

Social Representation of Women in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*

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ABSTRACT

An analysis of the African fiction in the South of the Sahara shows a bias in the depiction of male and female characters. The purpose of this article is to explore the social representation of African women in post-colonial Africa as hardworking and intrepid characters, man's companion, support and shield, and eventually as educators. Contrary to the distorted social perception society has of women in Africa, female novelists like Buchi Emecheta in *The Joys of Motherhood* and Flora Nwapa through *Efuru*, have deconstructed the social established norms giving masculine roles to their female characters. Nnu Ego, Adaku and Efuru – characters in these novels – have reversed the roles by working hard, protecting their families and by educating children and societies. Through the use of post-colonial criticism as backdrop, this paper deconstructs the negative representations that patriarchal societies have of women highlighting the predominant roles that female characters play. A qualitative data analysis and feminism approaches have been used to better explore the social representation of women in African patriarchal settings in this work.

Key words: representation, masculine roles, female characters, feminism, patriarchy.

INTRODUCTION

For many years, African societies were organised in a way that constantly deteriorated woman's image. Women were subjugated to any sort of degrading treatment. On this score, in "a patriarchal society, women are faced with all sorts of dehumanisation ranging from deprivation, negligence, maltreatment, marginalisation, oppression, subjugation, exploitation, humiliation and even isolation, all of which emanate from aspects of people's culture. In such a

society, for instance, women are seen, but not heard" (Capo-Chichi, Gbaguidi & Djossou 2017: 113). These words exemplify the evil done to women in phallogocentric societies. Indeed, women in male-dominated societies are in a total confinement and have no access to good social conditions. This state of things is fuelled by men's writings which have tended to diminish women folk as a result of a distorted portrayal. Women have been portrayed as dependent upon men – who have historically been the heads of the family and the only bread winners. Subsequently, Kaboré (2020) posits that African literature "shows variations in literary portrayal of men and women" (32) and often to women's detriment. This depiction of women in their household and society justifies the position of triviality and uselessness they are given. Ouadrigo (2016) buttresses these traditionally assigned female tasks when he points out that: "culinary activities and – the collection of firewood and water is seen [...] as female tasks". Chukukere (1992) confirms that the ideal female character created by male writers often acts within the framework of her traditional roles as wife and mother. In this wake, Kaboré (2020) contends "To be a wife and mother stands first and foremost in woman's role" (33) in African patriarchal societies. This means that women's representation in their society is limited to these two roles whereby they should learn to become good wives and mothers. Oddly enough, as "Achebe justifies the writing of *Things Fall Apart*, arguing that African pre-colonial history must be written by African people to avoid distortions" (Booker 2003: 65), only women can work to restore their true image. Aiming to repaint women's image and buttress the pivotal roles, which reveal their true representation, women writers like Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Amma Darko, Ata Aidoo, to mention only a few of them, assign masculine parts to their female characters. In *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Efuru* respectively by the first two female writers, the characters Nnu Ego, Adaku, Efuru and Nwabata show that women are not so different from men and that they can also do everything that men can.

Using a socio-critical approach, this article presents African women as they are depicted in the aforementioned novels. How do Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa describe women in their works?

WOMEN AS HARDWORKING AND INTREPID CHARACTERS

In traditional Africa, women are believed to be useful only for domestic tasks and child bearing. Kaboré (2020) confirms this patriarchal stance on the traditional African woman when he opines that "Begetting children is also presented as a key to woman's self-realization" (35). This image of women has proved wrong when we consider the actions and the works many of them truly perform. African women's daily fights for self-sufficiency and self-autonomy or empowerment are largely sufficient to attest to their paramount position in society. In Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, the practice of levirate is still rife whereby the female character Adaku has been 'inherited' by Nnaife after the death of his elder brother. Interestingly, though Adaku has been open-heartedly welcomed by the senior wife, Nnu Ego, she eventually leaves the household in search for a better life not only for herself but also for her fatherless daughter. In the absence of their husband Nnaife, she becomes a public woman who trades in various food crops. She sells beans and peppers whose profits help her to buy a larger stall for herself. This idea of using one's business profits to better develop one's business is the strategy of intelligent businesspeople. Adaku's entrepreneurial skills and commitment to succeed show women's cleverness. When she happens to acquire a larger stall, she decides to sell abada material for lappas. This new business is more profitable than the former.

