

Re-Fashioning Femininity and Motherhood in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Zikora: A Short Story"

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie'nin "Zikora: Kısa Bir Öykü" Eserinde
Kadınlık ve Annelik Kavramlarının Yeniden Biçimlendirilmesi

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Abstract

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one of the postcolonial writers who has made her literary contribution by introducing Nigerian culture to her readers in English. This paper aims to present a re-fashioned postcolonial perspective on the understanding of femininity and motherhood in Nigerian culture and to demonstrate how the perception of these concepts has evolved over generations as illustrated by the mother-daughter relationship in Adichie's "Zikora: A Short Story" (2020). "Zikora" deals with various issues directly related to the situation of Nigerian women, such as single motherhood, polygamy, sexism and the preference for male children. The article draws on African feminism to explore womanhood as an identity and to emphasise the role that contact with a foreign culture plays in women's self-determination and development as individuals. In the story, the eponymous character is a single woman whose expected child is not wanted by her father. In the final stages of labour, Zikora reflects on her mother's relationship with her father and how she had to stay in the polygamous marriage just because she did not bear her husband a son. This study also shows that "Zikora: A Short Story" is a boldly written story that draws attention to the many injustices faced by Nigerian women in a patriarchal society.

Keywords: Adichie, African feminism, culture, motherhood, Zikora

Introduction: The Role of Women Writers in African Literature

Although African men started writing fiction earlier than women writers, the image of women they conveyed in their writings was to bear children, raise them and ensure that food was ready for their husbands. This misconception of the role of women in African society was the result of longstanding traditions passed down from their ancestors, and it persisted until African women writers emerged seeking to restore the image of African women that had long been portrayed negatively by African male writers. Indeed, in African novels written by male authors, female characters do not have their own stories or identities to be proud of; instead, they are portrayed as weaker than men and marginalised.¹ In response to the male narrative, one can observe today how concepts such as femininity and motherhood are questioned in postcolonial literature based on the experiences of female authors. This trend became particularly important after the 1960s, when most colonised countries around the world became independent and started their own literature, including women's writing. The pioneers of modern African women's literature include names such as Mabel Dove Danquah (1905–1984), Nadine Gordimer (1923–2014), Mariam Ba (1929–1981), Grace Ogot (1930–2015), Alifa Rifaat (1930–1996), Flora Nwapa (1931–1993), Bessie Head (1937–1986) and many others who have

¹ The female characters in R. E. Obeng's *Eighteenpence* (1943), F. Oyono's *Houseboy* (1956), C. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), and G. Okara's *The Voice* (1964) may serve as illustrative examples.

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contributed significantly to the development of contemporary African literature. In their works, they address women's predicament in terms of cultural issues such as polygamy, female genital mutilation, the preference for male children and the bride price. They emphasise the role of education and believe that the situation of women would change for the better through education.

This study seeks to provide a re-fashioned postcolonial perspective on the understanding of femininity and motherhood in Nigerian culture and to illustrate how perceptions of these concepts have changed over the generations through mother-daughter relationships as described in "Zikora: A Short Story"² (2020) by a third-generation writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The significance of the study is to show how the characterisation of female protagonists has developed in modern African women's literature. The reading of Adichie's story is performed based on African feminism as a vernacular theory to explore womanhood/motherhood as identity and subjectivity and to show how pregnancy is used as a powerful element in the context of the female body and empowerment. Therefore, the study argues that the female characters in the works of third-generation women writers are bolder and more self-confident and express themselves openly, regardless of cultural taboos. In this framework, exposure to foreign culture is also emphasised as one of the important aspects in the formation of the individuality of the female protagonist – Zikora. In fact, resistance to patriarchal behaviour and the idea that women have the right to live their lives as they see fit and to be responsible for their own livelihood and destiny are popular themes among modern African women writers and in this literary milieu, "the female novel, as a protest book against patriarchy, depicts inequalities and injustices done on women by patriarchal traditions, whether Christian, Islamic, or indigenous" (Stanley 2021, p. 61).

