International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion
https://ijchr.net | eISSN: 3028-1318

Received: May 24, 2025 | Accepted: May 31, 2025, | Published: July 31, 2025
Volume 7 Special Issue 2 | doi: https://doi.org/10.63931/ijchr.v7iSI2.236

Article

Resilience and Rediscovery: War Trauma, Female Identity, and the Function of Language in Nwapa's "One is Enough"

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Abstract

The present study deals with the war trauma and female identity in One is Enough by Flora Nwapa. These novel records the psychological and social effects of the Nigerian Civil War on women who break through the traditional notions of gender roles and the expectations of society. Themes of survival, agency, and empowerment are highlighted by Nwapa's specific use of language like narrative structure, symbolism, and contrast. It juxtaposes Lagos, which is synonymous to modernity and freedom against the limitations of Igbo society, driving across the primary message of female emancipation. The study possesses Judith Herman's feminist reading to understand gender-based inequality and to work toward the elimination of sexist oppression and the empowerment of women. This theory critically examines how patriarchal systems produce and maintain gender inequality and the oppression of women, emphasizing the role of power dynamics in shaping women's experiences particularly through violence, sexual abuse, and social marginalization. This study also explores the psychological trauma and healing process of the protagonist in the novel through the lens of Judith Herman's Trauma and Recovery theory.

Keywords: *War Trauma, Female Identity, Resilience, Female potentials, Postcolonial Nigeria, Empowerment*

Suggested citation:
Abdulsahib, A., & Hadaegh, B. (2025). Resilience and Rediscovery: War Trauma, Female Identity, and the Function of Language in Nwapa's "One is Enough". *International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion, 7*(SI2), 643-659.
https://doi.org/10.63931/ijchr.v7iSI2.236

Introduction

Flora Nwapa's One is Enough (1981) holds a distinctive position in African literature, especially considering feminist accounts. In the post-colonial African setting where women's voices were silenced or relegated to the background, Nwapa boldly presents a fresh account of female survival and self-realization. The novel is an exploration of war, trauma, gender dynamics, and the reconstruction of female identity, providing a richly nuanced account of the African woman's struggle for autonomy in a society deeply carved by patriarchal and colonial legacies. Through the view of Nigeria's Civil War, Nwapa depicts the psychological and emotional cruelty of war on the one hand, while trying to recognize the feminist potential for identity reconstruction after violence and destruction on the other. The Nigerian Civil War, or Biafran War, is both a cure and a catalyst to trauma in Nwapa's tale as it mars the lives of those who had been participants, women in particular, who are thrown into disarray not just the physical, but also the moral and psycho-spiritual tenets of society. In the minds of many women, war meant losing all they loved, expulsion from their homes, and the unmaking of all they had ever known as social structures. (Nwapa,1981, p.75)

The answer to such questions as how women negotiate their identities in a postwar world, considering the overwhelming losses they have experienced, becomes central to this narrative. At the novel's beginning, the protagonist, Amaka, is portrayed in a state of loss and confusion due to the war and the loss of her family. This sets the stage for understanding the profound psychological impacts of war trauma. This initial stage aligns with the first phase of recovery in Judith Herman's Trauma and Recovery theory, establishing safety where Amaka starts adjusting to her new reality.

The current research applies Judith Herman's Trauma and Recovery theory alongside feminist literary criticism to analyze the psychological and social reconstruction of Amaka. According to Judith Herman's Trauma and Recovery theory (1992), trauma survivors undergo three stages of recovery: establishing safety, reconstructing the traumatic narrative, and reconnecting with others. A crucial aspect of this process is identity reconstruction, as trauma often disrupts personal identity, leading to disconnection and loss. Through recovery, individuals gradually regain agency, redefine their narratives, and establish a renewed sense of self, shaped by resilience and a deeper understanding of their experiences (Herman, 1992, p.99)

The protagonist of One is Enough, Amaka, is a powerful medium to critique and explore the changes in women's identities in personal and collective traumas over time. Amaka's story is rich in struggle and defiance as she faces the emotional scars wrought by war and the pressure of society to adhere to traditional roles of womanhood. The novel shows that Amaka's journey of self-discovery and

independence becomes a form of resistance against the social structures with limited choice. Her decision to leave her husband and go to Lagos for freedom and a new life reflects her refusal to be bound by traditional impositions on women, particularly in the context of post-war Nigerian society. Amaka is not merely an individual story but a broader discourse on women's collective experiences in times of social turmoil, as told by Nwapa. By dealing with war's emotional and psychological effects and developing nuanced shades in their impact on female identity, Nwapa has furthered the debate on women's roles in African societies. The women in the novel are not portrayed as mere victims of war, nor are they waiting to be rescued- an idea which has manifested in most women in society: they actively shape their destinies. Nwapa utilizes Amaka's journey to elucidate both negative stereotypes women have been yoked to under traditional contexts, as well as larger social forces that work to control their narratives.

