



## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work proudly to my beloved father, **Ali** who informed me with his endless love and who always pushes me forward

To my golden mother **Kerbane Fatiha**, who taught me how to defy the challenges of life.

To my precious brothers **Massinissa** and **Djaffar** who are always protecting me.

To my special grandfather **Hocine** and my grandmother **Djedjiga** long life for them.

A special feeling of gratitude goes to my lovely aunt **Nora**, who is always with me, and to all my other aunties and uncles.

To my dear husband **Abdenour** who gave me inspiration, patience and encouragement.

**Sabrina**

To my lovely parents **Karima** and **Tahar** for their belief on me, understanding and supporting me morally and financially.

To my lovely brothers **Amar**, **Ghilas** and **Massinissa**.

To my sweet sister **Fariza** and our little angel **Cilina** who gave a new meaning to our life

Finally to my friends and relatives.

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## **Abstract**

This piece of research falls within comparative analysis of the representation of motherhood in the works of two feminist African writers belonging to different generations, Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*(1979).In order to reach our purpose and support our premise, we have relied on the theory of Motherism developed by the Nigerian theorist Catherine Obianuju Acholonu in her work, *Motherism:The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism* published in1995.The work comprises a discussion of two important sections; firstly, we have studied the status of women in African patriarchal society and their sufferings from polygamous men and how both patriarchy and colonisation work together towards female subservience; Moreover, we have shown the myth of motherhood which is imposed on woman within African society. Similarly, in the second chapter, we have explored the importance of motherhood for African women's identity, focusing on the female protagonists Nnu Ego and Efuru. Then after analysing both works we have come to the findings that both writers are feminists deal with women's issues and the victimization of Igbo women in Nigeria and by extensions all societies. Finally we have supplied a conclusion that summarizes our findings in relation to our issue, and how both authors regarded motherhood.

Key words: Motherhood, Motherism, African female writers, patriarchy, colonisation, polygamy.

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Being a woman writer, I would be deceiving myself if I said I write completely through the eye of a man. There's nothing bad in it, but that does not make me a feminist writer. I hate that name .The tag is from the western world-like we are called the Third World.

Buchi Emecheta

## 1. General Introduction

Literature is a mirror of societies which reflects the society's emotions, ideas and issues. It globes universal interest of societies. African literature is viewed as a traditional one with vital elements because it possesses both written and unwritten form, transmitted throughout time from one generation to another. The western powers viewed African literature as an emanation from the underdeveloped world, therefore it is considered as unworthy of any attention. However, the emergence of elites and intellectual writers in Africa such as Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah and Léopold Sédar Senghor tend to correct all the racial misrepresentations and the cultural submitted mind caused by the colonizer and they intended to establish the assumed cultural superiority of one race over the other and to celebrate their traditions and identity. However African male writers depict a masculine literary work in which female characters are accorded a very low status. In 1990, in an interview with *the Nigerian literary magazine Quality*, Flora Nwapa herself declared:

Nwapa: 'We have suffered in the hands of male writers. From Chinua Achebe, to Wole Soyinka, to Cyprian Ekwensi.'

Quality: 'How?'

Nwapa: 'Read Things Fall Apart. Look at the male characters; the women were just ...'

Quality: 'Are you saying that there's a kind of literary chauvinism?'

Nwapa: 'Sure. Because we used to wonder, don't male writers have sisters and mothers in their own society? Why don't they write something positive about women in their novels?'<sup>1</sup>

In African literature, Female characters are seen as subsidiary characters and their good deeds are not recognized in their literary works. This patriarchal perception of female characters had produced hardship, not only as it is practiced from the traditional perspective in real life, but also by male writers themselves in their writings.

Women used to be passive and without any voice even in their society which is controlled by men, who believe that they were born as natural leaders to their tribes and women are under their control. The suffering and humiliation which African women submitted under the male chauvinism, led to the emergence of African female writers. They have started writing and portraying their characters as having a destiny of their own life by exploring themes that embrace society to find a place for them near male writers. In addition to that, African women wanted to denounce marginalization and change the patriarchal values, norms and accept a woman as a part of society and emphasize the importance of female's status as being equal to male community.

With the emergence of Women's Writings, women started to search for their place in African society, this was the beginning of strong women after years of bondage. Finally, they found their voices in writing, their strong desire for freedom and acceptance as full citizens not as a subordinate creature in their communities encouraged them to use literature as a vivid tool to tell and share their stories; suffering and oppression. Literature gave women .The Nigerian writer Flora Nwapa was the first African woman to write about women's conditions .She gave more importance to the daily trajectories of the everyday lives of Igbo women under the line of her novel *Efuru* (1966). Similarly, the famous Nigerian female writer Buchi Emecheta in her novel *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) drew a picture of the dreadful state of African woman by using a female character as a protagonist under the name Nnu Ego.

African women get rid of the prejudice against them, they decided to rebel with their pen to write about women's problems, like Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta wanted to light the destiny and raise awareness of women by depicting the reality of their situation in a realistic manner, they tried to reflect and raise African woman's voice through their novels hoping that they might underline woman's issues, dilemma and concerns, In addition to that,

they required to attract men's attention since they did not care about women's happiness or health, they see woman as objects not subjects to fulfil their sexual impulse which is an occasion for latter to bear children.

## **1-1The Review of literature**

Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979); have been the subject of many critics, from different perspectives. *Efuru* (1966) has received a substantial consideration of literary criticism especially from male perspective, since Flora Nwapa, is considered as the mother of modern African literature, the first woman to write in English, her first work *Efuru* (1966) set the stage for the emergence of female writers in Nigeria and African continent.

First of all, Nwapa was criticized by the literary critic Eustace Palmer for her amateurism "Flora Nwapa's novel leaves the reader with the impression that its author has not yet mastered her craft, it lacks the fluency"<sup>2</sup>. According to him Flora Nwapa is still debutant in writing, without experience, her novel lacks fluency and coherence, she does not make efforts in writing her novel and this can be noticed by the reader when reading her novel. Then he argued that from her style, literary techniques and the event's order of her novel, it is easy to know that it is her first novel "it is too obviously a first novel"<sup>3</sup>. After that, he focuses and blamed her for including too much detailed information; especially on the Igbo traditions and their way of life "the novel could quite conveniently have been half this length (281pages), for the bulk of it consists of unnecessary sociological information"<sup>4</sup> Actually, for him a good work should include only what is important and necessary; that can attract the reader's attention. But Flora Nwapa gives much unnecessary details and does not give importance to the structure and demands of her novel, she gives much importance to the Igbo society.

Another remarkable critic by Eustane palmer is that Flora Nwapa is seen as skillful novelist comparing her writing technique to Chinua Achebe's one, he pursues this point further in an essay on Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*(1958) , “we have only to contrast Achebe's technique with that of an inferior novelist Flora Nwapa to see how skillful she is”<sup>5</sup>.Then he examines the novel in terms of characters for being largely unconvincing, for instance the protagonist of the novel *Efuru*(1966) always dreams of becoming a mother and bearing children but at the same time she worships the river's goddess Uhamiri ( an infertile goddess) .

The last critic, Solomon Ogbede Iyasere is in agreement .In an essay entitled *African Critics on African Literature*, he includes *Efuru* (1966) in the category of novels “in which social and political realities are discursively presented and obtusely elaborated by the author”<sup>6</sup>. In this context, Flora Nwapa narrated the real life and situations of African people who are struggling for many centuries in order to live and how much they were oppressed and colonized by white men.

Even if *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) has been known as Buchi Emecheta's most outstanding novel, but it received a considerable number of critics. Andrew Norman Wilson in the observer states: “Buchi Emecheta has a growing reputation for her treatment of African women and their problems. This reputation will surely be enhanced by *the Joys of Motherhood*”<sup>7</sup>.

*The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) unfolds events in Nigeria (Igbo society) during the period of colonialism. At that period Nigeria was invaded and colonized by British imperialism and they were living under the white men's control; in this context Killam claims “In 1930, and moving forward to the time of independence from colonial rule”<sup>8</sup>.Finally, Andrade states: “*The Joys of Motherhood* affirms Efuru's claim that pre-colonial Igbo women had more independence than their colonized descendants”<sup>9</sup>, he indicates the huge difference between pre

and post-colonial life and the negative effects of colonialism on Igbo women, in pre-colonial period women were oppressed by patriarchal society, dominated by male but with the arrival of British imperialism , women were double oppressed (race and gender) .

## **1-2: Issue and working hypothesis:**

It appears from the above review of literature that Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and Buchi Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood* (1979), have been already studied in relation to women's oppression in African society. However, the theme of motherhood and its importance for African women has not yet studied, which is our goal. Both works have received a great deal of criticism even if *Efuru* (1966) and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) are written in different circumstances by two different generation of writers, but they share many points, such as the theme of motherhood in Igbo land and how women faced a double oppression and racial discrimination in their communities.

