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Contemporary african woman in rebellion against traditional norms as reflected in Flora Nwapa's Efuru

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UNIVERSITY OF BURUNDI

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN WOMAN IN REBELLION AGAINST TRADITIONAL NORMS AS REFLECTED IN FLORA NWAPA'S *Efuru*.

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Dedication

To you my late father

To you my beloved mother,

To you my brothers and sisters,

I dedicate this work.

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The present research would not have been a success without the devoted contribution of so many people to whom I owe much gratitude.

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ABSTRACT

This work examines the theme of Rebellion in *Efuru*. It gives a panoramic view of the conditions of the traditional African woman and suggests that given these cultural entanglements, the African woman can never be free. On this note, the study is build on the tentative conjecture that a reconciliation between tradition and modernity and economic independence are alternative measures to female emancipation. Written against the background of feminist criticism, this work settles on the note that the African woman's liberation does not mean casting herself away from her society but making a melange of the good aspects of tradition and modernity.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

From time immemorial, women have been subjected to oppression by men and tradition all over the world. The oppression stems from the fact that women are considered inferior. Women are made to be used by and for men. Thus, women are expected to be what men want them to be. In fact, men are happy in their status and care very little or not about the unbearable situation of the woman.

However, women are becoming more conscious of their exploitation and the position of man and tradition. They try to talk about it in different ways according to their origin, colour and situation. Nowadays, some women have been educated enough to redress the situation by creating a general sense of awareness .

Feminist writers privilege the question of women issues in literature in general. They try to give the true image of the African woman and reveal the realities about women's problems. Thus, they oppose the wrong interpretation of woman's role given by most male writers. Female writers like Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa portray women as they are in the society – a suffering people who live in a society which denies their dignity.

Brown Llyod in 'The African Women as a Writer' states that

> The African woman as a writer offers special perspectives which need to be considered... for in the first place some women writers do not subscribe... to that idealised image of women which we have remarked in some male writers.(45)

This work is centered on Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*. Nwapa depicts the African woman who is ready to rebel against some norms so as to assert her selfhood. Through Efuru, the heroine of the novel, Nwapa shows the pligh of the African woman. They suffer from physical or psychological abuses. Nwapa projects the African woman who is ready to liberate herself. Thus, some question may arise. Are women really oppressed by men and tradition? Are women really ready to fight for their rights? Should tradition be ignored in the course of female emancipation? Satisfactory answers to these questions will be given in the course of our analysis.

This work aims at highlighting the theme of rebellion and evolution in Efuru. It equally intends to examine the spirit of reawakening in women who are caught in the trap of patriarchy and modernity. From this perspective, the work habours on the hypothesis that a reconciliation between tradition and modernity and economic independence are alternative measures to female emancipation.

This work is constructed against the background of the feminist theory. Feminist criticism varies from one country to another, and from one critic to another. Feminist criticism is difficult to define because it has not yet been codified into a single critical perspective. Feminist critics are therefore united by the assumption that most cultures are fundamentally patriarchal, creating ambivalence of power that marginalizes women and their works. That social structure, they agree, is reflected in religion, philosophy, economics, education – all aspects of the culture including literature.

The feminist critic works to expose such ideology and in the end, to change it so that the creativity of women can be fully realized and appreciated. For centuries, western culture had operated on the assumption that women are inferior creatures. This is not true because women can do what men do if they are given the same opportunities. From all indications, it is the society that makes what the woman is. Women have grown over centuries to have lesser status. According to most literary theorists, feminism is politics, which aims at changing the status of women in the society. Women like Virginia Woolf and Mary Wollstonecraft stand out as eloquent spokespersons for women. Along with them are many others whose names are less well known but whose efforts have been important to the development of women's history both social and literary. Some of this history has been traced by Elaine Showalter, who divided it into three phases which she called the feminine phase (1840-1880), the feminist phase (1880-1920) and the female phase (1920-present).

As a distinctive and concerted approach to literature, feminist criticism was not inaugurated until the late 1980s. Behind it, however, lies two centuries of struggle for the recognition of women's cultural roles and achievements, and for women's social and political rights marked by works of writers like Mary Wollstonecraft's *A vindication of the Rights of women* in which she presents women as an oppressed class. This is true because girls and boys are not given the same value from childhood. Boys are always privileged than girls because parents consider boys as superior to girls.

However, it is not surprising, given the widespread acknowledgment of the inferiority of female, that women too accepted their lesser status. Even the french writer Madame the Staël is said to have commented, 'I am glad that I am not a man, as I should be obliged to marry a woman". And Jane Austern advised, ' A woman, especially, if she has the misfortune of knowing anything, should conceal it as well as she can".

Although feminist criticism has many strands, most critics hold some general approaches in common, more specifically, they look at literary history to rediscover forgotten texts by women, to reevaluate other texts, and to examine the cultural contexts in which works are produced. They analyze the male and female power structure that makes women the other. They work to abolish limiting stereotypes of women. They seek to expose patriarchal premises and prejudices.

In short, by changing the literature that people read and the ways that they read it, feminist critics hope to change the world so that everyone is valued as a rational being.

Despite the sprawling nature of feminist studies, it is possible to group some of the different perspectives into several overlapping approaches. Three major groups of feminist critics are those who study difference, those who study power relationships, and those who study the female experience.

Feminist critics who study differences in male and female writing work from the assumption that gender determines everything including value system and language. Not all feminist critics agree, for they recognize that historically the concept of female difference has resulted in an assumption of female inferiority, leading to the argument that differences should no longer be an issue. Here, critics compare and contrast what men and women write and how they write it. They examine not only their subjects but also their voice syntax, and diction.

Feminist critics who are interested in the studies of power with the assumption that economic system is at the root of the inequitable relationship, they attack both economic and the social exploitation of women. They charge that women are oppressed by a group that consciously works to hold them down through its ideology.

Feminist critics who study the female experience reject the idea of a male norm, against which women are seen as secondary and, derivative.

They call for a recognition of women's ability that goes beyond the traditional binary opposition such as male and female, and the parallel oppositions of active and passive, intellectual and emotional. Searching for the essence of feminine style in literature, they examine female images in the works of female writers and the elements thought to be typical of 'l'écriture féminine'. Such as blanks, unfinished sentences, silences, and exclamations. Early female image and goddesses become important symbols of the power of women to resist and overcome male oppression images of motherhood are significant too, for childbearing and rearing involve power and creature. However, this approach runs the risk of creating female chauvinists who argue for a special, superior gender and a ghetto in which women's writing stands separate from male tradition that is thereby weakened.

This work is going to be classified under the studies of power, because the conditions in which African women live and which causes them to rebel is not only rooted in social oppression by men but also in their economical dependence. In fact, as Flora Nwapa records, if women were economically independent, they would live happily.

Many critics have been interested in the writing of Flora Nwapa. Eustace Palmer in 'Elechi Amadi's *Concubine* and Flora Nwapa's '*Efuru*' says that the novel "*Efuru*' leaves the reader with the impression that Flora Nwapa has not mastered her craft. According to him, the heroine of the novel *Efuru* is beautiful, generous, brave and upright. In fact, almost ideal. However, she has been chosen by the goddess of the lake, Uhamiri, to be one of her worshippers.

This means that, although she will be rich, she will never be able to have a successful marriage or to have children. According to him, it is as if Flora Nwapa has set herself the task of writing an east Nigerian epic and want to ensure that whatever the subject matter, her novel should embody the culture and the spirit of her tribe. The reader is therefore treated among other things, to an unnecessary description of a cure of convulsion and numerous Nigeria songs.

Ernest N. Emenyonu in" Who does Flora Nwapa Write For" states that the characters of Flora Nwapa are very talkative and therefore boring. To him, Flora Nwapa proceeds by exploring in depth the beliefs, aspirations, failures and successes of the people whose lifeways create the particular human condition in the novel. For him, she writes with a peculiar realism. Ernest N. Emenyonu is not wrong but he should bear in mind that Flora Nwapa is a woman. She knows women best and she presents them in all their realities.

