

## Female Voice In Namibian Poetry: Analysis Of Selected Poems By Christi N. Warner

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### Abstract

Namibia, a country in the South Western region of the African continent has a complex history of political upheaval, exploitative colonial rule, cultural crisis, and loss of indigenous practices. This country has undergone swift transitions to stabilize a teetering administration. As such, these events greatly impact the life and perspectives of the people. Thereby, the objective of this paper is to understand Namibia's socio-political context through a critical analysis of Namibian literature. This analysis is based on selected poems by Namibian poet Christi N. Warner from her poetry anthology *Ice Cream and Politics*. This paper aims to locate the Female Voice and look at the world through the lens of a female centric viewpoint. The ten selected poems are scrutinized based on the frameworks of Gender Theories by Butler and Beauvoir. Images used in the poems as well as their language are thoroughly studied to understand the thematic hints and underlying meaning of the narrative. Racial discourse is also explored in these poems along with various theoretical perspectives regarding visual pleasure and objectification.

Keywords: Female Voice, Namibian Literature, Objectification, Gender Theory, Racial Discrimination, Oppression.

### **Introduction**

Namibia, a country in the continent of Africa, used to be a German Colony during the twentieth century, gaining Independence on 21st of March, 1990. It is situated towards the north west of South Africa covering a land mass of 8,00,000 square kilometers. The country shares its borders with Angola, Botswana and Zambia. The country has a diverse geography as some of its areas are desert areas while some are greener and has rich wildlife. Also rich in natural resources, Namibia is an important producer of copper, diamond, gold, lead and uranium. The country has a long history of development and inhabitation by various groups like – San, Namas, Damaras, Hereros, Ovambos, East Caprivians, Oorlams, Kavangos, Rehoboth Basters, Kaokovelders, Tswanas and finally European settlers, mostly German people. The first European that landed in Namibia in 1484 was a Portuguese explorer named Diogo Cao. In 1885, the European powers divided Africa among themselves known as the “Scramble of Africa”. The first German military fort was constructed at Windhoek in 1890. Germany then got the access to Zambezi and other East African territories. In the same year the Britishers apportioned the Caprivi Strip to the Germans. Namibia was selected as its “protectorate” due to influence exerted by a tobacco merchant from Bremen, named Franz Luderitz and Germany established itself in Africa by 1884. Herero lands were occupied by the Germans in 1888, aiming to carve out a settler colony in South West Africa. Though the Herero people initially sought to accept the treaties of protection; the Nama people displayed resistance and German soldiers orchestrated an attack on them in 1890.

The African resistance under the local leaders become the central theme in the beginning of twentieth century. In 1904, the Herero rose in revolt but met defeat in the hands of the German troops. The German Commander-in-Chief General Lothar von Trotha ordered the extermination of the entire Herero community and thus they fled into northern Ovamboland and Botswana. The guerrilla war in 1905 was met with fierce resistance by the Nama lead by Jacob Marengo for two years after the death of Witbooi. The war of resistance ended with the death of Marengo in 1907. Most of the surviving Nama and Herero people were imprisoned or sent to labour camps and the remaining were forced to give up their land and coerced to work for the development of the colony. In 1914 during the

World War-I, South Africa agreed to participate in an assault on the German South West Africa which was opposed by some Afrikaner Nationalists led by Generals J. B. M. Hertzog and C. R. de Wet as it would end the friendly relationship between the colonial territories. However, the Union Government wanted to incorporate the territory due to military necessity and economic reasons. These conflicting motives and contrasting ideologies finally paved the way to the South African Rebellion. The British Navy in September 1914, captured the Luderitz Bay putting a stop to the German supplies. General Louis Botha in May 1915, then named the first Prime Minister of the then known Union of South Africa ordered a total of 40,000 South African troops into the German territory. The German forces sounded retreat, finally surrendering on 9<sup>th</sup> of July, 1915. Thus ended the 31 years long colonial rule of Germany in Namibia.

