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**Womanhood and Motherhood in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and
Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980)**

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*I dedicate this humble work to my dear mother Flora, my
precious brother Ramzi, my beloved husband Karim, and my
beautiful friends Lamia and Kaissa.*

_Sarrah

To my beloved family who supported me, and my lovely friends.

_Cylia

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Abstract

Our work centered on the notion of womanhood in non-white societies that have different views of motherhood. We have relied on the work of Bell Hooks to study these themes in the prominent novels of Flora Nwapa Efurú (1966) and Clear Light of Day (1980) of Anita Desai. Our work was divided into two chapters, the first discussing the historical backgrounds of the two stories, both the Igbo community of Nigeria and the partition of India in the past century and their effects on the lives of women in those environments. The second chapter dived into an analysis of the main characters of the novels in order to extrapolate the intertwinement of gender and societal norms in the lives of the protagonists Efurú and Bim, and show how they fought against these established standards. The results we reached were that the struggles of women in the settings of the novels went beyond the gender issue into other kinds of repression, while the two main characters asserted themselves through diligence and hard work.

Key words: *Feminism, gender roles, motherhood, patriarchy, womanhood, womanism.*

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I. Introduction

Literature occupied an important role throughout history by participating in the dissemination of gender roles. Tales and stories have often mirrored the patriarchal society in casting male protagonists in heroic roles, often performing noble acts, defeating gods, or rescuing princesses. Women on the other hand were put in the backseat as accessories in a masculine landscape. They were often relegated to the roles of homemakers, spinsters, or on the other end, witches. This stark contrast between portrayals of men and women gave rise to feminine voices that counteracted the masculine ones, dotting their stories with female characters from their own perspectives, in order to showcase their unique experiences in life as free agents.

Female-centered literature saw a big rise in the reading world as it evolved in the last few centuries into an all-accepting mode of being, hence allowing the multiple voices that separated from the traditional one to be heard and read. This happened all around the world, at varying speeds, from the United States of America, to the United Kingdom, all the way to Africa and India, which are poles of the previously colonized lands. Our work in this present dissertation is centered in two authors that come from communities in which female literature is not accepted, let alone women in general. Written by Flora Nwapa and Anita Desai, our primary sources are two examples of works that struggle to be acknowledged by the male-dominated art world. Many critics who have reviewed their works were blind to the female experience and the complexities of gender issues.

Flora Nwapa is a Nigerian author who is considered the pioneer of many generations of African female writers. Her book *Efuru* (1966) is her most famous work, whose story encompasses its writer's central themes of exposing the struggles of being a woman in traditional African society, narrating events independent of judgment, whilst remaining true to

said-society's expectations of women and their own agreement with them. On the other side of the world in India, we find Anita Desai, a prominent novelist whose works also center on the female voice, removing it from societal prejudice and patriarchal dominance, displayed in her novel *Clear Light of Day* (1980). The two authors present a clear image of societies that are only catching on to the realities of men/women treatment by each other.

a. Review of literature

Our main sources, *Efuru* (1966) by Flora Nwapa, and *Clear Light of Day* (1980) by Anita Desai have, due to the nature of their themes, received a lot of attention, both positive and negative, from various different critics and journalists whom espouse their opinions to their own prejudices in their own societies. In this section, we are going to be taking a look at some of the reviews that these two novels have received.

Flora Nwapa as the first African author to be published in English, received a lot of interest in her writings, starting with the novel *Efuru* but ultimately extending into her other writings, and often referred to as a feminist despite her never defining herself as such. This feminist touch in her bibliography was what allowed Mary D. Mears to construct her postgraduate thesis on this +issue. Citing feminist critics, she ventured into an in-depth analysis of Nwapa's novels, mainly *Efuru* (1966), *Idu* (1970), and *One is Enough* (1981). Mears's dissertation sought to excavate the dialogic relations between the main characters of these books, as well as "the conversations that Nwapa's female characters have between self and society, between self and self-consciousness, and among themselves" (Mears, 2009, p. 5). This was done in an all-encompassing study that reached, not for a separation of the female from the male, but, as an African society, it reached to an exposé of the female characters in Africa whose feminism went hand in hand with the concepts of motherhood and marriage.

In addition to this, the book *Efuru* has been analyzed from a lens of African traditions, particularly what relates to superstition. Nwapa ingeniously employed symbols in her narration style to put together the events with African mythology and their beliefs. In fact, the novelist had tied her main character's life to the worshipping of a Goddess named Uhamiri who "is believed that she has great wealth but no children, and so her devotees are usually enriched materially but not with children" (Tambari, Ogbonanwii Dick, 2014). In his article, Tambari, Ogbonanwii Dick elaborates on the relationship between the characters and the spiritual state of the Igbo society which makes the presence of goddesses and gods a natural thing in the community, relying on instances in the novels where healers are consulted and forefathers are called upon.

This great diversity in *Efuru* as a multifaceted novel also garnered raised eyebrows from critics such as Eldred Jones, who compared the novel to Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966). In his comparison, Jones ascribed to Amadi's book a range of positive descriptions, such as "accomplished first performance" (Jones, 1972, p. 56). He praises his use of sociological elements as building blocks of narration that served to showcase the structure of its setting, but not focusing on the bad sides of the novel. The same critic, then goes on the same page to call Nwapa's implementation of sociological elements as lengthy rants that "the novel could quite conveniently been half this length, for the bulk consists of unnecessary sociological information" (Jones, 1972, p. 57). The exposition of this contrast between reviews of novels written by men and those written by women is relevant because it shows that the latter review of *Efuru* does in no way objectively evaluate its merit, but only criticizes it on the basis of the gender of its author. In Amato's novel, the life of the girl is also dictated by a male god who is in love with her, which perhaps fulfills the Eldred Jones's infatuation with the idea of controlling a woman's life with literally supernatural methods.

On the other hand, Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980) was lauded for exposing political tensions and their effects on the people living in partition-era India. It is considered to be its author's best work by critics. One of these critics is Dr. Rajnesh Kumar who published an article on Desai's works entitled "*Feminism in the Novels of Anita Desai: a Critical Exploration.*" In this article, Dr. Kumar discusses the feminist elements found within Desai's writings, especially what relates to the challenging of societal conventions by the female characters, the erosion of patriarchal patterns, as well as a look into the coming-of-age that Desai herself described as an element that makes the book autobiographical for her (Joshly, 2021, p. 58). Furthermore, Dr. Kumar contends that "Desai's storytelling not only sheds light on the challenges women confront but also highlights the resilience and strength they exhibit in the face of adversity" (Kumar, 2024, p. 413).

Md. Jobaar Talukder and Prakash Chandra Biswas did another dive into *Clear Light of Day*, one that they entitled "*Clear Light of Day: Exploring Social Dynamics Through Illuminating Relationships.*" In the article, the authors conducted a thematic and contextual analysis of the work they considered to "explore the multifaceted dimensions of womanhood, family, and national identity creating a rich and layered narrative that delves into the intricate intersections of personal and political spheres" (Talukder & Biswas, 2023, p. 17). Additionally, the authors went through the major themes at play in the novel, such as guilt, betrayal, and psychological trauma, in a discussion that encapsulated the heart of Desai's masterpiece.

In addition to the readings of the novels from feminist viewpoints, C. Tina Joshly looks into it from a sociological point of view, drawing from diasporic concepts relating to the state when a country's writers who live abroad look into their motherland through their writings. The critic then analyzes the novel through a lens of the 1947 partition of India, as well as that of the characters, which Joshly describes as "self-inflicted" (Joshly, 2021, p. 59).

b. Issue and Working Hypothesis

The review of literature has demonstrated some of the reviews and analyses that the books *Efuru* (1966) and *Clear Light of Day* (1980) have received through the years. It has also highlighted the complexity of these works and brought to lights some aspects of their similarity, especially when it comes to feminine themes. From the above review of literature, it is clear to see that both novels are controversial in their own right, given the sensitive subject matters they delve into, and the complexities of studying gender, especially in traditional societies that do not recognize the importance of a female-centered perspective. We can also see that they have been studied from various points of view, but are yet to be conjoined together in a literary analysis despite their similarities, more of which we will discover throughout this dissertation. It has not yet been attempted to look into these novels at once, which is why we are conducting this study, trying to shed light on societal norms that value above all womanhood and motherhood in women. Additionally, we are doing so by borrowing Bell Hooks' concepts on the marginalization of women in society, that she developed in *From Margin to Center* (1984), in an attempt to understand women of color's oppression, as well as their coming into the center with literature. We are seeking to study these books side by side, bringing into light along the way the political backgrounds that acted as reasons for the status quos of Nigerian and Indian societies in colonial and postcolonial times these novels are set. Our main goal is to expound on female notions such as womanhood, motherhood, marriage, childbearing, and other struggles unique, not only to women in general, but to those in Black and Indian communities, because they face challenges unique to their geographical and sociological settings.

c. Methodological framework

This present dissertation is divided into sections. The first one introduced us to the primary sources we are dealing with. The second one frames our work within a Bell Hooks method, bringing into focus our theoretical basis. We have presented our findings in the Results section. The discussion then elaborates on historical backdrops of the two novels in the first chapter by looking into the histories and beliefs of the Igbo community, and the history of India in the past century. The second chapter then goes in-depth into a study of the protagonists of these narratives from the perspective of womanhood and motherhood.

II. Methods and Materials

This section delves into our theoretical framework that we have selected due to its pertinence in the settings of *Efuru* (1966) and *Clear Light of Day* (1980). We are going to chart our theoretical framework for our dissertation, presenting the method we are going to use for our analysis, which borrows from Bell Hooks' *From Margin to Center* (1984) and deals with feminist issues. Then, we shall give an overview of the authors of our primary sources Flora Nwapa and Anita Desai as well as summaries for *Efuru* (1966) and *Clear Light of Day* (1980).

Hooks fits our study of our primary sources because the setting of the two novels is in the Global South that struggle, not only from sexism, but other political, social and religious tensions. Our reading of the two novels is therefore not achieved in terms of 'men are the enemy', for we are forced to consider the systems of oppression that keep the communities of Igbo and Old Delhi. However, the issues of women are highlighted, evidencing our study by Hooks' ideological stance on sexism. In fact, she does not discard women's issues on the basis of the other problems societies faces. She condemns sexism by saying it "is perpetuated by institutional and social structures; by the individuals who dominate, exploit, or oppress; and by the victims themselves who are socialized to behave in ways that make them act in complicity with the status quo" (Hooks, 1984, p. 43).

a. Method

Bell Hooks' *From Margin to Center*

Feminism is a struggle to end sexist oppression. Therefore, it is necessarily a struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels as well as a commitment to reorganizing society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires. (Hooks, 1984, p.24)

Bell Hooks is a feminist activist, author and social critic whose works have shed light on issues that would otherwise remain incomplete. Her book *From Margin to Center* is an example of her repositioning previous literature on feminist theory into an inclusive environment that also embraces women of color, and men of color too while at that.

