

Gender Complexity in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Efuru*: An Intersectional Analysis within Colonial and Postcolonial Africa

Dr Fabrice Lié IKAPI, PhD
Postcolonial African Studies Laboratory
Cheikh Anta Diop University, Senegal

Abstract. This paper offers an intersectional analysis of gender complexity in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, within the contexts of colonial and postcolonial Africa. By analyzing the female protagonists, Nnu Ego and Efuru, this study explores how gender roles and expectations intersect with other axes of identity such as class, race, and culture. Drawing on intersectionality theory, the study explores the experiences of Nnu Ego and Efuru, considering the intersecting dynamics of gender, class, race, and colonial power structures.

Keywords: gender complexity, intersectionality, colonial Africa, postcolonial Africa

Introduction

Traditional African societies were characterized by strong gender roles, with clear expectations for men and women. In these societies, men were typically responsible for providing for their families, protecting their communities, and participating in political and religious activities. Women, on the other hand, were responsible for domestic work, child-rearing, and maintaining social relationships. Indeed, "*Women in Africa are generally responsible for reproductive work, such as taking care of the children, while both men and women undertake productive work.*" (KIPTOT 12) Similarly, "*Women are mainly responsible for their household's needs for food and fuel.*" (Ibid. p. 12)

However, the traditional gender roles prevalent in African societies underwent significant transformations due to the profound influence of colonialism and modernization. These external forces brought about substantial shifts, including the reversal of gender roles and the dismantling of long-held expectations. African literature serves as a valuable source of understanding, shedding light on the dynamic roles of men and women in traditional African societies, as well as the profound changes that unfolded in the wake of colonialism and its aftermath.

For example, Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* depicts the Igbo society of Nigeria before and after the arrival of Europeans. In the novel, men are expected to be strong and assertive, providing for their families through farming and trade. Women, on the other hand, are responsible for domestic work, child-rearing, and supporting their husbands. But, the arrival of Europeans leads to a breakdown of traditional gender roles, as men lose their economic and political power, and women are forced to take on new roles in the community.

Similarly, Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* depict a society in transition, where women are forced to adopt masculine traits and roles to survive and thrive in a changing society, while men are expected to take on more traditionally feminine roles. These gender role reversals challenge traditional notions of gender identity leading to confusion, conflict, and disorientation.

Statement of the Problem

In African societies, the conventional gender roles were firmly entrenched in cultural and social ideologies that delineated the obligations of males and females. Nonetheless, as a consequence of the influence of colonialism and modernization, these roles have experienced

noteworthy transformations. In some cases, women have become more assertive and have taken on traditionally male responsibility, while men have taken on more feminine roles. This shift has created challenges and tensions within these societies.

The novels, *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Efuru*, present a vivid picture of gender role reversals in postcolonial African societies. They critically analyze and explore the reasons behind these changes, and evaluate their impact on the lives of men and women, the family structure, and the wider society. Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* offers a glimpse into the lives of women in colonial Nigeria, portraying the struggles of a mother in the changing landscape of gender relations. The novel explores how women's emancipation during colonization led to a shift in gender stereotypes and how this shift affected the traditional family structure. It also examines the consequences of these changes on society at large.

Consistently, Nwapa's *Efuru* challenges traditional notions of femininity and gender norms in precolonial Ibo society. The novel explores the role of women as breadwinners, and the impact of gender role reversals on the family structure and the wider community. Through the character of Efuru, Nwapa highlights the strength, resilience, and resourcefulness of women in a society that undervalues their contributions and limits their opportunities for self-fulfillment.

Overall, both novels provide rich insights into the experiences of men and women in postcolonial African societies, and how their roles and expectations have shifted over time. They underscore the importance of gender equality and challenge traditional notions of gender roles, emphasizing the need for a more inclusive and equitable society.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study on gender issue or complexity in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* is to critically analyze the phenomenon of gender role reversals in postcolonial African societies. The study seeks to evaluate the reasons behind the masculinization of women and the feminization of men and the impact of these changes on the traditional gender expectations, family structure, and society at large.

In addition, the study's aim is to provide insights into the experiences of men and women in postcolonial African societies and highlight the need for gender equality. Furthermore, the objective is to participate in the growing body of literature on African feminist thought and postcolonial studies by exploring how African women writers have used their literary works to challenge the patriarchal system and promote gender equality. The study is relevant in contemporary society as it highlights the importance of gender equity and challenges traditional gender norms that often restrict opportunities and limit the full potential of individuals.

