

Trauma of Procreation and Masculinity in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*

Anakoro, Canice Ihentuge Ph.D

Department of English Education,

College of Languages and Communication Arts Education (COLCAED)

Lagos State University of Education (LASUED), Epe Campus, Lagos State, Nigeria

anakoroci@lasued.edu.ng/eaglecreativepress2006@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Many African novelists have portrayed African women's fight for existence in different novels. These include prose works by pioneer female novelists like Flora Nwapa in Efuru, Buchi Emecheta in the Joys of Motherhood and Bessie Head in A Question of Power. There are also works by contemporary female novelists like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in Purple Hibiscus and Yvonne Vera in Butterfly Burning. Many male novelists like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in A Grain of Wheat also portray the female agency. Through their literary works, these writers protest against patriarchal dominance, while considering women's roles within the society. This paper explored the femininity bigotry in the African novel, through a re-examination of Nwapa's Efuru. The specific objectives are to: identify some core traumatic societal conditions facing Efuru as a female character in the novel; examine their impact on her life; and analyse her strategies in response to these challenges. With a descriptive qualitative research method that involves a close reading and interpretation of primary data drawn from Efuru, the study verified women's place in the society. The criterion for selecting the text hinged on its components of painful problems facing women. The study relied on feminist study prototype, particularly the Nego-Feminism model, propounded by Obioma Nnaemeka. The method helped to identify the traumatic conditions facing female characters in the novel; enhanced the evaluation of their impact and sustained the analysis of the strategies used by the characters in facing the challenges. Analysis and discussion did not heavily depend on external factors like author's intention. From the findings, the study concluded that feminist confrontations are part of the wider gender tragedy rooted in the fabrics of society. Efuru is portrayed as a woman particularly destroyed by the lopsided norms of her society. This is also true of her mother or Ogonim her girl-child who dies in babyhood. The fight for women's survival is synonymous with that for societal survival, as what affects them equally affects the family and the society. Notably, African women address societal conflicts in diverse peaceful manners. Most African feminists prefer labels like 'Motherism', 'Womanism', and 'Womanist' which highlight strategies of avoidance of confrontation or rebellion, give-and-take disposition ('no-ego') in a patriarchal society. This trend justifies the use of the Nego-Feminism model in this study.

Keywords: Femininity, Bigotry, African Novel, Nego-Feminism, Womanism

Introduction

Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) is a foundational work of African feminist literary production. The novel investigates the complex but tormenting dilemma of procreation and gender roles in Igbo traditional society. It presents the critical female viewpoint on marital union, motherhood and related concerns. The protagonist, Efuru, is barren but recognised for her financial success. Her emotional and psychological nightmare deepens due to societal rating of infertility. Her troubles are hence endlessly tied to the patriarchal system where women's value depended on a woman's reproductive accomplishments. This paper focuses on the problems facing female characters in the novel especially *Efuru*. It identifies and re-examines some of her critical predicaments. In other words, it reflects on various aspects of 'femininity bigotry'. This concept captures the biased and ruthless disposition of female characters viewed as a necessity for facing patriarchy with all its inequalities.

Notably, many African literary artists – poets, dramatists and prose writers – have, among other issues, depicted the African women's fight for existence in their works. However, the paper focuses on the novel *sub-genre* of African prose. A number of African literary artists whose works reflect femininity bigotry include the pioneer African female novelists like Flora Nwapa in her novels like *Efuru* (1966), Buchi Emecheta in *Second Class Citizen* (1974), Mariama Bâ in *So Long a Letter* (1979) and Bessie Head in her novels like *A Question of Power* (1974). There are also the contemporary female novelists such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in the novels like *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), Yvonne Vera in

the novel *Butterfly Burning* (1998), and Sefi Atta in the novel *Everything Good Will Come* (2006). Many male novelists like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (Kenya) in *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) equally portray female agency. These writers use their literary works to denounce patriarchal supremacy and its bigotry against females, while ultimately re-examining the position of women within the society.

Nwapa's works generally touch on the impact of traditional norms on female characters. For instance, *Efuru* is a novel that dwells on pre-colonial African world and its age-long traditions. It highlights African women and their struggles in the midst of diverse political, socio-economic and cultural challenges posed by patriarchy. With its traditional African setting, *Efuru* treats diverse femininity bigotry issues like the absolute submissiveness of women to their husbands, barrenness and failed marriages with their numerous challenging effects on women, as well as, different forms of stigmatisation of females in the society.

