

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

NEGOFEMINISM IN THE WORKS OF SELECTED ANGLOPHONE
AND FRANCOPHONE WOMEN NOVELISTS

BY

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DECLARATION

CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this University or elsewhere.

Candidate's Name: Danquah Grace Signature.....

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SUPERVISORS' DECLARATION

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this thesis were done in accordance with guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

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ABSTRACT

The portrayal of women in fictional works is still a contentious ground. Women authors have often bemoaned the portrayal of women in male-authored novels. Various scholars (Chukukere 1995; Kolawole, 1997; Fonchingong, 2006; Ohale 2010) have all argued that male-authored novels do not indeed portray a realistic picture of the African woman. This study looks at the depiction of women by women authors. The study adopts the Negofeminism theory to analyse the protagonists in four woman authored novels-*The Amputated Memory* by Werewere Liking, *Essential Encounters* by Therese Kuoh-Moukoury, *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa and *Changes; A Love Story* by Ama Ata Aidoo. The study has revealed that contrary to popular depictions and Eurocentric notions of the African woman, she remains both an empowered and liberated being. It has also revealed that women-authored novels as counter-narratives pulsate with a new reality which is that of correcting the fractured image of the woman as well as unfolding the politics of oppression. Furthermore the study has exposed the fact that manipulative power rested in the hands of women. It validates Chukwuma's (2006) and Ogunyemi (1996)'s claim about the complementary role of the woman as opposed to the perceived oppressive status. Lastly, the study has demonstrated that women writers are redefining new spaces in the margins of woman portraiture. This they have done by creating female characters that are as dynamic and mutable as their changing situations.

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DEDICATION

To my dearest brother Edward Asiamah Danquah: This is the man whose selfless contribution helped me come this far.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Traditional societies in pre-colonial times had spheres of power and influence for women in closely-knit organizations that helped them maintain a voice. Women held tremendous power in the traditional sphere and commanded great respect. Among the Igbos of Nigeria, for example, women are known to wield tremendous traditional power. Amadiume (1987) discusses the status of the women in Igbo society vis-à-vis the men. The focus of Amadiume's studies is the sinuous gender system of the Igbo people. Her investigation revealed that there is a marked difference between biological gender and social gender. So it was indeed possible for certain groups of women to assume the social roles of men. Hence women had been given the opportunity to attain wealth, political power and authority. Amadiume's study is significant because it debunks Western notions of African women as voiceless and beasts of burden.

This assertion of the woman as an empowered being is also supported by Nnaemeka (2004) who notes that this flexible permissible gender system allowed women "to assume positions of wealth, power, and authority which, under strict gender definition, would have been the preserve of men." (p. 357) This fact is contrary to popular opinions of women's suppression in African societies as well as popular depictions of women in literary works. Again Chinweizu (1990) distinguishes between male power and female power. He is of the view that in

traditional Igbo societies, like most patriarchal societies in West Africa, women are indeed a force to reckon with. He argues:

Generally then, whereas male power tends to be crude, confrontational and direct, female power tends to be subtle, manipulative and indirect. Whereas aggressiveness is the hallmark of male power, manoeuvre is the hallmark of female power. And where man is the great physical aggressor, woman is the great psychological maneuverer. From a male-entered point of view of what power is, it is easy to be misled into thinking that a female form of power does not exist at all; and even when female power is recognized, it is easy to dismiss it as power of an inferior type, just because it is not hard, aggressive or boastful like the highly visible male form. (Chinweizu 1990)

In as much as that may be true in pre-colonial societies, a lot changed with colonialism. Colonialism has its merits but its new culture of ascendancy through education, white-collar jobs and money-driven economy relegated women down the economic and social ladder. Men were favoured over women in the pursuit of education, and with the traditional structures gradually replaced with colonial administrative structures, men quickly gained dominance over women. One literary example of preference of boys over girls in terms of access to education is Tsitsi Dangarembga's first novel *Nervous Conditions* published in 1998. The protagonist, by virtue of her gender, had to struggle to see herself through school. She sums up her sentiments in the opening paragraph of the

novel: “I was not sorry when my brother died...” (1) This is because her brother, who had been given a collective identity in the novel, represents a stumbling block to her own education and personal development. Her own education could not have been possible if her brother had not died. Perhaps a much more vivid literary example can be seen in Emecheta’s *Joys of Motherhood*. The purpose of the wives in the novel, according to Nfah-Abbenyi, “...is to bear children and to maintain continuity in the family without which they have no place in society. They are nothing....” (10) It was the boys who were privileged to receive the white man’s education because they were the valuable offspring who ensured the immortality of the men. The state of the girls/women was summed up by Nwakusor, one of the characters: “...our life starts from immortality and ends in immortality...I know you have children, but they are only girls, who in a few years’ time will go and help build another man’s immortality....” (39) In light of this knowledge, Nnu Ego did not see the need to educate any of her daughters. This implies that as men got access to education, they inevitably ascended to positions of authority and affluence. The women on the other hand have to contend with a domestic life which left them totally dependent on the man.

Women’s education and subsequent ‘emancipation’ brought a change, exposure, awareness and the inevitable reaction which is the struggle for equality. Whereas women’s earlier powers in pre-colonial times were eroded by the advent of colonialism, new avenues were created from which women were not totally shut out. However they were denied equal access as the men. This led to women’s protest against the disparities created by the colonial structures.

Women's protest consists of activism, individually and in groups, the inferior status accorded them in society.

It must, however, be emphasized that pre-colonial African societies were oral societies. Women played significant roles as custodians of cultural lore and choice storytellers. Women were more than mere transmitters of folklore. They were producers and composers of lyrics in the genre that best suited their purpose. Barber (1991) discusses the active involvement of women in the performance of oriki which is a genre of Yoruba poetry. The book also touches on the power of expression that existed in pre-colonial African societies. In their autobiographies women writers such as Diallo, Aidoo, Bugul and Kuoh-Moukoury emphasize the crucial roles their mothers and grandmothers played as transmitters of orature. They all admit they have been profoundly influenced by their mothers.

Women's silence in the literary world could well be attributable to colonialism. Boys being favoured over girls in the quest for education mean that they take the lead in the literary world. Women are determined not to be silenced anymore. Writers like Liking, Nwapa, Kuoh-Moukoury and Aidoo have now come to occupy the place of significance their mothers occupied before them in ancient societies. Perhaps women taking to writing have been encouraged to an extent by Awa Thiam's urging in her book translated as *Speak Out, Black Sisters: Feminism and Oppression in Black Africa* (1978). The book states:

Black women have been silent for too long. Are they now beginning to find their voices? Are they claiming the right to

...speak for themselves? Is it not high time that they discovered their own voices, that _even if they are unused to speaking for themselves-they now take the floor, if only to say that they exist, that they are human beings-something that is not always immediately obvious-and that, as such they have a right to liberty, respect and dignity?” (11)

The ‘taking to writing’ by women writers then seems to be recognition and a response. In writing, they can bring up issues that threaten their existence. Ba’s statement in an interview with Harrell-Bond confirms the absolute necessity of writing. She states, “we cannot go forward without culture, without saying what we believe, without communicating with others, without making people think things. Books are a weapon, a peaceful weapon perhaps, but they are a weapon.” (1980, 209) Ba insists that women paint a more realistic picture of their societies; one that challenges patriarchal establishment’s predetermined hierarchies. Thus writing becomes a weapon which African women writers are determined to master and make it serve their own end. In this vein, Nfah-Abbenyi explains the trend of women’s writing in Africa and what has informed that trend. She argues that “...African women writers have reclaimed and reaffirmed the anteriority of an African feminism, one that their maternal ancestors have relied on for millennia, a feminism that has grounded and continues to ground their daily lived experiences, one that is open to learning from the new global agenda of feminism(s) but one that can also share with and teach a (Eurocentric) feminist movement a few things as well.” (Nfah-Abbenyi

148) One of the concerns of African women writers seems to be an interrogation of their gendered existence. In their literary creations, they create female characters who challenge the existing gender system. It is possible then to discern a pattern of collective activism on the part of the female characters in their writing.

The works of women writers has been filled with images of women who wish to remain independent as well as autonomous. These breed of African women writers were “determined to entrench feministic sensibilities in the African novel by casting the female character in a new light and in ways hitherto unknown”. (Ohale 2010)

Arndt (2002) argues that the first stage of women’s writing could be termed reformist. In these reformist writings, women are portrayed as conforming to existing patriarchal structures and do not seek to aggressively dismantle the existing traditional models. They subtly negotiate and articulate their needs. Assertion of rights by the female characters in the literary texts is not radical and there is the expression of hope that the man, who is seen as an individual and therefore not having a collective identity, is capable of change. These types of writings include Nwapa’s *Efuru* and Kuoh-Moukoury’s *Essential Encounters*. These reformist writers portray a message of hope that it is possible for the man and by extension the patriarchal society to embrace the woman as a worthy partner in economic, political and social development. These reformist writings do not see an enemy in the man but the patriarchal system which tends

to undermine women's capabilities. The characters in this work represent strong women in traditional African societies who are more than able to hold their own.

The second stage of women's writing is the transformative writings where the man is given a collective identity and is capable of change. The women are much more assertive and consider themselves worthy opponents of the men. Such writings include Aidoo's *Anowa* and Nwapa's *One is Enough*. Such literary texts also portray the character of an ideal man who is either transformed during the course of story to have respect for women and what they stand for or they are destroyed in the end if they offer resistance. The third stage of writing is termed radical feminist writings. In these literary texts there is an aggressive attempt on the part of the women to overthrow the repressive traditional models which threaten their self-actualization. The man is given a collective identity and is solely held responsible for all forms of repression. Ironically, these forms of writings do not take into account woman to woman suppression as all such forms are blamed on the man. Such radical writers include Saadawi's *God Dies by the Nile* and Aidoo's *Changes: A love Story*. Perhaps these evolving trends in African women's writings reflect the changing images of female identity in society and the female characters underscore the artistic agenda of these women writers.

Assumptions Underlying the Study

The basic assumption underlying this study is that there is a form of feminism prevalent in Africa which is quite distinct from white Western Radical Feminism. This form of feminism can be termed Negofeminism. This is what

Nnaemeka meant when she argued that “no ego feminism” as well as “feminism of negotiation” is what characterises women activism in most African societies. The Study seeks to prove through the selected literary works that female characters who are Negofeminist are better placed to negotiate fulfilment. Nnaemeka (2004)

Statement of the Problem

Interestingly Chemain-Degrange’s *Emancipation feminine et roman africain* (1980) study does not contain a single chapter devoted to an African woman writer. This extensive study does not list a single African woman writer in the bibliography. Perhaps a better description of the study would be women as seen in male eyes. Women writers writing about women’s experiences was not a vibrant area of study. It was not until the 1990s that interest in women writers began to emerge. In West Africa, women writers in both Anglophone and Francophone countries are writing out of their lived experiences. According to Ohale (2010), “The dearth of female presence in the early novels has been taken up by feminist critics for the obvious disparity in the delineation of male-female relations” (5) One area of study that has not received the needed intellectual attention is characterisation as well as character analysis in the works of women authors. The question that remains to be addressed is how do female writers portray their female characters to reflect their changing status in society? The problem that clearly emerges then is what these women authors seek to achieve by casting their characters in a particular light. In the face of this observation this

study seeks to examine how the selected women writers have created and maintained a strong female presence in their works.

The bulk of the available literature focuses mainly on the thematic concerns of women writers. (Chukukere 1995; Ohale 2010; Chukwuma 2006) Most of the analysis adopts a general feminist analysis of literary works; there seems to be a neglect of the application of the “Negofeminism” theory to literary texts, and this research intends to fill that gap in scholarship. It will explore how the characters’ portrayal betrays their Negofeminist stance. The study would again focus on character evolvment as well as development over time.

Research Questions

The research will be guided by the following questions:

- How do Francophone and Anglophone women writers portray their female characters?
- How do the female characters evolve and what accounts for the changes in the female characters?
- What deductions can be made from the changing roles and status of the characters?

Significance of the Study

Though much work has already been done with regards to characterisation in general, not much research has been geared towards the comparative study of characterisation by Francophone and Anglophone women writers. The significance of this study lies in the fact that it explores the casting of female characters in Anglophone and Francophone literary works. It will also

show how probably internal and external factors like traditional models and colonization have helped shape these patterns of female character portrayal. In addition the study will also bring to the fore through the selected literary works, how women in these parts of Africa are negotiating for avenues to articulate their needs.

Drawing on both the “Negofeminism” theory as propounded by Nnaemeka and the Post-colonial theory, the study seeks to explain the factors that underscore women activism in these countries. The use of this theoretical framework will help confirm or debunk previous assumptions held about African women. The obvious significance of this study then is to bring to light the dynamics of representation employed by Anglophone and Francophone women writers. Again the study is significant because it will also bring to the fore, the motives behind the portrayal of the complexity of the female character.

Delimitation of the Study

The study mainly focuses on the works of Anglophone and Francophone women writers; it will explore the actions exhibited by the major female characters in these works. The study remains an examination of the portrayal of women by women.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the images of women in Anglophone and Francophone women writers. The focus is on the holistic representation of women in the works of selected writers. It is assumed that the

characters mirror their respective societies. Their portrayal is therefore significant as they mirror the thematic concerns of the women writers. The study will dig to unravel the motives underpinning the representation of women in the texts. The purposeful sampling technique is employed in the selection of the primary texts. Nwapa's *Efuru* and Kuoh-Moukoury's *Essential Encounters* are selected because they both are works by pioneer writers. Again their works portray strong women characters that are willing to negotiate for their needs. Aidoo's *Changes* and Liking's *The Amputated Memory* are included because they echo the sentiments expressed by both Nwapa and Kuoh-Moukoury. Together all these female writers prove the hypothesis that Negofeminism is the viable strand of feminism for African women.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on two theories: the Postcolonial Theory and African Feminisms with emphasis on Negofeminism propounded by Nnaemeka.

The Postcolonial Theory/Criticism

Postcolonial criticism belongs to the larger field of postcolonial studies, which evolved in the wake of the independence of many countries from the domination of European powers of the nineteenth century. It is distinguished by this singular subject; the examination of postcolonial writings that explore the ways in which the colonizers imposed their culture and values on native peoples and thus distorted or suppressed their past. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin write in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practise in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989: 11):

The idea of 'post-colonial literary theory' emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing...Post-colonial theory has proceeded from the need to address this different practise. Indigenous theories have developed to accommodate the differences within the various cultural traditions as well as the desire to describe in a comparative way the features shared across these traditions.

The Postcolonial Theory is very relevant to the current study because this study concerns itself with examining how women writers in Francophone and Anglophone West Africa project their post-colonial experience through the casting of their female characters. This theory supports the fact that colonialism in Africa produced a hybrid society, one that has come into contact with a foreign culture and adopted new ideologies. There is the interrogation of traditional models that place the woman in a subservient position and a re-examination of the roles traditionally assigned to women. The woman is educated hence liberated, open-minded, and capable of carving an identity for herself, one that conforms to the changing/changed society within which she lives. The post in postcolonial theory then comes to refer to works produced after independence. The Postcolonial Theory is relevant to this study as it justifies the existence of this new kind of woman who is not hemmed in by traditional dictates and is not bashful about her new identity.

Emerging Perspective on African Feminisms: Negofeminism

African feminisms hold the assertion that at its core is the transformation of existing gender relationships. Ultimately, African feminism aims at complementarity, “the need for men and women to complement one another and build one another up. The secret of peaceful living nestles in this idea” (Adimora-Eziegbo II). Nnaemeka in 1995 took the debate of African feminisms a step further by propounding a new term “Negofeminism” derived from “feminism of negotiation.” This theory of “Negofeminism” implies the ‘necessity of challenging given facts by negotiating, a universal concept which is at the heart of many African societies’. (Signs 29: 357) She adds an interesting new dimension to the concept of “no ego feminism,” which is to be understood as a critical allusion to white Western Feminisms’ arrogance, imperialism, and power struggles. In effect, Nnaemeka proposes a feminism that is based on negotiation, one that gives ample room for women to fearlessly articulate their needs without fear of reprisal, with men as partners. There is the assertion of the self without resorting to hatred of men, penis envy, the non-acceptance of African traditions, the fundamental rejection of marriage and motherhood, the favouring of lesbian love and the endeavour to invert the relationship of the genders.

This theory of “Negofeminism” is relevant to the current study because it supports the notion of ‘liberated’ African women as it maintains that “what is at stake is the issue of agency, subjectivity, and power, the power to name oneself, one’s location and one’s struggle.” (Signs 358) One other relevance of the theory lies in the fact that it explains and justifies the actions of the central female

characters in the selected texts. Finally, this theory is significant because it upholds the notion that “[t] here must be a diversity of feminisms, responsive to the different needs and concerns of different women and defined by them for themselves” (Signs 2004: 359),” an idea that comes into play in the selected texts.

Methodology

This research will adopt the textual analysis approach. The choice of this approach is justified by the fact that it will help in answering the research questions that guide the study. The primary sources of data for this study are Therese Kuoh Moukoury’s *Essential Encounters* and Werewere Liking’s *The Amputated Memory*, both from Francophone Cameroun as well as Nwapa’s *Efuru* and Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Changes: A Love Story*, from Nigeria and Ghana respectively. Kuoh Moukoury, born on February 7th 1938 in Douala Cameroon, completed her first novel *Essential Encounters* in 1956. This gives her the distinction of being the first novelist not only of her native country, but of sub-Saharan Francophone Africa as well. She has also served as the president of the Union des femmes Africaines et Malgache (Union of African and Malagasy women).

The analysis of the four novels will be done to ascertain how character development is achieved. In addition the reasons that account for the sameness/differences in the development of the various characters will be argued out. In the inter-textual analysis the two pioneering novels- Efuru and Essential Encounters will be examined together. Changes and Amputated Memory will

also be considered together as contemporary pieces. This way it is hoped that a clearer picture of the world these women writers are creating would emerge.

Brief Biographies of the Writers

Therese Kuoh-Moukoury, of Cameroon states in an interview that she wrote her first novel to inspire other women to write. *Essential Encounters* is a story of love, infertility, a failed marriage, and adultery. It documents the life of a woman who was not afraid to take her destiny into her own hands. The central character Flo skilfully manipulates tradition to suit her whims. Again, the novel looks at both interpersonal connections and national politics from a woman's perspective. It deals with the painful transition in Cameroon from rural matriarchal traditions to contemporary urban society. One of the reasons her book was included in this study is due to the fact that her work portrays strong manipulative women characters who subtly maintain their grounds in a patriarchal setting. Her pioneering work under study points to the women's attempts to find their place in a culture that threatens to undermine them.

Werewere Liking, writing decades after Kuoh-Moukoury also picks up from where she left off and creates strong women characters. Liking weaves together history and memory and captures the anti-colonial resistance in the late fifties. In her work *The Amputated Memory*, she advances this theme through women who have refused to remain victims and who heal both their public and personal trauma. The justification for the selection of her 1997 text *The Amputated Memory* lies in the fact that her book celebrates female strength, the

joy and pain of being a woman; through the changing roles she assigns her female characters, she proves the existence of a new breed of women who remain unyielding to gendered demands. According to Katrak of the University of California, Liking`s book is an excellent example of postcolonial literature since the story, through the female characters, explores the cultural adjustments people had to make in the wake of colonialism. (1989: 26-35) Her text was included in this study because of the desire to study how she cast her female characters as well as the roles she assigns them.

Flora Nwapa (1930-93) started writing in 1966; she was the first published Nigerian female writer. According to Chukwuma (2002), the writing interest of Nwapa was women and her motive for writing was to correct the disparaged image of women in male-authored novels. She started from the grass-roots and situated her women characters in the village environment with its masculine supremacy and dominance where gender roles and relationships were strictly circumscribed by norms and tradition. Her first novel *Efuru* (1966) features a village woman who though unlettered, is accomplished and distinguishes herself in her society. *Efuru* is imbued with beauty, intelligence, industry and economic power. She is successful in life but not fecund. Her strength as a woman shines forth in that she is able to marry her first husband without the requisite dowry. She is able to live down the shame and abasement of two failed marriages and exercises her right of choice of staying married or returning to her father`s house. She is still admired and respected at the end of

the novel. This reason provides the justification for the inclusion of her text in this study, a truly feminist piece.

The other Anglophone woman writer whose work serves as the data for this Study is the Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo. The justification for the inclusion of her novel *Changes* (1991) in this study is that her central female characters resist victimisation and subjugation. Esi Sekyi, the heroine in *Changes* is not afraid to interrogate male mythologies of female subjectivity. She does not define her worth in marriage. Aidoo's *Changes* shows how women who are educated choose to exercise their 'emancipation.' The female characters in an urban setting are portrayed as both unyielding and uncompromising. Perhaps the process of acculturation they had undergone had set them up to dismantle man's allegorical claim to power. Their portrayal however leaves much to be desired as they end up as solitary figures by the time the story draws to close.

Organization of the Study

The study will be presented in five chapters. Chapter one deals with the background to the study, statement of the problem, research questions, purpose of the study, significance of the study, delimitation of the study, theoretical framework and methodology. Chapter two deals with literature review. Chapter three answers the first research question. The fourth chapter deals with the second research question while chapter five deals with the third research question as well as the conclusion of the thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This section of the study reviews some critical receptions on the works of the selected writers Aidoo's *Changes*, Nwapa's *Efuru*, Liking's *The Amputated Memory* and Kuoh-Moukoury's *Essential Encounters*. This chapter is organized into two parts. The first part deals with a review of the portrayal of women in fiction. This review is necessary as it helps position the work in the continuum of the tradition of women's portrayal in fiction. The second part deals with a review of the critical studies done on the works of the selected writers. It will examine the existing literature on the works of the selected writers.

Portrayal of Women in Fiction.

