



EMPOWERING AFRICAN FEMALES THROUGH THE PORTRAYAL OF PROSPEROUS WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN FLORA NWAPA'S *EFURU* AND LOLA SHONEYIN'S *THE SECRET LIVES OF BABA SEGI'S WIVES*

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the portrayal of *Efuru* and *Iya Segi* as women entrepreneurs respectively in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010). These two African women writers from Nigeria strongly condemn the male chauvinistic organisation of African societies where women are nothing but naïve, second-rank and sexually addicted people, reproducers, mere commodities and men's appendage, just to name only a few. Hence the necessity to carry out this research work in order to unveil how female characters can regain power and blow up some of the patriarchal structures that prevent women from achieving their full potentials in their society. The methodology used in this study falls on descriptive and critical analysis of the selected novels applied to women's entrepreneurship in a patriarchal environment. As a matter of fact, relevant research works and books that are written on women's entrepreneurship, gender, feminism, women empowerment are used for the purpose of the analysis. Feminism is the theoretical framework of the present article. This paper posits that some writers show concern for the relegation of the African woman to subordination because they are not satisfied with some African male writers' misrepresentation of the African woman. For this reason, they decide to give proofs of the real role of the African woman in her community.

Keywords: Women entrepreneurs, male chauvinism, African societies, appendage, regain power.

RESUME

Cet article met en lumière le portrait d'*Efuru* et d'*Iya Segi* en tant que femmes entrepreneurs respectivement dans *Efuru* de Flora Nwapa (1966) et dans *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* de Lola Shoneyin (2010). Ces deux écrivaines africaines du Nigéria condamnent fermement l'organisation machiste des sociétés africaines où les femmes ne sont que des personnes naïves, de second rang et sexuellement dépendantes, des reproductrices, de simples marchandises et l'appendice des hommes, pour ne citer que quelques exemples. D'où la nécessité de mener ce travail de recherche afin de dévoiler

comment la critique postcoloniale offre les lentilles à travers lesquelles les personnages féminins peuvent reprendre le pouvoir, en utilisant les deux romans sélectionnés comme corpus. La méthodologie utilisée dans cette étude repose sur une analyse descriptive et critique des romans sélectionnés appliquée à l'entrepreneuriat féminin dans un environnement patriarcal. En fait, les travaux de recherche et les livres pertinents qui sont écrits sur l'entrepreneuriat féminin, le genre, le féminisme, l'autonomisation des femmes sont utilisés pour les besoins de l'analyse. Le féminisme sert de cadre théorique d'analyse au présent article. Cet article postule que certains écrivains se préoccupent de la relégation de la femme africaine à la subordination parce qu'ils ne sont pas satisfaits de la mauvaise représentation de la femme africaine par certains écrivains masculins africains. Pour cette raison, ils décident de donner des preuves du rôle réel de la femme africaine dans sa communauté.

Mots-clés : Femmes entrepreneurs, phallocratie, sociétés africaines, appendice, reprise du pouvoir.

INTRODUCTION

The financial autonomy of women, especially in Africa, is a big challenge. Indeed, the traditional roles of procreation and family housekeeping are entrusted to them so that whatever they undertake has to get the blessing of the family in general and that of the husband in particular. The husband can decide at any time to stop his wife's income-generating activity. Thus, writers have looked into the problem by questioning the conditions of women's emancipation and financial autonomy. This marginalization and refusal to create the conditions for women's emancipation have been so entrenched for decades that many neologisms have emerged such as emancipation, feminism, gender empowerment, etc. Many studies have been carried out on feminism and gender. But few studies have been carried out in terms of portraying women entrepreneurs. Hence the necessity to carry out this study with an intergenerational focus based on the novels of two women writers through their main female characters. This study intends therefore to raise the constraints of women's economic independence in a patriarchal society.

The main purpose of this study is to explore and analyse women's entrepreneurship as a means of emancipation in the selected novels. It also aims to show, through literary writings, that African women's entrepreneurship has existed even before colonisation, to explore and analyse the cultural and social environment in which these women are moving by pinpointing women's challenges. The methodology used in this study falls on descriptive and critical analysis of the selected novels applied to women entrepreneurship in a patriarchal environment. As a matter of fact, relevant research works and books that are written on women's entrepreneurship, gender, feminism, women empowerment are used for the purpose of the analysis. The theoretical framework of the present study is feminism which aims at valorising women's image. The paper is divided into three sections, namely *Efuru* and *Iya Segi* as women entrepreneurs, the motivations and constraints of *Efuru* and *Iya Segi* as

women entrepreneurs, and a comparative analysis of their entrepreneurship and personalities.

1. *Efuru* and *Iya Segi* as Women Entrepreneurs

Feminism is a theoretical tool which aims at valorising women's image. According to different research works, the main characteristics of women entrepreneurs are almost the same as men's: having a vision, knowing exactly one's goals and gathering the means to reach them with psychological and physical strengths such as determination, the sense of opportunity and anticipation. According to S. Hanson (2009):

Entrepreneurship has traditionally been associated with men and until recently women's businesses have largely been ignored in the literature on entrepreneurship. Businesses run by women have been considered insignificant because they are perceived as too small and typically located in sectors of the economy (services and retail) that are considered to contribute little to economic growth. In recent years, however, women's businesses have been growing more rapidly than men's businesses and setting up a business has become a major livelihood strategy for women around the world.