Subsequently, Adaku's social standing has changed. This sudden improvement of the committed woman's fortunes fascinates the senior wife, Nnu Ego, and this is shown in this passage:

On that day Adaku was living up to the meaning of her name: 'the daughter of wealth'. She told Nnu Ego that she was giving up selling beans and peppers, she was buying a larger stall on which she would have abada material for lappas. She smiled to see the wonder and surprise on Nnu Ego's face. She would have passed on her former stall to Nnu Ego, she said, but she was leasing it to someone who would pay her yearly. 'That will take care of my rent at least' she finished laughing. 'You mean you won't have to depend on men friends to do anything for you?' 'No', she replied. 'I want to be a dignified single woman (Emecheta, 1979: 190).

It appears that the narrator in Emecheta's novel published in 1979 highlights the African woman's entrepreneurial and innovative skills enabling her to be entirely self-sufficient from men's bondage. As a result, one can see through Adaku that female characters are capable of achieving great things in many fields contrary to the domestic and traditional limit which is set for them. The success Adaku has achieved in her trade is illustrative of the fact that a woman can work hard to make money and provide herself and her children with all the necessary comforts in case a man's support is missing.

In addition to Adaku, Nnu Ego – the protagonist of the novel – shows much effort to survive without her husband's back up. She works very hard as well. She is ready to do whatever possible to feed her children and herself and even sometimes pay the rent. Even other women acknowledge that Nnu Ego is a distinguished woman. Though her husband is at war, she does her best to compensate for the duties of the head of the family. Buchi Emecheta uses the character of Mama Abby to show that Nnu Ego is a very strong character, a man-like woman who does all she can to satisfy her family's basic needs. Talking about Oshia (Nnu Ego's elder son's) schooling, Nnu expresses her thankfulness to Abby's mother for all she has done to her. The conversation of both women goes thus: "Putting her baby to her breast Nnu Ego said gratefully, 'I do thank you for taking all this trouble over him, Mama Abby. The older woman [Mama Abby] laughed. 'You know I'm no better off than you, but at least a man pays my rent'" (Emecheta 119). It stands out that Nnu Ego is in the position of a man. The role of providing shelter and food is dedicated to men. This way, Nnu Ego is doing the masculine role which Nnaife should do as husband. By raising the point in their conversation, Mama Abby recognises that some women are so strong physically that they can even do without men. Nnu Ego's effort and determination are openly acknowledged by Mama Abby. The eponymous heroine, Efuru, in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* is another enterprising woman who has made herself a name in the male dominated society in which she lives.

In addition to Adaku and Nnu Ego, Efuru is also a hardworking woman whose intelligence and entrepreneurial skill are even beyond her husband's. She is the initiator and leader of the business she and her husband run. She refuses to follow her husband for farm work, as she firmly thinks that she is not cut out for farm activities. The narrator counts: "Efuru refused to go to the 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'. That year the man went to the farm while his wife remained in the town" (Nwapa 1966:10). In this case, one can clearly see that Efuru as a woman in a more masculine role, has decided on what she thinks can be profitable, not only for herself but also for her husband whose farm activities have revealed to be unprofitable and

fruitless. This assertion raises the issue of men's limit. It means that the super intelligent men are not successful in all they undertake. When the man expresses his desire of giving up the farm and joining her in town, she answers the following way: "In that case' she said to him, 'I would like you to leave the farm. But you have to wait until the harvest and after that you can come to town. Both of us can trade together'" (Nwapa 1966:20). Efuru in a role reversal, is then the order giver. She is the one that takes the decision concerning the line of action of the family. Later on, husband and wife have started the trade the intelligent and independent women have initiated:

So, after the harvest Adizua left the farm for good. His harvest was of course very poor. His fellow-farmers laughed at him and said unkind words behind his back. He did not make any profit at all. But his wife consoled him. Never mind, she said. 'What matters is health. Once you are healthy money will come.' Efuru and her husband traded in yams. They would paddle a canoe from their town to a tributary of the Great River, and thence to Agbor. There, they bought yams and other things rare in their town and sold them at a profit (Nwapa 1966: 20).