Ify G. Achufusi in' Feminist Inclinations of Flora Nwapa' says that although Nwapa has written on various themes including the Nigerian war, she has most often made the experiences of the African women in relation to those themes the central concern of her creative work. In her three novels, *Efuru*, *Idu* and *One is Enough*, Nwapa focusses on family life, a rather broad theme which allows her to explore the life of the African women within her society. In her first novel, *Efuru*, Nwapa focusses her narrative on Efuru the beautiful daughter of Nwashike Ogene, Adizua her husband, a nonentity Ajanupu, her

mother in-law's sister, Eneberi Gilbert her second husband and a network of her friends and relation. Thus, Nwapa explores family life in her own part of Igbo land. In discussing her people's life, their tribulation and joys, occupation and various activities, Nwapa draws attention to the position of the woman in the realm of things, her dreams, fulfilled and unfulfilled.

Mabobori Catherine on her part in 'The Tragedy of Womanhood in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru'* argues that Nwapa is one of those writers who defends women by creating assertive female figures who live in their own rights inspite of the exigences of the society which tries to tie the woman down.

Inarukundo Caritas in 'Woman as a Dominating Character in Literature' shows that even if a woman has been underestimated in general and relegated to an inferior position, some fictional and even documentary evidence prove the contrary. They point out various image of women with dominant and positive ability. She gives evidences from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Sophocles' *Antigone* and Chaucer's tale. According to her, a woman is not passive, indecisive, illogical, naive without dignity as she has been thought of. Instead, she is a person capable of momentous decision which affect the destiny of men. She demonstrates that contrary to the common belief that a woman is of a weak character, lady Macbeth is decisive when she suppresses her feminine sentiments to get rid of fear.

This work differs from others in the sense that it does not only show how contemporary African women are rebelling against some custom of the

tradition but proceeds to show how effective a combination of tradition and modernity can be useful in the process of female emancipation.

This work is made of five sections. The general introduction which gives an overview of the whole work. The first chapter entitled "African Tradition and the African Woman" gives a panoramic view of women's condition while the second chapter entitled 'The Woman as Rebel' shows how the African woman rebels against tradition. The third chapter entitled "The Reconciliation between Tradition and Modernity' shows how the new woman reconciles tradition and modernity in her search for freedom. It also examines the role of economic independence in women's liberation. Finally, the general conclusion gives a summary of the main arguments of the whole work, brings out findings and recommendations for future researchers.

CHAPTER ONE

AFRICAN TRADITION AND THE AFRICAN WOMAN

This chapter gives a panoramic view about the condition of the African woman. In fact, traditional women are oppressed by tradition and society. Women are given less importance than men. They are viewed as liabilities in the society and their lives are in the hands of men. Moreover, this chapter intends to present the woman as object or property to be passed from one family to another or from one man to another. In this light the woman is viewed more or less as a tool for men's pleasure.

In most traditional societies, women are oppressed by tradition and men. Since childhood, girls and boys are not given the same importance. There is preference for boys in most African societies. As Sylvia Leith-Ross observes in *African Women*, the common womanhood was a key to many of women's thoughts and feelings; their passionate desire for children, especially for sons to increase the line of their husbands family. If a woman has only daughters, she cries, yet she is happy to have a few. It is on this note that Flora Nwapa through Onyemuru says that Ajanupu is blessed because she has many children. Not only that she has many children but because she has several boys and girls.

The African society admires women who bear girls and boys. This fact of giving birth to boys and girls is seen as a function of women. If a woman gives birth to girls only, she is not admired by the society. According to some African societies, she has failed one of her role, which is to assure the continuity of the family through the male child. Flora Nwapa in *Efuru* says: "what is annoying is when some women have about six children and all of them are girls. What one will do with six girls? I don't know." (184)

Here, girls are given less importance. The question that what will one do with six girls proves that the female child is underestimated in some African societies. One wonders if men can build a society of their own without women. As Claudine Matuturu in "African Women's Liberation: Alienation or Emancipation" says that the woman although radically ignored by the hard and harsh pressures of the men, has always been there. The society despised her but cannot get rid of her. Men cannot build a society of their own without the female company. Although men make women their slaves, women in turn fashion slaves out of men through their beauty, and indispensability. They were and are still inextricably bound to each other.

Even though women are underestimated in the society, they are integrated in the family because of their biological role. When Efuru passes her first two years of marriage without a child, people begin to say that Efuru is not a woman because she cannot give birth.

They say that they do not see the reason why Adizua her husband cannot marry another woman. According to them "two men do not live together"(24). To them Efuru is a man since she cannot reproduce. This shows how a woman suffers when she is barren.

By the way, women are very happy when they give birth to a child. When women get their first child, they are very pleased because it is proof of their fruitfulness. Efuru is very happy when she gets her first child, Ogenim. Her joy is shown in the following lines: "Is that baby mine or somebody else? Is it really true that I had a baby, that I am a woman after all? Perhaps, I am dreaming. I shall wake up and discover that it was not real". (Efuru, 31)

From the above, it is evident that Efuru is very excited. She cannot understand what is happening to her. She is now a woman in the eyes of these people: though it is a girl, she is now integrated in the society of her in–laws. She has proved her womanhood. A woman without a child feels incomplete and unfulfilled.

In the early days of Efuru's marriage, many people question her potency, hence her womanhood. This is seen when people say that they do not understand the reason why Adizua, Efuru's husband should not marry another wife since Efuru is not able to reproduce. Women suffer during their lifetime if they are barren. In most African societies, a man is never barren. The fault is always that of a woman. Women as such become victim of an ignorant society. Flora Nwapa, through Onyemuru comments that « If Idu cannot have a child, let her allow her husband to marry another wife. That is what our people do. There are many girls around, explained Onyemuru" (*Idu,* 33).

Some African societies permit polygamy when the first wife is barren. What is annoying is that when women lack the capacity of giving birth, it is as if it is their fault. That capacity is seen as a function. Nwapa remarks that "the second wife comes to fulfil a function which Idu is unable to fulfil *(Idu*,26).

Idu is taken as a machine for producing children. She is seen as if she does not want to bear children. However, in some societies, women accept that when they do not bear children, their husband must marry a second wife. After much difficulties in getting a child, Efuru tells her husband, Adizua that 'Don't you think, it will be good if you began to look around a young girl for wife? (Efuru, 26). Efuru is encouraging her husband to have a second wife. For her, it is not a problem if Adizua marries a second wife. After all, the tradition of their societies allows men to marry many wives. When she finally succeeds in getting one child and a second one was not forth coming, Efuru sees no reason why the husband cannot have a second wife. She says:

> If he wants to marry a second wife, I shall be only too happy. In fact, I have been thinking of it, for I have not had a second baby, and now I wonder whether a second one will come. (*Efuru*, 50)

Efuru accepts that her husband should marry a second wife. This shows that women participate in their oppression. They accept the dictates of tradition. Efuru once more reiterates that

> What is wrong in marrying a second wife. It is only a bad woman who wants her husband all to herself. I don't object to his marrying a second wife, but I do object to being relegated to the background. I want to keep my first position as the first wife, for it is my right.(*Efuru,*53)

To Efuru, it is a bad woman who wants her husband all alone. For her, marrying a second wife means nothing to her. It is a normal act. What is important for her is to maintain her position as first wife.

In Traditional Africa, girls and boys are educated in different ways. Girls are mostly grown up to manage their home and take care of children. They are encouraged to early marriages. Thus, they are prepared to be good wives. Sylvia Leith-Rose in *African Women* in her quest to which kind of education should be given to girls discovers that mothers in Africa do not mind much about 'books' but they want their daughters to know how to manage their homes and how to care for their children. Girls are encouraged to take interest in house activities while boys are encouraged to go to school. Mothers see their daughters as future mothers and they encourage them to early marriages: Groombridge Joy in *Hers and His: An Examination of Feminity and Masculinity* notes that "Girls are still encouraged to think that their only aim in life is to get married, have children and vaguely live happily ever after" (42).This shows that boys and girls are not educated in the same way.