Hypothesis

This study analyzes the hypothesis that the gender complexity portrayed in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* subvert the traditional patriarchal structures and present a novel model for gender relations in postcolonial African societies.

Scope of the Study

The historical context of the two novels, *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Efuru*, is colonial and postcolonial Africa. The period of African decolonization began in the late 1940s, after World War II, and continued through the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. During this time, many African countries gained independence from European colonial powers, and African writers began to use their work to explore the social, political, and cultural changes taking place in their societies.

The Joys of Motherhood is set in colonial Nigeria and covers the period from the 1930s to the 1950s, a time of rapid change in Nigeria's social and political landscape. The novel explores the impact of colonialism on traditional African societies and the struggle of Nigerian women to reconcile traditional gender roles with the new opportunities and challenges brought about by colonialism.

Efuru is set in rural southeastern Nigeria in the 1930s, during the early years of British colonial rule. The novel depicts the lives of Igbo women and their experiences of marriage, motherhood, and economic independence in a patriarchal society. The historical context of *Efuru* reflects the early stages of colonialism in Nigeria and the tensions between traditional cultural practices and the influence of Western values and institutions.

Thus, the historical context of *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Efuru* is intertwined, as they are both set in the colonial and postcolonial era of Africa, where the effects of colonialism and the struggle for independence are still felt. The intermingling of the historical context of the two novels underscores the continuity of the issues faced by African societies and the need for ongoing critical engagement with them.

Theoretical Framework

A suitable theoretical framework is intersectionality theory within the field of postcolonial studies. Intersectionality theory recognizes that individuals belong to multiple social categories that intersect and overlap, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and nationality. This theory is particularly relevant in analyzing the complex interactions and power dynamics between different identities and their impact on social hierarchies and inequalities. Indeed, "*Intersectionality is about more than simply categorizing identity; it is about understanding the lived experiences and unique challenges faced by individuals who exist at the intersections of multiple systems of oppression.*" (Collins p. 222)

In the case of this study, intersectionality theory provides a lens through which to examine the intersection of gender roles, post colonialism, and African cultural traditions. The theory allows for a nuanced analysis of the multiple and overlapping factors that contribute to the feminization of men and masculinization of women in postcolonial African societies. It also helps to highlight the ways in which gender roles intersect with other social identities such as race, class, and culture, and how these intersections shape the experiences of individuals within these societies. In this respect, Angela Davis says: "*Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects.*" (Davis p. 225)

Thus, intersectionality theory enables to acknowledge the interconnected nature of systems of oppression and privilege, and how they shape the lives of women in *Efuru*'s colonial Ibo society and the challenges faced by women in *The Joys of Motherhood*. Through this theoretical framework, we gain insights into the ways in which gender roles, power dynamics, and societal expectations interact and impact women's lives, ultimately fostering a deeper appreciation for the resilience and struggles of women in their pursuit of self-fulfillment and equality.

Methodology

Studying the gender issue in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Efuru* through the lens of intersectionality theory in colonial and postcolonial Africa involves examining the historical and social context of colonial and postcolonial Africa to understand the specific colonial policies, cultural norms, and power dynamics that shaped gender roles and expectations during those periods. This analysis helps establish the backdrop against which the novels' narratives unfold. Then, the study applies an intersectional framework to map the various intersecting identities that influence characters' experiences considering factors such as gender and class to

comprehend how these intersecting identities shape the characters' roles, opportunities, and challenges within the colonial and postcolonial societies depicted in the novels.

In addition, focusing on the depiction of female characters and their experience in both novels, the study considers the similarities and differences across colonial and postcolonial contexts. The primary sources in this study are *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Efuru*. They help deepen the understanding of the lived experiences of women in those contexts.

Additionally, the study engages with relevant secondary sources, including scholarly articles, books, and critical analyses that focus on intersectionality, gender studies, and post colonialism in African literature to gain valuable insights into the complexities of gender issues within the colonial and postcolonial African contexts as depicted in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Efuru*.

Literature Review

In *The depiction of subjugation based on race and gender in The Joys of Motherhood*, Disha Mondal sheds light on the subjugation experienced due to race and gender, acknowledging the reality of this oppression and its hindrance to women's personal growth. To her, there is no joy of motherhood. However, in her exploration of Nnu Ego's tragic circumstances, Disha Mondal falls short of delving into the struggles women face in their quest for empowerment and the resulting effects on men's feminization.