The female character Efuru appears to be somehow the leader of the household. Adizua has waited till the harvest as it has been established by the woman before he joins her in the town. And even in town, the emasculated Adizua has no other choice but follow his wife. Here again, the women's hardworking and power related to it are highlighted. Efuru in her role of a leader and confident woman suggests strategies for a successful business and gives the man courage to keep on and never to abandon the work. When they come across a trouble or an obstacle, she proposes alternative routes to come over them. Emecheta describes Efuru's commitment this way:

When the yam trade was bad, they traded in dry fish and crayfish. It was in crayfish that they made their fortune. They were the first to discover the trade 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 (Nwapa 1966: 20-21).

There is indeed no risk that is so huge to dishearten a determined woman. Efuru's ability is even recognised by Adizua, her husband. Her determination and commitment are so high that no event whatever its influence and importance can turn her away from the direction she decides to take. Thanks to her hard work, she is an exemplary member of her community. All Efuru's group mates, and even women older than her, resort to her to solve their daily problems.

Efuru is a wealthy woman, even wealthier than her husband. Omirima, the gossip of the village recognises her financial power: "She is wealthy but riches cannot go on errands for us" (Nwapa 1966:163). This means that Efuru's financial independence is no more hidden. In sum, both novelists (Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa) show that women are not the financial or emotional bloodsuckers men and society think they are. They have the possibility to earn their living, like men, as hardworking and intrepid characters.

WOMAN AS A MAN'S COMPANION, SUPPORT AND SHIELD

In traditional Africa, women are considered as men's other half. Under this consideration they give the best of themselves to satisfy the single need of their husband. They are present in every situation to support and protect men. Women's whole life is guided by their femininity. This is the ideology that governs and justifies all the roles they perform in their societies. However,

and paradoxically, femininity is not well valued in patriarchal societies. As a traditional Ibuza woman, Nnu Ego does a lot to prove her femininity in her household as well as in the society at large.

The term femininity refers to “the fact of being a woman; the qualities that are considered to be typical of women” (Hornby 2010: 545). Femininity in this context refers to all actions and sayings that show women’s submissiveness and the ways they support and protect their husbands. On this basis, women take the responsibility of protection which normally comes from men. Nnu Ego, the main character in Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood*, has shown her femininity via various and multiple practices. First of all, she is a very careful, submissive and protective wife and mother. Although her second husband’s look and attitudes deceive her, she still tells her father that she is a happy woman. She praises the handsomeness of her husband that herself, in the beginning, thinks is the ugliest of all. In a message to her father Nwokocha Agbadi, the extradiegetic narrator points out: “Before her brother-in-law left a few weeks later, he prayed that she would not be a failure. Nnu Ego thanked him, and through him she sent twenty thousand messages to her father, to say how happy she was, how handsome her husband was [...] She kept repeating this over and over again, like a child frightened of being left alone”(Emecheta 1979: 47). So, women sacrifice their welfare for the social image of their husband. They care less about their own representation than the one of men. This self-sacrifice and selfless attitudes of women in order to value men are illustrations of patriarchy which places women under men. Under another angle, it is the evidence that men cannot do without women. The support is the basis, the foundation without which anything cannot really stand. Women here again are placed in the position of an important member of the society.

Nnu Ego’s attitude intends not to backbite her husband lest her own family should have a bad appraisal of the man. She wants her family to build positive ideas about her husband and the kind of life they are living. In other words, she considers that the shame of her spouse is hers. Those words contained in her message are protective and image-building; which means that women hide their partner’s weakness. In this same view of protecting and caring for her husband’s social image, a woman is capable of suggesting a man to look for another job if the work the man is doing is damaging to his image. As for Nnu Ego, she does not hesitate to tell Nnaife to abandon a cloth-washer he uses to be even if for the man the kind of job and the image it gives do not matter. The extradiegetic narrator tells:

She had at first rejected his way of earning a living and had asked him why he could not find a more respectable job. Nnaife had scoffed and told her that in a town people never minded what they did to get money, as long as it was honest. Did she not think the work easier and much more predictable than farming? But every time she saw her husband hanging out the white woman’s smalls, Nnu Ego would wince as someone in pain. The feeling would cut deeper when, with sickening heart, she heard Nnaife talking effusively about his treatment of dainty clothes and silk. The man was actually proud of his work, she realised (Emecheta 1979: 49).