In the same vein, Nwapa in *Idu*, remarks that a child of sixteen years is old enough to marry (15). A girl of sixteen year is to get married while a boy of the same years is at school. The physical differences determine the behaviour of girls and boys. Mineke Schipper in "Mother Africa on Pedestal: The Male Heritage in Literature and Criticism" argues that the physical difference between sexes that children are born with have enormous effects on their entire

lives. In any given cultural context, male and female behaviour patterns are fixed by norms and anyone who tries to break the rules can expect to meet with serious problems in the community in which the ruling group produces images and conception of the other to legitimise the status quo. Thus, women are underprivileged in many patriarchal African societies for biological reason. Boys and girls are not accorded equal rights. Girls are prepared to get married early and mothers think that women's happiness is marriage. Thus, every woman is prone to marriage as the society stipulates. This is seen in Mongo Beti's *Perpetua and The Habit of Unhappiness*:" Every woman is meant for marriage. It is the law of nature and that is that: I swear when I married Perpetua, I only thought about her happiness and the law of nature" (27).

Perpetua's mother thinks that a woman's happiness is in marriage. For her, every woman is meant for marriage because it is the law of nature. What is boring is that Perpetua is still studying but Maria, her mother considers school as a game for boys. That is why when Perpetua asks for more time to finish her examination before marriage, her mother replies her: "You are no woman, you talk about examination when you are offered a husband and a husband like him (70). For Perpetua's mother, what is more important for a woman is a husband and not school.

Traditionally, the education of a girl is misconceived in most African societies. Formal education is not seen as fundamental. For Perpetua's mother formal education for girls is a waste. Girls are deprived of the right for

education. Perpetua's mother sees school as a modern custom. She intimates that

> For a woman, school is a kind of game that girls get pushed into by fashion and modern customs, not a foundation on which to build their lives.(Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness, 65)

Girls' education is seen as a game and not a foundation on which they can build their lives. They are deprived of such rights, while boys are given what they need for being important person in the society. For them, schools have no importance. Girls are to stay at home and look after children. They have to manage their home because their place is there. Ubani remarks that "you are to give her children and food. She is to cook and bear children and look after you and them" (*Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness,* 71).

Ubani is defining the role of women. They are to cook and bear children. He shows that the women's place is at home. Women, according to Ubani should sit and wait for their husband to provide them with food and other things. This is supported by some male writers who see the woman as a tool for procreation. For instance in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, Ihuoma, the heroine of the novel is only a play thing in the hands of men. She tries to prove her womanhood even in her widowed state but without much success. In attempting to remain in her husband's compound and to educate her children as men do, she fails because she meets men's obstacles.

For male writers like Elechi Amadi, each woman has to get a sponsor' or someone to protect her. This shows that Ihuoma is taken as minor.Women are therefore seen as children who wait for their parents(husbands) to take care of them. Women are adult without decision according to some men.

Talking about traditional marriage in African societies, women have no right to choose their husband but they are encouraged to get married for the simple reason of getting children. Marriage is something important in most African societies. It is a custom to be fulfilled by anyone in the society. An unmarried woman is scorseding the society. People say that a bad marriage is far better than to remain single. Nwapa shows this when Efuru fails in her marriage. Her first husband Adizua leaves her without saying goodbye but Efuru remains in her husband home. Efuru is still faithfull, to her husband though he is not there. She stays there and waits for him. She only leaves the husband's compound because the husband fails to come back. After the disappointment, she decides to take another because she does not want to become single. For most African societies, celibacy is seen as a failure.

Maria Rosa Cutrufelli in *Women in Africa: The Roots of Oppression* clearly states that

> Customary, marriage is mainly regarded as an institution for the control of procreation, and is seen as a social act endowed with religious values and one from which nobody should shrink. For this reason, celibacy is deemed to be an actual 'social failure' a bad marriage is by far better than no marriage.(68)

Here, marriage is an obligation. Thus parents are obliged to encourage their children to get married. Parents, in most African societies, search for a suitor of their daughters. The latter accept without saying a word. They have no right to refuse the choice of their parents. Buchi Emecheta in *The Joys of Motherhood* presents an encounter between a father and a rebelling daughter over a choice of a husband: « I am not marrying that man; I don't like him. You don't even have to like him. You don't even have to know him in advance. You just marry him » (24).

This shows that in most traditional African societies, most marriages are organised by parents. Girls are not consulted in such matters. They have no right to choose a husband, or to know their future husband in advance. They are helpless and only receive orders from the patriarchal society. They have to fulfil their parents' will even though the man might be too old or ugly. Nevertheless, men are never ugly in Africa.

Ubani, in The Joys of Motherhood states:" A woman may be ugly or grow old, but a man is never ugly and old. He matures with age and is dignified"(71).

From the above, it is justified that girls cannot object their fathers'choice because a man is always young and handsome. Even though a man is too old or ugly, girls have to submit to their parents' will for they have no say in making a choice for husband.

In some African societies, women are taken as objects or property to be passed from one family to another. Women are to be sold by their families.

Fathers evaluate their daughters in terms of money, cows and many other things they obtain as bride-price.

Fathers wait patiently the time to 'sell' their daughters. They do not think about the future of their daughters. What count much on what have to be obtained as bride-price. Thus, from bride-price, a father can buy many things, even pay the bride-price of his sons' wives. That is why parents behave like businessmen. Buchi E mecheta demonstrates this in *The Joys of Motherhood* when talking about a father who finds a suitor for her daughter:

> Nnaife quickly approved of this man; knowing that his daughter was striking a good bargain, and was in hurry to get much money as possible from his children before retiring.(203)

Here, it is shown that the father is in a hurry to get much money as possible. The father sees her daughter as a marketable commodity. Instead of thinking about her future and happiness, he wants his money. Thus, the father behaves like a businessman who needs his profits.

In the same line of ideas, Mongo Beti joins Buchi Emecheta in *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness* when Perpetua affirms that:

> I know that I am a property of man who paid a lot of money for me for years. Up to now, I've done every thing I've been told. I was told, Perpetua go there and I ran there. Perpetua get up and, got up. Perpetua get into the bed and, I like a fool, I got into bed. (69)

Perpetua is convinced that she is a property of a man who paid a lot of money for her. She is obliged to do whatever the man wants her to do. Perpetua demonstrates how women are not free after marriage. Women are taken as children, indecisive and irresponsible.

However, women also make their husband to underestimate them. If women do something they have not been ordered by their husbands, it is as if they have commited a crime. Women are submissive, obedient but they can see what is wrong. To stay at home and wait for a man to dictate what you have to do is somehow boring. Thus, women should be aware of their position and start doing some of the things that they have abandoned solely to men, rather than wait for the man all the time.

Tradition wants women to be obedient, submissive, illogical and indecisive as Perpetua does. But women should see what is good for their lives and not follow blindly what tradition and their husbands dictate to them.

The bride-price also plays an important role in the oppression of women. The bride-price comes to rob women of their rights. When men pay the bride-price, it is as if they have bought an object. The wife becomes the property or the slave of her husband.

In "The Myth of Inferiority of the African Women" in the United Nation Commission on the status of women in 11th session 1957, Awoli observes that

> The bride-price in so far as it is operated against the freedom to chose a spouse, degraded to the position of a chattel or slave and constituted a serious drawback to the recognition of the human dignity of a woman. (qtd in *The Civilisation of Women in African Tradition,* 33)

It is evident that in some traditional African societies, the bride-price plays an important role in oppressing the woman. Women are victims of tradition. They are forced to be treated as slaves by their husbands. They are beaten by their husbands who are supposed to protect them. Women undergo many kind of sufferings without raising a voice because tradition has taught them to be silent and obedient. In the same vein, Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*, shows how Nzowulu, beats his wife even when she is pregnant, he defends himself that

> That women standing there is my wife, Mgabobo. I married her with my money and yams. I don't owe my in-laws anything. I owe them no yams, no money. I owe them no coco yams. (64)

After marriage, a woman becomes part of African man's property. A husband can do whatever he wants to her wife. Nzowulu, as seen above, shows that he has bought her wife with his money and yams.

As such, the wife belongs to him entirely and he can use her the way he likes. He is the only person who can decide for Mgabobo. She belongs to him as any other property in his homestead. This is a kind of oppression for women. Nzowulu represents men who think like him, who believes that a wife is an object because they have paid a bride-price for her.

In the like manner, men like Napoleon Bonaparte, a french emperor sees that the oppression of women is justified. Napoleon states that:

> Nature intended women to be our slaves. They are our property, we are not theirs.They belong to us, just as a tree that bears fruit belongs to a gardener. What a mad idea to demand equality for women... Women are nothing but machine for producing children.
>
> (qtd in *Last Famous Words, 78*)

Napoleon sees that women's oppression is justified. For him, women are nothing but machine for producing children. Women are given an inferior place to that of men because of their biology.

