

Marital Dispute and Separation in African Patriarchal Setting: A Cultural Appraisal in Flora Nwapa's *Idu*

Akinola Monday Allagbe^{1,*}, Ablam Amouzou², Mamoudou Conde³,
James Nawa Toure¹, and Yoh Odile Niamy¹

ABSTRACT

It is sometimes erroneous to limit the African patriarchal system to one that oppresses and stifles the female gender to the profit of the male gender. On the contrary, evidence in Flora Nwapa's *Idu* shows, through some customs and traditions, that the African patriarchy often forces the male gender to make some compromise for the survival of the household. This study aims to show how, in the case of marital dispute and separation, the African patriarchal system paves the way for fair interaction and mutual understanding, irrespective of gender. The study uses cultural, womanist and radical feminist theories and is based on the assumption that married women enjoy the freedom to make decision when they abide by societal cultural rules and regulations. Findings show that, to prevent family dysfunction in African society, especially in Igbo society, patriarchal rules and regulations compel married men to make concessions. In addition, it is observed that although the African patriarchal system might be marred by shortcomings, Flora Nwapa, through her womanist stance, has revealed its positive aspect, which justifies her fight to educate her female pairs by referring to Igbo cultural values that refute any radicalism in women's relationships with their husbands. Thus, this work has filled a critical gap in the existing body of knowledge by offering an alternative interpretation of African patriarchal systems, moving beyond a purely negative portrayal. It has provided new insights into how traditional customs and values, particularly in Igbo society, can actually empower women in certain marital situations. By analyzing Flora Nwapa's 'Idu', the study contributes a literary perspective to socio-cultural discussions, enriching the understanding of gender dynamics within African contexts.

Submitted: June 01, 2025

Published: August 15, 2025

 10.24018/ejlang.2025.4.4.150

¹Department of English, University of N'Zérékoré, Republic of Guinea.

²Department of English, Julius Nyerere University of Kankan, Republic of Guinea.

³Department of Sociology, University of N'Zérékoré, Republic of Guinea.

*Corresponding Author:
e-mail: akinolas4u@yahoo.fr

Keywords: African patriarchy, marital home, married men, married women.

1. INTRODUCTION

A society without rules and regulations can be worse than a jungle because every individual is free to do whatever he/she likes and goes court free. As Gbaguidi and Allagbe (2018) stipulate "A society or continent without rules, principles, and norms that regulate the conduct of its people is nothing else but a jungle. A jungle is a place where the fittest easily dominate over the weakest" (p. 43). Accordingly, to maintain the rules and regulations in traditional African societies, a system of governance called patriarchy is observed. For instance, in Nigerian cultures and traditions like other African traditional societies, patriarchal system is used to determine customary rules and regulations. Offiong et al. (2021) argue that

Nigeria as a country is made up of several communities with various cultures and traditional practices under a patriarchal system. Patriarchal being the rule and control of the society by men determine all customary laws within the various societies and most of these laws have been discriminating against women (p. 85).



Similarly, several scholars have defined patriarchy in different ways. According to Rich (1976, p. 57) patriarchy is a familial-social, ideological political system in which men by force, direct pressure or through rituals, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education and the division of labour determine what part women shall or shall not play in which the female is everywhere subdued under the male. As one can retain in the above, patriarchy is a system that empowers the male gender in all ramifications to the detriment of the female gender.

Following Rich's position concerning patriarchy, Nkala *et al.* (2018) argue that patriarchy has thrived through the vehicle of culture and tradition, where certain practices that are oppressive towards women in communities cannot be contested or questioned, just because they are culture and tradition (p. 3). In the same vein, Nkala *et al.* (2018) argue that cultural and traditional practices are fascinated, under patriarchal system to degrade and deprive women of rights in taking leadership positions, and owning land and property, among other things. Some patriarchal systems, such as forced marriages and sexual abuse, have promoted barbaric and inhuman practices against women (p. 2).

Similarly, Houndjo and Allagbe (2018) affirm that social imbalances between men and women are the bedrock of injustices women encounter in the world, particularly in African societies. Patriarchy is identified by womanist and feminist scholars as one of the social practices that give men more privilege and maintain women in peripheral roles (p. 18).