However, focusing on specific language structures, like literary techniques of symbolism, characterization, and setting, Nwapa offers a rich, multi-layered text that subverts the typical portrayals of African women in literature. In terms of this, Lagos manifests the migration between rural, traditional Igbo society and modern, urban life. Lagos, the place of unparalleled opportunities, opposes the contours of Igbo tradition, thereby reinforcing the novel's central theme, liberation and the transforming force of self-determination. Thus, Lagos becomes a potential setting, both physically and symbolically, to reconstitute Amaka's life and to formulate a new future.

In One is Enough, the journey toward self-definition is personal and collective. Nwapa offers an even broader scope of criticism into the role women in post-colonial Nigeria, like other areas of Africa, are supposed to play in society, often against their interests. In portraying Amaka's defiance against such expectations, Nwapa lends a voice to women attempting to break free from the constraints imposed by a patriarchal system that does the greatest injustice to their agency. The journey of Amaka, thus, is one along which trauma from the war and burdens of societal expectations can become a source of empowerment, leading to an even greater sense of identity and self-actualization.

Flora Nwapa's One is Enough (1981) occupies a critical space in African women's writing as it explores the interplay between personal trauma, gendered identity, and the larger socio-political disruptions of post-war Nigeria. Scholars and critics have long acknowledged Nwapa's commitment to portraying strong, independent women navigating systems of patriarchal oppression and post-colonial disillusionment. The novel centers on Amaka, a woman who rejects traditional expectations of marriage and motherhood, choosing instead to forge her identity

through economic independence and emotional resilience. This thematic exploration makes One is Enough a key literary site for examining the dynamics of female identity reconstruction in the aftermath of trauma.

Literature Review

Judith Herman's trauma theory, particularly her three-stage model of recovery: safety, remembrance, and reconnection, provides a valuable lens through which Amaka's journey can be interpreted. Herman (1992) emphasizes that trauma *"shatters the sense of connection between the individual and the community"* and that recovery involves *"reclaiming control over one's body and life"* (p.159). In Amaka's case, this reclaim begins when she refuses to accept polygamy and childlessness as a personal failure. As Ogunka et al. (2020) argue, Nwapa's novel *"unmasks the psychological and emotional trauma experienced by women due to childlessness in a patriarchal African society"* (Ogunka et al.,2010, p.110). Amaka's decision to leave her marriage reflects the first phase of trauma recovery, that is, establishing safety.

The post-war context of the novel is also crucial. While One is Enough does not directly describe the Biafran War, its socio-cultural consequences, particularly the disruption of traditional roles and the emergence of new gender dynamics, are palpable. In an interview, Flora Nwapa noted that *"during the war… women played roles they never thought they would play. They became breadwinners"* (qtd. in Umeh,1998, p.130). Amaka's shift from domestic dependence to economic self-reliance is not just a personal decision, but a reflection of larger historical forces. This war-induced transformation aligns with Maxine Sample's (1991) observation that Nwapa's female characters represent "the internalization of external conflict," and that war imagery in her novels is often symbolic of deeper psychological struggles (p.94).

Additionally, the narrative's emphasis on rediscovering self through economic empowerment and sexual autonomy challenges conventional representations of women in African literature. Linda Kwatsha(2005) views Amaka as "a symbol of change," arguing that her rejection of traditional roles and movement to Lagos enables her to redefine her identity on her terms (Kwatsha,2005, p.122). In contrast to the trope of the suffering African woman awaiting redemption through domesticity, Amaka constructs a new paradigm of womanhood based on self-validation and personal freedom.

