

# **NTELA**

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**Revue du Centre Universitaire de Recherche  
sur l'Afrique (CURA)**

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**Couverture :** Figure de chasseur bantou de l'Afrique centrale. Statuette collectée par le Laboratoire d'Anthropologie et d'Histoire (actuelle Faculté des Lettres, Arts et Sciences Humaines de l'Université Marien Ngouabi), entre les années 1975 et 1980. Dans les langues kongo de cette sous-région, le bon chasseur est justement appelé « *NTELA* ». Par métonymie, ce nom symbolise l'homme constamment animé par la quête des savoirs et des connaissances ; un scientifique qui cherche, qui trouve et qui partage ses trouvailles avec les autres au moyen de la publication.

Les opinions exprimées dans les différents textes publiés ici sont celles de leurs auteurs. Elles n'engagent nullement la Revue *NTELA*

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## **Le mot de la rédaction**

Le comité de rédaction de la revue *Ntela* est heureux de présenter dans cette livraison d'autres articles reçus pour le compte du numéro de décembre 2021. On le voit, il s'agit ici du second volume de ce deuxième numéro qui souligne le dynamisme de la recherche et de la diffusion des savoirs en Afrique, notamment dans l'espace académique CAMES. L'idée de faire deux volumes se justifie par la densité numérique et la diversité originelle des textes retenus par le comité des pairs consultés pour leur évaluation.

Les articles constituant le premier volume de ce numéro concernent trois disciplines des sciences humaines proches que sont l'histoire, la géographie et la philosophie. Ceux réunis dans ces colonnes concernent la sociologie, la psychologie, les sciences de l'éducation, la communication, la littérature, les sciences du langage et l'anglais. Ils viennent des pays comme le Bénin, la Côte d'Ivoire, la République du Congo et le Togo. L'honneur et le plaisir qui sont pour nous de publier, dans ce volume, les vingt-trois textes originaux venus d'horizons scientifiques divers nous confortent dans notre engagement de participer efficacement à la mission de diffuser les savoirs en Afrique et dans le reste du monde.

Le comité de rédaction félicite les auteurs et tous ceux qui ont collaboré dans la matérialisation de cette œuvre. Il leur souhaite, déjà, une bonne fin d'année, dans l'espoir que celle qui s'ouvre bientôt leur offre encore des perspectives meilleures. Les lecteurs de l'ensemble des textes publiés dans ce deuxième numéro sont encouragés à en faire bon usage et à participer, de la sorte, au développement de l'Afrique. La publication du troisième numéro de *Ntela* interviendra en juin 2022. C'est un rendez-vous ferme !

**La rédaction**



**IV. LITTÉRATURE, SCIENCES DU LANGAGE  
ET ANGLAIS**



## **Patriarchal System and Women's condition in Flora Nwapa's and Buchi Emecheta's works**

Flore DIATOULOU\*

Zéphirin BOKOTIABATO MOKOGNA\*\*

### **Abstract**

The objective of this article is to analyze the Igbo women's condition in Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa's novels. It also examines the way these women live that condition in a patriarchal system. In fact, what matters scientifically lies on the way Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta manage and succeed in re-creating women's condition in the selected novels. How does the patriarchal system impinge upon the lives of female characters in the novels on study? To achieve our purpose, this study requires the examination of feminist and sociological approaches. Resultingly, Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta present women in the Igbo culture as objects of cultural and social oppressions. They attempt to rebel against them, consciously or not, within their living space. But at the same time, they express the inability to totally reject the cultural and social backgrounds. They, therefore, stand at cross-roads, caught between tradition and modernity as a clash.

### **Keywords**

Patriarchy, women, condition, tradition, sex preference, education.