This dissertation is a comparative study deals with the two masterpieces of African literature; *Efuru* (1966) and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), both of the authors deal with motherhood differently. Our task is to identify the source of this difference between the two writers, regarding their perception of motherhood, relying on the theory of Motherism developed by the Nigerian theorist Cathrine obianuju Achuluno sited in *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism* published in 1995 where she gives the importance of women in African society within the context of motherhood and its importance to complete a woman.

This dissertation is divided into two sections. The first section is devoted to the introduction as well as the two novels reviewed from different perspectives then the methods and materials used in analyzing the two works. The second section is divided into two chapters;

the first one will provide the Aspects of women's oppression in African society such as polygamy and patriarchy, then we will discuss the importance of motherhood which is a symbol of power according to African traditions. The second chapter will focus on the representation of motherhood in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru (1966)* and Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood (1979)*.

### **1-3: Methodological outline**

In order to explore the theme of Motherhood in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), this dissertation will follow the IMRaD structure. We have started with a general introduction in which we have introduced our topic, and the general background about the topic with the review of some works written on Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). In the method section, we have introduced the theory of Motherism by Catherine Obianuju Acholonu developed in her work, *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism* (1995). Then, we have provided a brief summaries of the novels cited above in the material section.

Results is the second section where our findings are revealed. They are discussed in the Discussion section which is divided into two chapters. In the first one, we have tried to give a general background of the condition of African women in their society. Then, in the second chapter, we have attempted to analyse the representation of Motherhood in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) with a comparative framework. Finally, we have ended our work with a general conclusion where we have summarized the main points tackled in our study.

## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup>Adeleke Adeogun, Nwanne, “*Some ANA Members are Crazy*” (1990), 28 - 31.

<sup>2</sup>ADEWALE MAJA-PEARCE, *Flora Nwapa’s Efurū: A study in misplaced hostility*, (world literature written in English, 1985).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Iyasesre Solomon Ogbede, *African Critics on African Literature: a study in misplaced hostility in African literature today*, (London: Heinemann Educational Publishers), 26.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Norman Wilson, *The Observer* (quoted in Zell, Bundy& Coulon , 1983), 151.

<sup>8</sup> Killam GD, *Literature of Africa: Literature as Windows to World Cultures*, (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Florence Stratton, *Contemporary Literature and The Politics of Gender: “their new sister”*, Buchi Emecheta and *the contemporary African Tradition*, (London: Routledge press, 1994), 111.

## **II. Methods and Materials.**

### **A. Methods:**

This section aims to highlight the theoretical basis of our work. In fact and for the purpose of relevance to the issues treated in our work, we intend to borrow the theory of Motherism developed by Catherine Obianuju Acholonu in her work, *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism* published in 1995 in order to reinforce the theme of motherhood and its importance in African society.

### **1-Catherine Obianuju Acholonu's Motherism:**

The term "Motherism" was first coined by the Nigerian writer, researcher and former lecturer on African Cultural and Gender Studies, Catherine Obianuju Acholonu in her book entitled *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism (1995)*, she provides an African alternative to Western feminism. According to Acholonu motherism is composed of motherhood, nature, and nurture:

An Afrocentric feminist theory, therefore, must be anchored on the matrix of motherhood which is central to African metaphysics and has been the basis of the survival and unity of the black race through the ages. Whatever Africa's role may be in the global perspective, it could never be divorced from her quintessential position as the Mother Continent of humanity, nor is it coincidental that motherhood has remained the central focus of African art, African literature (especially women's writing), African culture, African psychology, oral traditions, and empirical philosophy. Africa's alternative to Western feminism IS MOTHERISM and Motherism denotes motherhood, nature and nurture.<sup>1</sup>

According, to Acholonu the concept of motherhood is taken both literally and metaphorically. She defines motherism as "a multidimensional theory which involves the

dynamics of ordering, reordering, creating structures, building and rebuilding in cooperation with nature at all levels of human endeavour”<sup>2</sup>. For her a mother involves several dimensions, aspects or initiatives. The African woman is in all a mother, she cannot live without the significance of a motherist concerns. She is a nurturer, a home-maker that is to say ; all the hard activities of home are put under her responsibility. In addition to that, she is a partner for her husband and a defender of both her husband and her children, here we can see how a mother has a sacred position in societies, and she is the one who can take the place of all others but whose place no one else can take. Acholonu defines a motherist, as :“a man or a woman ... a builder, a healer, not a destroyer, a co-creator with God, a lover of the child who loves and respects all men and women irrespective of colour, race, ethnicity, cultures and religions”<sup>3</sup>. In different ways, the mother is an activist because she has an active and a vivid role in her society. Acholonu depicts motherism with a historical sense because a mother’s role in society is to globe it and assure the survival of all peoples and generations; she is like a hope of the continuity of the existence because motherism is committed to the survival of the mother land or the land of ham which is Africa and the Mother Earth.

The motherist discourse or this African variant of feminism transformed into a theory; which seeks to draw a general framework of African feminism. Which underlines the struggle of African men and women, to free themselves and their society from the fangs of the colonizer and class oppression under racial mistreatment, before going home to sort out their differences together .

Motherism, is a supporting framework to this paper because Acholonu placed the importance of a woman in African society within the context of motherhood that those last have an inseparable relation, that is to say we cannot separate motherhood from a woman, it has this concept of motherism as a basic element .The motherist relationship between both Flora Nwapa

and Buchi Emecheta belonging to different age of writing is the fact that they look at motherhood as a lived reality, they did not approach motherhood with the same eyes .

## **B- Materials:**

This part of our work contains the biographies of the two novelists with regard to its relevant to the issue under study, and summaries of Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and Emecheta's *the Joys of Motherhood* (1979).

### **a- Biography of Flora Nwapa**

Flora Nwapa, from her full name Florence Nwanzuruahu Nkiru Nwapa, is a Nigerian novelist, best known for re-creating Igbo traditions and customs from a woman's viewpoint. She was born in 1931 in Oguta, eastern Nigeria, and Enugu, Nigeria. She was educated at the University of Ibadan, receiving her first B.A. in 1957. Moreover she earned also a degree in education from the University of Edinburgh (1958). She was an educated officer in Calabar in 1959 and taught English and geography at Queen's School in Enugu from 1959 until 1962. From 1962 to 1964 she was an administration officer at the University of Lagos.

In addition to that, she engaged in ministry as a Ministry of Health, Education, and Welfare Lands, Survey, and Urban Development and Establishments. She was the Managing director of both Tana Press, which publishes adult fiction, and Flora Nwapa and Co., publishing children's fiction, in Enugu, Nigeria. She was married to Gogo Nwakuche, an Industrialist, she gave birth to three children. She on died October 16, 1993, in Enugu (Nigeria) Nwapa's writing was based on women's liberation from oppressive means of colonization and patriarchy, she wrote many novels such as: *Ido* (1970), *One is Enough* (1981) and the most notable one is *Efuru* (1966) which was Flora Nwapa's first novel, *Efuru* (1966), the first novel

published by a Nigerian woman and the first novel in English by an African woman writer. It was followed by *Idu* (1970). Each of these novels has an eponymous heroine, struggling with the issue of childlessness in Igbo society. Nwapa's second novel, *Idu* (1970), is also concerned with the issue of motherhood.

### **b- Biography of Buchi Emecheta :**

Buchi Emecheta, in full Florence Onyebuchi Emecheta, (21 July 1944- 25 January 2017) is a Nigerian Igbo writer whose novels deal largely with women oppression in a patriarchal society with the difficult and unequal role of women in both immigrant and African societies. Emecheta married at the age of 16, and she emigrated with her husband from Nigeria to London in 1962, she started working as a librarian then in 1970 she joined the University of London where she got a high degree in sociology. She worked as a community worker in Camden North London and lectured in United States throughout 1979 .After that she returned to Nigeria in 1980 as senior research fellow and visiting professor of English at the University of Calabar. Finally she was made as an officer of the British Empire OBE in 2005.

Buchi Emecheta is now among the most important female authors, to emerge from post-colonial Africa. She has been characterized as “The first successful black woman novelist living in Britain after 1948”<sup>4</sup>.She began writing stories based on her life and experience including the problems she encountered in London as a woman first then as a black woman (race and gender),including *In The Dish* (1972); her first semi- autobiographical novel, *Second Class Citizens*( 1974) , *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977) and her well known novel *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) which was an account of women's experiences bringing up children in the face of changing values in traditional Igbo society .In addition to that ,she wrote also plays and works for children such as *Nowhere to play* (1980) and *The Moonlight Bride*(1980). Most of her early novels were published by the London based company “Allison

and Busby” where her editor was Margaret Busby. Emecheta’s writings are based on themes of child slavery, motherhood, female independence and freedom, patriarchy and male dominance, she once described her stories as “stories of the world where women face the universal problems of poverty and oppression, and the longer they stay, no matter where they have come from originally, the more the problems become identical”<sup>5</sup>.