Stylistically, Nwapa employs a female-centered narrative voice that amplifies women's experiences and creates space for emotional honesty. Elleke Boehmer (1995) highlights Nwapa's use of *"choric language"* and shared female perspectives as structural tools that center the narrative around women's voices, turning domestic and

emotional landscapes into sites of resistance (p.92). This stylistic choice enhances the novel's resilience and emotional survival themes, as Amaka's reflections and conversations with other women form a collective testimony of resistance against patriarchal trauma.

According to Boehmer (1995), Nwapa's narrative style uses women's voices and oral storytelling techniques to center female experiences and challenge male-dominated literary norms: "Nwapa makes use of choric female language and collective voice to structure her narrative, grounding her work in a women's world of shared experience and resistance." (p.92)

Many scholars view One is Enough as a radical statement of female independence in African literature. According to Linda Kwatsha(2009), Amaka's rejection of polygamy and traditional marriage expectations makes her *"a symbol of change"* and personal agency. She thus writes: *"In One is Enough (1981), Amaka refuses to remain in a polygamous marriage and instead chooses a life of independence in Lagos. She becomes a model of resistance to traditional norms and expectations"* (page 9)

The trauma of childlessness, especially as a societal burden placed on women, is another key theme explored in One is Enough. Ogunka, Onyinyechi (2020) argues: *"Amaka's trauma is intensified by societal rejection and her in-laws' dehumanizing treatment. Nwapa presents the psychological pain that childless women experience in African societies."* (pp. 109–118).

Although One is Enough is not directly about the Biafran War like some of Nwapa's other works, like Never Again, scholars still recognize how social and marital conflict mirrors national trauma. Maxine Sample explains that: *"In Nwapa's novels, including One is Enough, the war becomes a metaphorical lens through which women's struggles in marriage and identity are examined. The external violence reflects internal battles."* (pp. 89–102).

Herman's Trauma Theory

Judith Herman's seminal work Trauma and Recovery (1992) outlines a three-stage model of trauma recovery: establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma narrative, and reconnecting with others. According to Herman, the first stage, establishing safety, is essential because trauma *"shatters the sense of safety and predictability"* (p.33). In this stage, survivors regain control over their lives and surroundings, which *"begins with taking back control of one's body"* and environment (p.160). This framework is particularly relevant when analyzing Flora Nwapa's One is Enough (1981), which centers on the protagonist Amaka's psychological and emotional transformation after a series of personal and social traumas. The novel

echoes Herman's theory as Amaka gradually asserts her independence, rejecting oppressive marital norms and patriarchal expectations. Her journey toward autonomy begins with a withdrawal from harmful domestic relationships, symbolizing the reconstruction of safety in Herman's terms. Just as Herman argues that "recovery unfolds in three stages, but it is not a linear process" (p.155). Amaka's journey is marked by internal conflict and gradual growth, reflecting the non-linear path toward healing and identity.

Judith Herman's Trauma and Recovery remains foundational in trauma studies, especially in its delineation of a three-stage recovery model: establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma narrative, and reconnecting with others. Herman explains, *"The first task of recovery is to establish the survivor's safety. This task takes precedence over all others, for no therapeutic work can succeed if safety has not been adequately secured"* (159). Trauma disrupts one's sense of control, and the survivor must reclaim personal autonomy in both physical and emotional spaces. This theoretical framework provides a valuable lens through which one can analyze trauma and identity in African post-colonial literature. Flora Nwapa's One is Enough offers a compelling narrative of a woman's struggle to survive, redefine herself, and heal from the psychological consequences of patriarchal violence and cultural disillusionment.

In the first stage of trauma recovery, the survivor must reestablish personal security, both physical and psychological. In One is Enough, Amaka's departure from her unfulfilling and oppressive marriage represents a pivotal moment of self-preservation. She refuses to conform to the societal expectation of polygamy and childbearing as measures of a woman's worth, choosing instead to leave the toxic environment. This act mirrors what Herman describes as the survivor's need to *"take back control of one's body"* (160). Amaka's decision to migrate and begin anew in Lagos is not merely a geographical shift but an emotional and existential one; she seeks safety from a society that continuously invalidates her worth. This retreat into solitude and reflection allows her to protect herself and begin the gradual journey toward self-definition and healing.

