

Marriage and Demystification of Cultural Expectations in Marjorie Adebisi's *Entangled*

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Abstract

*Marriage is a significant institution in Africa, especially the one involving the normative sex and this makes lineage progression depend on it. However, certain cultural practices seem to single out women for the onerous responsibility of making marriage work, through their complete obedience to societal and cultural prescriptions for marriage. It is against this backdrop that this study examines how women reinterpret cultural imperatives on marriage, and reconstruct their personality in Adebisi's *Entangled*. As a text-based study, data was purposively selected because of the relevant contents. The paper adopts Hudson Weems' *Africana* womanism as theoretical lens through which analysis is done. Through textual analysis, the work reveals that modern African women defy the traditional cultural ethos and assert themselves as people with dignity and self-worth. The study also reveals that the hitherto biased orientation African women received has been re-calibrated to give modern African women the opportunity to make informed choices regarding the challenges they face in marriage. The study, therefore, concludes that the cultural expectations of married women are myths and patriarchal*

fallacies which the modern woman like Ajoke continuously strive to debunk and set a new social order for women.

Keywords: *marriage, cultural demystification, africana womanism, Adebisi's entangled*

Introduction

Marriage has always been a cherished institution in Africa and is deeply rooted in the cultural practices of African societies. It facilitates family life and progression, and thus, the institution of marriage is regarded with high esteem. It is indisputable that, at the center of every marriage in African society is the woman. Most often, the culture and tradition of the people demand more from the woman than the man. These cultural expectations are what give rise to gender inequality, violence, and abusive marriages. Chinyere Ajayi, Khatidja Chantler, and Lorraine Radford (2022) observe that patriarchal societies use religion and cultural norms to manipulate women into giving in to what is expected of a traditional wife in Africa. According to the scholars, “men used religion to assert gendered expectations on women such that when women resisted expectations of them as “traditional wife,” [sic] violence was sometimes used to get them to conform” (Ajayi, Chantidja, and Radford, 2022, p. 467). This assertion portrays marriage as an institution that engenders discrimination and victimisation of African women. Against this backdrop, the cultural expectations of women in marriage tend to be harsh, biased, and discriminatory.

In most marriages, culture demands women to be completely silent. They are equally expected to appropriate to themselves the

blame for anything that goes wrong in the marriage. Thus, on many occasions, women are blamed for infertility and childlessness in the family, even when they are medically fit to bear children. Hence, the worst thing that can happen to any woman in a typical African society is for her to be barren. Remi Akujobi (2011) posits that “motherhood is so critical in most traditional societies in Africa that there is no worse misfortune for a woman than being childless” (p. 4). Again, this demonstrates that women in Africa are valued based on their roles in the progression of the man’s lineage. A typical African patriarchal society, therefore, regards the woman as a “child-bearing machine”.

Lauretta Ngcobo avers that “every woman is encouraged to marry and get children to express her womanhood to the full” (p. 44). Deducing from this, therefore, culture and tradition in African patriarchal societies demand that the woman asserts her identity in womanhood only through child-bearing. It is not surprising then, to see these societies ridiculing and mocking those married women who do not bear children, probably because of the infertility of their husbands. Women are perpetually subjugated and abused by the male-dominated society via biased socio-cultural and traditional institutions. Corroborating this claim, Ekwutosi Offiong, Eyo Eyo, and Asibong Offiong (2021) state that Nigerian society is bugged by biased cultural structures that produce “socio-cultural laws and practices that have put women in a disadvantaged position. These laws and practices have led to socio-cultural attitudes which have been discriminatory and economic inequalities that subsequently reinforce the women’s subordinate place within the various societies” (p. 80).

Corroborating this, Isonguyo Akpan (2024) posits that this leads to thingification of females, denoting the “... abuse of women in such a way that they are used as one would [use] ordinary things or objects bought ...” (p. 34). Hence, the slavery condition of most married women in African traditional societies is orchestrated by the anti-women cultural practices enshrined by their laws.