Buchi Emecheta in her writings takes the reader across the boundaries of time, to the colonial domination of Africa, at the beginning of her writings she was rejected by many African feminist writers because she lives in London and they thought that she shares the same point of view with western writers, but she strongly refused to be called a feminist; in her essay “*feminism with a small f*” she said that “being a woman and African born ,I see things through an African women’s eyes ;I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African women I know. I did not know that by doing so, I was going to be called a feminist, but if I am now a feminist then I am a feminist with a small f.”<sup>6</sup>.

### **c- Summary of *Efuru* (1966)**

Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* was first published in 1966, she was the first African female novelist to give a candle for an African female character. Her novel *Efuru* (1966) is special because it occupies a foremost position in the minds of academics and students of African literature, being the first text from a woman’s eyes. The novel tells a story of Efuru a beautiful, smart and remarkable woman and the daughter of a Chief of a tribe in Igbo community. The story opens with Efuru’s autonomous action; she moves from her father’s house to marry Adiuza, an ordinary poor man without any consent of her family. She falls in love with him, she breaks the traditions of her tribes and her husband did not pay her bride price which is an obligatory gift in African societies. Efuru lived with her husband and her mother in law, she helped her husband in trading and they love each other so much. The two lovers shared the hardship of life until they could collect money and pay Efuru’s dowry.

After a year of marriage, Efuru has no baby, so she decided to go to a dibia to see what is wrong with her why she is not pregnant all this time. Months passed Efuru succeeded to give birth to a baby girl Ogonim, she was very happy, finally she became a mother, but unfortunately, Efuru's joy did not last long because the little girl dies and the mother's emotions die with her. In addition to that her husband leaves her for another woman, Efuru did not understand why Adizua left her but she decided to return to her childhood house and carry on her trade as nothing has happened to her.

Days and months ago, Efuru meets another man named Gilbert. An educated one different from the ordinary Adizua. She married him and lived happily together. After four years of marriage Efuru lost the hope of tasting the joy of motherhood, she decided to marry her husband Gilbert with another woman, he agreed to marry another fertile woman to have children. The new wife became pregnant after a short period of time but Gilbert revealed that he had another illegitimate son with another woman, he started to spend a long period of time away from home, Efuru stayed calm and carried her life as usual but her hurts was buried deeply in her heart. Efuru's father died and Gilbert did not attend the funeral.

After four months Gilbert back home but nothing was the same for Efuru the same scene that she used to live in her first marriage with Adizua because Gilbert was jailed along these months for his foolishness and Efuru was very angry against him. Finally, she decided to leave her second husband and returned to her father's house. Then she has dedicated herself to the lady of the lake, Uhamiri, a goddess who has no children but is beautiful, wealthy, and wise, like Efuru herself and became a worshiper.

#### **d- Summary of *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979)**

Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) tells the story of female protagonist Nnu Ego who has always dreamed of becoming a mother. After a year of her first marriage, she returned to her father's home because she was unable to produce children. However, after months of her second marriage she gives birth to her first boy (Ngozi). She was very happy for not being barren woman. But her happiness was uncompleted because she lost her first child, she saw herself as incomplete, failure and not a woman . After a slow and painful process, she becomes pregnant again and gives birth to a boy (Oshia). Nnu ego lived in miserable conditions with her family; she always struggled to live and to help her husband Naife. After a long period of suffering in order to feed her children, Nnu Ego gives birth to another son Adim. Finally, she was assured her position in society as a complete woman and a mother of two boys, but also her responsibilities and her life become more complicated and difficult especially with her husband's absence. Nnu Ego has no news about her husband for many years and she gives birth to twins girls which make her life more difficult and her, after her husband's return for few days Nnu Ego becomes pregnant again and gives birth to another boy. One day she decided to go back with her family to Ibuza (the deathbed of her father), but after her father's funeral she is unwilling to return to Lagos. With Adankwo's (her husband's inherited wife) advices she returned home but she found life becomes more difficult than before and many black people are slaves of the whites.

Nnu Ego is pregnant again with twin's girls which make her unhappy because she always wants to give her husband more boys. First Oshia and then Adim announce their intentions of furthering their education. Four years ago Oshia succeeded to leave his village to United States of America, marries a white woman and rarely contacts his mother, Adim later went to Canada, Taiwo's marriage is arranged to an Igbo clerk, but Kahinde runs away to marry a Yoruba, At the end Nnu Ego has also returned to her homeland where she dies several years later alone by the roadside.

## **Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup>Catherine Acholonu. *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism*. (Owerri, Nigeria:Afa, 1995),110,111.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 112.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 3.

4

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<sup>6</sup> Nathani Wane Njoki, “*Indigenous African Knowledge Education: food processing practices among Kenyan rural women*”, (University of Torino Press, scholarly publishing division, 2014), 14.

## Results

This research is a comparative study in which we tried to compare between two Nigerian works, Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Flora Nwapa's Efuru* (1966). Our comparison focuses on the theme of motherhood and the importance of becoming a mother in African society. To achieve our goal we have relied on the African feminist theory of *Motherism: the Afrocentric alternative to feminism* (1995) developed by the Nigerian theorist Catherine Obianuju Acholonu .

After analyzing the two selected works, we have come to the findings that both writers are feminists who deal with women's issues and the victimization of Igbo women in Nigeria and by extensions all societies. Another important point reached after analyzing both female protagonists Nnu Ego and Efuru, was that African women were forced to submit to the necessity of conforming to the extremely imposed requirements of their masculine societies. For many centuries, they were oppressed, marginalized and considered as second class citizens in their patriarchal society. Finally, we have come to the conclusion that both writers have different perspectives regarding motherhood because they do not belong to the same generation. Flora Nwapa belongs to the first generation, considered as the mother of modern African literature; she overvalued motherhood in her work, for her a woman who was infertile, even if she was intelligent and educated she will never live a happy old age and she will stay alone at the end, on the other hand, Buchi Emecheta who belongs to the second generation refused to accept the patriarchal definition of motherhood means womanhood and argued that motherhood should be a choice not an imposition, rather than presenting an idealized view of motherhood, she supplies a nuanced and challenging account of the experiences of motherhood by using Nnu Ego's struggles as a powerful example in order to expose the harsh realities of the lives of mothers .

## **Chapter one: Aspects of Women's Opression**

For many centuries, African women used to be passive and without rights; woman and man are treated differently by the same society; women are defined by their fathers, husbands or children, they were subjected to negative stereotype. In addition to that their contribution to build their society have been neglected or even omitted. This negative portrait led African female writers to the need of having a vivid existence in their own community. This chapter aims to highlight the status of African women in their societies and the different discrimination that they have faced such as patriarchy which is viewed as one form of political organization that dispensed power in an unjust and iniquitous way between men and women. In addition to that, we will introduce polygamy as a form of oppression which is mainly present in African female writing because for male authority, they have all the right to take more than one woman to satisfy their needs and to maintain the house, then to bear children to assure the continuity of the community. Motherhood is another issue discussed in female writings, which according to African context, one of the greatest achievement to complete a woman .As the last point we will study how motherhood is a symbol of power.

### **A-Status of Women in African Society**

In pre-colonial Africa, women were considered as important figures in their society, they had greater influence on social, economic and political status. For many years, they enjoyed positions of prestige and recognition for their social rules, they were conspicuous in high places and they were queen mothers, queen sisters, princesses, chiefs and holders of other offices in town and villages. In traditional African societies, gender was not the most important stratifying category; Niara Sudarkasa in her article entitled *The Status of Women in Indigenous African Societies (1986)* notes that power was based on seniority rather than gender<sup>1</sup>, however elderly women were more respected than others, they had a special place in society and could take

decision in many important issues concerning family and community, and they were seen as oral tradition transmitters to future generations through artistic expressions such as stories, folktales, proverbs, songs and dance in this note Obioma Nnaemeka states that: “in African oral traditions women were highly visible not only as performers but also as producers of knowledge, particularly regarding oral literature’s educational relevance and moral obligations”.<sup>2</sup> Researchers in the field of African oral tradition have recorded the active participation of women in the preservation and transmission of oral literature.<sup>3</sup> The existence of African women and their power in the pre-colonial societies were based on ethic of care that was rooted in their motherhood and their nature which was peacefulness and non-violence, in this context, a Somali poet Mohamed Suleiman in his poetry entitled *Hadraawi Mother* (2011) celebrated women’s status and their importance in society ;Mohamed says:

Oh Mother, without you  
Language would not be learnt  
Oh Mother, without you  
Speech would be impossible  
There is no one in the world  
You did not bring up<sup>4</sup>

In pre-colonial Africa, a mother is seen as a basic school where they learn everything, a popular Somalian proverb says: “before becoming adult we attend a basic school and that school is mother”<sup>5</sup>. However, with the arrival of colonialism, many traditional sexist structures were reinforced by western morality and Victorian ideology, traditions were usually interpreted in ways that favored men’s control over women especially with the imposition of patriarchy; which is masculine in ideology and therefore celebrated violence, valour, conquest and new dominance, on this note, Diop Chikh Anta in his book entitled *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or reality? (1989)* holds the view that patriarchy denies women from their rights, subjugation and making them properties of men especially after paying the bride price to their family.<sup>6</sup> Colonialism is considered as one of the major reasons, for women oppression

and marginalization in African society, because of its negative effects on women. Certain pre-colonial traditions of women's groups that protected women's rights within communities, and that ensured power sharing between the two sexes were often misunderstood by colonizers who brought their own legal system, colonialism reinforced gender division in African society; in such society women were oppressed through gender inequality and traditions; they were considered as second class citizens and inferior to man, regarded as useless and sometimes inhuman, every field was dominated by man; and the voice of pre-colonial women who negotiated and complemented in their society was largely silenced. African men believe that they were born as natural leaders to rule their tribes, dominate their wives and that women's place is at home bearing children especially a male child in order to be called a woman and feeding them, not in the sphere of business or trade, instead of promoting political equality and economic rights for women in their societies, they were often encouraged to pursue domesticity and economic subordination to a male who serves as a head of family.

