Exploring Female Self-Awareness and Self-Realization in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*

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Abstract

Human personality is prone to change and might undergo development or deterioration. Self- focus is one of the means to achieve personality improvement. The present study aims to shed light on the interrelation and inter-effect among certain self-processes with a particular focus on self- awareness. Furthermore, it aims to inspect how self-realization is reached. The previously mentioned processes are explored in the personality of the protagonist in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*. This exploration is conducted to provide an in-depth vision and understanding of both the corpus as a whole and the personage's psyche on her journey towards attaining her goals within her society too.The findings reveal that Nwapa makes use of speech and actions as some of the tools to portray her protagonist's self-awareness and self-realization. They also reveal how *Efuru* experiences self-awareness, and how that is demonstrated via her actions, attitude, and perception of matters.

Keywords: *Efuru*, female, personality, self-awareness, self-realization/ actualization.

Résumé

La personnalité humaine a tendance à changer et peut endurer un développement ou une détérioration. La concentration sur soi est l'un des moyens d'améliorer la personnalité. La présente étude vise à mettre en lumière l'interrelation et l'inter-effet entre certains processus de soi avec un accent particulier sur la conscience de soi. De plus, il vise à inspecter comment l'autoréalisation est atteinte. Les processus mentionnés précédemment sont explorés dans la personnalité du protagoniste dans *Efuru* de Flora Nwapa. Cette exploration est menée pour fournir une vision et une compréhension approfondies du corpus dans son ensemble et de la psyché du personnage dans son cheminement vers la réalisation de ses objectifs au sein de sa société également. Les résultats révèlent que Nwapa utilise la parole et les actions parmi d'autres outils pour illustrer la conscience de soi et l'autoréalisation de son protagoniste. Ils révèlent également comment Efuru expérimente la conscience de soi et comment cela est démontré à travers ses actions, son attitude et sa perception des choses.

Mots-clés : L'autoréalisation, *Efuru*, femelle, la conscience de soi, la personnalité.
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1. INTRODUCTION

For individuals to reach their goal in attaining change or improvement in their lives, they first have to be aware of their status, and then they need to consider their past and put plans for their future. In the literary work *Efuru*, the female protagonist _who carries the novel's name_ experiences constant devaluation and stigmatization within her society. However, she reaches self-realization by the end.

The current paper is concerned with psychologically tracking down how the protagonist has reacted to the status she has been enduring and how she finally proves herself and fulfills self-realization. By doing so, we aim to provide an

elaborate fathoming of the literary work in hand through grasping Flora Nwapa's representation of the female psyche.

Applying psychological theories like self-awareness and self-realization/actualization would engender more credible insights into the novel and the socio-psychological issues it treats. This paper attempts to answer the following queries; how does Nwapa present concepts of self-awareness and self-realization in the novel as well as how does *Efuru* show self-awareness?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Objective Self-Awareness

One among several self-theories is Objective Self-Awareness. According to Duval and Wicklund (1972), it refers to the capacity of directing conscious attention towards the self and is generated through reflections on the self. "Objective" indicates that the person's attention is directed inward towards the self, and they are hence the "object" of their own conscious focus. Self-awareness represents one of the four levels of consciousness; while consciousness is focusing one's attention on the environment and processing external stimuli; self awareness is focusing one's attention on the self and processing self-information (Morin, 2011).

The inclusion of self-processes is necessary when it comes to the study of personality. Self-processes have a direct effect and control over personality. They are dynamic and intricately interconnected which results in dynamism and constant change in personality (Morin & Racy, 2021). Trapnell and Campball (1999) regarded self-awareness as an umbrella term for any kind of self-focused attention. Self-awareness comprises two other sub-processes; self-reflection and

self-rumination. The former is healthy self-directed attention that is usually linked with positive results and openness to experiences. Whereas the latter is an unhealthy and uncontrollable sort of self-directed attention leading the person into self-absorption and it is therefore associated with negative outcomes psychological dysfunctions (Cited in Morin, 2011).