### **Résumé**

L'objectif de cet article est d'analyser la condition des femmes Igbos dans les romans de Buchi Emecheta et Flora Nwapa. Il examine aussi la manière dont ces femmes vivent cette condition dans un système patriarcal. En effet, ce qui pose problème scientifiquement s'étend sur la manière que Buchi Emecheta et Flora Nwapa arrivent et réussissent en recréant la condition des femmes dans les romans sélectionnés. Quel est l'impact du système patriarcal sur les vies des personnages femelles dans ces romans ? Pour accomplir notre but, cette étude fait recours aux

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approches féministes et sociologiques. En conséquence, les deux auteurs présentent les femmes dans une culture Igbo comme objets de l'oppression culturelle et sociale. Elles essayent de se rebeller consciemment ou non, vivant dans leur espace. Mais, en même temps elles expriment l'incapacité de totalement rejeter leur passé culturel et social. Elles se trouvent dans un rond-point où il y a un conflit entre la tradition et la modernité.

### **Mots-clés**

Patriarcat, femmes, condition, tradition, choix de sexe, éducation.

### **Introduction**

All over the world women are subjects of different circumstances. They experience their condition differently in their cultural context. In fact, African woman condition is the subject matter of several studies. Female writers such as Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and others, have given much thunder on this issue. These novelists attempt to recreate an Igbo community where women are insignificant. Indeed, they expose the way woman's nonentity is the root of women's plight. This shows how African creative writing in English has entered a phase of an inimitable representation of the new African women who are dissatisfied with the inhibiting cultural, natural or sexual roles assigned to them. In this effect, Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta try to demonstrate the way Igbo women's plight take root from cruel and dehumanized rules of patriarchy. Indeed, the two writers give the places in Congo Brazzaville, to Ossoba Etoa, Boris Gildas (2016) to work on *Woman's Position in Buchi Emecheta's Works*; helping to have reliable understanding of the female condition in the Igbo community. And, to Mokoko Akongo, Marain, (2017) to work on *Textual and Autofictional Analysis in Flora Nwapa's Fiction*; discussing issues like marriage, mammy water, motherhood and Nwapa's life.

Subsequently, our concern in this article is to analyze the Igbo women's condition and to examine the way these women live that condition in a patriarchal system through the characters in the novels of our corpus. They are Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of the Motherhood* and Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*.

So, what matters scientifically lies on the way Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta manage and succeed in re-creating women's condition in the selected novels? How does the patriarchal system impinge upon



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the lives of female characters in the novels on study? Is the depiction accurate? The answers to these questions, call for some hypotheses like:

- the similarity of the accounts by Nwapa and Emecheta is faithful to the Igbo female real life;
- the facts depicted by both writers remain the same and unchanged for their two generations. To achieve our purpose, this study requires the examination of feminist and sociological approaches. The feminist approach will help to examine the social and cultural aspects of the novels, especially for what those works reveal about the role, position, and influence of women. This article focuses on: patriarchy, woman's role, children sex-preference, and girls' education.

## **1. Patriarchy**

Over the years, women's roles in the society have remained issues of serious concern and debate in many fields of human life. In literature, female writers such as Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta have made it their main source of inspiration. In their novels, women are not only perceived as inferior to men but are marginalized and denied equal opportunities with men. They are identified as "lower gender", "weaker sex" "second class citizen", "second sex" and the "others". In many traditional African societies, and in the community represented by these authoresses, female identity is defined by the patriarchal perception which considers woman as a constructed subject. Accordingly, this investigates patriarchal system, especially, the way women suffer because of its severe laws. The question to be asked and answered here is: how do Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta reproduce the impacts of patriarchy on Igbo Women?

This study of patriarchal regime will shed light on our analysis of women's condition in the novels on study. In this respect, the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (2011:1050) defines the word "patriarchy" as «a form of social organization in which the father or eldest male is the head of the family and descent is reckoned through the male line around one older man who has control over the family members». Moreover, E. Oluwayomi (2013, p. 370) defines patriarchy in these terms:

Patriarchy is a form of sociological stratification that exalts the male gender over the female. It ultimately seeks to delineate the society among gender lines, thereby assigning certain roles and responsibilities to a particular gender, the male in this sense, and relegates the female gender to the background.

Marginalization, suppression, self-defacement, self-erasure, and injustice are but a few negative terms associated with such a social order.