Regrettably, many women in toxic marriages suffer in silence because the culture has already conditioned them to remain so. Their consciousness has been battered by existing cultural practices such that it almost becomes a norm for the oppressed women to suffer in absolute silence so that the man is protected from public criticism. Offiong, Eyo, and Offiong (2021) offer an explanation on the silence culture of women in patriarchal Nigerian society, thus:

Their opinions are not sought even in matters that concern them crucially. The notion that women are expected to be submissive to men remains one of the foundation stones of Africa's political, economic, and social structures. That is why patriarchy has characterized several Nigerian sociopolitical traditional institutions. (p. 80)

Therefore, ideologically and traditionally, most married women have been conditioned to remain silent even in matters that concern their well-being. It is not surprising that they bow to the inconsiderate expectations of culture such that their life is defined by such cultural demands. This has been the thematic concern of most nineteenth and twentieth-century writers of African descent. Marriama Bâ (1989) explicates the terrible condition of women during widowhood rituals in some African society. In her *So Long*

a Letter; Bâ brings to the fore the sufferings, victimisation, and oppression of widows in African society, as reflected in the letter sent to Aissatou by Ramatoulaye. Ba's letter reveals the ordeals of African women during widowhood rite. Ramatoulaye tells her friend, Aissatou, of her forceful confinement to a room for four months and some days. It is worthy to note that this confinement is a metaphor for the mental slavery of women, the correspondent psychic trauma, and the social and political embargo placed on women. Ramatoulaye recounts that she is confined within ' . . . walls . . . for four months and ten days' . . . (*So Long . . .*, p. 18). This is an obvious conspiracy by patriarchy against women. It is safe to say that the woman in a traditional patriarchal society is always on the trajectory of explaining herself because the societal expectation is that she must prove her innocence of every conspiracy against her. Offong, Eyo, and Offiong (2021) further consider these expectations obnoxious, traumatic, and degrading.

However, this narrative has changed in recent times, as most women have access to education and become participants in the decision-making process of their societies. Through this, they mystify patriarchy and chart a course for their emancipation. This has, no doubt, found its way into the thematic canon of contemporary African novels. In these novels, there are revolutionary female characters who reject the debased and subservient ideologies, seek and obtain self-actualisation. Akpan (2023) avers that in Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, Liza and Sikira protest their husband's subjective opinion and decision about them as wives. In doing so, they have been able to cut through the veil of patriarchy and demystify the grand narratives surrounding housewives in the African worldview.

The two characters represent the revolutionary energy in the twenty-first-century female experience in the institution of marriage. Also, the lead character in Yejide Kilanko's *Chasing Butterflies* is equally a woman who refuses to accept the cultural praxis of enduring a toxic relationship at home. Instead of mourning and shivering, her husband is surprised that she is ready to quit the marriage. Also, in Ndidi Chiazor-Enenmor's *If They Tell the Story*, Azuka, the central character, is mocked because she is childless. When she finally gives birth to a girl, Nduka, her husband treats her like trash because a female child is equated with childlessness. There is a turn of events when Azuka summons enough courage to leave the toxic marriage, disobeying her mother who wants her to remain silent in the abusive marriage, as expected by society.

This new trend in gender discourse has brought a counternarrative in the presentation of female characters and how women respond to the traditional and cultural demands of patriarchy. This shows a shift in the thematic occupation of most female writers in twenty-first-century Nigerian novels. Thus, it becomes pertinent to research how women traverse patriarchal and cultural demands and make conscious decisions for themselves in the very 'sacred' institution of marriage. This forms the background upon which this article rests, as it examines marriage and demystification of cultural expectations in Kayode Adebisi's *Entangled* with a view to exploring the condition of married women, cultural influence on their lives and how they navigate their way out of patriarchal cultural bondage.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is Clenora Hudson-Weems' Africana womanism contained in her publication entitled *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*. This publication was revised and developed more in her 1997 article entitled "Africana Womanism and the critical need for Africana theory and thought". The term "Africana womanism" was coined in the late 1980s by Hudson-Weems as an alternative to feminism for women of African descent. This theory is premised on African culture and Afrocentrism. It focuses on the experiences, needs, struggles and conditions of African women in Africa, and women of colour. Africana womanism differs from Alice Walker's womanism in terms of its ethos. Walkers' womanism originated out of dissatisfaction over the exclusion of the experiences of African American women in the mainstream feminism. Thus, it became a feminist framework that catered for the peculiar challenges for black women and women of color. This strand is rooted in African American culture, and it has a close link with the mainstream feminism. For instance, it encourages women to love one another, sexually or otherwise. Thus, it serves as a bridge between black women experiences in the African diaspora and the feminist discourse.