Self-reflection in its turn has two different methods; either through self-distancing or self-immersion. Self-distancing on the one hand is when the self observes itself with an outer objective eye; self-immersion on the contrary takes place when the self observes itself with an inclusive involving eye. Moreover, self-distancing includes autobiography (thinking and recalling one's past experiences using episodic memory) and prospection (imagining and planning for one's future using episodic future thinking). The relationship between autobiography and prospection is crucial in reaching self-regulation (goal attaining); in other words, constructing future thoughts depends on personal experience (Cited in Morin & Racy, 2021).

At this juncture, it becomes notable that self-awareness is quite effective and necessary in goal accomplishing. Nonetheless, in the case of self-immersion, the latter would lead to self-rumination and therefore the individual falls into the trap of anxious and uncontrollable self-focus. There are two forms of self-rumination:

> Negative private self-focus, which triggers thoughts about one's standards and is associated with depression when one falls short on some of these standards; or (2) negative public self-focus, which evokes thoughts about others' opinion of oneself (Theory-of-Mind) and leads to increased social anxiety. (qt. in Morin & Racy, 2021, p. 376)

Thus, it is worth emphasizing that for an individual to change (self-regulate), they first need to be aware of what to change (self-awareness) (Bandura, 1991).

Self-regulation represents "a complex long-term process involving the attainment of numerous goals and sub-goals, such as successfully graduating from university" (Morin, 2017, p. 6). It is constituted of several self-control instances. Self-control is "a single short-term effort at resisting temptation or delaying gratification, like studying instead of watching a movie." (Morin, 2017, p. 6).

Another aspect that plays an important role in self-regulation is self-talk (talking to one's self loudly or silently (Hardy, 2006); this activity facilitates self-regulation and is initiated by self-awareness. It is present in all self-processes which renders it the glue that joins those self-processes together (Morin & Racy, 2021). Equivalents of this term are: phonological loop, self-statements, internal dialog, inner speaking, verbal thought, and self-directed, subvocal, covert, acommunicative speech, and inner speech. The letter refers specifically to the silent talk to the self and it is present in self-awareness and self-reflection (Hurlburt, Heavey, & Kelsey, 2013).

The diagram below summarizes the correlation among the main self-processes which have been defined previously. The positive processes that eventually lead to self-regulation are distinguished from the other negative processes with the use of colors.
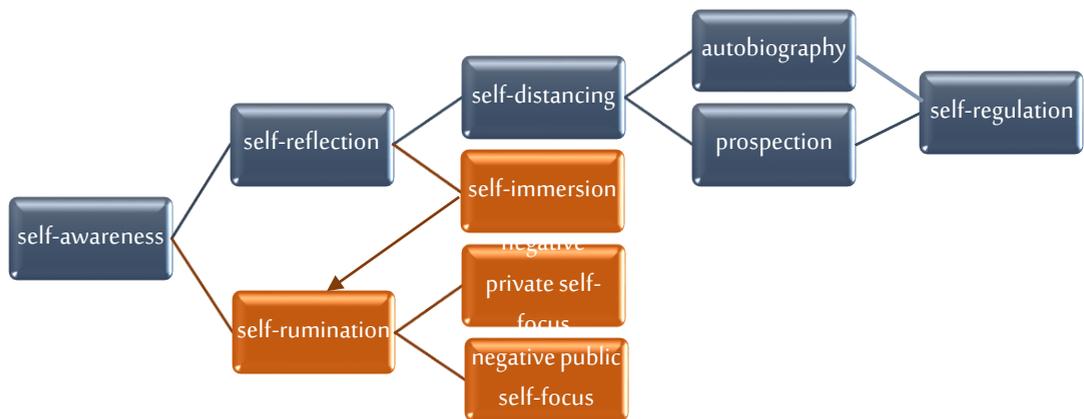
Figure 1. Relations between Self-Awareness and other Self-Processes

(Adapted from Morin & Racy, 2021, p. 368)

All in all, Objective self-awareness is an intricate process that is comprised of many inter-effected sub-processes. Self-awareness is a crucial step in self-development because individuals obviously cannot self-improve if they are not aware of what to change.

