definitely tells her own story, chooses her own way. No one expects a pregnant mother to die and leave her son motherless, because motherhood is revered, respected, required. In addition, by allowing Idu to die, Nwapa demonstrates a characteristic of black women writers identified by Henderson: they enter into familial and public discourses that both affirm and challenge the values and expectations of the reader. Thus, the women in Nwapa's novels enter into familial discourse with other women, especially Igbo women who understand their situations based on culture, tradition, education, history, and politics. However, at the same time, Nwapa's female characters enter into public or competitive discourse with African men as African women and with European men and women as African women. Too often, the African women are fighting several conflicts at the same time familial and public. Henderson refers to these simultaneous discourses as multiple voices fighting to be heard and respected.

Works Cited:

- Adeola, James. (ed.), *In Their Own Voices, African Women Writers Talk*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1990. Print.
- Andrade, Susan Z. *Rewriting History, Motherhood and Rebellion*. *Research in African Literatures*, 21. (1990): 91-110. Print.
- Asanbe, J. *The Place of the Individual in the Novels of Chinua Achebe*, T. M. Aluko, Flora Nwapa and Wole Soyinka. Diss. Indiana U, 1979. Print.
- Gadamer, H. G. *Truth and Method*. 2nd ed. Trans. Garret Barden and John Cumming. New York: Seabury P, 1975. Print.
- Githaiga, Anna. *Notes on Flora Nwapa's Efuru*, Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979. Print.
- Nwapa, Flora. *Efuru*. London: Heinemann P, 1966. Print.
- . *Idu*. London: Heinemann P, 1970. Print.
- Nzegwu, Femi. *Love, Motherhood and the African Heritage: The Legacy of Flora Nwapa*, African Renaissance Foundation.2003. Print.
- Ogundipe, L. M. *The Female Writer and Her Commitment*. *Women in African Literature Today* 15 1998: 5-13. Print.
- Ogunyemi, C. O. *Africa Wo/Man Palava: The Nigerian Novel by Women*. Chicago: UP of Chicago, 1995. Print.
- Uchendu, V. *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, 1965. Print.
- Umeh, Marie. *A Comparative Study of the Idea of Motherhood in Two Third World Novels*. *College Language Association Journal* 31.1 (1987): 31-43. Print.