The second stage of trauma recovery, as outlined by Herman (1997), involves *"remembrance and mourning "*, a process in which the survivor reconstructs the trauma narrative to make sense of the pain (p. 175). In Lagos, Amaka begins to reinterpret her past not as a sequence of failures, but as evidence of her strength and agency. She questions inherited traditions and begins articulating a new identity unbound by patriarchal expectations. This critical reflection aligns with Herman's assertion that survivors must *"create a new narrative that makes sense of their experiences"* (p.181). The third and final stage of recovery, reconnection, occurs when the survivor re-engages

with the life, not as a victim, but with a renewed and empowered sense of self. By the novel's end, Amaka embraces a life of independence and entrepreneurship, choosing to remain single and childless. This radical self-affirmation represents the culmination of her recovery journey. As Herman (1997) emphasizes, *"The final task of recovery is to become a survivor rather than a victim"* (p.197).

Amaka's journey embodies this transition in both personal and political terms. In One is Enough, Amaka's initial experiences reflect this stage as she struggles with the emotional and psychological aftermath of the war. Her sense of self is fragmented, and she is overwhelmed by the trauma she has endured. Amaka's trauma is not only physical but also psychological, as she battles feelings of confusion, isolation, and loss. This stage is marked by survival, simply getting through the pain of war and beginning to acknowledge its effects. *"I was lost in the pain of the war. The pain became my world; I did not know who I was anymore."* (Nwapa,1981, p. 65).

In this quote, Amaka describes how the trauma of the war overwhelms her, leaving her lost and disoriented. She does not yet have the strength or tools to heal, reflecting the initial stage of recovery, where survival is the primary focus.

Discussion

As Amaka moves to Lagos, she begins to rebuild her identity outside of the traditional roles imposed on her by society. Her decision to leave behind her old life and move to a new city symbolizes the start of a critical phase in her recovery, where she begins to reject societal norms and assert her agency actively. Amaka's journey is one of resilience and defiance for a woman in a society that expects women to conform to gender norms, which existed before her birth: she does not give herself to the pressures of marriage, motherhood, or dependently existing male authority, but carves out a new path of self-discovery and personal empowerment. Leaving an abusive husband and traveling to Lagos in search of a new life is thus Amaka's radical and direct act of defiance against a society that seeks to define her. It is not an escape route but a conscious effort to claim her independence and future. Nwapa uses Amaka's experience to emphasize what can emerge from transformation after the deepest traumatization. This act of defiance against the norms of society resonates with feminist notions throughout Nwapa's body of work, which celebrate women's autonomy and the reshaping of their roles in post-colonial African societies. This perspective aligns with Ogundipe–Leslie's (1994) argument that African women must actively redefine themselves beyond inherited cultural limitations (p.126).

The narrative structure employed by Nwapa forms an integral part of reinforcing Amaka's resilience. Realistic and direct storytelling deeply engages the

reader with Amaka's internal struggles and emotional evolution. The simplicity of the prose reflects her emotional rawness and makes her resilience more achievable to the reader. The usage of the third-person limited narration thus enables Nwapa to probe Amaka's psyche and provide insight into her thoughts and feelings while traversing a world that would usually seem hostile and oppressive. Through this language technique, he asserts the agency of Amaka, denying definition by trauma or the social structure that seeks to control her.

Contrary to the stereotypical portrayals of women in war literature as victims, Amaka's internal monologue and outward actions reflect a woman of strength who can face hurt and turn it into power. This portrayal aligns with Caruth's (1996) view that trauma narratives can both reveal pain and serve as a site for recovery and reinterpretation(pp.3-11). As Amaka declares,

"I had to leave. If I stayed, I would be buried in the expectations of others. In Lagos, I could breathe." (Nwapa,1981, p.48)

While looking at Amaka's resilience, it becomes essential to investigate how Nwapa critiques the traditional gender roles that shape her society. In African societies, the female role is primarily confined within the framework of marriage and motherhood. These roles are prescribed in culture and social norms, bringing stigma on the heads of women who deviate from them. Amaka is leaving her husband to fit into that journey of self-discovery, being portrayed as a radical act of resistance. Amaka's journey is indeed not an escape but a reclamation of her agency. Since she knows that there is a level of reclamation involved in the recovery process from the loss of trauma due to war, she also feels she needs to be free before discovering a new way of being in the world. Nwapa contrasts Amaka's path with other women's lives who remain enmeshed in traditional roles, which illustrates the point that resilience is not just about surviving trauma. However, it is also about actively reshaping one's identity in response to it. As J Herman (1997) asserts, *"The survivor must come to terms with the trauma by constructing a new self"* (p.196).