Men privilege themselves and underprivilege women. Men organize the society as they want and give an inferior place to women. In this light, Simone De Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex* says that the society being codified by men decrees that women are inferior. Societies are organized by men and women are like witnesses. Instead of being consulted, men decide on their behalf and women accept what men decide and follow with single or no complain.

As women are supposed to be subservient and obedient. Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay in *Women in Africa* add that

> Unlike a 'rundikazi' (a woman), in public does not speak, nor does she look you in the eyes. To each question she answers 'ndabizi' (how should I know). In public, she lets it be thought that she knows nothing about politics, or where her husband is today or even the wedding date of her daughter. She is the modest and obedient wife of her husband, the mother of her children, the conscientous mistress of her house who is always working. Whatever she does, she does within the limits of her various feminine roles. (180-181)

Here, a traditional woman 'rundikazi' is well described. She does not speak in public and does not look in somebody's eyes. This demonstrates how a woman is supposed to be according to the dictates of men. According to tradition, a woman must be silent and obedient. In public, she is not supposed to be out speaker. Men believe that during her lifetime, a woman is subject of her father's will, despite the fact that after marriage, she also has to obey her husband. A woman is to fulfil her husband's will as she belongs to him.

Awdi Thelma in "The Myth of Inferiority of the Africa women" argues that many writers in their attempt to describe or analyse African societies, hold with great certainty that

> The woman has a position and status which is in many ways definetely inferior to that of a man and this is in spite of the facts that she does most of the hard work in supporting the family. They were regarded as minor. After marriage, a woman is under the control of her husband and on his death, of some male member of his family. She could never sue independently at court, she could own property but could not dispose it without her guardian's consent and she could inherit cattle or other livestock from her father or husband. Women took no part in the government of the tribe, they did not attend the tribal assemblies and all political offices were kept exclusively in the hand of men. Even in the family, life preference was given to males, and a woman bearing daughters only was held to have failed in one of her most important duties to her husband. (qtd in The Civilisation of women in African Traditional society, 33).

The above quotation shows the injustice done on women. Women are given an inferior place to that of men even though they do most of the hard work in supporting the family. Women are excluded in tribal assemblies and in most political offices. Women are excluded not because they are unable to do like men but because of patriarchal injustice.

In a nutshell, this chapter has portrayed the status of a woman in traditional Africa. It has also shown that women are oppressed by tradition and some men. Women are underevaluated and degraded to a position of chattel or slave during her lifetime, even though they do most of the hard work so as to help the family to survive.

CHAPTER TWO

THE WOMAN AS A REBEL

This chapter examines the contemporary woman as a rebel. It proceeds to show how the contemporary woman establishes an order that suits her and not the society. This revolution opens a new page to ardent traditionalists. The central figure here is Flora Nwapa's Efuru, who is ready to liberate the female folk by liberating herself.

Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* falls among the early novels written by a female. Efuru, the heroine of the novel is a strong-willed, rebellious young woman. She is ready and determined to assert herself. She does not hesitate to break with some traditional norms which stifle the evolution of women. Efuru is a daughter of Nwashike Ogene, a well-known and respected 'Mighty man of value'. But Efuru elopes and marries Adizua, an inconsequential nonentity who cannot afford to pay the bride-price requested by the parents of Efuru.

After their encounter Adizua tells Efuru that he loves very much. Efuru replies him that, 'She would drawn herself in the lake if he did not marry her' (1). Efuru is ready to marry Adizua even though he is not able to pay the bride-price.

Efuru accepts to marry Adizua but asks him, 'what about the dowry'(1) and Adizua replies:

> You will come to me on Nkwo day. Every place will be quiet that day being a market day. Take a few clothes with you and come to me. We will talk about dowry after.(1)

Efuru approves that and goes home feeling very happy and light. This action shows that Efuru is a decisive young woman. By marrying Adizua she shatters the expectations of her society. She firmly rejects the idea of an arranged marriage. She refuses to live apart from the man she loves. She decides to elope and goes to live with him. They together, work and save the money required for the bride-price.

Nwapa, through Efuru, encourages women to reject some norms or oppressive policies prescribed to them by the society. John Harris rightly says:

> We must remember that to deny someone control of her own lives is to offer them a most profound insult, not to mention the injury which the frustration of their wishes and the setting at naught of their own plans for themselves will add. (qtd in *African Literature Today* *n*°19, 107)

In concurrence with Harris' opinion, Flora Nwapa creates in Efuru a character who takes control of her life, who creates a unique image of herself.

Rather than place Efuru on the periphery of activities, Flora Nwapa allots her a decisive role. Efuru thus becomes a cynosure, the centre without which, all other things fall apart. By juxtaposing the character of Efuru with that of Adizua, the author creates an admirable personality, respectful daughter, resourceful woman, dutiful wife and, in the end, mother.

In traditional Africa, there are some people who emphasize much about the cultural affair of the society, for instance, village leaders, husbands, religious traditional leaders and other head men. The latter act to oppress women. They used cultural beliefs, traditional values as obstacles to women's freedom. Thus, Efuru is ready to divorce from these traditional values.
Efuru shows that she is disappointed with some of the dictates of tradition. Efuru is an example of many contemporary African women who are aware of their condition and determined to liberate themselves.

Efuru is proposing another type of marriage. She elopes and lives with her beloved and both of them work hand in hand for her bride-price. For her, the bride-price should not be a handicape in marriage. If two people love each other, and it happens that the man is not able to pay the bride-price, the parents should not forbid the marriage. They should accept that the two get married and pay the bride-price later. Efuru in this light, openly shows that she is disappointed with arranged marriages. Efuru makes her choice and marries a man she loves and knows.

The same type of woman is found in Buchi Emecheta's *the Bride-price.* Akuna, the heroine of the novel is determined to marry Chike, the slave man she loves. She does not hesitate to put her life and reputation at risks in order to marry Chike. She prefers death instead of living with Okobosho, whom she considers as 'dog chief'. Her anger is aroused by the obligation of marrying someone she does not love. She wonders why she is refused the right she would benefit from. Irène Assiba supports this in, 'The Concept of Choice in Mariama Bâ fiction' *in Ngambika: studies of women in African Literature,* when she says:

> Women have been denied to choose the courses of their lives even though choice is at the center of what gives significance to human existence .(46)

Akuna could not imagine her life with Okobosho. She wonders how she could escape. She decides to do whatever she could in order to achieve her aim. She does not even care about her life. The author comments that

> She was determined that she would kill herself in the night. She was not going to be a willing bed-partner to somebody she did not love and who had never spoken a single kind word to her whole life .(75)

In the same light, Ama Ataa Aidoo also creates a female character with such a personality in *Anowa.*

Anowa, the heroine of the novel refuses to marry any of the men chosen by her parents and wants to make her own choice. She decides upon Kofi Ako, "A good-for-nothing cassava man" as her mother labels him. However what is very interesting is the conception of married life. Anowa soon exposes on her role as a wife. When her parents insult and criticize her husband, she simply replies: "you will be surprised to know that I am going to help him to do something with his life"(32). Anowa is showing that she will help her husband to do something. She is determined to contribute in the general build-up of their family.

Oyono Mbia's play *Three Suitors: One Husband* equally portrays a character of such personality. Juliette, while in school gets a fiancé, a poor student. When she comes back home, she finds that her parents have already chosen a husband for her. What is surprising is that it is not one husband but more than one husband. They have accepted the money of a farmer who wanted to marry her. Next comes Mbia, a civil servant whom they think will pay a bigger amount of money as the bride-price.

When her parents decide to take her out of school to marry Mbia as his ninth wife, she refuses and makes this comment: « Do you really mean to ignore me when you make decisions affecting me? Why don't you ask me my opinion about my own marriage »(22).

Contemporary African women desire a change of some norms of the society which places her at the bottom of the social ladder.

