

The Entrepreneurial Journey of Efurú in Flora Nwapa's *Efurú*

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Abstract

The study explores the portrayal and agency of African women entrepreneurs in Efurú by Flora Nwapa. Through a portrait and critical analysis, the article follows Efurú, the main character in her entrepreneurial journey. The study tries to capture her motivations, the nature of entrepreneurship in her life and how she is perceived in her environment. It applies the theories and characteristics of women entrepreneurs to portray the heroine Efurú as drive to a "new African woman" and the different mountains she went through to gain her freedom and happiness. It gives insights into how the main female character navigates economic empowerment through her entrepreneurial experiences within a patriarchal society. The analysis focuses on how entrepreneurship serves as a means of self-assertion, independence, and resilience for Efurú, despite the weight of cultural, social, and gendered obstacles. The study reveals the evolving roles of the main character Efurú as a full entrepreneur according to entrepreneurship theories taking risks and managing well her business. The study also demonstrates how African fiction serves as a vital space for recreating and reshaping the new identity of African women in

contemporary society. The study is carried out on the lenses of nego-feminism, womanism and entrepreneurship theories.

Key words: entrepreneurship, nego-feminism, gender, patriarchy, economy empowerment.

Résumé

*L'étude explore la représentation et l'action des femmes entrepreneures africaines dans le roman Efurú de Flora Nwapa. A travers un portrait et une analyse critique, l'étude suit Efurú, le personnage principal, dans son parcours entrepreneurial. L'étude décrit et analyse ses motivations, la nature de l'entrepreneuriat dans sa vie et la perception de son environnement en ce qui la concerne. L'étude applique les théories et les caractéristiques des femmes entrepreneures pour peindre l'héroïne Efurú comme le prototype de la **nouvelle femme africaine** ; les difficultés qu'elle a traversées pour accéder à la liberté et au bonheur. L'étude donne un aperçu sur la manière dont le personnage principal accède à l'autonomisation économique grâce à ses expériences entrepreneuriales au sein d'une société patriarcale. L'analyse se concentre sur la manière dont l'entrepreneuriat constitue pour Efurú un moyen d'affirmation de soi, d'indépendance et de résilience, malgré le poids des obstacles culturels, sociaux et sexistes. L'étude révèle l'évolution du rôle de Efurú, le personnage principal, en tant qu'entrepreneure à part entière selon les théories de l'entrepreneuriat, prenant des risques et gérant efficacement son entreprise. L'étude démontre également comment la fiction africaine constitue un espace essentiel pour recréer et façonner la nouvelle identité des femmes africaines dans la société contemporaine. L'étude est menée à travers les prismes du négo-féminisme, du womanism et des théories de l'entrepreneuriat.*

Introduction

Women Entrepreneurship has different definitions but with common point: independency, innovating, creative and earning money.

The article on *Women Entrepreneurship*, written by two researchers explains that:

Women entrepreneurship means “an act of business ownership and business creation that empowers women

economically, increases their economic strength as well as position in society.”

A woman entrepreneur is “a confident, innovative and creative women capable of achieving self-economic independence individually or in collaboration, generates employment opportunities for others through initiating, establishing and running the enterprise by keeping pace with her personal, family and social life.”

Woman entrepreneur may be defined “as a women or group of women who initiate, organize, and run a business enterprise. In terms of Schumpeterian concept of innovative entrepreneurs, women who innovate, imitate or adopt a business activity are called women entrepreneurs”.

Kamal Singh who is a woman entrepreneur from Rajasthan, has defined woman entrepreneur as “a confident, innovative and creative woman capable of achieving self-economic independence individually or in collaboration, generates employment opportunity for others through initiating, establishing and running the enterprise by keeping pace with her personal, family and social life (R. Buvaneshwari and V. Abinaya, 2019, p. 61).

1- About the author Flora Nwapa

Flora Nwapa is the first African woman writer to be published internationally in the English Language. Her full name is Florence Nwanzuruahu Nkiru Nwapa. She was born in Oguta, Imo state, Nigeria and published *Efuru* at an age of thirty-five years. Flora Nwapa is considered the mother of modern African literature. Marie Umeh transcribes the interview given to Flora Nwapa: “The male writers have disappointed us a great deal by not painting the female character as they should paint them," "When I write about women in Nigeria, in Africa, I try to paint a positive picture" (M. Umeh, 1995, p. 2)

In 1953, Flora Nwapa attended University College Ibadan. While there, she was president of the Queen's Hall and met the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh during their visit to Nigeria. She kicked off her career as a Woman Education Officer in the Ministry of Education Calabar and then moved to become a teacher at Queen's School, Enugu. She left there and headed to the University of Lagos where she started as an Administrative Assistant and rose to the position of Assistant Registrar in charge of Public Administration in 1966. In 1970, she became the first female Minister of Health and Social Welfare for Nigeria's former East Central State. Later, she served as the Minister of Lands, Survey, and Urban Development until 1974. At the start of her literary career, because of the way feminism was portrayed and the manner in which she perceived it, Nwapa wanted nothing to do with the label. She thought it was contentious and against men. Eventually, she embraced it. But her struggle with the label feminism is representative of the current conversations about the movement in Africa. It is a movement often misunderstood. Indeed, there is no universal definition of feminism, a challenge brought about by the diversity of social realities. Every society is different because it experiences many different things in many different ways; the way women are perceived, represented and treated differs from one society to the other. Flora Nwapa was reluctant with feminism and then denies to be a feminist while all her literary works highlight feminism struggles. Nnaemeka (1995) reports that:

At an interview, she said: 'I deny that I am a feminist.... But they say, all your works, everything is about feminism. And I say, No, I am not a feminist.' However, having heard Obioma Ata Aidoo's definition of feminism: « that feminism is about possibilities; there are possibilities, there are choices. » She then accepted to be called feminist: «...I think that I will go out and say that I am a feminist with a big f because Obioma said on Monday. Let us not be afraid to say that we are feminists.... Globally,

we need one another,” Nwapa said during a conference before her death in 1993” (O. Nnaemeka, 2004, p. 83).

For her, feminism is about possibilities and choices, about giving women the right and freedom to choose their path without the menacing burden of societal limitations. Getting to that point where Nigeria is accepting of a woman’s right to choose is a long, rocky road, but is not a fool’s errand. It is possible. Despite her refusal to identify with the movement, feminism was a strong theme in Nwapa’s book, *Efuru*. Her representation of female characters paved the way for reconfiguring women in industrious, articulate, independent, self-defining and self-determined roles which is a contrast for former portrayals of inferior, servile, subordinate, subjugated and objectified women in African male writing such as Chinua Achebe’s. Her writing sounds like an echo to male writers ‘chauvinism and ego. Flora Nwapa and many other female writers like Buchi Emecheta, Mariama Bâ, Adimora-Ezeigbo to quote but a few, wrote to redress the negative stereotypes about women, portraying their ability to balance their domestic, social and economic roles, thus breaking women’ subjugation by giving to their female characters, agency, strength, independence and self -definition.

The professional life of Flora Nwapa is rich. Worldwide recognised, she travelled for conferences and was granted with many awards and recognition. For Marie Umeh (1995), “Nwapa gave African women an authentic identity in literature by introducing a female literary tradition at a time when little or nothing of a realistic nature had been written” (M. Umeh, 1995, p. 5).

The bibliography of Flora Nwapa is rich: *Efuru* (1966); *Idu* (1971); *This Is Lagos, and Other Stories* (1971); *Never Again* (1975); *Wives at War, and Other Stories* (1980); *One Is Enough* (1981); *Women Are Different* (1986); *Cassava Song and Rice Song* (1986).

Children's books: *Emeka: The Driver's Guard* (1972); *Mammy water* (1979); *My Tana Colouring Book* (1979); *My Animal Number Book* (1979); *The Miracle Kittens* (1980); *Journey to Space* (1980); *The Adventures of Deke* (1980).