The first characteristic of *Efuru* as a woman entrepreneur is 'vision.' It is clear that she does not want to go to farm as shown in this quotation: "*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'" (Nwapa, 1966, p. 10). Feminism is at stake at this level. According to M. H. Abrahams (2005, p. 128), "feminist criticism is a distinctive and concerted approach to literature 'which' struggles for recognition of women's cultural roles and achievements and for women's social and political rights." What the reader may believe concerning *Efuru*'s starting resources or capital may be the inheritance from her mother or at least savings she has made before getting married to *Adizua*. After harvest, *Adizua* has almost brought nothing home because he is lazy and does not like farm work. This state of affairs is confirmed by the narrator as follows: "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" (Nwapa, 1966, p. 20). So, it can be inferred that *Efuru* finances her trade with the money brought from her parents' house. Although it is not clearly stated, with her husband's financial situation, this can likely be the origin of her starting trade resources. The reader may also think that she has borrowed money from elsewhere. However, this argument can be rejected, because the reader has read nowhere in the novel that debtors have asked *Efuru* to pay their money back. She can be qualified as an agribusiness woman. She knows that the first basic need in society is feeding; so, trading in such a domain will be beneficial for her and her family. Then she seizes each opportunity to

buy and sell farm produces: yams, groundnuts, corn, etc. The dry season is the season when people are in much need of corn, fishes, crayfish and these are some of the ingredients that women use to cook. So, Efuru has the sense of opportunity. She knows her assets, her skills, and 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 tradeswoman.

In the same vein, in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Iya Segi's first characteristic as a woman entrepreneur is 'vision.' It is clear that she wants to be rich, to be powerful and to get back to her village to rule supreme over it:

I will pile it on top of the money I have now and the heap will be as hefty as the hills of Idanre. Then, I will leave this city and return to my village. I will buy a big marble headstone for my mother. I will burn down her bungalow and build a four-storey building in its place. From the balcony, I will watch hawkers come and go. (Shoneyin, 2010, p. 105)

Iya Segi has not played a good role in the novel. She has learnt business since her teenage, and she knows her assets, her skills, her abilities in succeeding in trade as Efuru does. She wants to take revenge on life through her wealth. Contrary to Efuru, the origins of Iya Segi's capital are clearly revealed in the novel. She makes a lot of money by her own – from her *fufu* business – which her mother has given to Ishola, her best friend's son, who has eventually become her husband. It is important to highlight that Iya Segi has accepted to be married off to Ishola on purpose; on this score, Iya Segi's apparent submission to her husband rings like this: "I will follow you anywhere, my lord. 'I raised my buttocks and let him fill me again'. I would follow my money anywhere" (Shoneyin, 2010, p. 103). At this level, she has to do her best in order to get what she wants, meaning the financial resources to start her business again. For this reason, she has even given birth to her second child, a baby boy named Akin. She refers to this fact in these terms: "I use all my wisdom to force Baba Segi's hand. After giving birth to Akin, my second child, a son for that matter, I knew the ache in Baba Segi's balls would have subsided. That's when I made his head spin with worry" (Shoneyin, 2010, p. 73). The result of all Iya Segi's strategies is summed up in the sentence below uttered by Baba Segi: "If I permit you to do these things, will a man be able to sleep in his own house?" (Shoneyin, 2010, p. 74). Iya Segi herself unveils her scheme and unwavering resolves to get back the money her mother has given to Ishola, her future husband: "Within months, I informed him that wholesale sweets were no longer lucrative and that a wise woman had advised me to try selling cement [...]. That is how I started my business" (Shoneyin, 2010, p. 75).

Likewise, in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, Efuru's second characteristic as a woman entrepreneur is 'commitment'. Interestingly Efuru is a hard worker. For instance, after her circumcision, her mother-in-law wants her to feast for two months, but she objects to the idea certainly fearing idleness, inactivity and boredom in a festive

moment. The excerpt below is an illustration of this fact: "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" (Nwapa, 1966, p. 17).

The above excerpt clearly shows that Efuru's mother-in-law acknowledges that she is a hard-working woman. Rather than changing her mind after the mother-in-law has asked her to continue feasting, Efuru posits: "No mother, one month of confinement is enough. We have not got much money, and I want to start trading. Again, we have not paid the dowry yet. I shall go to market on Nkwo day" (Nwapa, 1966, pp. 17-18). In the same vein, in Lola Shoneyin's novel in 2010, Iya Segi's second feature as a woman entrepreneur is 'commitment'. Her education and, particularly, her mother's influence have raised in her the awareness that the only one way for a woman to be self-sufficient is to trust her own person, to avoid being a man's adjunct. Forcefully, Iya Segi's mother rules: "[...]. Listen to my words. Only a foolish woman leans heavily on a man's promises" (Shoneyin, 2010, p. 97). Because Iya Segi grows up in a setting and an environment where she does not get friends, this leads her to engage entirely in the business of her mother who specialises in *fufu* turning and thus becomes flourishing in *fufu* business too. Like the eponymous female character Efuru in Flora Nwapa's first novel, Iya Segi is a hard worker as she says of herself: "I had become quite adept at making *fufu* and like my mother, I had a stash of money under my mattress" (Shoneyin, 2010, p. 97). It is obvious that Iya Segi's dazzling success in *fufu* business buttresses the generation of profiled heroines fighting to prove their capability deconstructing the phallogocentric system that hinders the African woman from achieving her full potentials in society. Efuru's third characteristic as a woman entrepreneur is 'collaboration'. She believes that working together with her husband must be profitable for them; so, she associates with Adizua, her husband. Collaboration is important in business since as the saying goes: "two heads are better than one". The narrator in Nwapa's novel highlights such collaboration as follows:

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. When the yam trade was bad, they traded in dry fish and crayfish. It was in crayfish that they made their fortune (Nwapa, 1966, pp. 20-21).