However, that desire is mediated by a strong streak of her conservatism. This is one of the greater characteristic in the novel of female writers such as Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Mariama Bâ and others. Most of the time, their heroines aspire for change of their condition and freedom but they are torn between modernity and tradition. As Irène Assiba d'Almeida says while commenting on Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter:*

> If Ramatoulaye is the persona that represents the writer's point of view, then Mariama Bâ belongs to a generation of African female novelists whose writing is characterised by a certain malaise. This malaise emerges from a dilemma women face in writing to keep tradition while at the same time want to reject what in society ties women down. To find an acceptable and viable modus vivendi between the forces of tradition and the realities of the present is almost a "tour de force". (167)

Irène states that women ~~what~~ want to change their situation. They are in search for their freedom but the problem they face is to break with tradition and at the same time follow the norms of tradition. Efuru is a good example, especially when she apologizes to her father. She says:

> Tell my father that I shall be the last person to bring shame on h im. My mother died five years ago, I h ave been a good daughter to him. In fact, my husband is not

rich. He is poor. But the dowry must be paid. I must see

that this is done .(*Efuru*, 10)

Even though Efuru elopes, she knows that the act is shameful in her traditional set up. Since her father is a respected person and the elders in her society stick to their traditions and are very reticent to change, she sees it necessary to apologize because she knows that her society is not ready to understand her.

There is another type of woman who needs great attention. These women are the type of women in Sembene Ousmane's *The God's Bits of Woods*. Penda, the heroine of the novel clarifies the impression of the determined women. The novel is about a long and bitter strike by workers on the Dakar-Niger railroad. These workers are demanding a decent wage and better working conditions. Penda, the main character in the book, a prostitute, turns into a great political leader. Her actions have deep ideological insights. She is a woman who does not fear men and who hates them since she sees them as animals who are using her body and soul. In the struggle, she works by their side and she gains from both men and women, respect, dignity and pride. Penda is the representative of women, she convinces them that they have to join the strike and she leads the march of women from Thies to Dakar. According to her, oppressed people can only achieve their goal by uniting and struggling together.

She also calls on the women to participate in the strike. She says:

> I speak in the name of all women, but I am just the voice they have chosen to tell you what they have decided to do. Yesterday, we all laughed together, men and women, and today we weep together but for us women, this strike still means the possibility of a better life. Tomorrow we owe it to ourselves to hold up our heads and to give in now. So, we have decided that tomorrow, we will go together to Dakar...
>
> Yes, we will go together to Dakar to hear what these tobabs have to say and let them to see if we are concubines! Men, you must allow your wives to come with us! Every woman here who is capable of walking should be with us tomorrow. (135)

Penda is committed to the struggle. She is determined and seeks a solution. She is a leader among others. As Aloysius Kwitonda says in 'Women Character in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's Works: Impact of Ideology" through courage and optimism of the peasant women, the fire of the Mau Mau movement "rebellion was born" (22). This demonstrates that women can equally be very useful in nation building. Women fight for their countries and for their rights. Thus, women are able to do what men can do, even though there are some tasks which can be assigned to men or women only. This difference should bring harmony and not discrimination.

Men and women need one another. Women are now showing what they are able. A woman like Penda is a representative of many other women in the world. Men must know that women can help them in many things as Penda does.

All these examples show that women like Efuru, Anowa, Penda, to name a few are ready to fight for their rights. They want to change some traditional norms gradually. That is why they are ready to transgress tradition which has oppressed them for long. As Flora Abena Dolphyne in *The Emancipation of women* states, every human society has a body of beliefs that regulate the way people behave and relate to each other in the society. She goes on saying that over the years, these beliefs and modes of behaviour are modified to suit the changing circumstances of the society. For her, the African society is no exception. What is different, however, is that as a result of the contact with western civilization and uneven influence that this civilization has had on African societies one finds in every country, a contrast between a very westernized society and a traditional society whose beliefs and way of life often show that they have hardly been touched by western culture. That is why contemporary African women have many problems to confront in order to be liberated.

Efuru chooses her husband and elopes so as to escape from being married to a man she does not know. According to elders, the act of choosing a suitor is a revolt, a reaction against the prejudice on women and practical

means of breaking loose from these prejudices and subjugation. But contemporary women like Ramatoulaye in Mariama Bâ's *So Long A letter* are ready to undergo what follows. Ramatoulaye is courted by two suitors both educated, enlightened, cultured and exposed. Daouda Dieng, the medical doctor whom Ramatoulaye's mother prefers and recommends as against the smooth and suave Modou Fall, the man in the perenial Rhaki suit, who eventually won her heart and her hand.The choice is hers and she narrates:

> Our marriage was celebrated without dowry, without pomp, under the disapproving looks of father. Before the painful indignation of my frustrated mother, under the sarcasm of my surprised sister, in our town struct dumb with astonishment.(10-11)

Ramatoulaye's people are conservative. They are not ready to change. They do not want their daughters to make their choices. But Ramatoulaye prefers to marry Modou whom she loves without her parents' consent.

Contemporary African women like Efuru, Anowa, Ramatoulaye and others are showing that they cannot continue to bear the oppression. They need a change in their condition. They consistently prove their point of not consenting to an arranged marriage. Some like Efuru elopes with the boy friend. Others like Ramatoulaye celebrate the marriage without the consent of their people.

Efuru refuses to come back home. When her father sends people to bring back Efuru, she says no. This refusal of returning home is also another act of revolt. Though her husband is poor, Efuru gives them two big kola-nuts and a bottle of home-made gin.

The author says that: "Efuru brings two big kola-nuts. They are fit only kings. She brings out a bottle of home-made gin – a very good one that had been, in Korosene tin for nearly six months" (9).

The men enjoy the drink very much. They finish the bottle and some of them are even tipsy to the extent that the men forget about bringing her back home. The spokesman says, "We shall go, our daughter. You seem to be happy here and we wonder why your father want us to bring you back (9). Efuru succeeds to show the people that she is happy in her husband's house. But the people do not forget to tell Efuru the following:

> We shall tell him (father) what we have seen. But your husband must fulfil the custom of our people. It is very important. Our enemies will laugh at us.Tell your husband, he must see your father. Let him not be afraid.(9)

Efuru is happy with her husband since it is her choice. But her people want the husband to fulfil the demand of her tradition. They are not ready to allow the newly married to live together without paying the bride-price. They want Efuru and Adizua to fulfil the people's custom by paying the bride-price after.

Efuru's father is very pleased when Adizua comes to pay the bride-price. Nwashike Ogene says "I am glad you have come"(23). They come to fulfil the custom. Nwashike Ogene is very happy. That is why, at the end of ceremony, he calls Efuru and Adizua. He blesses them and gives them a piece of advice. The author comments that:" Efuru and Adizua go home and for the first time since that fateful Nkwo day the two feel really married"(24).

Efuru is self-willed and ready to stand by her own decision. Efuru refuses to go to the farm with her husband and says that, "Go to the farm. I am not cut out for farm work. I am going to trade"(9). Efuru is very decisive. She refuses what her husband decides and sticks to her own decision. Normally, in some traditional African societies, women are supposed to be totally submissive to their husband. But Efuru does not submit to her husband in all circumstances. She refuses to go to the farm with him. People are surprised to see Adizua coming alone and wonder why. Some says that Efuru is not to blame because she is so beautiful. However, Efuru does not refuse to go to the farm because she is beautiful but because she wants to trade instead of farming. After a certain period, Adizua tells his wife that he wants to give up the farm for something else-trading.

Efuru and Adizua trade together and make a lot of profit. It is said that "Adizua was not good at trading. Efuru was the brain behind the business" (36). This shows the importance of women. Adizua knows very much that he is not good in trading.

As such, he tells Efuru that: "Efuru, I think it is time you should face your trade"(36). Adizua speaks as if the trade does not concern him. Efuru is a good businesswoman. She decides which kind of things to trade with. Even when they make no profit, her husband asks her what kind of goods they can trade with.

Efuru is an extraordinary woman who participates in the payment of her bride-price. That is why she lives happily with her husband. Some women are taken as object because they depend much on men.

Efuru refuses to tell her father when she is going to have her 'traditional bath'. Normally, in her society, when a woman is to be circumcised, she tells her father. But Efuru, does not tell her father. Adizua, her husband is afraid to tell his father-in-law since he married her daughter without the bride-price. Adizua proposes that Efuru shall have her 'bath' after the payment of the bride-price. He says:

> Your father must be told; my wife. It won't be fair to have your bath without his knowledge. He must be told.(12)

And Efuru replies:

> He won't be told. It will make him angrier. When we have money to pay the dowry, we shall approach elderly men who will help us to beg him.(12)

Adizua is afraid but Efuru convinces him that she can have her bath without telling her father. Efuru again makes a decision. She depends on nobody when taking her decision. This is also an act of rebellion.