2- Brief summary of the novel *Efuru*

Efuru is a beautiful, smart and successful trade woman who marries a lazy man Adizua by breaking some of the Igbo customs. She marries a man, Adizua, without dowry even though, later on, they fulfilled this part of the tradition. Efuru has lost her mother when she was five and has been well raised by her father who loved her a lot. Her marriage with Adizua, a poor man coming from an unknown family has been disapproved and creates a lot of gossip. “How can a beautiful girl coming from a well-known and respected family can marry such a boy?” p2. This marriage has made her father sorrowful but he forgives her when Efuru and her husband came with her in-laws to beg for forgiveness and then pay a dowry. This clumsy beginning is a sign because after two years Efuru was unable to give child and has been qualified as “a man.” And when, she gave birth, it is to bury the baby girl two years later in a condition where her husband Adizua has abandoned her. The common say: “like father like son”. Adizua has behaved exactly as his late father showing a cowardice. Not only, is he lazy but he is a man interested by beautiful and rich trading women. Efuru, after waiting for many years for Adizua, returned back to her father’s home who unless the weight of his age and traditions has shown great support to his daughter. As a trader, Efuru continues her business and became a successful business woman. But, she kept herself humble, faithful, kind and generous. Efuru is almost a perfect woman having both good behavior and money. She assumed her loneliness despite the bad things said on her on jealousy. She imposed herself in patriarchal society through hard work and consideration towards others, and got a second marriage with Gilbert who honored her and her family by paying an honorable dowry unlike Adizua. Unfortunately to her, she didn’t fall pregnant and is considered as a barren woman. Four years after her marriage, she accepted a second wife for her husband Gilbert and considered her cospouse as her daughter. The relations between the two women were good and she treated well the second wife and considered the child boy of the latter

as her own. Efuru has also accepted the child son born outside the marriage by Gilbert with an unknown woman. Accused by Gilbert to have committed adultery, Efuru refused humiliation and returned back to her father's home by continuing her trade and by showing generosity helping people in need.

3- The portray of Efuru as an entrepreneur

Efuru is a slim and fair woman. Her beauty is recognized by all. Morally, Efuru is a faithful woman, respectful of the traditions with strong and soft behavior at the same time. She knows exactly what she wants and how to obtain it. Many assets can be identified in Efuru. Here, the focus will be put on her features as an entrepreneur.

Starting and managing a business is not an easy task. Entrepreneurs actually create their own odds of success by taking steps that move them closer to their goals as coined by the effectuation theory. This theory is defined by Antonio Donizete Ferreira da Silva & Edmilson de Oliveira Lima as a way to undertake from the raise of possible effects of means that are available (effectual means) to the entrepreneur regarding who she/he is (or identity), who she/he knows (or relations) and what she/he knows (or knowledge) (Sarasvathy, 2001). With such raise, the entrepreneur considers the objectives enabled by such effects and works to carry out one of them using the means available with risks limited to affordable loss (Sarasvathy, 200); Sarasvathy, Foster & Ramesh, 2020, p. 3). This entrepreneurial process consists of three variables: the characteristics of the founder/s, business opportunity and environment. It involves all functions, activities and actions that are associated with the perceived opportunities and creation of organizations to pursue them. This process involves four distinct phases, through which entrepreneurs will pass in order for them to start and manage their new venture. These phases are to identify and evaluate the opportunity, develop a business plan, determine the resource requirements and finally start and manage the enterprise.

It is the process through which Efuru undergoes even if she has not a written or formal business plan. However, her actions, thoughts and voice in the novel show that she has business plan in her mind. Accordingly, when she reaches a given level or life cycle of a given trade (product), she knows the next steps to move on. She is smart and follows not only her intuitions but also her elevated sense of business.

4- From the business idea to the implementation

Efuru knows that her husband is poor and that she must work in order to help her husband pay a dowry and honor both her father and husband, but also to contribute to the satisfaction of her family's needs and the well-being of her family. This is the beginning of her business. The second step is which business to carry on and with which capital. What the reader may guess concerning Efuru starting resources or business capital may be the inheritance of her mother or at least when getting to Adizua's house, she probably had some few savings. This sentence affirms the above assertion: "After the harvest, Adizua almost brought nothing at home because he is lazy and didn't like farm work" (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 20). Therefore, one can suppose that Efuru finances her trade with the money brought from her parents' house. It is not clearly stated but with the situation of her husband, this can be likely the origin of the starting trade resources. According to reader theory response, the reader may also states that she borrowed money from elsewhere, but this argument can be rejected, because the reader found nowhere the debtors coming to claim a debt. Efuru can be qualified as a multidimensional trader. She knew that the first basic need of human being is feeding, so trading in food sector will be benefit for her and her family. As a matter of fact, she sized each opportunity to buy and sold the products of farm: yams, groundnuts, corn... The dry season is the season where corn, fishes, crayfish are rare and these are the ingredients used to cook by the women, thus, Efuru had the sense of observation. She finds the need to fulfill and sizes the opportunity and a good intuition of business. Here, a reader

is moving within the entrepreneurial process of Efuru. Indeed, according to Mishra and Zachary:

The entrepreneurial process involves the entrepreneur identifying an external opportunity; matching the entrepreneurial resources at hand with the opportunity to effectuate an entrepreneurial competence; acquiring external resources, if necessary; creating sustained value. Besides, in the first stage of venture formulation, the entrepreneur, driven by the entrepreneurial intention or an aspiration for entrepreneurial reward, discovers an external opportunity and the opportunity is leveraged by the entrepreneurial resources at hand using an effectuation mechanism, (Mishra and Zachary, 2015, pp. 3-4).

Efuru discovers the opportunity of selling fishes, crayfishes and corn because people need them and there are sources of income for her and her family. And more important, she knows when to sell them. The products of farm are kept in a storage and when rare, she sold them. It is the same thing that she did during dry season where sea products such as fish and crayfish are rare.

According to different research, the mains characteristics of women entrepreneurs are almost the same with men: to have a vision, to know exactly ones 'goals and to gather the means to reach them with psychological and physical strengths such as determination, the sense of opportunity and anticipation. Through her journey, Efuru as an entrepreneur, has shown such characteristics:

Vision: Entrepreneurs often have a clear vision of what they want to achieve, despite obstacles. Efuru is depicted as someone with an ambitious vision for her life, which transcends the traditional expectations placed upon women. She envisions a life of independence, where she is not solely defined by her role as a wife or mother. Despite the heavy pressure from her community to fulfill these traditional roles, Efuru seeks to carve out a different path for

herself, the one where she can assert her own agency. For Efuru, it is clear, she didn't want to go to farm: "Efuru refused to go to farm with her husband. If you like, she said to her husband, go to the farm. I am not cut out for farm work. I am going to trade" p10. She knows her assets, her skills, her abilities in succeeding in trade. She knows that she can earn money herself and be prosperous. As such, her vision is to be a successful trade woman. In engaging in entrepreneurship, Efuru shows some entrepreneurs characteristics.

Commitment: Efuru is a hard worker and strong minded woman. She is very young but mature. For instance, after her circumcision, her mother-in-law wanted her to feast for two months, but she refused saying that the life was a dull one. She wanted to be up and doing:

Since you won't continue feasting, we shall talk about going to the market, her mother-in-law told her one day. But 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. And Efuru answered as follow: "No mother, one month of confinement is enough. We not got much money, and I want to start trading. Again we have not paid dowry yet. I shall go to market on Nkwo day. (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 17-18).

Nwapa shows once more that her female character is not lazy denying the assertiveness of women and deconstructing the common norms of women who are meant to stay at home. Nwapa moves her heroine, Efuru, from position of second class citizen to a state of self-empowerment and authority. She, by empowering Efuru and even Ajanapu brought the reader from the usual stereotypes of negative images, weak women which the reader is quite familiar to a strong woman, resilient, beautiful and morally faultless, hence describing a remarkable woman.

Collaboration: Efuru believes that working together with her husband must be profitable for them and then she associated with Adizua, her first husband and later on Gilbert, her second marriage's husband. Collaboration is important in business since two intelligences worth one. "Then, Efuru and her husband traded in yams. They would paddle a canoe from their town to a tributary of Great River, and thence to Agbor. There, they bought yams and other things rare in their town and sold them at a profit. When the yam trade was bad, they traded in dry fish and crayfish. It was in crayfish that they made their fortune" (F. Nwapa, 1966, pp. 19-20).

By this behavior, Efuru enhances Obioma's Neco feminism in which, woman knows, when, where and how to negotiate culture boundaries and how to navigate through them. Efuru is the brain of their family business, nevertheless, she uses to ask the opinion of her husband instead of entering in a confrontational discussion.

Determination: is one of the strongest characteristic of entrepreneurs. Efuru is strong and determined. Indeed, based on the theory of entrepreneur highlighted above, the entrepreneurial process of value creation is driven by the entrepreneur and her entrepreneurial intention. The entrepreneurial process is not an autonomous process; the entrepreneur itself is integral to the entrepreneurial process. Thus, the entrepreneurial intention and resources are intrinsic to the entrepreneurial process. Various studies have indicated that personality traits are determined by birth. Other research provides evidence that from birth individuals have a propensity and innate capacity to be satisfied with specific kinds of behavior. This propensity toward certain types of behaviour guides people to select occupations and situations consistent with genetic predispositions coined by (Kendrick & Funder, 1988; Scarr & McCartney, 1983). From the reader response theory and perspective quoted by Sugitha A/P Kunjanman1, Azlina Abdul Aziz (2019), as "the process of making readers critical, thoughtful and engaged (Woodruff and

Griffin, 2017), one can infer that Efuru has this ability in her NDA and this statement is enhanced as follow:

Is that woman from a very good family? The daughter of Nwashike Ogene, the mighty man of valor, Ogene who, single handed, fought against the Aros when they came to molest us. Nwashike himself proved himself the son of his father. He was a great fisherman. When he went fishing, he caught only asa and aja. His yams were the fatest in the whole town, (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 11).