It is crystal clear that Efuru proves her capability to work with her husband in the patriarchal society in which she lives thus showing that men and women need to join hands for the welfare of the community. On the contrary, as a woman entrepreneur, 'collaboration' is not Iya Segi's business. As a matter of fact, for Iya Segi in Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, 'domination' is the substitute for 'collaboration' and is rather her main characteristic. Interestingly, rather than helping her husband or collaborating with him to reinforce and do business together, she has

preferred to set up a business of her own with clear ideas and a secret goal. Each action done by Iya Segi is meticulously calculated and well planned. Her first strategy consists in sighing, sitting on bed, etc. When one strategy does not work, she tries the second one which is to use onions in order to feign crying. It is the third stratagem which has worked: satisfying her husband's libido. She has used this strategy because she knows that after the sexual act, the man being in his good mood will be more receptive and that she will succeed in arousing his interest. The following excerpt proves this fact:

One night after Baba Segi had climbed off me, I smeared my eyeballs with onion juice. Baba Segi couldn't take my sniveling; he sat up and turned on the light. 'What is it that has twisted your insides, my wife?' There were both weariness and earnestness in his voice.

'It is nothing, my lord. The time was not exactly right.'

'That is all you say! Nothing! Nothing! Yet you weep like a mourner!'

It is nothing. I cried silently so I would not wake my children in their cots.

Is it house?

I shook my head. Almost.

'Is it me? Is there something you want to do?' (Shoneyin, 2010, p. 73)

At this level, Iya Segi has noticed her husband's real concern and it has been the right moment to ask what she desires. Each word is measured and she knows how to take her husband: "My lord, my hands itch for work" (Shoneyin, 2010, p. 74). This sentence is full of sense. Iya Segi has become a specialist of *fufu* and makes a lot of money out of it. As a result, she has indulged in the building of cement shops in a number of markets as shown below:

'Work? Are your hands not full with the children you are taking care of?'

I dropped to my knee and told him of my wish to have a small stall where I could sell sweets wholesale, interact with other women and learn of new recipes, the best household detergents on the market, better ways to please a husband. I slipped it in when I noticed each blink weighed down his eyelids longer than the one before. 'I also want to attend driving school [...].'

I will be able to take my children to day-care without sweltering in the heat like poverty-stricken orphans.' [...]. When he'd sufficiently burrowed into his pillow with the back of his head, he asked, 'If I permit you to do these things, will a man be able to sleep in his own house?' [...].

Within months, I informed him that wholesale sweets were no longer lucrative and that a wise woman had advised me to try selling cement. A few weeks later, this same mysterious woman (who lived her life for her husband) advised me to extend my stall and build a proper shop. Before the year was out, I was talking of a second shop [...].

That is how I started my business. And that is how I learnt to drive [...].

I had shops in most of the major markets: Mokola, Dougbe, Eleyele, Sango, but I wanted to have one in Ojoo, too. (Shoneyin, 2010, pp. 74-75)

It appears that facing Baba Segi's reticence to allow Iya Segi to be financially independent, she has used her sex power to snatch what she wants from a rather selfish husband. Besides, Efuru's fourth trait as a woman entrepreneur is 'determination'. As a matter of fact, the eponymous character Efuru is a strong and strong-minded woman. One must think that her determination is due to the fact that

she is with her husband and they are doing business together; for sure this is a misjudgement as one can contend without being wrong that she has inherited this sense of business and trade from her parents. We can infer that Efuru has this ability in her blood and this statement is enhanced as follows:

[...]. How the woman agreed to marry him [Adizua] still remains a mystery to everybody.
'How? Is that woman from a very good family?'
'The daughter of Nwashike Ogene, the mighty man of valour. 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 (Nwapa, 1966, p. 11).

Furthermore, Efuru has inherited her beauty and her sense of trade from her mother too. Indeed, her mother is a successful businesswoman and an honest woman. Through the discussion between Efuru and her father, we learn a little bit about her mother physically and morally: "You see, your mother had similar dreams [...]. 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. She spent a lot of money for her age-group. Then she took titles" (Nwapa, 1966, pp. 149-50).

Determination is also one of Iya Segi's characteristics as a woman entrepreneur. She is strong and determined. From the beginning, she shows determination to find money at all costs. She has accepted to marry Baba Segi, and she has followed him not because she loves him but because her mother has taken all her money and given it to him as her future husband chosen for her. Referring to the circumstances of Baba Segi's marriage with Iya Segi, the narrator declares: "He marries his first wife, Iya Segi, out of the conspiracy between his mother and Iya Segi's mother" (Shoneyin, 2010, p. 100). Iya Segi has therefore decided to follow her money as shown in this excerpt:

My room had been ransacked and all my money was gone. My heart beat so loud that the sound filled my head. I couldn't scream lest demons rush out of the forests so I opened the door off my bedroom to report the tragedy. Mama was standing there filling up my doorway. 'It's all gone,' she said... 'I have given it to the man who will be your husband. He will need it to look after you.' (Shoneyin, 2010, p. 101)

As a result of what her mother has said earlier, Iya Segi concludes: "I would follow my money anywhere" (Shoneyin, 2010, p. 103). Thereafter, she is now in town after her marriage. After her second child, she decides to open a shop and uses once more her assets to get money from her husband by lying. The strategy has paid after making love with her husband:

I had to use all my wisdom to force Baba Segi's hand. After giving birth to Akin, my second child, a son for that matter, I knew the ache in Baba Segi's balls would have subsided. That's when I made his head spin with worry.

It started with the sighing. I would lie next to him in bed and sigh. He didn't seem to take notice so I'd sigh, sit up and shake my head hopelessly. I had to do this on several occasions before it finally occurred to Baba Segi that he might not be a perfect husband if his wife is saddened [...]. After a few weeks of this, I took to crying [...]. I had to use onions (Shoneyin, 2011, p. 73).