General J. C. Smuts who was a member of British War Cabinet proposed the idea of a League of Nations Mandate system for the colonies that were occupied by Germany. However, it met stiff opposition in the Peace Conference. It was then in 1920 that General Smuts and General Botha reached an agreement that the administration of South West Africa would be controlled under a Class C Mandate given to South Africa by the League of Nations. The indigenous people were, however, deprived of their rights and the white settlers were given more privilege as they were the only people allowed to vote in the Legislative Assembly. Till 1948, the highest authority was that of the Administrator of the territory and as such there was a resident commissioner and a magistrate who looked after the administration of the local inhabitants. However, when the Union administration began to involve itself in the oppression and the suppression of the Bondelswarts in 1921, with Jacobus Chistian, their leader too being arrested without proper cause; criticism and disagreements against the administration began to rise. Abraham Morris, then led the Bondelswarts resistance in 1922 and decided to move along with his supporters to the Union. The group mobilized the people and brought peace by handing over his gun. Despite this, the violent riots continued that resulted in the deaths of many women and children.

With the establishment of the United Nations (UN) in 1945, efforts were made to persuade the submission of

South Africa to the mandate regarding UN trusteeship. UNGA opposed the petition that proposed transferring the South West African territory into Union of Africa. With the controversies associated with election procedure, the place saw a series of riots. South Africa's actions and administration was challenged in the International Court of Justice by the UN. Apartheid was enforced in South West Africa by South Africa. The latter defended their actions by declaring that they did not intend to abandon its policies and did not agree to the independence of South West Africa. Finally, the rising political consciousness among the people in South West Africa led to the formation of Black political parties like the SWANU (South West African National Union) in 1962. OPO (Ovamboland People's Organization) evolved and was renamed as SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organization). In 1960, SWAPO trained a guerrilla army. They also received much sympathy and attention of the Black African States and through them managed to grab the attention of the UN. This had a huge impact as UNSC soon banned the sale of arms to South Africa. Then the first military action by SWAPO was conducted in 1966 in Ovamboland. It brought changes to the development of South Africa. In 1967, the UN again tried to gain control over the administration of the territory but failed. As such the UN finally recognized SWAPO as the only lawful representative of the Namibian people.

The pressure of the UN increased after the fall of Portuguese rule in Mozambique. An attempt was made to prevent a communist-backed SWAPO government in Namibia from coming to power and as such the policy of partition was changed to match the standards given by the UN. From 1976, the unilateral independence of Namibia started with the assembly elections and many political chaos and economic depression continued in the country for a long time. The country has also seen the exploitation of the natural resources as well as of the people of the territory. The joint Commission of 1988 saw the participation of South Africa, SWAPO, UN and the Western Powers after which a peace initiative for Namibia was adopted that led to the Independence of Namibia in 1990.

### **Themes and Influences in Namibian Literature: An Overview**

Namibia has an interesting tapestry of literature which has both the colonial imprints as well as the footprints of resistance and liberation. The literature of the country includes “colonial literature that in German, Afrikaans and English reflects various metropolitan concerns” (Chapman, 20). There is also a distinctive sense of German consciousness which emphasizes on the ideal of the German national bourgeoisie with women “cast in the role of the keepers of the culture in their home-making enterprise...while men tame the frontier with the clinical brutality shown in real life by German colonial authorities” (Chapman, 21). Beyond this literature was also influenced by the classical past on songs, fables and stories of Bushmen and Khoi. Apart from many such influences, Namibian literature, according to Haarhoff, “proclaimed a nascent nationalism in its exploration of the related themes of exile, home, resistance and liberation” (Chapman, 22). Poetry specifically became a sense of resistance in the act of its expression in itself, rather than any sort of form or technique. An element of “Namibianness” (Chapman, 26) pervaded in the literature in a manner that the history of the country, the cultural and socio-political scenario crafted much of the nuances in literature. Interestingly in writings of women writers, it can also be observed that, “family becomes the nation writ small, in a microcosmic allegory of power and policy” (Andrade, 47). The association of women with nationalism and the socio-political scenario is wholly entwined with another series of consequences that also continued after Namibian Independence.