2.2 Self-Realization

Carl Gustav Jung believes in the constant possibility and ability to self-develop, according to him man is always in pursuit of what advances them towards being perfect and complete (Cited in O'byrne & Angers, 1972). In the same token, Karen Horney posited that man naturally seeks self-realization; the real self is the inner force of growth that is within all human beings yet unique to each one of them. Put differently, man is by nature likely to self-develop and fulfill his potentialities (See Horney, 1950).

Self-realization is then a complex process that can be approached from several perspectives. It was first introduced by Jung and has become later on a very important concept in Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow's systems (Rusu, 2019). Self-actualization is an equivalent term that was initially coined by the neurologist Kurt Goldstein; he "claimed that every organism had a master motive or a unique innate drive, and the realization of this inner drive is what he termed self-actualization" (Cited in D'Souza, 2018, p. 2). Maslow further explored the term at hand; he defines it as the realization or fulfillment of the individual's talents and potentialities. This definition remains the basic one despite all other variant contextual definitions (D'Souza, 2018).

The view of the self-actualization concept that we intend to follow henceforth is Maslow's view who advanced his hierarchy of needs theory in 1943, where he first suggested a hierarchy encompassing a set of five human needs. They are namely; physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. Afterwards, some modifications were brought into the hierarchy and the self-realization needs section itself was substituted by the following needs; cognitive needs, aesthetic needs, self-actualization needs, and self-transcendence needs. At this stage, the needs were divided into deficiency or lower needs (D needs) and being or higher needs (B needs). The form and the table below represent the former and the latter hierarchy of needs (Cited in D'Souza, Adams, & Fuss, 2015).
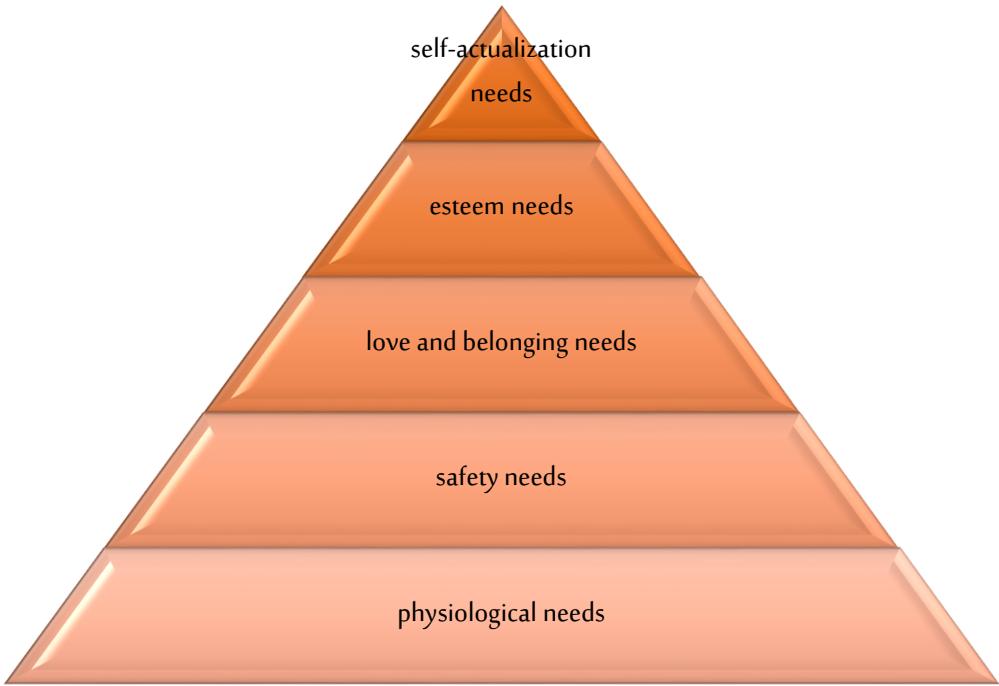
Figure 2. Maslow's Initial Pyramid of Needs (Adapted from D'Souza 2018, p. 2)

The pyramid above was not originally introduced by Maslow himself but was rather a business invention, yet it has been broadly taken as a representation of his theory of motivation in the different fields ever since (Cited in Sosteric & Ratkovic, 2020).

