

The pangs of a single mother in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Zikora"

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Abstract

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is sprawling the epic journey and emotional storms battered by women in her short story "Zikora". The Nigerian-American author Adichie does not stick to the details of pregnancy and labour alone but she also an emphasis on single motherhood. This short story deals with the plight of women, maternal mortality, single motherhood, polygamy, societal expectations, and misinformation about the female body, pregnancy, and sexuality. Zikora, the protagonist is a 39-year-old successful lawyer whose boyfriend Kwame abandons her when he finds out she is pregnant. Zikora's mother comes to help her through labour, and she reflects upon their relationship. Zikora is a thought-provoking story. It explores the unique challenges black mothers face in the U.S., as well as the difficulty of being a working mother.

Keywords: pregnancy, maternal mortality, sexuality, black mother, single motherhood.

INTRODUCTION

Literature embodies the self and plays a pivotal role in exposing the different sides of life, providing emphasis on the darker side of life which is filled with hatred, miseries, and darkness concerning the individual in particular and the society at large. In Nigerian literature, motherhood, parenting and childbearing are not new themes. It is one of the recurring themes in the majority of first- and second-generation Nigerian women's writing, as seen in Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* (1974), Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1981), and Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and *One Is Enough* (1981), as well as *The Joys of Motherhood* by Flora Nwapa, Mariama Bâ, and Mariama Bâ (1979).

Some critics have referred to the works of these female writers as "domestic literature" or merely "maternity writing" due to their intense concentration on marriage, maternity and motherhood, and family issues (Nnaemeka 1994; Ogun-dipe-Leslie 1987). Regardless of this trend, these authors also emphasize the struggles of being a single parent, like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie does in her short story titled *Zikora*, in addition to the subtleties of childrearing (2020). This brief story illustrates the fresh starts or new directions in African women's writing that the visionary Obioma Nnaemeka envisions for the new and developing writers of the era, as she states the Nigerian women writer "must reinscribe herself in history on her terms" (1994, 154). Moreover, to add emphasis on the importance of name as naming an individual is the first step in ascertaining their identity, the word "Zikora" in Igbo culture is equivalent to "assemble the throng" (Obinna 2020).

In the short narrative, *Zikora* Adichie immerses the readers towards a woman's path to childbirth while presenting them with vignettes from relevant daily life. The narrative also introduces the readers to the *Zikora*, a Nigerian attorney working in Washington, D.C., who is coping with her motherhood as well as the breakup of her partnership, bearing the outcome of the relationship in the form of the child in her womb. Her mother also appears to help *Zikora* prepare for motherhood, though in a passive way serves as an important emotional support when she needed the most.

The 37-year-old attorney's boyfriend deserts her after she tells him that she is pregnant. *Zikora's* independent mother, who comes to see her after the birth, however, helps make her appear like a lonely young girl once more. She starts to think back on her mother's difficult history filled with the miseries of being a single mother herself and her strive for integrity as she is astounded by how quickly her ideal existence has fallen apart. *Zikora* starts to understand her mother's intentions for her, her

unborn child, and the elf who appears to be her only companion for the moment as she gets ready to become a mother. Zikora as a tale though was penned with passion also reveals the hardships endured by a single mother, in particular with the women part of the Igbo culture.

The protagonist Zikora serves as the narrator for Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's narrative. At East Memorial Hospital, Zikora is in labor when the narrative commences. Despite doing extensive research on the subject of bearing a child, reading widely, and bracing herself for the anguish of labour, she explains at the beginning of the story, It wasn't only pain, either. It was both similar to and distinct from pain. It sat like fire in my back, extending to my thighs, pressing against my internal organs and spiraling downwards. The experiences of past experiences of the mother who pain had impelled a sense of anguish within her inner self had led her to Zikora indulge in the same issue again and again without getting a proper answer or even better support from the people around when she needed them the most. Moreover, Zikora also learns about the distinction between psychological preparation and knowledge not just because of her protracted labor, but also because of the people around her regarding the same.