Likewise, Efuru has the characteristics of a real businesswoman by seizing opportunities and changing activities as soon as she notices that the market is becoming worse. Interestingly, the narrator in the eponymous novel points out that: "they [Efuru and her husband] 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" (Nwapa, 1966, p. 20). Taking risks is one of the major characteristics of businessmen and businesswomen. Efuru has accepted to brave the risks of crayfish trading: armed robbery and the possible capsizing of her canoe. She has gone for such a trip five times. It is also important to mention Efuru's sense of opportunity, perseverance, patience, and her good nose for a lucrative and flourishing business. Efuru's capability as a businesswoman is buttressed as follows: "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 Efuru and her husband a huge profit" (Nwapa, 1966, p. 20). The risks have paid off and they have become well off. However, it is worth mentioning that training is important in business. 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 spoilt it. It was by sheer luck that Efuru and her husband recovered their capital" (Nwapa, 1966, p. 21). As a matter of fact, training could have led Efuru to diversify her trade. This is unfortunately the characteristics of African women's business environment where as soon as a businesswoman flourishes in a given business, all the others rush up to the same business and then saturate the market instead of innovating. According to the law of the market and the law of supply and demand, prices collapse and then losses appear because the seller cannot even recover his or her capital. There is no gainsaying that Efuru is the one who gives instructions regarding the trading. She shows leadership. After the fifth trip, which is unsuccessful, she becomes desperate and seeks to give up the trips. The quotation below is an illustration:

'We won't go again,' she told her husband.

'Yes, we won't go again. But what are we going to do?'

'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. So we shall look for another thing to do, but we have to go to my father now that we have money. [...]. (Nwapa, 1966, p. 21)

Efuru masterminds the fish business insofar as her husband is not good at all at trading and is presented as a mere puppet on a string beside his wife as revealed in the following quotation:

Adizua was not good at trading. It was Efuru who was the brain behind the business. He knew this very well and so one night he spoke to Efuru. 'Efuru, 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.' (Nwapa, 1966, p. 36)

Efuru has a language of business which can come down to 'profit and capital'. In a conversation between Efuru and one of her friends, she says: "I shall get a good one. I want to help my husband. We have been losing much money" (Nwapa, 1966, p. 37).

'Success and decision-making' are other characteristics that the female Efuru has as a woman entrepreneur. That is why she is a very successful tradeswoman. Gilbert's mother refers to this fact as follows:

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 a 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. (Nwapa, 1966, p. 136)

The foregoing excerpt infers that although Efuru is ambitious, she has the sense of priority. Between building a house and buying a canoe, the choice is crystal clear for her as a methodical entrepreneur. Indeed, building a big and beautiful house is for prestige; for many people, it is a symbol of wealth showing off. However, the eponymous character Efuru is not in the dynamics of showing-off. Moreover, building a house is not an easy task because it demands a lot of money and the risks to stop at a given moment are great. After buying a canoe and hiring it out, Efuru and her new husband have not only earned more money, but they have also bought a second canoe and then after some period, they have started their building. Efuru has a prospective vision. She is ahead of her generation and her successive husbands, Adizua and Gilbert. She does not rush to do things. She is the brains of her joint business with her successive husbands. She does not impose herself or her opinion, but she gets her partners, Adizua or Gilbert, to understand her goal. She confirms her leadership which is to get the others to do what she wants on the one hand, and to bring out their qualities on the other hand. She has never complained by insulting Adizua as a lazy man or by insulting Gilbert.

'Success and decision-making' are also other characteristics of Iya Segi as a woman entrepreneur. The reader has to acknowledge Iya Segi's abilities to run her business. Indeed, Iya Segi has started with a small stall of wholesale of sweets, then, she has moved to the selling of cement which has become very profitable. As a matter of fact,

she has opened cement shops in the major markets. It means that she has a sense of business, she looks around her and guesses the needs of her counterparts. It also means that people are building houses and that her community is developing its economy and towns. Probably, the middle class is rising and the need for having houses is waxing. Iya Segi seizes this opportunity to build her empire. Like Efuru, Iya Segi is ambitious. She has the sense of organisation and method. One by one, she builds her houses methodically and strategically with her husband's 'consent'. She is ahead of her co-spouses and even of her husband. She does not rush to do things and she knows that she should have her husband by her side. It is only her husband's opinion which matters. Iya Segi's environment is not hostile, she is in a town where individualism reigns, so neighbors' opinion does not matter. On the contrary, seeing other women driving their cars and managing businesses has pushed her to go further.

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. The hope to make a positive change in the lives of others is one of the most important characteristics of women entrepreneurs, and it is counted as an important factor in their economic activities. Efuru has shown this sense of great generosity. In our current time, she may create an NGO and be qualified as a social entrepreneur. There is a situational irony in Efuru's attitude towards Adizua's mother in that as soon as her maid tells her that Adizua's mother is ill, Efuru rushes to her former mother-in-law's house as pointed out by the omniscient narrator in the eponymous novel: "Efuru took her wrappa, tied it quickly, and she and Ajanupu went as fast as possible to see Adizua's mother" (Nwapa, 1966, p. 155). It appears that although Adizua has hurt her and has deeply humiliated her, Efuru has shown compassion and deep concern about his sick mother despite their separation. So, Efuru has a sense of discernment; she sorts out the sheep from the goats. For her, Adizua's behaviour should not be a hindrance to help his mother who has been kind to her and considered her as her daughter. In turn, Efuru shows her respect and behaves as if she were her own daughter. Efuru inquires for Adizua's mother's state, and puts all the necessary means at her disposal and sends for the dibia because she is too weak to go to the doctor's. She has even sent her maid, Ogea, to take care of the sick woman: "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'" (Nwapa, 1966, p. 158). There are many cases where Efuru shows her sense of being useful to others: from lending money to many people to taking them to hospital for curing, the list is not exhaustive. For example, she has taken Nnona, the old woman, to hospital as shown in the excerpt below:

'I went to Akiti and returned only three days ago. I have not come out since because of my bad leg.'
'That leg of yours. So it still hurts you.'
'My daughter, it is still there. It will kill me. I have said it, this leg will kill me. Why it has not killed me all these years is as a mystery to me.'
'Sorry if you like, I can take you to the hospital. The doctor will look at it and he can do something for you.'
'Is it true? If you do that, my daughter, God will bless you.'
'We shall see what we can do for you when the doctor comes to the town. I am going. Let the day break.' (Nwapa, 1966, p. 123)

As a tender-hearted woman, Efuru brings Nnona to the doctor. Her leg is examined. The diagnosis is not good: "She had a bad sore and she allowed it to eat into the bones. I shall send her to the hospital where she will have an operation. So bring her any time next week and we shall see what we can do for her" (Nwapa, 1966, p. 129). Then, the narrator further says: "Nnona was overjoyed [...] she would need someone to cook for her since the hospital did not provide food for its patients. It was arranged and Efuru had to buy them a few things they needed, like yams, fish, pepper and salt. She paid the fare to Onicha and gave Nnona a few shillings as pocket-money" (Nwapa, 1966, p. 129). Efuru's sense of solidarity is beyond common actions. She not only advises the beneficiaries of her great heart but she also commits herself fully by paying visit to the needy, and by assisting them morally, financially and materially. Efuru also lends money to many people. For instance, she has lent money several times to her maid's parents who have not paid her back but cannot help coming to beg her. Even though Efuru feels vexed, she lends them money again and 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 (Nwapa, 1966, p. 171).

It turns out that Efuru is a benefactor who is concerned about the welfare of the people around her, even about those who do not pay back the debt they have contracted from her. Instead of sending Ogea's parents away, the situational irony is that Efuru decides to grant them another loan. Just after Ogea's parents, it is the turn of Old Nnona, the one Efuru has helped to find the cure for the leg:

'What brings you here this night?' 'Is it well?' For an answer, Nnona began to weep. '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 do.' [...]. Everyday, I go to ferry people across the lake. I come home with one shilling, and some good days with one shilling and sixpence. I put the money in a cigarette-tin and put it in my box. Yesterday, I came home with only ninepence [...]. I looked for the box, but it was

gone. I 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' [...].
'That will do,' Efuru said quietly and firmly. 'Wipe your eyes. How much was in the tin?'
'Fifteen shillings, sixpence and half penny.'
'Ogea, bring me that small box near my bed. Ogea brought the tin. Efuru opened it and brought out sixteen shillings. You take this. But if you want me to keep it for you, I shall do, so it is all yours' (Nwapa, 1966, pp. 171-72).

Efuru has not only solved Nnona's immediate problem, but she also makes sure that people are successful in the future. She is aware that if she does not help people in a sustainable way, they will continue asking her for all types of help. She has not only given money to Nnona, but she has also suggested keeping that money so that when she is ready to achieve her project of buying an old canoe, she will give it to her. Her behaviour is suspicious so much so that Efuru's maid, Ogea, speaks in these terms: "If you continue giving people money in this way, they will take advantage of your generosity and worry you all the more" (Nwapa, 1966, p. 172).

Efuru is indeed very generous. She knows that people may exaggerate. Nevertheless, she cannot help being good to them. It is in her nature to do good. She replies to her maid: "I know it very well but what can one do? It is difficult to deny these people anything" (Nwapa, 1966, p. 172).

She lends money to those who come for help without any interest and most of the time, refunding is 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" (Nwapa, 1966, p. 45). The reader can even draw a conclusion about a social business set by Efuru, like a company of microfinance with zero interest rate.

2. The Motivations and Constraints of Efuru and Iya Segi as Women Entrepreneurs

Women's motivations to start their businesses are rooted in wanting to achieve greater autonomy and control over work and family (Duberly and Carrigan, 2013), financial gains and flexibility (Williams, 2004) and avoiding unemployment (Dawson and Henley, 2012). Starting a business relates to their desire to having a more balanced life (Rehman and Roomi, 2012; McGowan *et al.*, 2011), and this balance is of greater concern to women than to men (Rothbard, 2001). In patriarchal societies, women are defined primarily through family roles (Brush *et al.*, 2009; Leung, 2011; Roomi *et al.*, 2018).

Every project or business starts with an idea or a challenge to take up. Efuru's background shows that she is from a brave, hardworking and successful family. She has been raised in an entrepreneurship environment. As a matter of fact, she has skills inherited from her background: her mother and father are parents of great

values, hard workers and successful people, each of them in his/her own business. So, she has to honour the blood of the family, and this could be the first motivation. The second motivation is that the bride price must be paid to her parents, this tradition must be fulfilled. Efuru has got married to a poor man, then she has to work to afford the bride price and to help him. When her father sends 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 is done" (Nwapa, 1966, p. 10). This assertion is not only a challenge to herself but also a duty as a daughter of a valuable man to honour. As such, after the circumcision, while other women such as her mother-in-law have stayed home feasting for three months, Efuru has spent just one month, because there is a challenge to fulfill: to fetch her bride price. When her mother-in-law asks her to stay and enjoy herself, she replies as follows: "No mother, one month of confinement is enough. We have not got much money, and I want to start trading. Again, we have not paid the dowry yet. I shall go to market on Nkwo day" (Nwapa, 1966, pp. 17-18). The environment of women entrepreneurs is a key factor of their success. When the environment is hostile and the woman is not strong enough, she can abandon her dreams and her projects. "The main focus of women's entrepreneurship research is on understanding the reasons why women start their own businesses" (Ratten and Tajeddini, 2018, p. 782). Petridou and Glaveli (2008) as quoted by Ratten and Tajeddini, (2018, p. 783) assert that there are pull and push factors influencing women entrepreneurs. On the one hand, pull factors normally focus on the need to earn money forcing women to start their own business. Other pull factors include boredom or wanting a change. On the other hand, push factors relate more to recognizing opportunities and then starting a business.