After having her bath, she refuses to feast three months as other women do. Normally, when a woman has her 'bath', she feasts for three months, eating what she wants after doing nothing. Efuru's mother- in-law tells her to feast three months as others do. But Efuru refuses and feasts only for a month. She says that type of life is a dull one. She wants to be up and be doing something. Efuru is not like other women because she is always prepared to work but her mother in-law insists and tells her that

> If I were you, Efuru, I should continue for another one month. When I did mine, I feasted for three months. I know I cannot do for you all that my own mother did for me, but I will try.(17)

Efuru simply replies, 'no, mother. One month of confinement is enough. We have not got much money and I want to start trading. Again we have not paid the bride-price yet. I shall go to the market on nkwo day.(17)

Efuru, in her life with Adizua gives birth to one daughter, Ogenim. After a certain time, Adizua begins to stay nights out of her home. He even disappears without telling Efuru. Adizua does not come to bury her only daughter.

Contrary to her mother in-law who suffers the same situation Efuru chooses to leave Adizua. Adizua's mother chooses to stay in her husband's house. Efuru divorces Adizua even though the tradition does not permit that.

Efuru, through her varried choices, courage and determination decides to transgress the frontiers of tradition. According to tradition, a woman is supposed to stay in her husband's house and bear difficulties she may encounter. But Efuru, after enduring the pains inflicted on her by Adizua for eight months she says:

> But when Adizua comes home, it is going to be a straight forward business, cut and dried and nonsense. Does it not occur to my mother in-law, Ajanapu and my father that Adizua is quiet satisfied with this woman and does not want me anymore? Needs to stay until he says: "Efuru I don't want you anymore. Return to your father's house and when you marry again I shall come for my dowry?" Our ancestors forbid that I should wait for a man to drive me out of his house.This is done to women who cannot stand by themselves, women who have not good homes, and not to me the daughter of Nwashike O gene. A nd besides, m y f ace i s not burnt, I am still a beautiful woman.(63-64)

Efuru does not wait to be chased shamefully. She decides to suffer nobly. Efuru sees Adizua's absence as a way of asking her to leave his house. Efuru, unlike her mother in-law wants to marry again but does not want this to take place in Adizua's compound. That is why she prefers to leave him.

Efuru, through these acts affirms that life is what you make it. If she is any kind of woman, she would have stayed in Adizua's house like her mother in-law.

But as Jean-Paul Sartre states it in *L'être et le Néant and l'Existentialisme est Humanisme*, human beings are nothing else but what they make of themselves. According to him, their life is a sum total of their choice. Through the act of choosing they create themselves.

Efuru here shows that women are capable of making themselves more valuable. She deviates from her traditional norms, not because of her bad behaviour, but because men and society have denied her that dignity. She realises the oppression done on women and raises her voice in order to have a place in the society. Flora Nwapa, through Efuru presents a woman who is not ready to totally submit to the dictates of the society. Nwapa creates a woman who is conscious of her rights and willing to liberate herself.

CHAPTER THREE

RECONCILIATION BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY

This chapter examines how Nwapa reconciles tradition and modernity. In this process of reconciliation, she redefines the female status and also portrays how self-reliance can facilitate the process of female emancipation. The economic independence helps women to live their lives as they want without depending on men. In light of this, Efuru accepts some traditional rites and practices, and rejects some.

Flora Nwapa succeeds to create a character who reconciles modernity and tradition. Efuru accepts to be circumcised even though it is not good for women. It is not good for women for many reasons. For instance, women can die as a consequence of such operation. Efuru accepts to have that traditional bath because she is a woman like others, she must follow the custom to an extent. Nwapa notes that

> The woman went into the back of the house and there it was done. Efuru screamed. It was so painful. Her mother in-law consoled her. 'It will soon be over, my daughter don't cry.(14)

When the neighbours hear Efuru screaming, they did nothing because they knew what was happening.

One of the neighbours said to the other: "It is being done now. Oh, yes, that is it. I saw the woman when she came. Efuru is having her bath. Poor girl, it is so painful »(14).This shows that women are aware of the painful nature of the traditional bath. When they come to sympathize with someone who has had the traditional bath, they often say: "It is what every woman undergoes. So, don't worry » (15). This shows that woman see it as a passage of rite for every woman. When a woman refuses the traditional bath, the society believes that her children must die. This is evident in the case of Nwakaego who did not have her bath before she had that baby who died after the dreadful flood. And Efuru mother in-law asks:"God forbid! Why? Fear. She was afraid foolish girl. She had a foolish mother, their folly cost them a son, a good son"(14).

It is seen that when a woman refuses to have her bath, she is judged as foolish. And if it happens that her child dies, it is affirmed that it is because of her mother who refuses to have the traditional bath. When Efuru's mother in-law asks how the woman did she know, she replies as follows:

> They come to me early one morning and told me. They wanted it to be done in my house so that people will not know. The dibia had already told them that the baby died because she did not have her bath.(14)

Efuru's mother-in-law wants her daughter to have her bath before she becomes pregnant. Even though the operation is so painful, Efuru like other women accepts to follow the custom of her tradition.

Unlike most feminist writers who are ready to totally dismantle the existing hegemony and impose a new order, Nwapa creates a woman who accepts her position as a mother but who is not ready to be enslaved.

Female circumcision is an issue that arouses very strong feelings in many women. Some western feminist decry it because they feel that the principal objective of female circumcision, be it clitoridectomy, excision or infubation is to suppress women's sexuality and make them docile and faithful to their husbands. Others including African women from societies where the practice does not exist, get horrified at the details of how the operation is performed.

There is a risk of death from excessive bleeding or from tetanus or some other infection as the result of the operation, as well as the risk to the woman's health during childbirth on account of the scar that result from the operation. Some of the women who have passed through the ordeal speak of how traumatic the whole experience is for them, and how they would not inflict such pain on their daughters.

In societies that practise female circumcision, there are stories and beliefs that provide the rationale behind the practice. A little girl growing up in a village is bound to hear about these so many times, that by the time she is of age she knows that the operation is for her own good and that this is what she has to do, to be accepted as a woman in her society, for the operation is usually meant to transform a girl into a woman.

As Llyod Williams comments on this in" Religion and Life in James Ngugi's *The River Between*" while talking about Muthoni who wants both Christianity and the tribe. Muthoni wants to unite the two. She needs religion but knows that Christianity can meet that need only if it comes to her through the idiom of her way of life. Her desire to unite the two forces finds expression in her simple words to Nyambura her sister, " I am still a Christian, see, a Christian in the tribe"(6). Muthoni's death after circumcision portrays the consequence of such an operation.

Muthoni dies because of the operation. Her father, Joshua is a new christian and does not want her daughters to be circumcized. And Muthoni thinks and decides to be initiated to the way of life of her tribe and she says to her sister:

> Why! Are we fools? Father and mother are circumcised. Are they not Christian circumcision did not prevent them from being christian. I too have embraced the white man's faith. However, I know it is beautiful, oh so beautiful to be initiated into womanhood . You learn the ways of the tribe. Yes, the Whiteman's God does not quite satisfy me. I want, I need something more. My life and your life are here, in the hills, that you and I know. (30)

Muthoni knows that religion in and itself is nothing. She says that she is a christian. She does not wish to leave the faith but she realizes that her life is

inseparably bound up in the ways and life of tribe, and christianity cannot be meaningful to her if it attempts to meet her outside the tribe, outside of her life in the tribe.

Efuru like Muthoni tries to reconcile the two, modernity and tradition. Though they flout some norms, they succeed to follow some custom of their tradition, though painfully.

Another traditional custom that Efuru abides to is African solidarity. Efuru is a generous woman who helps some members of her community. She supports both her relatives and neighbours. Though Efuru wants to live on her own, she does not forget to help those in need. This is seen when Nnona's son comes to thank Efuru for what she has done to their mother:

> We have come to see you Efuru, to thank you for what you have done for our mother. What you have done surprised everybody that we have no mouth to thank you. Our hearts are glad and we have come to show you our appreciation. Thank you very much. Thank you.(131)

Efuru as an African still follows that custom of helping each other. Efuru helps Nnona by paying the money of her medecine. What is good is that Efuru does not help only the sick persons but also people who are poor like Nwosu and Nbwabata. Despite that the family is still owing, they did not hesitate to present the second problem. They thought they could pay a part of their debt after the harvest, but it was not possible.