From her mother, Efuru inherited her beauty and her sense of trade. Her mother was a successful business woman and honest woman. Her father also is a respected man in the village and owns many titles. Through the discussion between Efuru and his father, we knew a little bit about her late mother physically and morally: "...Your mother prospered in her trade. She was so good that whatever she put her hand to money flowed in. When she sold pepper, she made huge profits; when she sold yams or fish, she made profits also. She was so rich that she became the head of her age-group. Then she took titles" (F. Nwapa, 1966, pp. 150-151). Henceforth, the strong motivations of Efuru based on her family environment. She is born in a hard workers' family and as such she has developed some trade reflexes which has been reflected in her trade decisions.

Resourcefulness and Innovation: Entrepreneurs are known for their ability to be resourceful using what is available to them in creative and innovative ways. Efuru, while not depicted as an inventor or a business mogul, demonstrates resourcefulness by adapting to her environment and leveraging her local knowledge and skills in trade. Efuru's entrepreneurial efforts in the market show her capacity for adaptation. She buys and sells goods that are in need and she often manages her transactions with skills and savvy. The market, with its social and economic dynamics, becomes a space where Efuru learns how to navigate competition, interact with customers, and maintain her

economic independence. Her business acumen and ability to persevere in this challenging environment suggest an entrepreneurial mindset that can recognize opportunities by using available resources. Efuru shows the characteristics of a real business woman: sizing an opportunity and changing activities as soon as she noticed that the market is becoming worse.

Business has a cycle of development and for Josef Schumpeter quoted by Assen Slim in his article, *Economic Cycles by Josef Schumpeter*:

... an entrepreneur can identify market opportunities and exploit them by organizing resources effectively to accomplish an outcome that changes existing interactions in the economic circuit. Guided by the pursuit of profit, entrepreneurs are seen as “innovators,” which means they are key players in changing business standards and finding new productive combinations. Someone willing to accept a high level of personal, professional, or financial risk to pursue an opportunity” (A. Slim, 2019, p3).

The sentence below, illustrates the business mindset of Efuru and depicts the Schumpeter’s definition of an entrepreneur, the discovery of opportunity, the identification of market opportunities and the exploitation of those opportunities. “They were the first to discover the trade (of crayfish) that year. The place where they bought the crayfish was three days journey on the Great River. It was a risky business. Thieves could waylay traders and rob them of their money. The river could be rough and when that happened their canoe could capsize” (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 20). By being the first to discover the trade of crayfish, they have a monopoly which obviously let them determine the selling price. The market opportunity is there. The people of Efuru’s village like eating crayfishes which were rare. As a matter of fact, this lucrative business makes them not only the pioneers, but make them very rich. According to the law of supply and

demand, the more there is a demand, the more the price is costly and the more the traders make a huge turnover and subsequent profits.

Risk-Taking and Decision-Making: Entrepreneurs are often required to make bold decisions and take risks, particularly when the outcome is uncertain. Efurú takes risks in her personal life and entrepreneurial journey, which can be seen in her decision to remain in her marriage and her choice to invest time and effort into her trade despite the pressures of motherhood. One of the key risks Efurú takes, is pursuing her business ventures in the face of societal expectations that women should be primarily focused on domestic duties and child-rearing. Even when her marriages are faltering, Efurú continues her entrepreneurial efforts, choosing to invest in herself and her business rather than conforming entirely to society's view of her role as a woman. By taking this risk, Efurú redefines what success looks like for women in her community. Taking risks is one of the major characteristics of business men and women. They can brave adversity, hostile environment to reach their goals. Risk taking does not stop Efurú. After braving societal norms, her second risk is to brave the risks on crayfish trading knowing that she may face thieves, the eventual capsizing of the canoe as written in the following sentence:

The place where they bought the crayfish was three days journey on the Great River. It was a risky business. Thieves could waylay traders and rob them of their money. The river could be rough and when that happened their canoe could capsize. And she went five times for this risky trip to get her products. It is important to raise the perseverance, patience, the intuition of a lucrative and flourish business shows in the sentence below: When they got to the place, they bought crayfish in bags. Then, they paddled back and sold the crayfish making a profit of over a hundred per cent. Four trips gave Efurú and her husband a huge profit (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 20).

The risks have paid and they became rich. However, it is worth mentioning that education and particularly training are important in business. For instance, studies of the World Bank showed that training women in management is of great importance for them to be successful for long. Indeed, it is said in the novel that: “The fifth trip was not so good. Many women had got to know about the business and had rushed into it and spoiled it. It was by sheer luck that Efurú and her husband recovered their capital” (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 21). Training in business management and anticipation could have led Efurú to diversify her trade and to anticipate on others jumping in the business which is called competitive intelligence. This is unfortunately the characteristics of African women business environment where, when one woman flourishes in a given business, all the others instead of making a complementary business will rush to the same business and then saturate the market. And according to the offer and the demand in the law of market, the prices collapse when the offer is bigger than the demand, consequently, the seller is compelled to sell off the goods. Nonetheless, Efurú is not discouraged but rather she has starting to think about another business. Efurú is also a leader. She is the one who gives directions for the trading. After the fifth trip which was unsuccessful, she said: “...We won’t go again” and the husband replied: “yes, we won’t go again. But what are we going to do?” and Efurú replied: ‘We are going to look for another trade. These women spoil trade so easily. When they see you making a profit in one trade they leave the trade they know and join yours and of course in no time, it is no longer profitable” (F. Nwapa, 1966, p.21).

Efurú has a language of business: profit, capital. She shows off what it is entailed in “feminine masculinity” which means using her soft skills to move in a sector of business with its own language. It is said in the novel that:

Efurú who was the brain behind the business... Adizua was not good at trading. He knew this very well and so one night he spoke to Efurú: Efurú, I think it is time you should face your trade. Your baby is old enough to be left with a

nurse.....at this time, your baby can eat some mashed yam well prepared with palm oil. You have to think over this, my dear wife. I have thought of it. You are right...we are not only making no profits but we are losing our capital. (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 36).

The above asserts and deconstructs totally the patriarchy norms of men as breadwinner and wife as housekeeper. Adizua, a man and a husband who is supposed as the androcentric norms entail to take care of his family and be a breadwinner shows no abilities in whatever: nor a good farmer, a good trader, a good husband neither a good father. The points to rise here may be that, the author Flora Nwapa wants to show once more that women can be breadwinner too and assume as well their role of wife. Breadwinning is not the exclusiveness of men.

Success mindset: Efuru is a successful trade woman. This fact is enhanced through such sentences from Gilbert's mother:

Any trade she put her hand to, was profitable. Soon Gilbert began to contemplate building a house of his own and buying a canoe. Efuru advised him that buying canoe would be better at that stage so they bought a canoe and gave it out on hire and this fetched money for them; in no time, they bought another canoe which they also gave out on hire and when Efuru saw that they could afford to build a house they began the house. (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 122).

Efuru has the sense of priority. Between building a house and buying a canoe, the choice is clear for her. Indeed, building a big and beautiful house is for prestige, for others to see that they are wealthy. However, Efuru is not in that dynamic of showing-off. Moreover, building a house is not a small task, it demands a lot of money and the risks to stop at a given moment the building could happen. While, by buying another canoe, hiring it, not only they earn more money, but

they also buy the second one and then after some period, they started their buildings. Surely, they make a lot of savings with which, they can now build a house. Building in Africa remains a big self-achievement. Efuru has a prospective vision. She is in advance on her generation and her husbands. She didn't rush in making things. She is the brain of her cooperative business with her husbands. She didn't impose herself or her opinions, but bring her vis-à-vis Adizua or Gilbert to understand the route: she confirmed her leadership which is to bring others to make what she wanted in one hand and to bring out their qualities in the other hand confirming the impact of soft power and the theory of nego-feminism as defined by Obioma : "Nego-feminism is the feminism of negotiation; nego-feminism stands for 'no ego' feminism and is structured by cultural imperatives and modulated by ever shifting local and global exigencies"p 9. For Obioma, most African cultures have a culture of negotiation and compromise when it comes to reaching agreements. In nego-feminism, negotiations play the role of giving and taking. Nego-feminism suggests that in order to gain freedoms, African women must negotiate and sometimes compromise. Nnaemeka Obioma writes that African feminism works by knowing "when, where, and how to detonate and go around patriarchal land mines. This means that Nego-feminism knows how to utilize the culture of negotiation in order to deconstruct the patriarchy for the woman's benefit. Efuru has never complained or insulted Adizua as lazy nor did she insults Gilbert. On the contrary, she always shows respect to her husband. Accordingly, her environment is responsive and has a great impact for the success of women.