In this book, Hooks responds to the work of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine mystique*. Hooks explains that Friedan centered her work around bourgeois-class women, labeling her sphere of feminist reach "leisure class white housewives" (Hooks, 1984, p. 2), arguing that her model for feminine mystique was only possible to this narrow demographic.

Specific problems and dilemmas of leisure class white housewives were real concerns that merited consideration and change but they were not the pressing political concerns of masses of women. Masses of women were concerned about economic survival, ethnic and racial discrimination, etc.

Hooks then expands the issue of feminism to interlink with the issues of ethnicity and classism, and calls for "the ability to 'translate' ideas to an audience that varies in age, sex, ethnicity, degree of literacy [because it] is a skill feminist educators need to develop" (Hooks, 1984, p. 111). *From Margin to Center* is divided into twelve chapters. Each of the chapters tackle a different aspect of the issue of feminism that Hooks aims to reframe. In the first chapters, she reviewed the Liberal view on feminism that stands for political equality between women and men. She then ventured into an overview over the radical feminism of the 1970s and 1980s that challenged the fundamental causes of patriarchy. The feminist author then positioned herself to a condemnation of its neglect of the intersections of race and class in women's experiences. In light of her ideological thoughts related to feminism, Hooks aligns herself with Black Feminism, a movement that emerged as a response to the limitations of mainstream feminism, by addressing the unique struggles faced by Black women.

In Chapter 5, Hooks analyzed the state of oppression that both women and men of color face. This condition of social and political marginalization, according to Barbara Smith which Hooks cites, leads to black women being reluctant to denounce sexism in their communities. She further adds that “[they] too have been socialized to accept sexist ideology and many Black women feel that Black male abuse of women is a reflection of frustrated masculinity - Such thoughts lead them to see that abuse is understandable, even justified” (Hooks, 1984, p. 74). Black feminism, then, emphasizes the intersectionality of race, gender, and class, by including men of color in the struggle for equal social standing, as opposed to traditional feminism led by white middle-class women, and therefore, it fails to describe objectively the experience of being a woman in the confinements of racial discrimination.

Another important topic we must evoke relating to Hooks’ discussion of feminism, is the concept of Motherhood, because it is relevant to our study of characters who face the issue of bearing children. Hooks when discussing this issue in Chapter 10 of *From Margin to Center*, draws on the different perspectives different feminists attributed to it. In fact, she blames white women for alienating large groups from their cause due to vilifying child-bearing. She firmly states:

early feminists ... did not attribute enough significance and value to female parenting, to motherhood. It is a gesture that should have been made at the onset of feminist movement. Early feminist attacks on motherhood alienated masses of women from the movement, especially poor and/ or non-white women, who find parenting one of the few interpersonal relationships where they are affirmed and appreciated (Hooks, 1984, p. 134).

In this fashion, one must then acknowledge the importance of motherhood in the lives of women who choose to bear children, and what’s more to it, in societies that value it as a fundamental tenet of femininity.

Overall, *From Margin to Center* promotes a whole-encompassing and tolerant feminist outline that both acknowledges and amplifies the voices and challenges of women of color by

way of redressing traditional issues within the feminist movement. Bell Hooks, by this virtue of expanding the horizons of feminist study, will guide us in our analysis of the novels *Efuru* and *Clear Light of Day* where we shall implement these notions in order to dissect the verities of women's lives in communities that have different living standards than the western ones.

b. Materials

This part of our work will give us a look into the authors of our *Efuru* and *Clear Light of Day*, as well as brief summaries of the works, in order to contextualize the works within the correct time settings of their times, especially in what relates to the political climate of the novels that influenced the events.

1. Biographies of the authors

1.1. Biography of Flora Nwapa

Flora Nwapa was born in Oguta, Nigeria in 1931. She completed her Bachelor's degree in English in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, but completed her postgraduate studies in English at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. Nwapa is remarkable for being the first African woman to be published in English. In 1966, she got her first novel *Efuru* published by Heinemann in London, and subsequently became known as the mother of modern African literature. The recurrent themes of her works include feminist issues although she has never called herself one, colonialism, and social marginalization in African communities.

Among her achievements is her establishment of Tana Press in 1967, a distributing company dedicated to promoting the voices of African writers and contributing to the literary revitalization of the African landmass. Her work cleared the way for the following generation of African women writers. Flora Nwapa died in 1993, leaving behind a large collection of short stories, novels, and plays.

1.2. Biography of Anita Desai

Born in Mussoorie, India in 1937, Desai is known for her compelling stories that examine her complex feelings and social nuances. She conducted her studies in the Universities of Delhi and Cambridge, which enormously impacted her writing style and intellectual profundity. Known for her use of imagery in her prose, Desai also employs a large range of literary techniques to engage readers with her writings, such as flashbacks, and playing with the chronology of timelines in her novels, especially in *Clear Light of Day* (1980).

Her novels investigate subjects such as identity in the landscape of post-colonial India, and the effects of political problems such as the partition of 1947 on society. Additionally, her commitments to Indian literature have won her various grants, and has attracted the attention of researchers and critics who find in her work rich material for scholarly examination of themes such as feminism, postcolonialism and cultural studies. Her books such as *Clear Light of Day*, *In Custody*, and *Fasting, Feasting* have become staples in academia and are included in school educational program and scholarly discourse around the world.

2. Summaries of the primary sources

2. 1. Summary of *Efuru* (1966)

The novel follows the journey of the titular character Efuru, an exceptional woman from an Igbo community, who is the daughter of a tribe chief. Efuru weds a man by the name of Adiuza, who does not have the financial ability to pay his wife's dowry, and whose situation caused Efuru's family to object to this wedding. Efuru, however, supports her husband in trading until they are able to pay her dowry. After years of barrenness, Efuru gives

birth to a child girl named Ogonim, but the joys of motherhood are short-lived as her baby passes away, and her spouse leaves her for another woman.

Throughout the story, Efuru reconnects with her childhood friend Gilbert and marries him. Eventually however, Efuru's inability to conceive children strains their relationship. Her second marriage ends when she leaves her husband because of his accusations of adultery. Eventually, the titular character of *Efuru* is chosen by the lake goddess Uhamiri as her worshipper, granting her wealth and respect by her communities, whilst denying her of children. A fate Efuru accepts as the story ends with her living in her paternal home alone, and working alongside her community.

2. 2. Summary of *Clear Light of Day* (1980)

Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980) is her most renowned work for its juxtaposition of different elements, such as psychological trauma, reminiscence, political upheaval, and dealing with themes such as remorse, guilt, and family conflicts. The story is about the Das family who grew up in Old Delhi in the thirties and forties of the previous century. It revolves around four siblings, Bim, Raja, Tara, and Baba, as they stir their lives in often unpredictable manners. The story is split into four parts, where the first and last are set in the 1980s, and the two middle ones in the 1930s and 1940s, therefore we can trace the evolution on these siblings.

When they were children, they had a housekeeper Mira who raised them instead of their parents who were hardly interested in the lives of their children. Eventually, Mira grows into an alcoholic, and the sister Bim who chose not to marry ends up taking care of her and her debilitated brother Baba, while the other two siblings move away. The story ends when the siblings each realize individually that their grievances are holding them from living on.

III. Results

Our study of *Efuru* (1966) written by Flora Nwapa and *Clear Light of Day* (1980) by Anita Desai discussed the multiple layers of being woman and the struggles that accompany it in their societies. As two prominent writers, their main characters expressed much of the views on the issues of feminism, hence we relied on Bell Hooks concepts she developed in her book *From Margin to Center* to express the complicated facets of the lives of women of color in underprivileged social positions.

The first chapter dealt with the historical settings of the Igbo community and Indian partition, and revealed the extent of unfairness towards women that they had to endure in such climates. Besides the feminist problems however, it was clear in our analysis that issues of gender were marginalized due to the socioeconomic factors that made these societies prioritize certain issues over others. For instance, we saw that in India, women were treated as property and used to appropriate and punish, not the women alone, but their tribes as they were seen to represent them with their bodies, hence the heavy symbolic weight that fell on women ended up costing them their freedom and even lives.

We have reached the result that the issue of feminism surpasses the basic outline of gender, and that to be a woman in the societies we have analyzed is also to defend against their ingrained beliefs. In the second chapter, we have shown *Efuru* and *Bim* as examples of women who had to overcome many financial, romantic, and cultural struggles in order to assert their identities separate from their cultures' expectations. It is also in their fights to be and continue to be independent that these women conformed to certain societal expectations of them, such as *Efuru*'s acceptance of the remarriage of her husband as a solution to her infertility. All in all, these novels have revealed the complicated issues of feminism in non-white societies that have other definitions of notions such as domesticity and what being a

woman means. Additionally, upon comparing the novels, we could see that the Nwapa and Desai went about discussing the same topics in different ways, imbuing Efuru and Bim with contrasting experiences and ideas about motherhood, the home, and community life. Overall, the works of Nwapa and Desai navigated the complex way of gender's connection to race, and social class, and have described through their fictional characters the realities of many real life women and have hence brought this marginalized group to the center.

IV. Discussion

In this section, we are interested in analyzing the novels *Efuru* (1966) and *Clear Light of Day* (1980) from a standpoint of Bell Hooks' views on feminism, and what it means to be a woman in non-white societies. The discussion is going to tackle the historical and sociological backgrounds of each of the communities, starting with the Igbo community in Nigeria, then going the Indian milieu of Old Delhi, touching upon the customs and beliefs of each, in order to set our work within a relevant historical and socio-political frame from where we are then going into the second chapter. The second chapter is going to analyze womanhood and motherhood in the main female characters of the novels, putting into focus the instances in which they chose to put their personal choices above those of their communities.

Chapter I: Historical Backgrounds

In this chapter, we are going to look into the historical settings of the communities in which our main sources are set. For this, we have two very different countries that are situated in different parts of the world and have different customs and traditions, while also sharing some similarities in the structure of their societies. These places are the Igbo community situated in Nigeria and Old Delhi of India, and we will take into consideration the time setting of the novels *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa and *Clear Light of Day* of Anita Desai.