Feather-edged at the social level, Nwapa's portrayal of women's endurance would also depend on the context of the novel. It shows a post-colonial Nigeria, which continues to wrestle with the consequences of the Civil War, where the powers of patriarchs have dictated women's roles. The war, which caused damage to the larger society, opened a space for women to rethink their position in society. One Enough captures that space in Lagos for a woman to escape from traditional enslavement. It becomes the space of modernity where Amaka starts afresh, apart from the rigid expectations of her rural, Igbo community. In Lagos, Amaka finds sisterhood with other women who, like her, are seeking a way to live independently and assert their

identities in a male-dominated world. *"A woman is not a tree rooted to one place. I, too, can seek a better life"* (Nwapa, 1981, p. 53)

The idea of women's solidarity is an essential aspect of the journey of Amaka. With all her past trauma, the struggles and pains each woman shares give her power. Nwapa uses these relationships to confront the stereotype of women as rivals. Instead, she shows how these women develop caring, nurturing bonds that encourage them to live and prosper. Amaka's experiences with other women in Lagos provide community and the understanding of shared strength, the idea that trauma is healed through solidarity and mutual support. This network of women becomes a source of power and resilience to enable Amaka to confront past trauma and chart new pathways in life. As McClintock (1995) notes, *"Women's alliances, often dismissed as sentimental or secondary, have historically functioned as critical sites of resistance and renewal, especially in the face of trauma and displacement"* (p. 263).

By discussing the resilience of Amaka, Nwapa also aims to critique other societal forces actively inhibiting women's autonomy. The expectations for women in post-war Nigeria revolved around maintaining family structures and supporting male rebuilding efforts. Along Amaka's pathway, however, the very display of her defiance contends that women should not merely be subjects of this process; they should be shapers of their futures. Nwapa goes on to critique the very stereotype assigned to women historically and challenges even the very concept of women going back to their pre-war identities. Thus, Amaka's resilience is not only about survival; it symbolizes the refusal to ever go back to a standpoint relegating women to the sidelines. As Herman (1992) argues, *"The reconstruction of the trauma story... does not mean simply returning to a pre-trauma state. The survivor must create a new self and a new future"* (p.196).

In Nwapa's One is Enough, we find a vision of female resilience that acts as a site of resistance to male actors and structures and thus provides a new narrative for women in post-conflict societies. In connecting Amaka's journey to discovering her identity and independence, Nwapa redefines the meaning of woman in a post-war context while critiquing the structures of society that limit women's agency. In Amaka's defiance and resilience, Nwapa makes a strong statement about womanhood and transformational possibilities in the face of trauma. Grounding the discourse of war trauma and female resilience in her work, Nwapa has drawn the strands through which women can negotiate their struggles and build their lives, not against the backdrop of these experiences, but along with them: *"In their stories, I found pieces of myself. We were all running, all healing."* (Nwapa,1981, p. 66)

A defining theme in One is Enough redefines female identity as epitomized through Amaka, the protagonist. Nwapa crafts a narrative in which Amaka ultimately

challenges the societal impositions of womanhood that cause women to see themselves as considering marriage and motherhood alone. Much like in other Igbo traditions, women had specific duties depending on which they would always rely on the authority of men and family networks. Amaka, however, refuses to take such a role and begins to explore her self-discovery while facing the limitations affixed on her. Amaka's leaving of her abusive husband and her independence in Lagos marks a powerful act of defiance against patriarchal standards and expectations. As Nwapa (1981) writes, *"She had had enough. She would go to Lagos. She would make it there. She would not go back to her husband"* (p.18). This departure is not merely geographical but symbolic, rejecting the traditional roles imposed on her as a woman and a declaration of self-determination. *"They said a woman without a child is nothing. But I am not nothing. I am enough"* (Nwapa,1981, p.75). This powerful statement encapsulates her evolving identity and resistance to patriarchal norms.