Makgwale Hassel Monhabeng, Malesela Edward Montle, and Mphoto Johannes Mogoboya's feminist study, *The Representation of African Traditional Women in African Literature: A Feminist Study of Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood*, utilizes a qualitative approach rooted in feminist theory to advocate for gender equality, aiming to eradicate discrimination, oppression, and exploitation perpetuated by societal forces. However, while their emphasis lies on equality and scrutinizing power dynamics within relationships, their analysis falls short in addressing the theme of men's feminization and women's masculinization as depicted in Buchi Emecheta's novel, *The Joys of Motherhood*.

In the same vein, Célestin GBAGUIDI and Eric GOUDOU BIDA's paper, *Gender-based Violence in Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood*, focuses on men's violence against women in the novel. It highlights the passive position women often find themselves in when confronted with male chauvinism, as they adhere to traditional roles due to cultural values. While some African human rights activists and emancipated intellectuals, like Buchi Emecheta, courageously depict the mistreatment of African women, the paper lacks a comprehensive exploration of the nuanced gender complexities depicted in *The Joys of Motherhood*.

Velestin Gbaguidi's research, *Colonial Period in Africa and the Rise of New Classes of Women in Literature: A Study in Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood and Flora Nwapa's Efuru and Women are Different*, delves into the evolving status of African women during the colonial period. It examines the portrayal of courageous female characters who challenge patriarchal norms and assert their agency. While our study adopts an intersectional perspective on gender complexity, Gbaguidi's analysis employs deconstruction as a foundation to highlight the significance of education and women's participation in decision-making for the holistic development of African nations. His work serves as a valuable reference for our own paper.

Adegbite Tobalase, in *The Notion of Masculinity in Female Writings: A Study of Flora Nwapa's Efuru* investigates how Flora Nwapa unconsciously portrays masculinity while advocating feminism in her novel. The study analyzes various aspects of masculinity, employing the theoretical frameworks of feminism and masculinism. It serves as a valuable reference for our own analysis, which examines both *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Efuru*, using the intersectionality framework to understand gender complexity.

The cumulative body of research conducted on the complexities of gender dynamics in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* significantly contributes to our understanding of power relationships within the context of colonial and postcolonial Africa. These inquiries shed light on the subjugation experienced by women, resulting from their intersectional positioning within societal structures that perpetuate race and gender-based discrimination. While these analyses advocate for gender equality and challenge prevailing patriarchal norms, they occasionally have limited scope in fully addressing the multifaceted struggles encountered by women in their quest for empowerment, as well as the nuanced implications for the masculinization of men. However, they underscore the paramount importance of education and the active participation of women in decision-making processes, along with the portrayal of resilient female protagonists who assert agency and defy societal conventions. Collectively, these endeavors deepen our comprehension of the intricate gender dynamics prevalent in African literature, serving as invaluable resources for further exploration and analysis.

Understanding Colonial Africa's Societal Cultural Norms

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta writes: "and they all agreed that a woman without a child for her husband was a failed woman." (Emecheta 87) Here, she illustrates the cultural norm that defines a woman's worth based on her ability to fulfill her maternal role. It signifies the emphasis placed on motherhood as the primary measure of a woman's value, reinforcing traditional gender roles and limiting women's agency. This helps in comprehending the significance of patriarchal structures and the confinement of women to traditional roles.

In the same line, Flora Nwapa highlights that, back in colonial time, women's daily task was to look after their husbands and children. Such a perspective exposes the societal expectation imposed on women, restricting them to domestic roles and negating their aspirations beyond familial responsibilities and thus reflecting the pervasive cultural norm that confines women within the boundaries of their prescribed duties.

Indeed, both novels present female protagonists who navigate the challenges posed by societal expectations and norms. By analyzing the characters' experiences, actions, and aspirations, one discovers that one of the central themes in both novels is the tension between traditional gender roles and the desire for personal fulfillment and autonomy.

As a matter of fact, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego is expected to fulfill her role as a mother and wife, and her worth is measured by her ability to bear children and provide for her family. However, she yearns for more than this limited role, stating, "You mean you won't have to depend on men friends to do anything for you? "No, she replied. "I want to be a dignified single woman" (Emecheta, 170) Similarly, in *Efuru*, the main character struggles to balance her desire for love and companionship with the societal expectation that she should marry and have children. In fact, the author writes that "Efuru has run away to a young man." (Nwapa, 8) This quote captures a significant turning point in the narrative of the novel *Efuru*. This moment signals a departure from societal expectations and traditional norms for women. By choosing to run away to be with a young man, Efuru asserts her agency and challenges the constraints placed upon her. It expresses her desire for independence and personal fulfillment, even if it means defying societal norms. This is the perfect example of Efuru's journey of self-discovery and the exploration of unconventional paths, making it a pivotal moment for women's life experiences in the so-called patriarchal structure.