This quotation presents patriarchy as a common feature of African societies. The Nigerian society is no exception. It is the base of gender discrimination. Accordingly, Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta create female characters which come to challenge two forms of patriarchy, one perpetuated by the father figure and the other by the husband. The challenge involves a process of metamorphosis in their search for individual personhood. In her examination of patriarchal beliefs about the difference between men and women and the laws and customs that govern marriage and motherhood, Simone de Beauvoir quoted by the critic L. Tyson (2006, p. 19) observes:

In a patriarchal society, men are considered essential subjects (independent selves with free will), while women are considered contingent beings (dependent beings controlled by circumstances). Men can act upon the world, change it, give it meaning, while women have meaning only in relation to men. Thus, women are defined not just in terms of their difference from men, but in terms of their inadequacy in comparison to men. The word woman, therefore, has the same implications as the word other. A woman is not a person in her own right. She is man's other: she is less than a man; she is a kind of alien in a man's world; she is not a fully developed human being the way a man is.

This thought from Simone De Beauvoir is not from the representation of the dominant father who has long governed the Nigerian literary canon. In *Things Fall Apart* (A. Chinua Achebe, 1958) Okonkwo reflects patriarchal dominance in his belief that a man's power and manhood lay in his ability to rule his women and children. This is the way he treats his family.

The second form of patriarchal dominance challenged is the husband-wife relationship. In the Igbo community, the father's assumed responsibility for his daughter is transferred to her husband who becomes her new figure of authority. Indeed, Nwapa and Emecheta's heroines do not totally accept their subjugated and silenced positions. They do not allow their lives to be governed by their husbands; instead they break away from their marital ties to pursue their ambition. Moreover, girls are denied the right to Western education. They are sent

in early marriages, while boys keep on going to school. When girls become women, they do not participate in male decision-taking. In addition, they are denied the right of children inheritance. In fact, children do not belong to their mothers, but to their fathers. When women lose their husband, they are given in marriage to one brother of the dead man, as if they were simple objects. Indeed, Nwapa and Emecheta criticize women's role in the Igbo community which is generally believed that it starts and ends with the running of the home, children bearing and rearing; and nothing more. Accordingly, they are presented as daughters, wives and mothers, and the different roles they have to perform are assigned to them by the community. Daughters have to help their mothers in the household chores. Sometimes, they have to help their mothers to run their trade. This portrayal of women in traditional roles is challenged by Flora Nwapa in *Efuru*.

In effect, *Efuru* is an industrious, independent woman who seeks a sense of agency for herself despite her childlessness, thus challenging patriarchal definitions of women as mothers. Nwapa's subsequent heroine Amaka, similarly challenges traditional notions in *One is Enough*. These two cases illustrate the roles Igbo women have to negotiate to transform social values and attitudes in their roles as daughters, wives and mothers. Yet, to their traditional roles, women are also expected to have good manners and be obedient towards their parents and their future husbands. At this point, Nnu Ego constantly reminded her twin daughters that they are girls and that they should behave accordingly. In the case a girl goes astray it will affect the whole family and its reputation. It is especially the mother's responsibility to make sure the girl remains chaste until her marriage.

However, if a girl does not restrain herself from sexual activity, it will be seemingly difficult for her and her sisters to marry well. It is a cause of great distress and shame. It is for this reason that Nnaife was so upset when Kehinde her daughter set on dating a neighboring a Yoruba's son who is Moslem. He is upset both for the reputation of the family and for the bride price which he would not draw any more. In fact, it is not customary to give the bride's parents any financial consolation what is called bride price in Yoruba tradition. Aware of this, Igbo girls were taught to understand that promiscuity brought great shame to the family and punishment accordingly. A severe beating or even a red hot pepper being put in their vagina was the sanction result of pre-marital intercourse. To avoid shame to him and to his family,

Nnaife in *The Joys of Motherhood* is willing to kill her daughter Kehinde as the following words read:

My daughter with a Yoruba husband, she is better dead-and with her the father of the man! Where are they'? His cutlass was still in the air, held high. No one dared come near him face to face (B. Emecheta, 1979, p. 209).