The sense of helping others: Among the characteristics of successful women entrepreneurs, there is the sense of being helpful to others. Studies show that women have a higher capability to become influential on others by being helpful to them. A hopefulness to make a positive change in the lives of others is one of the most important characteristics of the women entrepreneur, and it is counted an important factor in their economic activities. Among different motives, the sense of being helpful to others and making a positive

change in the lives of others are the most important factors for the women entrepreneurs. Efuru has shown this sense of great generosity. In our current time, she may create an ONG and be qualified as a social entrepreneur. She is spontaneous in helping as stated the sentence below. After being informed that Adizua's mother is ill, Efuru has not hesitated to visit her and take care of her: "Efuru took her wrappa, tied it quickly, and she and Ajanupu went as fast as possible to see Adizua's mother" (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 155). Efuru has been hurt by Adizua. She has been deeply humiliated by him. Nevertheless, she showed compassion and deep concern about Adizua's mother. Efuru showed a sense of discernment. She didn't mix things, for her Adizua's behavior should not be a hindered to helping his mother, the latter has been kind to her and has considered her as her own daughter. In turn, Efuru showed her all the respect and behaved as her daughter. As a matter the fact, the reunion was translated as follow:

When she arrived in Adizua's house, the sick woman raised her head when Efuru and Ajanupu came in. When she saw Efuru, she said: My daughter, have you come to see me before I die? Ajanupu, didn't I tell you that my daughter will come to see when she hears of my illness. I can die in peace now that you have come, my daughter...I am glad that you are happy with your husband." Are you very cold, Efuru asked to the sick woman, Yes, she said nodding her head. You make me very happy my daughter. It is gratifying to see that you still care for me. ((F. Nwapa, 1966, pp. 155-159)

This passage shows an affective relation between Efuru and her former in-laws, Adizua's mother and sister Ajanupu. After inquiring on Adizua's mother state, she did everything to help the old lady: "Efuru sent her maid Ogea to take care of her. "Efuru sent Ogea to Adizua's mother with yams and fish and told her: "do whatever she asks you to do" she instructed Ogea. If she wants anything bought, come for some money" ((F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 158).

There were many cases where Efuru has shown her sense of being useful and helpful to others. From lending money to many people to taking them to hospital for curing, her actions are not exhaustive. She took Nnona the old woman to hospital:

Nnona: "...I went to Akiti and returned only three days ago. I have not come out since because of my bad leg." Efuru: "that leg of yours. So it still hurts you." [...]

Efuru: "Sorry if you like, I can take you to the hospital. The doctor will look at it and he can do something for you."

Nnona: Is it true? If you do that, my daughter, God will bless you".

Efuru: "we shall see what we can do for you when the doctor comes to the town. I am going. Let day break." (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 123) [...]

Nnona was overjoy...It was arranged and Efuru had to buy them a few things they needed, yams, fish, pepper and salt. She paid the fare to Onicha and gave Nnona a few shillings as pocket-money. -----One day, Efuru and Ogea came to see Nnona in the hospital. They brought her live oguna fish" (F. Nwapa, 1966, pp. 127-129).

Efuru's solidarity is beyond the common actions, not only she advised the beneficiaries of her great heart but she committed herself fully, by paying visit to the needed, by assisting them morally, financially and materially. Efuru also lend money to many people. For instance, she lends money several times to her maid parents who didn't pay back but couldn't avoid coming to beg her. Even though, Efuru felt vexed, she will lend them money again:

I gave you money last year without interest. You harvested your yams and did not bring me yams. You did not even come to tell me that you had sold your yams and could not

pay me. Nwosu, you were ill and I sent you to the hospital. I paid for everything. When you returned, you disappeared. What I heard next, was that you had taken a title. It is planting season and you have come to me, hoping to get some money. Have I a tree that bears money as its fruits? Am I not a human being? Am I not free to be angry when I am provoked? Ogea's parents, you have not done well. Put yourselves in my position and see whether you would be pleased if someone did this to you.How much do you want? Efuru asked to the surprise of Ogea's parents. They had thought that after scolding them, she would send them away empty handed. (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 171).

Just after Ogea's parents, it was the turn of the old Nnon Nnona, the one Efuru helped to cure for the leg:

What brings you here this night? For an answer, Nnona began to weep. Efuru: "Why are you weeping? Please don't weep in my house this night. What is the matter? Nnona wiped her eyes and said: "Efuru, my daughter, I don't know what to doI have been saving this money with the hope that I can use it in buying an old canoe next year. And now the money is gone. A thief has stolen everything...." Efuru: "---Wipe your eyes. How much was in the tin? "Fifteen shillings, sixpence and half-penny." "Ogea bring me that small box near my bed... (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 17).

Efuru didn't only solve the immediate problem but also look forward so that people can be successful in the future. Efuru is aware that if she didn't help people in the sustainable way, they will continue asking her for all type of helps. She has not only given money to Nnona but proposed her to keep that money so that when Nnona will be ready to achieve her project, here buying an old canoe,

she will return it back to her. The kindness of Efuru even irritates her maid Ogea who spoke in such terms: “If you continue giving people money in this way, they will take advantage of your generosity and worry all the more” (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 172). Efuru is indeed very generous, she knows that people may abuse, nevertheless, she cannot help being good to them. It is in her nature to do good. She replied to her maid: “I know it very well but what can one do? It is difficult to deny these people anything” p172. She lends money to those who came for help without any interest and most of the time the paying back was difficult: “I am so busy Ajanupu. Our trade is bad. People don’t pay their debts, and so when I return from the market I go to collect these debts and have no time for anything else. Do you know what? Nwabuzo has not paid that money she borrowed a year ago” (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 45).

A reader can even draw a conclusion of a social business set by Efuru as an enterprise of microfinance with zero interest rate.

5- Analysis of Efuru’s entrepreneurship:

In Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru*, the theme of women’s entrepreneurship is well demonstrated and powerfully explored. The novel explores themes of female agency, economic empowerment, and social impact within the context of traditional and African customs. The narrative highlights the challenges and triumphs of Efuru navigating entrepreneurship, showcasing her resilience, innovation, and contributions to both her families and communities. The novel presents Efuru, the protagonist, as a woman who embodies both traditional and modern roles, including that of an entrepreneur, within her society. While *Efuru* focuses on her personal struggles, relationships, and the social dynamics of her village, it also offers a look into the ways women engage with economic activities, both within the home and in the marketplace.

- **Efuru's Role as a Trader**

Efuru's entrepreneurship is through her involvement in trade. Efuru is shown to be a skilled and independent businesswoman who takes part in local markets, where she sells goods and trades with others. This is a significant aspect of women's roles in traditional Igbo society, where women are expected to contribute economically through various forms of labour, including market trading. Efuru's participation in trade highlights the economic agency women can have, even within the constraints of a patriarchal system. She doesn't just sell goods; she manages her business activities carefully, interacting with the market and using her resources to ensure success. In many ways, Efuru's role as a trader symbolizes the broader theme of women's economic independence, even when they have limited formal power. Indeed, entrepreneurship is presented as a pathway for women to gain economic independence, challenge traditional gender roles, and assert their agency within their communities. Through trade, Efuru has proved that she can brave obstacles, made long trip to buy goods and come back to sell them with huge profits.

- **Women's Economic Empowerment**

In Igbo society, women's entrepreneurial activities, such as trading, farming, or craft-making, are often an important source of their financial autonomy. Efuru's work as a trader allows her to support herself, even when her marriages or relationships with men do not provide her with the fulfilment she desires. By contributing financially, Efuru is able to gain a certain level of respect and independence from the men in her life, particularly in her relationships with her husbands. Her entrepreneurial spirit is also tied to the idea of women being able to carve out a space for themselves in a society where they are often expected to serve primarily as wives and mothers. In Efuru's case, her business dealings are a way for her to assert some level of control over her own life, even as she navigates the challenges imposed by societal expectations and her personal struggles with motherhood and marriage.