Again, When Emecheta writes "You are the senior wife of your husband; you are like a male friend to him. Your place is at his side, to supervise his younger wife. Have you ever heard of a complete woman without a husband? You have done your duty to your father, a man with such nobility of spirit it defied explanation. Now it is to your husband that you should go" (Emecheta, 158), she exposes the traditional or colonial power dynamics within marriage,

where men possess the authority to acquire additional wives, leaving women in vulnerable positions and perpetuating their subjugation.

It is for this reason that, she was not even to voice an opinion except to endorse her husband's views. A good example of this fact is sorted out when Efuru says: "*thank you, my husband. Now go and have your bath while I prepare some food for you to eat.*" (Nwapa, 10) Flora Nwapa, rejoining Buchi Emecheta, highlights the suppression of women's voices and their lack of agency in decision-making processes. It signifies the societal expectation for women to conform and subordinate their own thoughts and perspectives to those of their husbands. Indeed, Nwapa adds: "*the husband went off to have his bath in the stream. Efuru went to the kitchen to cook... When her husband came back from the stream she welcomed him and put the food before him. When he finished, Efuru asked him if he would go out to see his friends.*" (Nwapa, 10)

Exploring Gender Complexity

The experiences of the female protagonists in the two books under study are shaped by the intersection of gender, class, and race, highlighting the disparities and challenges they face in contrast to men. Indeed, both novels explore the societal expectations and limitations placed on women. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego's worth, as said earlier, is primarily determined by her ability to bear children and fulfill her role as a mother. Her worth and identity are deeply tied to her reproductive capacity. Similarly, in *Efuru*, societal norms and expectations confine Efuru to traditional gender roles, limiting her choices and agency. Both novels expose the pressures placed on women to conform to certain roles and behaviors.

Furthermore, the intersection of gender and class further complicates the experiences of the female protagonists. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego's lower-class status and poverty exacerbate the challenges she faces as a woman. Her economic struggles and the need to prioritize survival over personal aspirations reflect the impact of class on her experiences. Similarly, in *Efuru*, Efuru's middle-class status allows her some privileges and opportunities, but it also comes with its own set of expectations and limitations. Class disparities shape the options and opportunities available to the female protagonists, influencing their decisions and the challenges they encounter.

In addition, race also intersects with gender to shape the experiences of the female protagonists. As a matter of fact, in both novels, the protagonists belong to African societies where cultural and traditional norms play a significant role. The impact of race is particularly evident in the cultural expectations and practices imposed on women. It influences the standards of beauty, societal norms, and the dynamics of power within their respective communities. Indeed, Nwapa writes: "*her body was bare showing her beautiful breasts. No dress was worn when a young woman went to the market after a period of feasting. Her body was exposed so that the people saw how well her mother or her mother-in-law had cared for her. A woman who was not beautiful on that day, would never be beautiful in her life.*" (Nwapa, 18) In the same vein, one of Emecheta's characters emphasizes: "*I wish Nnu Ego had been born in our time. When we were young, men valued the type of beauty she has.*" (p.37)

In contrast, the male characters in the novels often benefit from patriarchal structures and societal norms. They have more freedom to pursue education, careers, and personal ambitions. Men in these narratives are often portrayed as having greater agency and control over their lives compared to the female protagonists. They are not bound by the same expectations and limitations imposed on women, allowing them to navigate their worlds with more freedom and autonomy.

Indeed, Emecheta writes: "*You see, you won't even allow yourself to be a woman. You are in the first weeks of motherhood, and all you can do is to think like a man, raising male issue for your father, just because he cannot do it himself*" (Emecheta, 24-25) Here, she

demonstrates the societal belief in male superiority and the perception of women as subordinate beings, highlighting the dominance of men in the patriarchal structure. In the same perspective, she adds: “*The arrival of her new twin daughters had a subduing effect upon Nnu Ego. She felt more inadequate than ever. Men, all they were interested in were male babies to keep their names going. But did not a woman have to bear the woman-child who would later bear the sons?*” (Emecheta, 186) Here is a clear preference for male children in the society depicted in the novel and the privileges of men in terms of inheritance and the continuation of family legacies.