A. Historical Background of the Igbo Community

1. Overview of Igbo Community

Africa is a vast continent, comprising of multiple countries, religions, languages, and ethnicities. It is the continent in which the Igbo communities, ethnic Nigerian tribes, is situated. The latter is rich in its complex cultural and social structures along fascinating

religious beliefs that dictate their lifestyle. The pre-colonial Igbo society was characterized by its autonomous communities and their decentralized system of governance, the holders of power in this society were namely the heads of family, age grades and council of elders. Ajayi describes the contrast between the Igbo's system and other tribes, "In the Eastern part of the Country, traditional rulership was non-existent before the advent of colonialism. Unlike the Hausa and Yoruba societies, traditional Igbo society was essentially a republican system characterized by village democracy." (Ajayi, 1992, p.5) Elechi expands on the concept of democracy in the pre-colonial political arrangement of the Igbo people; he states that every member of the community had the right- in varying degrees, to express their opinions to contribute to the process of decision-making concerning the community (Elechi, 2008, pp.4-5). Uchendu also affirms the afore-mentioned in his book *the Igbo of the Southeast Nigeria*, "the Igbo pattern of leadership is one in which the secular roles are combined. Leaders are essentially 'opinion leaders, they must be sensitive to public opinion and embody what is the best Igbo tradition'" (Uchendu, 1965, p. 90)

Women in particular were discouraged from participating in politics as it was seen as man's right and duty traditionally. This disregard of feminine viewpoints in the said arrangement was only exacerbated by colonialism. According to , the study of women's political involvement throughout history is subjected to the overstatement of the role of women in the pre-colonial era in addition to the exaggeration of their political subordination in the colonial period. She emphasized the necessity of understanding the complexity of the changing social structures that imposed different societal norms in order to correctly grasp the function of women in the political context of their time. (Uchendu, 2009, p.2-3)

For a clearer understanding regarding women's position in society, it is essential to understand the sociopolitical and economic structures of Igbo communities. In the pre-colonial period, Chuku (2009, pp. 3-4) clarifies that political power was based on many factors such as relationships, status, gender, religious title, and age grade; these standards heavily contribute to the male domination of the system. Despite the unequal participation of

women in the processes of governing, chances to access positions of authority still arose for them through their relation to influential men (sister, daughter, wife, in-law...).

In addition to their political participation, women were also essential to the Igbo's economy as they played an active role in agriculture, trade and craftsmanship enabling them to have financial freedom in the area of their male counterparts. Ogbaa (1995) affirms in his book "As farmers and traders, men and women are equal partners" (Ogbaa, 1995, p.28). Similarly, he adds that the exclusion of women from warrior service is in consideration of their other motherly duties. Although women could practice a wide range of occupations extending to practicing medicine, in which they perform surgical operations such as circumcision, they also had limitations. This is to say that the Igbo women in the pre-colonial era still suffered certain setbacks despite their important role in society.

On the other hand, the position of women during the colonial era was significantly undermined in various aspects, especially economically and politically. According to Chuku's survey (1995), Nigerian women were forced to rely on men's labor who were given access to training and taught essential skills that women were denied. The latter greatly undermined women's economic freedom in addition to the British colonial systems' focus on cash crops leading to large scale farming which pushed aside Igbo women who managed traditional subsistence farming, aside from causing issues with land ownership; Education provided by the British colonialist system could be considered problematic to women as it reflected western gender norms and stereotypes. While men were taught leadership and skills indispensable to acquiring a modern employment, women were disciplined on domesticity reflecting the expectations of submission home life on Igbo girls and women. Supplementary to the negative economic effects of colonialism on Igbo women, there were political repercussions of forcefully instilling a new administrative system while purposefully disregarding all existing organizations that allowed for women's participation in politics.

2. Motherhood and Superstition in Igbo Community

In hopes of potentially understanding the Igbo women, it is crucial to understand the concept of motherhood and the expectations it entails and how it shapes not only the life of women but also society. It is not exaggeration to say the most important accomplishment an Igbo woman can experience is to give birth to children according to their society. A fertile woman who has many children gains higher social status. Ogbaa solidifies this statement showing the contrasting effect fertility has on women, “unfortunately, barren women are not accorded the same respect as the ‘fruitful’ ones” (Ogbaa, 1995, pp. 30-31) Nwokosha reports that not only women face societal pressure to have more children, but sons specifically in order to gain recognition, and “exacerbating the situation is the fact that women in some communities achieve recognition not only by high fertility but also, and particularly, the birth of at least one son.” (Nwokosha, 2007, p. 9) In the Igbo community, the importance of motherhood is as clear as day light as women who struggle with infertility battle to find happiness outside of the predetermined concept of joy to a woman: motherhood. This is only amplified by the woman’s surroundings with neighbors and other women questioning these woman’s place in society after her primary role is cast off to her ‘barrenness’.

Another important aspect of Igbo society is religion. Simply put, Igbo religious beliefs consist of honoring the supreme god, deities and ancestors, other key concepts are chi and dibia (diviners). To start, the supreme god Chukwu is believed to have created the universe and everything else, he is associated with many things including the sun. In contrast to him, deities namely Alusi or Arusi are in charge of maintaining it; they are considered supernatural forces. The most well-known deities are Ala (deity of earth) and Igwe (deity of fire). Other small local deities exist as well in the beliefs of the Igbo people for whom their existence is uncontested. For instance, we find the goddess Uhamiri of fertility, who is responsible for the fate of women in her tribe by attributing certain blessings to them and denying them others.

These blessings have to do with the traditional domain of men, that of riches, money, and financial abundance. In their community, a woman is rarely allowed to own land independently of her male companions and family members. This is the reason for which Uhamiri is considered an unusual deity in the Igbo community despite her other attributions. In addition to her material wealth, the goddess is also known to renounce the traditional role of women despite her gender. Uhamiri is in fact childless. She is depicted to refuse the role of motherhood despite it being the most prized contribution to her culture that a woman can make. This makes her in some accounts appear to be oppressive as Mohammad and Usman discussed intensively, and as such her blessings remain incomplete. The authors go on to explain that the worship of the goddess Uhamiri comes at a cost: infertility. This is attributed to the fact that the goddess herself is barren, and because she believes that motherhood cannot be combined with priesthood, she deprives her followers of their ability to have children regardless of their wishes. (Mohammed & Usman, 2018, pp.4-5)

There are many controversies concerning ancestors in Igbo religion due to the fact that some researchers define the relationship as worship and others argue that it is honoring and respect. Ibadan defines it as follows, “(...) a special relationship has to be maintained between the living lineage and the dead members by the living offering sacrifices to the dead ones who are Ndi ichie.” (1975, p. 7-8) In both cases, sacrifices and offerings are made in exchange for blessings and protection. Chi is defined in various manners, however, for the sake of simplicity, we will take Ejizu’s (1992) definition, “the prevailing indigenous understanding in these subcultures is that Chi is primarily a spirit being intimately associated with the creation/reincarnation, protection, and destiny of every individual human being.” (p. 2) In other words, it is not far-fetched to call chi a guardian spirit which Chukwukere suggests that it has effects on the life of people,

(...) one who gets a good chi is thought of as usually 'lucky and 'successful'; he or she is not prone to serious irreversibly damaging mistakes, accidents, and misfortunes. The opposite goes for bad chi. and in this sense, it is believed that one's chi and ikenga work together to make success on earth a reality. (1983, p. 8)

He adds that sacrifices and offerings are symbols of gratitude that aid in the maintenance of good chi, and helps alleviate bad chi and evils caused by evil spirit. This is achievable with the support of a diviner (dibia) who will provide a divination and inform the patient of the cure. The existent of dibias is particular, as Uchendu explains, “‘dibia’ is a word that the Igbo tend to use loosely. an herbalist, a diviner or a medicine man may be referred to as dibia.” (1965, p.81). Women in the Igbo community make multiple visits to dibias throughout history for different reasons and outcomes. The superstition of the community allows for the domain of traditional and alternative medicine to prosper, which in turn leads to the spread of such healers or doctors. Sickness of the body and mind are said to be cure through visits to these knowledgeable individuals who hold the secrets to the body and its sicknesses, but not only that, they also take care of attending to issues of psychological nature often attributing them to spiritual origins. Their medicine consists of medicinal herbs at times, occultist rituals, and divination practices all aimed at driving out the disease. Whether or not these practices work is only up to their communities’ strong beliefs and their own experiences with said-treatments.

B. Historical background of colonial India

Asia is a melting pot of cultures, religions, arts and architecture along with complex social structures which all come together to create a fascinating viewpoint for simulating intellectual exploration. Within its bounds is India, a country with not only a profound illustrious history extending through thousands of years, but also home to great minds that marked records with their great contributions. In the recent century, India has gone through various changes that altered its course creating the complex setting we have now days; the

instigators of these transformations are the British colonialism and the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947.

1. Pre-independence India

The Indian subcontinent consisting of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh was subject to the British colonialism from 1757 till 1858 through the East India Company, followed by the direct rule under the title of the British Raj extending from 1858 into 1947 marking the Partition of India. According to Blackwell (2008), the British rule of India was facilitated through trade by the East India Company which was allowed to access Indian politics during the decline of Mughal empire that had political power over India. The EIC secured its dominance by eliminating the other European competitor companies and assured its monopoly over India until the Rebellion of 1857 that was fired because of widespread discontent with British policies, resulted in the dissolution of the EIC and intervention of the British government to rule India under the British Raj.

The period over British rule over India is said to have caused profound changes in the Indian society by the means of policies and education impacting women greatly. The British public kept a close eye on the 'strange' religious and societal practices of Indians, and they found great issue with some of them, in particular, widow immolation (sati), female infanticide, and the age of consent. Policies such as Bengal Sati Regulation was passed in 1829 under the Governor General Lord William Bentinck that banned the process of burning widows under a religious context which was rarely the will of the women herself, but the will of relatives and Pundit that did not consider the widow a free agent at the performance of the suttee. Such transgressions as the forcing of widows or the performance of sati for material gain could either be the result of ignorance of scriptures or reflect conscious design on the part of relatives and critics.

In addition, the Age of Consent Act of 1891 was passed to raise the age of consent from 10 years to 12 years out of concern for the growing issue of child brides and its health implications on young girls (Anagol-McGinn, 1992, pp. 1-2). The age of consent was later raised to 14 for girls and 18 for boys with the Sarda Act of 1929 (The Child Marriage Restraint Act). Other impactful acts are the Female Infanticide Prevention Act, 1870 and Hindu Widow's Remarriage Act of 1856.