The following table clearly classifies the D needs and the B needs with their definitions.

Table 1. Maslow's Modified Hierarchy of Needs

	The need	Its definition
D needs	Physiological needs	The need for rudimentary life essentials (food, water, shelter, clothing)
	Safety needs	The need for safety (personal safety, financial security, health)

	Love and belonging needs	The need for friendship, family, romantic partner, intimacy, and affiliation with a club or organization (social needs).
	Esteem needs	include needs for recognition, attention, fame, competence, mastery, and self-confidence
B needs	Cognitive needs	Generally, they refer to understanding the universe through reason, thought, and learning; to pursue knowledge, meaning, morality, and truth.
	Aesthetic needs	They include the need for beauty, art, order, and symmetry.
	Self-actualization need	It refers to realizing one's full potential through introspection, contemplation, and self- discovery.
	Self-transcendence need	It is the ultimate need; the need to go beyond one's self. It can be manifested through spirituality, deep meditation, peak experiences, flow, social activism, or using one's fully realized potential to render the world a better place.

Note 1: Adapted from D'Souza et al. (2015, p. 29)

Maslow notes that it is natural as well as necessary for the individual to first satisfy their deficiency needs before attempting to self-actualize; i.e. they should not pursuit self- actualization at the expense of fulfilling their deficiency needs; otherwise, they risk suffering depression or frustration (Cited in D'Souza, 2018). The satisfaction of needs is regarded as impossible to Maslow; needs are supposed to be relatively well satisfied; relatively well satisfied differs and depends on the empirical investigation as well as factors such as personal predilections and

cultural stipulations (Cited in Sosteric & Ratkovic, 2020). According to Maslow, self-actualizing people:

> (...) tend to pursue knowledge, meaningfulness, justice, truth, science, beauty, goodness, and wholeness. They are not slaves to their biological needs and their ego and are free to explore themselves and the universe (...) self-actualizing people spent significant amounts of time in understanding themselves and figuring out their true innate potential. Once they figured this drive, they typically concentrated on using their potential on tasks outside of themselves thus rendering the world a better place. (Cited in D'Souza, 2018, p. 3)

The Self-actualization view is supported by many other prominent psychological life span theories; they all agree on the path of growth idea where mentally healthy humans go through certain stages during their lifetime. Human beings then self-actualize through time thanks to the growth motivation path where they move farther from self-interest towards social interest; their attempt to satisfy self-actualization need is hence bound to age and it augments in adulthood (D'Souza, 2016).

Nevertheless, some individuals do not self-actualize despite having their lower needs satisfied, in this case, one wonders what the explanation might be. Maslow suggests a few possible causes including genetics, low socioeconomic status, anxieties and fears, social marginalization, and poor education. Meta-pathology is the term which he coined to refer to the state of failing to attain self-actualization in late adulthood (Cited in D'Souza, 2018).

Another inquiry that comes to one's mind is whether self-actualization can be measured and how. Personal Orientation Inventory and the Short Index of Self-Actualization are two measures known the most. They determine the self-

actualization level based on the person's beliefs, views, and values. However, more recent methods rely on measuring self-actualization based on the person's actions rather than beliefs (D'Souza, 2018).