Thus, the aforementioned scholars have criticized patriarchy as a system that oppresses, subjugates, and impedes women's freedom in some African patriarchal contexts, but that is not to be taken for granted, as generality for African patriarchal societies. In particular, generalizing the traditional Nigerian patriarchal system as a system that favours men and oppresses women will be aberrant because there are several ethnic groups with different customary laws in Nigeria. As Offiong *et al.* (2021) confirm "Customary laws vary from one ethnic group to another..." (p. 82). If there are variabilities in Nigerian customary laws and ethnicity, there is a possibility to accept that "There is therefore no uniformity of practice in all parts of Nigeria" (Offiong *et al.*, 2021, p. 82). As a result, it stems from the above argument that the patriarchal system is not a bottleneck to the female gender in all ethnic groups in Nigeria, especially in the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria.

In this vein, there are specific cases where female gender have the right to make decision in Nigerian patriarchal society, especially in Igbo patriarchal society which is one of the three popular ethnic groups in Nigeria.

This study aims to show how, in the case of marital dispute and separation, the African patriarchal system paves the way for fair interaction and mutual understanding irrespective of gender. The study uses cultural, womanist and radical feminist theories and is based on the assumption that married women enjoy the freedom to make decisions when they abide by their societal cultural rules and regulations. In the next paragraph, we shed light on the theoretical framework of the study.

1.1. Theoretical Framework

This study draws its underpinnings from cultural, womanist and radical feminist theories. Culture has been defined in various ways by different scholars. According to Mbaebi (2018, p. 105), culture is said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or a social group. It includes not only arts and rights but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of human beings, value systems, traditions, and beliefs. Likewise, it is referred to as the way of life of people that encompasses their beliefs, music, art, and social organization (Anidobe & Uzoalor, 2010, as cited in Oladumiye, 2018, p. 17). In fact, in a milieu where there is no culture or tradition to regulate individuals' conducts and interpersonal relationships, one should not be surprised to encounter disorderliness where people can do whatever they want. Thus, as argued by Gyekye (1996), the most important values in which human rights are rooted are put into practice in traditional African culture. "These include individuality, personal responsibility, the dignity and integrity of every person, the intrinsic value of every person, the consideration of every person [...]" (p. 177). Therefore, culture is all-encompassing. It covers everything that is learned socially and shared within a society. As a shared behaviour it affects the ways of life of all individuals in society. The culture of a group helps them develop a set of rules and procedures from their experiences and defines their attitudes, values and goals (Mbaebi, 2018). Hence, cultural theory aims to analyze and interpret the way in which culture influences and shapes various aspects of human experience, behavior and society (Allagbe *et al.*, 2024, p. 35). Since a society is made up of two categories of individuals, such as males and females, and between them there are sometimes misunderstandings to some extent that it is sometimes argued that some African cultures and traditions are carved to favour the male gender to the detriment of the female gender, we have used womanist and radical feminist theories.

The womanist and radical feminist theories are two different theories used to examine and advocate for the female gender or women's rights and fighting against patriarchal injustice. According to

Phillips (2006), womanism is derived from feminism. It is rooted in or draws on the African-American experience. It manifests itself generally in five overarching characteristics: 1°) it is anti-oppressionist; 2°) it is vernacular; 3°) it is non-ideological; 4°) it is communitarian; and 5°) it is spiritualized (p. 26). Therefore, it ensues from the above that the womanist theory is complementary in that it advocates for a balanced and inclusive society; that is, a society wherein the survival of both male and female individuals is guaranteed. As Allagbe and Alou (2021) confirm “Womanism strives for a meaningful union and survival of women, men, and children” (p. 71).