For SWAPO, National liberation goals included the defeat of South African apartheid rule, as well as securing the territory of Namibia as a nation for the Namibian people. However, this did not include liberation from gender-based biases and discriminations that a section of the society still had to undergo. The struggle for cultural autonomy for the women did not end there and gender as well as sexuality became the, “social constructs in need of decolonization” (Currier, 444). The postcolonial Namibian state has since then evolved a great deal in mediating the interaction of the global and the local in many ways. Yet as Becker states, gender equality acts as a “decisive ploy in the discursive construction of modernity and tradition, the other side of the coin” (31). This easily puts women and their struggle for equality in the periphery resulting in

consequences such that they have to begin their struggle anew. Virginia Woolf in her work *A Room of One's Own* had commented that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (Woolf, 6). This holds true in every aspect of life as a woman can reach her potential only if she is given a platform to thrive on and hone her talents. If a woman is bereft of opportunity to gain skills and express her own opinions, it is not just an injustice to an individual but to the entire idea of liberty. Oppression is often considered a multidimensional and hegemonic complexity carved out from social beliefs of superiority and privilege. Catering to these ideas, often act as a barrier, preventing women from even exercising their basic rights. Thereby it is of great importance that the voice of the women is given a platform to find its own identity. As such, this paper aims to understand gender discrimination and study the situation of women in Namibia through a critical analysis of literature of the country. For this purpose, a total of 10 poems by Namibian poet Christi N. Warner are taken for analysis.

#### **Theoretical Framework: Gender and its Representation**

Simone de Beauvoir, in her prominent work, *The Second Sex* had clearly stated that a woman is not born but rather created. From birth itself the entire world conspires to fill in the pre-requisites and requirements for donning the ideal role of being a woman such that the concept of being one becomes an idea of understanding that is not born, but rather forcefully imposed on through mental conditioning. These invisible lines and checkpoints are so deeply intertwined into the psyche of a girl child that when she falls into the pattern; she does not even realize the harm this internalization of external norms does to her own individuality. The entire case ends up being stretched taut between the extremes of the pink and the blue; thereby demarcating a clear divide in treatment as well as identity.

Women empowerment is an encompassing social process that penetrates a wide range of social domains. As such the need is to understand the social and mental conditioning that acts as a great barrier to the goals of the same. According to Alexander and Welzel, "social practices, including the practices that subordinate women to men, persist because they are inspired by subjective beliefs in their legitimacy and desirability" (365). Hence such

conditioning succeeds because it is a belief-related process which formulates a strong ideology to defend its stand. To justify this stand, various roles are imposed to resemble a certain checklist of parameters that define a woman. In her work "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", Judith Butler, states that, "gender is an 'act' broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority" (528). Gender, thereby, is neither stable nor rigid. Instead, it is in itself an identity constituted in time, that too through repetition of acts that are stylized in nature. She further analyzed Beauvoir in her work "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex" stating that gender can be understood as "an active process of appropriating, interpreting and reinterpreting received cultural possibilities" (36). Toril Moi too commented on Beauvoir's theory of alienation, opining that "social factors have greater influence on girls than on boys: precisely because girls' transcendence is precariously balanced between complete alienation and authentic subjectivity" (110). This is where the equation of empowerment disempowerment comes to focus because narrative authority always conforms to the dominant social power and in narratives lies the potential and the possibility that Feminist movements across ages have struggled for. Feminist theorist and activist Pearl Cleage had defined feminism as the certain sense of belief that women are also human beings who are capable of participation and leadership. As such feminism also seemed to dual both as "an ideology and a global political movement that confronts sexism, a social relationship in which males as a group have authority over females as a group" (Collins, 12).