This paper delves into identifying various major traumatic and culture-based conditions facing Efuru and other female characters in the novel. It also scrutinises the effects of the conditions and how the affected female characters respond to them in the text. Consequently the major concerns of the paper include procreation as the prime reason for marriage. It is viewed as a vital tool for the perpetuation of family and its legacy. Therefore, at the root of societal disdain and rejection of Efuru is her sterile status especially after the death of her only daughter, Ogonim. In addition, societal bias against female characters and preference for the males is a relevant issue for discussion in

this paper.

Defining feminism becomes an onerous task as conflicting definitions and descriptions besiege an understanding of feminist critique and its theoretical affiliations, such as Marxist sociology and aesthetics (Showalter, 1986). Some theorists have often associated feminism with the awful impact of the male-dominated social system on both motherhood and babyhood. Consequently, feminism is often equated with the endless confrontations, coupled with recurring murmurs of dissatisfaction and anxious hostilities, which have followed centuries of feminine experiences, spelling out the urgent necessity for a societal revolution that could consolidate women's emancipation from a second-class-citizen status in the society (Anakoro, 2004).

Purpose of the Study:

The specific objectives of this study are to:

- i. Identify some of the core traumatic economic and socio-cultural conditions facing Efuru as a female character in the selected African novel;
- ii. Examine the impact of these conditions on the said female character in the text; and
- iii. Analyse the strategies employed by the character in response to the various societal challenges facing her in the narrative.

Theoretical Framework:

The study relies on a feminist study prototype. Specifically, it is anchored on the concept of Nego-Feminism model propagated by Nnaemeka (2004) an article titled "Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way". It is a framework celebrated as the "feminism of

negotiation" and "no-ego feminism". It is a feminist approach that hinges on the principle of an avoidance of confrontation especially in an intense marital relationship, favouring a give-and-take solution to all critical matters in any man/woman union. Nnaemeka notes that in nego-feminism, the agency discerns "when, where, and how to detonate and go around patriarchal land mines" (377).

Exploring the tactics of dialogue and negotiation, in addition to giving room for compromise and accommodation within the union, the Nego-Feminism is, thus, selected for this study due to its 'no-ego' stance which makes it suitable for studying literary works set on a patriarchal society pedestal. Since rebellion is largely eschewed by women in this feminist approach Nego-Feminism is, furthermore, considered a suitable study model for analysing women's traumatic predicament and their resilience in the face of such quandary. Thus, African women's feminist struggles against the patriarchal society and its political, economic and socio-cultural traumatic conditions do not essentially annihilate the family or community but enhance these institutions.

Review of Relevant Literature

Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966), is often seen as the foundational African novel that challenged the age-long traditional perspective of gender roles. It exposes the dangers of viewing marital union solely on the necessity of procreation, highlighting the various emotional predicaments and other societal ordeals inherent in such perspective. Infertility is one of these age-long and most critical causes of the gender rift. Although the lopsided perception that blamed sterility on women remained for ages within society,

the personal agony it generated for Efuru remains traumatising. Accordingly the novel generates a memorable depiction of Igbo patriarchal society with its weird disposition towards a “toxic” and dreadful mode of masculinity. *Efuru* is, therefore, Nwapa’s creative critique on a masculine mode that perfunctorily places wealth and power under men’s control while undermining women, their lives and interests. It is a challenge to the many forms of physical abuse, emotional pain, economic mess, social ordeal, political manipulation and many a culture-based outrage of inequality suffered by women.

The feminist agitation is shrouded in different conceptions and misconception. The *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2026) sees feminism as “the principle that women should have the same rights and chances as men”; while the *The New Lexicon Webster’s Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language* (1988) asserts that feminism is the policy, practice, or advocacy of political, economic and social equality for women. The two definitions presented above show that it takes courage and guts to be ‘feminist’. Women have been in this struggle over the years. To state the least, in practice, the term feminism has often turned out to be a most misused term, a kind of ‘misnomer’, and it consequently means different things to different writers and activists.