Contrary to womanism and their inclusive approach which is not only limited to advocating for the female gender but also for the survival of males and children, radical feminism believes in the survival of the female gender alone. In fact, this branch of feminist theory is used to study the portrayal of female characters in the novel. However, there is something particular in radical feminists’ stratagem of advocating for women’s rights which is the use of violence. Ibeku (2015) holds that “[...] Radical feminism [...] uses violence in order to gain freedom” (p. 430). Similarly, Adei (2009, p. 47) points out that “Radical feminism attempts to draw lines between biologically determined behaviour and culturally-determined behaviour.”

In a nutshell, cultural, womanist and radical feminist theories are used to examine marital dispute and separation in the African patriarchal setting of Flora Nwapa’s *Idu*. Next, we address the methodology of the study.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper draws on a qualitative research method to closely examine how married men and women’s issue of marital dispute and separation in the African patriarchal setting of Flora Nwapa’s literary text, *Idu* (1970). Additionally, it draws on cultural, womanist and radical feminist theories. The marital issue addressed in this paper is fictional, and the married men and women are purposively chosen in the text. Although there are three main ethnic groups, Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo, which are nationally recognised in Nigeria with different cultures, our analysis focuses on Igbo culture due to the origin of the female author’s fictional text under study.

Flora Nwapa was born in 1931 and brought up in Oguta in Eastern Nigeria. She attended Arcdeacon Crowther’s Memorial Girl’s School and the CMS Girl’s School in Lagos. She went to the University College, Ibadan where she received an arts degree. In short, through the above brief biography, one can easily deduce that Nwapa is not an outsider to the cultural reality of the Igbo ethnic group. In the next paragraph, we address the subject matter in Nwapa’s novel.

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The results and analysis are supported by textual evidence from Flora Nwapa’s *Idu*, with direct quotes provided for illustration. The claims made, such as the nuanced role of patriarchy in Igbo society, are presented as interpretations derived from the literary analysis. We have consistently linked our interpretations back to the specific events and dialogues within the novel.

Through our analysis, this work fills a critical gap in the existing body of knowledge by offering an alternative interpretation of African patriarchal systems, moving beyond a purely negative portrayal. It provides new insights into how traditional customs and values, particularly in Igbo society, can actually empower women in certain marital situations. By analyzing Flora Nwapa’s *Idu*, the study contributes a literary perspective to socio-cultural discussions, enriching the understanding of gender dynamics within African contexts. In the next paragraph, we draw our literary analysis on the subject matter with proofs from the novel.

3.1. Cultural Appraisal of Marital Dispute and Separation in African Patriarchal Setting in Flora Nwapa’s *Idu*

In traditional African patriarchal societies, especially in the Igbo patriarchal society, wives or married women have the right to decide whether to abandon their husband if there is a problem. But how they proceed and where they go count in traditional African societies, especially in Igbo traditional society. The above reality is examined through the depiction of two different female characters, married in two different marital homes, in Flora Nwapa’s novel titled *Idu*.

The first case of a married woman leaving her husband’s home is Obieze. She is the second wife of a man, called Adiewere. The fact of abandoning her husband is given through the gossiping of two female characters in the novel under study. The female characters are Nwasobi and Uzoechi. They are both married women. It is through these women’s discussions that the reader is informed about Obieze’s leaving her husband. This can be observed in the above excerpt from their interaction “Did

you know that Adiewere's small wife has left him? [...]. Has she left him? I knew that she would not stay. When did she leave? Uzoechi asked" (Nwapa, 1970, p. 65).

The above depiction of Obieze's rupture of her marriage with her husband by Flora Nwapa, through the two elderly married women, shows that divorce is not easily tolerated in traditional African societies, especially in Igbo society.

Truly, it is not always the fault of a married woman to abandon her marital home, and if she does, she must be ready to face criticisms from her pairs in African society. Criticisms are not always negative but positive because there are several problems that can make a wife to abandon her husband. Among these problems are lack of love from her husband, lack of patience, and miscomprehension of marital realities. In fact, the problem of miscomprehension of marital life is identified as one of the reasons why Obieze abandons her husband. The above reason can be deduced from this discussion between Nwasobi and Uzoechi: "It is not entirely her fault. But he petted her at the beginning" said Nwasobi". (Nwapa, 1970, p. 65).