A Black Woman's experience, however is much different from that of mainstream feminist perspective. Their experiences are shaped by "myriad of interlocking systems of oppressions that are framed within the context of political economy of a given society" (Neville & Jennifer, 440) that are in return orchestrated by culture and socio-historical context. As Breines had mentioned in her essay; the intersection of gender and race is obvious in the silence of black women. Due to a hierarchy that is at once genderized and racialized, women of colour generally remain at the lowest rung of the ladder and are given the least possible opportunities to live a life of dignity. Sheftall

describes this quite clearly in his work stating that, “black women suffer the double burden of racism and sexism...black women have not had the so-called benefits of being female; they have not been sheltered, protected, or idealized by their men to the extent that was possible for white women” (38). Hence a black woman faces twice the amount of subjugation and discrimination in comparison to another. She is discriminated for being a black and then for being a woman. Both race and gender become important factors that propel her suffering and continue her coerced silence.

### **Textual Analysis**

Born in Windhoek, Namibia, Christi N. Warner is a singer, poet, songwriter and a freelance journalist. She is a well-known name in the Namibian music industry and has carved her own niche as an indigenous poet of Namibia. While she presently lives in the UK, her poetry is an integral part of Namibian literature showcasing the plight of women in Namibia, the socio-political scenario of the country as well as Namibian culture. Her poetry anthology *Ice Cream and Politics* (2016) has a vivid collection of poems that highlight various issues and aspects of Namibian society. This paper has taken into consideration 10 poems from the collection titled - "My Voice", "Cold Fire", "Feelings", "Less Ordinary", "Painting for Sale", "Lost in the Fog", "Her Wish", "The Image on a Picture", "Breaking the Fourth Wall" and "Let the Drum Roll". These poems give an interesting glimpse from a woman's point of view thus bringing into focus her voice which rarely sees the light of the day.

In the first poem "My Voice", the speaker is a little girl named Sheila who wonders how her name might appear on paper. Her curiosity is boundless and since she does not yet know how to read and write, the lines on the book resemble a squiggling snake to her while her teacher appears to be a magician who can bring those snakes to life and erase them easily too. She sees her name on the paper and gets excited after which she keeps on badgering her mother to teach her how to write her name too. Her mother, however, keeps postponing the same again and again. She would give various excuses of household chores

to distract her daughter. All the while however, she laments her fate that she desperately wants to help her child write but is unable to, because she is illiterate. The poem then has a time jump in the last stanza. Sheila is getting married and she requests her mother to be her witness. Her mother promises her and when Sheila signs her new name, her mother feels the pride and nostalgia seep into her as her daughter leaves behind the name she had given her. However, she manages to surprise her daughter by signing her own name too.

Sadness filled my eyes but just for a second though  
because this day danced with pride  
as she witnessed how I commanded the paper  
to own my voice for the first time. (Warner, 2016)

This poem is a glimpse of the reality in many households of Namibia where a woman is mostly engaged with only household works and rarely gets basic education. Yet the poem does not focus just on the dismal tone or despair. The mother feels her lack of education burdening her relationship with her daughter and yet she does not falter. It takes time but, on the day, when Sheila gets married, her mother signs her own name by herself. This poem is thus indicative of resilience and adaptability in human nature. Interestingly the mother in this poem can be read as a parallel to Bengali writer Rassundari Devi who had desperately wanted to learn to read and write and had taught herself the same from her son's books; all the while carrying on with household duties. This poem thus, evinces the empowerment of a woman that comes forth with the mother finally being able to command her own voice by signing her name.

In the poem "Cold Fire", the speaker describes her toxic relationship with her lover. She narrates her love and the way she was fooled by his sweet phony words and his false promises. He had hoodwinked her into investing in a relation that took advantage of her naivety and her blind love; finally destroying her dignity and self-respect. The speaker likens herself to a trapped fish in a fish-tank that performs for others to see. As per her point of view, she "...was hopeful...Little did I know grabbing onto your paw is a promise of my end" (Warner, 2016). All the while he soothed her shivers and brushed away her insecurities enveloping her in false warmth only for the truth to be

unveiled later when she declares that “...you are the dealer and I’m the addict” (Warner, 2016). This poem can be understood as a toxic love affair where the woman is addicted to her lover; unable to leave him despite the fact that he is using her. Beyond this it can also be read as a trap by a drug dealer who lured an innocent woman with false promises ultimately turning her into an addict and one of his customers. The poem, however is significant because the speaker expresses her desires for her partner and her journey as a lover, without any hesitation or coercion. She is addicted to the love of her lover and she craves for the attention of the lover. Though she understands the toxicity of the entire affair, she is unapologetic of her choices and is ready to face the consequences. The woman is firm with her opinion and clear about her choices and options. While she is facing a downward spiral, it is remarkable that she manages to find a space for her own voice to express her opinions and desires.