It is of particular interest that African women portray a positive image of women in their fiction. Unlike their male counterparts who make women marginal to the plot, women writers make women play significant roles in their works. Fonchingong (2006) asserts that, "African literature is replete with write-ups that project male dominance and inadequately pleads the case of the African woman". Women writers are bent on correcting the stereotypical representation of the woman in fictional works. Chukukere (1995) argues that, male writers project a one-sided view of women in their works. The dynamics that underscore the existence of African women is often a muted subject in male writings. African women writers have challenged the status-quo by empowering women

through literature. They have done this by casting the female character not as restrained and disadvantaged but as ingenious and spirited.

On the other hand, those male writers who claim to positively portray women in their works often lift them to unrealistic proportions. Women are idolized and given mythical identity. For instance, Negritude writers like Leopold Senghor depict the woman as some sort of demi-god. This impractical portrayal of women in fictional works according to D'Almeida (1994) is unfavourable to the woman. This is because her being blown out of proportion presupposes that she is immune to the constraints of everyday life. This representation is far from reality. In most works by male authors, the patriarchal subjection of the woman is crucial to the development of their plot.

According to Ogundipe (1994), the female writer and her commitment lie in representing and re-enacting the role of the African woman. The female writer should be committed to telling the story of the African woman in its totality if their works should be of any significance. (21) This is what the selected African women writers have done in their works. They have succeeded in depicting an all-inclusive universal portrait of the African woman. This study is particularly interested in studying and analysing those actions of female characters that point to their assertiveness as well as will-power. The term feminism as used here then comes to represent the individual and collective actions on the part of women that show their 'rebellion' against an established traditional order.

Criticism on Selected Works

This second part of the review looks at the critical reception of the works of the selected writers. It looks at how their works have attracted critical reviews and also how others have analyzed their portrayal of the African woman. Stringer launched an investigation into Francophone feminist novels in her book *The Senegalese Novel by Women: through their Own Eyes* (1996). In this book, she advances the argument that Francophone women writers write quite differently from their male counterparts, according to her female novelists see themselves as “illuminators of the female condition.” (pp. 17-18). Francophone women writers concern themselves with telling the woman story the way it is, their daily struggles against repressive systems that threaten to deny them of their identity, and their adopted strategies against these systems. This according to Stringer is “the fundamental question to be asked about women’s literature at this stage of development.” (p.17).

Stringer reveals that Francophone women’s literary works leave no stone unturned in their telling of the woman story; they create balanced characters that truly representative of their societies. Her findings reveals that indeed there exist elements of feminism as women form solidarity groups to support one other and stand up to their men. Stringer goes on to further argue that in the novels of Francophone women, ‘the cultural conflict is almost always related to the female condition, even if other aspects of the problematic are also treated.’ (p. 144). Again the female characters in the narratives emerge as individuals, ‘... play a primary role, even where the main character is male, there is a case to be made

for a strong female being the dynamic force in the plot...the function of women is more significant than that of men.’(P. 144).

Arndt (2002) seems to be making a point that women writing in Francophone countries are primarily concerned with condemning the societal restrictions that face the woman at every turn, restrictions that filter into their lived experiences as wives, mothers and daughters, and determine their place as secondary and their views as irrelevant. Stringer’s book makes an interesting remark about Nafissatou Diallo that ‘her works all centre on highly motivated, self-reliant female women...in their own rights and not merely in a relationship with a man’. She concludes that in Diallo’s writing ‘there is a conscious feminism apparent in the choice of a (female) protagonist embodying specific virtues to be admired and perhaps imitated.’ (p. 46) It is clear that Diallo has come under the influence of Kuoh-Moukoury, the first woman to publish in her native Cameroon and who was preoccupied with creating strong female characters. This study is relevant to the current study because it lends credence to the assertion that there exists a form of consciousness in Francophone women’s writings. This is a consciousness pioneered by Kuoh-Moukoury, which applauds female self-confidence. This thematic concern permeated the works of later writers like Diallo and Beyala.

One other literature reviewed in relation to this topic is Nfah-Abbenyi’s book *Gender in African Women’s Writing: Identity, Sexuality, and Difference* (1997). In this book, Nfah-Abbenyi argues that she had ‘chosen to include both Anglophone and Francophone women writers...and had decided to read them as a

complementary whole without necessarily presenting them as belonging to a distinctive literary tradition because of their linguistic affiliations.’ (2) She further states that she ‘refuses to maintain a dichotomy or promote the splintering of African literatures into linguistic camps reinforcing the false notion that these literatures are inherently different...’ Thus to Nfah-Abbenyi both Anglophone and Francophone women’s writings are crafted along the same lines because the woman’s experience, despite separate linguistic affiliation, remains the same. According to her, writers on both sides ‘offer more dynamic representations of women than the images of subordination often presented by their male counterparts.’(2) What Nfah-Abbenyi fails to realise is that though there exists a form of suppression of the woman everywhere, it takes different forms and the experiences differ from culture to culture. By lumping them all together Nfah-Abbenyi seems to be making a linear argument that all forms of suppression are one and the same. This may not always be the case though there may exist some similarities. This also implies that women’s ‘struggle’ to fight off oppression would differ.

Selected Studies on *Efuru*

It is interesting to study the array of critical reception that has greeted Flora Nwapa’s works. Some of the criticisms have not been favourable because perhaps the critics do not really understand the cultural environment within which the novels were written. Again these unfavourable criticisms may also stem from the prevailing practise of the deliberate silencing of the African woman writer. In her essay *To Be a Woman* (1984: 259), Aidoo furiously

claims: “When a critic refuses to talk about your work, that is violence; he is willing you to die as a creative person” One such unfavourable critic of Nwapa’s work is Jones Palmer. In his book *An Introduction to the African Novel* (1972), he only made reference to one female writer, labelling Flora Nwapa “an inferior novelist” (61). In his second book, *Growth of the African Novel* (1979) Palmer also excludes women. This according to Stratton in her book *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (1994) is due to the fact ‘that Palmer is using a western or male-dominated canon as a checklist for African literature, a canon that did not include women authors.’ Some critics question Nwapa’s craftsmanship as a writer and her ability to accurately capture the human experience artfully in her writing. Again she is accused of portraying idealistic female characters that have no place in African societies.

According to Deif in his essay *A Critical Study of Feminist Realism in Modern Fiction*, one of the important arguments that highly preoccupied the feminist critical stage is whether female writers did not reach the literary standard of male writers as their patriarchal society did not allow them to do so; or they actually reached that standard, but their works were not evaluated in an adequate way. It could be that women writings were not considered to be up to the standard based on the patriarchal criteria. The answer might be in Showalter’s assertion that she is not sure about the ability of prominent male critics to turn women as readers without surrendering ‘paternal privileges.’ Her fear is that instead of breaking out of patriarchal bounds, they will merely

compete with women, failing to acknowledge women's feminist contributions. (Showalter 1985: 143).

There are critics who struggle with Nwapa's portrayal of women, the peculiar non-traditional roles she often assigns them, putting them at the crossroads of modernity and change. Others argue that Nwapa gives her women characters too much liberty, too many choices and makes them too liberated to fit into their traditional Igbo society. Those who question her process of characterisation as well as her character portrayal argue that all Nwapa succeeds in doing is creating women who are responsible for communal and individual chaos. (Frank 1987: Palmer 1972) Clearly these critics demonstrate their lack of understanding of the literary agenda of this renowned writer. Her literary agenda was that of creating ordinary people in any normal society. The characters created by Nwapa are not responsible for either communal or individual chaos. They are just ordinary people going about their business.

In his review of *Efuru*, Palmer writes, "Flora Nwapa's novel leaves the reader with the impression that its author has not mastered her craft. It lacks the fluency, effortlessness, and economy of *The Concubine*. It is too obviously a first novel" (p.57). Palmer goes ahead to state that in parts, Efuru reads like a sociological treatise of the Igbo people and not a work of art. (p.60) It is the inclusion of unnecessary sociological details and the omission of significant ones that according to Palmer points to Nwapa's 'amateurism' as a novelist. Palmer goes on to suggest that Nwapa should have consulted renowned male writers like Achebe to see how they artfully incorporate sociological information into their

work. (p.57) One other major flaw which he finds in *Efuru* is the absence of a dominant theme in the novel. He accuses Nwapa of rambling on and on without paying artistic attention to form and structure. For instance, in his introduction to *The Growth of the African Novel*, he writes:

A novel, while being a realistic work of fiction, is not a photographic copy of everything that has gone on in society. It is the scrupulous process of selection during which the author assembles his materials from within the social or historical situation, transforming them into a satisfying work of art which gives his own interpretation of the situation, an interpretation which might be quite different from the historian's or the sociologist's. (p.7)

This he states Nwapa failed to do thus rendering her attempt at writing a novel a highly unsuccessful one. The core of Palmer's argument is that "the artistry of the novel should include coherence of plot and structure, language, setting, presentation of character, descriptive power" (p. 9) and emphasizes that an author's technique should give the work its semblance of realism. This he says is the major flaw in Nwapa's pioneering work because it does not include such artistic coherence. Finally, Palmer summarises his assessment of Nwapa's work:

"We must never forget that in the business of criticism we are primarily concerned with the work in front of us, not with its background. In the final analysis, our attitude will depend on whether we regard the novel as

a work of art which demands evaluation, or as a sociological or historical document whose main function is to act as a handmaid of sociology or history”. (p. 8)

Palmer is not alone in his criticism of female writers. Twentieth century women were belittled for their portrayal of female experience, while male writers were admired for “their ruthless appropriation of life for their art”. (Rapone 1973: 400) It is clear that Palmer has a problem with Nwapa’s narrative structure and the inclusion of certain detail in the narrative. I do not agree wholly with Palmer’s criticism of Nwapa’s work. What Nwapa does is to portray events from her own historical and cultural point of view. She was only an ordinary woman writing about everyday events. She chooses an ordinary woman living in an Igbo society and documents the struggles she goes through to survive as a woman in a male dominated world. Her subtle manipulation of the existing system wins our applause though her victories are not grand. The difficulties she encounters as a woman are not pieces of sociological information but the daily realities of a woman struggling to ‘negotiate realities.’

One other critic who shares Palmer’s view is Jones. In his essay ‘A Review of The Concubine by Elechi Amadi and *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa’ (1968), Jones asserts that Nwapa’s novels inform about traditional Igbo life while Amadi’s work focuses on the human nature; that Nwapa’s work lacks an overall sense of artistry, she seems too preoccupied with documenting unnecessary details about life in an Igbo society and that makes ‘...*Efuru* read like a manual on how young girls are treated in an Igbo society.’ (p.130) He calls Amadi’s

Concubine ‘a penetrating study’ and labels Nwapa’s *Efuru* as a ‘manual.’ But that is far from the truth, *Efuru* goes beyond a manual on how young brides are treated. It talks about the lives of the whole community—men, women, children, marriage, barrenness, love, education, religion and impact of colonialism. More importantly *Efuru* is the story of a woman’s search for inner peace which ironically does not come in motherhood. It comes in the contentment she derives from her decision to serve the water-goddess Uhamiri. This through the portrayal of a single character, Nwapa has succeeded in challenging traditionally conceived notions about women.

Jones’ assessment of the work of Nwapa is not a fair one. He uses a part to represent the whole. In his praise of Amadi’s work he asserts that he succeeds in ‘conveying the feeling of the Igbo society’ because he pays attention to informative details. He is of the view that Nwapa fails because “her novel is full of small talk, and she employs too many details” (p.129). Perhaps by this assertion he meant to state that Nwapa’s work is shallow and not detailed enough. This is a totally false statement unless we wish to equate small talk to lack of detail. His assertion shows his lack of serious engagement with the novel.

However there are other critics who are in favour of Nwapa’s work; two of such critics will be discussed here. Andrade in ‘Rewriting History, Motherhood, and Rebellion: Naming an African Women’s Literary Tradition’ (1990), addresses the impact of colonialism on African literature. She contends that “what interests her in *Efuru* is not the authenticity or the importance of village life, but rather the tensions that the first woman-authored novel must

confront when written in a colonial/neo-colonial situation” (p. 97). Andrade judges Nwapa’s success against the backdrop that she is the first African woman writing about the ordinary life of a woman in her community in a post-colonial world. Andrade advances the notion that “Nwapa manipulates the language and narrative form of the colonizer; on the other hand, she represents a dignified African female character against the backdrop of frequently pejorative representations of female characters by male authors” (p. 97).

Andrade seems to be of the view that Nwapa favours traditional discourse over modern because she emphasizes the virtue of the protagonist and the importance of Igbo customs while at the same time embracing desirable change. She, therefore, comes to present a woman at the confluence of traditional virtues versus postcolonial dictates. This according to her is what makes *Efuru* a highly successful creative piece. A true assertion since part of Efuru’s success as a character stems from the fact that she is not disdainful of the cultural context but negotiates efficiently within its confines with relative ease.

Wilentz (1986) also shares the views of Andrade. Wilentz admires Nwapa’s amalgamation of tradition and change as well as her skilful use of language. According to her, Nwapa liberates especially her female characters by allowing them to make choices that uphold traditional values while still making other choices that do not coincide with traditional Igbo habits. Wilentz maintains, Nwapa, “in her works, illustrates dialectically that, as upholders of tradition, women are powerful figures, economically secure and socially vibrant, yet are limited in their choices by the restrictive cultural milieu” (p.16). What is

of interest, according to Wilentz, is the manner of protest against this restrictive cultural environment. It is neither loud nor aggressive but rather subtle and manipulative.

What I totally agree with in Wilentz's work is her assertion that too many traditions are not to the advantage of the women in the Igbo society and yet they must uphold them if they wish to gain the respect and recognition of the community. This is where the issue of negotiation comes into play, where the women know how to successfully hold their own in the midst of a repressive culture.

Ohale (2010) asserts that Flora Nwapa pioneering work *Efuru* is groundbreaking because it marked the beginning of a new chapter of African woman writing. Nwapa achieved this by making women the central characters in her novels. The women are also portrayed as wealthy and accomplished as well as assertive. Ohale however argued that "the female protagonists in *Efuru* and *Idu* are illiterate and glued to tradition, the very tradition that ultimately brings them down". It must be stated that *Efuru* did not stay "glued to tradition". This, she exemplified by leaving Adizua her first husband when it became obvious that the union offered her nothing but misery. Again *Efuru* demonstrated her disdain for repressive culture by leaving Gilbert her second husband when he accused her of infidelity. It is not true that *Efuru* stay glued to tradition that demeaned her. She was willing to compromise and negotiate as far as her integrity was preserved. By the time the story draws to a close, *Efuru* had attained an elevated status which is that of a worshipper of Uhamiri. It is difficult to ascertain the validity of

Ohale's claim in the face of what eventually became of Efuru. Ohale also failed to mention an important thematic concern of Nwapa. The subtle message imbedded in the narrative that a woman can attain a form of happiness even without children. Nwapa proves that a barren woman can find fulfilment in channelling her nurturing instincts into other avenues. In the case of Efuru, she found satisfaction in meeting the needs of others as well as stepping into her ultimate role as worshipper of Uhamiri.

Chukwuma's essay 'Women's Quest for Rights: African Feminist Theory in Fiction' (2006) argues that traditional societies in pre-colonial times had spheres of power and influence for women in social organizations that helped them maintain a voice. Colonialism has its virtues but its new culture of dominance through education, white-collar jobs and other factors relegated women into insignificance. She further asserts that "Literature has proved a worthy tool in interrogating the female condition. The silence was broken by women writers in the mid-sixties in the continent which correspondingly was the era of political independence of quite a number of African States". She goes on to further claim that there is the appreciation of female self-assertion in fiction by women writers. She proves that Flora Nwapa the first woman to write in Nigeria created female characters in the like of Efuru and her mother-in-law's sister Ajanupu. Efuru's feminism shone because she was able to stay with a man of her own choosing and refused to bow to patriarchal demands of parental selectivity. Hence, according to Chukwuma, Flora Nwapa succeeded in creating a truly

representational female character who was not covered into submission by her gendered society.

In effect, Chukwuma is stressing home the point that Anglophone female writers like Emecheta, Aidoo and Nwapa advocate personhood in their novels. These writers create female characters who break out of subsuming norms and situations as the marriage institution and risk standing the enormous risk of being dubbed cultural deviationists for the marriage institution is sacred to culture, tradition and religion. According to her, “the ways our women writers liberated their women characters from the gendered yoke was to make them burst the system and be free”. This current study intends to delve deeper into the portraiture of this new crop of strong willed women.

Nnaemeka (1995) supports Chukwuma’s views. She advances the argument that Flora Nwapa’s first novel *Efuru* is truly a feminist novel because the protagonist Efuru exercised her feminism within the constraints or the dictates of her culture. Here there is a demonstration of the “Negofeminism” theory where Efuru does not downplay what tradition demands while fulfilling her personal interests as a woman who wishes to get married to the man she truly loves. She does not consider herself properly married until her bride-price has been fully paid by her husband and his people. She cleverly negotiates the cultural space afforded her within the patriarchal society without losing her identity as a woman. This is what according to Nnaemeka makes Nwapa’s book a truly African feminist piece. (80)

Nnaemeka refers to Nwapa's heroines as reformers, not rebels, for she believes they are negotiating choices within the context of cultural boundaries. Women are able to chalk successes when they deftly negotiate their way within the cultural space. As proven by Nwapa, Efuru is able to maintain her respect in society at the end of the story because she had profound respect for the traditions of her people, and did not perceive the man as the enemy but as an individual capable of change. No wonder Nnaemeka argues that "Nwapa's work is a biography, a collective biography of beautiful, strong Ugwuta women dependent upon the goddess Uhamiri, the goddess of the crossroads." Nwapa's "work locates [readers] at the crossroads, inviting us to ask questions, many questions" (p. 104). Such questions mostly concern the female characters: how they demonstrate their awareness of self and their growth first in a colonized, then in a post-colonial, world. Nnaemeka's essay touches on many truths, one of them being that it is negotiation and complementarity not radicalism and aggressiveness, which is the solution to the problem of gender imbalance in African societies.

Mears (2009) also sheds some interesting lights on the literary work of Flora Nwapa. In her introduction she states that "Flora Nwapa writes about women and their lives, issues, and concerns within a traditional Igbo culture radically affected by British colonialism. As she explores and analyses many of the characteristics of her tribal group, she posits the women's desires for change, choice, and acceptance within a society in which they wish to participate fully as human beings not just in the roles traditionally allowed them—as workers,

wives, and mothers”. (Mears: 7) Here she summarizes the thematic concerns that run throughout the canon of Nwapa. The female characters Nwapa creates are constantly caught in the struggle against being stereotyped and hence marginalized. They prefer to, within the confines of their culture, find means of assertion. (This holds true for her earlier works *Efuru* and *Idu*) This is especially true of the protagonist in *Efuru*. According to Mears, “*Efuru* is a novel with a heroine who consciously decides to break one major rule of tradition: she decides to get married before the bride price is paid to her family, but this is the first of several customs she manipulates as a matter of choice and freedom.’(p.11) The distinctive feature of *Efuru* as a character then lies in perhaps the fact that she is still able to enjoy the respect of the community at the end of the story though she remains childless. Mears attributes this change in the female characters to colonialism and the subsequent spread of Western education.

While her claim may be true in certain contexts, it is not so in *Efuru* the character since she was not exposed to Western education. Other assertive independent women characters in the novel like Ajanupu were also not educated. Perhaps Nwapa is making a point that holding one’s own and being insistent on one’s right is not a foreign concept, it is inherently African. That is why these women, though not exposed to western education, are still a force to reckon with within their traditional societies.

The crux of the Mears’ thesis seems to be the hypothesis that ‘Nwapa’s characters, especially those in *Efuru* and *Idu* express their choices for change and compromise through words and actions. (84) The characters speak and act in

subtle ways to convey their views to the audience, and throughout the novel, Efuru is caught between making choices. This is what Nnaemeka calls ‘negotiating realities,’ in other words manipulating existing customs to meet one’s needs. This implies that Efuru as a character demands our respect because she is highly successful in bending traditional dictates to meet feminine needs without breaking them. Kuoh-Moukoury also supports this view on the need for balance between tradition and modernity. Kuoh-Moukoury stresses the need for women to work towards the elimination of customs and traditions that are oppressive whilst holding on to those that are empowering and liberating.

Ogunyemi (1995) posits that the novel *Efuru* focuses on developing selfhood and finding empowerment through mothering in the community, but the novel has two parts: the first part concerns the individual desires of a young woman to make her own choices, there is a conscious shift from communal life to the focus on the self. She states “the personal must therefore be liberated to enhance development in the public arena.” (p.134) The second half of the novel is “corrective and instructive” because Efuru marries Uhamiri and finds a peaceful existence as mother of the community (146). The confusion that had dominated the first part of the novel is resolved in the second part because Efuru the character had come to an understanding of the self. She had accepted her lot in life as the worshipper of Uhamiri. She was therefore not concerned about the fulfilment of any ‘womanly roles’ such as motherhood.

The awareness of the self that Efuru comes to in the second part of the novel is highly significant because it is the point of rupture between her traditionally defined role and her newly acquired knowledge of who she really is.

The novel traces the ideological confusion, political awakening, material nurturing, and spiritual development of Efuru (p. 147). Ogunyemi's thesis is on point because the overall focus of the novel is on Efuru the character making her own choices and then evaluating the consequences. She has to determine the effect her choices have on self and society. When she came into a full understanding of the self, the 'conflict' in the novel was partly resolved. One other issue that Ogunyemi stresses in her book which is of utmost importance is the adoption of complementarity as a resourceful tool in personal development. She states: 'men and women are in a cultural bind and, therefore, are mutually dependent.'(135) It is only in the light of complementarity that a mutually beneficial society is built as evidenced in *Efuru*.

Arndt's essay on *Efuru* proves insightful indeed. Arndt puts forward the argument that *Efuru* "offers a partial criticism of the gender and power structures of Igbo society. For one thing, the criminalization of the free choice of partners is criticized, for another the belief that womanhood is defined by wife-and motherhood is challenged". (2002: 101-103) This stance advocated by Nwapa implies that women should not define selfhood in marriage; it is plausible for the single woman to be truly happy and fulfilled. That marriage is not the only defining moment in a woman's life. Men are not condemned as a group and no man is given an entirely negative portrayal. This according to Arndt is what

makes the novel an example of a reformist literary piece. The male characters in the novel are not sharply criticised, there is room for change and the impression is created that there is the possibility of an ‘ideal’ man who treats his wife with love and respect.