Unfortunately, no punishment was carried out because as they were living in the urban area of Lagos, the police were called immediately and Nnaife was put in jail. As daughters, they are taught how to be submissive to their parents, their family and to their community. They are thus prepared to be good wives and mothers. As wives they should be submissive, obedient and respectful to their husband; and as mothers they should be devoted to their children. These roles keep women in a state of inferiority.

To sum up, Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta present patriarchy as a suitable canon to oppress and discriminate women. These novelists expose not only the oppression and discrimination of their female characters, but also identify the need for social reform to remove this oppression. Thus, women are solely recognized as daughters, wives and mothers.

## **2. Women's Role**

Women's role was to seek fulfillment as wives and mothers. They could not have greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity. What they have to do is to learn how to catch a man and keep him, how to breast and feed children, act more feminine. They also learn that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights, independence and the opportunities that feminists fight for. However, this part examines both Nwapa and Emecheta women's role through the characters of the selective novels. Women's role is an issue widely discussed by Catherine Villanueva Gardner (2006, p. 38). She quotes Blackwell Antoinette Brown who holds that « Each sex is adapted to its particular function: women remain in the home, bear and raise children, while men work outside the home to support and provide for the material needs for the family».

Moreover, she argues that the division of labor within a family must follow this design of nature; (...) Essentially, Blackwell Antoinette Brown's theory on gender roles is something linked to the division of

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labour by sex. The *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender Men and Women in the World's Cultures* (2003, p. 19) writes: «The different social roles that men and women play are based on the sexual division of labour. (...) lead to difference in the behaviours of males and females». Indeed, in patriarchal communities, the division of labour is normative, with the women having the lower status or inferior role. However, Catherine Villanueva Gardner's approach is not totally respected by both Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta. Their female characters are not limited to remain at home to raise their offspring; but they move beyond. That is, they provide for material needs of their family. Thus, Efuru's, Nnu Ego's Amaka's and Aku-nna's roles spread to the role of breadwinners; but they are not limited to the sphere of home.

In fact, the gender roles are dismantled to a certain extent. This is reflected through the relationship between Nnu Ego and her husband Nnaife. Emecheta describes Nnaife as someone who is supposed to care for his family, but keeps getting more wives and abandons his children to his wife Nnu Ego to care for. Nnu Ego takes on the responsibility of her family, a role traditionally devoted to men. She earns money by trading and takes care of her children. On her side Nwapa describes Efuru as the family breadwinner. She is a prosperous woman who takes care of the family by trading while Adizua her husband is a poor farmer who is unable to pay the bride price without his wife's help. In spite of her husband's financial difficulties, Efuru helps him pay for her bride price. Thus, men's and women's roles are inversed and the culture which places the subordinate role on a woman becomes wrong. Adizua is also portrayed as a deserter, who is totally irresponsible. *One is Enough* provides the best illustration of women as not limited to the sphere of home:

Amaka no longer listened. It was she who bought the car and presented it to her husband. One thing she begged on him was that she should not say that she bought it. It was the second year of their marriage and Obiora's Volkswagen had had 'knocked engine' and there was no money to send it in for repairs (...). He told his friends when they came to see the car that his good wife had bought it (F. Nwapa, 1986, p. 15-16).

How to interpret this action from Amaka in a patriarchal community where women are limited in the sphere of home and seen as simple instrument for producing children? The answer is that, to limit women on the sphere of home is a glaring mistake. This reversal of roles

indicates that women are not set to take up tasks which put them in subservient position. This description of women's condition is realist. Nwapa and Emecheta try to show that Igbo women held trade in Nigeria of that time through their female characters' devotion on trading. They are recognized to be prosperous.

In the Igbo community, woman belongs to her husband; but at the death of her husband, she belongs to one of her brothers-in-law. Buchi Emecheta presents this fact in many of her novels. Thus, in *The Bride Price*, Ma Blackie belongs to Okwonko, her dead husband's brother. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Adaku becomes Nnaife's wife after her husband's death. This reality is pointed out by the narrator in *The Slave Girl* (1977, p. 113) as follows: «All her life a woman always belongs to some male. At birth, you were owned by your father and when you grew up, your new master who had paid something for you would control you». This quotation explains how woman belongs to two masters (father and husband) in relation to her age. In fact, the whole humanity has always believed that woman is narrow-minded, not capable of achieving great things. Accordingly, she is considered as weak and especially inferior to man. So, she must always live under the watch and care of a man who is a father, a brother, a husband.