To Amaka, the rebellion against these standards is more than an individual act; it is a proclamation of the possibility of change within the larger socio-cultural context. In her portrayal, Nwapa suggests that leaving one's husband is not simply abandoning an abusive relationship but making a conscious decision to regain one's autonomy. Moving to Lagos thus represents Amaka's severance from the gender roles that have circumscribed her existence. Lagos signifies much more than a place in the novel; it serves as an avenue of possibility and entry into modernity, whereby Amaka can redefine herself further. Such a move quickly adds a serious contrast to her hometown in rural Igboland, where gender norms are still so strong and women's opportunities are so restricted. Lagos becomes a progressive space where Amaka would carve her way and thus create a new identity that does not revolve around her relationships with men or traditional expectations. As Cathy Caruth (1996) suggests, *"trauma describes an overwhelming experience that resists full integration into consciousness… and opens up the possibility of a new story being told"* (p.4). Through her relocation and the rejection of prescribed norms, Amaka begins to narrate a new version of herself, one that is not shaped by trauma alone but by her power to rewrite her place in society. *"I will not allow myself to be the victim forever."* (Nwapa,1981, p.92)

Through Amaka, Nwapa condemns the age-old society's idea that a woman has no identity except as a wife or mother. Leaving her husband implies much more than running away from an unhealthy relationship; it means Amaka claims her right to live outside those traditional identities. Accordingly, she shows that the identity of a female is not static but dynamic and flexible, capable of being changed due to one's agency or external circumstances. Much of the critique that Nwapa builds into this transformation concerns the patriarchal apparatus that defines women solely based on

their relations with men, their primary calling being to reproduce and nurture. As Judith Herman explains, *"The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. The old definitions of self, imposed by others, must be examined and challenged"* (Herman, p.133). Amaka's transformation thus becomes an act of psychological and social recovery, in which she asserts control over her identity beyond patriarchal constraint. *"It was not enough to survive; I had to live again."* (Nwapa, p.107)

The second stage of recovery involves reclaiming control and reconnecting with one's emotions and experiences. As Amaka's journey progresses, she begins to confront her trauma directly. Her strength emerges as she recognizes that survival alone is not enough; she must reclaim her power and control over her life. Amaka's emotional and psychological recovery begins as she resists the societal pressures that seek to keep her in the role of victim. Her actions in this stage reflect a growing sense of agency. Amaka's emotional journey mirrors Herman's (1992) theory of reclaiming power, as she begins to assert her voice and decisions, rejecting the passive role of victim. As she boldly declares

"I will not allow myself to be the victim forever." (Nwapa,19981, p.92)

This quote marks a critical turning point for Amaka, where she consciously decides to break free from the victimhood imposed by her trauma. Her active decision to reclaim control over her life aligns with Herman's description of this stage of trauma recovery.

The novel also makes it apparent that not all women like Amaka, who break the chains that bind them; with this, Nwapa uses the city of Lagos as a metaphor for women's solidarity. In a way, it also brings out the possibility of identity transformation within these women through Amaka's association with other women who have also broken the patriarchal traditions, whether through an abusive marriage, an attempted career, or independent selves. These women form a supportive community, offering one another strength and solidarity as they navigate their shared struggles. Nwapa emphasizes the greater implications of the character Amaka's metamorphosis by contrasting urban and rural settings. The rural Igbo society is laden with tradition and patriarchal control, while Lagos epitomizes a modern urban life in which old customs give way to new. As modernity and opportunity, Lagos means a site where women like Amaka can begin to reconstruct their life stories; a site whose diversity and readiness to accept change is just right for Amaka's personal transformation. In this space, traditional patriarchal limits upon Amaka do not exist. Here, she can display the multiple contours of her identity and, more importantly,

make choices different from what society expects. As McClintock (1995) observes, *"The distinction between home and world rural and urban becomes a contested space where identities are reconfigured, especially for women who cross the boundaries of traditional domestic spaces into public spheres of modernity"* (p.36).

The final stage of recovery is about rebuilding one's identity and reintegrating into the community. For Amaka, this stage is marked by her decision to move beyond survival and begin actively living again. This involves reasserting her place in society and redefining her identity. Amaka's recovery from trauma is not just about healing herself but also about finding a new sense of belonging within her community. She re-engages with life and reconnects with others on her terms. This stage involves a deeper reconciliation with the past and reconstructing a meaningful future. *"It was not enough to survive; I had to live again."* (Nwapa,1981, p.107)

This quote encapsulates the essence of the final stage of recovery according to Herman's (1992) theory. Amaka's realization that mere survival is not enough signifies her shift towards true healing and re-engagement with life. The transformation-dependent theme of female identity is crucial to Nwapa's broader feminist agenda. By insisting on refusing the social constraints imposed on her, Nwapa uses Amaka to represent female empowerment and autonomy. Given that the journey of Amaka in Nwapa's narrative fights the conventional view that a woman's worth comes solely from her role within the family structure, through Nwapa's narrative, a radical re-conceptualization of female identity that embraces personal space, independence, and self-definition is advanced. In stark contrast to the fixed identities imposed on women in a patriarchal society, this crooked view of female identity presented by the author is one flexible enough to adapt and change. As Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) notes, *"African women need the space to define themselves on their terms... and the definitions of womanhood re-conceptualized beyond domesticity and subordination"* (p.28).