In the sector of education, the British colonial system allowed increasing Christian missionaries to handle education which resulted in an unequal toll of literacy throughout the country and between genders. Lankina and Getachew argue that the reason behind the prioritization of the education of boys over girls is economic incentive, "Utilitarian motives underlie the colonial authorities 'hands off' approach to female education. Boys' schooling resulted in cheap and abundant supplies of clerks. Female schooling would have been a more altruistic undertaking due to women's limited employment prospects." (Lankina & Getachew, 2013, p. 10) Furthermore, they suggest that the literacy rate in boys and girls is less contrastive in states under princely governance as opposed to states under the direct British rule, "In 1921, in British Bihar and Orissa there was one literate female to fifteen literate males, while in princely Cochin and Travancore the ratio was one two" (Lankina & Getachew, 2013, p.10).

2. Motherhood in Delhi

On the issue of domesticity and life inside households, motherhood, womanhood and the role that the wife plays must come into discussion, for it has long been taken as a priori to a nation's development the purity and goodness of the wife and mother, who, by attending to the house order contributes by raising children for the well-being of India. Prajjwal Yadav and Amar Jeet discuss in an article entitled "*Significance of 'Mother' and 'Motherhood' in*

Making of Indian Nation” the various meaning that the word “mother” holds in the collective conscious of both the Indian people and state. They state that this word is used often in expressions such as “mother India” in order to evoke feelings of safety and security from the colonial rulers, given that a mother’s role is first and foremost to provide a home to her children. Taking all of India to be a mother therefore, allows for it to be seen as a national protector of its children, the citizens.

This designation of adjectives and qualities to the concept of motherhood has then lead, inevitably, to the desire to construe women as bearers of these national definitions of the word, in other words, India wanted to make its women in the image of this abstract nationalist symbol that it has adopted. This led to campaigns of wanting to educate women and train them to be chaste wives, in order to fit with this ready exemplar. Yadav and Jeet elaborate on this idea by explaining the procedures of it by referring to Sen’s work in 1993:

This iconic representation was a by-product of the abolition of barbarous practices against women like sati, polygamy etc. and also a potent force which contributed to this process of eradication. Women’s emancipation in the nationalist discourse resulted in national achievement and regeneration with women signifying social and national superiority (Sen, 1993). (Padav & Jeet, 2022, p. 23).

This is how the image of the woman became synonymous and symbolic with the nation of India. It created the concepts of “enlightened motherhood” to be given importance resulting in regulations that allowed women to study, yet to be formed in issues relating to the domestic work of a “good wife.” In contrast to this purified image of a woman, the modern Indian woman was seen as unchaste and impure which narrowed further down the definitions of a good wife and what motherhood could look like, which was very traditional and domestic, with the woman, mother, and wife providing care for the home and raising her children to inherent the same characteristics as she was raised on (Yadav & Jeet, 2022).

3. The partition of India 1947

The Partition of India can be considered the last parting gift- or curse from the British rule; an event that continues to shape India and Pakistan and their relationship. This partition came about in 1947 as a consequence of intense religious differences and crushing societal pressure; the results were no less than devastating for the Indian subcontinent than to be called a catastrophe by historians.

As for the causes for the partition, attributing the separation to religious motivations would be an oversimplification of complex issues and other factors driving both sides. Rajurkar (1982) points out the different parties blamed for the following event,

While some hold the British policy of 'divide and rule' in India primarily responsible for its ultimate division into two parts, others take the view that it was the so-called Congress Policy of 'Muslim appeasement' in India that finally led to India's vivisection. A few others put forward the argument that the tragedy of partition could have been averted if the Congress had been a little more responsive to the demands of the Muslim League. Then there are still others who vehemently declare that some major mistakes on the part of the Congress leaders as also some tactical errors on their part, ultimately led to a situation wherein partition of the country became inevitable. (Rajurkar, 1982, p. 1)

To restate, the separation came about because of many complex factors, and resulted in everlasting effects on geographical borders and political agendas. Some of these reasons that lead to it are the already existing religious divide between the Hindus and Muslims which was exacerbated by the 'divide and rule' strategy employed by the British colonial administration. Amidst this climate of political unrest, the all-India Muslims League led by Muhammed Ali Jinnah pushed for a separate state (Pakistan) to protect their political interests and identity. The congress' failure to reach a compromise and the leaders' lack of ability to represent both sides effectively proved to be fatal for the unity of India as this religious turmoil extended beyond political tensions into social conflict between those who identified

as Muslims and those who were Hindus. The two communities' fighting could not have helped the political divide, in fact, the political parties involved used it to justify most of their actions.

The Mountbatten plan was proposed in 1946 by Lord Louis Mountbatten to formally introduce the idea of the two states nation. This proposal aimed at separating Pakistan from India geopolitically by dividing their borders and creating two distinct countries, Pakistan for the Muslims and India for the Hindus. This was prematurely accepted by Indian leaders. One of the catastrophic consequences that we bear witness to today is that the borders were drawn hastily, and that was the responsibility of the boundary commission who was challenged by time and pressure of both parties and the complex interconnectedness of history, culture and religion which couldn't be drawn away with a simple line. According to Hassan (1998), the impact of this problem was not felt immediately by the common people as they were indifferent,

Contrary to the exaggerated claims made in both the countries, most people were either indifferent to or unconcerned with the national borders or the newly-created geographical entities that were being labouriously created. National borders were political constructs, imagined projections of territorial power. Although they appeared in deceptively precise forms, they reflected, at least initially, merely the mental images of politicians, lawyers, and intellectuals. Their practical consequences for most people were quite different (Hassan, 1998, p. 5).

This changed however, as the people started to see the real-life consequences of this separation between India and Pakistan.

4. Post-colonial India

The impact of the partition traumatized generations. It indirectly cause forced displacement and violence. The impacts of this division have marked the history of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. As is in all conflict, marginalized groups and minorities often suffer

the most. This was true for both men and women, however, most of the frustration and injustice of the living conditions of Indians were transferred onto women on whom the heavy toll fell. With the establishment of the state Pakistan and division of districts according to the belief of the majority; displacement of millions and mass migration of minorities to join their respective state happened. Ghosh (1998) suggests recounts that “between 1947 and 1949 an estimated one million Bengali Hindus migrated from East Pakistan to India, to Calcutta in particular. The decision to migrate was spurred by fear of violence, harassment and loss of status.” (Ghosh, 1998, p. 1). Talbot and Singh solidify the idea,

In 1947 South Asia witnessed one of the largest displacements of people in the twentieth century with the Partition of the subcontinent. The legacies of Partition have cast a long shadow on the people's lives in South Asia. At this point, the refugee movements also began in Jammu & Kashmir as the shadow of Partition fell over the territory. (Talbot & Singh, 2015, p. 143)

Partition violence was brutal; many lives were lost to it. According to Talbot and Singh, the consequences of the Partition are long lasting and shocking, leaving behind a significant number of human losses in addition to material ones. Some one million people—Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims are estimated to have been killed in Partition-related violence. Partition's legacy is now seen as far more complex and far-reaching than historians had previously recognized. As political scientist Gurharpal Singh has argued, the unintentional consequences of the Partition's mass political violence still continue to haunt the collective memory and history in both India and Pakistan. The lasting consequences of the 1947 Partition—signaled by Vazira Zamindar's idea of the "Long Partition" represent a serious threat to the nation-building processes in the region and have given reign to aggressive and narrow-minded nationalist ideologies in both India and Pakistan. The events of 1947 represent only the beginning of serial mass and women suffered greatly in the Partition of India in 1947; they were the target of crimes like rape, kidnapping and child marriages.

Bacchetta (2000) goes into more detail to explain the motivation behind these acts, she suggests that women were considered akin to territory: conquerable. As both sides thought of women as a subject of protection or defiling depending on if they belonged to their community or nation. Atrocious acts such as stripping, rape, made to parade naked, mutilation: amputating breasts or knifing wombs and killing fetuses, branding and tattooing of nationalist slogan to mark a defiled woman, and murder were committed against women. The idea behind this is that failure to protect women from their respective nation or community is a sign of feminization of the said community men, a reality of dishonor and shame. Some men regain their 'honor' by committing interfamilial crime; they kill their women who were violated or are about to be. Many women were also subjected to intrafamilial violence, and were killed at the hands of men in their own families because death was deemed preferable to dishonor. The honor in question is male honor, which required male control over the sexuality of female kin. Men deemed the murder of their own women a heroic alternative to interreligious marriage and conversion. Consider the narrative by Charanjit Singh Bhatia who is a Sikh: A Muslim neighbor had offered to have his sons marry Bhatia's uncle's six daughters to ensure their safety. The uncle seemed to agree, but that night he gathered all thirteen members of his family together and decapitated them. Bacchetta additionally comments on the situation women had to endure like self-sacrifice to death to spare their tribes shame, he writes,

The imposed misery on women is far from over; if not murdered by enemies or family, women were pressured to commit suicide in the event of the arrival of terrorists to their village. It is said that women would commit suicide by drinking poison or jumping into well on their own accord; however, Bocchetta suggests that the reason behind it is pressure from society reminding them of shame and dishonor. She reports that in an interview a woman recalling similar cases had no choice as the poison packets were readied for them. (Bacchetta, 2000, p. 9)

The Partition of India in 1947 has brought many tragedies that are yet to be fully comprehended; the resulted mass migration and violence has stained the history of the Indian

subcontinent and traumatized generations. It is not an exaggeration to classify the event as a man-made catastrophe which continues to shape the landscape of today's sociopolitical and economic state of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

This chapter has delved into the backgrounds in which the novels are set, starting with the Igbo community of Nigeria, to the Indian Old Delhi. Our study of these settings has shown a few similarities, as well as a few differences between these places. While they are both of the 'third-world', Nigeria and India are geographically very far apart with the patriarchy at the center of their culture. It is a system so ingrained in the formation of the communities' backbones that it is normalized to their peoples going as far as to justify all sorts of afore-mentioned crimes against women if they are deemed wrongdoing, impure or on occasion even widowed. Not only that, the patriarchy has also allowed practices that objectify women in a way as to hold them responsible for honoring and dishonoring a whole tribe, making them targets for repeated assault, not against them personally, but against the families, religions, and communities they represent. The patriarchy of these societies also justifies the need for male heirs to inherit their parents' riches as well as the need for mothers to care for them. In this way, patriarchy is an all-encompassing system with roots so deep in society that it has delegated fixed tasks to both genders which they are obligated to fulfill and punished for failing at.

Chapter II: Motherhood and womanhood in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980)

This chapter will deal with the concepts of motherhood and womanhood in the novels *Efuru* (1966) and *Clear Light of Day* (1980). The writers of these novels Flora Nwapa and Anita Desai bring into attention how the oppressive system is deeply rooted in judgment and complex social and cultural structures. They both make use of their female main characters, Efuru and Bim to demonstrate the intersection of gender, identity and social expectations alongside the assertion of agency in the context of a sexist society.