Economic empowerment refers here in *Efuru*, to women gaining Financial autonomy and control over their lives in a male-dominated traditional Igbo society. Unlike many African novels, where women are passive and just caregivers, Flora Nwapa portrays most of her women as actively engaged in trade, managing resources, both raw materials and goods, and make economic decisions to be successful...Efuru becomes a prosperous trader in corn and fish trade, but also a co-owner of her family SME. By diversifying her business in canoe hiring, she made a decision of diversification which is a strategical decision to foster their enterprise. She is a successful business woman and well respected among Igbo women and men. Efuru becomes a role model of empowered womanhood. Despite her husband Adizua and Gilbert's irresponsibility, she manages her business almost alone, showing resilience and competences.

- **The Role of Women in the Market Economy**

In the novel *Efuru*, women are depicted as central figures in the local market economy. The market is not only a place for economic exchange but also for social interaction, and women have a significant role in both. Their involvement in the market represents a broader social reality where women help sustain their families and communities through their business activities. Indeed, the market provides women with a space to be visible and active in the public sphere, a domain traditionally dominated by men. It's through these entrepreneurial activities that women, including Efuru, participate in and contribute to the financial well-being of their households, even though their formal political and social roles may be limited.

- **Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs**

Efuru's entrepreneurial efforts also highlight the challenges faced by women in traditional societies when they try to balance economic independence with the expectations of gender roles. For instance, her entrepreneurial activities are complicated by her personal relationships—especially her marriages—where her husband's influence may shape her business dealings. While she is economically

active and capable, societal expectations about women's roles as wives and mothers often conflict with her independence. Furthermore, the novel hints at the limitations imposed on women by both their own family structures and broader social norms. It seems that the author deliberately uses Efurú to debunk the assumption that women are less enterprising compared with men. Throughout the novel and despite Efurú's ordeals, she is portrayed as not only enterprising but also generous in sharing the profits of her business with those around her. Because of her astute enterprising nature, she is able to raise money within a short time to help her renegade husband pay her bride price. After that, she continues to build her business empire which later employs her first husband Adizua and makes him leave his poor farming business.

Women characters in these texts are not defiant of their culture. On the contrary, their actions speak of respect for others, but their role is noticeable and not silent. Ajanupu is also a strong and successful woman with many children. Efurú's own mother was described as a respectful and successful woman. Flora Nwapa doesn't objectify the single women she portrays, but presents woman who because of circumstances became single with the intention not necessarily to send cultural shock waves through the world, but as a demonstration of how women, especially African women, have changed over time by creating her new identity in a patriarchy society. Efurú does not choose to be alone, but she is abandoned by her husband Adizua for another woman. She calls her mother-in-law and explains to her why the situation has become unbearable:

Mother, I cannot stay anymore. A man said that he had wept for the death that killed his friend, but he did not wish that death to kill him. I cannot wait indefinitely for Adizua; you can bear witness that I have tried my best. I am still young and would wish to marry again. It will be unfair both to you and your son if I begin to encourage men who would like to marry me while still in this house. (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 88).

Efuru has the courage to leave her marriage, because she knows she is a good trader. As an economically independent woman she has the will, strength and determination to leave her husband and become an independent single woman while waiting for another man to marry her. Even before her husband abandoned her, she was the one who could come up with brilliant ideas about the business. She is an independent-minded and hard-working woman and she knows that she is going to survive at her father's homestead. Efuru is later on married for a second marriage to Gilbert (Eneberi), who eventually again marries a young wife because Efuru cannot bear children. Efuru also chooses to leave this second marriage and be single because her husband was accusing her of adultery: "I have left Eneberi. ... So here I am. I have ended where I began – in my father's house" ((F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 218).

Nwapa challenges an African saying that a woman's home is where her husband is by creating a character like Efuru who, because of marriage problems, ends up at her father's homestead on two occasions, the second time probably will be permanent as a worshiper of the Goddess. The character of Efuru disproves words that the experiences of marriage and womanhood traditionally dominate the lives and identity of women in Africa. The events around Efuru disprove the idea that a woman should have a man by her side in order to succeed and to self-achieve. Efuru gains her self-respect and dignity while she is still married. As a wife, she is never dependent and everything she wanted to do, she always required the consent of her husband, as to show that, respect is very important in her couple and fit with Obioma's Nego feminism: "a woman in order to succeed in public sphere as marketplace or business, has to negotiate instead of being in a confrontational situation" (O. Nego, 2004, p. 9).

Efuru's singleness is motivated by the fact that her two marriages fail. Her singleness is not a willed one. She wants to be a wife and a mother, that is why she agrees to marry Eneberi in a second marriage. Being an economically independent woman, she does not rebel against her traditional customs. She agrees that her husband

could take a second wife and also encourages her first husband to pay dowry and perform the marriage customs. As a wife in a traditional society, she also chooses her emancipation path, that of being an entrepreneur by remaining authentic African woman.

Two traditions are in conflict in her life as a woman: that of a wife in a polygamous marriage and that of an independent, brave and successful business woman., may be a clash between colonial and post colonial period where western customs become part of the indigenou's life. Although she obeys her traditions, in the end both her husbands fail to see her worth so she ends up as a single woman. Efuru is a symbol of survival, who manages to find a way to escape the traditional patriarchal world by moving forward in her business and social life.

Nwapa uses the traditional environment as a symbol of oppression and dependency, the mountains to overcome. In that environment marriage is the norm and singleness is seen as a calamity, and bareness as a failure. Here, it is worth mentioning women's own asserviness. The androcentric norms become somehow their own norms because it has been naturalized. Efuru herself feels that failure of not having a child and when the only one she gives birth to, dies, she cries by saying: "my own daughter has killed me". However, the economic success, the entrepreneurship portrayed by Flora Nwapa through Efuru as a representation of new beginning where independent single women are welcomed, accepted and lived without any guilt or shame. It is a symbol of freedom, self-realisation, self-assertion and a new identity of African women.

- **Self-affirmation and deconstruction of patriarchy system**

The background of Efuru showed that she is from a brave, hardworking and successful family. She has been raised in entrepreneurship environment. As a matter of fact, Efuru has inherited some skills from her backgrounds: her mother and her father are parents of great values, hard workers and successful persons each of them in his /her own business. Every project or business starts with an

idea or a challenge to take up like an innovation. Besides and according to Kendrick & Funder, (1988); Scarr & McCartney, (1983), birth individuals have a propensity and innate capacity to be satisfied with specific kinds of behaviour and this propensity toward certain types of behaviour guide people to select occupations and situations consistent with genetic predispositions. So she has to honor the blood of the family, and this is supported by her father who reminds her of her mother 'success: "...Your mother prospered in her trade. She was so good that whatever she put her hand to money flowed in. When she sold pepper, she made huge profits; when she sold yams or fish, she made profits also. She was so rich that she became the head of her age-group. Then she took titles..." (F. Nwapa, 1966, pp. 150-151). This is an encouragement for her to run her trade. Efuru confirms henceforth the effect on the culture on entrepreneurial activity and shows the relationship between culture and entrepreneurship put by some scholars on: "the aggregate psychological traits approach" (R. Thurik and M. Dejardin, 2011, p. 2). According to this approach, for a given country, the more individuals with entrepreneurial values there are in a society, the more individuals will display entrepreneurial behaviour (P. Davidsson, 1995).

Efuru is married to a poor man who didn't pay the dowry before, hence deconstructs the tradition which obligation that, before getting married, a dowry must be paid. Then, to honor both her parents and husband and fit with tradition, Efuru has to work hard to afford dowry and help her husband. When her father sent people to bring her back home, these are the words of Efuru: "My husband is not rich. In fact, he is poor. But the dowry must be paid. I must see that this done" (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 10). This sentence is a challenge to herself but also a duty as a daughter of a valuable man to honor her father. From the beginning of the novel, Efuru has been characterized as an uncommon person: courageous, audacious and confident fitting with Chikwenye Ogunyemi's womanism. Her courage is revealed after the circumcision, while others women such as her mother-in-law stayed at home feasting for three months, Efuru spent just one month, because there is a challenge to fulfill: her dowry and also to survive and feed

with their basic needs. When asked by her mother in law to stay and enjoy herself, she replied like this: “No mother, one month of confinement is enough. We not got much money, and I want to start trading. Again we have not paid the dowry yet. I shall go to market on Nkwo day” (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 13). Her self-affirmation is shown when dragging canoe through river with uncertainty as security is concern: “they were the first to discover the trade (of crayfish) that year. The place where they bought the crayfish was three days journey on the Great River. It was a risky business. Thieves could waylay traders and rob them of their money. The river could be rough and when that happened their canoe could capsize (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 20). Moreover, it is said in the novel that, Efuru who was the brain behind the business...Adizua was not good at trading. He knew this very well and so one night he spoke to Efuru to start her trade. Adizua deconstruct the male’s chauvinism by humbling himself and let his wife lead their business.