Reformist African feminist texts are hopeful of the African gendered society: they express the optimism that the man is capable of change and the answer lies in a return to matriarchy, a society where men and woman treat each other fairly. What Arndt did not discuss in detail is the issue of gerontocracy, taken broadly as woman to woman oppression. According to Nnaemeka, “the ways in which women uphold patriarchal systems and use them to abuse and oppress other women should be feminist concerns.” (1995: 88) More importantly Nwapa’s depiction of Efuru shows that Negofeminism which is the concept of negotiation and give and take is crucial to solving the problem of social imbalance. Women, against taking aggressive stance, should subtly negotiate avenues available to them in the patriarchal system and make their needs known. They should be conscious of the fact that men are sometimes victims in a patriarchal society.

Selected studies on *Changes*

Aidoo has always held the belief and her literary works attest to the fact that African women writers have a literary purpose; they feel as deeply as their male counterparts the need to repair Africa’s fractured image following colonialism. But they seek to do more than that; they also want to “interrogate cultural prerogatives and countless restrictions that delineate women’s lives”.

(Adeola 1990) That is to say they interpose gender as crucial to African cultural identity and recovery. Theirs is a bold and fearless gesture aimed at proving the statement that the woman question cannot be left out and relegated to the background if Africa wants to rebuild her image. Her novel under review here *Changes*, is one of her works that reposition women, taking them out of their culturally assigned role and placing their destiny in their own hands.

This is confirmed by Allan in her afterword to the Ghanaian edition of the text: “*Changes* pulses with an irrepressible pioneering spirit, clearing the ground for a new tradition of women’s writing in Africa. It is a record of the changing circumstances of women’s lives in contemporary Africa, but more importantly it transcends realistic significance and constructs a psychological blueprint for female portraiture”. (p. 191) The strength of the novel, however, lies in the enlargement of emerging African women in ways hitherto unimagined by the producers of African literary culture. It will not be far-fetched then to state that women’s diminishment in literary works might well be a thing of the past.

As Allan asserts, there are hitherto inconceivable paradigm shifts in Aidoo’s *Changes*. Stereotypes of women are discarded as women are educated, exposed and economically independent. But more importantly women are given a voice, they are free to articulate their needs and interrogate the traditional models that threaten to suppress them. As Allan puts it “the three main female characters together provide a composite portrait of an emerging African femininity from which many future experiments will be drawn.” (p. 175) The three major female characters resist all forms of oppression because they are not

accustomed to the consolidation of power in male hands. Thus what seems distinct in *Changes* is the fact that it goes ahead as a pacesetter for a new brand of women's writings in Africa. This is a form that truly reflects the lives of women in a multicultural and hybrid society, a true world of matriarchy. Allan is, however, silent on the implications of the choices the female characters make and how those choices serve to influence their lives.

Furthermore, Mekgwe (2008) advances the argument that women writers in Africa are concerned with the female as well as the postcolonial issue and they both seek one aim; "feminist and post-colonial discourses both seek to reinstate the marginalized in the face of the dominant."(p. 5) The essay demonstrated the impact that 'Africanity' and the decolonization project have had in shaping debates on African feminism firstly, by highlighting the intricate relationship enjoyed by post- colonialism and feminism in African literature. She goes on to state that feminism developed as a concept more aggressively in the postcolonial era and she attributes this to the 'exposure' or 'liberation' that came to women through Western education. It was through Western education that they came to better comprehend their relegated status in society and with this knowledge came the necessity to reverse this trend. Again education equipped women with the tools to fight back and reassert themselves and be better placed to successfully articulate their needs.

This view is also supported by Azumurana (2013). He posits that the protagonists in Aidoo's *Changes* are radical in varying degrees because they have all been exposed to education, that education had produced women of their

sort-women who are not afraid to ask questions and challenge the status-quo. In this vein, Oloko also states that “*Changes* demonstrates that as access to quality education improves for Africans regardless of sex ... African women have returned from the work place to see their homes from a newer perspective ... This ... entails coming to terms with the reality of a new life for the woman, a life which significantly challenges the traditional responsibilities of women in unanticipated ways” (112). In more ways than one, this is what makes the novel a definitive African feminist piece as well as a postcolonial novel. This process of redefinition of the woman’s gendered existence is possible because of exposure to education and its liberating influence. With education came paradigm shifts, and women began to see themselves in different lights, which is varied from their traditionally assigned roles as well as how they have always been perceived. This new consciousness came with choices as these women began to explore the avenues open to them. The question of satisfaction on the part of the women, however, remains unanswered.

Waleska (2007) makes an interesting read for many reasons. One of them being that he claims Aidoo’s primary concern in her literary works is the positive portrayal of the female in literature. He states that “Her writing has involved the reworking of previous, usually male-authored, literary stereotypes into believable characters, as well as an exploration of new, more complex roles for her female characters”. (3)

This assertion holds true as a careful study of her literary works will reveal. All her protagonists are female; strong willed, independent and free to

make choices that either doom them or accord them a place in a society where they are too often side-lined. In *Changes*, the female characters move from their traditionally assigned roles of ‘mother’ and ‘wife’ to career educated women; a reflection of the realities that now confront the woman living in a postcolonial context. He quotes Aidoo as saying:

[E]very woman and every man should be a feminist ... especially if they believe that Africans should take charge of African land, African wealth, African lives, and the burden of African development. It is not possible to advocate independence for the African continent without also believing that African women must have the best the environment has to offer. For some of us, this is the crucial element in our feminism”. (1998: 47)

This feminism is what Aidoo advocates in *Changes*, a feminism that does not question the ability of the woman but rather elevates her status to that of a worthy partner in the burden of African development.

In *Changes* Aidoo explores the opportunities available to a modern woman living in a postcolonial society grounded in traditional roots. He concludes by stating that Esi as a character has been given a collective identity, in that she represents the modern woman who questions society’s definition of her identity. Clearly society’s labelling of her needed redefinition and that she set out to do.

Petersen (2003) describes Aidoo's novel *Changes* as a “provocation” that works between and against the various positions of African and Western

feminisms to explore the question of modern-day African female identity (346). As she puts it, “[i]t is by breaking out of the expected or predictable configurations of and solutions to a set of problems faced by an African woman that Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* challenges hardened battle positions in the discussion of the role, power, desire and agency of the modern African woman” (349). This argument holds true in *Changes* because women are seen in positions previously not assigned them and it is fascinating to watch the paradigm shifts as women become ‘men.’ One such instance is when Oko had to leave their matrimonial home because it belongs to Esi. A woman has never been so economically empowered in a literary work, and even more fascinating are the reasons Esi assigns to divorcing her husband.

Petersen begins her essay with a discussion of the difficulties of working within various feminisms to negotiate a suitable position for African women and their issues in society and literature. She does this against the milieu that any definition of African feminism must take into account the peculiarities that confront the daily existence of the African woman. Some of the theoretical standpoints of Western feminism are of diminished importance to the African who is faced with enormous economic difficulties. In addition to all other pressing concerns, the African woman is concerned with the material oppression of their sex. A fact that is not too much of a concern to Western feminists. Petersen goes on to examine *Changes* in relation to the traditional Akan dilemma tale, arguing that Aidoo debates “modern African problems using adaptations of

African oral literature,” and thereby “acts on her claim to be both a nationalist and a feminist.” (350).

Petersen further argues that the dilemma tale is an entry point into the text and that the story is located in the concerns of its female protagonist, for instance, in her desire to have both a career and a man. Indeed, Aidoo places modern, educated women at the centre of the novel, affording them a space from which to speak and be heard on what might be considered largely personal issues. In addition, Aidoo's decision to explore the ever-contentious topic of polygamy, a traditional institution she neither defends nor rejects, but rather uses as a means to negotiate a new identity for her protagonist, who “seems to be engaged in a logical experiment in social construction” (352), blurs the distinction between Western and African feminisms. Aidoo's characters do not have set identities or roles, such as those of ‘wife’ or ‘mother,’ but are developed in relation to a variety of factors (race, class, gender) and perspectives (personal, political, feminist). Their identities are constantly under construction, as is the world around them. The postcolonial context then can be seen as a shift towards multiculturalism and globalisation which affords more liberties for women who have to live with the consequences of their choice alone in a dynamic postcolonial society.

Selected studies on *Essential Encounters*

According to Adesamni (2002), “one of the strategies deployed by colonialism to inferiorize women was to exclude them from educational institutions.” (20) This ensured that the production of modern literature was

purely a male affair. Bjornson (1991) did not include an independent chapter on any Cameroonian female writer although writers like Kuoh-Moukoury, Beyala, Diallo, Ba, and Liking to mention a few have already made tremendous impact in the literary world. Francophone women's literary tradition could therefore be informed and influenced by this deliberate attempt to suppress them. Kuoh-Moukoury's pioneering work *Essential Encounters* focuses, not surprisingly, on women and the issues that affect their daily existence. In his review of the text, Adesamni states that:

Flo's pathos laden first person narration, her auto representation as a victim, could lead one to the facile conclusion that the heroine is at the heart of the discursive universe of this novel. But she is not. Joel is. The construction of the story is such that the very existence of the heroine, let alone her metaphysical essence, is inconceivable outside of the personhood of her husband...in other words; Moukoury presents us in this novel the story of the essential man and the expendable woman.”
(35)

Toman (2008) asserts that “...Kuoh-Moukoury has always been ahead of her time, presenting a feminist vision that is purely African in its terms despite the seemingly Western context in which her protagonist live....” (22) It is quite obvious that it is against this background that *Essential Encounters* was written. This may be why her book has such a universal appeal. It is apparent from her story that in her desire to create a truly representative piece of African feminism; she not only borrows from her Duala culture but also from the traditions of

others across Africa. Thus, according to Toman (2008) what Kuoh-Moukoury aims for in her works is ‘...a way to define contemporary matriarchy in literature.’ Critics of Kuoh-Moukoury tag her work as ‘Westernized,’ that is not ‘not African,’ (Kuoh-Moukoury 1994), others label her text as ‘individualistic’ thus condemning her work as non-African which they claim is communal in nature. Those critics who make such remarks do not take into consideration the dynamics of the African community; they completely ignore the cultural context within which the story was written. What Kuoh-Moukoury aims at is a contemporary definition of matriarchy (Toman 2008). Anny-Claire as quoted by Toman states that “...*Essential Encounters* is one of the first works portraying an African woman who must come to terms with the fact that her personal happiness is now her own responsibility...it’s not society that exerts a destructive pressure on the couple, it’s not the husband who cannot bear the infertility of the spouse, but it’s the woman who cites unrealistic causes in order to justify an individual behaviour which is masochistic and asocial. (p.158) It is Flo’s obsession to have a child that gives the story its African flavour. As Ogunyemi (1996) states, “there is clearly a need for a material symbol, specifically, a child, for the woman to cling to, regardless of whether a marriage is meaningful or not...childlessness is important as a spiritual issue in indigenous religions. It creates a gap in the antenatal living post-mortem cycles that must be maintained for consonancy.”(p.5) The barren woman in African contexts is therefore alone, isolated and relegated to the peripherals of recognition.

In a 1994 interview Kuoh-Moukoury came up with the term ‘matriarcat nouveau’ which she says comes into play in *Essential Encounters*. Kuoh-Moukoury describes it as a “new” traditional role for the contemporary African woman that maintains the positive aspects of tradition that were empowering to women while working to eliminate the more negative realities or those that now prove unsuitable in a changing world. (Toman 2008) This holds true for the events in the text as women are portrayed as taking charge of their own destinies and trying to negotiate spaces for their self-assertion and articulation. According to Toman, therefore Kuoh-Moukoury’s text foregrounds contemporary notions of *matriarcat nouveau* which can be understood as contemporary matriarchy constructed through various African matriarchal traditions. This assertion is also supported by Chiwengo who notes that Kuoh Moukoury’s work explores the complexity of African female solidarity and matriarchy within a modern urban context. (Chiwengo 2011)

Toman (2000) argues that early critics were wrong to dismiss Kuoh-Moukoury’s work on the basis that Flo the central character was essentially a weak clinging dependent woman who saw herself as incomplete without a man’s love. Perhaps in Flo Western critics saw the weakness in African feminism: women defining their self-hood in marriage and getting enslaved to marriage and childbirth. Taking the cultural context into consideration, however, reveals a different face of African feminism, a phase where men and women complement each other. The text according to Toman’s analysis reveals an amazing understanding of the peculiar challenges facing the African woman. The

protagonist mirrors the uncertainty facing Cameroon after independence. Flo is an educated exposed woman yet her inability to give birth gives her cause for concern. She, like women everywhere defines herself in motherhood, devoid of that, she sees herself as a complete failure. This stance seems to be in conflict with her educated status. Toman offers an explanation for this:

Although Flo's levels of education and financial security have liberated her, no role models yet existed to show her the limitless possibilities of her individual freedom. Overwhelmed by the independence she has acquired, Flo is devastated by her infertility, for motherhood represents a choice with which she is the most familiar and therefore is one which would give her the most sense of control in her life'. (Toman 2004)

Flo is still bounded by the dictates of her patriarchal society, which has no place for the barren woman. Flo's solution to her problem would no doubt be condemned by Western critics as manipulative and 'an investment into the patriarchal system,' but again Toman offers a different perspective. She states that a matriarchal analysis would render a rather different interpretation. She argues that Flo was actually looking to exploit the positive aspects of polygamy which is that of friendship and solidarity to her advantage. At least in that regard, Joel's second wife would be her best friend, or based on the intimate knowledge she has about Doris, Flo was confident that she would reject Joel who will come running into her arms. By 'arranging' for an affair between her husband and best friend, Flo hoped to get her husband back. Toman argues for a positive aspect to polygamy which she says Kuoh-Moukoury explores in her text. This view is

further supported by Emecheta (1988) where she proposes that “Polygamy encourages her (the woman) to value herself as a person and look outside her family for friends” (p.178). Thus through polygamous marriages, women are able to cultivate ‘sisters’ and nurturing as well as taking care of the home becomes a shared responsibility among ‘sisters in marriage.’ This traditional institution of polygamy ends up actually empowering the woman and as stated by Toman seems to be the focus of Kuoh-Moukoury’s feminism. The ‘new’ traditional role for the contemporary African woman is well defined in thus: she has to work to maintain the traditional roles that are empowering to women while working (together with the man) to eliminate those that are demeaning to her.

One other vital point that Toman raised in her paper is the findings of a research conducted by Schneider and Gough. Their landmark study, *Matrilineal Kinship*, (2008) revealed that many African villages have dual social structures, both patriarchal and matriarchal groups that co-exists in certain regions of Africa. Women are responsible for group placement in matriarchal social structure, they are the ones delegating authority, thus giving them power that would otherwise be impossible in a patriarchal system. One advantage of this, as Schneider explains, is that “matrilineal descent groups require the institutionalization of special limits on the authority of husbands over wives.” (1103) This is so because matriarchal societies are communal and polygamous in nature. Women see themselves as cultivating ‘sisters’ through marriage. It is

through this solidarity groups that women form among themselves that gives them the weapon to fight male domination.

Toman further explains that it is through this ‘coalition of friends’ that Flo hopes to exploit in order to salvage what is left of her marriage to Joel, thinking that in Doris she would find a ‘sister’. Flo’s plan failed because the solidarity that existed between co-wives could never survive in a marriage that is built on love. The essay concluded on the note that Flo represents the African woman struggling with her independence who is not fully aware of her options. She quotes Kuoh-Moukoury as saying in an interview, “I did not intend for Flo to be depicted as a heroine. She makes mistakes like any one would in this stage of her development” (Interview 2000). In my opinion, Flo could be any woman trying to decide for herself what traditions in her society are liberating and hence worth saving and which are ‘suffocating’ and call for immediate change. If Toman’s assertion holds true then what it implies is that Flo can be seen as a symbol of the new breed of African women who having being exposed to western education is caught at the crossroads between traditional values and modernity. She is entangled in the web of indecision as the cost of maintaining a cultural identity conflicts with ideals of her educated status. What seems to be missing in Toman’s analysis of *Essential Encounters* is the fact that through education the women are empowered to make independent choices irrespective of cultural consequences. With education came the consciousness of the options that are opened to them, making them better positioned to make informed choices.

Selected Studies on *The Amputated Memory*

In the words of Nfah-Abbenyi, Liking opts for a “new African literary aesthetics” in her works (p.4). Her works, though written in French, do not reflect any Western form of the novel. They normally reflect the influence of her traditional Bassa education. Liking opts for a style that is both spontaneous and innovative. In a way then, this shows Liking’s passion as far as seeking out indigenous solutions to the problem of gender in Africa are concerned. Ngabeu (2013) discusses the central importance of time in the postcolonial novel. She states that “*The Amputated Memory* enables Werewere Liking to challenge the legitimacy of official versions of history that have been completely neglected. It presents the female condition in Africa as a dislocated memory seeking to reconstruct itself”. (2013: 203). Of central importance to this paper is the issue of time as it relates to memory. Liking explores ways in which Africa’s collective memory forgets and preserves moments as part of its cultural past. She attempts to establish a link between tradition understood as a legacy of the past and modernity associated with the new and the present. Evidenced in her works are rituals long forgotten in Africa’s past; her fictional works are created along these lines ‘the silences of Africa.’

Ngabeu’s essay, using a framework that is based on the notion of uncertainty or silencing, examines how Liking rebuilds a postcolonial identity in a context where history gets lost and suppressed. She quotes Said as implying that in a context of coexisting cultures, the dominant culture keeps the other addicted. The other is judged, labelled and stigmatized by the image imposed by

the dominant culture. It loses its identity in the face of the dominant culture. Liking's works show that Africa's history is completely distorted. There is a discontinuity between the past and the present that creates emptiness. This way, Africa cannot build its present and future without elements from the past. Africa is lost as Bhabha (1994: 7) supports the idea that the past appears as a necessity to understand the present:

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past, refiguring it as a contingent "in between" pace, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The "Past present" becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living.

Ngabeu insists that the core of Liking's work *The Amputated Memory* is to tell the untold story of Cameroon's past, a past that has been suppressed over time, such that only disjointed official versions of history are paraded as true history. The painful aspects of history have never been told, it have been silenced. Liking's prime motive for writing the story is to tell the 'silences' of Africa (p. 5). This assertion of suppressing the past of Africa which demonstrates how historical 'truth' can be manipulated to suit the interest of the people in power, a position supported by Trouillot (1994)

The second parts of her essay touch on the importance of memory to the reconstruction of a postcolonial identity for Africa. According to D'Almeida,

Liking “was born at a time when it was finally possible for women to write, to break the silence culturally imposed on them.” (2000: xi) It was conceivable then for Liking to create a female character through whose eyes the actual story of Cameroon’s struggle for independence would be told. As she puts it, ‘*The Amputated memory* explores the ways in which the woman’s memory preserves and forgets moments in her tumultuous past. The novel includes songs and presents the female condition in Africa, a memory dislocated with parts of the past seemingly lost forever, seeking to reconstruct itself’. (p.xi) Through Halle Njoke the protagonist then, aspects of Cameroonian history are reconstructed. Liking uses the element of memory to reconstruct the history. As Ngabeu notes, “for her, memory is seen as an important chain of transmission of knowledge that must be sustained through women. She uses the pre-colonial African experience through the Bassa ritual aesthetic, combines it with the colonial heritage and the postcolonial to create new conceptual spaces for women”. (203) One significant aspect of the novel that Ngabeu’s essay does not dwell on is the status of women as depicted in the narration of Halle Njoke. Especially in the collective struggle for independence, they were doubly oppressed: under the colonial administration as well as the patriarchal system. The essay is also silent on the ways the women manipulated the system to negotiate a way to meet their collective and individual needs.

The innovative style of Liking is deployed in her telling of the female condition in Cameroon. According to D’Almeida, ‘whether in literature, performing arts, or in real life, however, one of Liking’s preoccupations is the

need for a female perspective in responding to the demands of development and modernity'. (20) This is what comes to the fore in her novel *The Amputated Memory*, where the narrator is a young female, pregnant with hopes and aspirations, but her father had other plans in stock for her. In a sense then the protagonist's life can be said to mirror that of Cameroon's struggle for independence and the disillusionment that came to characterize the postcolonial era. By creating a female protagonist then, Liking had succeeded in relating the female, who is the most marginalized in society, version of events. The reader is confronted with the harsh realities of life in colonial Cameroon thereby establishing the position of the woman as true victims.

As Toman puts it, '...motherhood, solidarity, and the complementarity of man and woman are pervasive themes in Liking's works'. (12) This is a very true assertion as throughout the novel the panacea to the victimization of the woman had always been through solidarity and complementarity. The fact that in no instance does the woman succeed alone serves to drive home the point that complementarity and negotiation is the way out for women in Africa. This view is supported by Nnaemeka's 'Negofeminism.' The option of Negofeminism charges both sexes to be willing partners in progress. The option speaks in a new language, that of complementarity and mutual respect. Liking, through the novel, demonstrates that not only the woman is victimized and disadvantaged by patriarchy, but so is the man. This ties in neatly with Toman's belief that Liking's works advance the cause of matriarchy. She stresses that 'unlike patriarchy African matriarchy does not exclude men from important roles in

society. Thus when complementarity is not taken into account, both men and women suffer.’

Toman concludes her essay by stating that ‘...so Liking’s writings in part are meant to piece together a lost past and its traditions, and she invites the reader along on her journey in search of a more matriarchy-oriented world...’