To sum up, our analysis on women's inferiority has revealed that women's state of inferiority is not natural; it is constructed by men to settle their dominance on them. Thus, the secondary position of women in comparison with men is the resulting product of gender norms of society which values males more than females.

### **3. Children Sex Preference**

The issue of children sex preference is not a particularity of the Africans; it also exists in other continent cultures. People always think that the sex of a child determines his/her future. Accordingly, male children are preferred. In the Igbo community described by Nwapa and Emecheta, girls are less valued and their birth is not a joyful event, but rather slight disappointment for the parents, family and community as well. Accordingly, they are victims of men's discrimination and oppression. These writers' accounts of women condition reveal that women are discriminated and oppressed since birth and at their younger age. Nwapa and Emecheta are good examples of this observation. In fact, they are preoccupied by girl's condition within families. For them,

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the way female children are considered in Igbo community widely mirrors minor the status assigned to women.

However, the view that people have always preferred male children is a worldwide fact. If in some countries this need is weak, in the Igbo community, however, this desire is so strong; that a mother without boys is considered infertile even if she has many girls. Consequently, girls are considered as second-class babies. In this respect and in an interview by Adeola James (1990, p. 113-14), Flora Nwapa writes: «The oppression of women starts in the home. In our home today, we treat girls differently, and we treat boys as if they are kings». In fact, here Nwapa denounces discrimination of female children and criticizes the excessive importance given to boys. In *The Bride Price* and *The joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta expresses how all the fathers long for male children, especially the eldest child.

The first form of discrimination can be seen in the introduction of Aku-nna, the protagonist of *The Bride Price*. Her parents' preference of a male to a female child becomes the first oppressive notion against female gender. Aku-nna is born a female but in her environment a woman without a male child is despised by her people because of the superiority granted to male gender over their female counterpart. Consequently, she suffers rejection and oppression. The following quotation from Emecheta's autobiography *Head Above Water* is a good illustration:

Why, all said 'Ah, only a girl' to Alice Ogbanje Ojebeta and her husband Jeremy Nwabudike Emecheta; when a little girl was born to them was understandable. What trouble did she not cause as she ran out of her mother's belly in seven months when other children stayed nine? *Head Above Water* (1986, p. 9).

This reaction is also observable in *The Joys of Motherhood*:

When Nnaife returned in the evening and was told that his wife Nnu Ego had had two girls at the same time, he laughed loudly as he was wont to do when faced with an impossible situation. "Nnu Ego, what are these? Could you not have done better? Where will we all sleep eh? What will they eat? (B. Emecheta, 1979, p. 127).

A typical example is also apparent in this passage:

She was a girl who arrived when everyone was expecting and predicting a boy. So, since she was such a disappointment to her parents, to her immediate family, to her tribe, nobody thought of recording her birth she was so insignificant (B. Emecheta, 1974, p. 7).

Emecheta shows how the birth of a female baby is a slight disappointment. Accordingly, all the above quotations reinforce female babies' discrimination. At this level, the writer handles the worldwide issue of children sex preference. In fact, since immemorial times, people have always preferred baby boys. Subsequently, different reactions arise at the birth of a child. In this respect, Monica Vincent (1982, p. 7) writes: «Everyone wants a healthy baby – and nearly everyone wants a boy baby. “It’s a boy!” is a cry of joy. “It’s a girl” is only good news when there is already a son in the family». Two facts, significant in this quotation need to be analyzed: the presence of an exclamation point in the one hand, and its absence on the other hand. It appears when it is a boy who is born. This presence or lack of exclamation is frequent with meaning. A baby boy's birth is a promise of future happiness since a family chief is born. Thus, it expresses the accomplishment of a wish. On the contrary, it is not used when it is a girl who is born. This neutral attitude conveys that nothing has happened.