However, Hudson-Weems' Africana womanism is a framework that rejects white or mainstream feminism. It provides the method for engaging gender issues affecting both the continental African women and black women in the diaspora, and it is completely rooted in African cultural values. Therefore, Hudson-Weems lists characteristics or ethos of African womanism to include self-naming, self-defining,

familycenteredness, male complementarity, ambition, mothering, nurturing, respect for elders, struggling with males against oppression, role flexibility, black female sisterhood, mothering, among others. All these make the theory holistic, and clearly define African women in terms of their personality, self-esteem, flexibility, roles in society, potential, their ability to adapt comfortably to circumstances while striving to create a better society for all (Jackson, 2022, p. 27).

According to Pero Dagbovie (2007), each aspect of this ethos has a specific interpretation within the context of the African woman experience. Self-naming discusses the self-identification of the African womanist movement as variant and different from feminism or black African feminism. Self-definition on the other hand entails the description of the various challenges of womanhood in the African continent. Africana womanism is different from Black feminism, feminism, and womanism. The theory focuses on the liberation of women from all forms of oppression while still maintaining good relationships with men, and having respect for the culture and traditions of African communities.

It is widely held that the womanist theory emerged mostly as a result of the perceived indifference of the feminist movement towards the concerns of Black women. Early feminist activism around suffrage (first-wave feminism) in the United States largely excluded non-white women, as non-white women were not seen as feminists in similar ways as white women. Therefore, they were not regarded as worthy of inclusion in the feminist discourses. The lingering inability to reconcile with the differences among women, especially the peculiarity of experiences of African women of black descent, came with the emergence of third-wave

feminism which sought to identify with the struggles of African women. Africana Womanism has become one of the theoretical models which has clearly and completely conceptualised African women's experiences, struggles and strengths. Therefore, she provides a model which has the African agency at the core of the theory, and builds the critique of gender issues on how African culture impacts gender discourse.

Hudson-Weems clarifies that Africana womanist activism is a part of a cultural inheritance when she articulates the authentic agenda of her Africana womanist theory which dates to the rich legacy of African womanhood. In this way, she incorporates the experiences of black women outside of the US through her diasporic vision. Consequently, she keeps the Afrocentric perspective as a basic element of unifying Africana theory and action. Hudson-Weems is also against Alice Walker's concept of womanism because it does not truly reflect the sensibilities of African women, irrespective of colour or race. Commenting on this in the foreword to Hudson-Weems *Africana-Melanated Womanism: In It Together*, Jackson notes that the definition of Womanism given by Walker in the introduction to *In Search of our Mothers' Garden* is distorted as it fails to address the complexities of issues affecting women of all colour.

Walker's conception of womanism as "Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender" (p. xii) is seen by Jackson as a "sub-optimized definition where the shortcomings of one construct are foisted on that which was to be expansive, thus, causing this construct to similarly fall short" (p. xii). In other words, the criticism against white-women feminism has not been justified by Walker because her explication on Womanism is not

inclusive of the experiences of African women of the black race and other sub-regions: which makes many proponents of other strands of feminism disassociate their theoretical models from the mainstream feminism.

This paper adopts Hudson-Weems' Africana Womanism as its theoretical framework because the model is more developed, and encompasses the collective struggles of Africana men and women in the continuous fight for total liberation of all peoples. It recognizes the African sensibilities and the efforts of Black women towards the liberation of people, especially women across the world. The critique of Adebisi's novel from the perspective of female emancipation requires a theory of this nature because it does not only focus on the struggle for the liberation of females but also facilitates the analysis of the interplay of gender, marriage, and patriarchal culture in the work of this nature.