Igbo traditions are revisited by Flora Nwapa, the first African woman author writing in English, in *Efuru* (1966) for the sake of giving a voice to the marginalized Igbo women to tell their story through Efuru who navigates her life freely despite societal limitations. In a similar manner, Anita Desai explores in *Clear Light of Day* (1980) the challenges faced by women during the Partition of India in 1947 through the lenses of the Das family, Bim in particular, as she refuses to conform to society's expectations. In this chapter therefore, we are going to study *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa (1966) and Anita Desai by *Clear Light of Day* (1980) by drawing womanist perspectives from Bell Hooks and use them to position our main characters as resilient women in all their roles, be it domestic (mothers, caregivers) or professional (traders, workers). This analysis is done by reading into Efuru and Bim's layered identities and their constant display of autonomy in their limiting settings.

A. Womanhood and Motherhood in *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa (1966)

1. Efuru as a Married Woman

Igbo women live with the prospect of getting married: the path is already carved for them with the expectation to submissively follow it if they do not wish to be judged, in this manner, Efuru is no exception. Nwapa successfully portrays the notion that takes women's

domesticity, passiveness and subordination to their husbands as a given; Efuru is a satisfactory example of a 'good' wife according to the Igbo society. Once married, she willingly takes care of her husband's needs, handles the domestic chores, and practices her trade and brings home profits to support the family, all while maintaining a good relationship with her mother-in-law and community, in order not to spoil her image in her social circle, in other words, to keep her reputation clean.

Efuru's first marriage to Adizua proves to be a reckless move because her marriage starts when she eloped with her destitute fiancé who was unable to pay her dowry. Efuru regardless of this, tries to be a good wife, not only does she support her husband's decision to leave the farm and aids his trade endeavors, but she also helps provide the money later on to pay her dowry to satisfy their ancestors' customs. In this regard, Nwapa narrates, "Adizua went out and was making for home, when Efuru called him and gave him some money instead. So he gave the money to Efuru's father in place of the bottle of schnapps" (Nwapa, 1966, p. 23). This quote from the novel solidifies Efuru's devotion to her husband despite his lack of social status or wealth in contrast to her distinguished background that left everyone confused as to what worth she saw in such a man. Efuru later on has a child, Ogonim, who dies of sickness at the age of 6 years old in the absence of her father who leaves his family for another woman, leaving his wife to bury their child alone. Efuru, taking the advice of her surroundings, does not leave her husband immediately but waits an entire year hoping for his return; however, he fails to return resulting in her departure to her father's home.

Gilbert, her second husband, is her childhood friend whom she meets in her father's house. The initial years of their marriage are smooth and filled with happiness as Nwapa describes, "Gilbert was very happy with his wife. He was proud of her and respected her. They were so much together that people admired them. They went to the stream together, there they swam together, they came back together, and ate together" (1966, p. 137). As

expected in the Igbo society, Efuru's infertility comes in the way of her happy marriage. Therefore, feeling the pressure put on her by her surroundings, Efuru takes another wife for Gilbert, and discovers at a later time that he has an illegitimate child. He also misses her father's funeral and disappears for a while, the cause of which was ultimately exposed by a conversation in the market eluding that he was jailed. Her second husband hence stops being perfect and mistreats Efuru as well. This mistreatment results in a sorrow she is forced to hide. Eventually, the straw that breaks the camel's back is when he wrongfully accuses his loyal wife of adultery when she is sick, urging her to confess which she did not do,

Efuru. my wife. the gods are angry with you because you are guilty of adultery. and unless you confess. you will die. So you should confess to me and live. I won't ostracise [sic] you. you will still be my wife, and I won't allow anybody to molest you. So confess and live. (1966, p.216)

However, throughout the novel, Efuru is constantly shown to be self-sacrificial for her men, starting with her first husband for whom she breaks her traditions to her second one for whom Efuru actively seeks polygamy to reward him with a child. In spite of her behavior as a good wife, society hardly rewards her. Efuru through the former practice, does what is expected of her by society. Recognizing the pattern of a typical family in the Igbo community, having children is a necessity in every household, hence, her acceptance of sharing her husband with another woman becomes her duty as a wife, beyond any considerations of monogamy which is only expected of women while men are allowed, according to their customs, to proliferate and marry repeatedly in order to maintain their lineage.

2. Efuru in her Maternal Role

Motherhood is both oppressive and empowering depending on the context. It delegates a woman's role permanently to that of a caregiver taking up all of her time, while it can also provide tremendous joy and love. Different societies have different understandings of

motherhood, from glorifying it, to holding it as the greatest responsibility a woman can have. The Igbo people equate a woman's worth with her fertility, gifting women who have many children gifts, ceremonies, and a high social status. It is imperative for them that the womb of a woman carries many children with the hopes that many of them be male. On the other hand, infertile women are pitied at best. Their disposition in society is that of an incomplete person, and they are expected to offer their blessings to the remarriage of their husbands.

Efuru struggled to have children, which was difficult for her emotionally, especially since she craved the joys of motherhood. In her first marriage, Efuru is able to give birth to Ogonim after a long period of trying and many a visit to a traditional healer or what is known as a Dibia. After successfully bearing a child, Efuru gives birth to a daughter and names her Ogonim. Efuru is thus initially considered to start fulfilling her duties as a wife and as a woman in the community. She becomes an attentive mother who loves and cares for her child although it is not a boy. Unfortunately, however, her happiness with being a mother is short-lived, and Ogonim passes away after only six years into her life, leaving her mother childless and heartbroken.

The emphasis placed on motherhood in the Igbo society and the joy they claim it brings, makes any other form of happiness invalid, or at least unsatisfactory in their eyes. It is only with children that a woman's mission is complete. The second marriage of Efuru was a happy one at the start even though it was childless; however, people did not see it that way. Nwapa makes use of a scene where people see the happy couple, yet still find fault in Efuru's struggle with infertility to demonstrate Igbo's' attitude towards 'barren' women and motherhood,

The important thing is that nothing has happened since the happy marriage. We are not going to eat happy marriage. Marriage must be fruitful. Of what use is it if it is not fruitful. Of what use is it if your husband licks your body, worships you and buys everything in the market for you and you are not productive? (Nwapa, 1966, pp. 136-137)

To change her situation, Efurú tried to get help, but no amount of praying or visits to the Dibia proved any useful, so she opted to bring her husband another wife to bear his children. Her resort to polygamy was expected of her, otherwise she would face the reputation of a “bad” woman, therefore she says: “What is wrong in his marrying a second wife. It is only a bad woman who wants her husband all to herself. I don't object to his marrying a second wife” (Nwapa, 1966, p. 53). This quote illustrates the ingrained beliefs of Efurú's society that she has come to adopt and consider rightful conduct. Men's control over the community has therein proven to enter everyone's attitudes, so much so that a woman as independent as Efurú would readily accept her husband's desire, and her household's need for an heir. The story also suggests the importance of not just a child, but a male child in the Igbo society, because a male is considered his family's protector, and he is the one who takes care of the parents' funerals, gets land passed down to him, and continues the bloodline through marriage. Nwapa repeatedly hints to this favoritism by saying: “a girl is something, though we would have preferred a boy” (Nwapa, 1966, p. 72).

In spite of the circulating notion that joys of motherhood is the only fulfilment a woman could experience in Igbo society, there is a contrastive image painted of a happy childless woman all along the story: the Goddess Uhamiri. Efurú refuses to admit such contrasting idea of happiness, boiling down to the ending where she ponders why such goddess could be worshipped by women despite being childless, ignoring all her counted fortunes. In this perspective, Ògúnfolábí (2022) suggests,

it should be noted that though the space of Uhamiri isolates Efurú while failed motherhood stigmatizes her as failure, the ostensibly childless and happy goddess empowers her through the prospects of material wealth that is so necessary just as Ugwuta transitions to a modern society where capitalist economy predominates. (Ògúnfolábí, 2022)

The symbolism of the goddess Uhamiri is used throughout the story to hint to Efuru's destiny to remain childless and retain her social standing regardless. This translates Nwapa's belief in womanhood's transcendence of the need to be a mother, defending the sacredness of femininity in all its forms be it motherhood or independence and freedom. The goddess's blessings to Efuru and giving financial gifts on her show that money is not only the men's domain, letting Efuru infiltrate it and succeeding at it from the onset of the story to prove that. Equality with men is then not so hard to achieve once archaic beliefs are overcome, be it by choice or a stroke of divine destiny as it happened to the protagonist in *Efuru*.

Despite this positive image of childless goddess, and its appearance as satisfied and fulfilled, Efuru still occasionally thinks she is a failed mother, and this feeling is not unique to her case. Ogbodo et al. (2022) explain that an Igbo woman only considers herself a real woman if she is productive, otherwise she is rejected and left feeling incomplete. This emotion was stable throughout the story hurting Efuru's self-esteem and affecting her relationships. Hooks challenges this notion that places the value of a woman in her womb and criticizes holders of such opinions, "they imply that motherhood is a woman's truest calling; that women who do not mother, whose lives may be focused more exclusively on a career, creative work, or political work are missing out, are doomed to live emotionally unfulfilled lives" (Hooks, 1984, p. 135). This importance placed on motherhood by the Igbo community however, is ingrained in the necessity of survival in such a tribe, rendering the role of motherhood essential to the continuation of their lineage. Looking at the question of whether a woman's value lies in her womb would be an oversimplification of the process of reproduction and its importance for creating future generations for the Igbo community. The issue therefore lies on the very foundation of the family as the base unit of community. This primitive feeling is echoed throughout the story, and expressed through the characters' desire for having 'heirs', preferably male. The desire for a male heir is also due to the patriarchal

system of said community. In addition to the importance of motherhood, there is also a need for male child which complicates the task for bearing women. In such an environment, women are made to acknowledge the necessity of a male heir to a family due to the need for someone to inherit their fathers and households in spite of having female children.

In *Efuru*, these feelings reverberate through the characters and expressed as judgment for Efuru's infertility, a situation that she could not control. In fact, after struggling to conceive, she takes to seeing traditional healers and that shows that her understanding of the task of motherhood as an important if not necessary tenet of being a woman in her community. Despite her rebellion over many other aspects of life in Igbo, Efuru finds herself convinced as well that to bare a male child is a mission for her to achieve. However, as her tries fail, she comes to realize at long last that perhaps, motherhood isn't for her, and takes to developing other aspects of her personality. Through this, she proves her worth beyond her womb and her society's expectations of her to become a mother.