Efuru's marital life is strewn with sufferings because of her husband's bad behaviour. At the beginning, Adizua has been kind and deeply in love with Efuru. They trade together but Efuru is the brains of the activities so much so that when she stays at home after childbirth, Adizua is unable to manage the trade well and they start losing money. However, and surprisingly, he starts behaving distantly with his wife: "At this time, Adizua was missing many meals. He would return from the market, have his bath and disappear" (Nwapa, 1966, p. 50). Adizua's behaviour bothers and troubles Efuru a lot even though she is economically stable. She asks herself questions, even trying to find when she has hurt her husband:

At this time Adizua was missing many meals. He would return from the market, have his bath and disappear. Efuru would wait for him and when he did not return, she would eat without relish. Then she would go to bed very sad. At midnight, Adizua would come back and knock, Efuru would get up quickly and open the door. 'Have you returned my husband?'

'Yes.'

'Shall I bring food to you?'

'No, I am not hungry.'

Efuru would go to bed and think. 'What is wrong?' she would ask herself. 'How have I offended my husband? What am I going to do to win him back? Has he found another woman?'

These thoughts kept her awake all night. In the morning, she was very weak but she got up early all the same, did her housework and went to the market to buy and to sell. (Nwapa, 1966, p. 50)

As revealed in the above excerpt, Efuru is obviously confronted with sufferings, great sorrow and silence. After looking deeply into this excerpt, the reader can guess the state of Efuru's soul. She may be asking herself why she has almost run away from her father's home without his blessing and without following the normal traditional ways. She has followed her love against all the traditional norms and she cannot complain to anybody now. She has to keep it first to herself for long before deciding to seek advice from her father, her aunt-in-law and her mother-in-law. They have all asked her to be patient. Her husband has not touched her for nearly six months. "But how can I have another baby when for nearly six months my husband has not slept with me? How then can I be pregnant when I am and always will be a faithful wife?" (Nwapa, 1966, p. 53) The lack of her husband's affection disturbs her a lot. And here, the reader can see all her pains. Although she tries to show strength and courage outside, she weeps in her bedroom. Efuru also has to face alone her daughter's illness and later on the death of the baby girl.

Efuru plays a great role as a mother. How to cope with her role of mother and her trade? Most of the time, it is the crucial question so much so that some women give up their jobs and their dreams. How to find equilibrium between Efuru's different duties? Being a tradeswoman and the backbone of her couple, she has to see how to cope with all of this. As a matter of fact, in order to be able to concentrate herself when being at the market, Efuru has to take a maid to look after her baby when she is at the market: "When Efuru went to the market, Ogea took care of Ogonim, fed her and changed her dress. When she cried and her mother was long in coming home, she sang this lullaby to her" (Nwapa, 1966, p. 40). Efuru loves her child a lot, but she has to leave her at home with a good maid, which is not always the case for many women. Efuru's relationship with her family-in-law and neighbours has not been affected by her entrepreneurship. Efuru has a good relationship with Adizua's mother. As an answer to a question of her friend who would like to know if Efuru is a good daughter-in-law, she sharply says: "You cannot see two like her. She is much a nice girl. I like her very much; I am glad my son married her" (Nwapa, 1966, p. 16). In her second marriage with Gilbert, Efuru has shown the same commitment as she has had with Adizua:

The first year of Efuru's second marriage was a happy one. Gilbert loved and respected her. Efuru on the other hand knew the duties of a wife. She did not for one moment slack in her duties. She did not only take good care of her husband, she was sweet to her mother-in-law. She did not for one day give her cause to be dissatisfied with her. She would go to the market and buy kola-nuts for her. She would wash her clothes when they were dirty. She would cook for her and if she went to the market or to collect debts,

she would ask Ogea to cook for her. Occasionally, she would make nni oka and cook ogbono soup and take them to her. When she and Gilbert went to Ndoni to buy some fish or groundnuts for sale, and they made good profit, she would buy clothes for her. So Gilbert's mother considered herself lucky to have Efuru as her daughter-in-law. She confided in her and treated her as her own daughter (Nwapa, 1966, p. 136).

Among the different characteristics of successful women entrepreneurs, three ones occur from Efuru: the vision, the determination and the sense of being helpful to others. This third characteristic remains the predominant one in Efuru's life in general and particularly as an entrepreneur. It seems that the author deliberately uses Efuru to debunk the assumption that women are less enterprising as compared with men. Throughout the novel and despite Efuru'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 to 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 community's 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. Efuru's own mother is described as a respectful and successful woman.

Flora Nwapa does not objectify the single women she portrays. She presents women who, by the force of circumstances, have become single with the intention not necessarily of sending cultural shock waves through the world, but as a demonstration of how women, especially African women, have changed over time. Efuru does not choose to divorce, but she is abandoned by her husband, Adizua, for another woman. She calls on 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 (Nwapa, 1966, p. 88).

Efuru has the courage to leave her marriage because she knows that 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 abandons her, she is the one who comes up with brilliant ideas about the business. She is an independent-minded and hard-working woman and knows that she is going to survive at her father's homestead. Efuru is later on married for a second time to Gilbert (Eneberi), who eventually marries a young wife because Efuru cannot bear children. Efuru also chooses to leave this second marriage and be single because her husband is accusing her of adultery: "So here I am. I have ended where I began – in my father's house"

(Nwapa, 1966, p. 220). 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.