Nnolim (2010) sees feminism as historically diverse and culturally varied international movement probing the “question of woman”; while Barrow and Milburn (1990) contend that “feminism is a label for a commitment or movement to achieve equality for women”. Again, Cuddon (1993) takes feminism to

represent “an attempt to describe and interpret women’s experiences as depicted in various kinds of literature”. Humm (1992) says that “the word feminism can stand for a belief in sexual equality combined with a commitment to transform society”. Sheila (1980) observes that no all-inclusive and universally acceptable definition has been reached amongst all feminist adherents. According to her, what feminism means different things to various people depending political or sociological leanings. Thus, feminism may be world-view, a political theory, or a kind of activism.

Accordingly, African ‘feminists’ have different standpoints on the meaning of the term. Some of these female writers, especially from the Nigerian literary arena, do not wish to be called feminist, as they prefer such terms as *womanism* or *motherism*. Probably this preference emanates from the seemingly complementary roles between men and women in the society. Hence, Udofia’s (2012) study reveals Adimora-Ezeigbo’s complementary perspective in her works. The scholar seems to agree with the novelist that “men and women are complementary”. Therefore, Udofia finds no justification in stressing the conflict “about equality, for they are different. They simply complement each other like two sides of a coin.” Recognising that “some subtle discrimination against women” exist, for instance at work place, she believes that “such imbalances” cannot be amended by women in seeking to “become men” try to “burn their bras”. Again, for female artists like Ogundipe cited in Edward (2007), the term ‘Feminism’ can neither be equated with “the hatred of men” nor the drive to have a “sex change” or behave as

men did or felt empowered to do in a male-dominated society. For such writers, feminism is simply a body of social philosophy that not only advocates, but also, actively seeks the ‘immunization’ of women within the society (9).

Although the roots of feminist agitation could be said to be as old as society; proper feminist scholarship is a very recent matter. Feminist struggle for women’s right began in Europe in the late eighteenth century. According to the *World Book Encyclopedia* (1984), the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792, as well as John Stuart Mills’ ‘The Subjection of Women’, a “joint production” with his wife, Harriet Taylor Mill, in 1869, represents the early major contributions to feminist literature. Subsequently, the suffrage movements at the beginning of the twentieth century carried out the campaign for achieving women’s right.

However, between the early 1990s and the 2000s, feminism and feminist literatures have become well-established with the enunciation of what most scholars term the *third-wave* of feminism. Besides the theoretical groundbreaking coinage of the term in 1992 and other contributions by Rebecca Walker, other theorists like Kimberlé Crenshaw in ‘Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex’ (1989) and Patricia Hill Collins in her book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (1990) aided the enunciation of the *third-wave* of feminism. Other scholars include Naomi Wolf in her *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (1990) and Elizabeth

Wurtzel in her *Bitch: In Praise of Difficult Women* (1999).

Feminism is not a mere theoretical exercise for the African woman. It involves many ruthless life-changing experiences like barrenness in a woman or failure of her marriage. These are seen as a woman’s faults and generate unjustified societal stigma and private frustration. In the long run, the novel launches a redefinition of womanhood. This is not attained by the natural imperative of motherhood or procreation. Instead, Efuru gets connected to Uhamiri the goddess of wealth. Through this bond, her frustration abated as she begins to reclaim her self-worth. It also signifies a redefinition of womanhood. Notably, it is devoid of attachment to men like Adizua and Eneberi (Gilbert) who are symbols of the “toxic masculinity” of traditional patriarchal society.

Feminist Bigotry in Nwapa’s *Efuru*

Nwapa’s *Efuru* (1966) is concerned with many pre-occupations such as procreation, masculinity and the traumatising deprivation of women. These and other issues dovetail into a narrative that accounts for an Igbo patriarchal system. A groundbreaking feminist novel commemorating unique female role and liberty, *Efuru* exposes many aspects of feminist discrimination. With its traditional norms and patriarchal expectations, the scourge of societal codes in the novel affects Efuru in numerous ways. She experiences matrimonial betrayal, loneliness, denial, barrenness and several other forms of femininity bigotry and marginalisation. She represents many women who experience all these in diverse parts of Africa. This is especially true of the archaic

patriarchal society in which men constituted the solely elevated and potent voice. The girl child is sent out of her family through marriage and is denied inheritance on the grounds of being inferior to the male child. Moreover unlike men, it is a taboo for a woman to go into sexual affair outside her marriage.