Zikora is aware of the suffering that her younger cousin Mmiliaku suffered through at the mercy of Emmanuel's callous behaviour. He would rather or even prefer to have sex with her in her sleep. Similar to how her relative Mmiliaku experienced from daycare, Zikora is now concerned about issues that she had previously ignored, such the maternal fatality rate throughout the USA. Moreover, Adichie in the short story also illustrates many interpersonal complications experienced by Zikora in the short story. Zikora has a basketball player infatuation from college who won't commit to her since he is only attracted to her physical beauty. Secondly, Mmiliaku's "impoverished boyfriend" leaves her beloved to someone who is "older and wealthy" (10) Because of the fact that Mmiliaku's parents are unwilling to wait for her fiance to establish himself, she turns to Emmanuel. Thirdly, Zikora's father weds a second woman notwithstanding his devotion to and affection for his first wife in order to just have sons who would maintain the male race and also carry on his heritage. Ultimately, Zikora and Kwame, who is younger than her and makes less money than she does, are shown to have an ostensibly flawless love relationship. Zikora is shocked by their breakup since there was nothing in Kwame's personality and approach toward her. Consequently, the conception is what causes his abandonment. Nevertheless, he decides to see the pregnancy as a "miscommunication" (11) and departs from Zikora as a result.

Adichie suggests that perhaps the assistance and encouragement of others, especially close friends, can help with the physiological, cognitive, and adjustment-related changes that are associated with becoming a mother. Zikora is a successful, independently wealthy woman who doesn't seem to concern herself with making acquaintances because she thinks she can manage situations and circumstances on her own. However, she turns to routine phone calls with her cousin Mmiliaku as a result of her melancholy following Kwame's departure. As Zikora states: "I called Mmiliaku again sobbing, saying I was scared to do it alone, I was scared to be alone" (p. 16). Zikora also learns to respect compassion and consideration through her mother's concern for her throughout her protracted labour and also for her grandson following his circumcision when he experiences fits:

My son began to cry. He was fed [...] and yet he cried. He cried and cried.

"Some babies just cry," my mother said calmly.

What am I supposed to do with him? I thought to myself. It had only been a few days

[...].

"I don't know what I'll do when you leave," I said.

"My visa is a long stay," she said. "I'm not going anywhere yet."

"Thank you, Mummy," I said, and I began to cry. (27)

Zikora's emotions as a nursing new parent resonate strongly because they are so genuine. Zikora's mother and herself had a chilly connection that warms when she gives birth. Zikora grows closer to her mother as a result of the delivery of her baby since only then does she recognise her as the mistreated woman who gave up her status for a younger woman. The readers are left with much to think about and consider regarding their relationships with friends and family after reading this short novella that is jam-packed with sensations.

Single mothers are at the sad receiving end in many cultures and societies. When the entire responsibility along with taking care of the entire household, at times maybe as a result of accidental loss and at times due to negligence and emotional turmoil between the parents and as a different family types are referred to by the term "single parent." A parent may be raising their children independently, with little or no help from another parent. The experience of having parents who are both still alive but not living together is very different from this. These circumstances can range from an absent parent who is not at all active in parental duties and responsibilities to parents who have literally no responsibility and no role to play in their children's lives to parents who are involved partially in the lives of their children and/or in planning for the needs of children. A child's growth is effected by parental separation. The protagonist in this narrative is one of the liberational and socially challenged children of unmarried parents.

The sociocultural practise of centering and placing women's identities as such in their ability to care and endure for the care and integrity of the children and their babies are also considered to be part of motherhood. Zikora's single mother was in town for the delivery of her daughter Zikora, which gave her a nostalgic feeling for her younger years. After the birth of her own child, Zikora starts to comprehend more vividly what her mother wants for her, her new kid, and herself as she turns to think about her mother's single mother who was in town for the delivery while she was in the hospital. Adichie also manages in depicting new motherhood in "Zikora," as well as the responsibilities that come with it and the mother-child bond. The new work is distinctive in that it allows the reader to experience the emotions and thoughts of the central protagonist.

The mother of Zikora embodies traditional motherhood and womanhood and comprehends the relationship between cultural and natural rules. She knows how to get around them. In order to accept polygamy, she combines her acceptance of her inability to conceive a male child with the legal requirements of her community. In "Zikora," reproduction involves two genders, although only one is required to experience labour and delivery pains. It concludes with a scene in which males have abdicated their obligations and the women have taken up and are burdened by both the masculine responsibilities and their duties. Adichie addresses the third generation of writers in this tale who aren't afraid to broach sensitive subjects.

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