3. Efuru as an Independent Woman

Despite Efuru being limited by the restraints of society, she manages to rebel against certain aspects of culture she deems oppressive. Efuru's agency shines on two levels: personal relationships and economic independence. On the personal relationships side, the story began with her elopement with a poor man she courted only a fortnight who could not afford her dowry. This act paints her as a woman capable of taking her own decisions and someone who is not afraid of challenging the status quo. Other instances of Efuru's agency are when she chooses to leave her first husband Adizua regardless of her mother-in-law's pleas to stay and wait for his return by using her suffering as an example; Efuru thinks, "Perhaps self-imposed suffering appeals to her. It does not appeal to me" (Nwapa, 1966, p.61). This reflects a view

of womanhood outside of self-victimization and pity generating a sense of responsibility for one's life which Hooks recommends instead of self-pity,

Women need to know that they can reject the powerful's definition of their reality—that they can do so even if they are poor, exploited, or trapped in oppressive circumstances. They need to know that the exercise of this basic personal power is an act of resistance and strength. Many poor and exploited women, especially non-white women, would have been unable to develop positive self-concepts if they had not exercised their power to reject the powerful's definition of their reality. (1984, p. 90-91).

The second marriage also ends in failure as she chooses not to stay with Gilbert who accuses her of adultery, ignoring the lack of support from her friend who urges her to go back to him. She tells her friend: “if you are my friend. why then do you want me to go back to the man who accused me of adultery. You don't know the seriousness of the offence” (Nwapa, 1966, p. 220).

Another important aspect to Efuru is that she is an active member in her community. She manages to cultivate meaningful relationships with the people around her, extending a helping hand to those in need which elevates her position in society. Her interactions with other characters such as Ajanupu, prove to be the result of goodness that allows her to lean back for support in her moment of weakness when her daughter passes away and when she is accused of adultery by her husband. Ajanupu, by virtue of their friendship, takes it upon herself to organize the entire funeral. She even fights Gilbert and injures him when she witnesses the disrespectful accusation of adultery, which was fueled by Omirima's suspicion that was confirmed by a dibia. In her fit of rage, she scolds him:

“Eneberi, who are you? Who is your father, who is your mother? What have you got to be proud of You went to school. Eh? If your own brand of education is the only brand, then I am glad I did not go to school. Eneberi what happened at Onichal Tell me what happened at Onicha ? You don't know that we know that you were jailed. And here you are accusing Efuru, the daughter of Nwashike Ogene of adultery. You . . .” (Nwapa, 1966, p. 211)

In addition to defending her, she took her to many Dibia and cured her illness while providing mental support all along. Efuru's relationship with Ajanapu is a perfect example of sisterhood which Hooks encourages, a relationship where woman support each other despite their differences. Efuru herself is a representation of a good sister who stands in solidarity with other women and people in general. She is known for her good heart as she helps many people, even her ex-mother-in-law when she gets sick and asks for her. She also helps other people like her neighbors when faced by financial hardship, like Nwosu when he is sick and when he leaves his daughter in her care, as well as many others showcasing her good will and pure heart that is dedicated to helping others.

Omirima on the other hand, is the by-product of the sexist system that pits women against each other, the system that produces women who comply and police other women in an attempt to appeal to the oppressors and defend the system. "Sexism teaches women woman-hating, and both consciously and unconsciously. We act out this hatred in our daily contact with one another. women spend hours of their time daily verbally abusing other women, usually through malicious gossip" (Hooks, 1984, p. 48) The latter provides insight to understand the complex and depth of the effects of the system on women who are brainwashed to become enabling agents. Omirima is not a standalone case in her targeted doubts of adultery towards Efuru, between women, male supremacist values are expressed through suspicious, defensive, and competitive behavior. It is sexism that leads women to feel threatened by one another without cause. (Hooks, 1984, p.47)

She is also a capable woman who knows the importance to financial freedom; she is a successful trader whose skills cannot be undermined on top of being blessed by the goddess Uhamiri. She is said to bring wealth to her household and make profits from every trade she gets into. Efuru supports her husband's decision to get into trade and facilitates it, she challenges the gender norms by not relying on any of her husbands for financial security.

After leaving her first husband, she does not rush into another marriage immediately, but she focuses on her trade. The same goes for after she leaves Gilbert and focuses on herself and trade.

These aspects of analysis that we have focused on illustrate the uniqueness of Efuru in a society that was built on homogeneity. In addition to her rebellion against the household institution and her inability to conceive, her trade and work ethic are also aspects of her person that prove to add value to her individual vision of herself and her relationship with her surroundings. These achievements, both personal and financial however, did not come through without struggles unique to the female experience in the Igbo community. Hence, this character's persistence and resilience are appreciated only through an intersectional lens that combines issues that women struggle with in society.

B. Womanhood and Motherhood in *Clear Light of Day* by Anita Desai (1980)

1. Bim as a Sister

This part of the chapter aims to explore the similar issues of identity and their intertwinement with societal expectations for women in *Clear Light of Day* (1980). We are relying on concepts provided by Bell Hooks to illustrate the marginalization of women, and the Das sisters' resilience and lives with special emphasis on Bim who has had the most internal turmoil throughout the story, and the one to exemplify the key themes of the novel, such as the sense of family and its complex ties, forgiveness, the past's effects on the present, and most relevantly to our study, gender and its relationship to identity. We will also demonstrate the instances of Bim's rebellion against the established gender identities of women that the Indian society had constructed for her.

The Das siblings have complex relationships which change through time, they are the product of their environment and have shaped the four siblings' personalities as they grew up.

The story is told non—linearly, often featuring flashbacks and relying on visual imagery to put its point across. This makes for an artistically and psychologically compelling reading of the story, one which describes its themes from the perspective of its main protagonists, mainly Bim. Bim plays a crucial role in the family as she naturally steps up when her parents pass away and her Aunt Mira becomes incapacitated due to alcoholism, and she takes care of her siblings at the expense of her dreams and life. Bim’s relationship with her sister Tara is complex, mixed with guilt, resentment and love. The two sisters grow up as opposites; Bim is strong-willed, educated and assertive, going against gender norms with her ambitions, and often competing with her brother Raja. Bim also refused to marry. On the other hand, Tara is shy, timid and passive. All she wants from life is marriage and she did not do well in school as she lacks ambition. She envies Bim for her strength and she idolizes her while keeping distance away from her. Her guilt towards Bim stems from an accident in their childhood where Tara leaves Bim and runs away when they got attacked by bees; this cycle of abandoning Bim replays often in the story as she abandons her when they get caught trying Raja’s trousers and ultimately, when she marries Bakul and moves abroad leaving behind her sister to take care of the family. The sister who stays to care of everyone grows resentful and bitter, and the one who escapes the house in the decaying city to live away from her past only makes her regretful and uneasy. Bim’s tenaciousness to stay home is exemplified in her saying,

‘I won’t,’ repeated Bim, adding ‘I shall never leave Baba and Raja and Mira-masi,’ making Tara look away before her face could betray her admission that she, closely attached as she was to home and family, would leave them instantly if the opportunity arose. (Desai, 1980, p. 143)

These mixed emotions created tension between the sisters despite the affection and shared memories; Tara’s comeback to Old Delhi for Raja’s daughter’s wedding was the perfect opportunity for her to seek forgiveness for the misunderstandings between the two, Bim in

contrast who grew bitter and cruel wanted to be understood and acknowledged for the sacrifices she made. The sisterhood of the two women was a subject to new influences that came into light with the reunion. For instance, Tara climbed the social ladder after marrying Bakul and enjoying the economic benefit of it, upon her return to Old Delhi, and seeing the situation her sister lived in, a particular moment comes to mind when Tara is ashamed of Bim saving leftovers to serve in the next meal when she and Bakul would organize grandiose luncheons for every meal. (Desai, 1980, p. 149) It can be argued that Tara's subconscious thoughts, guided by her internalized misogyny, created a split in her relationship with her sister. Hooks explains that the women who have satisfied their role in the system have a feeling of superiority over those who have not, "While sexism teaches women to be sex objects for men, it is also manifest when women who have repudiated this role feel contemptuous and superior in relation to those women who have not" (Hooks, 1984, p. 46).

Raja's relationship with Bim is emotionally charged and subject to a lot of conflict. Raja idolizes his neighbor Muslim Hyder Ali which flees to Hyderabad soon after the partition of India in 1947 amidst the violence between Muslims and Hindus. Raja, who is a spontaneous, ambitious and educated man follows his neighbor to Pakistan and settles there after marrying the daughter of Hyder Ali. Bim, who was always close to her brother, felt betrayed due to his abandonment of the family after taking care of him when he got sick and nursing him back to health. Moreover, Raja sent her a letter following his inheritance of the house she was living in with their brother Baba, addressing her like a tenant and promising not to raise rent; this letter was kept for years by Bim to remind her of the anger and betrayal she felt receiving it of which the contents that caused a resentment are as described in the following quote:

(...) Benazir herself spoke to him about the house and asked him to allow you to keep it at the same rent we used to pay him when father and mother were alive. He agreed—you know he never cared for money, only for friendship—and I want to

assure you that now that he is dead and has left all his property to us, you may continue to have it at the same rent, I shall never think of raising it or of selling the house as long as you and Baba need it. If you have any worries, Bim, you have only to tell— Raja. (Desai, 1980, p. 33)

At the end of the story, Bim after a lot of contemplation and through her reunion with Tara, finally finds it in her to forgive Raja and invite him to their family house. Both siblings are very alike, what makes their lives radically different is their gender, while Raja's recklessness and stubbornness reflected well on him in society, Bim on the other hand is considered unruly and rebellious. Another difference between the two is their commitment and responsibility towards their family. Both had dreams and ambitions, but Raja was the one willing to sacrifice his family behind in contrast to Bim who sacrificed her happiness to keep the family afloat.

Baba represents yet another aspect of Bim as a sister; their relationship is fairly well. Their relationship is characterized by Baba's profound dependence on Bim, requiring her to manage his daily needs with great care. Her focus is on providing for all of Baba's needs and keeping him safe from harm, having long since come to terms with the unlikely prospect of his recovery. This dynamic demonstrates Bim's dedication and compassion towards her family as she establishes the steady predictable environment that is vital to Baba's wellbeing.

2. Bim as a Caregiver

Although Bim is portrayed as strong-willed and pragmatic, it does not take away from her compassion, empathy and dedication to take care of her family. She is a caregiver in many ways; she provides care for her autistic brother Baba and her alcoholic aunt Mira, she nurses Raj back to health when he gets sick, she financially provides for the family and takes care of all the domestic labor. she always dreamed of taking care of her family, "I shall earn my own living—and look after Mira-masi and Baba and—and be independent" (Desai, 1980, P.143).