As a result, women take the direction which discriminates and oppresses them, while men take the one which makes them masters of women. In this thread of line, Nwapa and Emecheta describe the impact of this approach on women's life. In fact, in the Igbo community, children are strongly valued, but sons are visibly preferred to daughters. Ifemeje Sylvia Chika (2014, p. 23) who recognizes this fact writes: «Male sons are preferred under Igbo culture. The birth of a son into any Igbo family calls for a big celebration and jubilation, (...) ». In fact, women are taken for responsible of the sex of the child.

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Adaku who feels this discrimination on time sends her daughters to good schools. On the contrary, Nnu Ego understands it very late and cannot remedy the situation. So, she laments that “My only regret is that I did not have enough money to let the girls stay at school”. Subsequently, Nnu Ego's response to Nnaife in *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta (1979, p. 186) is a good initiative to value their daughters: «Men, all they are interested in were male babies to keep their names going. But did not a woman have to bear the female child who could later bear the sons? ».



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The preference for male children is also recognizable in *Efuru*. Appropriately, Amede is advised to persuade her son Gilbert to marry the mother of his child; because he is a boy:

But don't you think you should persuade your son to marry the mother of his son? A woman who gave birth to such a boy should be married. You don't know tomorrow. Nkoyeni won't be barren of course – she is pregnant already. But nobody knows whether she is going to have a girl or a boy. She might take the footsteps of her mother who had four girls and a boy (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 196).

This comes to reinforce the importance given to male children and decreases the need for female offspring. In addition, at home, the girl-child is practically forced to perform all the chores, for the simple reason that she is a girl and the place of a girl is in the kitchen. This stereotype role is of course traceable to the Igbo culture. Can this preference and strong longing for male children be justified? Actually, it is commonly believed that girls grow up, marry and join another family but boys stay and inherit their fathers' names and property, thus, continue the lineage of their families. The best illustration of this can be found in *The Joys of Motherhood*. The fact that Adaku offended Nnu Ego, a mother of boys is considered as an unforgivable sin:

Our life starts from immortality and ends in immortality. If Nnaife had been married to only you, you would have ended his life on this round of his visiting earth. I know you have children, but they are girls, who in a few years' time will go and help build another man's immortality (B. Emecheta, 1979, p. 166).

This quotation shows how the birth of a son can value his mother's identity. Therefore, it solidifies her link to the husband's family. For this reason, the birth of a son (especially the first son) is more eagerly anticipated than the birth of a daughter. Finally, our analysis of children sex preference has revealed that male children are more valued than female ones. The main reason for that is, the boys stay, inherit their fathers' names and property, and continue the lineage of their families. While girls marry and join another family. Consequently, mothers of daughters are discriminated and oppressed, while those of sons are "valued" and respected. However, this longing for male children is followed by several privileges for the boys, such as in the field of education.

#### 4. Girls' Education

Education has long been one of the fundamental topics discussed in literature. It is a set of activities which aim at developing human beings' physical, intellectual, moral spiritual and social potentialities with the view of ensuring their autonomy and development. The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (2011:1050) defines education as «the process of educating or being educated». Thus, each human being needs to receive moral and social instruction to lead his/her life on the earth. The personality difference by gender is also apparent in Nwapa's and Emecheta's characters. However, education in this study will be examined in its two dimensions: traditional and modern. Consequently, how do Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta reproduce the issues of education in the selected novels? Is the representation accurate?

On an attempt to apprehend the significance of education deeply, we cannot help thinking of some great Yoruba intellectuals like Ademola Kazeem Fayemi and O. C. Macaulay Adeyelu at the department of philosophy of Lagos State University in Nigeria who state:

Education for the traditional Yoruba, is a life-long process-any act or experience that has an integrative and formative effect on the mind, character, skills, physical and spiritual abilities of the individual to enable him/her live effectively and responsibly in the society (K. Fayemi and O. C. Macaulay Adeyelu, 2009, p. 44).