Again, one may argue that women's strength hinges on their power to break away from social barriers. Having rejected the tradition that has confined her, Amaka finds strength and meaning in that rejection. Her growth is not considered survival but empowerment as she unlearned everything that made sense to her and reconstructed a new identity on her terms. This ability to redefine herself in a space that would frustrate the very act of her self-definition is a significant theme of Nwapa's artistic discourse concerning gender inequalities within post-colonial African societies. As Cathy Caruth (1996) argues, *"the experience of trauma, the attempt to tell the story of trauma, and the transformation of the self through that story are deeply intertwined"* (p.10). Affirming that Amaka's identity reconstruction is a personal and political act of survival and transformation. Hence, Amaka's journey symbolizes a possibility for all

women to reject the trauma discourse and claim agency over defining their existence, thereby celebrating their humanity and potential. This analysis of Amaka's transformation reflects on the notion of a female identity that is assumed to be constant and predetermined. Instead, she sees women as fluid, dynamic, and capable of unimaginable change. By placing Amaka squarely in this urban landscape of Lagos, Nwapa opens the door for women who are bound by tradition to break free and chart a course into urban modernity; thus, she allows for very bold statements of female empowerment and resilience, where women are not only able to readjust their identity and refashion their own lives from within.

Nwapa's One is Enough discusses not only the trauma and loss inflicted upon the people of Nigeria by the Civil War, but also the prospect for female agency after such horrendous warfare. The novel investigates how women, Amaka, find a way around the social, emotional, and psychological deconstruction of war. Nwapa gives credence to women as they find empowerment and self-determination in their attempts to reconstitute their identities in the post-war Nigerian setting, having gone through the horrors of suffering, dislocation, and loss. The process of reconstructive endeavor is central to them, as is the problem of masculine gaze versus feminine dignity, expectations of society, and women's role in rebuilding life and community.

A post-war change generally serves as a period of re-definition in societal roles, and for women, adapting from post-conflict gender norms can feel suffocating, especially when they have experienced trauma, where their entire perspective on such gender norms has shifted. In the novel One is Enough, the journey of discovering oneself, according to Amaka, hinges on the ability to exercise agency over her life. Therefore, the concept of agency becomes important in post-war narratives because it contemplates the reinvention of women's roles in a society struggling to undergo reconstruction. Denying societal expectations where her womanhood would be entirely attached to the roles of wife and mother, Amaka has experienced loss and violence, both inflicted on her by her husband and by the war. As Nwapa (1981) writes, *"She had had enough. She would go to Lagos. She would make it there. She would not go back to her husband"* (p. 18).

Thus, her decision is not merely about the geographical relocation but the reclamation of her agency, which patriarchal systems have hugely undermined. The act of leaving her husband is, in fact, a seemingly traditional expectation- and this forms an impressive proclamation of agency on the part of Amaka. Many African societies, including that of the Igbo culture, expect women to be married and remain married without regard to the degradation or torment they undergo in the union. These societal expectations place women in further servitude, especially in a postwar

setting when the focus of all reconstruction seems to gravitate towards restoring or establishing the traditional family. Nwapa negates such a construct by portraying Amaka's courage in confronting trauma and her ability to redefine herself outside the confines of marriage. This makes a case against the assumption that women's agency is paradoxically made to depend on their link with men and family institutions. As Herman (1992) notes, *"In the post-traumatic state, the ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness... society may pressure survivors to resume their former roles without acknowledging their trauma"* (p.66). This observation aligns with Amaka's rejection of societal pressures to return to her abusive husband or conform to postwar domestic norms. Instead, her departure to Lagos represents a personal rebellion against this societal erasure of trauma, affirming her right to self-definition and emotional survival.