- **Resilience and Perseverance**

One of the hallmark traits of successful entrepreneurs is resilience which is the ability to recover from setbacks and persist in the face of difficulties. Efuru’s life is marked by emotional, social, and personal challenges. She struggles with infertility, which is a source of deep sorrow and societal pressure. Additionally, her marriages are not fulfilling, Yet, Efuru continuously rises above these struggles through her entrepreneurial activities. Despite her personal pain and societal judgment about her inability to have children, Efuru does not give up on running her trade. She uses what is called emotional intelligence which very important for women. Shelley Thompkins explains that « Emotional intelligence is the capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions. It helps to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically end for women, it helps them understand their own strengths and weaknesses, allowing them to leverage their talents and address areas for improvement” (S. Thompkins, 2023, p. 2). Efuru uses her emotional intelligence for a self awareness and self regulation. Which

enables her to manage her emotions and makes tough decision. Efuru shows strong emotional motivation and drives which has been a fuel to persevere through her moments : loosing a child and husband Adizua at almost the same moment and nevertheless achieve her goals by giving herself a second chance for marriage. She consistently finds ways to generate income, and her work in the market becomes a source of emotional refuge as well as a way to assert her independence. Her resilience in continuing her business and navigating her personal setbacks mirrors the perseverance of many entrepreneurs who continue to push forward despite failures or challenges.

6- Positive masculinity in Efuru

Before dealing with positive and toxic masculinity, it is important to understand what does it mean to describe someone as ‘masculine’? In his blog, Gill Harrop through the article “*Developing A Culture of Positive Masculinity*,” quoted Franklin (1984) identified male-valued traits that were typically linked to being masculine, including aggression, dominance and a lack of emotion. Perceptions of what it means to be masculine are still frequently linked within research to rigid behaviours and traits, most noticeably around sexism and lack of emotion (Levant & Richmond, 2016). The Crowther Centre in Australia (2021) suggests that positive masculinity should be defined as the expression of attitudes and behaviours (character strengths and virtues which any gender might have) that have been embodied and enacted by males for the common good, both individually and for the community. Kinselica et al (2016) noted that positive masculinity should include pro-social behaviors, attitudes and beliefs in boys and men, which result in a noticeable positive consequence for themselves or others. This includes fostering a sense of duty towards others, and recognizing the positives that can come from looking out for others. To that end, Kinselica et al (2008) developed the Positive Psychology-Positive Masculinity Paradigm (PPPM) to focus on strengths associated with masculinity, adaptive behaviours and the positive aspects of being male. The PPPM suggests

some key actions that are important in developing and maintaining a culture of positive masculinity, and are things that everyone can reflect on and consider. Drawing from the emerging literature on the psychology of human strengths (Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2003) and positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Mark S. Kinselica and Matt Englar-Carlson (2010) “describe a positive psychology model of boys, men and masculinity that accentuates noble aspects of masculinity, including the following: male relational styles; male ways of caring; generative fatherhood; male self-reliance; the worker-provider tradition of men; male courage, daring and risk-taking; the group orientation of boys and men; fraternal humanitarian service; male forms of humor; and male heroism” (M. S. Kinselica and M. Englar-Carlson, 2010, p. 276).

In Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru*, positive masculinity is depicted in more subtle and less overt ways, especially when compared to the more dominant expressions of toxic masculinity. The novel focuses primarily on the experiences of women, particularly the protagonist *Efuru*, as she navigates her roles as wife, mother, and individual within a patriarchal society. However, there are moments in the novel that hint at positive masculinity, where male characters demonstrate empathy, respect, and a more supportive, nurturing approach to relationships. These examples stand in contrast to the destructive forms of masculinity seen in some of the male characters.

- **Nwashike Ogene, *Efuru*’s father**

Efuru’s father, Nwashike Ogene, is a great man, both while alive and in death. From the very first point of introducing him to the reader, Nwapa reveals that he is a man of abundant greatness, and is loved by all: “...the mighty man of valor. Ogene who, single handed, fought against the Aros when they came to molest us. Nwashike himself proved himself the son of his father. He was a great fisherman. When he went fishing, he caught only *asa* and *aja*. His yams were the fattest in the whole town. And what is more, no man has ever seen his back on the ground. *Ogworo azu ngwere eru ani*” (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 11). Although, he is a man of honor, he did not struggle *Adizua* nor

fight the choice of his daughter who gets married without dowry which can be considered as a dishonor to the great man he is. Nevertheless, a reader sees him giving good advises to his daughter. When Efuru was troubled about her childless state, her father consulted a dibia¹ who was able to proffer a solution and Efuru conceived: “Efuru was very worried in the second year of her marriage...Efuru did not sleep that night. Early in the morning before the cock crow she got up, dressed and went to her father. She opened her heart to her father. ‘Something must be done my daughter...we shall see a dibia’ (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 24). When Adizua left home, he had the following words of advice for his daughter:

I came to see you, father about Adizua’, Efuru said...For months now, father, my husband has come home very late. Some nights, he has not come home at all. Sometimes he has refused to eat my food. And now I have heard he wants to marry a woman who has just left her husband...my life is ruined’. ‘God forbid. Your life is not ruined my daughter...It is only a bad woman who wants to have a man all to herself...’I can understand you my daughter. But patience. Wait until he returns from Ndoni. I shall see him then. Meanwhile go home and be a good mother to your daughter’ (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 63).

When Adizua finally left home and refused to return even at the death of his only child, Efuru’s father sent for her:

“Have you heard the voice of your husband? No I have not heard. What are you going to do? Nothing. Perhaps I shall continue to wait...He is not thinking of coming home. Perhaps you can consider going there yourself...in case you decide on going. I shall give you some people to go

¹ A herbalist.

with you. Or, if you don't want to go yourself, our people will go for you "(F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 78-9).

Adizua has revealed to be a bad husband and father. However, considering the above extract, a reader finds a caring father, concerned by his daughter's wellness. He did not advise her to leave her husband despite the fact that she didn't get his blessings before rejoining Adizua. He, rather suggests to put means for her in order to find her husband. And when at the end, Efuru moved back into her father's house, he welcomed her and gave her all the support and encouragement she needed. When, it was time to get married again, he encouraged her, prayed for her and advised her on how to behave to her husband and his people:

Efuru, my daughter, come here...You married Adizua without my consent. But I prayed our ancestors to make your marriage a success. We are forgiving in our family. This is your husband. Take care of him and he will take care of you. Don't speak harshly to him. If he annoys you, wait until you go to bed. Then ask him softly why he annoyed you and he will explain. Respect your husband and your husband's people. Always greet them well" (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 135).

Nwashike Ogene is a great man in life as well as in death: "A great man has left us. You don't fire cannons when an ordinary man dies. Cannons can be seen only in wealthy men's house. Cannons are the sign of greatness" (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 199). Efuru's father can be qualified as feminist. He understands his daughter. There is a sort of evolution even renaissance with a strong man who couldn't according to the people afford to be humiliated. He was a great man both physically and financially. When talking about his wife, the mother of Efuru, he said "Everything, your mother touched is transformed in wealth. She owns a lot titles..." (F. Nwapa, 1966, p). Thus showing one of the principle of Positive Psychology-Positive Masculinity

paradigm (PPPM) such as emphasizing the importance of ‘action empathy’ and Nurturing male-self-reliance. Efuru father did not reject his daughter when she married without dowry. He takes her to the dibia for getting a baby, he encourages her in trade. He has been a shoulder on which Efuru can lay her head.

In summary, Efuru’s father, while not a central character, represents a more positive form of masculinity. He is depicted as loving, supportive, and progressive in his attitude towards his daughter. His treatment of Efuru contrasts with the more traditional and patriarchal norms imposed by other male figures in her life. Efuru’s father show such qualities as positive masculinity:

Emotional Support: Unlike many of the other men in the story, Efuru's father does not see her as a failure or disappointment because she cannot have children. Instead, he accepts her as she is, showing emotional understanding and respect for her personal struggles.

Equality in Education: Efuru’s father also plays a role in encouraging her intellectual growth. He supports her decision to marry for love, not just for social or economic gain, and recognizes her potential beyond the traditional roles expected of women in Igbo society.

His respect for Efuru as an individual with her own desires, aspirations, and agency stands as an example of positive masculinity, where a man does not impose limiting gender norms on a woman but rather supports her in pursuing her own path.