Through the above interaction, Flora Nwapa, as a womanist writer, has tried to criticize some traditional African customs, especially the Igbo custom which hypocritically seems to welcome newly married women and later maltreat them after their integration into their new home. She further denounces that bad attitude through Nwasobi in the following "That is the custom. Isn't it? You pet a newly married wife. Then, after a month or so, you leave her to fend for herself. That's how it is, said Nwasobi" (Nwapa, 1970, pp. 65–66).

At the same time, Flora Nwapa has not only demonstrated her anger against some traditional African customs, especially the Igbo custom that oppressed married women but she has also tried to condemn and educate her pairs on some attitudes to adopt and not to adopt when there are crises in their marital homes.

On the one hand, she has condemned some wives' bad attitudes which tend to violate the customs of their milieu in times of disputes with their spouses by exposing the way Obieze, Adiewere's second wife abandons her husband. In the novel, Obieze leaves her husband's house for another man and she even gets pregnant for the man. Since she has to give the reason for her separation from her husband she has come up with different false accusations of her husband. The false reason she gives for her departure from her husband's home is that her husband is not a man. That is her husband, Adiewere is suffering from erectile dysfunction, which is not true because the first wife of Adiewere is carrying a pregnancy when she has left him. That accusation has become a rumour everywhere in the society to the extent that it is heard by the first wife, Idu in the following excerpt from the novel "'Well, that girl has been saying that Adiewere is not a man' said Idu" (Nwapa, 1970, p. 56).

As a result, the rumour of Obieze almost causes bad blood between her and Idu because Idu threatens to go and quarrel with her immediately after she has put to bed. One can notice that in her discussion with her best friend, Ojiugo "[...] my friend. I [Idu] will not say anything until I have this baby. Then, I shall go to Obieze, the daughter of Ojiuzo Madagbu" (Nwapa, 1970, p. 57).

Through the above comportment of Obieze, Flora Nwapa shows what it means to publicly consider a man sterile in African society and has tried to pour oil on troubled water by condemning Obieze's attitude through Idu's reaction. By so doing, Nwapa, as a womanist writer, proves to her womenfolk that Obieze's attitude is bad and if it is not handled with care, it can destroy the relationship between male gender and female gender and the relationship between married women and their families in African patriarchal societies, especially in the Igbo patriarchal society.

Furthermore, that act of Obieze is radical and it is usually observed with radical feminists because they believe in vengeance. The action of radical feminists, as Nubukpo (1995) argues, is if you kill my dog I'll kill your cat (p. 65). Therefore, Nwapa, as a womanist, has tried to call the attention of married women who abandoned their husbands because of disputes, in the African patriarchal system, especially in the Igbo patriarchal system, not to transform their liberty into liberticidal.

On the other hand, Nwapa has tried to educate her womenfolk through a flashback of what Obieze should have done by recurring to African traditional customs, especially the Igbo custom. In her novel under study, she has wanted to educate her womenfolk through Obieze's mistake or error that it is permissible for married African women to leave their husbands if there are misunderstandings but where they go counts. Indeed, it is recommended that a wife who has a problem with her husband report him to his parents/relatives. Notably, in the novel, Adiewere's parents have passed away and he has a brother named Ishiodu who hardly caters for his own home. This means that he is irresponsible. Since there is no one on earth without a family or relatives, Nwapa has made Idu, the first wife, as a bona fide relative/family of Adiewere. When Obieze has left and rumours start coming to the ears of Idu concerning Adiewere, their husband, she (Idu) utters the following words as his parent, relative or family. "She [Obieze] does not tell me that she was going" said Idu. "And since she left, her mother [Obieze's mother] has not come to ask me why she left" (Nwapa, 1970, p. 56).

Consequently, in the above Idu, the first wife of Adiewere is empowered to have a say in the problem of Obieze, the second wife. By so doing, it is erroneous to say that women, especially married women in general, do not have voice in African patriarchal societies, especially in Igbo patriarchal society.