(5) In advocating matriarchy, therefore, Liking encourages complementarity built on mutual respect. As Amadiume said, African matriarchy is to be regarded as ‘the greatest achievement of African women and their singular contribution to human civilization.’ (1997: 92)

Diabaté’s review of *The Amputated Memory* proves to be an interesting read. She reviewed the novel from the perspective of the tragic circumstances that had come to define the life of the protagonist, Halle Njoke. The focus of the review dwells on the horrific incidents that the protagonist underwent as a child such as suffering physical abuse and an incestuous relationship with her father that led to the birth of twins. One important point that she raised in her review is the resilience of Njoke in the face of seemingly daunting circumstances. If she is given a collective identity, then it can be said that she represents the women who struggled under the fetters of colonialism amidst betrayal from their men folk. Liking describe these women in the following words: “Really, these women should all be decorated. They are the country’s true development agents, and I wonder how we’d manage without these nameless women who do enormous work for our survival every day.” (112) It is clear the protagonist lived in a patriarchal society. This is evidenced in the way women are relegated and

disregarded in everyday life. Her success as a feminist was won on this ground, that she negotiated available avenues to articulate her needs. Refusing to be weighed down by repressive system symbolised by her father that threatens to undermine her, she succeeded in holding her won.

Halle Njoke's feminist stance according to the review is betrayed by her decision not to keep silent. As she puts it, "I needed to shake loose the silences about experiences that should have been told, seeing them as facts of life if not test cases, and at least force my own people to say, 'Never again'". The protagonist has succeeded in 'destroying the emptiness of silence' as Almeida puts it, by giving a feminist perspective to the unfolding of events. The oppressive system succeeded in robbing her of a good education but it did not succeed in keeping her in the dungeons of silence. Diabaté's review ends on the note that Liking has succeeded in painting a detailed picture of Africa, violated yet full of potential. She likens Halle's violated hence 'amputated' body to that of the African continent that had been plundered and left battered by colonial masters. Yet just as Halle's revival came from Bassa religious rituals so will Africa heal if she deftly integrates pre-colonial African rituals and values with the present. This seems to be the thematic concern of Liking which she achieves through a character like Halle Njoke.

Conclusion

It is clear from the existing literature that both the Anglophone and Francophone writers do not pay much attention to the portrayal of the female characters. The emphasis seems to be on the thematic concerns of the writers. It

seems that the process of characterisation as well as character portrayal in the selected texts have not received much critical attention. This study would fill that gap in the existing literature. Again what is not clear in the existing literature is the comparative angle in the selected texts. This study would then fill that gap by analysing the portrayal of female characters as well as how they are sustained as the novel progresses. The studies carried out so far are all important in the advancement of knowledge. But one fundamental issue that has not been satisfactorily tackled is that of the true depiction of the African woman.

CHAPTER THREE

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE SELECTED TEXTS

This chapter addresses the first research question: how do Francophone and Anglophone women writers portray their female characters? It will begin by tracing the pattern of behaviour portrayed by the protagonists as well as the other female characters in the selected texts. The story of an entire community is transported into the lives of the protagonists as well as other characters that help the plot unfold. A detailed analysis of their actions as well as their response to subjugation will lead to an understanding of their societies and how women's individual as well as collective actions may point to their status as independent women. Again the probable motives of the writers in casting such characters will be unravelled in the analysis of the actions of the individual female characters.

Character Analysis in *Efuru*

Wilentz's assessment of Nwapa's characters is worthy of mentioning here. She celebrates Nwapa on her excellent and accurate portrayal of women in Igbo society. She states:

Flora Nwapa herself...compelled us to take a fresh look at women in Igbo society.... [Her] commitment to create literature from the oral heritage of her foremothers has placed her in a continuum in which she, too, is a foremother. "Flora Nwapa, 1931-93" (8)

Efuru is the story of a beautiful young woman who is successful in everything except what really mattered in African societies--motherhood. Her economic prowess coupled with her barrenness marks her out as both distinguished and doomed. Traditionally *Efuru* is a doomed woman. She is well respected in the society, even her enemies cannot overlook her generosity, yet in their eyes she had failed as a woman. For what is a woman's life worth if she remains childless? Her friends cannot comprehend or intervene in the tragedy that had come to define *Efuru*'s life. It is this duality, this blend of a woman's greatest failure, which is her barrenness and her highest achievement--as a priestess that makes the story of *Efuru* the work of a masterpiece.

The *Efuru* we meet at the opening of the text is a strong headed woman who defies tradition. She comes across as a strong-willed assertive character. The text opens on a note of apparent 'rebellion' on the part of *Efuru*. She had left her father's house to live with *Adizua*, a man who was too poor to even afford her dowry. *Efuru*'s strong personality becomes apparent here, she defies patriarchal authority to satisfy her own need. This is against the backdrop that *Efuru* is no ordinary woman. The narrator describes *Efuru* the character thus:

She is "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* 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...." (11)

Thus Nwashike Ogene was not only a man; alive he was tradition, he was the epitome of patriarchy. Many feminist analyses of *Efuru* capitalize on this fact and hail Efuru's rebellion as a step in the right direction. It must be mentioned, however, that what marks out Efuru as a strong and decisive African woman is her willingness to negotiate her place in her gendered society. Though she had gone ahead to live with Adizua, a man who was too poor to pay her dowry, she insisted "... the dowry must be paid. I must see that this is done." (10) It is her insistence on adherence to cultural dictates that singles her out as a woman of virtue. Efuru knew the customs of her people and she knew her place within that custom. Efuru's position as a married woman was only secured after the bride-price had been paid.

Efuru was aware that she breached this ancient custom at the risk of her life. This explains why she could not celebrate the ushering into womanhood by circumcision. Though everybody congratulated her on attaining womanhood "... underneath, something weighed Efuru down." (19) What weighed her down was her unpaid bride price. She could never feel completely married until it had been paid. Efuru made elaborate plans for the payment of the dowry when they finally could afford it. According to the text, "...Efuru and her mother-in-law went to the market to buy the best cola they could find. Then they went to the shops and bought six bottles of schnapps. Then they went to a woman nearby and bought a big jar of home-made gin. The men were responsible for buying palm wine. So Adizua was in charge of that and he bought many kegs."(21) It looked like Efuru and her husband were willing to go out of their way to make amends for past

misdeeds. After they fulfilled custom, “Efuru’s father called her and her husband and blessed them and gave them some words of advice.” (22) They could only receive Nwashike blessing after the dowry had been paid. “They went home and for the first time since that fateful Nkwo day the two felt really married.” (24)

That the two felt really married after the dowry had been paid is hugely significant. It showed that they both had respect for the customs of their people. Efuru’s stance as a strong-willed woman becomes evident here. She chose to exercise her right to freedom of choice within the cultural context. She demonstrated what Nnaemeka calls Nego-feminism. Nnaemeka (2004) refers to the African feminist struggle for parity as Nego-feminism and defines it as “a feminism of negotiation” or as “no-ego feminism.” To her, this is a feminism that foregrounds “negotiation, give and take, collaboration, compromise and balance.” She argues that African Feminism “challenges through negotiation and compromise.” In explaining the negotiation, Nnaemeka cites Filomena Chioma Steady to point to a very important feature of the cultural universe in which African feminists function; the fact that their context makes it necessary that they “view human life from a total, rather than dichotomous and exclusive perspective. For women, the male is not the other, but part of the human same. Each gender constitutes the critical half that makes the human whole. Neither sex is totally complete in itself. Each has and needs a complement, despite the possession of unique features of its own.” Nnaemeka concludes with the statement: “African women’s willingness and readiness to negotiate with and around men even in difficult circumstances is quite pervasive.” (2004: 357)

This singular action of Efuru right at the beginning of the novel shows her maturity as a character. This she demonstrates by her willingness to negotiate her way for acceptance within a patriarchal society. It was through negotiation and inclusion not exclusion and aggression that paved the way for Efuru to win back her father's approval. She could not live in her 'marital' home knowing she had not fulfilled her cultural obligations. Through Efuru and other characters in the text, Nwapa as a pioneering woman writer has succeeded in showcasing an array of strong independent women who existed in her society. It was said that Efuru's father was one of the last men who had seen the white man with his own eyes. Though Efuru was not formally 'educated,' she was well schooled in the customs of her people. She knew how her maternal ancestors before her had succeeded in having their way in a male-controlled world.

Efuru's tactfulness in dealing with issues of male domination shows her dexterity as a character. The essence of negotiation in peaceful co-existence is seen on the night Efuru went to the dance. One member of their age group "was performing the ceremony of the second burial of her father and so they went to dance with her". (29) She was not in the house when her husband came in. She knew the consequences of her action and so before she even got home she had begun negotiating for peace by singing this song; "My dear husband, don't sell me, My dear husband, don't kill me. Listen to me first before you pass judgement..." (30) It is easy to deduce the degree of control and dominion wielded by men making Efuru's society a gendered one. The concept of negotiation is at the heart of many primordial cultures in West Africa. It is

believed that one can get anything one desire through negotiation. It is a powerful weapon to articulate one's place. ((Nnaemeka 2004) In the hands of Efuru, it worked like magic. Her husband Adizua "was completely disarmed." (32) What could have been a disruption of peace was skilfully handled by Efuru through negotiation-a call on her husband to first listen to her before deciding to judge her.

Efuru's development as a character is sustained through her actions. Through Efuru the conclusion can be drawn that Nwapa creates economically empowered women characters. This way she succeeds in diverting 'power' from men, depositing it in the hands of women. The consolidation of power in female hands suggests that together the women characters constitute a force to reckon with. According to the text, "Adizua was not good at trading. It was Efuru who was the brain behind the business." (36) Efuru is portrayed as a wealthy woman, with enough money to spare others. Her economic status also affords her a certain level of respect and recognition within her society. She had succeeded in breaking the chain of reliance on any man. She took the initiative to engage in business ventures. For instance, she was the one to introduce her first husband to the trade in yams and crayfish. Other female characters like Ajanupu, Omirima and Efuru's mother-in-law were all industrious women. They understood the essence of economic empowerment and took it seriously. They understood that to achieve harmony and balance in the society, there must be collaboration of efforts as well as give and take.

One trait that proves that Nwapa's characters are strong-willed and assertive is their outward display of candour. The women in Nwapa's society refuse to be silenced. The women are very vocal in articulating their desires and refuse to be covered into silence. Ajanupu, the sister of Efuru's mother-in-law, for instance, bluntly states; "...who wants to be quiet these days. Don't you know that if you don't lick your mouth the harmattan will lick it for you? You stay there and talk of being quiet these days." (33) Nwapa's women are well able to express themselves, the patriarchal context notwithstanding. This shows how liberated the women were in the times they lived in. Perhaps Ajanupu reference to 'these days' shows the changing society they lived in. This is a society where women have to master the art of speech if their integrity as humans is to be preserved. Colonialism had destroyed the traditional spheres of influence held by the women. Colonial administrative structures replaced traditional organizations and boys were favoured over girls in the quest for education. One example is Efuru who had not gone to school though her childhood friend Gilbert had gone on to become a doctor. Women could therefore not afford to keep silent or to be silenced. To be silent implied that others in authority determined your fate hence the reference to the harmattan licking your mouth for you. Nobody has control over the harmattan, but you can control the effect of the harmattan on your lips. Likewise the new system of ascendancy through education could not be undermined, but one's place within such a society could be negotiated. Their level of forthrightness demonstrates the high level of freedom Nwapa imbues her female characters with.

One trait that attests to the strong character of Efuru is her fiercely independent spirit. She did not define herself in marriage. She demonstrated that she had an identity of her own. She did not see herself merely as an appendage of her husband. Efuru displayed the masterful art of balance and moderation.

This trait in Efuru was demonstrated when Adizua her husband left for Ndoni with another woman. She felt her position as first wife threatened. She stated thus "...I want to keep my position as the first wife, for it is my right." (53) Efuru had come to reason that she was not getting the respect that was hers by right. Her husband Adizua was playing against the cultural rules. He was undermining the traditional norms that govern their lives as a people. She believed in complementarity and give and take which is at the heart of many African cultures. She demanded for respect in the relationship, she was a human being and wanted to be treated as such. Her attitude demonstrates that she was negotiating for what was hers by virtue of her marital position. She was, however, not an emotional wreck who had come to pieces just because her husband left with another woman.

Moreover, Efuru was fully conscious of the cultural boundaries. Her society allowed for polygamy, the right of the man to marry more than one wife. Efuru was not against her husband taking in a second wife, what she was against was her husband taking her for granted by not seeking her consent. All the other female characters agree with her. She was the first wife and so deserved the right to be respected as such. Efuru was only establishing her Nego-feminist stance by exercising her right as a woman within her gendered society. She knew she stood

to gain should her husband go in for a second wife. According to Emecheta, women are able to form bonds as sisters in marriage through polygamy. Together they run the household and co-exist peacefully; the first wife is always respected as the ‘mother’ of the household. (1988: 171) It was this respect that Efuru demanded be accorded her. It must be mentioned that whereas Westerners frown on polygamous relationships, within the African context it is permissible and often encouraged by the first wife. According to Efuru, “it is only a bad woman who wants her husband all to herself.” (34) Her bitterness about her husband leaving her did not stem from jealousy or the urge to possess him. It was rather a Efuru’s life when she reasoned thus:

How long will I continue to tolerate him? There is a limit to human endurance. I am a human being. I am not a piece of wood. Perhaps he wants to marry this woman. What is wrong in his marrying a second wife...? I don’t object to his marrying a second wife, but I do object to being relegated to the background...” (53)

The Nego-feminist option, according to Nnaemeka, is opposed to confrontation and hostility. Rather it is open to negotiation and compromise, and that was something Efuru was looking forward to. She was open to negotiation and reasonable talk from her husband. She lamented “...Oh if only I could know how and when I offended him, I shall ask people to beg him. I shall try all in my power to win his love...” (54) In this Efuru is not displaying weakness or dependency, she is showing how open she is to the option of negotiation. In the absence of any dialogue, she did not see a way out of their predicament. The

relationship will have to be over if her husband did not negotiate with her: "...if I fail in this attempt, (of negotiating with him about the issue of a second wife) then I will have no other course than to leave him." (55) There was no point in staying in a marital relationship where there was no avenue for articulating one's needs.

Efuru's reaction to her husband's behaviour points to her stance as a Nego-feminist. Even when her husband left her and it became obvious that he was not coming back anytime soon, she did not pack out of his house in anger. Here again she exhibits balance and moderation. She told her father and Ajanupu that she had still not made up her mind about her husband's behaviour. She listened once again to the dictates of culture, this time in the voice of Ajanupu who reasons that she waits a year and then leave for her father's house. It is this trait in Efuru that endears her to the people in the community. She was aware she lived in a gendered society; this is evidenced in her acceptance of her husband as lord and master. She states: "...He is the Lord and master, if he wants to marry her, I cannot stop him." (55) What she can and is willing to stop in the circumstances is the total disregard of her integrity as a person. She is willing to live by the ways of her people, not just as a passive observer in the scheme of things, but as an active participant in the issues that concern her. In this regard, praise for Efuru can be contrasted with the hostility and disapproval that met her 'supposed rival' who had gone off with her husband. In this way, Nwapa succeeds in creating a balanced view of her society.

The dialogue between the supposed rival's mother and her friend in the marketplace reveals much:

“Yes, my daughter went to Ndoni about a week ago. She left very early and she did not tell me whom she was going with”.

“Well, you can never understand young women of these days, but what of her husband?” the other woman asked.

“Her husband?” she repeated. “...she had left her husband.”

“This is an abomination. What is wrong with these children nowadays? When we were young, we dared not do this. You mean that she was committing adultery in her husband's house?”

“...she is a bad daughter, my friend. She is a bad daughter. She won't listen to me. She won't listen to anybody...” (55)

The severity of the offense committed by the ‘bad daughter’ is seen in the way her mother presented the story. Her use of repetition and parallel structures serves to foreground the atrocity her daughter has committed. According to Mick Short (1996), “Parallelism is one of the mechanisms which writers have at their disposal for controlling the associative connections which readers make...parallelism is an important tool for the writer in exercising control over the reader” (65-67). Through this linguistic feature Nwapa achieves the effect of making the daughter an object of scorn. The reader shares in the sorrow and disappointment of the mother; she has given birth to a daughter who is everything a daughter should not be. She has succeeded in robbing her mother of the joy and prestige she should have enjoyed as a mother. The reader is

compelled to join in the condemnation of the ‘bad daughter.’ It is also significant that Nwapa does not give the daughter in question a voice. The reader comes to empathize with the character whose voice he hears. The silence of Efuru’s rival, then, in the reader’s mind implies guilt. She has done what is inconceivable to her mothers and the reader willingly joins the condemnation train. Another feature worthy of note is the silence of Adizua, Efuru’s husband. It is significant that the narrator denies him speech. This technique is highly successful because it adds to the impression that he is an irresponsible man. A man who commits a ‘cultural travesty’ is not worthy of anyone’s respect. We are moved as readers to side with Efuru and admire her courage in the face of such injustice. This is partly possible because we, the intended readers, get to hear only Efuru’s side of the story. Perhaps in refusing to name the ‘bad’ woman Nwapa wishes to state that such woman with anti-social behaviours does not exist. Again it might be that naming such a character is not consistent with the rules governing her literary choices with regards to characterisation.

Through skilful use of language then, the third person narrator positions the reader to side with Efuru. Thus Efuru is admired when she leaves her husband’s house. Again the Nego-feminist stance of Efuru becomes evident in her actions. She told Ajanupu that she would not wait for Adizua her husband to come and drive her away. He had shown through his actions that he did not want her anymore. She was not going to cling to her failed marriage as a means of maintaining her identity. Efuru knew her identity transcended marriage; she did not exist merely as Adizua’s wife. Efuru was not alone in her Nego-feminist

stance; other female characters also shared her position. Ajanupu was one such character, she stated: “I had to recommend a girl for my husband when I saw that I was too busy to look after him and my children, and at the same time carry on with my trade. So there is nothing wrong in his wanting to marry a second wife. But he must go about it in an open and noble way....” (44) All the women agree with on this issue; Adizua had not done well with Efuru. Efuru represents the women in her community who hold on to traditional ideals. Given a collective, identity Efuru comes to represent women in Ugwuta who are fully aware of their rights as women in the traditional set-up. Again they are aware of the changing times they live in; the colonial administration creating spheres of influence that largely left them out.

Nwapa wrote *Efuru* around the time when Nigeria was emerging from colonial rule. In one vein then her work could be seen as representative of a society that was undergoing change. For instance, the woman whose daughter had run away with Adizua commented: “What is wrong with these children nowadays? When we were young, we dared not do this”. Their society had changed with colonialism, morals had obviously broken down and some women felt they could disregard norms and values in the name of asserting their independence. Such immoral characters are scorned, as women are still expected to behave with decorum. This explains why both Adizua and his ‘new wife’ attracted nothing but condemnation. Adizua then comes to represent men who have no respect for custom. Ajanupu has this to say about them “...some men are not fit to be called men. They have no sense. They are like dogs that do not know

who feeds them....” (58) This goes to show that traditional values were still very much respected.

Much of the feminist critics of *Efuru* condemn Efuru the character for not leaving her husband when she left with the new woman. They consider her action weak and ineffectual; it is a sign of weakness that she hung on to the hope that Adizua might one day return to her. As Ajanupu advised her “...My advice is this dear child: be patient and wait. It is only the patient man that drinks good water...He will soon be tired of her and you will resume your position again.” (58) Efuru’s decision to wait for her husband is neither weakness nor a sign of clinging to the debris of a failed marriage. It is the action of a true Nego-feminist who believes that the key to social equity lies in complementarity and negotiation. By waiting for her husband and even going to Abor, Ndoni, Akiri and Ogwu to look for him, Efuru was indicating how open she was to negotiation. She demonstrated her true strength when she came back from her search. The narrator tells us, “Efuru came back after a month and vowed that it was over with her and Adizua. She told herself that even if Adizua came back and begged her on her knees with a bag of money; she would not listen to him.” (88) It is highly significant that we are told of Efuru’s actions by the narrator. It is a clear indicator that Efuru thought out her next plan of actions, only after careful considerations. Perhaps by making the narrator lift her thoughts from her head, Nwapa hopes to show the reader the process of rationalization that Efuru had undergone. Her decision to leave was not a product of a hasty action, it was

the only recourse she felt open to her after the Nego-feminist option of negotiation had failed.

Efuru's decision to remarry corroborates her Nego-feminist stance. Her action was guided by her respect for their customs. Her barrenness did not lead to despair or desolation. She was even instrumental in procuring a second wife for her husband. She told her mother-in-law, "I want my husband to have children. I am barren." (180) She was willing to negotiate her place by allowing her husband to marry a second wife. The diplomatic way she tackled the whole affair can be attributed to her maturity and willingness to respect the customs of her people. She left her husband because her integrity was at stake; he accused her of adultery. That was something Efuru could not take. Gilbert's accusation meant that Efuru had no respect; neither for her womanhood nor the customs of her people. It struck at the very core of her being as a woman and her standing within her society. She had the courage to end the marriage in dignity.