Flora Nwapa follows Emecheta when she writes: “*Respect your husband and your husband’s people. Always greet them well. It costs nothing to be courteous to people*” (Nwapa, 135) Nwapa portrays the power imbalance between men and women, with men being the decision-makers and women expected to conform to societal norms and expectations. Additionally, she emphasizes the limited agency of women and the acceptance of male autonomy, highlighting the unequal power dynamics between men and women when she says: “*Women are nothing. He, my husband was asleep when the thieves came to the house. But I am only a woman. What can a woman do?*” (Nwapa, 178)

To conclude, the two authors illustrate the dominant role of men in the two novels, showcasing the societal structures and norms that grant men more freedom, agency, and control over their lives compared to the female protagonists. Men are portrayed as the primary actors who shape their destinies, while women are expected to conform to societal expectations and fulfill their roles within the patriarchal framework.

Power Dynamics and Resistance

Despite the power dynamics in the African patriarchal society, both novels depict instances of resistance and agency by the female protagonists. Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood* asserts her identity and desires, even in the face of societal pressures and hardships. Efuru in *Efuru* challenges traditional expectations, seeking fulfillment beyond marriage and motherhood. These acts of resistance showcase the characters’ determination to reclaim their agency and challenge oppressive structures.

And one way the novels highlight is the importance of female solidarity in resisting oppressive systems. Women support and uplift one another, forming networks of support and resistance. This solidarity is evident in the friendships and alliances formed by female characters such as Nnu Ego and her fellow market women in *The Joys of Motherhood* and Efuru’s relationships with other women in *Efuru*. Indeed, Emecheta write “*It was a group of early workers, market women and labourers on their way to the Ebute Ero market, all babbling in a kind of excitement.*” (Emecheta, Ibid., p. 59) This exemplifies the solidarity among market women, leading to their masculinization as they band together to support one another and navigate the challenges of their circumstances. Another example of solidarity is when she writes:

“*Nnu Ego soon slipped into this pattern of living, so much so that on the night she came into labour she made sure she had her evening market first. With her husband still asleep she slipped out and went to the cook’s wife next door. Between them they managed to stifle her labour cries, and Nnu Ego agonised for hours there in the back of their shared kitchen so as not to wake their sleeping husbands and the Madam in the main building. It was only after the baby was born that Nnaife would be woken from his masculine slumber*” (Emecheta, 53-54).

Along the same lines, Nwapa points that Efuru and the other women of her type could not stand alone. Indeed, because they were facing the same plight, they needed to lean on one another. She writes: “*Now that the wound had healed, she went out with other women who were circumcised like her*” (Nwapa, Ibid., p. 17)

Buchi Emecheta and Nwapa examine instances of resistance, agency, and challenges to patriarchal structures presented by the female characters in the novels. This includes their pursuit of education, assertion of autonomy, and attempts to redefine traditional gender roles. Indeed, Nwapa points that Efuru “*was among a handful of girls who went to school when fathers frowned at sending their daughters to school.*” (Nwapa, 96). Likewise, Nnu Ego was determined to send her children to school so that they would be modern children, emancipated from the rules of their father’s village. Nnu Ego, speaking to her husband Nnaife says: “*Nnu Ego went with Oshia to his new school in Warri.*” (Emecheta, 190) Here, the writer showcases a woman’s resistance to traditional norms and her determination to empower her children through education. Such a fact underlines the pursuit of agency and challenges the restrictive cultural expectations placed upon women. Again, this portrays a mother’s desire to instill gender equality in her children and defy societal gender norms. It represents a call for women’s empowerment and challenges the notion of inherent gender-based limitations.

Implications for Colonial and Postcolonial Africa

When exploring the complex issues of gender and its implications in colonial and postcolonial Africa, the novels *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta and *Efuru* by Flora expose how multiple aspects of identity, such as gender, race, and class, intersect and shape individuals’ experiences. Indeed, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta delves into the life of Nnu Ego, a Nigerian woman navigating the challenges of motherhood in the midst of colonial and postcolonial transformations. Emecheta shows how traditional gender roles and societal expectations limit women’s agency and contribute to their marginalization.

Additionally, Nnu Ego’s experiences are shaped not only by her gender but also by her economic status. She is caught between the rural traditions and urban modernity, and her poverty limits her choices. To support this fact, Nnu Ego husband says: “*So you see, Nnu Ego the daughter of Agbadi, that washing the white woman’s underclothes was what was able to keep us alive. Only now do you know its value, when even that is taken away from me.*” (Emecheta, 85). This passage reveals the feminization of African men in postcolonial Africa and the impact of colonialism on gender dynamics. Nnu Ego’s lamentation about washing the white woman’s underclothes underscores the emasculating effects of economic dependence and the loss of traditional roles for African men.