Efuru listens to them and replies them: "You don't know the value of goodness, Poverty does not affect the reasoning power or the innate goodness in human beings. Poor people do not behave foolishly (170-171) ».

Efuru says like that because Nwoso and her wife Nwabata have harvested and did not pay her and they return now to ask for money so as to get money for the planting season and they say to Efuru: "We have no money to buy yams to plant. That is why we have come, Efuru. Please help us. There is nobody we can go to. You know us well and our nakedness" (170). This shows that Efuru is generous. She is a good woman who is ready to help anyone who comes to her. Amid the fact that they are owing her, she does not hesitate to give her money for the second time. What is surprising is that Efuru does not give what she wants, but Efuru asks them "how much do you want?"(171). They have thought that after scolding them, she would send them away empty-handed, but her goodness is still there and she proposes them ten pound. Efuru's goodness or spirit of communalism is accentuated when one comes to her house and tells her about a problem. She is always ready to help. She also helps a woman, whose money is stolen. When this woman comes to Efuru's house weeping, she asks her why she is weeping and she tells her that her money has been stolen and Efuru gives her the same amount of money.

In return the woman thanks her:

> Weo-o, my daughter, my daughter how can I thank you? Eh ada Nwashike, how am I thank you for this? Thank you, my daughter, thank you. Ogea, please, thank her for me Nwaononaku, Mbona, my daughter.(172)

Efuru tries to live her life as she wants by flouting some customs of her tradition and accepting some. But the problem she faces is that the contemporary African woman is torn between modernity and tradition as Beatrice Stegman says in "The Divorce Dilemma": The New Woman in Contemporary African Novel that the fundemental problem that seems to face the contemporary African fictional heroines is that she is torn between the two antagonistic identity: her communally bred sense of herself as an African and her feminist aspiration for autonomy and self-realisation as a woman. She goes on saying that African society, of course, even in its most westenized forms, places the values of the group over those of the individual with the result that the notion of an African feminist almost seems a contradiction in terms.

Efuru seems to have succeeded to work within these two antagonistic identity because she tries to reconcile tradition and modernity. By creating a character like Efuru, Nwapa is giving her own view about female liberation. She exposes the dilemma in which the woman finds herself. The problem is how to be liberated without totally abandoning the traditional ways of life.

The conversation between Omirima and Amede brings out some of controversies between tradition and modernity.

Omirima: My daughter in-law! She went to school and think she knows everything. She is so lazy. Have you ever known a woman brought up in our village who slept until the sun is up?

Amede: No, impossible, who sleeps until the sun is up? Where did she learn those foreign bad behaviour. This is bad. She is unlike our women. I thank God my daughter in-law does not sleep till sun rise.(194)

This conversation shows that there is cultural conflict. The contemporary African women are influenced by a modern culture and they live with conservative women like Amede and Omirima. These old women do not understand the new women.

Amid her controversial roles, Efuru tries to blend modernity and tradition. She lives to an extent in a way that the society expects as Ify G. Achufusi says in "Feminist Inclinations of Flora Nwapa' in *Critical theory & African Literature Today n°19*:

> Efuru is a young woman, a strong willed, rebellious young woman, who respects and observes the tradition of her people, but who, at the same time rejects those aspects which seek to oppress and dwarf her personality.(107)

Efuru accepts the traditional bath but firmly rejects the arranged marriage, nor would succumb to long years of living apart from her fiancé. She loves him and that is why they decide to work and save money for her bride-price. She elopes and goes to live with him and together they work to save the substantial amount required. This is contrary to traditional norms.

Efuru tries to reconcile tradition and modernity so as to live in harmony. Since contemporary African women are torn between these two realities. There must be a marriage between the two so as to facilitate her stay in her society. When Efuru rejects some traditional norms, it is partly because she wants to be liberated, she is not out to destroy the tradition of her people but she believes that as time progresses, things are changing and so, their tradition should not be let behind. From this perspective, she takes up the assignment as a catalyst. Pieterse in *Protest and Conflict in African Literature* notes that

> When two cultures come into contact the people they influence form a comparison, between the two and have to choose between those values as they are but in practice and their effect, and assume one or other form of synthesis of the two cultures.(81)

Efuru succeeds to some extend though she is not understood by her society.

Nzekwu like Nwapa proposes the reconciliation between modernity and tradition. Peter, the hero of Nzekwu's *The Wand of Noble Woods* realizes that both cultures have good as well as bad points.

He decides to acknowledge only the good aspects of his people and rejects those he considers bad. He preserves the custom of helping each other as he puts it in *The Wand of Noble Woods*:

> Our traditional pattern of life makes it essential that we care for them all. The number of relatives can be incredible. You may say it is one of the evils of having many wives as possible so as to satisfy the craking for children and still I believe the support of our relations is a good idea.(36)

Peter tries to preserve what is good in his society and at the same time borrows what is good in the western culture in order to fulfil his aspirations. As Reginald says it in *Wand of Noble Woods*: "While absorbing in the best foreign cultures, we must also retain what is best in our own. Only the best is good enough for the Africa".(40)

This shows that the reconciliation between modernity and tradition may be the solution to cultural conflict that the young generation is facing today.

Efuru lives in Igbo society. A society which accepts polygamy. Efuru though rebellious proposes her husband to marry a second wife. Since there is a custom which gives the right to the first wife to search for the co-spouse, Efuru proposes Eneberi, her second husband a second wife.

This is seen in a conversation between Efuru and Eneberi:

> Eneberi, I am thinking of getting a wife for you. (Efuru).
>
> Why? Gilbert asked surprised.
>
> You know why, this is the fourth year of our marriage and I have not had an issue for you. We have lived happily these four years and I am worried. If we get another wife, a young girl, she will have children for you and I will love the children because they are your own children. I don't care whether I have child or not. And...(174)

Here, Efuru acknowledges the custom of her people which allows her to search a wife for her husband. It is seen that Eneberi does not want another wife since he does not care whether her first wife has children or not. But Efuru insists and Eneberi accepts her proposal. Efuru does this because she knows that if her husband does not marry another wife and get children, the society will gossip about her and she knows that all men care about children as she tells to Eneberi: "No, please be frank. You do care. Don't feel for me. All men care for children. If you don't like the method I want to use, say so » (174).

Efuru knows that not only all men care for children but the whole African society in general.

Nwapa presents Efuru as a prototype character. The contemporary women must know the problem they are facing and try to find a solution.

The new women have to choose what is good for them and reject what oppresses them. As Awoli Thelma says it in *The Civilisation of Women in African Tradition,* the success here means the adaptation of traditional societies to meet modern needs. Not that innovation by a tighty knit misdirected elite group, who in order to maintain the status quo, would emphasize a degree of conformity to western triviality within its ranks: trivialities that are foreign to the African spirit and make him lose his equilibrium. Each group of elite in Africa has developed its own peculiarities within new values based on western economic standards. She goes on saying that the motivation achievement in the future of an African civilization should evolve out of harmony and not out of conflict. The harmonious blending of the past with present, of African tradition with western ideas. The expression of this should be centred around the rearing of children, culculatively attempting to instill the motivation for this achievement into him.

Efuru succeeds to merge the African tradition and western ideas. When she gives birth to a child, she is ready to use a maid even though in her tradition a mother has to look after her child. When Efuru says to her friend that she wants a maid to look after her child, her friend replies: "A maid? You want a maid to look after your only child? She will kill her. I advise you not to have a maid you will regret it »(37). Efuru uses a maid so as to easy her task, especially as she is a trader. However her friends think that a woman's place is at home. Efuru has to participate in some activities outside her home.

In searching for a maid, Efuru displays her modern attitude on the role and function of the new woman. The minor controversy on whether to keep a maid or not may help to highlight a contradiction that exist in the society towards the upbringing of girls in the modern society. Efuru uses the maid but she knows that her friends do not agree with her. According to her friends a maid can kill their children as one her friend tells her but Efuru hopes that she can have a good one who can look after her child.