African women were marginalized and oppressed socially, economically and politically. Male leaders rarely speak out against the culture of male dominance most believing that gender arrangement are natural or traditional and must not change, for instance Daniel Moi, president of Kenya, exemplifies this view when Kenyan woman at *the international conference on women* in Nairobi published in 1985, recommended that women must be more equitable represented in parliament Moi responded that "God made man the head of the family and challenging that was tantamount to criticizing god."<sup>7</sup> According to Gordon 1996; In Nigeria, Igbo women exercised significant political power prior British colonialism, but colonial administrators perceived politics as a man's concern and thus female political influence declined.<sup>8</sup> The negative effects of colonialism on women have mainly not been limited to political aspects alone but also to agriculture; for instance in Uganda, it was women farmers who first started cotton cultivation yet in 1923 the British administrator in charge of agriculture declared that "cotton growing

cannot left to the women and old people”<sup>9</sup>, thus a new technologies were introduced for cotton growing they were taught only to men in order to eliminate women.

African women were not marginalized only in agriculture and politics, but also in literary field. The African voice started as male voice; in which women were stereotyped and projected in bad light. They were presented as inferior, silent, weak and men’s property, expected to regard man as their lords and owners, they were nearly always described on the basis of her own relationship to a man as mother, daughter or a lover. This stereotypical way of presenting women and their position in society has been echoed by Kolawole. M in her article entitled *Womanism and African Consciousness* published in (1997) argued “male writers in the early phase of African literature encouraged the marginalization of African women”<sup>10</sup>. Later on, they were stereotyped by western feminist writers by describing them as “women of color” and neglecting their sufferings from colonialism and its negative effects on women and their position in society. As a response many African feminist writers were emerged in order to correct their image, such as Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo and Mariama Ba, they illustrated in their novels African women who are accomplished, very intelligent, well behaved, successful and had an active role in society not only at home but also in other fields such as trading and agriculture.

## **B- Patriarchy**

Patriarchy is a social system in which men hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property. Some patriarchal societies are also patrilineal, meaning that property and title are inherited by the male lineage. Patriarchy is associated with a set of ideas, a patriarchal ideology that acts to explain and justify this dominance and attributes it to inherent natural differences between men

and women. Sociologists tend to see patriarchy as a social product and not as an outcome of innate differences between the sexes and they focus attention on the way that gender roles in a society affect power differentials between men and women. Historically, patriarchy has manifested itself in the social, legal, political, religious, and economic organization of a range of different cultures. Even if not explicitly defined to be by their own constitutions and laws, most contemporary societies are, in practice, patriarchal.<sup>11</sup> For instance, In the African novel *Things Fall Apart (1958)*, the description of Igbo community focuses on men's actions, a successful man with a title should have more than one wife, he is always the head of his family or tribe, it is considered as an androcentric where man is all and woman is nothing despite her hard working at home, that is to say a woman or a wife is not more than an obedient and a part of men's acquisitions, come in multiple numbers.

Among the myriad discrimination practiced against woman is physical violence which is not the only form of oppression suffered by women in the patriarchal family structure where the male is the supreme chief of the community and woman an obedient wife without voice or any sense of a good life, and this can be noticed from Buchi Emecheta's novel *The Joys of Motherhood (1979)* when Nnu Ego the protagonist of the novel was beaten so badly by her husband Amatokwu "Amatokwu, I don't blame you for beating her so badly. We will not quarrel, for we are in lows"<sup>11</sup>. A woman is dependent on her husband, she cannot defeat her husband even if this last has many wives and her portrayal is painted with dark colour, she cannot do anything without his permission.

Forced marriage is another mould of oppression imposed on women in the African society, where all women's issues must be treated by men. It is preventive for women to achieve equal opportunities. African women were faced harsh discrimination, they were not considered as equal to men, and they suffered from bad treatment under male laws and rules, they are called "The Other" and men are the dominators, for them they have all the right to guide woman's life

even at the level of choosing her future's husband otherwise if she refuses to obey, she will be considered as an antagonist for her traditions.

Men in African societies allow women to work outside the home. In fact, many women start working to support men in financing the family because they are aware of the increasing financial requirements, so women help in trading and farming, but African woman tried to free themselves from male domination through economic empowerment and education. For Buchi Emecheta the education of a girl is different from a boy because a girl learns many social and family issues more than a boy.

African women are believed to have experienced hardships that have affected their lives in different ways. They are oppressed, suppressed, and considered as inferior to men, and can be looked down as second-class citizens. But women writers insist on the crucial need for education to be accessible for every child, especially woman in order to have the freedom of expression and the freedom of changing the “double oppression” signed by the colonizer and African male kingdom. As Emecheta states, in her autobiographical book, *Head Above Water*:

My mother did not understand me and did not see the reason for my wanting at school. How we both suffered those days. Poverty and ignorance can be really bad even for a mother and daughter who apparently loved each other but did not know how to reach each other.<sup>12</sup>

### **C- Polygamy**

Polygamy, which is defined as the practice of having more than one wife at the same time; or multiple marriages generally practiced by men. The term is opposed to monogamy which is the more common practice of having just one wife at any given moment. Historically, many factors are thought to have perpetuated polygamy and these include; higher mortality rates of men, satisfaction of sexual desires, traditional practices, culture and the need to have many children as desired. Polygamy is widespread, socially as well as culturally accepted

phenomenon in many African countries especially in the rural regions thanks to the fact that it represents an aspect of their culture and religion, Speizer, Ilene .S in her article entitled *Men's Desire for Additional Wives and Children (1995)* documented that monogamous men from rural parts of sub-Saharan Africa express more desire for additional children compared to man from urban areas.<sup>13</sup> African marriages are polygamous; a man can make a decision to marry another woman in any time without looking to his first wife's emotions and the major reason of polygamous marriages in Africa is that children were seen as a form of wealth in African societies, in this context Zeineb Al Hammadi and Dadoo.F in their article entitled *Marriages type and reproductive decisions (1998)* state:

Polygamous marriages are the most popular in the rural regions and are taking place in the low educated peoples. Polygamy has reflected various different on the couples where couples relationships will be more traditional than in monogamous marriages. Men are the masters in a family in particular in the developing nations and rural regions. Men can take the decision at any time to marry one, two, three, or four wives. Marriage is more locus of reproduction in African countries.<sup>14</sup>

Women under polygamous marriages experience varying degrees of emotional difficulties such as anger, loneliness, unhappiness, emptiness, depression and neglect, they are sexually exploited by their husbands and they are exiled from their bodies as it can affect them physically or mentally; women in polygamous marriages are at increased risk of acquiring sexually transmitted infections which can led to their sufferings or death in young ages or in child birth.

Polygamy and gender inequality are the traditional factors that men use to oppress and dominate women, they were seen as men's property and slaves especially after paying a huge bride price to their families Nyanhongo Mazvita Mollin claims: "commodities that only appeal to the owner whilst still new"<sup>15</sup>. In African societies, men's wealth was judged by their huge barns and their number of wives and children, the more wives a man had, usually meant more children. Man in African society was not only judged by the amount of wives, but also on how

he rules his family and dominated his wives ,African men marry more than one wife for reasons such as trying to prove their manhood or to have enough hands to work in their family farm, and this can be noticed in the majority of male writings such as the well-known Nigerian fiction *Things Fall Apart (1958)*, in which Chinua Achebe neglected women's sufferings from polygamous men and described them as weak, inferior, oppressed and marginalized .In Igbo culture having several women in household enhanced a man's status. The practice of polygamy in most Igbo homes is usually due to the quest for power, respect and more children especially a male child because the Igbo's place so much importance on the male child, if a woman cannot bear a son she is considered as barren by her in-laws even though she might have daughters. Another reason for polygamy in African societies was inheritance; the brother may inherits his dead brother's wives if the woman was not old; the practice was meant as a means for the widow to have someone to support her and her children financially, and this is highlighted in the majority of African writings .