A pattern of similar behaviour could be seen at play among the Ugwuta women. The women are not openly aggressive towards their men, neither are they dead set against the norms of their patriarchal society. They are able to negotiate their way within their cultural set up. Efuru then becomes the standard by which other women are measured. The good well behaved women are like her whilst the ill-mannered ones are everything she is not. She therefore stands out as the model Ugwuta woman. Through her portrayal the narrator is able to paint a picture of her society and the kind of women who live in it. According to the narrator, Efuru is "self-willed." (78) By creating female characters like Efuru,

Nwapa seeks to counter the claims of Western critics who portray African women as beast of burden and a down-trodden lot. They are nothing of the sort; women in African societies are strong and independent minded. Granted that the advent of colonialism robbed them of some of the rights they enjoyed in pre-colonial societies, nevertheless in colonial societies they still had a voice. Efurú's mother-in-law noted this about Efurú; "...She knew that Efurú was a good woman...but she also knew that Efurú's patience could not be tried. Her kind of suffering did not appeal to her. She was not meant to suffer at all. Life for her meant living it fully. She did not want to merely exist. She wanted to live and use the world to her advantage...." (76)

It can be safely concluded then that women in Ugwuta who were assertive as well as active in articulating their needs even in their gendered society, were to a large extent successful. Women who embraced silence like Efurú's mother-in-law suffered the consequences. They were taken for granted and their dignity as human beings was trampled upon. This is exemplified in the character of Efurú's mother-in-law. Efurú said this about her; "...and my mother-in-law, poor woman...perhaps self-imposed suffering appeals to her..." (61) Her refusal to articulate her needs marks her out to be treated as an object of scorn. In Efurú's mother-in-law then Nwapa seems to be making a statement against women who decide to keep quiet and go with the tide. The dependency syndrome in women is strongly condemned in Efurú. This is demonstrated in the humiliations and miseries that Efurú's mother-in-law had to go through. It is also significant that the narrator does not give her a name. Throughout the story, she

is only referred to as Efuru's mother-in-law or Adizua's mother. By denying her definite identity, the narrator wishes to make a statement that a woman of such character should not exist and that no one should be like her. This is what marks Nwapa out as an expert in her field. In portraying a character like Efuru's mother-in-law, she had succeeded in debunking western notions of African women, as well as the name given to African women collective activism.

In casting a character like Efuru, Nwapa had betrayed her literary agenda of casting strong-willed African women. Efuru as a character portrays the traits of an African woman who though aware of her cultural constraints, refuses to be hemmed in by it. Nnaemeka (1995) proves through the actions of Efuru that African feminism is based on negotiation and balance as well as collaboration. The African feminist struggle, that is the woman's call for attention, is steeped in arbitration as against antagonism. That Efuru as a character wins our admiration is because of the artfulness with which she negotiated her way within the confines of her patriarchal culture. Nnaemeka states:

Reading Nwapa should not be a referendum on radical feminism.

Nwapa's work is a biography, a collective biography of beautiful strong Ugwuta women and their majestic lake. Nwapa's work captures the complexity, ambiguities, and contradictions of her environment as they are embodied in the force that lies at the bottom of the lake. (p.104)

In light of Nnaemeka's statement, *Efuru* should be read as a referendum of another kind. This is the kind that takes into account the peculiarities within

the African context. Efurú's feminism shines on many fronts. Throughout the text, Efurú demonstrates how negotiation and complementarity prove to be worthy tools in the gender equation.

Character Analysis in *Essential Encounters*

Kuoh-Moukoury, like Nwapa, is a pioneering woman novelist and essayist. She is interested in interrogating the place of the woman within the gendered society. According to Kuoh-Moukoury in an interview, she 'wrote to inspire other women to write.' Both Kuoh-Moukoury and Nwapa believe that women have to destroy the aura of silence that characterises their lives. In their maiden novels, they created strong, self-willed independent women characters that held their own even in gendered societies. This is what Nnaemeka calls Negofeminism; they believe in collaboration as well as complementarity. They are able to negotiate their way and meet their ends in a gendered world. According to Toman, in "reading *Essential Encounters*, one notes that 'matriarcat nouveau' maintains the idea of interdependence and solidarity from the original tradition, yet calls for women to look beyond their traditional role in an attempt to regain some of the power they have lost in the transition from rural to more urban lifestyles". (3)

Kuoh-Moukoury did more than that in *Essential Encounters*; she succeeded in creating a simple story with a complicated plot. Her protagonist Flo is a Western-educated modern African woman who fiercely believes in love and marriage. Love is central to the plot of the story; this is captured in the preface to the story: "Love is worrying about another as much as, or more than, oneself:

doing everything possible to protect the other from self-destruction and from the rest of the world. Nothing is more beautiful than a couple...” In this statement the very premise of Negofeminism is laid bare; in Africa men and women complement each other.

In Flo’s character, therefore, Kuoh-Moukoury succeeds in painting picture of a woman who is representative of the modern African woman. Like Aidoo’s Esi Sekyi in *Changes*, as well as Aissatou in Ba’s *So Long a Letter*, her elevated status that came with her education and exposure places her in a position to question traditional norms. She is under no obligation to fulfil traditionally assigned roles for women. Her parents are no exception, she states:

“...my parents are determined to become the ideal African couple of the twentieth century: my mother wants a sewing machine, an iron, a bicycle, dresses made of cotton, silk and satin and a few pieces of fine jewellery. My father needs a radio, a bicycle for himself, as well as a record player to replace the old phonogram and a refrigerator later on...” (8)

The traditional life that existed in pre-colonial societies did not appeal to them. They were determined to live the full life of the ‘French black man.’ It becomes clear that the French system of colonization by assimilation proved to be both a more effective and thorough weapon than the British system of divide and rule. The British, it seemed, did not interfere too much in the traditional lives of the people. The French, on the other hand, were determined to create French Black men who would live in total denial of their African culture. The system of colonization adopted by the British was not that brutal and thorough. It is,

therefore, not surprising that the characters in the Francophone stories are cast as behaving much more like the colonizer than their Anglophone counterparts. This is seen in how Kuoh-Moukoury depicts her female characters.

The narrator defines herself and the lives of her friends in these words: “Who are we? We are little privileged Cameroonian city girls with boots to protect us from the rain and caps to protect us from the sun...” (5) This generation of African children had come to believe that access to Western education was a window of opportunity. The narrator states “Life is just beginning for us and it is full of promise. In every family one hears the same motivational sermon to do well and persevere in one’s studies; achieve more than we did...” (8) The new way of life that had come to stay was a paradigm shift towards acquiring modern education and with it the prospects of a better modern life. The educational system was so designed to shift the loyalty of the African towards France and hold in contempt his cultural heritage. As the narrator states, “I know very little about my own country”. In her mind she associates home with France, not her native Cameroon. The image of France as home evokes in her mind “...the image of a magical place where one enters a paradise through a golden gateway. This is a country with a temperate climate of mild winters and cool summers that offers the wonders of life without problems”. Flo lost this perfect picture of France the moment she stepped feet there. Just like Ousmane Sembene’s protagonist in his short story ‘The Black Girl’. She was disillusioned with France as soon as she went to live there. The narrator states “I lost this idealistic image of France as soon as I arrive in this country.” It was, however, in

France that Flo received the education that would put her at the crossroad of tradition and modernity.

An ideologically Westernized Flo is caught in the throes of African tradition. In Flo's society, as in most African societies, a woman's ability to have children is her primary function. As a result, a barren woman does not really exist. The special case of barrenness and what it means in a woman's life is emphasized by Kuoh-Moukoury in *Essential Encounters*. Flo is haunted by her inability to give her husband a child. Toman has argued that Flo's obsession to have children is only a diversion for her to put more compelling issues aside. She states that Kuoh-Moukoury created a character who mirrors the confusion that embodies postcolonial Cameroon. The novel, written just at the dawn of independence, mirrors the uncertainty of Cameroon as a new nation. Cameroon's confusion then is mirrored in Flo who though educated was bent on fulfilling her primary customary role of motherhood. The strength of Toman's argument seems to be that though Flo is educated and exposed, there exist no role models in her society for her to imitate. Her actions could then be read as investing into a patriarchal system; a system she was more familiar with instead of exploring avenues that existed for her as an independent woman.

In as much as this might be true, the other possible explanation for Flo's insistence on adherence to her customary duty of attaining motherhood might be her desire to be accepted among her people. Her financial and educational accomplishments amount to nothing if she fails in her primary role of childbearing. In motherhood, therefore, she stands more fulfilled. After a

miscarriage and numerous medical consultations it becomes apparent that Flo is to remain childless. Defining herself within patriarchal terms, Flo carried her barrenness like a huge burden. She had failed in the eyes of her people as a woman and her place as a dignified woman in society was at stake. It is interesting to compare and contrast the characters of Flo and Nwapa's Efuru. Faced with the same predicament in similar gendered societies both women responded to the situation differently. For Efuru a second wife was the answer. With Flo, however, the solution was much more complicated. She devised a plan to encourage a relationship between Joel her husband and Doris her best friend. Flo's Western ideals would not allow her to encourage polygamy yet she was determined to manipulate it to meet her ends.

The fulfilment that would come to her husband Joel is what urges Flo on. Her action emphasizes the essence of motherhood in her society. Ngcobo points out the extreme importance of motherhood to African societies. She explains why childlessness is associated only with women:

Central to many African beliefs is that there are three states of human existence-the land of the unborn, the land of the living, and the land of ancestors and the dead. Belief has it that children of any given family are there waiting for the mothers to come and rescue them from oblivion and bring them to life in the land of the living. Failure therefore, to "rescue" the children is a sorrowful capitulation and betrayal. In cases of childlessness,

people ...hear the echoing cries of the unborn child that she (the mother) will not “rescue” and bring to life. (142)

Society is therefore not kind to a woman who is barren. They see the barren woman as a traitor; she has deliberately schemed to keep the children that belong to that particular family in oblivion. There is no question of her personal suffering as a barren woman. Flo’s despair is apparent in the following statement in *Essential Encounters* “But we cannot truly understand the pain of a woman when she is incapable of giving a man that she loves the most beautiful gift in the world. When she feels incapable of an act that makes our life fulfilled. I have destroyed myself”. (16)

In this vein D’Almeida explains:

Women have internalized the primary biological tenet of patriarchy, which posits reproduction as the essential act of women’s lives. By adhering to this patriarchal command, women place a tremendous psychological burden on themselves... (This) psychological conditioning for motherhood affects women across class divisions...” (89)

It was expected that Flo with her exposure to education would carve a new identity for herself. Her education notwithstanding, her concept of marriage and marital relationship were based on the traditional cultural beliefs. Flo encouraged the friendship between Joel and Doris because it perfectly served her purpose of eventually holding on to her man. She did not want to compromise her position by truly allowing Joel take a second wife. She was not ready to

negotiate her way around the gendered setting to arrive at a solution. By refusing to negotiate and collaborate especially with her husband, she has rejected an option that had proved successful for women even in difficult situations. It becomes clear even before the story draws to a close that Flo is set up to fail. It is difficult to account for Flo's behaviour. On one hand, she assumes the Western educated woman's stance by insisting on monogamy. On the other hand, she wants to desperately fulfil her obligation as an African wife. Motherhood is not central to white Western educated women. It seems that for them, it is not a crucial issue. Many of them like Beauvoir deem motherhood as enslaving. Flo's dilemma is representative of the Western educated African. She disregards her African traditions and yet finds no fulfilment in a western culture that is racist in orientation. She is deaf to Joel's persistent pleading that "There are happy couples without a child" (42)

What Kuoh-Moukoury did in Flo is to create a split personality. The crisis for Flo has to do with the gap between her 'new' ideals and the old cultural demands that she still accepts. In the scheme, she devised to bring her husband Joel back into her arms; her justification lay in the fact that she was only following tradition by choosing a co-wife for her husband. Flo had a different reason for encouraging the friendship between Doris and Joel. Her reason differed from what existed in tradition. The solution could have been compromising to have Doris as a co-wife. Flo did not want that, she wanted a way to have her husband back and she counted on Doris to unwittingly help her do that. She knew Doris from childhood; she knew her stance on love and

marriage. She knew that “Doris holds on to her independence and does not hesitate to destroy everything that stands in the way of her freedom”.(22) This way Flo hoped that Doris would reject Joel who would then come running back into her arms. She was ready to sacrifice her friendship to secure her marriage.

Feminist critics of *Essential Encounters* such as Frank (1987) have criticised Flo for encouraging a relationship between her husband and her best friend. Frank has described polygamy as “the most glaringly inequitable and sexist feature of traditional African society.” (18) In this vein, she seeks to condemn this move by Flo without considering the cultural context. Emecheta (1988) criticises the West for not seeing the other side of polygamy. She argues that women cultivate friendships and sisters through marriage. She states “polygamy encourages her to value herself as a person and look outside her family for friends.” (178) Flo’s decision to encourage an affair between Joel and Doris can be seen on one hand as an act of negotiation. It was a move to save her marriage from collapse. Caught in her situation, she felt she had no other choice. This is reflected in what she told Zimba of the conflict between tradition and modernity: “People accuse me of throwing my husband in the arms of my friend. I am far from thinking about it in reality. Even if that was true, I said laughing with Zimba, isn’t it a good thing? In the tradition isn’t the wife who chooses herself a new wife for her husband?” (88) It could have been a perfect success if Flo had been genuinely interested in cultivating a polygamous relationship. The arrangement failed because Flo had another motive for encouraging the relationship.

Kuoh-Moukoury explains that in *Essential Encounters* “she wanted to write a good novel that includes a good story, which would interest women, and through which one could also subtly communicate other messages, and without threatening men”. At the core of Kuoh-Moukoury’s writing then lay the desire to create characters that would affect subtle changes without being aggressive. She said it would be difficult to see Flo as a true heroine because in people’s eyes she did not take radical action. She seemed too dependent on the man for her happiness. She is not truly representative of an African woman because she is not independent minded. In Kuoh-Moukoury’s own language, “Flo is a thinker. She is a sage. She wants to orient and organize her affairs. It is Flo who knows, understands her own nature, understands the nature of Joel, and understands human nature; and that permits her to move beyond certain sorrows and to control them”. Flo is not a dependent woman who needs a man to survive. She is a schemer, a planner and an individual who knows what she wants in life and how to get it. Kuoh-Moukoury goes on to state that “What people have now admitted is that there is also this type of women - that this type of woman exists and is a contributor to society.... It is true that Flo is not a social heroine, at first glance. But what I want to demonstrate, through this interview and other means, is that she is a social heroine in an intellectual manner.” This intellectual manner is what she demonstrates in her Nego-feminist action; encouraging an affair between Joel and Doris. She reasons that Joel’s happiness is crucial to their peaceful co-existence. She had to devise a way to bring back the sparkle in his eyes. What Flo had not counted on was Doris getting interested in Joel.

Flo had to go through a series of emotional and psychological torture because of the affair between Doris and Joel. Her survival at the end of the story proved that she had won back Joel her husband. She had gained from the pseudo-polygamous relationship she herself had encouraged between Doris and Joel. She had to take care of Doris' baby in the wake of her death. In this she had assumed her traditional role as the first wife to care for her husband's child. Her triumph is evident in the fact that through her standing as a Nego-feminist, willing to collaborate, compromise and complement, she gained in one stroke what had eluded her most of her marital life. In a day she became both a mother and a wife.

Toman(2004) posits that what plays out in *Essential Encounters* is what Kuoh-Moukoury described in a 1994 interview as a 'matriarcat nouveau'; a 'new' traditional role for the contemporary African woman that maintains the positive aspects of tradition that were empowering to women. This dates back to the kind of traditional matriarchal system that was prevalent in pre-colonial Cameroon. Schneider and Gough (1961) explain this concept of matriarchy. They observe that;

[T]here are certain very obvious differences between matrilineal and patrilineal descent groups. Perhaps the first and most profound is that in patrilineal decent groups, the line of authority and the line of descent both run through males. That is, both authority and group placement are male functions. Matrilineal descent groups, on the other hand, although the line of authority

also runs through the men, group placement runs through the line of women. (7)

The matriarchal social structure therefore empowered women to delegate authority. They were also empowered to decide on issues affecting their lives, this could not have been possible in a patriarchal system. Schneider and Gough further explain that “matrilineal descent groups require the institutionalization of special limits on the authority of husbands over wives” (19). One option that was opened to them as women was that of negotiation. They could collectively or individually negotiate with their husbands to have their needs met. In addition, they had ways of ensuring that the power the man wielded over the woman was not absolute. In effect, they were a group whose ideas were structured on the Negofeminism principles of complementarity, negotiation, collaboration and no ego deliberations. Also crucial to matriarchy was the issue of solidarity among sisters, something Flo hoped to fall upon in Doris in her bid to save her marriage. That is why Flo came to realize that it was her friendship with Doris that gave her the strength to go on.

It is significant that Doris is portrayed as a white woman from France. In one vein, she might represent the hold France has on Cameroon which must be eliminated. On the other hand, she might represent western ideas of radical feminism which is individualistic in nature and as a result ought to be jettisoned. Western notions of female assertive behaviour are not the antidote to the problem of gender imbalance in Africa. Perhaps Doris dies so that Flo may live. Through characters like Flo and Doris, Kuoh-Moukoury depicts strong self-assured

women characters that are not afraid of interrogating the traditional models that threaten to stifle them.

Character Analysis in *The Amputated Memory*

Toman (2000) makes an interesting observation of Liking's works. She states "...it must be said that Werewere Liking stands alone in terms of constructing a contemporary matriarchy through literature and theatre arts... motherhood, solidarity, and the complementarity of men and women are pervasive themes in Liking's works" (5). Liking's works focus on encouraging a return to matriarchy as a means to end discrimination against women. D'Almeida also supports Toman along these lines; she reiterates that "Liking's preoccupation is the need for a female perspective in responding to the demands of development and modernity." In her fictional works Liking creates female characters that are truly resilient in the face of horrendous atrocities. In *The Amputated Memory*, for instance, Liking focuses on portraying spirited female characters that are not defined by the tragedies of their lived experiences. These are women who are truly representative of women across Africa.

Liking's epic novel *The Amputated Memory* recaptures the Cameroonian anti-colonial resistance movement in the late fifties. The resistance is recounted through the eyes of seventy-five-year-old Halla Njoke. She was urged to write the story of her own life by her Aunt Roz, the first in a chain of women who were actively involved in the anti-colonial struggle. The issue of memory is very important in the novel. Halla has to reach back into the forgotten past to try and remember aspects of their history. Aunt Roz cautions her "...sometimes we don't

really know what is happening to us. Our only truth is the memory of our memory...we are marked by the things that stay engraved in our memory.” (6) Halla is urged to remember and recount aspects of their individual and collective history. Her aunt Roz laments the tragedy that had come to define the history of Africa. She urges Halla to “unearth what her memory holds back...pull out some snatches of our Unwritten History...you know we’ve been living in a context that made us choose oblivion as a survival method, a secret of life, an art of living...and surely you know... what a farce Africa’s history is...” (6-7) Thus situated Halla begins the process of remembering “...all the women of my clan, who, in spite of all the vile acts perpetrated against them, had nevertheless managed, and were still managing, to remain cherished, indispensable, and self-possessed.” (8)

What is at the core of *The Amputated Memory* is a recounted documented history of women’s collective activism. Women who held their own even amidst abuse. Ironically the women held great respect for the men in their society. Perhaps this is what makes the novel an example of what Arndt would term a transformative African literary piece. The narrator observes concerning her grandfather who stood tall as a custodian of the culture of the people, “your beauty, the beauty of your body and of spirit that dwelled inside was manifest in everything you said and did. For me, Grand Pa Helly, it was what lay at the foundation of everyone’s respect for you...” (15) Yet it was these men who perpetrated the worst crimes against the women. That the narrator and other women still had respect for the men in their society implied the men did not have

a collective identity. Again it demonstrates a politics of activism on the part of women which is inclusive in nature.

The story is set in a patriarchal society as contained in the narrator's lament. She states: "I became unhappy about not being a man. A man is free. He shows up, makes decisions, gives orders, and women and children obey. The women stay, and the men leave..." (23) Clearly it is a man's world and women have to just play along. The women are mere pawns in the world of men. It was out of frustration that the narrator asked the grandfather "when will I be a boy?" It was what a boy had come to represent that the girl truly desired. Perhaps it was her grandfather Grandpa Helly who first planted in little Halla Njoke's heart the seed of self-confidence, about being complete in herself as a woman. He told her "You'll never need that. You are a complete being, better than a man, better than a woman, and you should thank the creator." (27) Now she acquires a sense of satisfaction in being a woman and begins to believe in herself. She reiterates "I am beginning to appreciate being a woman; the only problem is food restrictions and all the other taboos imposed on women." (28) Societal restraints against women were designed to keep them in their place, secondary to the man.

The first hint at emancipation through education came from the narrator's father. She reported what he had told her "You told me that only the school of the White people would liberate Black women, because then they wouldn't be compelled to marry and become submissive to a man out of habit." (49) Formal education which came with colonialism was one channel through which women could be empowered. This confirms Chukwuma (2010)'s assertion that though

colonialism collapsed some of the traditional organizations that empowered women, it nevertheless opened up new windows of opportunities. Kuoh-Moukoury agrees with this assertion, she observes in an interview:

We were constantly aware that African women were put behind men. They don't go to school, or very little. Parents prefer to send their sons to school, and leave the daughters at home; saying that the home, marriage, and having children is their calling. It is therefore necessary that we respond to this [through education]... And with this instruction (for which schools are very important) woman may begin to become more aware of the disparity – that they can also study and that through their studies they can occupy important and influential positions in society...”

In effect then, what colonialism actually brought was a new order of things. Education became one means through which women could be endowed with power to call the shots. Education brought a new level of awareness, of the existing inequality and what they could do about it. Education held the key to economic independence - a state that ensured that they no longer served as appendages to the men. With economic independence they had a voice and a choice. They could articulate their needs and explore avenues available for their self-expression. That was what Halla Njoke's father wanted for her, a life that was totally different from that of her mothers. This could explain why Halle pursued education with all her might. She states “...I am the best in every subject. The teachers had me do two years in one....” (75) Nestling in her young heart was the idea of economic independence through education.

Halla Njoke's mother Naja Njoke is a 'traditional' woman who defines herself within patriarchal bounds. Unaffected by colonialism's 'civilising' ways, she demonstrates an independent streak. She is fully cognizant of her customary rights as the wife to a polygamous husband. Halla observes "What really bothered my mother was that her husband wanted to disregard her to the point of changing wives without changing names. This willingness to merge the two women shocked my mother to the highest degree..." (68) Her husband had already side-lined culture by taking a new wife without her consent. Halla's mother could not take it that she shares the same name with the new wife. In this move by her husband, she senses perhaps her husband duplicating her identity thereby reducing her to nothing. A situation she would not succumb to. It could be deduced from this that though they lived in a patriarchal society, they also had rights as women and could not be taken for granted. Liking portrays her female characters as wielding an amazing amount of power irrespective of their educational background.