- **Gilbert, Efuru's Second Husband**

Gilbert is a mixed of positive and toxic masculinity. As for some aspects of positive masculinity in contrast to her first husband, Adizua. While Gilbert is not without flaws, his relationship with Efuru shows a level of care and respect that was lacking in her first marriage.

Respect for Efuru's Personal Choices: Nwabueze (Gilbert) respects Efuru’s autonomy and does not pressure her in the same way that Adizua does, especially concerning the issue of having children.

While Nwabueze does desire children, he does not let his frustration dictate how he treats Efuru. His approach to their relationship is more based on understanding and mutual respect, even when faced with challenges.

Emotional Intimacy: Nwabueze also exhibits more emotional openness compared to some other male characters in the novel. He seems more willing to engage in the emotional complexities of his relationship with Efuru, which is a form of positive masculinity that embraces vulnerability and shared emotional experiences.

7- Toxic masculinity in Efuru

Toxic masculinity has been coined in the 1980s. Carol Harrington describes toxic masculinity as “the behavior of “troubled” or “troubling” men who are labeled as “toxic” and needing therapy because of violence, or lack of engagement in family life, and employment” (C. Harrington, 2020, p. 4).

This analysis reveals how the underachieving, non-committal and harmful behaviors of Adizua and Gilbert, the two leading male characters in Efuru, are indicative of toxic masculinity. The environment of the women entrepreneurs is a key factor of success. When the environment is hostile and the woman is not strong enough, emotionally balanced, she can quickly give up her dreams and her projects.

In Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, toxic masculinity is subtly portrayed through the behaviors, expectations, and attitudes of male characters, particularly in relation to their treatment of women and the societal pressures they face. While the novel primarily centers around the experiences and empowerment of the female protagonist, Efuru, it also critiques the social norms and gender dynamics that reinforce harmful ideals of masculinity. These toxic ideals contribute to the struggles that Efuru and other women face, especially in their relationships with men and within the broader society. Here are key ways in which toxic masculinity is represented in the novel, *Efuru*.

Male Entitlement and Control: One of the primary ways toxic masculinity manifests in *Efuru*, is through the sense of male entitlement and subtle control, particularly in the relationships between Efuru and her husbands (Adizua and Gilbert). The male characters in the novel, like Adizua and Gilbert, often display a sense of ownership over their wives, especially in terms of reproduction. This entitlement is rooted in the patriarchal belief that men have control over women's bodies and their roles as mothers.

Adizua, Efuru's first husband, exhibits toxic masculinity through his insistence on having children. The reader can conclude that his frustration with Efuru's inability to bear children leads to emotional and physical neglect. He views her as a failure because she does not meet his expectations of fertility, revealing how toxic masculinity can commodify women's bodies and reduce them to their reproductive roles. He started dated another woman not caring about Efuru's emotions. He will come back late, just to take a shower and go back outside without even eating. One of the punishments, men used to make in African context, to show their anger and frustrate women, is to refuse to eat. For African women, it hurts deeply their heart. And Efuru suffers that situation until, she decides no more to cook. Similarly, Gilbert who at the beginning of their marriage, shows love to Efuru, behaved like a coward at the surprise of the reader. Efuru's second husband, demonstrates control over her by imposing his own ideas about what constitutes a "good" wife, expecting her to conform to certain gendered expectations. His lack of understanding and empathy towards her emotional and personal needs further highlights the ways in which toxic masculinity harms not only women but also men who are caught in rigid gender norms. Gilbert with no prove has accused Efuru with adultery because of his illness (sexual disease) that he caught with another woman. The men in *Efuru* expect female submission as part of the traditional gender roles they uphold. In Efuru's case, both of her husbands expect her to fulfill the ideal role of a wife and mother, disregarding her desires, individuality, and emotional needs. These expectations are reflective of toxic

masculinity because they demand that women prioritize the needs and desires of men, often at the cost of their own well-being. Efuru, who struggles with infertility, faces harsh judgment and neglect because she does not fulfill the traditional expectation of motherhood. Her inability to bear children becomes a point of contention in her marriage, reflecting the toxic belief that women's worth is tied to their ability to reproduce. This expectation is deeply ingrained in the men's understanding of masculinity, where a man's status is elevated by his control over women's reproductive capacities.

Violence and Aggression: Toxic masculinity is often associated with a culture of violence and aggression, and while Efuru does not depict overt physical violence, the emotional and psychological violence men perpetrate in their relationships with women is evident. Adizua's abandonment of Efuru and his refusal to support her during her period of infertility can be seen as a form of emotional cruelty, which stems from his toxic belief in male dominance and the objectification of women. In addition, Efuru's experience with men is marked by emotional distance and neglect, reflecting a broader societal tendency to value men for their ability to be providers and protectors, rather than for their emotional sensitivity or compassion. The emotional violence, in this sense, is a direct result of toxic masculinity, which discourages men from expressing vulnerability or care.

- **Cultural Pressures and Male Identity**

Toxic masculinity in Efuru is not just individual but also cultural. The societal pressures placed on men to act in a certain way, to be dominant, assertive, and emotionally detached, create a cycle of pain and alienation for both men and women. Adizua, for example, cannot express his own frustrations or vulnerabilities and instead channels them into a destructive sense of entitlement toward Efuru. The toxic idea that men must control and possess women ultimately leads to his emotional disconnect and their marital breakdown.

In summary, Flora Nwapa critiques the damaging effects of toxic masculinity on both men and women. The male characters in the

novel, particularly Efuru's husbands, embody the rigid, patriarchal expectations that limit their emotional expression, reduce women to their reproductive roles, and prioritize male dominance over empathy and mutual respect. These attitudes lead to emotional neglect, psychological abuse, and the breakdown of relationships. Through the experiences of Efuru and other female characters, Nwapa demonstrates how toxic masculinity harms both individuals and communities by enforcing gender norms that restrict personal freedom and emotional well-being which can impact negatively the entrepreneurial objectives of women.

8- Efuru as emancipated woman or a symbol of “a new woman”: A Determinism.

Efuru remains a subtle mix of modern woman and tradition woman. Assuming her position by remaining humble. She has indeed decided to be happy even though she hasn't personal children. She achieved great things but her bareness is considered as a failure. Although, Efuru is literate and respectful of traditions, at a given moment, she has refused to continue bearing the weight of the traditions by remaining in a marriage which brought her sorrow. Efuru's strength is remarkable. First, she decides who will be her husband. The beginning of the novel was already setting the scene of the kind of heroine that we will follow: “they saw each other fairly often and after fortnight's courting she agreed to marry him. ... Efuru was her name. She was a remarkable woman. It was not only that she came from a distinguished family. She was distinguished herself. Her husband was not known and people wondered why she married him” (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 7). After the death of her only child Ogonim, and the long absence of her husband Adizua, bearing both her sorrow of being abandoned by a husband, Efuru shows special determination to move forward: “...She went about her business as usual» p102. The narrator according to the perspective from which the story is told can be classified as an emancipated woman, a woman defender who somehow tolerates polygamy but refuses to suffer because of the

weight of traditions. The conversation between Efuru and her father shows an intimacy between the both relieving the barriers mostly observed between daughter and father even though she has disobeyed him when marrying Adizua without his consent.

I came to see you father, about Adizua. Efuru said in a quiet voice. "If he ill-treats me father I shall leave him...For months now, father, my husband has come home very late. Some nights, he has not come home at all. Sometimes he wants to marry a woman who has just left her husband. This woman has gone to Ndoni with him, father. And what will become of me? ...It does not matter my daughter if Adizua wants to marry another woman. It is only a bad woman who wants to have a man all to herself. No father, I don't object to his marrying a second wife. I don't object to it at all. Even before I had Ogonim, I was thinking of marrying a wife for Adizua. But our ancestors were kind enough to bless me with a daughter and the joy of having a baby, the realization that I was not barren filled me with happiness that I did not think of getting a wife for him anymore. But I have not abandoned the idea completely. So I don't mind if he marries another wife. But rumor has it that this woman is a bad woman... (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 63).

Efuru accepts traditions but not humiliation. The determination of Efuru refusing a slavery marriage, an unbearable sufferings seem to be appreciated by the narrator. Efuru, although she is illiterate, is an emancipated woman meaning the one who can support herself through prosperous activities. The conversation between Efuru and her mother-in-law: "My daughter, I can only solicit patience. You may not wait as long as I did. I gained nothing from my long suffering, so the

world would think, but I am proud that I was and still a true to the only man I loved.” (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 61)

The dialogue between Efuru and her mother in law will clear her mind and she will make her decision. Efuru was in her room deep in thought:

So it is in the family. There is no point staying then. Adizua’s waywardness is in the blood and you can do nothing about it. And my mother-in-law, poor woman. She does look as if she had seen many sad days, and the behavior of her son has reminded her of all her suffered in her younger days. Perhaps, self-imposed suffering appeals to her. It does not appeal to me. I know I am capable of suffering for greater things. But to suffer for a truant husband, an irresponsible husband like Adizua is to debase suffering. My own suffering will be noble. When Adizua will come back, I shall leave him... (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 63).