Buchi Emecheta is one of Nigerian feminist writers who explored the issue of polygamy and its negative effects on women in her novel *The Joys of Motherhood (1979)*,most of male characters are polygamous .It depicts the life of Igbo woman who sacrifices all her life for her children and her husband in order to prove that she was a complete woman .Nnu Ego, the protagonist of the novel was a powerful example about women's suffering from polygamous men, for instance; her father Nwokochi Agbadi has married four wives ,three slaves and two mistresses “two of Agbadi's wives came from Ibuza, two from his own village of Ogboli, three were slaves he had captured during his wanderings; and he also had two mistresses”<sup>16</sup>, he was described as an aggressive man, his view about women is all about beauty and possession, he changes women every time he felt that she could not satisfy him enough or she was looking for motherhood.

He marries a few women in the traditional sense, but when he watched each of them sink into domesticity and motherhood he was soon bored and would go farther afield for some other exciting, tall and proud female.<sup>17</sup>

## **D- Motherhood As a Symbol of Power**

Marriage is a formal and social union between two individuals in order to share life. In the African context, marriage is a fundamental aspect of advancement that unites African families. It is a social contract with its rules and regulations, a rite of passage uniting two persons to share obligations and values. In order to complete this act of union, a woman should bear a fruit of her marriage by giving birth to a baby, it is the wish of every woman, to have a happy family, a peaceful home and children. African society teach girls from their childhood that they will be most successful when they get married and bear children. In order to be a good wife, a woman must be first a good mother. A woman plays the major role in her marriage, both within her family and her society in general. However, her role is limited to raise children, cooking and cleaning. She is seen as an object of reproduction, her female body is no more than a tool of pleasure and she should take care and fulfil all the needs and demands of her husband, otherwise, she will be considered as a bad woman. All those sacrifices that a woman makes, on the other hand men fail to aid women in the simplest tasks of home.

Motherhood, in the words of many writers, has got many definitions and assumptions. Motherhood is one of the most powerful word that contains all the sense of sacrifice; bearing a child and giving birth is a sacred level. The concept of motherhood in African patriarchal society, has another meaning. It is influenced by religious mythologies and folklores. According to the traditional and cultural milieu of the society, a woman is considered a complete woman

only when she gives birth to a child. Moreover, her motherhood is valued and celebrated if the child is a boy. In *Procreation Not Recreation: Decoding Maman in Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood*, Marie Umeh explains the state of mind of Nnu Ego when she fails to have children in her first marriage. Marie Umeh's reflects Igbo society's masculinity. It raises the question of women's lives, who, not only fail to have males inherit:

[The] glory of a woman is a man; a woman without a son is a failure; marriage is for the production of male heirs to continue the husband's lineage; and a complete mother is a mother healthy sons.<sup>18</sup>

In traditional Igbo society, motherhood was powerfully valued. Women were considered as a full citizen, only when they experience motherhood, because the tribe knew that without women to produce children, there would be no continuity for the community. In addition to that, Igbo people believe in mythology of numbers, in which the ideal number of producing children was seven, because seven means completeness or perfection in the tribal culture. If a woman had more children she was considered exceptional. If a woman had ten children a celebratory ritual was held in her honour. After this ceremony, called "igbu ewu ukwu", the woman was considered one of the blessed "queens of mothers" and gained great respect and status in the tribe. A mother of a single son is valued much more than a mother of a number of daughters. Moreover, a woman cannot claim for her femininity unless she experiences the joy of motherhood. Thus, barrenness is an issue of subjectivity and oppression for the woman. The Nigerian scholar Remi Akujobi states that in African societies and cultures there exists the belief that 'motherhood is an essential part of being a woman, outside which the woman is empty'. She also writes the following:

It no longer a secret that the Nigerian woman considers herself a real woman only when she has proved herself to be fertile and the 'halo of maternity' shines over her. This holds true for most women in Africa where the index of motherhood is used to define 'real' women or responsible women. This is so in the sense that motherhood is a

prerequisite for social acceptance, many non-mothering women experience feelings of rejection and low self-esteem.<sup>19</sup>

A woman's identity is completed by the fact of giving birth to children, otherwise, she will be considered as equal to men. In African society, motherhood not always means to produce children, but also at times it symbolizes women's power of fertility.

Motherhood has been described in glorious terms. Women are respected in African society for nothing, but for their ability to procreate, her fertility is painted with the colours of nature, and this portrayal of woman is underlined in Negritude poets, where the Mother Africa land is likened to the woman's body which are two productive elements, and give birth to a new soul, this piece of art is illustrated in Leopold Sedar Senghor's Poem *Black Woman (1945)*:

Naked woman, black woman  
Clothed in your colour which is life, with your form which is beauty!  
In your shadow I have grown up; the gentleness of  
Your hands was laid over my eyes.  
And now, high up on the sun baked pass, at the heart of summer<sup>20</sup>

The stereotype representation of women in male writing, truly speaking in this poem through a patriarchal vision tends to grave the image of Africa as a naked woman, in which the addressee is a woman specifically is a Mother, which takes on larger dimensions as she is seen in the mould of the Nation. Africa is metaphorically represented as a fertile female by illustrating motherhood as motherland and the supreme position of Africa as a mother, the centre of existence, because she is able to give birth and embodies the whole world with her softness and love for her children. However a woman is seen with a highest importance metaphorically but practically she is nothing.

Motherhood is one of the most important gift, which a woman could give to her husband and to her society .However, childlessness has caused a lot of physical and psychological sufferings for woman in her environment because she is regarded as a hopeless creature. Ketu

H. Katrak In her book *Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women Writers of The Third World* (2006), point out that:

Postcolonial women writers do recognize motherhood as a significant part of cultural tradition, a role that is personally sustaining, and that carries enormous social status and prestige. A different aspect of mothering is also commonly revealed, that is, mothering as m-othering, when the experience of being a mother, or of not being one (infertility, or by choice) is alienating and destructive to a woman's psychic state. Failure to be a biological mother exiles the woman from her body. She is regarded as a failure, not a complete woman; infertility is considered unfortunate, sometimes even a curse. Such views persist even among educated classes in postcolonial societies.<sup>21</sup>

Since their early childhood, women are taught that once they enter into "womanhood", they need to get married and bear children .In Igbo land, it could be said that "motherhood defines womanhood"<sup>22</sup>. It is evident that the Igbo community believes in motherhood at all cost, Nwapa in this quotation illustrates how motherhood, which is a sacred task, is the major dream of a woman in African society, for a woman it is better to be a mother than a wife because at the moment she will be a mother, she will be considered as a valued woman and a respected wife. The African traditional norms damned woman by associating their identity as a woman to motherhood, for this reason Nwapa have illustrated Motherhood as a honorific act to complete a woman with choosing a protagonist character Efuru, searching for the joys of motherhood to reinforce her existence and gain a place in her tribe but Emecheta through her character Nnu Ego contrasted with this honorific approach of motherhood by showing the sufferance of Nnu Ego .

## Endnotes

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- <sup>10</sup> Kolawole M, *“Womanism and African Consciousness”* Trenton N. J ,(African World press, 1997).
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- <sup>13</sup> Speizer Ilene, *“Men’s Desire for Additional Wives and Children”*, (Social Biology, Full Winter 1995).
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- <sup>15</sup> Nyanhongo Mazivita Molln, Gender *“Oppression and possibilities of Empowerment: Image of woman in African Literature with Specific Reference to Mariama Ba’s So Long a Letter*.
- <sup>16</sup> Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* and Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions”*, (Diss.University of Fort Hare, December, 2011).
- <sup>17</sup> Emecheta Buchi Florence, *The Joys of Motherhood: The Mother’s Mother*, (London, Heinemann, 1979)
- <sup>18</sup> Marie Umeh, *“Procreation Not Recreation: Decoding Maman in Buchi Emecheta’s The Joys of Motherhood”* Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta, (Africa World Press, New york, 1996), 192.
- <sup>19</sup> Remi Akujobi, *Motherhood in African Literature and Culture*, Purdue University press, (2011), 4.
- <sup>20</sup> Léopold sédar Senghor, *“Black Woman”*, in Negritude Black poetry from Africa and the Carribean and trans. Norman Shapiro ( New York;October House; 1945).
- <sup>21</sup> KETU H. KATRAK, *Politics of the Female Body: POSTCOLONIAL WOMEN WRITERS OF THE THIRD WORLD* (Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London2006), 212.
- <sup>22</sup> Boyce Davies, Carole. *“Motherhood in the works of Male and Female Igbo Writers: Achebe, Emecheta, Nwapa and Nzekwu”*, en Boyce Davies, Carole and Adams Gravss Anne (eds.): *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1986, 241-

256.