2.3 Previous Studies

Only a few studies have been conducted in the context of the current subject, i.e. a psychological approach to postcolonial literature, namely self-awareness and self-realization in postcolonial feminist writing. Jorgensen's thesis (2018) tackles identity creation and self-realization in colonial and postcolonial African literature by comparing three different corpora of three different female authors including Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*. Jorgensen highlights the possibility of identity formation after oppression as well as the extreme forms that are often necessitated by identity creation in an oppressive kind of life.

It is for instance depicted in *Efuru* how the protagonist transcends and reaches independence —although difficultly- through defiance of patriarchal expectations and exigent social norms that confine the female merely to marriage and motherhood. Awareness —in this case- plays an important role as it spares the individual the adherence to social roles and would eventually guide them to self-realization (Jorgensen, 2018).   Jorgensen (2018) also pointed that the three discussed novels denote the necessity for:

> balance between transcendence over various forms of oppression (colonialism and patriarchy) and balanced chosen social connection. This balance begins as toggling between these extreme states after the probationary phase and necessary madness that leads to re-birth as characters begin identity negotiation. The negotiation continues until a

cohesive identity is realized as a middle path represented in less extreme

forms of living. (p. 2)

Additionally, the Foucauldian thought in Madness and Civilization is considered applicable to the corpora in hand as the latter portrays how women may enter into a phase of temporary hysteria or madness due to their delicate nature when they are exposed to challenges beyond their capacity. Nonetheless, it is this temporary madness that —normally- leads to change and re-birth of identity; the crisis or the difficult experience represents an opportunity for personal growth that can help to transcend the temporal madness to eventually reach a stronger identity (Jorgensen, 2018).

Gbaguidi (2018), on the other hand, deals in his paper with the theory of man's supremacy over women in the postcolonial female narrative, in addition to women empowerment through education in Flora Nwapa's *Women are Different*. He mentions how women's status has changed in postcolonial Africa vis-a-vis her position in pre-colonial Africa; women at first had a voice and were not oppressed by culture, however, they lost their rights afterwards and have become even dehumanized.

He also focuses on how African female writing came in opposition to male writing which used to limit the female to a certain ideal model. Female literature came to rectify the woman's representation by picturing her the way she is supposed to be and the way she can be; i.e. an individual that does not exist only to serve within the boundaries of the house as a wife and a child bearer, but rather an active effective person within her community. Hence, Nwapa empowers her females by giving them the lead and by projecting them as strong, independent and defiant to submit to the other gender. Nwapa resorts to a middle path where

she shows the need for collaboration between the two genders where each of them completes the other rather than attempting to prevail over them.

Ikonne's article is another study conducted on two of Flora Nwapa's early novels; *Efuru* and *Idu*. It addresses the matter of society and women's quest for selfhood. Ikonne also regards the socio-economic antifeminism of the patriarchy as the main reason behind women's frustration to attain their self-assertion.

He pinpoints how some women become the enemies of themselves as a result of internalized disesteem and the patriarchal system that views the female as a mere property of her husband. Nwapa's works are a rebel against the established norms where she pictures the husbands Adizua and Gilbert as irresponsible while Efuru is independent and a decision maker who moves forward with her life and does not depend on her husbands. Nwapa delivers the concept of the independent unmarried childless beautiful woman by making referring to the lady of the lake Uhamiri who is wealthy and whole on her own.

3. Analysis

Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* obviously demonstrates women's self-awareness and self-realization. The protagonist _Efuru_ is a self-focused person; she has her thoughts and attention directed towards herself. She also initiates self-talk to reflect upon her issues, to identify the problem, and to think of a solution for it. Efuru does not stand passively in front of the situation her marriage has got into, she rather reflects upon it and tries to improve her status. When she confronts the fact that her marriage is holding her back and that her husband is not worthy, she decides to end that marriage and resumes her life.

After a few years of marriage, Efuru notices that her first husband Adizua starts to act strangely and changes his attitude towards her; he would come home late every night and not eat the food she prepares as usual. Efuru wonders one night and asks herself: "'What is wrong?' she would ask herself. 'How have I offended my husband? What am I going to do to win him back. Has he found another woman?'" (Nwapa, 1966, p. 58).