Synopsis of the Novel

Adebisi's *Entangled* is a story of love and complexities of human experiences which affects women in African society. The twentythree-chapter novel begins with Kikelomo Femi Cole (Kike), a university student whose parents have separated because of infidelity of the husband. Kike should be on national youth service but for the continuous industrial action (strike) by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). As she returns to school after the strike has been suspended, Ajoke, her mother wants to go with her to meet with Prof. Ola, who has been so helpful to Kike in her studies in Department of Pharmacy. On meeting Prof. Ola, Ajoke realizes that the man is her longtime

friend and contemporary in the University, in whom she had consolation whenever Femi, her boyfriend, broke her heart.

Prof. Ola is very pleased to meet Ajoke and her daughter, Kike. He is now sure of why he has been very fond of Kike, although she is equally very intelligent and studious. Ajoke and Prof. Ola schedule for a date to catch up old sweet memories. However, Ajoke is still very upset with Dr Femi Cole, also referred to as Femi, Dr Femi or Dr Cole, her ex-husband whom she divorces because he has been repeatedly caught cheating on her. She does not understand why it takes him so long to be sending

Kike and Ayotunde's, his children, education support funds. Whenever this happens, Ajoke cannot help but hate him the more. The turn in events comes when Kike and Deji, her NYSC lover, plan to get married and Pastor Olujoba prophesies that Kike's father must pray for her before the wedding day, to avoid calamity. Dr Cole is delighted to pray for his lovely daughter. However, the pastor insists that the prayer has not been offered. It is in this circumstance that Ajoke remembers and wonders why Prof. Ola calls Kike "my daughter". She remembers the day she slept over at Ola's apartment in the university because Femi broke her heart, and Ola made love to her and the condom broke in the process, though she was in her safe period. However, after settling matters with Femi and continuing the relationship, she realizes she is pregnant and will not imagine it is for Ola. Now that her daughter's dignity and life are at stake, she decides to go for a DNA test which shows that Prof. Ola is the biological father to Kike and not Dr Cole. This brings a twist to the love between Kike and Deji Obalanta as Kike is afraid of being rejected by the Obalanta's family because of her questionable paternity.

However, Deji and Kike have the approval of their families to get married beyond all odds.

Women and Demystification of Cultural Expectations

Adebiyi's *Entangled*

Marriage is one of the honorable institutions in African society. A married man is always regarded as responsible and somehow, every woman in the African context is expected to marry and bear children; otherwise, she would be treated as insignificant or an unfortunate member of society, if not married between the age of twenty and thirty. These married women are also expected to behave in a certain way, do or don't do some things as expected by culture. This has placed women at a disadvantaged position, while giving the males an edge over them.

Develda Seanego, Malesela Montle, and Mphoto Mogoboya (2022) posit that "Women's lower status in Africa is a form of biological fate imposed by culture rather than nature, one that limits a woman's identity, surrounds her with taboos, and even limits her physical mobility" (p. 496). In Adebiyi's *Entangled*, Ajoke has proven to be a deviant to such cultural expectations. She confronts Dr Cole, her husband, who cheats on her. This is against the traditional value of African women. Normally, a woman is expected to keep quiet, obey her husband and take care of the children irrespective of the atrocities and abuse committed by the husband. It is this cultural practice that keeps women in perpetual bondage. Collaborating this, Seanego, Montle, and Mogoboya

(2022) observe that “there is not, and has never been, a society in which women do not have a lower status than men, and that this oppression is not supported by that society's religious ideals” (p. 497). Therefore, marginalization continues and extends to the cultural expectation of married women, while the men are free from traditional scrutiny. This makes it clear that most cultural traditions are deliberately practiced to keep the woman in bondage.