## **Chapter two: Motherhood in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979)**

The notion of motherhood is repeatedly interpreted in different perspectives within societies; a remarkable intention has been given by female authors to discuss the importance and relevance of the mother in African society. Motherhood, therefore, takes on much larger dimensions where it has often been collated with the Mother Africa image. The African female writers discuss the importance of motherhood and bareness in their traditional society.

Flora Nwapa was the first African writer best known for revisiting Igbo traditions from a woman's point of view, she gives voice to the protagonist *Efuru* to change a woman's destiny. Following the path opened by Nwapa, the second generation of African woman writer to which Buchi Emecheta belongs continues to draw on the evolution of African women and changing the roles of a mother and wife and to interpret motherhood from different perspective through her protagonist Nnu-Ego in her gem *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979).

This chapter aims to study the representation of Motherhood in both *Efuru* (1966) and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) from different angles., by analysing both *Efuru* and Nnu Ego as main characters in the two novels, then we will study how *Efuru* is portrayed as a failed mother, and how Nnu-Ego's great desire to have children ends tragically. Finally, we will discuss the importance of a male child in Igbo society.

### **B-The Representation of Motherhood in *Efuru* (1966)**

Flora Nwapa in *Efuru* (1966), expected roles of women as wives and mothers within African community .The Igbo woman gain their status and respect from motherhood, and her fortune as a wife rests on her fertility. *Efuru* seems to meet the challenges inherent in men-dominated society.

She is an example of courage and symbol of change, counter the stereotypical image of the woman by the male writers as weak and docile.

### **1-Efuru as a Wife:**

Unlike, the earlier image presented by African male writers of the Igbo women as weak, passive, and subordinate characters; Efuru is portrayed in Nwapa's novel as a strong and successful woman in her Igbo village. Nwapa tells the story of Efuru, and reconstructs the Igbo history through the eyes of the woman. Efuru was beautiful and intelligent her name means the daughter of heaven or a child who brings light to the world, as it is reflected in Efuru's personality. She was the daughter of Nwashike Ogene a man with a title in Igbo land. Efuru is a deliberated and developed girl "she was a remarkable. It was not only what she came from a distinguished family. She was distinguished herself."<sup>1</sup> she was a special girl in her tribe, loved by all people there. The story opens with Efuru's foolish action, she falls in love with Adizua and agrees to elope with him. She did not recognise that she moved from one form of social patriarchy to another form, here Nwapa illustrates Efuru in a mode of a strong and liberated woman can take her own decision:

They saw each other fairly often and after a fortnight's courting, she agreed to marry him. But the man had no money for the dowry. He had just a few pounds for the farm and could not part with that. When the woman saw that he was unable to pay anything, she told him not to bother about the dowry. They were going to proclaim themselves married and that was that. Efuru was her name. She was a remarkable woman. It was not the only that she came from a distinguished family. She was distinguished herself. Her husband was not known and people wondered why she married him.<sup>2</sup>

In Igbo society, a man should pay to marry a woman, this is called a dowry or a bride price, but Adizua did not fulfil this traditional act. Efuru broke up with her traditions and gain the angriness of her family, but her only aim was to marry the man she loved but also wanted to bring a change to her culture and traditions. She never rejected her culture, but she expressed her desire to choose the man she wants even if Adizua was an ordinary man without any title

he was a descendent of a slave but Efuru loved him and defeated all her family. After the marriage Efuru was an example of a good wife, she used to trade and through that, she wanted to help Adizua earn more money and pay her bride price, she was a very successful business woman this shows how a woman supports her husband in Igbo society and helped him, she was an active element in that society. After a period of time, Efuru and Adizua succeeded to collect the dowry and fulfilled the traditional act. Efuru's first marriage was a transitional marriage because the first year was a happy year for the couple, but unfortunately, the joy did not fulfill because Adizua without prediction left Efuru and run away to another town with another woman this shows how Igbo society is a polygamous society even if Efuru was a good and beautiful wife, but she seems to have bad luck with her husband because Adizua left her in mysterious conditions, his sudden disappearance after the couple have their first baby without any reason :

Adizua has left me. Before he left, he told me he was going to Ndoni, and today in the market I overheard two women conversing. I am sure now that Adizua went to Ndoni with a woman. I gathered that this woman had left her husband<sup>3</sup>

After a period of time, Efuru came back to her childhood house and carried on her life as if nothing happened, she never accepts defeat, and this reflects her desire to be independent and to rebuild her life, regardless of the rumours of Adizua's marriage to another woman. This does not restrict Efuru from engaging in another marriage with another man, Gilbert Eneberi, after the death of her baby born with her first lover, Adizua. Efuru's second marriage was a new source of hope for her, she asserts her rights and duties as a wife:

The first year of Efuru's second marriage was a happy one. Gilbert loved and respected her. Efuru on the other hand knew the duties of a wife. She did not for one moment slack in her duties. She did not only take good care of her husband, she was sweet to her mother-in-law.<sup>4</sup>

Gilbert Eneberi was an intelligent man, he has received some education himself, unlike other men in the society, Nwapa here tried to give another image from another category of African

men different from the traditional one like Adizua, but the nightmare of motherhood followed Efuru because she did not succeed to bear a child after a long period of marriage:

Two years passed and Efuru was still not pregnant. Her mother-in-law could bear it no longer and so she called her one day to her bedroom.

‘My daughter, doesn’t your body tell you anything? She asked Efuru. Efuru knew that this question must come eventually. She, on her part was afraid.<sup>5</sup>

Efuru cannot give birth to a child, she was willing to bring a second wife into her home to have more children for her husband. This is a custom repeated and accepted in her Igbo society but in the traditional Igbo tribe, unfortunately, Eneberi disappears in the same obscure conditions as Efuru’s first husband and does not attend the funeral of Efuru's father. Efuru is left alone, with no children, husband or family.

## **2-Efuru as a mother**

The most important factor with regard to a woman in traditional African society is her role as mother. Efuru worries about not having a child after one year of her marriage with Adizua, she knows that people there gossiped behind a woman without children, because in Igbo land a woman should have children directly after her marriage, this reflects how Igbo society is a conservative society and how children are central to the lives of the villagers. Efuru decided to visit a Dibia to see what is wrong with her. A Dibia is an old woman and a diviner of future’s holdings key to the secrets of lifelines, having knowledge of the underworld, and possessing an ability to see things and transmit that knowledge to others. Efuru succeeded to be pregnant, she has finally the hope of entering into motherhood:

Yes, you did not. But she knew it. She smelt it. I am so glad. ‘They agreed not to tell Adizua until they were quite sure. Four months later, it was quite obvious that Efuru was expecting a baby .The neighbours knew it and talked of it. It was at this time that Adizua knew of it and asked Efuru, who confirmed it.<sup>6</sup>

Efuru gave birth to a beautiful baby girl named her “ogonim”, but by then Adizua had lost all his interests over Efuru. In other hand ,Ogonim brought Efuru’s motherhood into reality, she used to be a good mother with her daughter, she became a valued women and a mother which is the most beautiful women after having a child. Through Efuru’s baby, she shows motherhood as a spiritual and an artistic dimension of motherhood which is a role and identity that had be taken up by everyone, but Efuru’s emotion to her baby illustrates how motherhood is not only understood in terms of physical reproduction but is also deeply valued for its material, and its capacity of sacrifice, nurture, educate and economically provide. But this fact of having one child is not sufficient for an Ibgo woman, she should make more than one child, but even when she had a daughter, even when she was a mother. She could not imagine what loss of her motherhood would bring to her.

Efuru's failure to produce more than one child makes it imperative that her husband marry a second or even a third wife. Oginim the little baby ,suddenly became ill and died, this tragedy made Efuru in a hysterical situation, she did not believe it, the death of Oginim made an end to the joy of motherhood that Efuru dreamed to win at the very beginning of her marriage but Efuru’s fear turned into reality and Adizua does not return for the funeral. Clearly, the marriage is over, she hoped to be consoled by her husband, she thought that at least in such misery her husband would stand by her side. But all her thoughts and hopes were in vain:

‘Ajanupu, my daughter has killed me. Ogonim has killed me. My only child has killed me. Why should I live? I should be dead too and lie in state beside my daughter. Oh, my chi, why have you dealt with me in this way?’ When Efuru said this tears rolled down her cheeks.<sup>7</sup>

Nwapa illustrates in this scene how it is awful for a woman to experience the pain of bareness and the loss of the husband, we can feel the inner hurt of Efuru through this quotation, she lost a part of her soul her only child, her only hope. It is destructive for her the fact that she will not say the word my daughter again, because she faces similar problems with her second

marriage to Gilbert Eneberi, at the moment where she is searching to find herself and her space within the community, but regardless the pain, Efuru is allowed to be happy and to help people in the community even though she is widowed and without children. In another hand the shadow of motherhood is also a problematic issue for the couple Efuru often says to herself, ‘God cannot deny me the joy of motherhood’<sup>8</sup>,the vivid meaning of the word “cannot deny” may indicate that Efuru has already made her choice for her future and she is sure that god will not deprive her from the joys of motherhood, she has a certain certitude that she is able to have children .but her destiny denies for her this joy even in her second marriage because Gilbert left her and he did not attend Efuru’s father funeral, the Efuru leaves Eneberi, her choose was a transitional because she chooses to live her own life with supernatural and superstition conditions, this shows how she is a strong woman, despite the fact that she submitted a psychological devastation.