This concept of space is also highlighted in the poem “Feelings”. The speaker expresses that she feels the helplessness of being a woman because she has something she wants to speak out but is unable to. She thus wants to shout to let it out of her mind to attain peace but is afraid that her speech might cause chaos and make people walk out of her life when she starts to have her own opinion.

I feel there’s something I have to shout  
I don’t know how, but I must let it out  
So please give me the space  
To whisper these feelings that feel like a maze (Warner, 2016)

She asks for the space she needs and criticizes the standards set by the society where in the name of novelty people fake affection which is cruel as kindness is often sacrificed to fit into that standard. After observing the cruelty that scares her innocent soul, she wants to vent out her anger and set her spirit free. Interestingly in the third stanza, the speaker also tries to defend her yet unuttered words, stating that they will never be aimed to hurt. Instead, she only wants a little kindness as acceptance for her to speak out. This stanza is slightly similar in its theme to Anne Bradstreet’s “The Prologue” where the speaker asks for acceptance from the society of male poets and writers to give her a little

recognition as a poet too in lieu of her accepting publicly that men are superior to women. The two poems, "Feelings" and "The Prologue" are consistent in asking for space of their own but differ greatly in the approaches. While the latter tackles the matter as a deal, Warner's poem delves deeper into the psyche of obscured and hidden words that have long since been suffocated and kept out of sight. This poem highlights the suppressed Voice and the deterioration of the stability of the speaker's psyche as she is made to keep quiet. Her opinions, her wishes, her aspirations are all trampled under the mountainous girth of the expectations of the society and in a way contribute to her oppression and subjugation. The speaker in the last stanza, finally takes a stand to unshackle her Voice so that she can attain the freedom she had dreamt of.

The poem "Less Ordinary", focuses on the lives of common people; specifically based on the impact of the Namibian War of Independence. The speaker is settled in her life but keeps on encountering an old woman who always sits in the Verandah of her house; gazing at the distance as if waiting for someone to return home. Many days pass and the speaker, unable to help herself, approaches the old woman and asks her about her actions. The response is as follows:

"He is coming tomorrow", she said  
"They say all the heroes have all come home  
Not all true, because he's still coming  
The 21<sup>st</sup> of March has not yet reached him". (Warner, 2016)

In 1990, on 21<sup>st</sup> of March Namibia officially got its Independence. The long struggle for freedom that the Namibians had to undergo had finally resulted in a success. The soldiers that had gone to fight for the nation returned home. This is the political scenario that the poem is based on. The focus, however is on the old mother who was still waiting for her son to return even 26 years after Independence. The old mother has never given up hope of her child's return. She still thinks that he is on his way back home. The narrative of the poem is a heart-rending and poignant tale of a mother who only wants her son to return unable to accept the truth that in all possibility, he is dead. The poem further highlights the suffering of the families of

the war heroes subtly criticizing the war that killed many innocent lives for a peace that has blood and grief in its foundation. This old woman is representative of all the widows who had lost their husbands in war and all those mothers who had lost their sons. The victory narrative always focuses on the greatness and the glory but the sacrifice of the women whose lives are torn asunder is often dismissed from the focus to the periphery. As such, Warner, through this poem gives a Voice to those grief-stricken women whose agony fueled the Independence and peace of Namibia.