In other words, education can be seen as the process of cultural transmission and renewal; the process whereby the adult members of a society carefully guide the development of infants and young children, initiating them into the culture of the society. However, to educate children for what need? At this question, the response below is helpful:

The aims of education among the Nigerian societies were to discipline all the faculties of the individual, to bring out the best human quality in the child and to help the individual, at different stages, to become a useful member of society. To fail to achieve these aims was fail woefully in life (A. Fajana, 1966, p. 39).

In fact, society has always provided children with moral spiritual and social potentialities since the young age, to ensure their autonomy and development. For the Igbo people, education serves the primary purpose of transmitting traditions, cultures, beliefs, and customs from

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one generation to the next. Igbo traditional education aimed at training children to be good, honest, humble, courageous, sociable, hardworking, trustworthy, and respectful. Moreover, the purpose of the Igbo traditional education focuses on the Igbo oral tradition. Proverbs were so very often used as a means of education.

Nevertheless, and very often, boys and girls do not receive the same education. They are educated in accordance to their role in society. This is what is called personality differences by gender in the *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender, Men and Women in the World's cultures* (2003, p. 269). It gives the features of personality differences by gender:

Men are expected to be decisive outspoken, clever, ambitious and firm in the decisions and opinions. A weak man is one who bends to his wife's will and is unable to make his own decisions in life. Such men are ridiculed and not respected. Women on the other hand, are suspected to be patient, kind, modest, sweet-tempered and flexible (*Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender...*, 2003, p. 269).

The personality difference by gender is also apparent in Nwapa's and Emecheta's characters. This kind of education received by boys is different to girls'. The features of personality concerning girls described in the encyclopedia above seem similar. Of course, they are suspected to be patient, kind, modest, sweet-tempered and flexible. In addition to this, their traditional education consists in receiving feminine teachings such about politeness, submissiveness, devotion and quietness first in their family and community, then in their marriage:

Children, especially girls, were taught to be very useful very early in life, and this had its advantages. For instance, Adah learned very early to be responsible for herself. Nobody was interested in her for her own sake, only in the money she would fetch, the housework she could do and Adah, happy at being given this opportunity of survival... (B. Emecheta, 1974, p. 19).

To a large extent, girls are taught at a very young age that they would eventually marry and move to another household. Thus, they are raised to become wives of strangers and daughter-in-laws of another family. As mentioned previously, this is the main motive which leads Igbo people not to prefer female babies. Accordingly, the domestic chores rightly fall on them, while boys enjoy much freedom because they are

boys and should not indulge in female tasks. Every girl and boy grows up with this gender role consciousness so much, so that no one can even afford to move from this norm. This is exemplified in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979, p. 14) when Adaku asks her husband's son to fetch some water for the cooking: « Oshia, did you not hear me call you? Go and fetch some water, » Adaku repeated. (...) "I'm not going! I am a boy. Why should I help in the cooking? ».

In traditional African context, in general, the task such as helping in household, washing the laundry, fetching water and firewood, selling in the market place and others seem to be girls' tasks, not boys' ones. This biased vision of education gives rise to an awesome social syndrome bequeathed from one generation to another. Through the above quotations, Emecheta draws forcefully attention to a budding male assertive attitude captioned in a child's reaction to his mother or sister. The two boys' words are revealing enough. Despite the role of education as a central component of the good society, Emecheta presents the situation as if Igbo people did not tend to pay much attention to the issue of schooling. Buchi Emecheta (1976, p. 74) describes how in the past, people were very reluctant to send their sons to school: «school was where you send the family slave, (...), not a place for the children of a free man, though he knew their objection was really because they were not made of the stuff that school demanded». Similarly, in *The Slave Girl* (1977, p. 93) school was not a free born people affair: «They admitted that their son could not make head not tail of the new white's man learning, (...) ».

Emecheta also describes people's new attitude towards school after noticing that the slaves they sent to school had much money and power. At the time the Igbo understood that sending children to school is beneficial to them, to the family and to the whole community, they started to send their sons to the white man training. This sudden awareness on the benefits education can bring in children's lives is what Buchi Emecheta explains in *Second Class Citizen*, (1974, p. 9): «School-the Igbos never played with that! They were realizing fast that one's savior from poverty and disease was education. Every Igbo family saw to it that their children attended school».