In post-independence African literature, the concept of motherhood was interpreted as one of the core components of female identity, and the belief that femininity is fully expressed after the birth of a child was one of the central ideas in male literature. Indeed, motherhood is one of the pillars for the fulfilment of an African woman, which is also reflected in Nigerian proverbs such as "Mother is gold" and "Mother is supreme" (Amari & Maoui 2020, p. 232). Due to the idolisation of motherhood, the cultural constructions of infertility and male-child preference show how burdensome this experience is for African women. With the advent of women's writing in African literature, womanhood/motherhood began to be treated first-hand and became one of the recurring themes in the works of most first and second-generation female writers.³ Apart from this, these issues were explored in parallel with the African socio-political context of colonisation, decolonisation and modernisation respectively. To illustrate, in her ironically titled novel *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), second-generation Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta, known for her depiction of the hardships of African women, uses the theme of childlessness, polygamy and male-child preference to show how traditional values are being corrupted against the backdrop of Nigeria's ongoing transition to modernisation, or more specifically, Westernisation. Marie Umeh (1980) explains that Emecheta "breaks the prevalent portraiture in African writing" and adds that "it must have been difficult to draw provocative images of African motherhood against the already existing literary models, especially on such a sensitive subject" (p. 199). Nevertheless, the themes of femininity and motherhood described in women's literature were interpreted differently by their African counterparts. This is

² Henceforth, the full name of Adichie's "Zikora: A Short Story" will be cited as "Zikora."

³ For some of these works, see Flora Nwapa's *Idu* (1970), Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1979), Z. Alkali's *The Stillborn* (1984), and B. Emecheta's *Kehinde* (1994).

explained by the extent to which these women writers focused on marriage, motherhood and family matters. This went so far that some critics and writers referred to their works as “domestic literature” or, more accurately, “motherhood literature” (Nnaemeka 1994, p. 150). For example, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie articulated her concern and irritation at the overused theme of motherhood and infertility and remarked that “the theme of childlessness has been explored by African female writers so much that one would wish they would seek other themes” (as cited in Nnaemeka 1994, p. 151). One way or another, African female authors have not sought to portray female characters as idealistic; rather, they are attempting to authenticate women's experiences, defy the unfavourable and derogatory images of female characters painted by male authors, and recognize the strength and intellect of women. They give voice to gender-based issues within both domestic and global socio-cultural contexts.

In this sense, African feminism can be seen as an appropriate platform to address the needs and expectations of African women living within and outside the continent. African feminism critically analyses contemporary issues such as gender and sexuality. Africa is not a monolithic continent, therefore, some of the feminisms tend to be tailored to specific groups of women to reflect the experiences of African women encompassing many different streams, such as Motherism, Femalism and African Womanism. Since African feminism is not only concerned with the situation of African women on the continent but is also relevant to the problems of black women outside the African continent, it is remarkable that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie addresses such universal issues as racism, class, abuse and violence. Adichie also engages in gender studies in her works based on the cultural practices of the Igbo community, where women are seen as powerless and therefore neglected. The author seeks to improve the representation of Nigerian women by presenting strong and self-reliant female characters in her novels and short stories. Adichie's women are mostly educated and influenced by the Western way of life. In her famous essay “We Should All Be Feminists” (2014), the author explains that the most bitter opponents of women's liberation believe that feminism is a social movement focused on reversing gender roles and degrading men. However, according to Adichie (2014), a feminist is a man or woman who admits that there is a problem with gender as it is today, and we need to fix it and make it better (p. 17). The author boldly demands that we should all call ourselves feminists to encourage men to talk to women about sexuality, appearance, roles and success and to support women's freedom (Adichie 2014).

Re-fashioning Femininity and Motherhood in “Zikora: A Short Story”

The revolutionary trend in literature, driven by third-generation African women writers who broke the taboo boundaries set by their culture, paved the way for the emergence of bolder writing, particularly expressed in the works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. As the descendant of first- and second-generation African writers, Adichie has contributed to both African and world literature by enhancing the character of her female protagonists and suggesting solutions to women's problems by elaborating on them. In “Zikora,” the author mostly adopts “an auto-diegetic narrative voice through her protagonist” (Kelechi 2021, p. 82). Zikora, a Nigerian-born and American-educated woman, faces the difficulties of being pregnant and abandoned by the father of her unborn child, the distance from her family living in Nigeria, and the lack of friends and relatives in the US where she lives.