Another example that confirms Idu's power, as a first wife, is seen when the people of Adiewere come to beg Adiewere to go and beg for the return of Obieze, they rebuke Idu for not preventing the second wife from leaving or urging his husband to go and beg for her return. As one can deduce in the excerpt from the novel

Shortly after Adiewere's second wife left, his people had come to him. It was a surprise to them that he had made no move whatever to beg for his wife's return. *They blamed Idu for it* [Italics ours]. Adiewere told them that he did not do anything to his second wife to warrant her departure, therefore he would not go to beg for her return (Nwapa, 1970, p. 66).

Nwapa has tried to prove to the world that women, especially to the radical feminist world that married women's affairs are catered for in African patriarchal societies, particularly in the Igbo patriarchal society. In addition, the fact that Adiewere's people urge him to go and beg for the return of his second proves that, in African patriarchal societies, especially in the Igbo patriarchal society lies laws, customs and traditions that assure the right of a couple irrespective of their gender.

Despite the fact that Adiewere insists that he will never go and beg for the return of his second wife, the elders' presence, in his compound, have made him understand the following truth about African customs and traditions, particularly the Igbo custom and tradition: "That's not how we behave," the eldest continued. "Our people don't refuse a woman like that. Is she a thief? Did she commit adultery?" (Nwapa, 1970, p. 67).

Thus, divorcing a married woman is a bottleneck for married men in African patriarchal societies, especially in the Igbo society. In spite of the fact that Adiewere complains to his people that his second wife is not a good wife, as in the following, "You didn't find out the facts before you came, my people. My second wife is not a thief. But she left my house for another man. She did not go to her mother, but to her man's friend. Don't you understand?" (Nwapa, 1970, p. 67)

His people still camp on their position. Likewise, he tries to convince them saying his second wife's pregnancy is not his but they kindly explain to him that he is recognised as the father of the baby his wife is carrying, according to their custom, because he has paid for her pride-price. In other words, even though his wife has a child with another man, the baby to be born is his. One can notice that reality in his conversation with the elders in the following "[...] But you married her with your money? Her child is yours... the child to be born is yours. That's the custom of the land" (Nwapa, 1970, p. 67).

By the above depiction of African patriarchal society, especially the Igbo society concerning Adiewere and his people's opposition to divorce with his second wife despite her being impregnated by another man, Flora Nwapa has tried to discard the negative beliefs about the African patriarchal system which is believed to be defensive of the male gender alone. In fact, she has been able to do that by exploring the positive aspects of African culture and traditions, in particular the Igbo culture and traditions. The above approach of Nwapa confirms what Wilentz (1992) says that, "The African women see their culture and traditions in both a positive and negative light" (1992, p. xvii).

In a nutshell, not only has Nwapa used positive and negative sides of African culture and traditions, especially the Igbo culture and traditions concerning female gender issue, particularly the issue of married women in the African patriarchal setting but she has also criticised some radical attitudes of married women which may not have allowed them to have a gainsay in their struggle against injustice towards female gender. She has revealed this through Obieze who abandons her culturally accepted husband for another man. In our analysis, we discover that Nwapa has explored the culture and traditions of her milieu to rescue Obieze in vain because after putting pressure on her legally married husband to go and beg for her return they have not been able to convince her husband because of her bad attitude.

Likewise, after inquiring about the attitude of the man she has run to and the son of whom he is, the elders who have come to defend her case are obliged to accept her husband's position of not willing to go and beg for her return. Immediately, Adiewere informs the elders that the man is the son of Onya Akaebua, the reaction of the elders puts an end to the matter of Obieze and their pressure over her husband, Adiewere. One can notice that in the following extract from the novel

'Don't say it again,' exclaimed the eldest and got up to go. 'It is true the woman is bad woman. What woman would run to a man like that if she herself is good? Our people, let us go. It is enough. I didn't know this. Adiewere, we are going to leave you now. God has done well for you.'

He has saved you from trouble by removing this evil woman from your house. We are going' (Nwapa, 1970, p. 68).

Therefore, the above conclusion from a female writer is pertinent and it is not something to underplay with. Apart from Obieze, Nwapa has depicted another female gender, married named Ogbenyanu who abandons her husband because of disputes. She is the wife of Adiewere's younger brother.