Hudson-Weems' Africana womanism encourages women to be strong, and seek self-awareness and assertion while maintaining a cordial relationship with the males. The theory proclaims self-naming and self-definition as seen in the character of Ajoke. Ajoke notices that “her husband, Dr Femi Cole, had changed from a loving and caring family man to an irritable husband and difficult-to-please father” (p. 7). “He had jeopardized a lifetime bliss he had with the woman he'd fallen in love as a teenager for the fleeting moments he'd had with the women he'd extramarital affairs with” (pp. 144-145). Therefore, against the usual cultural silence on injustice and abuse meted to women by some husbands, Ajoke defies the norms that keep married women in bondage, and breaks free from unpleasant marriage. To achieve self-definition, “... she moved out of their home, taking her two children with her” (p. 8). Adebisi clearly shows that even while it seems impossible to disentangle oneself from the dictate of the culture and tradition, it takes courage and determination to resist the culture of oppression and abuse in marriage. Thus, it does not matter what society or tradition says about the woman. What is important, as suggested by the author, is for the woman to be safe before considering what the culture says or what tradition approves of. Ajoke's decision to leave her marriage even when it

is not convenient is symbolic of the strength and courage of the Africana woman who is not tied to the stake of culture.

Chinwe Abara (2012) holds that culture influences how women are treated in a traditional society like Nigeria; therefore, "... all discriminations against women tend to seek justification in cultural norms, beliefs and practices" (p. 4). It is this cultural justification which has held many married women in captive which Ajoke dismantles, as she reconstructs herself as a rational human being who is not led by emotions or traditions. This informs her decision to demystify the cultural imperatives which question or restrict the freedom of woman. Consequently, Ajoke tells Prof. Ola that it is best to seek her physical, emotional, spiritual and mental well-being than hold on to an unrepentant cheating husband. More so, she explains:

Well, I guess we both realised we wanted different things from life. It was late when we realised that, I know. But was better to let go than hold on to unhappiness and misery forever. I tried to make it work. But eventually, I had to preserve my sanity. (p. 23)

Ajoke reflects the Africana woman temper, especially choosing *self* over traditional and cultural values which keep women not only in subservience positions society but also make them the weak, unfortunate members of patriarchal societies. Her refusal to remain in marriage with Dr Cole does not only portray the selfconsciousness which is characteristic of the twenty-first century Nigerian women but also in synch with Hudson-Weems' concept of self-assertion and self-defining in Africana womanist theory. Ajoke's filing for divorce and subsequent leaving of her

cheating husband define her worth. The decision and action reconstruct how patriarchy perceives the Africana woman. It is not surprising that Dr Cole, a patriarchal figure, later regrets his infidelity to his ex-wife when the latter, alongside her children, visits him so he could pray for Kike as directed by Pastor Olujoba.

Furthermore, contrary to the belief by most members of patriarchal societies that a woman cannot excel without a man, Ajoke continues to make progress in her business beyond Dr Cole's imagination. Although she sometimes breaks down when the memories of her love-life with Dr Cole's flash back, "she shrugged off the sad thoughts and continued ..." (p. 11). How society regards single mothers and the cultural implication for female divorcees have equally been dismantled and, this reconstructs the traditional views against divorced women. For instance, society makes it a taboo for a woman to leave her husband. Same society creates fear in the marginalized and abused women such that they become numb to thoughts of liberation. In the text, Prof. Ola comments that "many women hold to marriages that are not working, maybe out of fear of starting all over again" (p. 23). This is the authorial voice highlighting why victims of toxic marriages may choose to endure till death. Beyond this, the author encourages victimized married women to divorce their husbands as a means of recovering their self-worth and gaining a good mental health like Ajoke.

Nonetheless, Africana womanism encourages male complementarity, spirituality and adaptability. In the area of male compatibility, it could be seen in the novel that Ajoke is not completely turned off from men because of the rough romance she had before she divorced her husband. She is seen to be emotionally attached to Prof. Ola with whom she had a night

romance during her university days. It is not surprising that they both have a bear hug when she visits Ola's office to thank him for his kindness to Kike. Kike is suspicious of the hug because her mother has never allowed a male to have such a tight hug with her after the failed marriage of their parents. Again, Ajoke is caught trapped in her emotions when she visits Dr Cole with her children to ask him to pray for Kike.