The next poem, "Painting for Sale" describes an auction where people are observing the painting displayed. The painting is of a lady whose bluish skin appears like a tapestry of abuse as she is depicted as a sexual object for visual pleasure. The eyes of the painted woman reflect the horror and fear of her plight as she is frozen in an action where her pride has been permanently bruised by the artist. It is the "variety of pain and silent screams" (Warner, 2016) that gives the final touch to the artwork. This public depiction of her destruction, abuse and anguish is sold to the buyer who pays to just find visceral pleasure in her shame and agony as her abused form is treated as an object of pleasure to quench darker desires. In a way this poem brings to focus the concept of the male gaze. Laura Mulvey in her work had theorized that pleasure in the act of looking can be categorized into two groups – active (male) and passive (female). The dominant and determining male gaze projects the fantasy on the female figure. As such, coerced into a traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously displayed for visual impact even to the extent of eroticism. McGowan analysed that the male gaze propels the situation to, "a point at which spectators can notice the gaze and recognize their own involvement, through their desire, in what they see on the screen" (29). The male gaze allows the spectator to identify and align with the desire; thus, effectively controlling the spectator. Kathleen Stock in her essay "Sexual Objectification" observed that hierarchical social relations constitute gender theories. She defines objectification as an act that involves looking at and treating another human being as a means to one's own end; enforced by powerful social station. This takes a sexual turn when the subordination of women happens to gratify men's sexual interest. As such in

case of sexual objectification, social meaning of being an object to be sexually used is imposed as an identity tag. Another study by Martin S. Weinberg and Colin J. Williams indicates that women often experience themselves being sexually objectified. The power of the male gaze is such that women also begin to view themselves through those lenses. This also leads to a woman obsessively monitoring the body's physical appearance along with resulting in suffocating feelings of body shame and anxiety which negatively affects their psyche. As per Heflick and Goldenberg, "immense cultural emphasis on women's physical appearance and sexual features underlies their objectification by others" (225). Hence objectification of a female body conditions the female into internalizing that she can only function as, "an object of sadistic spectatorial possession" (Snow, 30). Similarly in the poem, the eyes of the spectators also assault the woman in the painting while enjoying her brutalized form being provocatively displayed. This poem, criticizes the male gaze, highlighting the manner in which women face sexual objectification through art and literature. Even the rape of the woman is often romanticized and people tend to look for the reason behind creation of such artwork instead of questioning the brutal reality of the society. The torn pieces of tattered clothing that are unable to hide her naked body also criticizes the inability of societal systems to protect the dignity of women in the society. This poem lends a platform to piteous voice of the objectified women throwing focus on the double standards of the society which commercializes the plight of a women all the while pretending to maintain the balance in society. Furthermore, this poem can also read as a tribute to Sarah Baartman, a Khoikhoi woman from South West Africa who was taken to Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and displayed in exhibitions to showcase her steatopygic body. She was often exhibited in parties of wealthy people and was at times collared like an animal. Penniless and objectified for her body, she even had to work as a prostitute during the exhibitions in brothels.

The next poem "Lost in the Fog" is another depiction of a toxic relationship between two partners. The poem then takes a turn where the woman feels suffocated in that ideal form of relationship where the authoritative position of the other lover suffocates her. Her lover gives her warmth and security; all the while whispering, "Clip

your wings..." (Warner, 2016). The power play between the couple begins to strangle her freedom and agency such that she wants to finally break free from it. The intercourse between the couple also symbolizes the controlling gaze where the male overpowers the desires of the woman. The authoritative behaviour of the male soon gives into violence. However, the society after seeing her bruises and darkened skin, instead advise her to be obedient next time and even blames that she must have provoked him. The poem beautifully intertwines two narratives of the lovers where both justify their toxic affection. The woman however wants to get out of the violent relationship but faces the jeers and unkind glances of the society. Some advise her to leave while others call her spineless. Another section of the society completely victim-blames her; asserting that it was all her fault and she should have been more obedient. This is a realistic portrayal of the society where a woman faces rebukes despite being the abused party. Instead of aid or solace, the woman is advised to abide by the terms and conditions set by the patriarchal society.