Bim's care for her autistic brother Baba is central to her role within the family, Baba, who shows traits associated with autism, is presented with the perfect space that meets his needs thanks to Bim's efforts and consideration. His attachment to his gramophone and routine provides an example of a constant need for a structured environment to assure him comfort. Bim's resolve to ease the worries and suffering of her brother Baba is shown through her catering to all his impulses, "She had given up hopes for Baba's improvement long ago, and had settled down to making his life as bearable as possible by catering to his every whim, and protecting him from all possible sources of disturbance and distress" (Desai, 1980, p. 154).

Moreover, Bim understands Baba's inability to cope with new situations which she handles with care and patience. Her approach to care is not superficial as she continuously pushes Baba towards self-reliance and independence without pushing him over the edge because of stress. She understands his limitations and manages her expectations while providing encouragement to engage with his surroundings as she prioritizes his well-being overall. Although Bim is happy to care for her brother, it does take a great toll on her; Eifert et al., (2015) explain that despite the positive relationship between a caregiver and the receiver, it often takes a toll on the caregiver physically and emotionally.

Bim and Aunt Mira switch roles soon after the death of Bim's mother and Mira's alcoholism and her descent into madness. Bim finds herself caring for her aunt since her physical and mental health worsens, which could be attributed to the death of her sister that allowed memories of the past to overwhelm her as she suffered from mistreatment in her in-laws' house and being accused of causing her husband's passing at the age of fifteen (widows used to immolate themselves before it was banned; therefore, indentured servitude took place instead). Mira finds solace in bottles of alcohol as a coping mechanism for her trauma which has aged her prematurely. She was also frequently ill and looked skinnier and balder as time

went on; Bim understood her struggles and provided her compassionate care when she needed it, although that did not stop Mira from going further into her addiction and blackouts, in fact,

But as time went on and Aunt Mira spent fewer hours in sobriety and slipped off to her room more frequently—guiltily and desperately—coming out only rarely and then stumbling and brushing her hands constantly over her face. (Desai, 1980, p.92)

Bim's care regardless involved monitoring Mira's health, managing her episodes of inebriation, and providing emotional support while attempting to restrict her access to alcohol. The task was not an easy one as Mira's episodes only got worse with time and would cause her many injuries. This addiction facilitates Aunt Mira's eventual descent into madness which leads to her unfortunate death the year after Bim's sister Tara marries and moves away from the family home. It is important to note that Bim stood by Aunt Mira's side and supported her to her fullest, as that shows her selfless attitude.

Bim's role as a caregiver extends to include Raja when he falls sick of tuberculosis; she offered him extensive care as she nurses him back to health in addition to providing emotional support. When her brother Raja falls seriously ill, Bim's role as a caregiver expands to include intensive nursing and emotional support. Raja's illness highlighted Bim's ability to manage severe health crises. Desai explains that Bim's choice to not marry stems from deep desire to care for her family,

Now I understand why you do not wish to marry. You have dedicated your life to others—to your sick brother and your aged aunt and your little brother who will be dependent on you all his life. You have sacrificed your own life for them. (Desai, 1980, p. 101)

Bim plays another pivotal role in the Das family; she is the breadwinner, manages accounts, pays bills and takes care of all domestic chores. She is responsible for elevating the financial burden of the family with her job as a history teacher in college. The task of managing the shares of the insurance company her family owns also falls on her. This is while upkeeping

the house and maintaining order. Her title as caregiver is not an easy one; she has multiple responsibilities which, with time, take a great toll on her emotionally and physically, turning her bitter and cruel despite her initial good intentions. Hence, we come to read Bim from this psychological viewpoint that dissects her personality in a sympathetic way which paints her as a multidimensional character.

As Bim made her way through the oppressive and misogynistic atmosphere of her town and her community as a whole, even as she was not seen through a positive lens, her domestic life inside the walls of her home paint her in a different light than that of a modern working woman. Because of Bim's care for her family members like Raja and her Aunt Mira, she has demonstrated qualities of a mother by being a selfless caregiver to her family, and the support of her home as we will see in the upcoming subtitle. According to Dr. Yashu Rai (2015), it is Bim who ultimately represents the mother figure in *Clear Light of Day*. The absence of any other figure who fulfills the role of a mother in the novel is what pushed her to take everything on her shoulder, hence her refusal to marry, for Bim was already a mother to her siblings and Auntie Mira. The mother of Bim in the Das family home lacked the motherhood instinct altogether, and instead had a selfish and neglectful attitude and behavior towards her children when they were young. Auntie Mira also fails to embody the icon of a mother because of her eventual descent into addiction and disease which took away from her ability to provide care, and to flip the narrative on Bim who is left with the responsibility to care for her as a mother would.

We can thus understand that the role of Bim as a caregiver is also her role as a mother, encapsulating in her nurture of her family the values and attitudes of a mother concerned with the livelihood of her children, and henceforth, although she has refused to marry, we can see her paternal household and her keeping of it as a realization of her mother instincts.

3. Bim as an independent woman

Desai describes Bim as a strong, intelligent, and assertive woman. This is well-reflected throughout the story. Bim, who strives for a way to free herself of the oppressive limits of society that oppress her, often finds herself dealing with anger and guilt as her past and relationship with her family. Her independence can be seen in her attitude towards social norms and her decisions in her personal and professional life.

Bim has many characteristics that are not usual for women in her society and that it views badly. She is a strong-willed, educated, and a professional woman which does not adhere to society's idea of women, for they must be the opposite to be accepted, like submissive, passive, and mellow. These traits are personified by Bim's sister Tara. Bahri & Vasudeva analyze the characters, "Bim moves on the one hand toward self-assertion, intelligence, strong-mindedness, independence, education, and professionalism and, on (...). Tara, the quiet, retiring one whose childhood is marked by passivity, fear, and isolation(...)" (1996, p. 277) Her rebellion against society's conventions is demonstrated through her refusal to get married which is considered the life purpose of a woman in the post-colonial climate in India where she lives. This is despite the pressure from her family and the proposal of the doctor she rejected. Her choice to remain single underscores the importance of her autonomy to her and highlights her desire to live her life on her own terms.

Bim faces various challenges as she navigates her life, since she has taken many responsibilities for the sake of her family. Bim's strength is highlighted because of the hardships she faces, and societal judgment she is subjected to. She realizes early on in life the patriarchy of the Indian society and the limitations it imposed on women. Desai makes use of the scene where Bim and Tara try Raja's trousers to capture the moment in which the girls' understanding of their social standing crystallizes, "Suddenly they saw why they were

so different from their brother, so inferior and negligible in comparison: it was because they did not wear trousers.” (Desai, 1980, p. 135)

Desai paints Bim as a reliable woman; she is always available to provide support for her family whether it is emotional or financial. She oversees the house and the finances of the family as she provides and manages the company shares despite having never been taught to by her father and not receiving any support from her brother Raj,

I don't understand the insurance business. Father never bothered to teach me. For all father cared, I could have grown up illiterate and—and cooked for my living, or swept. So I had to teach myself history, and teach myself to teach. But father never realized—and Raja doesn't realize—that that doesn't prepare you for running an insurance business. (Desai, 1980, p. 156)

In addition, Bim regards highly her education and professional life since she is a motivated person who aims to contribute to society, being possessed by a sense that continuously desires her to achieve for academic fulfilment herself. This is why she takes on the role of a history teacher which is considered a demanding profession that women traditionally stay away from, reflecting her dedication to academia. She struggled to get where she is as she had to postpone her studies to be caregiver while she lacked any support from her family, her father never showed interest in his daughters' education, and Raja, unlike his stoic father, often teased his sister Bim about her dreams and how she will amount to nothing. In one instance,

Bim was preparing for an exam—she sat before her books with her elbows glued to the sticky desk-top, trying to ignore Raja who paced up and down, interrupting and annoying her by mocking at the absurdity of her ambitions and putting forth ridiculous schemes for his own future. (Desai, 1980, p. 99)

The passage sheds light on the gender role and devaluation of women's ambition within the context of their families. Hooks explains the oppressive nature of families towards women and highlights an important issue which is central to the story: sexism in non-white

family units is the reason for the disintegration of households because of these reinforced gender disparities and the power struggles in the home. In fact, hooks as far as asserting that “the movement to end sexist oppression is the only social change movement that will strengthen and sustain family life in all households” (hooks, 1984, p. 38), thus blaming the growing familial problems on the systematic oppression of women and neglect of their rights and needs as individuals. Bim represents this fact by harboring a grudge against her brother for long denying her identity and desires.

Through this study, we have shed light on Bim as a multidimensional character who strived for excellence, sacrificed herself, and acted selflessly in a society that was characterized by intense prejudice against women in post-partition India as shown in the first chapter. The readily available information on the horrors that Bim had to live through, intersected by the psycho-social elements of subjection and neglect that were widely spread in her surroundings, proves this character to be a self-accomplishing individual who manages to overcome family tensions and societal burdens all while holding the financial responsibility of the Das family.

This chapter has thus provided insight into the selected aspects of womanhood in our primary sources, drawing from the intersectionality of class, race and gender in the context of the two novels set in two different parts of the world, relying on the concepts of hooks to show the social realities of their struggles and the difficulty of overcoming their natural situations. Additionally, this chapter aimed to extract the instances of rebellion that these women showed to counteract the dominating patriarchal mood of their respective spatiotemporal settings. Efuru and Bim by virtue of their independent characters both push the limitations of their societies and define their womanhood and lives according to socially inadequate yet individually veritable identities. Efuru in this light appears as a character driven not by fear but by determination, in order to surpass the issues she encountered in the

story, such as the failure of her two marriages, the death of her child, and her society's judgments of her. Bim on the other hand, paints a vivid picture of how an Indian woman was able to assert herself in a restrictive society living in the turmoils of politics and gender inequalities. Her portrait was presented to us in a psychological lens mixed with facts on her life often serving to clarify her depiction as an independent but flawed woman who has had to build herself –and her family— up in order to survive. Additionally, motherhood in the two stories existed just below the surface, for the two protagonists showed aspects of motherhood in different ways despite the fact that neither of them ended up with children to raise. Their instinct and care for others in their stories demonstrates their readiness to be mothers albeit to their communities in the case of Efurú, and to their family members in the case of Bim.

C. Womanhood of Bim and Efurú

The characters of *Efurú* and *Clear Light of Day* by Flora Nwapa and Anita Desai respectively are the protagonists of the novels. In them, they are portrayed as strong women who take their destinies by hand and go after the things they want. In their societies, they are considered as rebels because they do not follow their patriarchal standards of living for women. Bell Hooks worked extensively on the question of female problems in non-white societies and communities, and studies the effects of the patriarchal system on the livelihoods of women. In this part of the chapter, we are going to look into some of the issues raised and dealt with in *Efurú* and *Clear Light of Day*.