It is crystal clear that Nnu Ego wants her husband to have a manlier job. Men are not expected to wash clothes. The reaction from Nnu Ego shows the social fact that women want people to respect their husband. It is not honourable for a woman to have a husband that can be laughed at in society.

In addition to the previous standard role of women by the side of their husband, they do many other things that are also part of their womanhood. It is important to mention that all those supports to their husband value them more in the contemporary society than in pre-colonial era. A man as the head of the family will find it very harsh to come back in the evening or late in the night and start thinking of what to cook. Cooking or preparing food for men is another important role that women perform with all their heart. For a married woman, it is always a pleasure to make the table and serve her husband food whenever it is the occasion. Nnu Ego as a woman in traditional Ibo society does this the way every woman is expected to. Ibo women know that being a woman implies taking good care of the partner's stomach. Despite their poverty and the limited resources and comfort they have, Nnu Ego gets Nnaife's table ready. "She [Nnu Ego] left Nnaife's food on their one table, placed the handwashing bowl with water in it conveniently near for him and, contrary to her nature and to custom, sat and watched him" (Emecheta 1979: 50). The narrator's words are well chosen here to express both Nnu Ego's fulfilment of her womanly task and her envy to reproach Nnaife something. The fact that she sits, looking at Nnaife eating, which is not a habit, shows that she is awaiting to say something rather unpleasant. But this does not matter enough. What matters here the most is that though the Ibo woman has something against her husband, she still cooks for him; her reproach does not prevent her from assuming her feminine responsibility. This fact shows great femininity rather than weakness. Later on, this habit of Nnu Ego that consists in caring for her partner's stomach is repeated. Nnu Ego, the intradiegetic narrator says: "'Oh Nnaife, I am not going to do that. We have been talking about so many things that we forgot food. But we shall soon go and cook. Don't forget to come home for your mid-afternoon meal'" (Emecheta 1979: 83). This repetition of the woman care for men's stomach is on purpose. It shows the importance women give to their husband's diet. And the tone and the first person of plural 'we' that is used shows respect and humility. All of these patterns determine a strong woman in Africa, because being empowered does not mean rudeness.

The portrayal is made of women in Flora Nwapa's eponymous *Efuru*. The main character Efuru is a prototype of womanhood in the novel. Every action she has undertaken, every attitude she has shown facing one or the other situation depicts the character of woman in Ibo society. After a heavy working day for instance, a man needs to be heartily welcomed by her spouse. Efuru does not elude the role that is women's in their household. When the young married man, Adizua, is back from farm, Efuru welcomes him as he deserves. The extradiegetic narrator in a soft voice tells Efuru's welcoming words: "Efuru welcomed him: 'how are you?' she would ask him. 'How is everything in the farm? What did you bring me from the farm?'" (Nwapa 1966: 10) This way of receiving one's husband, when he is back from work, is definitely a way of giving him strength and assurance that you are always there and that you bear his burden with him. It is relaxing and encouraging. African women are characterised by the use of loving words to distress their husbands. All these practices reinforce men's masculinity and make them feel men.

However, femininity is not limited to the verbal welcoming of husbands. It covers many more actions that women often take. So, in addition to the previous patterns, both Efuru and Nnu Ego care for their husband's food. Many a time, Nwapa comments on the act of women feeding their husbands. This is of a great importance in Africa. The very day Adizua has come from his farm, Efuru kindly invites him to take his bath so as to be comfortable at the eating table: "'[...] thank you, my husband. Now, go and have your bath while I prepare some food for you to eat.' The

husband went off to have his bath in the stream. Efuru went to the kitchen to cook. She used plenty of fish and cooked delicious nsala soup for her dear husband. When her husband came back from the stream she welcomed him and put the food before him" (Nwapa 1966: 10). The care that is given to the welcoming words and the food that is intended for the head of the family show the eminent role women play every day in their household. This clearly illustrates that without women's great care and attention, men will suffer a lot.