Efuru, the protagonist of Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966), is valued for her industriousness which is marked by her financial success. She is a successful trader and her family depends on her. As a skilled businesswoman in the novel, Efuru supports them (her family) "by selling various goods at the local market" (2013, 12). Moreover, the narrator says that: "Efuru provides Adizua with bride price money for her own marriage" (2013, 10). However, she is strong-willed and independent. This is evident in her personal and active selection of spouses, and her eventual decision to peacefully leave unhappy marriages. The reader is told very early in the novel how she chooses and elopes with a man, Adizua. This shows clearly her strong-willed, independent and non-conformity spirit which remains throughout the narrative. The anti-social behaviour becomes more extreme as she goes ahead marrying the man without a traditional bride price. Consequently, she does not fit into the traditional pattern of absolute submissiveness expected of a woman. Her anti-traditional acts are frowned at by her family and the community at large. This shows that women's lives are persistently scrutinised by the patriarchal Igbo society of the novel. Tradition demands that she selects a spouse under strict family and communal approvals without which such a union

becomes a matter of communal humiliation. This general reaction is captured in the following words: "It is unheard of for a woman to live without a man in her life, either as her father, or as her husband, and in the cases of marital upheavals; the woman [should not] have an independent-mind" (178). Her strong-will, independent spirit and non-conformity disqualify her for the socially approved gender roles. It is not surprising that she becomes an object of gossip as her choices endlessly attracted wider negative scrutiny and distrust. In the long run, the strict traditional norms of the community almost turned Efuru into an outcast in the society.

It becomes necessary to look further into Efuru's experience of traumatising marital unions. For her, Marriage is another emblematic yoke tied to the expectations of the society. In the novel, she is frequently pressurised to tolerate her husband's negligence and absence. A woman facing severe challenges in her extremely loveless marriages, Efuru is forced to accept and live with unfruitful and inhuman arrangements. Marital union, in Efuru's experience and that of an average Igbo woman whom she represents, has become a "necessary evil" to be endured. Indeed, the narrator makes this fact clear with the expression: "marriage is a necessary evil for women as 'di bu mma ogori,' it is husband that beautifies a woman" (97). The extreme social demands and private anxiety to maintain marriages at all costs come amidst numerous unbearable socio-economic constraints and embarrassments. This trudge of an emblematic yoke of matrimonial union is made more excruciating by Efuru's futile longing for satisfying the

cultural expectation of motherhood role. In the novel, the height of discrimination based on gender enlarges since the pressure to fulfill her marital roles comes from an all-encompassing customary belief that a woman's fulfillment is tied to her matrimonial status.

In the traditional patriarchal society, therefore, marriage remains a symbolic burden. This manifests in many more complex ways for Efuru. She faces the problem of looking at a man's (husband's) infidelity as a normal and brave action. The society is totally biased against women in this issue of infidelity. When her first husband, Adizua, abandoned her and ran away with another woman, she suffered loneliness and several other pathetic situations. It is deeply traumatising as the experience is also evident in Efuru's second marriage to Gilbert (Eneberi). The anticipation of the society is that she keeps mute at this crime of his infidelity. Moreover, she has to accept his illegal child that results from his 'sin'. She is openly humiliated and laughed at by the people as she could not give birth to another child for five years in Eneberi's house. In other words, much pressure is mounted on Efuru to the effect that she "accepts Gilbert's illegitimate child, arranges a second marriage for him when it becomes clear that she cannot bear more children" (154). Here again, matrimonial union is made an excruciating emblematic yoke of the society which women must embrace to be acceptable. Her two failed marital experience show the inequality within a culture that demands that a woman endures physical abandonment and cruelty, loss of financial security, emotional neglect and torments, lack

of companionship and denial of sex, abuse and exploitation, as well as several other forms of gender discriminatory practices, in order to keep her marriage, that is, for the sake of being called a *good wife* (2013, 145).

Efuru calmly endures the numerous effects of physical abandonment and other forms untold brutality. Her apparent decision to calmly stay and wait for the man's return without rebelling is exceptional. There was no record of violence and rebellion on her part. Thus, regardless of the fact that she epitomises the good woman in an African setting, being remarkable for her beauty, hard-work and wealth, she falls a victim of several maltreatments. Nonetheless, the novels progresses with more revelations about her deepening isolation and ostracism in the society. But, it seems that tradition pays her back for involving in the disdainful act in marrying Adizua against her family's wishes, and also for doing so without the payment of her bride price. Not even considering the weight of her husband unfaithfulness and disappearance, the patriarchal convention and social demand was for her to stay in her marital home, at all costs. For the society, the brunt of being a "good wife" and aspirations to motherhood demand an endurance of abandonment, childlessness and all manners of humiliations.