1. Resisting patriarchy in *Efurú* and *Clear Light of Day*

With a special focus on women's issues, we have uncovered the effects of this arbitrary delineation of society and its stratification of the sexes that led to the exasperation of violence and the suppression of liberties. For instance, in the Igbo community, women are expected to be domestic creatures with the primary role of motherhood, as in carrying

children and raising them to the beliefs of the community in order to maintain the system. The beliefs are of course patriarchal in nature, where the man is the head of the house and also the one to lead every aspect of the women's lives. The men were also in charge financially, engaging in trade, and also benefitting from inheritance more than women, whose roles were relegated to care and traditional medicine. In India on the other hand, women's situation was even darker, especially when the political situation became dangerous and insecurity reigned in the community pre-independence. The political tension that expanded into a religious struggle between the Hindus and the Muslims caused a lot of problems against women who were already marginalized. The horrors poured on the female sex because the patriarchy allowed for women to be used as forms of dishonoring enemy tribes, for instance, kidnapping and humiliating a woman would cause the whole tribe to plunge into shame.

This violence in the form of subjugating women and reducing their freedom is present in the novels *Efuru* and *Clear Light of Day* who are set amidst these social conditions caused by the patriarchy. In *Clear Light of Day*, Bim and Tara are influenced with the ideas of male superiority and their reign over women, which is shown in some instances in the novel. The female characters are in one instance, shown to be in awe of Raja's clothes and different garments he wears so much that they try them on one night. They discover with the masculine clothes on their skins that it feels different from the feminine clothes that they usually wear. Contrary to the soft drape of their traditional dresses, the male fitting of the trousers and the shirts of Raja provoke a strange sentiment in which freedom is mixed with a sense of confidence that was strange to them as women, Desai described it as "Great possibilities unexpectedly opened up now they had their legs covered so sensibly and practically and no longer needed to worry about what lay bare beneath ballooning frocks and what was so imperfectly concealed by them" (Desai, 1980, p. 132). This is but one example of their personal association of masculinity with superior or otherwise desired qualities that are unattainable for women

because of their garments and also the limitations of society that are synonymous with the requirements of women's clothes to be modest and blend in. In *Efuru*, the title character faces a lot of prejudice that brings her to accept polygamy as a way out of her struggle with infertility, she even suggests that her husband take another wife, "this is the fourth year of our marriage and I have not had an issue for you. We have lived happily these four years. And I am worried. If we get another wife, a young girl, she will have children for you and I will love the children because they are your own children." (Nwapa, 1966, p. 174). She agrees to the remarriage of her second husband to another woman in order to assuage him and let him have children because it is what is expected of her as a wife in the Igbo community with a strong emphasis on the reproductivity of a woman to assure her husband many offspring. Eventually, however, as Efuru falls ill, her husband does not reciprocate her selflessness and believes unfounded rumors about her adultery. Bim and Efuru are thus shown in some instances to internalize patriarchal beliefs and act upon them in their lives.

The main characters Efuru and Bim however, are painted separately from the model of the exemplary submissive woman of the patriarchy. The woman who is accepted in her community as such has the qualities of a domestic creature whose interests revolve around the house, raising children, and the satisfaction of attending to her husband's needs. Hence, marriage comes as a priority to women of these societies which they consider to complete them. However, our characters Bim and Efuru each go about bending this rule in their own ways: while Efuru ventures into marital life twice, seeking love and companionship from men who turned out to disappoint her, Bim turns away from the institution of marriage by refusing the offer of Dr. Biswas for her hand in marriage and continues to work in a university.

Women's work is one of the aspects of their oppression, therefore, we can read Efuru and Bim's choices to work continuously throughout their lives as an act of self-imposition and resistance to the established rule that women must stay at home. Bell Hooks in her work often

lamented on the concept of work as something we do to maintain a level of self-esteem and purpose. The protagonists hence created their identities separately from the one expected of them from society in order to assert themselves in the male-dominated world. In fact, they had no choice but to sustain themselves and their families acting as providers for their households, sacrificing in the meantime the notions of traditional family life.

We have addressed the issue of patriarchy in these novels, less from an expositional point of view, treating it as the center of our study, but instead as a blockage the main characters worked around and transcended with their free wills in order to create and maintain an identity that in its very existence challenged the pillars of misogyny and gives hope to the disposition of women as free thinking agents capable of performing traditionally male roles and excelling at them even in such repressive environments.

2. Maintaining motherhood in *Efuru* and *Clear Light of Day*

Motherhood as an instinct was prevalent in the novels as a shadow lurking in the pages and making the reader aware of its stark effects on the actions of Efuru and Bim. Indeed, they have both demonstrated this instinct in their interactions with the world around them, through nurturing their young or the incapacitated or even taking care of the community at large as did Efuru despite the unconventional disposition of Bim as a working woman in a household without parents, she managed to take up the role of the loving mother to her siblings, especially Baba, and also her alcoholic former nanny Mira. Her selflessness towards these characters, as well as her resentment of her sister Tara for escaping from this responsibility, demonstrate how she maintained the heart of a mother despite striving to achieve financial gain in a male-dominated career as well. On the other hand, Efuru's daughter was an early example of her maternal instincts that only grew stronger after her daughter's passing. Through her work, Efuru was able to prove that it only made her motherhood stronger and

broader, extending her hand in help to many members of her community who relied on her and her successful trade. From this lens, the characters Bim and Efuru are similar yet from opposing viewpoints, mirroring each other's strong natures of motherhood, with one of them caring for the members of her household and the other taking her community at large as the receivers of her love and nurture.

3. Home in *Efuru* and *Clear Light of Day*

The two characters' peculiar choices according to their societies have also been used by the authors to each describe her personal views on the issues of womanhood. In their own ways, both Flora Nwapa and Anita Desai made their protagonists rebels in the face of multilayered repression to bring to the center the strength of their gender and fight back against the stereotypes of woman and mother, giving theirs with courage and resilience. Additionally, they have used weaker –or absent— male characters to contrast the females to. In *Efuru*, her husbands' shows of unreliability deepen her depiction as trustworthy and loyal, while in *Clear Light of Day*, Bim is shown to take care of her incapacitated brother and to take care of a home left behind by her other brother, instances that raise her position not only to a caregiver but a responsible and mature adult left to sustain a home all by herself. Efuru likewise ends up in her familial home all by herself after her loving father passes away, an image which shows the eligibility of Efuru, her sense of responsibility, as well as her newfound freedom. The home thus becomes for both women a symbol of endurance, accountability, and capability as they each continue to live there alone. According to Mohammad and Usman, Efuru's ending was in fact oppressive to her, leaving her without a husband or father, however, we suggest that these two protagonists, not only Efuru but Bim as well, be seen as catalysts to changing the definition of womanhood and motherhood alike even when it does not conform to societal expectations of women such as those of Nigeria and India.

Additionally, the home is not only the place of residence, but also includes the surrounding environment and the community that lives in it, sometimes extending into activities and rituals bound by common and shared beliefs and values. For this reason, Efuru builds a home outside of the walls of her house by spreading her wings to her neighbors in her village, thus gaining a feeling of content and fulfillment despite it being different from what is conventionally expected of a woman. Efuru is accepted by the members of her community as well because of she has proven her resilience, strength, and dependability towards them. In *Clear Light of Day* on the other hand, the home within the walls of the house and its garden represent the essential place where Bim feels at ease, and it represents in a way, the inner workings of her mind reflecting her psychological state, going from the past back to the present in the narration of the novel. In this manner, the novels mirror each other also in this regard, imbuing their stories with different definitions of what home means to each of the protagonists, representing at times the community at large and the sentiments of sisterhood and help that pervade, and in others the contemplative silence of a house filled with memories on years past.

All in all, comparing different aspects of the novels reveals they are in fact mirroring each other in many ways, from the multiple marriages of Efuru and its lack with Bim, the home representing different things, and the nature of motherhood that is exercised by both protagonists in different ways. It proves the different yet complementary natures of womanhood as they are depicted in the novels, asserts female strength, and serves to depict experiences of women of color who have each strived and achieved selfhood.

This chapter has therefore revealed aspects of motherhood and womanhood in the two books, *Efuru* (1966) by Flora Nwapa and *Clear Light of Day* (1980) by Anita Desai through using key concepts developed by Bell Hooks to illustrate the societal pressures put on women. We have also ventured into looking at the main protagonists of these novels as rebels who did

not conform but instead charted their own paths with their own conceptions of happiness through work and independence.

V. Conclusion

The subject of this research is womanhood in both of *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa (1966) and *Clear Light of Day* by Anita Desai (1980) and the masterful depiction of femininity in both novels. We have relied in this analysis on the works of Bell Hooks, mainly *From Margin to Center* in which she elaborates on the issues of feminism as many conflicting elements that make the simple problem of gender one that is multilayered and intersected by many other challenges. Hooks frames these matters within the social context of women of color that she believes involves in addition to gender disparities, problems of class and race and social standing. From this lens, we have attempted to extract the elements of the aforementioned interrelation of the women of color's expression of their womanhood in the respective novels we dealt with.

The focus of the analysis is two-fold: first the historical background of the Igbo community and the Partition of India 1947, and then the representation of female struggles in the aforementioned works relying on the feminist theory of Bell Hooks. Our work has attempted to take a look into what these works have had as a unique depiction of their societies' problems and repression of women in their respective ways. The two chapters were then a way to immerse us in the historical settings with special emphasis on women's issues both in the Igbo community and the Indian one in the previous century. In this way, the first chapter provided a realistic canvas from which the second chapter got its resonance in relation to the issues discussed by charting the real life circumstances of the lives of not only the fictional characters of the two novels, but also the millions of real stories that follow the same traditions of their societies with all their customs, repression, and overall unique settings.

In addition to the historical setting, the second chapter also relies on our selected method to understand the marginalization of women, but with more focus on the main

characters' efforts to overcome them. Efuru in *Efuru* made her way in spite of gossip and personal failures including divorce and infertility, and Bim in *Clear Light of Day* navigated her life taking accountability for her choices that were deemed unusual for girls of her society like celibacy and work. These characters, through their interaction with the other characters in the novels, proved their personal individualism and contrasted themselves against those who chose to conform to their societal norms. This study has therefore helped showcase their resilience.

What remains to be said about these works and this analysis that conjoined them in relation to their depiction of womanhood astray from the prevailing social norms of their cultures is that Bell Hooks's work has clarified that there is more than the gender element to the issue of feminism, therefore, we suggest that this approach be applied on other similar works, that look into fictional characters to represent real life issues of women across the globe. The goal from that would be to express the multitude of voices that women of all backgrounds utter to try and change the unfair disposition of their gender as oppressed, and their cultures as inferior.

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