Contrary to Obieze, Ogbenyanu does not radically behave as Obieze. Although Ogbenyanu's quarrel with her husband is caused by the money she borrows her husband and refuses to refund, she does not decide to run to another man's house. She does not try to violate customs or traditions of her milieu. Customarily, it is advisable for a married woman who has a problem with her husband and which they have both tried to solve in vain to go and report the husband to his people/family. The above custom is observed in Ogbenyanu's comportment. She directly goes to her husband's elder brother's house to complain when the problem between her husband and her is getting out of hand. One can observe the above act in Ogbenyanu's discussion with Idu, the wife of her brother-in-law "That is what you [Idu] always say, when I come to you complaining of Ishiodu. You side him,' complained Ogbenyanu" (Nwapa, 1970, p. 70).

In the above, one can notice that Ogbenyanu does not find her brother-in-law at home but his wife, Idu is present to play his role by trying to pour oil on troubled water between Ogbenyanu and her husband through the following conversation with her.

'What's the matter?' Idu asked.
 'We fought,'
 'Who did?'
 'Ogbenyanu kept quiet.'
 'I am talking to you. Who fought?' Idu insisted
 'Ishiodu and I fought.'
 'You and Ishiodu fought. Are you a mad woman?'
 'What does that mean?' Ogbenyanu asked.
 'To fight with your husband' (Nwapa, 1970, p. 70).

Likewise, focusing on the role played here by Idu, one can easily remark that she is empowered to play the role of her husband and also in the tone she uses to ask her brother-in-law's wife questions. In short, Flora Nwapa has made Idu play the role of a female-masculinity. It goes from the above representation to say that gender role is not static in African patriarchal societies, especially in the Igbo patriarchal society.

Since Ogbenyanu does not find solution to her complaint to Idu who represents her husband's people, she threatens to return to her mother's house. The above act of hers is acceptable in African culture and traditions, especially in the Igbo culture and tradition. The narrator stipulates that

Ogbenyanu got up and left Idu, returned to the house and collected all her belongings. She took them and her three children and went to her mother's house, but her mother was not pleased to see her. She, more than anyone else, understood her daughter (Nwapa, 1970, p. 71).

Ogbenyanu has respected African culture and traditions by seeking refuge in her mother's home in term of disputes. However that does not mean that her mother, Nwabata will blindly back up her daughter to the detriment of the marital relationship. In fact, Flora Nwapa has empowered Nwabata, Ogbenyanu's mother with the power to make decisions that are reserved for male gender, especially the father of her daughter. Notably, that role of decision maker is attributed to Ogbenyanu's mother due to the death of Ogbenyanu's father right from her childhood. One can notice that in the conversation with her daughter in the following extract from the novel,

She listened to her daughter as she described the quarrel between her and her husband. When Ogbenyanu had finished, her mother said, 'My daughter, you have done well to leave Ishiodu. I am poor but you know that you will not starve in my house. Your father died long ago, but I can support you. So let your heart be strong (Nwapa, 1970, p. 72).

Flora Nwapa has proved through Nwabata that what a male gender can do, a female gender can do better by the way she has catered for her daughter, Ogbenyanu to the extent that she has got married and she is still ready to shoulder her. Nwabata has served as a mediator in settling the disputes between her daughter and her husband. She has used different tactics to solve her daughter's marital problem.

The first tactic is that she assures her daughter and decides to pay her in-law a visit. In her mission of mediator, she has been diplomatic by not trying to quarrel with her in-law. As one can remark in the following “Her mother [Ogbenyanu’s mother/ Nwabata] took her headtie, tied it quickly and left her daughter to go to Idu. Anamadi was plaiting Idu’s long hair when Nwabata arrived [. . .] ‘Nwabata, welcome, come this way,’ said Idu” (Nwapa, 1970, p. 72).