She sobs and cries on the arms of her ex-husband who gives her comfort by cuddling her such that she wishes they return to their former life as family: "Ajoke stopped crying but made no efforts to leave her ex-husband's embrace. She dabbed her now red eyes and said, "It's okay. I'm sorry for breaking down on you" (p. 145). But she wonders if there could be such possibility for people who divorced to get back as one. Her contemplation is as good as Dr Cole's. Thus, Ajoke is an archetype of the Africana woman who is not completely broken emotionally by the abuse of patriarchy. The Africana woman seems adaptable to any condition she finds herself in, and makes sound and informed decisions about her life and family. Perhaps, this is why Ajoke is not fooled to return to Dr Cole or give in to the sexual advances by Prof. Ola who wants her.

Be that as it may, Ajoke's spirituality is influenced by her desire for Kike, her daughter, not to fall victim of the circumstance that befalls her. This is the reason Ajoke has prayer rituals when she wakes in the morning. She has a certain kind of psalms she chants and prayers she offers when she is going somewhere or if Kike is returning to school. She becomes spiritually mindful such that every step she takes must be confirmed by Pastor Olujoba.

This is why she wants the pastor to pray and foresee the marriage between Deji and Kike. Her concern is that she does not want her daughter to make the mistake she made. However, Adebisi's portrayal of Ajoke's spirituality foregrounds not only the Africana women believe in God but also makes her seem helpless and gullible before a pastor who could as well exploit her ignorance and anxiety. In all, such spirituality of a protective mother foregrounds the love, mothering and nurturing which are essential tenets of Africana womanism.

Beyond the travails of the disappointed and heartbroken Ajoke, she remains strong and focus in her course. In her explanation of the Africana womanism in her keynote address, Hudson-Weems states that genuine sisterhood and strength of character are complementary elements of the Africana woman. According to her:

Genuine sisterhood is an a-sexual relationship between two women/females, who demonstrate a genuine caring for each other. One must remain true to this role by being there for those trying times for her girlfriend(s). Strong connotes both physical and psychological strength, with the realization that the latter far exceeds the former. This is, indeed, needed for making possible a successful people (Keynote Address, p. 9).

It is not surprising that Ajoke is able to break the jinx of culture and traditions to define herself with the genuine love of Grandma, her mother. The turn of events in her life after divorce comes after Dr Cole prays for Kike but Pastor Olujoba says the prayer is not offered, as confirmation has not been given by God. This throws

up some controversies around Kike's paternity. However, Grandma's support and understanding take away Ajoke's shame, confusion and frustration. Her ability to ascertain the paternity of Kike, her daughter, to avoid shame receives a boost from the genuine love, understanding and support Grandma gives her: "Her mother listened to her without interrupting ... grandma simply said, I love you, and I love my granddaughter. Nothing can ever change that" (p. 169). After the DNA test shows that Dr Cole is not Kike's father, Ajoke is able to face her fears and come out to tell society the truth. Therefore, this hitherto taboo has been reconstructed to reengineer society towards a path of enlightenment and freedom for African women. Through Ajoke, the author demonstrates that the Africana woman has evolved and risen above patriarchal prejudices and myths.

The author uses the third-person or omniscient point of view as narrative technique. This allows the novelist to develop characters, dig deep into their minds and portray real human experiences (Udoinwang and Akpan, 2023, p. 345). Through this point of view, the author dissociates self from the voice narrating events and incidents in the text. Adebisi's narrator assumes an omniscient stance, possessing knowledge of multiple characters' thoughts, feelings, and motivations. This narrative perspective allows readers to access the inner worlds of various characters, fostering empathy and understanding. For instance, the narrator seamlessly transits between Ajoke's anxiety about her family's expectations and her struggles with an unpleasant marriage.

While the narrator is omniscient, Adebisi strategically limits the narrative focus to specific characters' perspectives. This technique creates an intimate connection between the reader and the character, allowing for a deeper exploration of their emotions and

conflicts (Akpan and Okon, 2021, p. 7). The limited perspective also enables Adebisi to conceal information, building suspense and tension. Adebisi incorporates free indirect discourse, blurring the lines between narration and character thoughts. This technique provides direct access to characters' inner monologues, enhancing the reader's understanding of their motivations and desires. For example, Kike's inner turmoil about her relationship with Deji is conveyed through a fluid, unmediated narrative voice. Her mother's worry about her paternity question is equally presented in a naturally occurring mood with suspense and anxiety.