This is what constitutes the numerous sufferings through which Efuru passed. The society demands that she waits and suffers indefinitely: "... for a person who did not appreciate your suffering" (116). As she calmly stays and waits for the man's return without rebelling, she fits into Nnaemeka's Nego-Feminism and its peaceful tenets. But, this seems to infuriate Ajanupu who criticises

this outlook. This is what constitutes the numerous sufferings through which Efuru passed. The society demands that she waits and suffers indefinitely: "... for a person who did not appreciate your suffering". She confronts Efuru as follows: "You merely wanted to suffer for the fun of it, as if there was any virtue in suffering for a worthless man?" (104). Unlike Efuru, she categorically states that she would not agree to "eating sand" (bearing unimaginable adversity) for the sake of being called a "good wife", signifying her denouncement of either the patriarchal societal norms or Nego-Feminism and its peaceful tenets.

Efuru's humility, kindness, love, endurance and humanity in the face of untold brutality and inhumanity are matchless. Her readiness to comply with the norms of the society is evident in the novel. She agrees to observe female circumcision, which is one scourge of societal codes and its patriarchal expectations that affect her. This is one of those physical and emblematic yokes of traditional rituals and cultural norms. Her independent and intelligent spirit, notwithstanding, Efuru finds herself being subjected to it like any other woman. Due to her desire to be recognised as a proper female, she tries to conform to the practices of her community which also involves a passage through this traditional circumcision ritual and its painful procedures, as the novel affirms that: "She undergoes female circumcision before having her first child, as is the custom" (14-15).

Notwithstanding her readiness to conform to societal codes and standards, Efuru suffers discrimination in various ways. The narrative itself is webbed in irony, paradox and

sarcasm, to say the least. Her experience of life is a clear demonstration of irony. Recall the fact that she is a prosperous trader, whose financial efforts and success are recognised in the community, making her an independent woman. However, the patriarchal society with its limitations of female status ridicules her for "behaving like a man" (24) rather than a docile wife. In other words, the narrative presents Efuru as a woman that is frequently accepted for her wealth, but the same wealth earns her sharp denigration when she behaves outside the pattern of a submissive housewife. In the long run, the community persistently equates Efuru to a man, signifying that she is grossly self-sufficient to be a woman. Hence, the sarcastic expression: "two men do not live together. For them, Efuru was a man since she could not reproduce" (24). Her perceived absurd masculinity (for, she is generally seen as a "man"), thus, stems from her economic power of independence; but, it is aided by what is perceived as her gross inability to conform to traditional feminine roles demanded by the society.

Recall that Efuru's childlessness is a notable issue addressed in the narrative. The most vital inherited burden of her existence is the societal obligation for every woman to be productive. Without this, the woman cannot be seen as an important member of her family. Consequently, the persistence of her childlessness through her second marriage makes her life unbearable in the community. Her emotional pains become enormous while her societal isolation enlarges. The communal verdict is clear as it is understood in patriarchal societies that a woman could only be seen as part of the family she gets

children. Barrenness is totally blamed on the woman. It becomes one of the highest humiliations of Efuru in the novel. She faces it like a mortal burden imposed on a woman with an inability to conceive by a tradition that ignores her numerous individual merits. Thus, in spite of Efuru's fleet of wealth and beauty, her inability to produce more children constitutes her inadequate and contemptible position within the society. She sacrifices her personal desires and goals in order to keep pace with various familial expectations, societal codes and traditional norms. This supports the tenets of Nego-Feminism.