Like Efuru, Nwabata is another woman very attached to her husband in *Efuru*. She is always with her husband: in sickness, poverty and joy. She even negotiates a loan and helps for the welfare of her husband and the survival of her household. Nwabata tells her worries about her husband, Nwosu's, condition: "My husband told me that the doctor wants to operate on him. Since he came back yesterday, I have not been able to eat. I have been so upset that I was useless to myself. I am afraid of operations. Can't anything be done for him? Can't the doctor continue giving him injections?" (Nwapa 1966: 101). As it is, Nwabata's concerns about the survival of her husband after surgery cannot escape the reader's attention. For the village woman, the operation may worsen the situation and cause the death of her husband. This shows that women are very protective and take important lifesaving decisions for men.

They also contribute to help their husband at work and on the farm. When Ogea's parents are late for their harvesting and have invited people for help, Nwabata has also played her feminine role. She cooks various foods for the workers for motivation to carry out the work to save the crops from spoiling in the farm:

The harvest season came, Ogea's parents were late in harvesting their crops. Her father was ill and her mother was heavy with child, the children were too small to be of much use to them. So they had to send for relatives who with friends helped them with the yams. Ogea's mother was very busy. She had to cook for the men who had come to help them to harvest their yams. In the morning she boiled yam in a big pot for them and brought palm oil in which plenty of pepper and salt had been added, to the workers for breakfast. In the afternoon she pounded huge piles of fufu for them and as she prepared the fufu, her husband went to the river with his net to catch fish for the afternoon meal, Ogea's mother did this for several days until all the yams were harvested (Nwapa 1966: 91).

A cursory analysis of this passage shows that women contribute to their husband's economic activities. The role Nwabata plays here in the absence of her husband is very significant. Providing food and drink on such an occasion is very motivating and fuels the work power. It is known that with an empty stomach, farm workers cannot have the necessary energy for the strain of their farming. Nwosu is sick for a long time and this can destroy all the work he has spent time doing on his farm. But, as his companion is there, all is done. The wife has replaced her husband and conducted the activities successfully. Woman's presence by a man's side is of a great importance. The saying which stipulates that "women are men's half" is not an overstatement because in the current context, we can conclude that women help their husband increase the family income.

At last, women are able to sacrifice all for the welfare of their partner. On behalf of the honour, dignity and the social position of their husband, women are capable of taking another wife for their men. All they want is to make their husband happy and great. For example, Efuru negotiates Nkoyeni Eneke's hand for her husband, Eneberi. This union has been blessed with

the birth of a bouncing baby boy (Nwapa 1966: 206). All these selfless attitudes are expressed by women to value their men and improve their image within a society whereby men's image builds and shapes their wives' respectability.

EDUCATORS OF CHILDREN AND SOCIETY

The important function of the children's education is entrusted to women in addition to all the roles that they play in the household. Women in Africa contribute to a large extent to the education of the progenies. According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, an educator is "a person whose job is to teach or educate people" (Hornby 2010: 468). It is also "a person who is an expert in the theories and methods of education" (Hornby 2010: 468). Mothers have good experience and managerial skills in giving children the basic knowledge they need to assimilate into society. The great role women play in the education of children is highlighted here by Mohammed, the Somali poet who praises women and mothers in his artistic masterpiece:

Mother! Without you
It would have been impossible to utter the alphabet
Mother! Without you
It would have been impossible to learn how to speak
A child deprived of your care,
Sweet lullaby
And soft touches
Would not grow up.
Mother! You are the source of love
The epitome of kindness. (Mohammed 2003: 102)

This quotation backs up the representation of women according to Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa regarding the field of education. In this role, women give children the right tools they need to become full adults. This role of teaching children moral practices, and investing one's wholeness in it, are highly stressed in both of the novels under study.