“Zikora” (2020) is a first-person narrative that begins with the eponymous character's labour pains in a hospital in America. From the very beginning of the story, Zikora, despite her mother's comment in the native Igbo language “That's how labor is,” vividly describes the technical and physical experiences of childbearing (Adichie 2020, p. 5). She finds it

difficult to explain the intensity of the pain which “was something like pain and different from pain. It sat like fire in my back, spreading to my thighs, squeezing and crushing my insides, pulling downward, spiraling. It felt like the Old Testament. A plague” (Adichie 2020, p. 5). At first glance, the cool-headed conduct of Zikora’s mother can be explained by her upbringing. In traditional Igbo society, “motherhood marks a woman’s attainment of the peak of the rites of passage into womanhood” thus “giv[ing] her a voice in the committee of women” and earning her “respect among the men in the traditional community” (Okereke 1994, p. 19). On an emotional level, however, Zikora’s mother is reacting out of her experience of having suffered three miscarriages and subsequently being abandoned by her husband simply because she was unable to have male children. This explains her pessimistic and common commentary, summed up in the laconic “that’s how labor is,” reflecting the condition of most African women who do not bear male children (Adichie 2020, p. 5).

It is noteworthy that for a long time, essentialist views of motherhood have been a prominent feature of public discourse, yet they are being substituted with more flexible and varied perspectives that “accommodate the diversity of women’s and mothers’ experiences” (Jilek 2020, p. 4). In this respect, Adichie is considered one of the few African women writers whose work addresses the idea of single parenthood and thus the predicament of women struggling with the consequences of this situation. On the one hand, Zikora has no financial worries, which means that she can single-handedly raise her future child, just as it has been her unilateral decision to have a child. In the story, it is also pointed out that Zikora, a lawyer like her boyfriend, Kwame, earns more than he does. The author presents a Western way of life that is not concerned with the question of who the breadwinner of the family is: the man or the woman. On the other hand, however, Zikora is afraid that she will not be psychologically able to cope with single parenthood. Adichie brings up one of the essential composites of African feminism – women’s solidarity with the arrival of Zikora’s mother, who supports her daughter at the time when she needs her most.

Zikora’s mother arrives from Nigeria just before the delivery to provide her daughter with assistance during the initial phases of labour, childbirth and childcare. Although Zikora believes that she does not need her mother’s help, as she feels sufficiently prepared both mentally and physically for this new chapter of her life, the protracted labour pains accompanied by the psychological stress of pregnancy and her feelings about her boyfriend’s departure make her accept the fact that she needs the support of her immediate family and friends. Intrinsically, women’s solidarity is embedded in the institution of African feminism, and as such, motherhood/mothering is seen as an indispensable part of this ideology. In the traditional African sense, motherhood is “about children” and procreation, which “women can only exercise from the outside” as they are “reduced to a permanent state of dependence and estrangement” in their husband’s home (Ngcobo 1988, pp. 141, 143). Contrary to patriarchal motherhood, African women’s writing subtly explores issues directly related to the psychological condition of an African woman and an African mother. For example, identifying her own ideals of a pan-African spirituality, the Afro-American poet Lucille Clifton, (1936–2010) explores how “a hysterectomy affects notions of sexuality, womanhood, and motherhood” showing that “womanhood has multiple meanings that do not entirely depend upon the capacity to reproduce or the genteel sexual norms that govern procreation,” thereby “moving beyond biological conceptions of motherhood to the multiple emotional connections” (Mitchell & Taylor 2009, p. 183).

In “Zikora,” Adichie extensively addresses the practices and beliefs she grew up with in her culture. From Zikora’s narrative perspective and in the flashbacks from her childhood, it

becomes clear that her parents' marriage turns into a polygamous arrangement since Zikora's mother cannot bear her husband a son. At this point, the author alternates the focus from Zikora's experiences to those of her mother. Her mother's efforts to conceive a son cost her "three miscarriages, and an emergency hysterectomy," after which Zikora's father "decides to marry again because he needs to have sons," and her mother agrees since "it is those sons who will inherit the family property" (Adichie 2020, p. 23). Emecheta (1988) explains that in most African countries, the birth of a son increases a woman's power in the household and therefore a pregnant woman will not object if others pray for her to give birth to a healthy, happy boy—a real man-child—because deep down she also wants a man-child (p. 179). It is obvious that most African communities value and treat male children more highly than female children, usually for social and cultural reasons.