Halla Njoke's strong character is revealed in her persistence and endurance as a woman. All the buffets she received did not affect her independent spirit. A series of incidents happened to her that should have left her broken and wrecked, but she still clung on to life with a cheerful attitude. Halle's first encounter with tragedy was when her own father slept with her. He managed to convince her with the following words:

I don't want to run any risk at all, not where you are concerned, at least. You are my mother, my soul, the pride of my life, my only real

hope for survival. I don't know or feel for the other children the way I do for you. I might be able to console myself if they were to separate me from them, but not from you. So I've found a solution: I'm going to put my blood into your body and then the test will have to be positive.... (81)

Halla's father is educated, exposed and highly respected by the French. It is mind-boggling then how he manages to conceive outrageous ideas and has the audacity to carry them out. Poor Halla became the victim in a man's despicable attempt to assert his manhood. It is significant that Halla recounts the events of this ordeal in a song, which is to show how deeply she was emotionally affected by it. The setting of the incident is also worthy of note. Perhaps that was what gave her strength to live with such a horrifying experience and still had the courage to recount the tale. The river where it happened could be seen as symbolic, it could be a site for cleansing and purification. Its cleansing effect realized in the strength it gave Halla to continue her life even when she realized she was pregnant with her father's baby. It is possible to trace a link between the river in Halle's life and Uhamiri, the river in Efuru's life. Both women found their identity and hope with the river, it became a defining moment for them. For Efuru Uhamiri the river-goddess meant wealth and prosperity. As Ogunyemi points out concerning the role of water in Nwapa's novels: "The rehabilitative agenda of Uhamiri is crucial in all [Nwapa's] texts. As a female, she speaks to woman's traditional, salvatory role. As a deity, she performs a spiritual function. As a body of water, the lake itself serves a domestic need, suffusing

Nwapa's writings with a cleansing and healing aura" (14). The river serves the same salvatory role for Halla; it becomes a source of hope and healing. She recounts the events of her ordeal:

I surrender to him, to the sounds of water and wind; I try not to feel anything, sure that I shall suffer less that way...certainly, a flash of fleeting pain cuts straight across my body...but the water, ever faster and more forceful in this time of floods, quickly eases it, erasing it as if by magic...." (83)

That Halla did not suffer any major emotional trauma after this event suggests that the river did more than ease the pain away. It cleansed her soul of the scar of bitterness she could have carried with her through the years. Looking back, she confidently states "Yes, I, Halla Njokè, was very lucky." Her psychological and physical resilience after the trauma caused by patriarchal and colonial subjugation reflects the resilience of African women as well as the salvatory role of the river.

Halla's father remarried a 'modern' woman; her education had secured her a job as a senior midwife of a District Hospital. Yet she still defined herself in patriarchal terms. She still clung to her husband for love and stability, without him she felt incomplete. As Toman argues, the 'newly liberated' African woman does not as yet have role models to show them the endless possibilities that their new freedom affords them. Thus stuck, they still define themselves in patriarchal terms. They feel the need to conform to existing standards. The 'unschooled' traditional woman then seems better positioned culturally to assert her

independence. Unexposed to modern ‘liberating’ ways, she finds solace in the freedom the traditional model offers her whereas her ‘educated’ sister straddles worlds, the old and the new. It is highly significant that this new educated wife bears the same name as Halla’s mother. This serves the purpose of indicating the pervasive nature of the odds against women.

The demeaning experiences Halla Njoke went through in the course of her life are enough to break any person’s spirit. Her father had wanted to barter her to “an old, very red-faced, freckled Swiss man,” for “two coffee and cocoa plantations and the houses that come with them...” (104) As if that was not enough, she gave birth to twins, one stillborn for her father. She had to end up singing in pubs at night in the city to support herself and coming across all shades of men who were only interested in her sexuality. With a father who was too caught up in his own vices to be of any use and a mother who was self-centred to the point of conceit, Halle had to develop an independent spirit that would see her through her tragedies. That she succeeded in doing this can be seen in her unscathed nature by the time the story draws to a close. She was devoid of bitterness in the narration of the tragedy that had come to define her life. In Halla Njoke, therefore, Liking succeeded in creating a Nego-feminist character that was not afraid to dream though the dreams never materialised. Her daily reality was marked by calamity yet she remained strong. Though partially educated, she had a mind of her own. She lived in a society where “polygamy was still officially permitted...the law didn’t even set the limit at four as does the

Koran. A man had the right to marry as many women as his means would allow; it was simply a financial question....” (331)

One trait that showed that Halle was a strong independent-minded character was her unwillingness to succumb to a marital relationship just because of promised comforts. She boldly told Monsieur Prosecutor she could not marry him. She states “ I took the liberty of reminding him that I wasn’t in love with him; that he never gave me enough time to feel a single emotion; that he imposed ways of conduct and a rhythm of life that were too stressful for me to imagine spending my whole life with him”(332). This is what Kuoh-Moukoury describes as ‘matriarcat nouveau.’ According to Kuoh-Moukoury, ‘matriarcat nouveau’ “reminds man that a woman’s heart exists and not only her arms for work.” (Kuoh-Moukoury 1994) Halla is determined to follow the desires of her heart and not concentrate on satisfying the material cravings of her flesh. In this her strength as a character is made manifest. This is a different Halla we encounter here, one that has been strengthened by the buffets of life. Mirrored in Halle’s life is that of her Aunt Roz who “imagines a better world for her youthful thousands, a world made up of small certainties, a world just liveable enough for all of them as they wait for the Eden that’s far too long in coming and impossible to foresee honestly, at the centre of a world that’s worse than hell and not even truthful enough to call itself by that name.” (5)

Halla’s grandmother Grand Madja, however, is the epitome of traditional knowledge and lore. Through her eyes then we see Halla’s pre-colonial society as a matriarchal one. Grand Madja observes “Man is born unstable and therefore

very weak; foolishly, it's our society that makes him conceited, because it insists on his being strong and taking care of women at any cost. Women are naturally responsible for life. If they'd take that role on conscientiously, they could settle their problems in solidarity with one another instead of fighting because of men's inborn instability, and then they would shape a different breed of men." (111) In Grand Madja's speech one could easily point to the features of Negofeminism. Solidarity among women would prove a powerful transforming tool in their quest to change their societies. In Grand Madja's speech, therefore, a picture of a society where man also suffers because of existing disparity is painted. Here the inclusionary nature of certain strands of African feminism is emphasized. The Negofeminist principle of collaboration, negotiation and balance is also stressed. Naja, Halle's mother, became a better person when she weaned herself off men's attention. Halla says of her: "Clearly, some marriages mark the end of daring and creativity in women. Alone and free, my mother in no way resembles the timorous woman I once knew, and it is a pleasure to share this undertaking with her. A perfectionist in search of the absolute, she does her part of the job boldly, meticulously, and with great imagination." (368) Naja's transformation proves Grand Madja right; a woman's happiness is not hinged to a man's heart. This is a different Naja we encounter here. She seems to have shed off her dependency trait and developed her character to a point of assertiveness. She now emerges as a strong spirited character.

In *The Amputated Memory* the women are cast as involved in anti-colonial struggle together with the men. They are so devoted to the liberation

cause that they sang “To the devil with marriage and the swarms of children that will only increase the number of sheep in the colonist’s herd...” (414) Aunt Roz represents all such women and in the end Halle pays a fitting accolade to them. She states: “You, my auntie, had no children, and I know what it cost a woman not to nurture her fertility: She is doomed to mortal solitude unless she creates- with her own hands, the clay of her own heart, and the water of her own lymph- thousands of children where two or three would have been more than ample!”(421) The resolute stance of all these women become glaringly clear, they were willing to forego their chance at attaining motherhood for the liberation of their dear nation. This justifies Halle’s action of wanting to “...take hunting horns and trumpets to strike up a hymn to the glorious mothers Naja and aunts Roz, for all the epic silent battles that, beyond all despair, have caused this tortured continent to remain the continent of all possible tomorrows for all of humanity” (422). Liking had indeed succeeded in creating unwavering, fiercely loyal, independent female characters who are truly representative of the women in their societies.

Character Analysis in *Changes*

Aidoo’s novel is set in an urban centre. Her three female characters are educated, economically independent, exposed hence capable of charting a course to their desired destinies. This proves Allan’s assertion; what she failed to mention was the fact that these leading female characters did not always make choices or chart courses that guaranteed their continued autonomy.

Esi Sekyi the protagonist is a government statistician, a predominantly male domain. She is a career focused woman, unaccustomed to traditionally assigned roles for women. A woman's pride is embroiled in her brood, if nothing at all she was fulfilling a spiritual function by bringing to life all those ancestors waiting to be reborn in the land of the unborn. (Ngcobo 142) These traditional concerns were of diminished importance to Esi who "was on those dreadful birth control things: pills, loops, or whatever..." (8) Esi is in full control of her life and "no amount of reasoning and pleading had persuaded her to go off them." (8) In Esi Sekyi we witness a rebirth of another breed of woman in postcolonial Africa. This is a woman whose life closely mirrored western feminist tendencies. Her life leaves no room for negotiation and she is individualistic in orientation. Esi proves that she belongs to a new breed of African woman, who is not mindful of traditional models, an offshoot of westernization. That is to be expected, she is a product of her education. An education that teaches her to put her interest first, that discourages communal collaboration as it exists in African societies. That is why Oko muses "Is Esi too an African woman? She not only is, but there are plenty of them around these days...these days...these days". (8) It is noteworthy that Oko does not speak this thought out loud; it points to how deeply he is affected by his wife's non-conformist ways. It seems strange that though both Esi and Oko have been cast in the same educational mould, they have each emerge a different person. What Oko regards as his unrestricted right to his wife's body is misconstrued by Esi as 'marital rape.' Their marriage broke

down because Esi could not continue to live with a man who refuses to respect her space.

The divorce makes a very bold statement about the assertive nature of Esi. It was unheard of that a woman would leave her husband because he slept with her, something that was to, if nothing at all, consolidate their union. In one vein, it could be argued that Esi's decision to leave her husband stems from the fact that she was self-sufficient. Dependence on the man implied obliging his whims and caprices including his conjugal rights. Esi was under no such obligation since she was economically empowered. She completely understood the female body as a 'site of negotiation.' This implies that the woman has total control over her body and decides who has access to it. It remains purely a matter of choice for the woman. Esi was proving to be a non-African woman both in conduct and speech. Her actions had disastrous implications for her place as a woman. This is seen in how her mother and grandmother, both 'traditional' women, reacted to the news. This is one of the many conflicts between the 'old' and the 'new' that abound in the story. In her mother and grandmother the traditional order could clearly be discerned. Her mother had called her a "fool" for leaving a man simply because "he wanted too much of her and her time." (37) Perhaps the problem with Esi as her sister-in-laws termed it was "...too much education and too much money of her own..." (38)

Education and money definitely were two empowering tools that enabled women assert their individuality. As Kuoh-Moukoury affirms, awareness is created through education and women can exploit the avenues available to them.

Esi is no longer defining herself in patriarchal terms; her new status allows her do what she feels is right and oppose any form of patriarchal imposition. Seen in this light, Esi's actions make sense. That is why there is a clash between her and other women who wish to uphold tradition. In this way, she contrasts sharply with Kuoh-Moukoury's Flo who though college educated in France still perceives of her womanhood in cultural terms. Esi exhibited a self-centred trait probably because she had in hand a different lens through which she viewed events. There existed differences between her ideas of womanhood and those of the older generation symbolised by her mother and grandmother. The older generation were Nego-feminists to the core. This is evidenced in the following conversation between Esi and her grandmother:

Not many women are this lucky...and who told you that feeling gratitude to a man is not enough reason to marry him? My lady, the world would die of surprise if every woman openly confessed the true reasons why she married a certain man. These days, young people don't seem to know why they marry or should marry."

"What are some of the reasons, Nana?"

"...Esi we all know that we marry to have children..."

"But Nana that is such an old and worn-out idea! Children can be born to people who are not married."

"Sure, sure, but to help them grow up well, children need homes with walls, a roof, fire, pots."

“Oh Nana. But one person can provide all these things these days for a growing child! Nana what about love?”

“Love? ... Love? ... Love is not safe, my lady silk, love is dangerous. It is deceitfully sweet... but when we need to count on human strength...love is nothing. Ah my lady, the last man any woman should think of marrying is the man she loves.”(40-41)

The dialogue between Esi and her grandmother is significant in a number of ways. It brings to the fore the ‘modern’ views of Esi regarding marriage and motherhood. Her views contrast intensely with those of her grandmother who represents the older generation. Esi believed in such ideals as independence and love. The Western notion of love is essential in marital relationships and a woman does not have to marry just so she could have children. Esi was striking at the core of traditional values. Nana her grandmother believes there are other reasons besides love that should propel a woman to marry. Love is fickle and therefore not dependable, what really counts is economic stability. Nana proves to be much more practical, and more open to other options other than love as the basis for marriage. She believes a woman can negotiate her way into a marital arrangement even in the absence of love, finding solace in the children she would bear in that marriage. In effect then Nana’s concept of womanhood is both compromising and negotiable whilst that of Esi is idealistic and unwavering. What comes to play between Esi and her Grandmother then is the issue of generational conflict. This conflict is as a result of the interests and ideals of one generation (Esi) collide openly with those of another. (Her grandmother).

Sociologists are of the view that only modern societies in which age specific social roles are not prescribed by tradition, often give rise to different generational identities. Each generation then is a new people. This seems to be the problem between Esi and her grandmother who represent different generations. This same conflict is seen mirrored in *Anowa* and de Graff's *Sons and Daughters*. The issue with Esi that probably led to a breakdown of her marriage with Oko was her unwillingness to compromise.

This is what makes the difference between Esi and her equally educated bosom friend Opokuya. Opokuya understood her society, the nature of men and was sometimes willing to compromise to achieve her ends. She told Esi when the latter complained of Oko smothering her with too much attention, "Esi, listen: men are not really interested in a woman's independence or her intelligence. The few who claim they like intelligent and active women are also interested in having such women permanently in their beds and in their kitchens." (44) Opokuya's marriage is intact because of her Nego-feminist stance demonstrated in her willingness to negotiate her way around her husband. Esi will not yield to concession claiming it is both impossible and a contradiction. It is clear that if she was ever going to remarry then it will have to be on her own terms, she will be the one calling the shots. She could not bear the thoughts of "another husband sitting on her back all twenty-four hours of the day? The same arguments about where a woman's place is? Another husband to whine all day about how I love my work more than him...?" (45) Clearly the idea of a wife in a compromising sacrificing position did not appeal to her. In a way, Esi's sentiment echoes that of

Nwapa's protagonist in *One is Enough*. Amaka states when she leaves her husband Obiora: "As a wife, I am never free. I am a shadow of myself. As a wife I am almost impotent. I am in prison, unable to advance in body and soul. Something gets hold of me as a wife and destroys me. . . . No, I am through with husbands. I said farewell to husbands the first day I came to Lagos. (127) Both Amaka and Esi then can be seen as conforming to the image of the new breed of African women who are interested in defining a new identity for themselves. They want to be seen first as they are, as humans before wives and mothers. Both women want to represent independence for women within an evolving post-colonial society. The price both women pay for their position is solitude. Their societies have not yet carved out a place of acceptance and integration for such women.

Esi again is portrayed as a character that is not so thoughtful of her actions. This is revealed in her decision to marry Ali as his second wife. She wanted a marriage on her terms. Her new marital status as Ali's wife afforded her the freedom she so desired. What was more; she could have both a husband and still enjoy the liberty of an unmarried woman. It was clear that Esi had not really thought out the full ramifications of her actions. Her haste in marrying Ali indicates her unwillingness to really think through her actions. That is why it was a source of bafflement for her mother. As she explained to Opokuya, "my mother thinks that with all the education I've had, I should have everything better than she has had..." (92) That included a man of her own instead of being secondary to any woman. Esi's alienation as a character is evidenced her. She, unlike her

mother, was not fully aware of the cultural and social implications of her actions. Alienated within her own culture, what she regarded as an assertion of her individuality turned out to be self-imposed seclusion.

Opokuya by virtue of her cultural awareness understood fully the implications of Esi's marriage to Ali. She cautioned Esi "...in a traditional situation, it was not possible for a man to consider taking a second wife without the first wife's consent. In fact, it was the wife who gave the new woman a thorough check-over right at the beginning of the affair. And her stamp of approval was a definite requirement if anything was to become of the new relationship." (94) Traditionally, Ali 'belonged' to Fusena and her consent was crucial if Esi was to succeed in her desired venture. Due to Esi's ideological attitude, she had no desire in investing in a patriarchal system that sought to tell a woman how to live her life. Through Esi, Aidoo paints a picture of a society that spells doom for a woman who has not learnt how to negotiate within a gendered setting.

Fusena, Ali's wife is also on the same pedestal as Esi and Opokuya. She is educated thus liberated and exposed yet her identity is wholly enmeshed in wifehood and motherhood. Beyond that she has not carved out any other personality for herself. One reason for this perhaps seems to be her religion which robs her of distinctiveness. Being a Moslem woman came with its own rules; she fails to exist as an individual, she lives in her husband's shadow. What she hopes to ferret out of the whole arrangement will be the respect she expects her husband to accord her. When Ali informed her of his intention to marry a

second wife, she asked him “she has a university degree?” It is probable that Fusena meant this as a statement rather than a question. Ali’s desire to marry a second wife with a university degree to her seems to be the worst kind of betrayal; negating all the sacrifices she had made over the years as a wife and a mother, Fusena was struck by the unfairness of it all. Her worst fears had been confirmed, “Her husband had brought into their marriage a woman who had more education than she did.”(97)

Fusena knew education to be a means of personal elevation. It places one in a powerful position where one can explore endless possibilities. Higher education then becomes a mark of class, the higher your class the better placed you are to negotiate your needs and assert your independence. According to the dialogue between Aba and Ama, a man would desire a woman with “high education, a degree or two...a government job with side benefits...” (99). Now she had to pay the price, by giving her unwilling consent to her husband. The dictates of her religion coupled with her patriarchal society left her no choice in the matter. Fusena then is portrayed as a weak character that is not able to make her own decisions. She is carried along in the tide of society. She casts a pathetic figure as a character because the inequitableness of the whole system shocked her into numbness. She had to learn the bitter lesson her mothers had already mastered; “It was a man’s world. You only survived if you knew how to live in it as a woman...” (104) A woman knowing how to live in a man’s world is what Nnaemeka calls ‘negotiating realities.’ This suggests that even within a gendered society a woman can still hold her own. Fusena, therefore, contrasts sharply with

strong characters like Esi's mother and grandmother as well as Opokuya. Opokuya's marriage is still intact because she has learnt how to live as a woman in a man's world, she has 'negotiated realities.'

Nana's advice to Esi is worthy of mention here. She states; "Leave one man, marry another. What is the difference? ... But tell me Esi, doesn't a woman's time belong to a man...? But remember, my lady, the best husband you can ever have is he who demands all of you and all of your time....Men were the first gods in the universe, and they were devouring gods....Life on this earth need not always be some humans being gods and others being sacrificial animals. Indeed, that can be changed...it would take a lot of thinking and a great deal of doing". (107-108) The great deal of thinking and doing that Nana was referring to is the principles embodied in Negofeminism.

Esi's weakness as a character lies in her inability to live by accepted standards. Ingrained in her orientation is the focus on the self which she feels must be put above all else. Her dilemma is expressed in the following words, "Why had they sent her to school? What had they hoped to gain from it? What had they hoped she would gain from it? Who had designed the educational system that had produced her sort? What had that person or those people hoped to gain from it? (111). Esi thence displays the conflict in character that has come to be mark of the Western-educated African woman. She straddles two worlds; the old and the new. How can she bridge the gap between the two without betraying either side? Esi's ideological position on womanhood contrasts sharply with the Negofeminism principles her mothers had lived by.

Esi's second marriage was bound to fall apart because she had not mastered the rules. According to her grandmother, "If she obeyed the rules, a woman like her should be all right. If she broke the rules, then her new marriage would be like fire that had been lighted inside her" (113). She lacked what will make the marriage work; compromise and balance. For a while, the arrangement suited Esi perfectly, and it looked like her assertive stance was beginning to pay off. Then the absences lengthened into uncomfortable moments of solitude. She was soon to understand that sophisticated gifts were no substitutes for a man's presence. One single fact is demonstrated in this, Esi as a character has matured into accepting reality. She had evolved into the consciousness that making choices went with possible consequences. It is possible that Esi was not fully aware of all the implications of her choice. She did not fully understand what it meant both culturally and socially to be a second wife. When the realisation finally dawned, she left the relationship. This is what marks her out as a matured character.

Aidoo vests knowledge in the formally uneducated 'village' women. She does not equate education with knowledge. Nana was proved right when Esi's second marriage failed. Aidoo wittingly or unwittingly had created a character that did not fit into her society. She had been set aside by her ideological audacity. Esi's failed marriage is a testimony to Negofeminism as a viable theory in peaceful co-existence. Esi and all that she represented crumbled because it collided with the reality of their lived experiences as a society. It was clear that

society had no place for a woman who was not ready to pursue options of negotiations available within her culture.