Women, particularly mothers, have a lot of responsibilities in African societies. They worry about the future life of their children and keep them in mind as far as their education is concerned. Nnu Ego tells her elder son, Oshia, that he will attend classes like all other Ibuza children in towns. At the moment, they are going through a financial difficulty that is preventing Nnu Ego from sending him to school; but when money comes, he will go to school. The intradiegetic narrator tells her beloved son: "[...] don't worry son. When we have money you'll go to school like the other children. All Ibuza people in this town send their boys to school. Why should you be the exception? Do you know that you're the most handsome of them all?" (Emecheta 1979: 110). Nnu Ego, through those words, thinks strongly that her elder son Oshia should go to school. This role is normally the one of men. It is men's responsibility to send their children to school in a patriarchal setting. But, here, it is a woman who is worried because her son is at home. Her ambition is to bring up a fulfilled son, a child of good stock.

This image that Emecheta wants to paint of women in Africa is not limited to a son's education. She also shows how girls are trained by their mothers to become good women and wives later on. Contrasting with the fact that in modern society boys and girls are expected to do the same

things and claim equality, Nnu Ego as a traditional woman and mother, tries to separate the responsibilities of girls from those of the boys. For her (Nnu Ego), girls should learn to do the household chores and boys should be at school or on the farm. And she is strict on the principles even if the female children Taiwo and Kehinde do not agree with her. She does think that the role of caring for the house tasks is dedicated to girls. In that logic of teaching girls how to become good housewives, Nnu Ego wants her female children to stay with her at home to learn trading and domestic chores. As we can see, Nnu Ego does not want her female children to continue schooling because, to her, they are learning nothing there. Nnu Ego says: "they [the twins] will have to leave [school] and help me [Nnu Ego] in running the house and in my trade. If they are lucky, they too will go to school when your father returns. They do not need to stay long in school – only a year or two" (Emecheta 1979: 194). In this sense, Nnu Ego wants to train her daughters to become housewives like her. As a traditional mother, she knows that the first education that matters for female children is to teach them what she does and what she is.

Additionally, among the numerous reasons and motivations that lead mothers to give a special interest in their children's education, there is the image of women themselves. Children's attitude in the society, that they are expected to lead and develop, is often assessed to the quality of education they get from their mother. The good actions they perform show how good and educative their mother has been. "So Abby's mama, though a woman whom many righteous would frown upon their wives associating with, bought her way into respectability through her son, who was destined to become one of the leaders of the new Nigeria" (Emecheta 120). So women have the great responsibility to build good citizens and leaders for the future of society and the future of the coming generation. It is then mothers' duties not to fail in that mission, because their social respect and the society's appreciation of them depend on the way their sons behave in the society. It means that instilling good moral values in children and giving them formal education are also determinants on how women can be respected in their communities. In other words, a well-bred child entails a good and respectable mother. As a result, every woman needs to utilize her children to maintain a good image.

Mama Abby sacrifices a lot to educate her children. Contrary to Nnu Ego, Mama Abby inherits a lot of properties from her husband. This wise woman and mother unhesitatingly invests all she has on the children so that they could help her in her old age. "Her husband, Abby's father, was a European who had been in the Nigerian colonial service; he had gone home after Abby was born, leaving Mama Abby fairly well provided for. The wise woman saved all the money to use for her son's education" (Emecheta 1979: 110). For the education and future of her children, a mother can sell everything. With this education, children will be able to help their aging parents. A mother does not give priority to her present-day welfare, but to the future wellbeing of her children and herself. This perception of Emecheta is also Nwapa's as she gives her female characters the roles of educator.

Education as it is perceived in the context of this research, is not only children going to school. It is all that has to do with bringing up a child to become a good citizen in the future, a sociable person and somebody of good morality. When children are well-bred, the positive impacts are reflected in the community. And this role is part of what women do in society. An example of a well-educated child is a child who shows elders respect and obedience and who learns how to do household chores. Moreover, a well educated child is the one that does not wait for the adult to greet him or her firstly. He or she knows it is his or her moral responsibility to greet in the

first position adults with due respect. And all these social norms are taught to children by their mother. When Nkoyeni Eneke does not greet in the appropriate way, Ajanupu, Efuru's first husband's aunt, does not hesitate to admonish her:

[...] the girl greeted them in casual manner and passed. 'Come my daughter, why don't you greet people? Eh, Nkoyeni Eneke, why don't you greet your elders?' Ajanupu looked offended 'Ewo-o, mother, I didn't know it was you'

'You must greet your elders, my daughter. I know your mother well. So, when you see me next time, greet me. There is nothing in greeting. How is your mother?