The last paragraph of page 63 shows once more the determination of Efuru: “.... Our ancestors forbid that I should wait for a man to drive me out of his house. This is done to woman who cannot stand by themselves, women who have no good homes, and not to me the daughter of Nwashike Ogene. And besides, my face is not burnt, I am still a beautiful woman” (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 63). This trilogy of assets: coming from a noble and good family, being a successful trade woman and beautiful so to say uncommon beauty are for me the most important revelation in the quest of emancipation: autonomy above all and self-determination.

The determinism: Efuru applies in her actions the agency framework seeing as the ability to set goals and act on them. As illustration, for the dowry, which is social norms even though she is not against it, she decides to do it in her own manner. Efuru has confidence in her abilities in trading. She knows that she has to honor both her father and her husband Adizua. Using a transformative decision-making

which contribute to the deconstruction of unequal gender relations, Efurū set back to her « husband's house » without traditional norms which entails that before getting to her husband's house, the latter should pay dowry. Quoting Botticini and Siow (2003), John A. Conteh defines dowry as: "the transfer of wealth, an invaluable component of bridal wealth" (J. A. Conteh, 2016, p.1). In the same article he argues that "in dowry systems, the concept of a daughter leaving home to unite with a husband comes along with transfer of wealth, goods, and services to the bride's family as a form of compensation for the absence of a family member" (J. A. Conteh, 2016; p. 2).

Ethnically, leaving home means that the daughter can no longer contribute to the wealth of the parents or family. It makes sense economically that dowries would be exchanged in traditionally rooted societies since children are regarded as part of the family wealth. The departure of a daughter can therefore be compensated due to loss of family in replacement for a dowry. After the episodic of dowry, at her husband's home, Efurū firmly refuses to go to farm: "I will not at farm, I am not meant to it, I prefer to trade" (F. Nwapa, 1966, p). To be able to defy social norms, one should be conscious of his/her power and assets. Her acts show the specifics WEE like Instrumental agency which is the ability to exercise capabilities and choices through influence or control over decision-making quoted by Eunice Mueni Williams, Heini Väisänen, Sabu S. Padmadas (2022), Eyben and colleagues (2008) define "WEE as the capacity of women to participate, contribute, negotiate, and benefit from growth processes, while being able to recognize their contributions and exercise agency and choice" (E. M. Williams et al, 2022, p. 418). Efurū makes choices in her life defying her community norms but not rejected them.

After few years of marriage and losing her only daughter and worsely, Adizua who should normally be a great help, left home for another woman. One year later, Efurū once more has to take her destiny in her hands and then embodies the intrinsic agency which is the ability of a woman to question or reject normative beliefs that promote gender inequality and to have confidence in her capabilities (power within), Efurū stands as a pure characteristic of WEE.

9- Efuru's soft power manifestation on her entrepreneurial journey

Joseph Nye popularized the concept of "soft power" in the late 1980s. For Nye, power is the ability to influence the behaviour of others to get the outcomes you want. Quoted by Li Lin, Leng Hongtao (2017) in their article *Joseph Nye's Soft Power Theory and Its Revelation Towards Ideological and Political Education*, Joseph Nye pointed that:

The soft power is the ability of the cultural recognition and guide others to follow, and this powers stems from the attractiveness of the culture and sense of value of a nation. They added that, the soft power affects, attracts, and persuade others to believe and admit the rule, sense of value, life style and social system through the spiritual and morality requirements (L. Lin and L. Hongtao, 2017, pp. 69-70).

The soft power is not only the ability to persuade and guide, but also contains the attractive power. The attractive power can let others choose the default attitude when doing something. Thus the soft power is the power which can attractive others. The soft power can use different methods to help cooperation, use the same sense of value to produce the attraction.

Joseph Nye quoted by Li Lin, Leng Hongtao (2017) proposes that "soft power is a kind of ability which can realize the goal through attraction instead of the violence or the temptation" (L. Lin and L. Hongtao, 2017, p. 71).

Based on the above definition, in Flora Nwapa's novel *Efuru*, soft power is subtly woven into the narrative, primarily through the ways in which women navigate their personal and social worlds. With the main character Efuru, it can be understood as the subtle ways in which cultural norms, values, and interpersonal relationships are used to

influence or shape behavior, especially concerning gender roles and societal expectations. Efuru brings others people to follow her, to understand her and to support her. Her soft power is manifests in the novel in different ways such as:

Efuru's Influence Through Compassion and Generosity: Efuru, the protagonist, is portrayed as a woman of great compassion and generosity. While she does not wield political or military power, her ability to positively affect those around her through kindness, selflessness, and understanding gives her a kind of subtle influence. Her generosity with both material resources and emotional support earns her respect and admiration within her community. In this way, she uses personal influence, rather than overt force, to gain social capital. She shows compassion with Adizua's mother, the parents of her maid, Gilbert's mother, her husbands, for different ceremonies etc

Cultural Power and Gender Dynamics: Nwapa explores how women in traditional Igbo society exert power through cultural means. Although the society is patriarchal, women in the community, including Efuru, maintain soft power through social rituals, community-building, and maintaining familial harmony. Efuru's relationships with other women, especially her role as a mother and her interactions with other women in the village, highlight how women's roles are integral to the social structure and the unwritten rules that govern it. Another aspect of soft power in the novel is Efuru's connection to the spiritual realm. She is portrayed as a woman who has an intimate relationship with the gods and is believed to possess some spiritual authority. Uhmari, the goddess has chosen her as a worshiper. It gives her another divine dimension which makes her a respectful and spiritual authority in her village. As a matter of facts, she can be consulted to calm the river for example or ask many fishes during dry season. She becomes a voice and a link between her and her people. This connection gives her a subtle but significant influence over the people in her community, as she is seen as a source of wisdom and spiritual guidance, even if she does not directly assert

direct control over others. Efuru for instance has never shouted on people even angry. Her calm and temperance are strengths that she uses to get people to adhere to her initiatives and follow her.

Efuru's Personal Integrity and Self-Reliance: Efuru's journey is also one of self-discovery and self-reliance. Her ability to maintain her own sense of integrity in a world that pressures her to conform to traditional gender roles is a quiet form of power. She chooses not to marry according to societal expectations, and despite the challenges this bring to her, she maintains her autonomy. In a patriarchal society, this independent stance is itself a form of soft power, one that influences others and challenges established norms. Moreover, Efuru is a very beautiful woman and she has never used that beauty to fall into easy options or asked for favours. On the contrary, she has maintained her integrity, her morality and earned the respect of all. This probity and integrity are some aspects of soft power.

Female Networks: The power of female solidarity is another soft power dynamic in the novel. The relationships among women, especially in their communal roles as wives, mothers, and ritual participants, create a supportive system of mutual influence. Through these networks, women can challenge societal expectations, support one another in difficult times, and assert their own form of agency, even in a male-dominated environment. Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* highlights the use of soft power through compassion, spirituality, social networks, and personal integrity. Women in the novel may not have the overt political power of men, but their influence is felt through the cultural and social systems they help to shape and sustain. Efuru, as a character, embodies this type of subtle yet potent power. He earns respect and influences her counterparts.

Conclusion

The article has highlighted African women's potential in business and the reader journeys with a smart and beautiful trader, Efuru. Using the

characteristics of entrepreneurship theories and African feminisms, the development of this chapter conclude that, there are women entrepreneurs in the western term before colonization. Efuru, the character who has been portrayed shows a woman who is respectful to her traditions. Using African feminisms, she finds ways and means to scale up and to be a successful trader. In her entrepreneurial journey, she takes risks, diversifies her investments and activities by for instance creating rent services besides her usual activities of trader. She deconstructs social norms in which woman should be just cartakers. On the contrary, she has been a brain of all her lucrative activities and among her staff, there are Adizua and Gilbert, respectively her first and second husband. The portray of Efuru has finally revealed that entrepreneurship is not gender neutral and it adapts with the social and cultural realities.

In Efuru, entrepreneurship is a transformative force enabling women to negotiate autonomy and identity. Nwapa challenges patriarchal assumptions by illustrating a protagonist whose worth derives from competence rather than conformity. Efuru's entrepreneurial trajectory lays the foundation for understanding African women's economic agency in later West African literature.

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