Conclusion

Clear patterns of characterisation emerge in both Anglophone and Francophone societies. Traditionally, women have been independent, economically and socially. Together they constitute a force to reckon with. They were portrayed as being unified in their understanding of their society, it is a man's world, and you only survive in it as a woman if you are able to negotiate the reality termed patriarchy. Educated exposed characters like Esi and Flo had problems 'negotiating reality.' Perhaps their educational exposure positions them to abhor the tenets of Negofeminism which are compromise, complementarity and collaboration. The conflicts in the novels stem from their desire to play out what they had come to realize as 'rights' as individuals. Perhaps the Francophone characters displayed more affection towards their spouses than the Anglophone ones. This is reflected in the character of Flo who had regrets after arranging for the pseudo-polygamous relationship between Joel and Doris. Again the Francophone characters, represented by Flo seem much more willing to make their marriages work than their Anglophone counterparts represented by Esi. Efuru and Halla Njoke, on the other hand, have fewer conflicts to contend with despite the harsh realities they sometimes have to cope with. They chose to display their strength as characters in a much more subtle way. Nfah-Abbenyi's assertion about African women writers holds true. She states "...while acknowledging the multiple ways in which patriarchal institutions do oppress

women, these writers also often reject allegations of absolute male power and control, of which women's networking is seen as a concrete refutation...." (149)

Toman agrees with Nfah-Abbenyi when she states thus:

African writers, male and female, have consistently been called upon to propose solutions to their society's problems using elements from within their own culture instead of looking to Western ideals for answers. Thus, the concepts of interdependence and solidarity in particular espoused in traditional matriarchal societies would certainly be useful in analysing and correcting oppressive situations experienced by the African woman in contemporary society. (5)

The two pioneering women writers, Nwapa and Kuoh-Moukoury, succeed in using a recurrent feature existent in their culture to propose for solutions. They created female characters that were schooled in the lessons of life. They had learnt from their maternal ancestors the art of subtle manipulation that enabled them hold their own. Liking also cast her characters as Negofeminist, thus willing to compromise and 'negotiate realities.' Aidoo proves her mark as an artful writer in casting a character that was willing to negotiate realities on her own terms. Her detachment from the ideals of her people implied that she had no place among them.

It is clear then that the female characters in the selected texts are both strong-willed and independent in varying degrees. Their maturity as characters is clearly seen in how they deftly manipulate situations to suit their desires. Their

richness as characters shines forth in the changing roles and status they assume as the story progresses. Like chameleons they absorb the colour and feel of their environment. In the end then, it becomes difficult to criticise or condemn them for their actions. They seemed motivated by a desire to realise their place and worth as women. Esi Sekyi does prove the existence of a form of white Western radical feminism in Africa. Perhaps this is as a result of her exposure. It remains contentious that such radicalism pays in the end. Together these female characters come to represent women in their societies for whom negotiating reality is a daily skill they must master.

CHAPTER FOUR

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN THE SELECTED TEXTS

This chapter addresses the second research question; How is character development achieved and what accounts for the differences/sameness in the development of the female characters within the selected texts? The analysis of the four novels will be done to ascertain how character development is achieved. In addition the reasons that account for the sameness/differences in the development of the various characters will be argued out. In the inter-textual analysis, the two pioneering novels, *Efuru* and *Essential Encounters* will be examined together. *Changes* and *Amputated Memory* will also be considered together as contemporary pieces. This way it is hoped that a clearer picture of the world these women writers are creating would emerge.

In one vein, the texts can be seen as a daring attempt on the part of the women writers to repair and repaint the fractured portraiture of women in African societies by male writers. This could have a direct influence on the way they choose the development of their female characters in the stories they write. Ba sums up the singular all important duty of the African woman writer who is writing for and against an established tradition. She observes:

The woman writer in Africa has a special task. She has to present the position of women in all its aspects. ... As women we must work for our own future, we must overthrow the status quo which

harms us and we must no longer submit to it. ... We no longer accept the nostalgic praise to the African Mother who, in his anxiety, man confuses with Mother Africa. (“La Fonction” 1981, 6)

Efuru and Essential Encounters

Nwapa’s work *Efuru* as well as Kuoh-Moukoury’s *Essential Encounters* both share certain similarities as well as differences in terms of their portrayal of the female character. Their stories are reflective of their societies and so mirror the dynamics of an African society and the place of the woman in it. Both *Efuru* and *Flo* defy the stereotypical portrayal of women in popular fiction. They do not conform to what Deidre Lapin terms the “classic and inescapable image of wife-mother at the core of the feminine literary persona.”(102) They both seek to carve an image for themselves and go all out to protect their projected images. Together both *Efuru* and *Flo* provide a composite picture of the subservient African woman. But that is as far it goes, they are able to play out perfectly the balancing act that in Africa characterises gender relations. The differences in their behaviour pattern stem from the dynamics at work in their individual societies.

Efuru and *Flo* come across as strong willed independent characters. Their self-governing instinct glares through their innate ability to take their destinies into their own hands. *Flo* is depicted as a round character that changes over the course of the story. By the time the story draws to a close, she had changed from

a weak-willed clinging woman to one in full control of her destiny. This she demonstrates by her willingness to accept Doris' baby. The baby has come to represent what for Flo was her failure as woman. Her ability to accept the baby then comes to mean personal development as a character.

In both texts, character development is achieved through the choices the individual characters make over the course of the story. In the case of Flo in *Essential Encounters*, her development as a character is perceived in the way she was willing to compromise her stance. Being western trained she abhorred polygamy, arguing instead for monogamy. Faced with the possibility of losing Joel over her childlessness then, she was willing to allow a pseudo-polygamous relationship between Doris her best friend and Joel. The emotional trauma she undergoes indicates the high level of sacrifice she had to make in the face of the circumstances. By the end of the story, Flo has come to accept her new role as the 'mother' of Doris' baby. Her development as a character is seen in her cheerful acceptance of her new role. Efuru, on the other hand maintained her strength as a character throughout the story. The change perceived in her seems to be her increasing in strength. She attains full maturity as a fulfilled character when she accepts her status as a barren woman. When she accepts to be a worshipper of Uhamiri, she demonstrates a high level of intelligence. She comes to prove that even a childless woman deserves to be happy.

Certain factors account for similarities as well as differences in the dynamics that affect character evolution. Both writers set their story in patriarchal societies and project their characters as having to live by restrictions.

The survival of the characters is dependent upon their ability to negotiate their way around a gendered system that seeks to oppress them. Though matriarchy existed alongside patriarchy, what is seen played out in the reality portrayed in the story is the man calling the shots. One feature that characterises Nwapa and Kuoh-Moukoury's societies as gendered ones is the existence of the practise of polygamy. A man could marry more than one wife in his quest to establish his immortality. The traditional system dictated that children belonged to the man and his family. The woman existed only to contribute to his immortality. In Efuru the statement "it is only a bad woman who wants her man all to herself" is repeatedly heard. Such philosophical perceptions help to further entrench the position of the man vis-à-vis the woman. Accordingly, the women are made to make choices that strengthen the status of the man. For instance, Efuru was instrumental in acquiring a second wife for her husband when it became obvious that she was barren. She even went ahead to suggest a third wife when the second wife was becoming too conceited. Ajanupu, Omirima and other female characters demonstrated that they were all in support of polygamy. What they did to assert their individuality as women was to have a hand in choosing the wives for their husbands. Ajanupu for instance told Efuru "...it is about you and your husband. Don't you think you will begin now to look for a young girl for him...? If you leave it to him and his mother, his mother might get someone that will over-ride you. You will have no control over her and it will be difficult for you." (164) The first wife in choosing a second wife for her husband has done

what Nnaemeka calls negotiating realities. The existence of polygamy then might have influenced the development of characters as to be more receptive.

The patriarchal cultural setting notwithstanding, women still hold manipulative power. This they demonstrate by the subtle way they interrogate and modify traditions that they find stifling. It is in polygamy that Efuru finds the solution to her problem of barrenness since the children born for her husband by her co-wife belongs to her as well. In this way, one of the benefits of polygamy is actualized; it consolidates family as it ensures continuity. Efuru treats Nkoyeni's baby as her own. She fondly tells Nkoyeni "please bring me something heavier for my son. It is rather chilly this evening." (213) Nkoyeni is Efuru's co-wife, they both share Gilbert as a husband, yet she refers to Efuru as mother. She told Ajanupu, "So I said, but my mother, Efuru, said he looks like Gilbert." (212) Polygamy then encourages solidarity among women and binds them together as a unit. This way women become a force to reckon with, and could come together to resist any form of victimisation. Thus Flo and Efuru have similar attitude towards polygamy because in it they see a means of meeting their ends as women.

Flo, faced with the predicament of infertility, resorted to this tradition to save her marriage. She told Zimba "In the tradition isn't the wife who chooses herself a new wife for her husband?" (88) This is the power that comes to play in choosing a second wife for the husband. Though polygamy obviously favours the man, it nevertheless holds benefits for the woman as well. In both Flo and Efuru's situation, polygamy provided the antidote to their ailment of infertility.

Polygamy fails to work so well in Flo's situation because other factors hinders its success. Flo is a schemer; she wants to manipulate this tradition to suit her whims. She is not sincere in her desire to have Doris as her co-wife as Efuru had wanted Nkoyeni and later Ogea. Flo had hoped that Doris would reject Joel and then he would come back into her arms. She states: "My friend Doris and I have two very different conceptions about love. Doris refuses to succumb to this emotion. She possesses an extraordinary trait which permits her to escape whenever she feels anything for a boy. She does not want to be a slave ...men do not play a big role in her life." (22) That is why she was such an emotional wreck when contrary to her expectations Joel and Doris fell in love. Efuru did not 'suffer' because she had to share Gilbert with both Nkoyeni and Ogea: she profited by it. Flo on the other hand went through torture because of it. Both Efuru and Flo are faced with the same predicament, they were both barren. Their societies abhor the barren woman and hold her in disdain. They are both able to find a solution to their problem in polygamy. Both Flo and Efuru exhibit similar character traits; they both know how to negotiate their way within a gendered setting to get what they want. Efuru adopts polygamy while Flo manipulated it, but in the end they both attained a status they had always wanted, that of motherhood. It becomes easy then to measure their growth as characters. By the time the story draws to a close, we find them as satisfied women; fulfilled in their assigned roles.

Though Efuru and Flo both exhibited their Negofeminist position, they did so differently. Why is it easy for Efuru to simply embrace polygamy while

Flo had to manipulate it to get what she wants? Efuru is a traditional woman, believes in the traditions and customs of her people. She has no problem negotiating her way within her gendered society even in difficult circumstances. Flo, on the other hand, is a Western- exposed African woman. Her education in France meant that her ideals of womanhood differed from ‘traditional concepts.’ She was a different breed of an African woman. Her ideals of asserting her personality is not African -oriented which was collaborative and communal. Hers was individualistic and solitary. In theory she did not want a polygamous relationship. In practise, however, she is willing to manipulate it to save her marriage. She feels her failure as a woman keenly, and is willing to scheme to her way to a solution. Efuru was sad that she was considered barren because she knew “it was a curse not to have children. Her people did not just take it as one of the numerous accidents of nature. It was regarded as a failure.” (165) Yet she was not devastated by her condition, she knew there were avenues in the traditional setup she could employ to arrive at a solution. Gilbert’s mother observed “You are taking keen interest, my daughter, in getting a wife for your husband. It is good. I am happy.” Efuru replied, “I want my husband to have children. I am barren”. (180) The solution to her problem lay in her husband marrying another wife and having children. The children born by her co-wife for her husband belonged to her as well. In this regard, she could not be regarded as barren and she had saved her marriage as well. Flo’s exposure to Western culture had alienated her from the customs of her people.

Efuru and Flo are respected in their respective society because of their economic status. Efuru, though unschooled, was involved in trading activities that were so successful that she had money to lend. Omirima jealously observes concerning her: “Efuru must be very rich. It must be Uhamiri that gives her money.” (185) The implication of this is that she has become a culturally strong voice which cannot be ignored. Her economic status also afforded her a sense of security, in that she had found fulfilment in her personhood. She did not need a man to satisfy her economic needs. By that she was better positioned to be more assertive. This is seen in how she left Gilbert her second husband who had accused her of infidelity. She could afford to protect her integrity because she did not need a man to survive. Flo belongs to a new generation of African women. She is educated, well-to-do and living the ideal life of the modern African woman. The economic security her new status afforded her implied that she could take independent decisions. This she proved in her decision to manipulate the polygamous system to satisfy her needs. What economic independence did for both Flo and Efuru was that it placed them in a better position to articulate their needs. In addition, it also afforded them the opportunity to be assertive without inviting unnecessary criticisms.

One feature that distinguishes Flo from Efuru is the former’s exposure to Western education and its impact on her. This to an extent also reflects their pace of development as individual characters. Whereas Efuru as a woman had no problem embracing polygamy, Flo on the other hand had a tough time accepting it wholly. Her education makes her a member of a new class of African women.

Education proves an influential tool in the process of alienation and acculturation for Flo. Marietou M'Baye's autobiography *Le Baobab fou*, [The Abandoned Baobab] as quoted by Almeida attests to this. M'Baye states what school represents for her as well as other Francophone women: "The school represents what is different from her normal environment and therefore appealing...the school gives her a sense of purpose, and she works hard to accumulate, though it is knowledge of things that are foreign, and so her studies intensify a process of acculturation." (51) In the same vein then, Flo's exposure to and thirst for education took her from her roots to other worlds. It is, therefore, not strange that Flo regards with disdain the words of the marabou. She had no confidence in the supernatural and she only visited the marabou because her mother-in-law had insisted on it. Yet her success and strength as a character shone in that she wanted to save her marriage and knew how to get her in-law's approval and support. She was successful as the mother-in-law did not harass her again. But this is what sets her apart from Efurú; her behaviour assumes an egocentric form as against Efurú who was altruistic.

One factor that contributed significantly to the difference in the development of the characters is the issue of colonization. Both Flo and Efurú's societies had undergone colonialism. Both societies had newly attained independence. Their societies were changing; it had come into contact with a dominant culture and could not afford to be the same. Efurú's father Nwashike Ogene was regarded as a great man. Part of his greatness stems from the fact that

he had had contacts with the White man. This explains why canons could be fired at his death. According to the narrator:

The canons were owned by very distinguished families who themselves took part actively in slave dealing. They were distinguished because they were privileged to have had contact with the slave dealers...the booming of the canons was announcing the departure of a great son, the last of the generation that had direct contact with the white people who exchanged their canons, hot drinks and cheap ornaments for black slaves.” (201-203)

The people’s contact with the Whiteman meant that certain aspects of their tradition had been modified. For instance, those girls who went to school no longer had respect for the traditions and customs of their people. Education was churning them out into different breeds. According to Omirima:

The children of these days have polluted the lake. I saw three girls—all school girls, on orie day, going to fish. I scolded them. You are responsible for the poverty of this town, I told them. I took a cane and chased them. But did they listen to me? Of course, they did not. As I was returning from the market in the evening, I saw them returning from their fishing. That’s what they learn in school—to disobey their elders” (195).

It is clear that the people’s attitude towards colonialism and its attendant education was a critical one. This unfavourable attitude towards colonialism as well as education is also played out in Emecheta’s *Bride Price*, where only truants as well as slaves were sent to school. This created an imbalance in society as the slaves and their descendants quickly gained to ascendancy under the new

colonial administration. Part of the people's hostility towards colonialism stemmed from the fact that it had succeeded in usurping the existing social order. Those who were bent on preserving the existing social order were greatly aggrieved.

What happens in Efurú's society is that those who get to go to school look down upon those who have not had Western education. For instance, Omirima laments to Amede her friend about her daughter-in-law who had been to school, "she went to school and so she thinks she knows everything. She is so lazy. Have you ever known a woman, brought up in our town who sleeps until the sun is up...? These children get on my nerves. What exactly are they taught in that school of theirs that they mock at us and oppose us in everything?" (193-194) Western education had succeeded in turning their society upside down, where children no longer regard what is traditionally sacred with sanctity. Granted that access to education could elevate one's economic status significantly, that was surely not the only way to economic independence. Efurú, Ajanupu, Omirima and all the other women were trading successfully though they had not received any formal education. The conclusion can be drawn with evidence from the text that the people were not so bent on the acquisition of formal education. Those who embraced it saw it as a necessary evil, one way you could rise up the social ladder. Those who opposed it wanted to preserve the African values intact. This explains why even among those who embraced Western education, only boys were sent to school. Girls were kept at home to attend to domestic issues.

This contrasts with Flo's society where education is encouraged. Despite the apparent hostility towards colonialism, it is perceived as the new existing order and it is prudent to get on board. The people aspire to the ideals of France and they consider Western education a mark of distinction and achievement. Flo's parents for instance "are determined to become the ideal African couple of the twentieth century...." (4) They saw the western way of life as offering better economic opportunities. Flo's father "at work likes to dress impeccably in a stylish, duly starched suit of khaki-coloured cotton linen." (3) Africanism was increasingly giving way to 'westernization' both in conduct and concept. The narrator states regarding their attitude towards school "we are well behaved in class, very polite and respectful towards our teachers. Life is just beginning for us and it is full of promise." (4) Western education had come to mean a ticket to a world of immense opportunities. Their eagerness to acquire an education stems from the fact that they could be better positioned to be in control in a fast changing colonial and postcolonial world.

The seriousness they attach to education can be seen in how they are encouraged collectively to get as much education as they possibly can. According to the narrator, "in every family one hears the same motivational sermon to do well and to persevere in ones studies: 'Achieve more than we did.' 'Do better than we did.' 'Do what we weren't able to do'...." (5) Collectively they were encouraged to do well in school. There is that conscious aspiration to the French culture. The narrator wholeheartedly admits "I know very little about my own country...I am acquainted with France through my readings...." (3)

M'Baye testifies to the portrayal of French superiority in school text books. She states "In every school text I'd ever had, the Black person was ridiculed, vilified, crushed....They'd be represented in the darkest of India inks, ugly and lightless. All stupidity, all foolishness, all awkwardness was theirs...." (90) In effect then it could be said that the French system of colonization was much more brutal and thorough than that of the British. Education proved to be a helpful aid in the hands of the French people in their bid to turn the black man away from his culture. This perfectly explains why Flo was much more 'westernized' both in speech and conduct than Efurú who had not received any form of western education. Flo as a character had undergone a stringent process of acculturation through education. Her concepts of womanhood and her place in a gendered society therefore prove to be an amalgamation of western and African ideals. This is reflected in the choices she made as a character such as arranging a pseudo-polygamous relationship between her childhood friend Doris and Joel her husband. Colonialism indirectly affected the choices both Flo and Efurú made as characters. These were choices that proved their dexterity as characters.

Furthermore, the differences in their development as characters could be traced to the impact colonialism had on their respective societies. Whereas Efurú's society frowned on colonialism and regarded the British with disdain, Flo's society it seems was much more receptive of it. This is attributable in part to the system of colonial administration. The French wanted to create an 'assimile; a black French man while the British adopted the concept of 'indirect rule'. The impact of colonialism can be seen through how the characters are

depicted. This is seen in how Efurú's concept of love and marital relationship was closely tailored to what existed in African traditional societies, the kind of love that was not overly obsessive, that permitted a wife to share her husband with another woman without any qualms. The African kind of marital relationship dictated that the woman puts the well-being of the family ahead of her own happiness. These traits that Efurú exhibited are cardinal beliefs in African societies. Flo, on the other hand, had a different concept of love that was Western both in theory and practice. She believed in the kind of love that was fixated and individualistic. It showed the extent of the colonial influence on her. It is not strange that the plan did not work. It is interesting that Flo still fretted about issues of motherhood, which is of extreme importance to the African woman. What becomes clear then is that Flo wanted to hold on to a dual identity—as a Westernized African. Cameroon in the eyes of Flo and others like her had become a multicultural society. She was at liberty to choose which side to align with.

One other fallout of colonialism that influenced the evolvment of both Flo and Efurú as characters is religion. Traditional religion existed side by side with either Christianity or Islam. Whereas Efurú's society was predominantly Christian, Flo's was Islamic. Though neither Flo nor Efurú belonged to either of these religious sects, the social pressure they exert had some influence on them. In Nafissatou Diallo's autobiography, *A Dakar Childhood*, a detailed picture of a French colonized Islamic society is painted. The Senegalese society shares certain similarities with Francophone Cameroon; they are both traditionally

patriarchal, French colonized as well as Islamic. In *A Dakar Childhood*, Nafissatou states concerning his grandfather, “He had obeyed the stringent Islamic principles of his generation, bringing his children up strictly according to the old standards: men to the forefront and women kept at home in the background.” (36) D’Almeida points out “the secondary status given to women in the context of ‘old’ Islamic culture”. In a way, Nafissatou’s grandfather can be compared to Flo’s mother-in-law who was bent on upholding old traditional customs. Though she did not feature so prominently in Flo’s narrations, she loomed large in the background, sounding a compelling voice which she could no longer afford to ignore.

It was her mother-in-law who compelled her to see a marabou about her infertility. The existence of the marabou in Flo’s society showed the extent of the penetration and influence of Islam. According to the marabou, the reason why Flo was barren was because she had rejected the traditions of her people. Thus Flo’s ‘westernization’ was blamed for her inability to conceive. Ngcobo rightly sums up Flo’s dilemma; “Our women are caught up in a hybrid world of the old and the new; the African and the Alien locked in the struggle to integrate contradictions into a meaningful new whole...” (82) Perhaps it was these compulsions at work that constrained Flo to make her marriage succeed against all odds. She was not an overly religious person, yet she understands the role of religion in the lives of her people. If her marriage will work, then she has to give birth to that child who would consolidate the marriage. A pseudo-polygamous relationship was her solution.

Efuru, on the other hand, is a traditionalist. According to her, she could never understand the 'churchgoers.' Christianity had come with colonialism and its new dictates of Western ideals. Efuru was chosen by Uhamiri the goddess of the Lake to be one of her worshippers. She was gratified in that revered role of a chosen servant of a deity. She understood that Uhamiri had no children to give her worshippers. Being a traditionalist and an ardent worshipper of Uhamiri, Efuru had no problem with her husband getting another wife. It was a problem for Flo who had rejected her African ways for Western ideals. This to an extent is what accounts for their differences as characters and the different choices they made.

The Amputated Memory and Changes

Halla Njoke and Esi Sekyi also mutate as characters. In their respective societies they are courageous enough to interrogate repressive traditional models that threaten their individuality. Factors such as colonialism and its fallouts like formal education and religion, as well traditional systems account for the differences or sameness in the choices they make as characters. These factors are also responsible for the changes they both undergo as characters.