Indeed, the height of all her misery is her encounter with Omirima (219-220). This old woman is one of the epitomes of society's ostracism of Efuru. She constantly derides her because of infertility. In other words, in spite of her beauty, wealth, confident looks and independence, she remains an object of mockery since she cannot produce more children. For the community, Efuru scores zero for womanhood; for to her people, if she is to justify her nature as a woman then procreation becomes obligatory. Even for her, the weight of sterility gives a hypertensive and mental anguish. It looks like an inherited disease as she remembers her mother's inability to conceive. With this reality comes a deeper inner battle with fear of becoming a true out-cast on the fact of barrenness:

My mother had only me... My father told me so and also she found it difficult to become pregnant. Am I going to be like my mother? But if I'm going to be like her, then I too will have a daughter like her. But what if that is denied to me? What if that also is denied to me? What will I do? Oh, what will I do? (24).

The above lamentation is a signal that Efuru is already accepting and internalising this reproductive stigma that also ruined her mother. This shows that financial success cannot compensate for what she already identifies as a "sin" of infertility. As the narrative unfolds, she lives in desperation and pain, being tormented by this oppressive and marginalising spirit of social stigma. She is alienated from both her husband's family and the society at large.

To compound issues for Efuru, Omirima goes ahead to add to her torments by calling her a "witch", attempting to openly label her an outcast. This heightens her rejection by members of the community. Thus, regardless of her good qualities, people gossip about her being responsible for marital problems while the man remains a saint. Efuru's sickness and childlessness are seen as spiritual punishments for a perceived adultery. Recall that by force she undergoes some traditional rites to prove her innocence. This was when Omirima accuses her of adultery, claiming that her sickness and childlessness are proofs that she is under a spiritual curse due to her 'sin'. According to her, "unless she confesses to her husband, she will die" (219). The allegations stress the patriarchal belief that a woman's body belongs to her husband and that she is only relevant because of her procreative abilities. But, Efuru's resolve to use peaceful means in settling issues in her extremely troubled marital bond remains incredible. This illustrates the principle of avoidance of confrontation which is theoretical code of Nnaemeka's Nego-Feminism model.

At the end, "She moves into her father's house, back where she began" (2013, 221).

This was after her performance of the rites with her age-mates to establish her innocence. This is the last straw that breaks the camel's back in her journey to freedom, as she discovers the allegation of adultery so unpleasant. She leaves her matrimonial home, signifying her rejection of a false identity powered by the husband or the communal pretentious perceptions. This also shows that a woman does not need to reside in a toxic, patriarchal matrimony to become reputable woman. The charge for adultery provides the turning point through which she reclaims worth, identity and autonomy from a husband's control. It enhances her eventual plunge into empowerment as a free being and a real woman, a new phase signified by her bond to the goddess Uhamiri. This walking away is also done peacefully after exhausting all peaceful strategies. It is not an out-right rebellion. It agrees with the codes of Nego-Feminism, since Nnaemeka notes that in this feminist model, the agency discerns "when, where, and how to detonate and go around patriarchal land mines" (377). The novel, therefore, charts out a journey of re-awakening in Efurū through the exposition of the inhuman and unjust stereotypes in patriarchal society and redefinition of a woman's existence.

Conclusion

Findings from the study show that Nwapa's *Efurū* (1966) presents a reflective critique of the traditional patriarchal Igbo society. The narrative achieves this by exposing the link between the traumatic consequences of infertility with the inhuman practices of masculinity. It identifies the core areas of quandary facing female characters, such as the unconditional submissiveness of

women to their husbands, generating total disrespect for women. Others are the subjection of female characters to the negative socio-cultural norms and harmful failed marital unions with unfaithful husbands and unleashing untold emotional trauma and socio-economic insecurity on their wives. The protagonist, Efurū, is a wealthy and industrious trader with financial achievements. However, she suffers from her inability to produce more children as her only daughter, Ogonim, dies in infancy. This illustrates that barrenness is not a mere private biological catastrophe, but also a source of passionate emotional and psychological trauma. The novel links the traumatic conditions of women with societal pressure, while highlighting men's inability to perform their roles as sympathetic spouses. Among other things, therefore, it explores the fight for existential purposes that most African women engage in. This has been adequately documented by other African feminists, including Zainab Alkali and Nurudin Farah who present various images of the African woman. The picture of Efurū evoked in Nwapa's novel is that of woman, particularly destroyed by the norms of her society. Her life is deliberately ruined by the lopsided beliefs of feminist bigotry. Moreover, other female characters like Efurū's mother or Ogonim her girl-child who dies in babyhood, do not have a say of their own in the novel. They remain simply dormant either as the 'suppressed voice' or the 'oppressed being' in the socio-cultural set-up.

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