This violence is further repeated as a theme in "Her Wish" which depicts the life of an innocent woman who had rosy dreams of her love-life filled with adoration and happiness. She finally gets her partner who appears to be the man of her dreams. It is only later that the mask falls and his affections begin leaving marks on her skin and his possessiveness begins to choke her spirit. Furthermore he tears her clothes and forces himself on her, "enjoying every moment of her pain" (Warner, 2016). Her wishes thereby go answered but in a manner that destroys her dignity. The repeated themes of rape in these poems highlight the conundrum faced by the Namibian society. As per Briton and Shooke, Namibia has one of the world's most progressive rape laws mainly because of its expansive definition, detailed description of coercive scenario, lack of gender specific identifier in case of victims, prohibition of marital rape as well as strict limitation on digging at a survivor's sexual history in trials. Despite this "Namibia continues to suffer from epidemic levels of sexual violence. The end of armed conflict and the advancement of women in the public sphere have been accompanied by an increase in violence against women" (154). This poem thereby reflects the despair and agony that a woman goes through

after being abused and brutalized. The instance of rape that is portrayed in the poem is representative of the patriarchal notions of the society where sex is normalized in a relationship and consent is a matter greatly overlooked.

In the poem "The Image on a Picture", the poet paints another picture of the society and the situation that women face. It talks about the day-to-day life of the Namibian working women where they struggle to meet their ends. A family of three is described who barely make their ends meet. The family of the mother, grandmother and the small girl is representative of the position of the women in the society where they work hard to earn their living. The child also longs for her father. She is still unaware of her father's identity and dreams of reuniting her family by drawing a happy picture. The mother who worked as a cleaner for the colonial masters and the grandmother, soon pass away leaving the little girl alone in the world. One day she is rudely rebuked by an angry pedestrian and she realizes that it is her father who had the same eyes like hers. The man realizes the same and when his wife approaches, he is struck by fear that she will find the truth. He pushes her and goes away with his wife. The child who is devastated by this behaviour of her father loses her innocence and attains maturity. This portrays the power imbalance between relationships among men and women. The man, in all probability a white European took advantage of the black slave and did not even bother to take care of his orphan child; all the while determined to hide it from his wife. This is unfortunately the truth of every colonized country where women had to suffer through sexual humiliation resulting in fatherless children who became an added burden to their lives. The poet through this poem manages to draw the narrative of betrayal and maturity that the speaker manages to reach after the revelations of her origin and, her father's behaviour finally meets her understanding.

Interestingly "Breaking the Fourth Wall" highlights the issue of women always being portrayed as a sexual object by sternly questioning the lack of representation of the essence that makes a woman. The speaker talks about the idealized image of a woman and how they are bound to the standard framework of the society. To question these binding norms, she uses the concept of the Cinderella fairytale and proposes a series of alternate narratives to it.

Using Cinderella narrative to argue a feminist approach helps create a deeper impact on the psyche of the reader. As per Crowley and Pennington, fairy tales were a genre that allowed women to attain a sense of “cultural authority” (299). It is this authority that fuels feminist retellings. As such in the poem, the speaker proposes a scenario in which Cinderella rescues herself from her dismal and abusive home life instead of a Prince. Furthermore, the poet dangles an interesting parallel by comparing the prince to a seat in the Parliament that the woman manages to attain. What if, the speaker questions, her evil step-sisters were Poverty and Disease? This is an interesting twist to the parallels drawn by the poet. A woman has the capacity to rescue herself from her fate, by taking her agency back into her hands. The way Cinderella was made a Princess and given power to rule; a woman can carve her own path to attain a seat in the Parliament and with it the power to make policies. If one is forever plagued by the step sisters Poverty and Disease, no turn of the Cinderella tale can magic out a way for anyone to succeed. Poverty and Disease are legitimate reasons that can hamper career as well as individual growth. Highlighting these aspects, the speaker questions the expectation that women are to be rescued by men and that would solve all problems. She also tries to define what a woman actually is despite the standards set by the society; asserting that a woman is much more than a sexual object in the bedroom. Rather she is an individual with potential and merit in her own right.