'She is well.'

'Greet her for me. Tell her Ajanupu sent greetings [...]' (Nwapa 1966: 179-80).

Through this short conversation, it can be said that greeting is a moral principle and a cardinal value that Ajanupu is trying to instil into Nkoyeni Eneke. She makes the reproach on the spot because she knows it is her role as a mother and a member of the community to educate and put every child of the society in the right way when anyone of them goes astray. In addition to this aspect, cooking is also another art all children should learn when they are still living with their parents or a tutor.

The acquisition of knowledge in domestic tasks is all the more important because a child cannot remain a child forever. He or she will become adult and will need to be able to do certain things for himself or herself. If it is a female child, when she is mature, she will get married and her first responsibility will be to care for the domestic chores – and, mainly, to cook for her husband. If Eneberi and his friends enjoy Efuru's meals, it is because in her girlhood, she has learned from her mother (Nwapa 1966: 125-26). With the time Ogea has spent with Efuru, she is also able to cook for the family. She has learnt the cookery art from her mistress, Efuru. Later, Ogea is able to cook meal for the family in the absence of Efuru who is out to collect her debts. The growing girl answers Omirima who wants to know where Efuru is. The extradiegetic narrator reports: "[...] She went to collect her debts,' Ogea replied. Ogea left to prepare the evening meal" (Nwapa 1966: 185). Ogea is going to prepare the evening meal which is of a great interest here. Indeed, the evening meal is the food that the whole family is going to eat before going to sleep. If she is not skilful in doing it, she will not be allowed to cook for everybody. In this, she is Efuru's apprentice and is taught how to cook. From this, her present family will profit, so will her future family after she is married. Such cooking skills are passed down from generation to generation thanks to the mothers who pass them over to their children.

In sum, women are skilled at instilling into children's brains, the good practices that make a society. When a female child's education for example is spoilt, it is the future generation that is affected. As the saying goes "like mother, like daughter". It means that a female child inherits and develops the same character traits like her mother. It is even taken into account for the choice of the marriage partner. In other words, a bad woman cannot bring up a good daughter. As such, children are their mother's image. Through a discussion about marrying Eneberi with another wife – because Efuru is unproductive – Amede, Eneberi's mother, rejects the girl that Efuru is contemplating for her husband. She refuses the proposal in the following way: "Eneberi my son will not marry the daughter of Eneke. There is murder in that family. There is curse in that family. Eneke is not a good woman, how can a bad woman [Eneke's mother] have a good daughter? We shall look somewhere else for a wife for Eneberi. There are many girls in town"

(Nwapa 1966: 180). We can infer from Amede's standpoint that children are seen through their parents' background. When a family has a good reputation, so is it for their children. So, what women do in terms of moral education in West African societies is priceless. They do a lot in keeping society standing. Without a sound education, children are lost and the society cannot stand.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we have shown that African women are showing another image of themselves through their enterprising and courageous characters. The fighting African women are reversing the opinion of the society towards them by being hard working and emerging in traditionally male realms. Furthermore, we have found out that in the quest of rebuilding good representation of women folk, women work hard like men to earn their lives, they play the protective and educative role that is in the power of men to do. Buchi Emecheta's and Flora Nwapa's characters like Nnu Ego, Adaku, Efuru and Nwabata in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Efuru* respectively have behaved in ways that rise the prestige of women. The novelists softly raise through those characters the ongoing role reversal in present day African societies. Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa aspire to a society in which women hold the positions they deserve, a society in which women can be considered full human beings capable of participating in the labour force, and able to play such an important role as protecting the family, and provide resources, and contributing to children's education. This means that a tight collaboration between men and women is necessary. Women characters in the two novels behave in African ways to restore their dignity and place in a patriarchal setting.

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