In "Zikora," Adichie also illustrates the cultural aspect of male-child preference. Ironically, Zikora, who is a lawyer by profession, gives a speech to her Western colleagues in which she discusses the traditional property rights of the Igbo, one of the most enduring cultural ideals in Nigerian communities having always been the favouring of male children. In cultures where such a distinction between the sexes is the norm, male descendants are seen as the "sustainers of lineage, holders of central, and often, most important positions of authority and inheritors of immovable properties" (Nwokocha 2017, p. 219). Discussing the "agony of motherhood" in the Nigerian cultural context, Nwokocha (2017) explains that women are psychologically affected by not being able to give birth to the desired child for various reasons and calls this disorder a "male-child syndrome" (pp. 221, 230). Similarly, in Adichie's story, the "agony of motherhood" of not being able to bear a son makes Zikora's mother go through a similar ordeal imposed upon her by societal norms of a patriarchal culture. Zikora thinks back to the time when her father and mother were still married, when she was eight years old and when her father moved out of the family home to live with his second wife. For Zikora, who grew up in the Nigerian culture in which a child "belongs to many mothers," "not just one's biological one," her mother's situation is not strange at all (Emecheta 1988, pp. 173-174). She describes how her father, even living in a polygamous marriage, showed her mother respect. For her mother's current situation, Zikora refers to the status of the senior wife as a cultural prerogative for a woman who is a man's first wife and who is entitled to "a starched deference, a string of ashen rituals," who always sits next to her husband at weddings and ceremonies and whose photograph appears "above the label of 'wife'" (Adichie 2020, p. 24). Zikora explains that this is a traditional form of marriage in her culture and that the title of the senior wife is the "reward" for her mother's acquiescence as a "civil," "proper" and "restrained" woman, which, in its turn, is "a thing that comes with a crown" (Adichie 2020, p. 24).

According to Osigwe (2021), Adichie's narrative technique in the story is autodiegetic, describing Zikora's emotional and physical anguish during pregnancy and childbirth, which makes her an unreliable narrator (p. 84). Nonetheless, as she goes on to explain, Adichie is one of the few writers to adopt a new perspective by rewriting the "narrative of motherhood and childbirth in African women's writing in her own terms" (Osigwe 2021, p. 84). Indeed, Adichie's autodiegetic narrative technique allows her to realistically portray what a woman *actually* experiences at the birthing table, rather than simply using exaggerated language that glorifies motherhood:

Now here he was wrapped like a tidy sausage roll and placed on my chest. He was warm and so very small. I held him with stiff hands. I was suspended in a place of no feeling, waiting to feel. I could not separate this moment from the stories of this moment—years of stories and films and books about this scene, mother and child,

mother meeting child, child in mother's arms. I knew how I was supposed to feel, but I did not know how I felt. It was not transcendental. (Adichie 2020, p. 17)

For Zikora the state of pregnancy becomes a transformative period in which she is exposed not only to physiological but also psychological changes. She begins to reflect on the painful experiences of other African women, including that of her cousin Mmiliaku, whose tactless husband engages in intimate relations with his wife even when she is asleep and impregnates her every six months. On the other hand, Zikora is suddenly concerned about maternal mortality in America wondering if it is “just higher for Black women” (Adichie 2020, p. 6). With the approaching labour pains and frequent contractions, Zikora begins to hear “the hysteria in [her own] laughter” and sees the image of a “pregnant and dead woman on a hospital floor” (Adichie 2020, pp. 5-6). Suddenly, her doctor becomes “a monstrous man pontificating opaquely about things he would never experience” (Adichie 2020, p. 6). Despite the constant efforts of her doctor and her mother to convince her that these feelings are normal, Zikora does not believe that the people around her understand what she is going through as the pain becomes unbearable. In the story, Adichie (2020) skilfully employs techniques of the short story genre to describe what a woman experiences during childbirth. Such a precise and explicit description, along with the medical vocabulary necessary to explain the birth process, characterises the author as a pioneer among her colleagues. By describing the first-hand experiences of a woman giving birth, she addresses the taboo subjects that are not allowed to be discussed due to the cultural appropriation of her society. Adichie's choice of words to describe the condition of a pregnant woman is not only shocking but also contradicts the phenomenon that glorifies the concept of motherhood in her culture. Faced with the reality of pregnancy, Zikora feels as if “a clutch of emotions paralyzed [her], bleeding into each other, disgust-horror-fear-panic” and that “something was growing inside [her], alien, uninvited, and it felt like an infestation” (Adichie 2020, p. 21).