### **3-Efuru as a failed mother**

According to the practiced norm of Efuru’s society, she is a failed woman because a childless woman brings shame and failure not only to her husband but also to her husband’s family and to the whole society, because she cannot assure the continuity of her tribe, regardless she is successful woman and beautiful but the fact that she did not succeeded to give a male inherit, she is considered as a barren woman as a man. She lost her identity and herself as a woman, she became incomplete and the loss of motherhood gave her crystal clear view of her married life. Efuru was seen as an abandoned wife or a damned woman because her two husbands left her without reason and her motherhood which was her personality, her means of existence vanished, truly speaking she experienced it but for a short period of time in her life and the joy was her last joy. Finally, she turns to her faith in the goddess of the lake, Uhamiri.

Efuru can be categorized under the group of women referred to worshiper woman that has only one child. The river goddess Uhamiri, the barren goddess, chooses Efuru to be one of

her worshipper. This class of women which Efuru belongs to, who are by tradition supernatural and mystical, is believed to have spirit husbands in the water kingdom. Uhamiri deprives women of the joys of motherhood, Efuru think that Uhamiri was like her: “She cannot give me children, because she has not got children herself”<sup>9</sup>this denial of motherhood figures that the worshippers of Uhamiri may not combine motherhood with their roles as priestesses this is why Nwapa ends the novel her novel with a question why women spend their lives to the worship Uhamiri when she does not provide any benefits to her worshippers “she had never experienced the joy of motherhood. Why then did the women worship her?”<sup>10</sup>. This enigmatic question make us think about it may be the beginning of a new change or a new age in Igbo land in women will completely upset and happy without signs of a child. Nwapa considers new ways of thinking and acting. Efuru is presented as a mouthpiece for women who want to change and have much freedom of choice about their lives without any rejection from the community. According to Ogunyemi Chikwenye; Uhamiri allows Efuru to become a mother figure to the community through her wealth, charity, and nurturing of the community <sup>11</sup>. She describes the outcome as a Nigerian worldview: motherhood is not limited to the biological view, but includes the social realm where women nurture everyone. It seems that Efuru had found an answer to her miserable life near the goddess of the lake by standing alone at the end with no living children and two failed marriages. Her consciousness has been awakened to her truth, she understood that she is not going to have children and she can be happy only if she accepts this truth, for this reason, Nwapa ends her novel with “Efuru slept soundly that night”.<sup>12</sup> Finally she found herself with inner comfort because she renounced to Uhamiri, she thinks that since Uhamiri was a rich goddess without children respected by all people there, so she will be like Uhamiri respected by her society despite the fact that she has no child, Uhamiri, the river goddess, is highly respected and prayed to by women, especially those who are asking for children she nurtured and help all her community like a mother, as Acholunu states: “The

African woman is all that a mother stands for denotatively and figuratively. She is a nurturer, a home-maker, a partner with the man, a soldier, a leader and a defender of both her husband and her children.”<sup>13</sup>

## **C- Motherhood in *the joys of motherhood* (1979)**

### **1-Nnu ego as mother:**

In Igbo society, the dream of any woman is not only to get married but also to become a mother because it is essential for her personality and to assure her position in society (social status). Motherhood in African societies is seen as one of the most essential requirements to complete a woman, According to Igbo traditions a woman is complete only when she bears children to her husband and enjoys her motherhood. Infertility is considered as a woman’s worst fate because through children she will get a social identity and respect, through motherhood that Igbo wives feel their womanhood, in this context Victor C .Uchendu states:

Motherhood brings an important change in a woman’s status, a change from A mistress who simply attracts and allures to a mother who shares the dignity Of her husband and who has increased the lineage membership (...) children are a great social insurance agency, a protection against dependence in old age.<sup>14</sup>

Buchi Emecheta is among the African feminist writers who criticized in her novels the fact that the myth of motherhood is imposed on Nigerian women and the way in which the Igbo patriarchal society defines motherhood. The issue of motherhood and its importance in traditional societies is explored in her widely read novel *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and this can be seen from her choice of the title which is ironical, because her novel does not talk about any joys of being a mother as the protagonist Nnu Ego is a subjugated, oppressed and marginalized African woman. *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) describes the long journey of an

Igbo traditional woman Nnu Ego , who has only one desire to get married and to have children especially boys ,she always lives with hope and anticipation of the joys and rewards motherhood will bring her; unlike her mother Ona who failed to live the joys of motherhood . In her first marriage she was considered as a barren woman she filled shame; apprehension and failure because she failed to bear children to her husband and to assure her husband's name continuity and she was convinced that the fault is on her side.

I am sure the fault is on my side .You do everything right, he can I tell him that I failed? I do not like going there these days because his wives always rush out to greet me hoping that I am carrying a child you can see the disappointment of their faces.<sup>15</sup>

Nnu ego was constantly dismissed, insulted and denigrated by her first husband Amatokwo, her childlessness humiliated her in her traditional village Ibuza because in Igbo society infertility humiliated not only the woman but also the husband, and it prevented him from his manhood, "I am a busy man. I have no time to waste my precious male seed on a woman who is infertile I have to raise children for my line"<sup>16</sup>. It is clear from the novel that children are important In African societies as H. Okeke said: " the value of children in marriage continues to be such a dominant one that the fortunes and fates of many African marriages hang on its fruitfulness" <sup>17</sup>, for Okeke the primary reason for African marriage is to conceive children and particularly sons .In Igbo society, senior wife was given more importance than others, however, Nnu ego lost her position as a senior wife and her status due to her bareness, then she accepted her position and decided to take care of her co wife's son in order to save her marriage she said: "father my position as a senior woman of the house has been taken by a younger woman"<sup>18</sup>.

The point of Emecheta's novel was to write a real story about Igbo women's lives in contrast to the idealized vision of the African woman as goddess, supreme or earth mother presented mainly in negritude Literature by male writers, The tradition played a vital role in the

progression of an idea of motherhood; Nnu ego was strongly believed that she needed to fulfill the requirement of being a mother to complete her as a woman ,she cannot feel fulfilled or even a real woman until she produces a child “But they all agreed that a woman without a child for her husband was a failed women”<sup>19</sup>, this can be seen with her temporary nervous breakdown following the loss of her son Ngozi after only four weeks of his birth , she feels failure, useless and not a woman anymore “But I am not a woman anymore !I am not a woman anymore.”<sup>20</sup>.

In the *Joys of motherhood (1979)*, Emecheta extends her metaphor of the enslaved Igbo woman, arguing that the society also programs women to be slaves of their husbands; in such society women cannot make a decision for themselves, they do not have any right to demand for money, to feed their children even they do not deserve a meaningful name because they are considered as inferior; Nnu ego faces several obstacles which deprive her emancipation and self-fulfillment, when she gave birth to her twins, her husband was absent she could not name her daughters before her husband’s return to home, she was unable to take the decision by her own she said: “they don’t deserve a suitable name”<sup>21</sup>, Emecheta is depriving a society in which gender determines the value of human being.

## **2-The Importance of the Male Child**

In African societies, a woman’s identity is closely related to her capacity to produce children; in fact for Africans a woman must not be unproductive or childless, she was seen as means of reproduction by her society ,and motherhood is her sole and only identity especially if she bears sons who will preserve man authority, in this context Killam in his book *Literature of Africa (2004)* states: “their principle role is to attend to the needs of their men and to produce children, especially male children”<sup>22</sup>. Each child is important to his parent but in African cultures, a male child is treated superior to the female one, they are given more privileges like education, inheritance and so many others, much premium is placed on a male child in a

patriarchal society in this note Wentworth (2005) states: “in many cultures, if a man does not father a son his virility is questioned”<sup>23</sup>, African women are taught that children, mainly male child are the only richness a woman could rely on.

In the *Joys of Motherhood* (1979) , Emecheta traces gender inequality and the importance of male child in Igbo society, where it was customary for girls to be forced into early marriage and the bride price used in sending boys to school, the female character Adaku Naife’s inherited wife was a powerful example about the importance of giving birth to sons; she failed to bear male child to her husband, she was considered as failure and useless woman, rejected and alienated by her husband and her society because she has only female children. Adaku did not have the right to speak or complain her situation even if she was right, and this is evident when she had quarrel with Nnu ego in Lagos she was treated unjustly Nwakosor and his friend took Nnu ego’s defense although the latter was guilty. All of them knew that it was Nnu ego’s fault, but the fact that she was the one who immortalized her husband by giving him male children justified such a biased behavior.