Amaka's internal dialogue allows for the characterization of her shifting self. Nwapa employs a third-person limited perspective to reveal Amaka's feelings and inner conflicts. This specific narrative device furthers her agency against the rather vast weighing factor of the external. Amaka, while contemplating her future and all the chances that lie before her, recalls her past, the abuse, and her lack of control over her life. Nwapa here paints the psychological journey of a woman seeking freedom from the restraints of society. No longer a passive recipient of whatever destiny has in store for her, Amaka has now developed into a conscious agent in rebuilding her world, which entails reclaiming her self-worth and autonomy.

Flora Nwapa's exploration of female agency in One is Enough has a broader implication in critiquing post-war reconstruction and women's roles in nation-building. The restoration of order post-conflict in post-colonial African societies has mostly been male-centered, as women's contributions and struggles have often been relegated to the background. Nwapa subverts this male narrative by representing how women, and more specifically Amaka, reconstitute their agency and redefine themselves after war and societal unrest. The novel offers a feminist interrogation into the expectation that societal norms would demand women to embrace traditional roles of domesticity and subservience after conflict, reinforcing the argument that nation-building should be seen as an inclusive sphere in acknowledging women's resilience and autonomy. As Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) asserts, *"African women must be seen as co-agents of history and not just as victims or passive participants. Any reconstruction of society that excludes their voices is incomplete"* (p.12)

Foremost among the tensions in the post-war period is the belief system that reinstates women as wives and mothers, making feminine duty a cultural reclamation. This belief system is entrenched in the images of the national identity since societies

emerging from war attempt to reestablish order by confirming the pragmatics of traditional gender roles. One is Enough, however, tells the story of Amaka, who shatters the limits set before her. Her move to Lagos demonstrated her refusal to abide by social prescriptions of womanhood. As Nwapa(1981) writes, *"She had had enough. She would go to Lagos. She would make it there. She would not go back to her husband"* (p.18). Lagos as an urban space thus becomes synonymous with modernity, economic opportunity, and social rejuvenation, freeing Amaka from the shackles of a rigid patriarchal order in rural Igbo society.

The contrast established in the novel between rural and urban space accentuates the evolving nature of gender roles in post-war Nigeria. While rural settlements are depicted as strongholds of tradition where gender expectations are firmly held, thus curtailing female independence, Lagos becomes a space of possibilities in which Amaka-like women can redefine themselves outside their assigned roles. This rural-urban divide expresses the greater tension between tradition and modernity in post-colonial African societies, where women grapple with structural inequalities to declare their agency. As Anne McClintock (1995) observes, *"Geography is not neutral. The spaces women inhabit are politicized terrains of struggle, where the meanings of gender, race, and class are contested and re-inscribed"* (p.30).

Nwapa's representation of female identity as fluid and changing refutes the standard conception that women and their roles should remain in one fixed position, particularly during societal reconstruction. By portraying Amaka's resistance to traditional expectations, Nwapa insists that women's agency is an individual issue and a collective process that shapes the national identity. Women who reject the rigid expectations of society are part of a broader feminist movement that calls for the recognition of their role in post-war recovery and nation-building.

Conclusion

In One is Enough, Flora Nwapa portrays Amaka's profound psychological transformation as she navigates the aftermath of the Nigerian Civil War and the societal expectations placed upon her as a woman. Through the lens of Judith Herman's Trauma and Recovery theory, this analysis tried to highlight how Amaka's journey aligns with the stages of recovery: from the initial trauma and loss to the reconstruction of her identity and reclaiming her agency. Amaka's decision to leave her abusive marriage and seek independence in Lagos is a powerful representation of resilience, defiance, and self-empowerment in the face of overwhelming trauma.

The novel goes beyond depicting Amaka as a mere victim of war, instead illustrating her active role in reshaping her life and identity, which is a critical aspect of recovery as outlined by Herman. Her transformation is not only personal but also a symbolic representation of broader social struggles women face in post-colonial, post-war societies. Through Amaka, Nwapa challenges traditional gender roles and critiques the patriarchal structures that limit women's autonomy, offering a new narrative of empowerment and self-determination. Ultimately, One is Enough presents a robust feminist discourse on the role of women in post-war reconstruction, emphasizing that true healing and societal rebuilding cannot occur without the recognition of women's agency and the acknowledgment of their experiences in the process. Amaka's psychological transformation exemplifies the broader possibilities for women to reclaim their identity, autonomy, and future, making Nwapa's work an important contribution to the discourse on trauma, recovery, and female empowerment in African literature.

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