Zikora's treatment of her body in a liberated manner is also noteworthy. Her single-handed decision to give birth to a child, while the child's father suggests an abortion, is an empowering element that emphasizes the agency of the female protagonist illustrated by her self-control over her body, which aims to decide and act for herself: “Was he recoiling because I had made this decision already? If he was going to have a child, of course he should have a say, but how much of a say, since the body was mine, since in creating a child, Nature demanded so much of the woman and so little of the man” (Adichie 2020, p. 14). Indeed, in the literary productions of third-generation African women writers, the process of decolonisation is particularly based on the patriarchal control of the female body and results from the cultural context in which women are heavily dependent on the decisions of men. Nevertheless, these works promise self-emancipation, even if the female body is portrayed as a victim of institutional and patriarchal power that imposes sexist norms and predetermined roles stemming from cultural prejudices.⁴ The fact that Zikora impregnates herself with a child without her boyfriend's consent and later refuses to terminate the pregnancy shows that a modern African woman not only asserts her female agency by taking responsibility for her own body but is also willing to take the risk of becoming a single parent to her child/children. In contrast to Kwame, Zikora is emancipated and self-determined, although she also grew up in a similar environment to her boyfriend from Ghana. She defies the prejudices of her culture and decides to keep the baby outside of marriage. Adichie's groundbreaking writing style is evident in her approach to portraying

⁴ For some of these works, see Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols* (2001), Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), and Sade Adeniran's *Imagine This* (2007).

the concept of single motherhood as the antithesis of married women with children in traditional Nigerian society. In doing so, the author breaks with the literary tradition of defining African women through two concepts: marriage and motherhood. In this sense, the influence of Western education and thus the contact with another culture is also remarkable. Zikora lives in the USA and benefits equally from all the rights to which women are entitled in Western society. She is therefore outside the borders of the native dominion and accordingly, its norms and regulations do not apply to her.

On the other hand, women who live within the boundaries of indigenous patriarchy are subject to what Katrak (2006) defines as “internalized exile,” in which the female body “feels disconnected from itself, as though it does not belong to it and has no agency” (p. 2). According to Katrak (2006), female exile, which consists in the fact that a woman is not allowed to claim ownership of her body, can be expressed both literally and metaphorically in two ways: internal and external exile. In this context, it is possible to examine Zikora’s mother in terms of Katrak’s categorization. Like any Nigerian woman who adheres to the traditions of her society, Zikora’s mother normalises for herself the status of a “senior wife” in a polygamous marriage instead of divorcing her husband. In the case of Zikora’s mother, the internal exile of the female body from patriarchy is expressed through silent protest. No doubt Zikora’s mother was offended by her husband, and also daughter, who had failed to support her mother at a difficult time in her life. Adichie (2020) employs flashbacks to convey to the reader the ordeal of Zikora’s mother, which aptly describes what it means to be a woman in Nigerian culture. The plight of Zikora’s mother underpins Hewett’s argument that the problem of silence and voicelessness in Adichie’s work can be traced back to cultural reasons through which a woman can suffer both from silence and from not being heard (2005, p. 85). Zikora’s mother represents the generation that met “each rush of pain with a mute grinding of teeth,” enduring and embracing this “pain with pride” (Adichie 2020, p. 7).

Zikora’s flashbacks make it clear that Zikora has had a complex relationship with her mother in her childhood, especially after her father has left home. At first, she is assured that it is her mother’s cold and aggressive behaviour that has driven her father out of the family. Hence, she speaks to her for weeks “only in sullen monosyllables,” believing that “she could have better handled it” (Adichie 2020, p. 25). Only when Zikora starts to experience the physical and psychological agony of becoming a mother herself, does she realize her mother’s predicament. As the story progresses, the entire picture of her parents’ married life is presented through Zikora’s flashbacks from a genuine womanist perspective. Her father abandons the family after fathering a son with his second wife on the following pretext: “[My son] needs to see me every morning when he wakes up. Boys can so easily go wrong, girls don’t go wrong” (Adichie 2020, p. 25). Zikora expresses solidarity with her mother as she becomes a single mother, remembering how she failed at it as a teenager. In the difficult times of her marriage, Zikora’s mother needs her daughter’s support whereupon Zikora leaves her alone with the pain of her father’s betrayal (Adichie 2020, p. 27). This episode also justifies the mother’s inner banishment, which is reflected in her silent protest and her subsequent cold attitude towards her daughter:

How do some memories insist on themselves? I remembered the night of Auntie Nwanneka’s birthday party. A big party ... My mother asked me not to go. It was shortly after my father had moved out of our house, the strain between my parents still ripe and raw. Stay and stand by me,” my mother said, and I scoffed silently, thinking she was being dramatic. Chill out, it’s not as if this is a blood feud. When I came home... my mother was in the living room reading ... I greeted [her], and she said nothing. She looked up from her book, as though to show she had heard me,

and then turned away. A recurring image: my mother turning away, retreating, closing windows on herself. (Adichie 2020, pp. 27-8)