Because of her husband's indifference, Efuru spends another night feeling very sorrowful; she goes back in memory and thinks about her past starting from her mother's death to the day she gave birth to her daughter. Efuru goes deep in thought in an attempt to apprehend her husband's behavior and she eventually assumes that it is all because he has found another woman; a fact which is confirmed later on. As a consequence, Efuru stops being sad and she firmly decides that she will quit loving Adizua. She even sets her mind on leaving Adizua as soon as he comes back home and taking her daughter with her. After searching for Adizua for a whole month in different towns, she finally packs her baggage and returns to her father's house. She tells her mother in law that she cannot wait for Adizua and she cannot allow herself to wait until he comes back and asks her to leave, especially since his behavior shows that he is no longer interested in her.

Additionally, individuals are in constant pursuit of perfection and wholeness; they constantly attempt to fulfill their potentials and prove themselves. This is because they have a drive or a need, i.e. a need for self-realization. Nonetheless, any human being has basic needs to fulfill _at least relatively_ before seeking to achieve higher needs; having a certain need in the hierarchy of needs fulfilled paves the way for the next one to be sought for or fulfilled as well. Efuru follows the growth motivation path where she moves away from self-interest towards social interest. She has her basic physiological needs from food and shelter

attained. Besides, she enjoys personal and financial security; Efuru is self reliant and is a good trader as described by one of Gilbert's friends: "Her hands make money. Anything she touches is money. If she begins to sell pepper in the market, she will make money out of it. If in salt, money will flow in". (Nwapa, 1966, p. 156).

Efuru's family, friends, and acquaintances admire her and appreciate the character she has which makes her a widely recognized personage on the one hand and builds her self-confidence on the other hand. Not to mention that Efuru belongs to a respectful family and is the beloved daughter of Nwashike Ogene who is described by one of the farmers as:

> (...) the mighty man of valour. Ogene who, single handed, fought against the Aros when they came to molest us (...) His yams were the fattest in the whole town. And what is more, no man has ever seen his back on the ground. (Nwapa, 1966, p. 7)

When all the previous needs are achieved, the way is paved for the B needs to be satisfied as well. Efuru is a person who explores herself and quests for understanding the universe through reason. She seeks to realize her full potentials as she plans for her future and effectively tries to take decisions when it comes to her life. When her first marriage collapses, and as soon as she gets desperate of Adizua's return, she _without hesitation_ leaves her first husband's house with the intention of moving on with her life. When she meets Gilbert, a very pleasant and responsible man, she gives their relationship a chance and marries him. She does her best to make their marriage successful, however, when Gilbert changes after coming back from jail, and when he accuses her of adultery as she falls severely sick, Efuru abandons him and returns to her father's house.

Furthermore, Efuru is socially active as she is not interested in herself only, but she even takes part in helping others and improving their lives in numerous instances and manners. She lends money to Ogea's parents because they are in need. She helps the old woman Nnona to go to the hospital to receive a suitable check and treatment for the leg she has long been suffering from. She simply transcends herself and participates in rendering the world a better place by her good deeds and by being kind to others. At the end of the novel when Efuru dreams of the woman of the lake who is generous, beautiful, wealthy, and happy although she is childless; in other words, the woman of the lake is still a goddess even though she has no children. She is perfect and complete on her own and those are characteristics that Efuru and Uhamiri have in common.

4. Conclusion

The current study aimed to explore self- awareness in Flora Nwapa's Efuru by casting light on the interrelation and inter-effect among particular self-processes. Additionally, it aimed to inspect how the female protagonist _Efuru_ reaches self-realization. After analyzing, it is deduced that Efuru's self-awareness was crucial to enable her to reach self-realization; i.e. to make plans and improve her status as an individual. Moreover, thanks to the growth motivation path, Efuru ascends Maslow's hierarchy of needs where she moves from D needs to B needs allowing her to eventually reach self-transcendence.

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