Efuru's success despite the difficulties that she has met invalidates the idea that a woman should have a man by her side in order to succeed. Efuru gains her self-respect and dignity while she is still married. As a married woman, she has never been dependent and for everything she wants to do, she always requires her husband's consent to show that respect, negotiation and dialogue are very important in her couple. Efuru's singleness is motivated by the fact that both of her marriages have failed. Her singleness is not a wilful one. She wants to be a wife and a mother; that is why she agrees to marry Eneberi, her second husband. Being an economically independent woman, she does not rebel against her people's customs. As a wife in a traditional society, she also enters upon a career of an entrepreneur.

Two traditions are in conflict in her life as a woman: that of a wife in a patriarchal society and that of an independent, brave and successful businesswoman. Although she obeys her traditions, at the end, her two successive husbands fail to see her whole value, so she ends up as a single woman. After all, Efuru succeeds as a single woman and strives for change and prosperity. She is a symbol of survival, who manages to find a way to escape the traditional patriarchal world by moving forward in her business, social and spiritual life. Nwapa uses the traditional environment as a symbol of oppression and dependence. In that environment, marriage is the norm, singleness is seen as a calamity, and bareness as a failure. However, the economic success, the entrepreneurship portrayed by Flora Nwapa through Efuru, can be seen as a representation of new beginnings where independent single women are welcomed, accepted and live without any guilt or shame. It is a symbol of freedom, self-achievement and self-assertion: "Men fear female power because they are aware that such power can break not only the bonds of customs, taboos and antiquated traditions to which women are chained, but also deals a heavy blow to that aged-old myth of male chauvinism" (L. Darmani, 2011, p. 80).

According to Børresen (1995, p. 171) as cited by Baloyi (2019, p. 5), "As a strategy to disempower women, patriarchy maintains the order of creation in that 'the male intellect rules over the female psyche and the distinction of their sexes, which for them (males), signifies that a woman is different from a man". In the present study, we are interested in Efuru and Iya Segi's entrepreneurship fiber, their motivations, their behaviour, the way they handle and run their business and how they manage it.

Iya Segi is a pillar of respectability in Baba Segi's house. She is a powerful and successful woman. Although she keeps her secret desire to meet the tomato-seller one day, she builds up her empire little by little through ruse and by creating several shops. Even, the reader discovers that Iya Segi has developed an intense passion for a flirtatious life in her youth. She proves to be a great and smart businesswoman with

eight shops of cement in different towns. Contrarily to *Efuru*, Iya Segi does not care for others. She is a real capitalist. Only profit matters for her. She too is an emancipated woman. The best analysis of Iya Segi's psychology and attitude appears in a thesis by Asante (2016) in these terms:

Iya Segi, the first wife, is a fat entrepreneurial woman who loves money more than nearly anything else. She is the real force behind the household. She got her strength from her mother's constant derision of the uselessness of men and this teaches her self-autonomy as she starts selling fufu in a small market business which brings her much money which she hides under her mattress and in pots. [...]. Her mind becomes so focused on making money that she has no time or desire to think of anything else: 'My fingers liked the feel of money. My eyes liked to see the piles of money swell. I worshipped money. Even when boys teased me over the flap of flesh that circled my neck, I was not bothered. I looked at them and sniggered, knowing their fathers' fathers could not have the fraction of the wealth I had accumulated' (p. 98).

The language, here, combines the sensual, seductive appeal of money ('feel', 'swell'), with the social status that wealth endows. Money replaces man and marriage as it were, becomes a substitute. Therefore, when Iya Segi is forced to marry Baba Segi for whom she feels no attraction and against her will, she decides to use her sexuality to take back control of her money which has made Baba Segi rich. Let's recall that her mother has given all her savings pile of money to Ishola (Baba Segi) so that he should better take care of her. Even though she does not particularly enjoy sexual intercourses with Baba Segi, she laments: "The pain in my belly spread through my back and up my neck to my ears" (Shoneyin, 2010, p. 103), she uses her body and sexuality to control her money and to manipulate her husband into allowing her to open some shops for herself.

For Iya Segi, money represents the path to freedom and self-determination, a life where she will one day be able to live as she has always wanted. Even if at the end of the novel this freedom has not materialised. She is better off living within the frame of her husband's life, the important qualification being that she is the woman who pulls the strings, manipulating a restricting situation towards more self-sustaining ends. Iya Segi's understanding of her role provides a good illustration of the concept of negro-feminism in the face of patriarchal control: "They [the co-spouses] know that I am the true provider. My husband only thinks he controls this household and I let him believe that he does. I want him to believe he does but I am the one who keeps this household together. Good things happen here because I allow them. I alone can approve vengeance and only I know how to bring calm" (Shoneyin, 2010, p. 104).

The emphatic 'I' in the above quotation underscores the position of power, authority and privilege that Iya Segi has negotiated for herself within the family which separates her from the other wives. "They are like humble maidservants who live for a kind pat on the head from the mother-of-the-home" (Shoneyin, 2010, p. 104) and Baba Segi who thinks he controls the household. Laré, dealing with this issue, posits:

For the patriarchy epitomized by the elders, man was born to lead and woman to follow, a system which is unfair. Patriarchy derives its force from tradition, custom, culture, even religion which are said to be unquestionable. Never should a woman rule when there is a man to do so. This principle has pervaded for years the Akan patriarchal societies and has conferred on men the leadership prerogative. (2015, p. 111)

In the above quotation, Laré denounces the subjugation that African women endure because of patriarchy which does not give them the chance to show what they are capable of in society. However, the two women, namely Efuru and Iya Segi, have overcome the demands of patriarchy through their self-assertion and abnegation. As Moolla (2017) puts it:

In what is possibly a satirical postcolonial allusion to Lady Chatterley, the apparently lesbian Iya Segi chooses the chauffeur, Taju, to impregnate her. Iya Segi may have accumulated wealth in the village like a man, and she may desire women, but she is obliged to marry and be impregnated by a man in order to have children. Her wealth allows the marriage to Ishola Alao to take place and her ingenuity allows her to be impregnated (p. 80).