Nwapa also proposes the development of economic matters as a part of the struggle for their rights and the blossoming of African women. It spells doom for the oppressive forces that ranged against this other half of humanity. That is why she creates a character who prefers to trade instead of farming so as to be economically independent. Efuru refuses to go to the farm with her husband. And she says to her husband 'Go to farm. I am not cut out for farm work. I am going to trade (10). Efuru begins to trade and makes profits. And it is said that:"her hands makes money. If she begins to sell pepper in the market, she will make money out of it. If in salt, money will flow in. Everything she touches is money"(125). Efuru trades and gets money. She asks nothing from her husband. Instead, Efuru is the one who takes care of the family after her first husband deserts her.

Efuru confirms Flora Nwapa's own contention as well as the opinion of her mother in-law that

> The route to (women) liberation is economic power. ... all women married or single must be economically independent. If it means selling oranges, then we sell oranges to be financially autonomous (qtd in African Literature Today n°19, 109).

Having achieved economic independence, Efuru is able to give up marriages, once her two marriages fail to live up to her expectations. Back in her father's house, she takes charge of all affairs and discharges both her civic and female responsibilities honourably. These include the provision of medical treatment for some members of her community who may otherwise have suffered and died neglected. Thus, by alloting these principal roles to her heroines, Nwapa demystifies the myths of female inferior and dependence. This is seen when Nnona thanks Efuru saying: "I want to say again that we are happy that you have helped our mother. You have done what only men are capable of doing and so you have done like a man »(132).

In most African societies, men are independent while women depend on men economically. By trading Efuru is economically independent and she is ready to help some members of her community. Thus, she is a man.

Flora Nwapa in her novels *Efuru* and *Idu* creates female characters who are hardly 'cut out for farm work'.

For Idu has also displayed a commendable business accum, which even her husband and her gossip neighbours recognize with great admiration. Through Efuru and Idu, Nwapa indicates that all humans, male or female under normal conditions are capable of progressing. All her heroines, Efuru in *Efuru*, Idu in *Idu* and Amaka in *One is Enough* display this strive for economic independence. The climax is evisaged when Amaka ends up buying a car, a plot, builds a personal house, and also frees herself by returning the bride-price to her ex-husband.

Nwapa has dedicated her novel *One is Enough* to her mother in-law, who she says, attaches a great deal of importance to the economic independence of women, be they married or single. Thus, Nwapa creates characters who are industrious as it is seen in the following lines: 'Women of our town are very industrious'(131). This shows the importance of industrious women in the African context. For this reason, these women will never be underrated by their men since they are able to move their worth in the society.

If life is to have a sustaining meaning, there must be political, social and educational changes within the foresee-able future. In that process, tradition must be respected and seen as dynamic. At the same time, it must have immediate references. For Nwapa, women have the same capacity as men. Thus, she creates women who are ready to fight for their rights. To her, the development of economic matter is part of the struggle for female emancipation. She creates a heroine, Efuru, who makes enough money.

She shows that women have the same potential as men. Iris Berger in *Treads of Solidarity: Women in South Africa Industry* writes:

> Women workers make a good trade unionists as men and it is no more difficult to organize the women than men. In fact, they are often more loyal to the union that the men as the union has not only helped to improve wages and conditions of work but also raised the status.(78)

Women have the same ability as men. They can work in industries so as to have money and be economically independent. Therefore, women in west African as Nigeria and Ghana are engaged in commerce as Justine Annie Jiaggo "Looking Towards the Future: The Role of Women in Africa's Evolution" in *The Evolution of women in African Tradition* that the market women are interesting feature in the west African scene. In Nigeria and Ghana they had established definite institutions. Women of these institutions date far back into Yoruba history where women apart from taking part in certain harvesting operation, seldom worked on the farms. Here, most of the women's time was devoted to trade. They turned hard goods into cash. Yoruba women traders could be found in markets all over west Africa today. She says that in Accra 90% of the women today are engaged in commerce.

Nwapa believes in the economic power as the route to women's liberation. But Buchi Emecheta sees education as the most potential means of women's liberation. It is a central theme in all her novels and her heroines are

free and fulfilled indirect proportion to the extent of their learning education constitutes power in Emecheta's books in two ways. Most often than not she equips women be economically and prepare them for a job or profession that will enable them care for themselves and their children without the help and protection of men. Education also gives women a vision of human experience beyond the narrow confines of their own lives. Even if they can not literally escape the imprisoning contraints of their patriarchal world, they can imaginatively transcend them through education.

In *The Double Yoke*, Nko, her heroine remarks that

> O Mother, I want to have both worlds. I want to be an academician, and I want to be a quiet, nice and obedient wife. I want the two mother. And mother responds with a sigh, 'daughter, you know what you are under, you are under a double yoke. (13)

This shows that when a woman is educated she knows herself better. She sees what oppresses her and tries to liberate herself as Nko does. She has to choose between the two and marry what are good.

However since modernism and tradition cannot clearly be separated, Efuru and her second husband Gilbert Eneberi remain prototype of the contemporary new Africa. They are the past but are also the present.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This study set out to prove that reconciliation between modernity and tradition and economic independence are alternative measures to female emancipation. This is proved in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* when her character flouts some traditional norms which deny her her dignity and at the same time maintains some aspects of her tradition

In this discussion, it is quite obvious that the question of women status is still a problem which interest writers and critics. Writers as Buchi Emecheta, Besse Head, Farah Nurrddin to name a few discuss the bitterness, frustration, violence, injustice and dehumanization to which women are subjected to.

We realized that in most traditional societies, women are subjected to inequality and oppression. The study has shown that women are oppressed by tradition and that the woman's position is secondary. Women are prone to domestic chores and the patriarchal systems exclude them from the public scenario which consequently deprive them of progress.

The work has shown that when a woman gets married, she becomes a slave to her husband because she is bought. She is exposed to her husband's aggression and brutality and undergoes physical and psychological threats and makes us to understand that when a girl is still in her father's house, she is educated restrictly and is considered as part of the father's property.

The discussion has shown how, Flora Nwapa joins other writers like Sembene Ousmane, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and others to fight against the exploitation of women. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, for instance once in an interview, after the publication of *Devil on the Cross*, says:

> Because women are the most exploited and oppressed section of the entire working class, I would create a picture of a strong determined woman with a will to resist and struggle against condition of her present being.(quoted in Kwitonda's the woman's character in Ngugi's work, 46).

Nwapa has shown that the African woman had engaged a real struggle to assert herself in her malely dominated society: a struggle for freedom from mental, bodily and sexual bondage. This work has also shown that the African woman is ready to liberate herself by rebelling against some traditional norms. Nwapa creates a character who breaks the frontiers of patriarchy. Efuru shows a great sense of independence and determination to live a fulfilled life. When she is still young, she is very independent. She is ready to make her choice when she wants to get married and refuses to farm with her husband but prefers to trade. The researcher has been able to show that the contemporary African woman is not ready to accept societal dictates. She is conscious of her rights and is willing to free herself. Although she does not submit blindly to tradition, she does not totally flout tradition. She chooses what is good for her and

protest against any obstacle along her way. It has been shown that the African woman's liberation does not mean that she should cast herself from their society but that her liberation should integrate her both in the modern and traditional set-up. Taban Lo Liyong calls it cultural synthesism.

According to him, it consists of adopting the best elements from both sides. He says that "The point is that we need to adopt positive policies for confronting new situations, if we want to make our marks. Hence synthesism" (*Last Word: Cultural Synthesism*,35-36).The researcher equally realized that the contemporary African woman works hard so as to become economically independent. According to Flora Nwapa, the route to women's liberation is economic power. When a woman is econonomically independent she lives a life she wants without depending on a man.

This work will help readers in general and women in particular to be aware of women's condition. It will encourage African women who are not like Efuru to act as she does. In fact, women will be ready to fight for their rights. Also, women's biological identity cannot be an obstacle to limit her. But as women and men are different, the difference should help them to live in harmony for one has his/her role to fulfil. In addition the society is made up of men and women and it cannot progress if one category oppresses the other. They have to unite in order to overcome some of the problems they encounter.

In this way, other researcher could carry out a research on the style used by Flora Nwapa in her novel.

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