Don’t you know that according to the custom of our people you, Adaku, the daughter of who you are, are committing an unforgivable sin? Our life starts from immortality and ends in immortality. If naife had been married to only you, you would have ended his life on this round of his visiting earth. I know you have children, but they are girls, who in few years time will go to help build another man’s immortality.<sup>24</sup>

for Emecheta a woman without male child shares the same fate with a childless one, and woman without male children is a poor one; although she is financially rich, infertility was just like male childlessness are equated with poverty; Adaku decided to become prostitute and accepted to sell her body because it could not accomplish its biological function; that of having male child. The majority of men ignorantly abandon their wives and children in the cases where the wife only gives birth to female children , they will marry another one in search for male child who was seen as a source of pride and honor , because it is shameful for Igbo men to die

without heir or descent Das Gupta in his article *Cultural Issues in Violence Against Women* (2011) states: “a woman’s place in her new (husband) family is often not secured until she produces a male heir”<sup>25</sup>. Women without male child in African societies could be victims of emotional or physical violence for instance Adaku was beaten by her husband Naife because she has no male child .

### **3-Nnu Ego’s tragic end:**

For Igbo women in traditional Ibuza motherhood means freedom, they were taught from their childhood that African woman exists in society as a complete woman only through her role as mother and her freedom is through procreation, as cited by the French writer and critic Simon de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* (1949) that since her infancy; a woman is told or made to believe that they are made for childbearing.<sup>26</sup> However ,this ideology does not exist in colonial Lagos ; Nnu ego was obliged to leave her traditional village to Lagos ,where she looked for the same freedom through the only way she inherited from her traditions, yet it becomes oppression and enslavement ,in her quest for freedom and happiness she used the only way her father taught her in order to be considered as happy and complete woman ,Nnu ego in her effort to fulfill traditional expectations during times of radical social change, she found herself not only struggling for physical survival ,but also struggling to understand why her life is so difficult.

In colonial Lagos, money turns to be the primary source of freedom after being secondary in traditional Ibuza; freedom that enslaves its seekers like Nnu ego, money is more important than bearing children in Lagos, Ezeigbo T.A in his article entitled *Traditional Women’s Institutions in Igbo Society* (1990) states “acknowledging that under colonialism Igbo women enjoyed far less freedom, however does not blind Emecheta to women’s subjugation under indigenous patriarchy”<sup>27</sup>. Buchi Emecheta in her novel incorporates the impact of

colonialism as one of the causes of the female character's unhomeliness and oppression that led to their decline at the end ,this is evident when Nnu ego was unable to understand that reality , she sacrificed all her money ,time and energy to raise her children , she was obliged to work hard in different fields in order to feed her family, especially with her husband's absence ,she sacrificed her physical , monetary and emotional investment for her children hoping that her old age will be happy "oh my life, I have to work myself to the bone to look after them; I have them my all. And if I am lucky to die in peace, I even have to give them my soul"<sup>28</sup> She becomes an enslaved mother, after years of sacrificing everything for her children and after a chain of disasters in her life, she was forced to understand that "the joys of being a mother was the joy of giving all to your children".<sup>29</sup>

For Igbo society having children is considered as an assurance and security for the woman in her old age, Nnu ego as a traditional woman always lived with the hope that her old age will be happy and beautiful thanks to her children, she believed that her children will look after her as the father explained to his daughter Nnu ego: "when one grows old, one needs children to look after one. If you have no children and your parents have gone, who can you call your own"<sup>30</sup> Nnu ego's children were supposed to be her joy and bring her wealth in colonial Lagos in her old age and respect within her community because she devoted all her life to them ;but unfortunately, the opposite happened ;she never lived the joys of motherhood or a comfortable old age, she only experienced disappointment after delivering seven children to her husband who left her alone and accused her for their children's bad behaviors, she becomes conscious of her illusion and sadness in her old age .Nnu ego is continuing to conceive children even though their bad conditions , because she was convinced that children are considered as a future investment for their parents especially their mother and through them she fulfills her joy as mother and as wife, she said:

My own rewards, the joy of knowing that at this age I am still have children for my husband. The joy of making the world know that while some of our friends and their wives are at this moment making sacrifices so that they may have children, I can have one without any effort at all.<sup>31</sup>

In this novel joy, happiness and fulfillment are enjoyed only through that biological function and this can be seen at the terrible end of Nnu ego when she died alone, abandoned and rejected by the Igbo community in Iboza, without child or friend, her struggle is carried out through her children until enslavement and then death “she died quietly there, with no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to her. She had never really made many friends, so busy had she been building up her joys as a mother”<sup>32</sup>, her physical strength is exhausted when bearing nine children and battling poverty , her death could be considered as an ironical liberation from her motherhood which brought her only sufferings and sadness, it could be considered as liberation from her traditions Buchi Emecheta in her novel wants to transmit the point that bearing more than five or six children do not mean that a mother is going to prosperous in her old age Kathrine Frank in her article entitled *The Death of The Slave Girl, African Womanhood in The Novels of Buchi Emecheta (1984)* ,states that “the complete futility of motherhood that we find in the Joys of Motherhood is the most heretical and radical aspect of Emecheta’s vision of the African women.”<sup>33</sup>

To conclude, motherhood is a central concern within African feminisms. if a woman is childless, she is not a woman, this idealization of motherhood is the basic platform of woman’s existence and a subversive alternative offered to women that challenges male gendered stereotypes.

## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Flora Nwapa, *Efuru*, (London: Heinemann, 1966), 221.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.7.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.,57.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.,136.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.,141.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.,28.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.,73.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.,24.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.,165.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.,221.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>14</sup> Uchendu Victor. C, “*The Igbo of South East Nigeria*”, (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1965).

<sup>15</sup> Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood: The Mother’s Early Life*, (London, Heinemann, 1979), 32.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Titus and Nnabugwu, “*Childless Marriage in Africa and Indissolubility*” (A Canonical Appraisal, March, 19, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood: The Mother’s Early Life*, (London, Heinemann, 1979), 34.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.,14.

<sup>22</sup> G.D Killam, “*Literature of Africa: Literature as Windows to World Cultures*”, (Greenwood Press, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> Richmond Amgbo Blay, “*The Image of African Woman in a Patriarchal society: A Study of Buchi Emecheta’s The Joys of Motherhood and Amma Darko’s Beyond the Horizon*”, (University of Education Winneba, October, 2014), 4.

<sup>24</sup> Emecheta Buchi, *The Joys of Motherhood: Women Alone*, (London. Heinemann, 1979), 166.

<sup>25</sup> Lisa Aronson, Kathy. MC Clos key, “*Cultural Issues in Violence against Women*”, 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Simon De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (New York: Random House, Inc.2009), 1949.

<sup>27</sup> Ezeigbo T.A, “*Traditional women’s Institutions in Igbo Society: Implications for the Igbo Female Writer*” in *African Languages and Culture*, 1990) 149-165.

<sup>28</sup> Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood*, 49.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>33</sup> Katherine Frank, “*The Death of the Slave Girl: African Womanhood in the Novels of Buchi Emecheta*”, (World Literature Written in English, 1982), 490.



## V. Conclusion:

This piece of research has dealt with the issue of Motherhood and how Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta approached the notion of Motherhood in their masterpieces *Efuru* (1966) and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). Our analysis has focused on two main elements which are The Status of African women in their society and The Representation of Motherhood in the two masterpieces mentioned before as portrayed in both works relying on the Nigerian theory motherism developed by Catherine Obianuju Achulunu .

Both *Efuru* and *Nnu Ego* reflect a vivid image of the state of a woman and a mother in the Igbo community and how the sensation of being a mother is a very important motif to complete her cultural identity and to prove herself as a woman. A woman without children is like a tree without fruits and she lives in the margin of society. Flora Nwapa writes about women and their lives, issues, and concerns within the traditional culture of African society, those women seek love and respect from the community and acceptance of the choices they make. Through this comparative analysis, we have noticed that women writers approached motherhood differently in their respective societies, because Nwapa depicted motherhood as an essential motif for a woman to complete her identity, her means of existence, according to her a woman without a child stays alone all the rest of her life as *Efuru*, and she is viewed as a failed woman. However for Emecheta Motherhood takes another dimension; a single woman can be happy even though she has no child, *Nnu Ego* succeeded to bear children but in the end, she died alone as if she never had any child in her miserable life, she sacrifices herself for her children. Her Motherhood gave her nothing but pain and suffering yet till the end of her existence, she died alone without the presence of her children. Both *Efuru* and *Nnu Ego* ended lonely, without or with a child. Ironically Emecheta gives a best lesson that a woman is always evaluated on the basis of men but at the end no man no child lasts forever.

To conclude, our modest research does not cover all the issues that can be discussed in both *Efuru (1966)* and *The Joys of Motherhood (1979)*. We hope that we helped our readers to understand the issues explored in this memoir. Furthermore, we believe that this topic is still an interesting subject that needs further investigation. Other studies can explore other issues using different perspectives.

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