Zikora realises that she has made an irrevocable mistake. This epiphanic realisation takes place at the time when Zikora herself is about to become a mother. Reflecting on her mother's situation, she admits that "it was [Zikora's] father who destroyed, and it was [her] mother [Zikora] blamed for the ruins left behind" (Adichie 2020, p. 25). Another eye-opening life experience for Zikora is the fact that she has been abandoned by the father of her child, which puts her in almost the same situation as her mother. Zikora initially believes that her Ghanaian friend Kwame is a suitable husband for her. Although Kwame has never been to Ghana, he grew up in a similar culture to Zikora, where the extended family is the norm. In some cases, Zikora feels relieved that Kwame understands her better than those who have grown up with Western values. To illustrate, she admits that she has to explain the concept of 'second wife' in her culture to her American friends, whereas with Kwame there is no need for such an explanation as "he had grown up familiar with his father's family, with relatives from a different place" (Adichie 2020, pp. 22-23). However, she is frustrated by Kwame's reaction when she tells him the news of her pregnancy:

He said, "We're at different places in our lives." He said, "I'll take care of everything," in a voice that belonged to someone else, in words that he had heard somewhere else. Take care of everything. How absurd; we were both lawyers, and I earned a little more than he did. (Adichie 2020, p. 11)

Zikora understands very well why she has not been able to communicate properly with Kwame. She knows that Kwame is bothered by the fact that she earns more than him and that he has grown up with values that condone polygamy, male favouritism and the preference for male children. For Kwame, the common view in his culture that the man is the main breadwinner, and the woman is the homemaker is therefore self-evident. It follows that although both Zikora and Kwame appear to be Westernised, it is Zikora who has internalised the values of Western culture, which reaffirms Kwame's argument that "[they] are at different places in [their] lives" (Adichie 2020, p. 11). Remarkably, Adichie equips her protagonist with the profession of a lawyer, thanks to which Zikora becomes aware of her rights as a woman. As a single mother, Zikora is determined to raise her child and not allow the negative aspects of her culture to infringe on her private realm:

My son. Those words: my son. He was my son. He was mine. I had given birth to him and I was responsible for him and already he knew me, moving his face blindly at my breasts. He was mine, and his tiny translucent arms lay precious against my skin. He was mine. My son. I would die for him. (Adichie 2020, p. 20)

Conclusion

In her works, Chimamanda Adichie questions the role of culture in women's self-realisation. The author believes that the function of culture is to ensure "the preservation and continuity of a people" and that "culture does not make people" but "people make culture" (Adichie 2014, p. 17). With "Zikora" (2020), Adichie illustrates how far the modern African woman of today has come. Compared to the works of first and second-generation female writers, "Zikora" is characterised by insight into the process of pregnancy and childbearing. By highlighting the nuances of childbearing, especially labour and birth, the author brings a re-fashioned viewpoint on femininity and motherhood to African literature, offering different approaches and opening up new perspectives on women's writing. Adichie's eponymous character Zikora becomes the embodiment of the voices of African women,

especially of those who are reluctant to speak up due to restrictive patriarchal traditions and must instead choose to silently protest against the oppressive forces of their society.

What increasingly distinguishes “Zikora” from previous literary works by African women writers is its bold straightforwardness about the challenges women face, expressed with clarity and brevity through the effective use of language. Apart from this, Zikora and her mother have different feminine concerns. On the one hand, Zikora draws most of her strength from her mother’s generation, who had to submit to traditions that suppressed the role of women in society. It is also remarkable that although Zikora’s mother, as an educated and financially independent woman, is not in a position to openly rebel against the male-dominated norms of her culture, she makes sure that her daughter goes abroad to receive a Western education and settles down. By supporting her daughter both financially and psychologically, Zikora’s mother is trying to make up for unfulfilled dreams and ambitions that she had in her youth but was unable to realise due to the circumstances. Unlike her mother, Zikora is simultaneously exposed to Western and indigenous culture, which allows her, as a representative of the new generation of African women, to make no concessions to freedom and female agency, as her mother’s generation once did. For Zikora’s generation, cultural practices such as polygamy and favouring male children are unacceptable. Ironically, Zikora gives birth to a boy at the end of the story. In doing so, Adichie contrasts the possibility of raising a ‘man’ by an African woman with Western values with the reality of raising a ‘man’ in African societies and thus implicitly provides an outlook on the feasibility of gender equality in African societies. Ultimately, the normalisation of the mother-daughter relationship takes place when Zikora herself becomes a mother, which has a vernacular meaning rooted in the context of femininity and motherhood and emphasizes the individuality of the African woman.

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