The second tactic used by Nwabata is to make an arrangement with Idu, the wife of her brother in-law. The arrangement of Nwabata is for Idu and her husband to come and beg for the return of her daughter, Ogbenyanu. The above is shown in this excerpt from the novel “Please will you come, you and Adiewere [sic] Come and beg Ogbenyanu to return. That’s all I am asking. I can’t cope myself. Please,’ Ogbenyanu’s mother pleaded” (Nwapa, 1970, p. 73).

In the above, there are two pertinent realities about African culture and tradition, especially the Igbo culture and tradition regarding marital issue. Firstly, marriage is not an issue of two individuals but between two families. That reality is shown in the way Nwabata is requesting for her in-law’s intervention, Idu and Adiewere to come and beg for the return of her daughter without forcefully considering her position for divorce. Secondly, divorce is not permitted.

In so doing, Flora Nwapa, a womanist writer who believes in the survival of the male and female gender in African patriarchal society, especially in the Igbo patriarchal society has given a just picture of African customs and traditions to solve marital issues. In her depiction, she has empowered Idu to serve as a mediator for marital conflict. In fact, Idu encounters some resistances on the side of her brother in-law, Ishiodu with his menace of killing and divorcing his wife, as observed in the following

What you must do is come and take that woman away. I shall kill her one day. It is Adiewere’s fault. He is the cause of my troubles. I didn’t want to marry Ogbenyanu. She is a poor woman, comes from a very poor family. She has infected me with her poverty. She is not happy with our marriage, so I am going (Nwapa, 1970, p. 75).

But she has tried, with the assistance of her husband, to bring him to his normal senses. One can notice Ishiodu, Ogbenyanu’s husband with Idu and Adiewere in Nwabata’s house to beg for Ogbenyanu’s return in the following

The next day, as agreed, Idu and Adiewere went to Ogbenyanu’s mother. Ishiodu went with them. Few words were said, but Ogbenyanu agreed to return, and the following day she and her three children came back to her matrimonial home. The quarrel was over (Nwapa, 1970, p. 76).

In a nutshell, Flora Nwapa has revealed through the depiction of female and male gender in African patriarchal society, especially in the Igbo patriarchal society that African married women and men encounter some misunderstandings in their matrimonial homes but they follow their customary rules and regulations to solve their problems. They do not need to recur to the radical customs and traditions copied from the Western system to solve their own problems. Therefore, Nwapa opts for complementarity among the male and female gender in her womanist struggle against some cultural injustices that are sometimes experienced by womenfolk in her society. She has tried to invite them to follow African customary and traditional trajectories in solving their marital issues.

4. CONCLUSION

This article has revealed that it is erroneous to limit the African patriarchal system to a system that is implemented to oppress and make female gender voiceless in their relationship with male gender and has shown how the African patriarchal system saves as guiding rules and regulations to mutual interaction of individuals, irrespective of gender in African societies, especially in African marital homes through the study of Flora Nwapa’s *Idu* (1970). Through cultural, womanist and radical feminist theories, it is revealed in Nwapa’s novel that married women have the freedom to make decisions when they abide by societal cultural rules and regulations. When wives abandon their marital homes because of disputes with their husbands, the husbands are expected to go and beg for their return after being submitted to several queries from their parents. This shows that the African patriarchal system imposes on male gender some customs and traditions that have to be respected to the extent that a married man who has paid for his wife’s bride price is expected to accept a pregnancy or a child his spouse mistakenly has for a casanova. In summary, it is true that the African patriarchal system has some drawbacks but Flora Nwapa has revealed its positive aspects, as a womanist writer who believes in the survival of males, females and children in African patriarchal societies, especially in the Igbo society. She has also tried to educate her female pairs through Igbo cultural values imploring married women not to be radical in their decision, abandon their husband or run to another man’s house whenever they have

misunderstandings with their husband. As a solution for disputes among couples, she suggests that African married women should go to their mother's house or to their husband's parents' home if they have problem with their husband. By so doing, number of divorces will be reduced in contemporary African societies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors wish to acknowledge the vision of Mr. Alpha Baca Barry, actual Minister of Higher Education and his collaborators for promoting excellence by renovating the Higher Institutions of Guinea, under the leadership of President Mamadi Doumbouya, Republic of Guinea-Conakry.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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