Moreover, the third-person narrative enables Adebisi to weave multiple storylines and timelines together seamlessly. The narrator effortlessly shifts between past and present, connecting characters' experiences across different narrative threads. This technique underscores the interconnectedness of the characters' lives and emphasizes the novel's themes of entanglement and relationship. This is readily seen in the contrast and peculiarities between Kike's and Ajoke's relationships. The narrator also maintains an objective tone, refraining from explicit authorial commentary. However, subtle narrative interventions provide insight into the characters' situations, inviting readers to reflect on the complexities of human relationships. The narrator's objectivity also allows Adebisi to critique societal norms and cultural expectations without didacticism.

Adebisi also introduces the main characters, Ajoke and Kike with distinct personalities, backgrounds, and motivations. Ajoke, the protagonist, is portrayed as a young woman and a mother of two children who has divorced her husband because of his infidelity problems. She remains at the center of discourse as she navigates between a good mother who does not want her daughter to make

mistake in marriage, and a good business woman who does not joke with her business. As the narrative progresses, Adebisi skillfully develops his characters through a linear trajectory. For instance, Kike develops from a university student to a graduate who goes for national youth service from where she falls in love with someone who would later become her husband. This growth is evident as she navigates the complexities of relationships, family, and identity. Her initial naivety gives way to increased self-awareness, particularly in her interactions with Ajoke and Dr Cole, her parents. Also, her brother develops from a school boy to a young man who could drive his mother and Kike to church. This means that Adebisi makes use of round characters. They are dynamic and contribute to the intricacies in the novel.

The author employs several techniques to facilitate character development. Dialogue reveals character traits, background, and motivations, while stream-of-consciousness narration provides insight into characters' inner thoughts and emotions. Reflection and introspection allow characters to confront their flaws and weaknesses, demonstrating growth and self-awareness. Interactions between characters expose their strengths, weaknesses, and development, further solidifying the narrative's focus on relationships and identity. From the perspective of diction, the author uses accessible language. This makes for easy interaction between the reader and the text. Also, the choice of language facilitates understanding of the subject matter and themes explored in the novel. The kind of language used at various levels of plot development in the text reflects character consciousness and maturity. The author's choice of words foregrounds commonality of the thematic occupation in the text. The plot structure of the text is organic, enhancing the

understanding of events as they unfold from the beginning of the text to the end. In all, the author's style is unique. Such peculiar stylistic feature enhances the overall understanding of the novel.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to advance the argument that the testing ground for women's efforts at liberation is in marriage. African traditional societies expect so much from women and part of that expectation are childbearing and silence in marriage. By silence, it is meant that the woman must endure everything she faces in the marriage without complaint. The development accounts for why they forced to remain in abusive and toxic unions and relationships with men. However, recent trends in African prose fiction indicate a deconstruction of African cultural values such that most female characters in novels and shorts stories rise above obnoxious and asphyxiating traditions, and embrace self-assertion.

Through a critical literary analysis of the text, the study finds out that Adebisi's work portrays the Africana womanist temper explicated through Ajoke, the central character. When Dr Cole cheats on her with Anita, she divorces him to protest his infidelity to her. This is contrary to the cultural norm which demands a married woman to remain silent and endure whatever happens in her marriage. Additionally, the paper reveals that it evident that the modern woman is strong and courageous in handling her emotional challenges as seen in the characterisation of Ajoke. The myth of silence has been broken and the walls of oppression shaken to the foundation as Ajoke emerges out of toxic marriage.

Therefore, the study concludes that cultural expectations of married women are myths and patriarchal fallacies which the modern woman like Ajoke continuously debunk and set a new interpretation of the social order. Equally, the study submits that Adebisi's novel is a post-modernist text, which questions the primordial perception of women and the cultural orientation of modern African women. The African woman can define herself and space as done by Ajoke in the novel. The veil of deceit and gender biased myths have been torn, thereby demystifying such cultural imperatives in contemporary African societies.

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