It appears clearly that girls receive education in accordance to their future purposes. They need to learn how to deal with house chores, to keep a household, and take care of a husband and a family. Accordingly, modern education is useless for them; so that when they are given

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opportunity to attend school, it will be just to learn feminine duties. In this perspective, Nnu Ego, talking about her daughters' schooling says:

They only attended for a couple of years. We have Adim and Nnamdio to think of and, with Oshia's big school fees, we cannot afford fees for the twins. I think they can read a little. I personally do not regret it. They will be married in a few years. They can earn an added income by trading. The most important thing is for them to get good husbands... (B. Emecheta, 1979, p. 189).

Consequently, girls are hurriedly married away at a tender age. Besides, Nnu Ego recognizes the importance of education in the life of a girl as she says:

I am beginning to think that there may be future for educated women. I saw many young women teaching in schools. It would be really something for a woman to be able to earn some money monthly like a man... (B. Emecheta, 1979, p. 189).

Moreover, Adrien Huannou opines that girls destined to be men's servants, household and tradition keepers do not need to be sent to school. Accordingly, to spend money on female children's education was a sheer waste of money, since sooner or later they would be compelled to get married. Thus, any investment on them is seen as not profitable. That is why in *The Bride Price* (1976, p. 74), Okwonko voices his attitude in his response when his son, Iloba, asks him why he (Okwonko) should «waste money» on Aku-nna. This conception of girls' schooling as a "waste of money" is also perceptible in *Efuru*, in a conversation between Gilbert Eneberi and his friend Sunday:

Gilbert: 'It is a good thing you are sending her to school. But it is a waste sending them to school you know'. (...) 'Sometimes these girls disappoint one, you know?' 'How' asked Sunday. 'They get married before the end of their training and the money is wasted (F. Nwapa, 1966, p. 191-192).

Here, girls are depicted as having free access to school, in comparison to Emecheta's girls. Thus, Flora Nwapa, in *Efuru* (1966, p. 44) presents one of Ajanupa's daughter "who was about fourteen" as a schoolgirl. Another girl who attends school in the same novel is Nkoyemi Eneke (1966, p. 189): «She is in school. She is now in standard four. I shall send her to college if she does well». Besides,

because of the financial reason and gender bias, males are given priority to attend school.

### **Conclusion**

This analysis has revealed that for the reason of patrilineage, male children are strongly needed, while the birth of female offspring causes slight disappointment. In addition, school is banned to girls. This makes their access to education very difficult.

Our analysis has also revealed that the female characters' condition as inferior is not natural; it is men's construction to dominate on women. In the same way, patriarchy not only discriminates women, but also oppresses them, resulting in their dehumanization and objectification. This attitude towards women and girls conveys men's selfishness and chauvinism, through which they treat their own interest as the foundation of morality. So, this presentation of women's plight is a satire through which Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta denounce discriminatory practices and social norms of the patriarchal system. However, in front of their plight, women react in different ways leading to a clash between tradition and modernity.

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## **NTELA N° 02, Vol. 2, Juillet – Décembre 2021**

Le volume de textes reçus dans le cadre de cette livraison suggère à l'évidence, par l'originalité des sujets abordés, leur variété discursive et leur diversité originelle, que malgré les drames (pandémie de Covid-19, terrorisme, guerres asymétriques, changement climatique et ses effets pervers, etc.) auxquels notre monde actuel est confronté, les chercheurs africains restent déterminés à repousser le plus loin possible les frontières de la recherche. Aussi paradoxal que cela puisse paraître, ces situations anormales leur offrent de meilleures perspectives de réflexions savantes, dont les résultats permettent de mieux comprendre ce qu'est l'homme dans son essence. Ainsi, bravant la peur, les chercheurs améliorent leurs harmoniques afin de livrer au monde des éléments explicatifs de sa complexité. Ils montrent une résilience à toutes ces situations traumatisantes qu'ils exploitent à leur avantage, en tirant d'elles le maximum de ce qui constituent des champs de recherche.

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