Indeed, the white woman’s underclothes symbolize the unequal power dynamics and the subservient position forced upon African men in the colonial context. Nnu Ego’s realization of the value of this task, which sustained their livelihood, reflects the profound impact of colonial economic structures on gender roles. Thus, the writer sheds light on the complexities of postcolonial gender dynamics, demonstrating how colonialism disrupted traditional gender norms and imposed a feminized identity upon African men, diminishing their agency and undermining their traditional roles and livelihoods.

Furthermore, Emecheta highlights the disparity in reproductive autonomy between the impoverished and the privileged, indicating the intersectional dimensions of gender and class in colonial and postcolonial Africa. At the same, it is for the husband a way to justify and accepts the mechanism of men feminization or ‘womenization’ in postcolonial Africa. Emecheta, substantiating this permanent social situation, adds: “*It was in this mood of expectancy that she spent the last few shillings she had in preparing Nnaife’s favourite dish, a thick and spicy corned-beef stew with peppers and tomatoes.*” (Emecheta, 85)

Similarly, Nwapa portrays the challenges Efuru encounters as she seeks to assert her independence and challenge gender norms. For example, when she was about to give birth, the midwife speaks to Efuru and says: “*you are a good child. Don’t cry. Don’t shout. If you cry or shout, you will continue shouting and crying each time you have a baby.*” (Nwapa, 31) Clearly, the instruction to not cry or shout implies that women are expected to bear the physical and

emotional burdens of childbirth without displaying signs of weakness or vulnerability. By enforcing stoicism and suppressing emotional expression. Society reinforces the notion that women must endure pain and hardship silently, perpetuating the stereotype of women as strong and resilient.

Additionally, Emecheta illustrates the socialization process that shapes women's behavior and reinforces gender roles. She suggests that expressing emotions or seeking support during childbirth is seen as a sign of weakness. Thus, she furthers reinforcing the masculine ideal of endurance and resilience. The pressure to conform to these expectations contributes to the masculinization of women, as they are encouraged to adopt traditionally masculine qualities such as strength, fortitude, and emotional restraint.

By examining this situation, we can recognize the ways in which societal norms and expectations contribute to the construction of gender identities, limiting women's ability to express themselves authentically and reinforcing rigid gender stereotypes. It emphasizes the importance of challenging and redefining gender roles to create a more inclusive and equitable society. For example, when Nwapa writes: "*we say that a woman has left her husband, but never say that a husband has left his wife. Wives leave husbands not the other way round.*" (Nwapa, p. 90) she illuminates the unequal power dynamics and gendered expectations within traditional patriarchal societies. As a matter of fact, Nwapa highlights the double standard that exists when it comes to the dissolution of marriages, placing the burden of responsibility solely on women. Here, the author of *Efuru* exposes the prevailing societal perception that women are the ones who are expected to remain faithful and committed, while men are exempt from such expectations.

Furthermore, Nwapa reveals the deeply ingrained gender biases and norms that perpetuate the idea of male dominance and female subservience in marital relationships. It reflects the unequal distribution of power and agency within traditional patriarchal structures, where women are often held accountable for the success or failure of a marriage, while men are rarely subjected to the same scrutiny. Consequently, Nwapa serves a reminder of the importance of promoting gender equity and dismantling harmful stereotypes that limit the autonomy and choices of women within marital contexts.

Conclusion

In both novels, *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Efuru*, the intersectional analysis helps reveal the complexities of gender in the colonial and postcolonial African context. These works emphasize the ways in which gender interacts with other social factors such as class, culture, race and sex, influencing women's experiences and opportunities. Through intersectional analysis, we gain a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of gender dynamics and the challenges faced by women in their pursuit of self-determination and agency in African societies.

The Joys of Motherhood Emecheta eloquently captures Nnu Ego's alienation, exemplifying the intersection of gender and societal norms, illustrating how women who deviate from prescribed roles face marginalization. In the same vein, *Efuru* examines the intersectionality of gender and culture, depicting the pressures faced by the protagonist to conform to traditional gender roles. Nwapa captures Efuru's struggle to challenge societal expectations and to illustrate the constraints placed on women's emotions and expressions.

Through an intersectional analysis of these novels, we gain a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted implications of gender complexity in colonial and postcolonial Africa. The works emphasize the intersecting influences of gender, class, and culture, illustrating the limitations imposed on women and their pursuit of self-determination.

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