The above-mentioned excerpt clearly shows that Iya Segi has defied the patriarchal norms prevailing in her community to become a successful woman entrepreneur.

3. A Comparative Analysis of Efuru and Iya Segi's Entrepreneurship and Personalities

3.1. Moral and Physical Comparison

Efuru and Iya Segi are two smart businesswomen but with different motivations, different approaches and different reactions. While Efuru appears to be a social businesswoman, Iya Segi has all the definitions of a pure capitalist for whom only profit matters and whose leitmotiv is her accumulated wealth. A lot of difference appears in comparing the two women but each of these businesswomen, in their own unique way, is flying the flag of African women in general, and of Nigeria in particular either at home or around the world. Efuru is physically and morally beautiful. She has been raised in a good and balanced family; so, she knows the place of her parents and neighbours. Her father and mother live together and they appear to have been very good parents to her. Everybody acknowledges her beauty and her commitment to work. She is loved in her environment. She always asks for advice and she is a faithful woman. Her physical assets have not pushed her to be disrespectful towards her elders and even towards children. But unfortunately, she cannot give birth to children and this is a wound for her because bareness is viewed as a failure in her environment although she is very successful in business.

Iya Segi is not beautiful but she is smart and very wise. She has unfortunately grown up with her mother who is very bitter towards men, thus causing her daughter to hold men in contempt. A town is a setting where individualism is a fact. So, as Iya Segi lives in a town, she does not care for the environment and just seizes some

opportunities. As far as Efuru is concerned, she manages her business in a village with the weight of traditions. The reader is facing two women entrepreneurs, each going through her own challenges and knowing how to cope with different situations in two different settings: village versus town. It is true that Efuru is very generous but the reader cannot judge Iya Segi because in the novel, there is no indication that someone has come and asked for money and she refuses to help. However, her wish to go back to her village can let the reader suspect that she is a miser: "From the balcony, I will watch hawkers come and go" (Shoneyin, 2010, p. 105) and above all she worships money, she likes feeling it on her body.

In the city people mind their own business and work hard to survive, others to fully be successful. A city is a symbolic space that embraces women's entrepreneurship and gives comfort to women as they do not feel intimidated by the custodians of tradition. Both authoresses show that it is possible for women to do business whatever the environment by using their own perception and personality.

3.2. The Origins of the Beginning Capital and the Type of Business Management

Each of the women has grown in an entrepreneurship environment and somehow has been impacted. We do not know exactly where Efuru has got her money but Iya Segi, has gathered through turning fufu and then getting her money back from her husband through ruse. The common point of both women is that they are all successful entrepreneurs. This fact implies the commitment of women whether they are in villages or towns in the development of their nations. Their strength should be saluted for the fact that they have grown in a patriarchal environment where men always want to be masters. Although Baba Segi lives in a town, he is not eager to see his wives work. He is a patriarch, a wealthy businessman, who has given everything to his wife, including expensive jewelry, clothes. However, Iya Segi has shown that she needs more to blossom.

Efuru is a traditional businesswoman, moving in an informal setting albeit with success. She has a good sixth sense, but the reader sees a soft businesswoman whose life is related to others' happiness. She gives money to people with no self-interest. Efuru can be considered according to the Meyers Briggs Type Inventory's four managerial types as the catalyst entrepreneur and leader: she is enthusiastic, good with people and she seeks approval from others. As for Iya Segi, she is a mixture of the traditionalist and visionary manager: practical, factual, realistic, and not focused on relationships, restless, creative, unfulfilled, and not likely to stick to the system. She is totally a contemporary businesswoman, taking into her hands everything without seeking anyone's approval, except Baba Segi, as a sort of moral guarantee. "She has eight cement shops in Ibadan alone" (Shoneyin, 2010, p. 104) which means a staff she manages and a list of suppliers to deal with. Till the end of the novel, it is said nowhere that she has a factory of cement but shops. So, the reader can guess that

she must be a tough negotiator in addition to her strict management. Both businesswomen know accountancy even though they are illiterate. This fact shows that intelligence is not synonymous with literacy.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is to explore and analyse women's entrepreneurship as a means of emancipation in the selected novels. It also aims to show, through literary writings, that the cultural and social environment in which these women are moving is harmful. The research work pinpoints women's challenges through the novels under study. It has dealt with three sections, namely *Efuru* and *Iya Segi* as women entrepreneurs, the motivations and constraints of *Efuru* and *Iya Segi* as women entrepreneurs, and a comparative analysis of their entrepreneurship and personalities. The study finds that men's subordination and domination of women should be eradicated so that women can be empowered in their communities. The two women novelists have used many narrative techniques to depict women's mentality versus men's mentality concerning women's business so as to convey their messages. They have succeeded in impacting their readership by drawing their readers' attention to the fact that the power of taboos and the weight of culture are still dominant in African societies and prevent women from fulfilling their potentials and being totally happy and economically independent. The findings of the study clearly show that women should be considered as equal partners in the process of development. Although entrepreneurship gives financial power, there remain the cultural barriers to raise and the good mindset to integrate in girls' and women's minds. As such, education remains the biggest tool to remove these barriers.

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