The final poem, "Let the Drum Roll", aims to paint a picture of a phenomenal women. The poet questions the status of women in the society where she talks about how they are represented though ages. The poet also portrays women not as a weaker sex but strong enough to stand for their right. Interestingly the phenomenal woman that she describes is not a superhero or an angel or any princess or saint. Rather it is the ordinary women that the speaker highlights.

I'm talking about ordinary women

A partner of the sun:

she will give you your wake-up call

Set the table in time.

Jump to the next scene

Finding perfection in the corporate world

I wonder how she finds the oomph

Then there's this wonder woman:  
Out of an empty cupboard  
She feeds a family, even orphans (Warner, 2016)

An ordinary woman is one who takes on all the chores of the family ensuring that everyone is well fed and taken care of. Beyond this she fulfills her professional responsibilities and also contributes to the betterment of the society. One does not need to search hard to find a hero. Because all these ordinary women struggle and persist in life to shine like the star. The speaker concludes the poem by urging women to break through the bindings of the society and lend voice to their thoughts. For only when a woman speaks, her voice would find its place. This poem is a suitable conclusion to the idea of the Female voice. Through this poem, the speaker empowers the ordinary women in the society, from home-makers to working professionals by highlighting the manner in which they manage their lives and also of their families. Women perform such a large diversity of work that is almost humbling to comprehend and this makes the speaker take pride in her gender. As such, this work can be seen as almost an empowerment strategy to encourage women in the world to stand upright and give wings to their dreams by voicing their opinions which, the speaker assures will be heard.

### **Conclusion**

Namibia has a very complicated history filled with colonial rule, loss of indigenous culture, exploitation of the people, oppression and violence and a long political struggle for freedom first from Germany and later from South Africa. The people have an inherited cultural memory of subjugation, alienation, oppression and resistance. As such the culture of the country reflects the imprints of history. Even the literature of the country is deeply influenced by the socio-economic and political upheavals as faced by the people at large. The poems by Christi N. Warner selected for the analysis have complex narratives rooted in the context of Namibian society, culture and history. Many of the poems reflect the reality of the society as faced by

women in various situations. They focus on the violence in the society and the consequences of oppression.

Warner's poetry delves into the motif of the Female Voice. These poems ably craft out a path for the reader to follow the female centric perspective in various historical, political, cultural and every-day situations; where women are made to tackle a variety of situations. Interestingly, while her poetry does focus on the subjugation, oppression and abuse faced by woman; she also balances it out by drawing portrayals of strong women characters who break away from their conventional image. The very first poem and the last poem chosen for analysis, brings this into a circle by starting with the image of an ordinary woman and ending with the same image. In both scenarios, an ordinary woman manages to balance life and empower herself in such a manner that she takes back her agency and gives flight to her Voice. These ordinary women prove to be none less than superheroes themselves as they sustain through various circumstances. Warner's poetry also ensures a celebration of womanhood as she portrays the strength and potential of a woman who can achieve all her aspirations; if only she voices out her concern. The concept of the Female Voice which symbolizes women taking back their right to choose as well as carving out their own space in the society, is a prominent theme in her poetry. Beyond this, there is also the important inclusion of social criticism which is prevalent in the poems. Her poetry at times subtly and in other times, rather blatantly comments on the society and the rules and regulations enforced by it. Irony and drawing parallel images, are small but impactful techniques that highlight the futility of these norms which often becomes the tool for suppression and exploitation of women.

Hence Warner's poetry paints a vivid picture of the society as well as carefully juxtaposes the images of empowerment and disempowerment against each other. All throughout, women who manage to retain their agency or gain it back are contrasted to women characters who are trapped by society such that they can only perform for the audience. This contrast reflects the duality in the society which is still weighed down by the burden of balancing a national identity alongside the convoluted history of the country. As such from colonial subjugation to apartheid, the country has undergone tremendous upheavals. It is this that finds a lucid representation through literature.

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