Esi Sekyi, like Flo, belongs to the new breed of African women. She had benefitted from formal education; she is a government statistician with a good salary and a bungalow. She too has undergone a process of acculturation due to her exposure to education and western ideals. It, therefore, stood to chance that she would have different concepts of womanhood from her mother and grandmother. Esi was also caught at the crossroad between traditional values and

modernity. Unlike Flo, Esi was bent on charting a new course that led to what she considered as her independence without compromise. Western education had taught her individualism as against African concepts of community, alliance and connectedness. Esi's concept of womanhood, therefore, focused on the self and there is a conscious attempt in the projection of the I.

Esi's mother and grandmother were traditional women. Unschooled in Western ways they firmly believed in upholding the tenets of patriarchy. They could not understand why Esi was so bent on being different. One major area of conflict was Esi's position on marriage and motherhood. Motherhood is considered to be a woman's primary function. This is her reason for being, for existing as D'Almeida states "Childbearing for a woman is equated with normalcy." (93) Esi strikes the reader as a 'different' sort of character. It is as if she is on a mission to prove her otherness. One way she proves this is by being on those "dreadful birth control things: pills, loops or whatever." (8) This attitude of Esi serves to increase her isolation from her in-laws and her own people. But Esi's focus is clearly on her job, unheard of in traditional societies. As the narrator puts it, "...Esi definitely put her career well above any duties she owed as a wife." (8) For an African woman, this is bound to bring up tensions. But Esi remained unperturbed; perhaps she wanted to be in control of her life. Much of the conflict in the novel stemmed from the fact that Esi on one hand wanted to make choices that best suited her and tradition on the other hand dictated what she can or cannot do as a woman. The reason for Esi's independent streak could be traced to the kind of education she had received. Ali, for instance, told Esi

what he thought of her: “Just kind of relaxed...like...like...as if you don’t need anybody.” She had received an education that instilled in her self-sufficiency. When she realised this was a source of conflict she lamented, “Who had designed the educational system that had produced her sort.”(111) Her ‘sort’ referred to Western educated career-oriented African women. This awareness deepened her alienation.

One issue then that baffled Esi’s mother and grandmother was her decision to relinquish her position as the first wife of Oko to be the second wife of Ali. Like Flo, Esi felt comfortable manipulating those aspects of tradition that favoured her. She was willing to be involved in a polygamous relationship because it suited her desires. Esi saw her decision to marry another woman’s man as an issue of choice. She was intellectually liberated enough to make those choices that best suited her. She, however, did not understand the subtleties of tradition that governed polygamy. She was not prepared to ‘negotiate realities.’ With such an attitude, it is not surprising her second marriage to Ali breaks up. As Opokuya her friend told her, “In fact, it was the wife who gave the new woman a thorough check-over right at the beginning of the affair. And her stamp of approval was a definite requirement if anything was to become of the new relationship.” (94) Fusena, Ali’s first wife, did not approve of the affair. But it wasn’t Fusena’s disapproval that ended Esi’s second marriage; it was her own decision to end it. This is where the complexity of Esi as a character becomes clear. It becomes increasingly difficult to explain away the actions of Esi. On one hand she comes across as a very insistent character. This she demonstrates by her

decision to divorce Oko. On the other hand she agrees to become the second wife of another man. If this assertion holds true, then Esi's isolation at the end of the story goes to prove that society has no place for a woman with such eccentric ideas. It could also be that Esi has now attained a level of maturity that allowed her to question her choices. But Esi is not left as a doomed character, she expresses hope that, "Yes, maybe, one day, one day" she was going to get a man who would welcome the contradiction that Western education had created in her.

Halla Njoke, on the other hand, was an embodiment of traditional values. Even at a tender age, she was schooled in the traditions of her maternal ancestors. Trained in the Bassa tradition, she grew up with the understanding that collaboration, negotiation and complementarity were the keys to surviving in a man's world. She was a product of her traditions. Though she was formally enrolled in school, she was often interrupted and finally made to stop. It becomes difficult then to attribute her assertive behaviour to the influence of formal education. Her grandparents provided the guidance she would need for life and from them she learnt the lesson that would help her survive in a man's world. It was Grand Madja her grandfather who taught her self-confidence. He told her "...You are a complete being, better than a man, better than a woman..." (27) This gave her the courage to declare "I am beginning to appreciate being a woman..." (28) Again it was Grand Madja who told her to "stop once and for all being so preoccupied with what you call school: Your father will never send you there. If you continue to hope for that, you'll waste time and a great deal of energy for nothing. And you'll miss all the important things you must learn in

the great school of life that is right here...Open your eyes wide, your ears, and your heart, and you will know that you are in your own school, the one that God prepared especially for you....” (217) With such self-assurance Halle was able to negotiate her way through life. It also imbued her with an amazing spirit of resilience, such that in each trial of life she emerged stronger. Halle’s assertive behaviour was steeped in the traditions of her people and so are the other women in the story. It is by collaboration and compromise that they succeed in a patriarchal world. Halle’s strength mirrors that of Esi. Yet these are two different women who have undergone different processes of education.

One feature that was common to both Esi and Halle’s society was that they were both patriarchal in orientation; a society where women came second, where they were seen and not heard. The implication for the women was that they had to find means of asserting their personhood. Their societies had both undergone colonization; Cameroon was still caught in the throes of anti-colonial struggles. Halle’s Aunt Roz, for instance had abandoned motherhood to join in the struggle for freedom. Esi on the other hand had benefitted from the fallout of colonialism; she has had an education that afforded her a decent luxurious lifestyle. She was more than determined to assert herself. Esi did not feel the emotional need to be accepted by her people; they would have to come terms with who she had become. That is why she did not go out of her way to please her in-laws, the closest to human feeling she harboured for them was disdain. The hostility between Esi and her in-laws peaked because they saw her as high-handed. The problem with Esi they reasoned was too much education and too

much money of her own. Interesting that Esi's in-laws treated her the same way Omirima in *Efuru* treated her daughter-in-law. It showed society's disapproval of the new crop of African women. This new breed threatens to usurp the status-quo and leave the 'unschooled' out in the void. Perhaps it was this hostility that Flo was so afraid of, that she was prepared to kowtow to traditional demands of motherhood. The old order, consisting of grandmothers, mothers and in-laws were distrustful of the modern Western educated African woman. They, on the other hand were bent on effecting changes in their society. This brought the clash between the 'old' and the 'new.' Perhaps this is what accounts for the duality we see in the new crop of African women.

Both Esi and Halla are portrayed as having the freedom of choice. It is by this freedom of choice that they make decisions that either builds them up or degrades them. Esi's decision to leave Oko and marry Ali as a second wife is purely an issue of personal choice. In leaving Ali at the end of the story, it shows that Esi had become what Liking terms a 'misovire.' Liking explains a 'misovire' as a woman who is unable to find an admirable man and so chooses to endure solitude. This man the misovire seeks can only be born out of the transformation of the social self. Oko did not qualify because he had no respect for Esi's space. Ali was also disqualified because he had too much respect for Esi's space. What she really needed was a man who was courteous enough to respect her wishes and bold enough to bring out her femininity. In this regard, both men failed and Esi preferred solitude to a life of compromise. Halle is also seen making personal choices that showed she was a misovire at heart. She was

quick to put an end to a relationship that did not satisfy her expectations. For instance, she states concerning Monsieur Prosecutor, “Furthermore my shield was not really offering me any great comfort. Of course, Monsieur Prosecutor assured me an enviable home in a fancy area, a more-than-pleasant lifestyle, beauty and health care, a pretty little Mini-Minor car, the dream of every young girl...I found this shield so obsessively jealous, clinging, and demanding, quite onerous and tiring.” (330) In spite of all the comforts at her disposal, Halle ended the relationship. This proves that the misovire is not obsessed with materialism. Likewise, Ali bought Esi gifts from around the world, a beautiful new car in her favourite colour, yet she left him.

Both characters demonstrate by their personal choices that they would not settle for less. Again both Esi and Halla refuse to suffer any outrage on account of their gender or need. But more importantly, they were open to love, were prepared to love again, an admirable man who met their expectations. They both wanted a man who knew the difference between loving and smothering. This new breed of man the misovire seeks must be attuned to the sensibilities and susceptibilities of the woman. In the absence of such a man, they would prefer the loneliness of a single woman’s life. The conclusion can then be drawn that both Esi and Halle were left single at the end of the story because they were misovire at the core of their being. Their society had no place for a woman perfectionist in search of the absolute.

Religion was also a factor that influenced the depiction of both Esi and Halle. For Halla it was the belief in the traditions of her people. For instance it

was her belief that her father had mutated into a Los, an extraordinary man with divine abilities; that made her allow him put his blood into her. Her father told her, “I am a Los, and that means I resist fate or conquer it, even when it goes against taboos.” (136) Halle’s father in her eyes had become something of a demigod. It was difficult for Halle to challenge him even when she knew he was just being selfish. He broke all the promises he made to her, including that of sending her to school. Yet Halla did not complain, neither did she raise any objections when her father pulled her out of school to serve in the home of his newly acquired mistress/wife. More importantly, it was her father’s demigod status that ensured her complete silence after what he termed ‘ritual blood transfusion,’ but was in fact rape. She could not open up to anybody for fear of repercussions. It is only the reader who gets to know that Halla’s child belonged to her father. Thus it was only in the face of religion that Halle remained helpless, showing how potent a tool it was in subduing her confidence as a woman. Halle firmly believed Nemy who used to say “When our consciousness starts to be locked inside its walls, it creates oblivion, even of ourselves, our state of mind, our desires and contradictions, erasing all questions and answers in the mere name of survival....” (159) It is all in the name of survival that Halle buried that incident beyond her consciousness. Halle likens her silence to that of Africa as a continent when she states: “Who will speak of Africa’s silences? Who will know where the work of true evacuation must be done?” (136) For Africa as well as Halla it was a question of survival, the choice to be quiet.

Religion, however, played a dual role in the life of Halle. It was in Bassa rituals that she found the strength to go on with her life. It was her encounter with Yere whom she called a Bissima, a genie from the river, who taught her the transience of all things. It became easier for her to bury her trauma deep inside her memory, and far easier to take pertinent decisions that aided her personal growth as a character from strength to strength. It was not only Halle's life that religion touched into submissiveness. Her two mothers Naja have to pretend to be civil towards each other because they both belonged to the same religious sect. They both belonged to the religion of the white man, they were Jehovah Witnesses. Under this religious umbrella, they feigned decorum and propriety. But as soon as they left the confines of the church, each did her best to show the other she was not weak.

Esi was not religious in any sense of the word. Fusena, Ali's first wife felt hemmed in by the dictates of a religion that gives women no room for articulation. Her education and exposure notwithstanding, Fusena still had to obey the voice of religion. Fusena had two forces working against her; her Islamic religion and the patriarchal context within which she finds herself. Both systems of belief are in support of polygamy. The traditional system at least dictates that the first wife gives her consent before the man can marry a second wife. Islam does not allow the woman such liberties, she has to be informed and her consent has to be given as a religious obligation. The only requirement in Islam is the man's ability to take care of his wives and not the emotional considerations of the first wife. Though Fusena had also been exposed to western

ideals of monogamy and fidelity, her religious factor becomes the yardstick. In the traditional setting, the first wife can exert a certain amount of influence in deciding who is chosen as the second wife; Islam is not that permissive. It is not strange that Fusena feels trapped and ends up doing nothing but complain to her mothers. Being victims themselves in a world that clearly favoured men, there was very little they could offer her in terms of consolation. They had all come to terms with the undeniable fact that it was a man's world and a woman can only tag along. Islam thus accounted for the submissiveness of Fusena as a character. In casting a character like Fusena, perhaps Ama Ata Aidoo wishes to highlight the restrictions that constrict the woman in an especially Islamic society. It is also significant that in accordance with her portraiture, Fusena is denied even the power of speech. She lacks even the will to express her sentiments as a character. Her silence serves to define the tragedy that characterises women who are no match against the odds that are against them, in their gendered existence. Aidoo demonstrates her awareness and role as a woman writer by breaking through the wall of silence that had cordoned her off the discussion of issues that generally concern women.

It could be seen in all the texts that women who were portrayed as economically empowered were more likely to be more exertive. Their economic status empowered and immuned them against dependency. Esi, Opokuya, Efuru, Ajanupu, Flo and Doris are but a few examples of women who were not push-overs. Halla's situation was different. She had become a school dropout and her father had won the custody case to keep her. She was therefore tied to the apron

strings of her father's pity. She was not in a position to affirm her independence and do what she really wanted. She was dragged everywhere the father's fancy took him. She was forced to become a farm-hand, then a servant in the house of her own father and her step-mother. She lamented "I had become the servant in my father's house without him even realizing it....Everyday I'd clean the house from top to bottom, do the dishes, wash and iron my father's clothes and those of his midwife-wife and their three little boys...." (97)

Halla was powerless to resist the force that his father had become. With no money of her own, there was nothing she could do to help herself. Her situation contrasts sharply with that of Esi who due to her economic prominence could do as she fancies. Trapped as Halla was in a situation she was incapable of ending, it becomes difficult to see a demonstration of her strength as a character. She had become voiceless, and allowed others decide her fate. Her escape to the city was the only option left for her if anything was to become of her dreams. An option she took. The portrayal of a character like Halla Njoke attest to Liking's commitment as a writer as well as her determination to portray all aspects of the woman's life. Halla's strong suit as a character becomes clear when she escaped to the city. Her ability to survive as a woman in a post-colonial urban context proves her stamina.

Colonialism had taken its toll on Cameroon's society. There was the disintegration in the moral fabric of society. Halla states of life in the city:

Now the basic rules that used to allow for such solidarity- respect for taboos, for the dignity and general interest of the clan- had been

completely flouted. One was under the impression that in this new society, only riff-raff would manage to get somewhere. The family circle was growing narrower and narrower...while all the essential values of the local cultures were made less and less practicable, especially among the elite.” (96)

The conscious drift towards the French culture that was at work in Flo’s society is still very much prevalent. Though Halla’s story was written decades after that of Flo’s, it shows the influence of Kuoh-Moukoury on contemporary writers like Liking.

The societal breakdown had implications for the role of Halla as an evolving character. It meant that she had to ‘grow’ into maturity as she gained a stance as a woman of substance in her society. By the time the story draws to a close the little naïve character we met at the beginning of the story had grown into a seasoned woman. As the reader accompanies Halla on her journey towards her identity and place as a woman in a changing world, he/she is overwhelmed with admiration. Liking has succeeded in creating a character who can be seen as reflective of the continent of Africa. The buffets and pain that defines her existence in a way mirrors the struggles of Africa. In Halla’s resilience then is mirrored that of Africa. For instance Halle’s survival after the incest/rape by her own father suggests the looting of Africa by her own leaders. It is a clever critique of African leaders and the disappointment they have come to be associated with. In casting a character like Halla to mirror Africa, Liking perhaps wishes to draw a parallel between the female’s compliant role and that of the

continent of Africa. That Halla survives the rape without a disruptive physical scar presupposes that there is hope for the continent of Africa. Though Africa as a continent has undergone many buffets, there still remains an iota of hope that Africa can regain its past glory. Halla's position sharply contradicts that of Flo and Esi who have both benefitted from colonialism.

Conclusion

In the selected texts under study, it could be deduced that there is a potent consciousness at work. This is a mindfulness that influences the women writers' literary choices with regards to characterisation. Imbedded in the personality of the character are their thematic concerns as writers. In more ways than one there is a cognizant representation of the condition of the African woman in their gendered societies. The societies they present in their fictional works therefore serve to be an extension of their own worlds. The female characters then become fictional halves of a real whole. According to Nfah-Abbenyi "African women writers have reclaimed and reaffirmed the anteriority of an African feminism, one that their maternal ancestors have relied on for millennia, a feminism that had grounded and continues to ground their daily lived experiences...." (149) A feminism Nnaemeka terms Negofeminism, one of complementarity, negotiation and balance. Characters like Efuru, Ajanupu, Amede, Opokuya, Halla, and Aunt Roz subtly interrogated a combination of the multiple forms of oppressive conditions that are both traditional and cultural specific. One significant trend that runs through all the stories is the rejection of absolute male power, manipulation as well as control. There is awareness on the part of the women of

the existence of their rights as women. All the writers argue for a sexual politics that guarantees satisfaction in a woman's life even in the absence of children. This is demonstrated in the lives of Esi, Flo and Efuru. The characters all 'grow' into this awareness during the course of the story. This is how the writers are able to maintain the evolution of the female characters. One way they succeed in doing this is by presenting them with series of challenges that test their resilience as women.

There are however certain factors that account for the sameness/differences in the representation and development of the female character in Anglophone and Francophone societies. Prominent among them is the issue of colonialism. The tactics adopted by the different colonial masters to a large extent played a significant role in the manifestation of their womanhood. The Anglophone texts *Efuru* and *Changes* portrayed strong women characters who are not afraid to assert their identity as well as sexuality. Societal shift in the aftermath of colonialism towards globalisation and modernism dictated the adoption of 'new' ideas. The erroneous idea that a woman can never be satisfied without children is undermined. The identity of both Efuru and Esi Sekyi goes well beyond wifehood and motherhood. The characters' attitude to colonialism seems to be an indifferent one. They accepted western education for instance as something one could pursue if one desires. Though they saw it as a means of empowering oneself economically, they also recognised other traditional economic means as equally viable. The introduction and teaching of Western ideals in these schools led to mistrust and tension in the society between the 'old'

order of mothers and grandmothers and 'new' generation of educated African women.

Coupled with education were economic empowerment and its attendant freedom of choice. Esi for instance was not inhibited by cultural constraints. Even Efuru who had not 'benefitted' from western education was vocal nevertheless. In the final analysis it seems Efuru's social position as a Negofeminism was worth it. This is seen in the contentment and satisfaction that came to characterise her life by the time the story draws to a close. Esi's identification with the ideals of a misovire implied that she preferred a solitary life to compromised one. Perhaps it was possible in Esi's kind of world to associate solitude with fulfilment.

The Francophone texts *Essential Encounters* and *The Amputated Memory* on the other hand showed that their society while harbouring distrust for the colonial masters, were more receptive of western education. Education became a communal thing and being left out felt like been left behind. The French system of colonialism was so thorough that their culture became the ideal culture. People began to associate 'home' with France. There was that societal consciousness that drifted towards the French culture. There seems to be more balance in the Francophone text as the writers created female characters that were still in touch with the traditions of their people and not alienated. Flo for instance demonstrated a desire to measure up to the standards set for an African wife. Motherhood was central to her being and for that she was willing to sacrifice her western acquired ideals of womanhood. Compared to Esi she was

seen as a character that puts in more effort into her marriage. She was almost desperate to make her marriage succeed, unlike Esi who cared not if her marriage failed or not. In Flo's parents it seems the French had succeeded in creating the 'Black French Man.' Flo's western exposure, her disillusionment with the French culture after studying in France, her economic status as well as the cultural dynamics at play in her postcolonial society all served as forces that shaped and directed her course as a woman in a gendered world. This may as well account for the matured Flo we meet at the end of the story. Again this might also account for the much more sensitive aspect of her character. This sensitive part she plays out in how she bares her soul to her husband Joel. She was not afraid to let Joel 'see' how much he was hurting her by going on with Doris. Their marriage was much more demonstrative than the one between Esi and Ali. This could be contrasted with Esi who remained a close book and bluntly refused to let Ali 'see' how much she was affected by his attachment to Fuseni his first wife.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The concluding part of this thesis answers the third research question; what deductions can be made from the changing roles and status of the characters? The deductions would be made based on the analysis done in the previous chapters. It would focus on the implications of the aesthetics of representation employed by the selected women writers. The extent to which the individual female characters played out the Negofeminism theory would be the basis for drawing a viable conclusion.

The texts under study are sincerely representative. The novels are integral rather than confrontational. The authors through their writing challenge assumptions and debunk theories. The women writers' varied cultural, racial, class, traditional systems as well as sexual identities implied that they responded differently to oppression, thus defying homogenization of women issues. This is one important deduction that can be made from the changing roles and status of the characters. Again it implied that prevalent theoretical positions of women's social roles as secondary could now be effectively challenged. Thus the woman writer in Africa has succeeded in creating, through her artistic creation, a world where gender roles are re-constructed and women get to become masters of their own fate. According to Ohale (2010), early narratives authored by men created an unbalanced picture of African societies. Their works have largely ignored the

important role played by women in their societies. He stated “As a result, feminist critics have denounced the patriarchal bent in these novels, citing that women have been cast in marginal roles and depicted as mere objects of sexual gratification, procreation and idle gossips”. This portrayal of women clearly belied the reality prevalent in African societies. African women writers have corrected this misconception through their writing.

Ogunyemi (1996) also asserts that novels written by and about African women largely go unrecognised by both readers and critics. This does not negate the authenticity of the views expressed by African women in their writing. Their writings fill in the gaps in men’s writings, presenting a poignant picture of the African woman. This view is supported by Chukwuma (2010) who laments this lopsided representation of the African woman. She states “The female character in African fiction is a facile lack-lustre human being, the quiet member of a household, content only to bear children, unfulfilled if she does not, and handicapped if she bears only daughters. In the home, she was not part of decision-making both as a daughter, wife and mother even when the decisions affected her directly” (219). This depiction of the African woman clearly contradicted that of her life in reality. There was therefore the call for a balanced representation of the African woman. Chukwuma reiterates;

Feministic writing in Africa today shows the difficult haranguing process of female self-actualisation. The affirmation “I am” presupposes that the subject knows what she is. The whole rubric of feministic literature traces the process of this self-knowledge

and selfhood. This cause is by its nature and goal revolutionary and different and in most cases radical. The cause cuts across the socio-cultural norm and in the process sets aside the old ways so as to carve out the new, and must so succeed in the new way that it will attract to itself acclaim, recognition and acceptance. (xv)

These writers, by creating characters who are constantly negotiating for space to articulate their needs, have succeeded in proving the viability of the Negofeminism theory. This they propose as a means of dealing with the gender imbalance in their societies. They all agree that the 'fight' for equality has to be subtle, it is essential that it is both restrained and manipulative. That approach is culturally sustainable. Within the context of patriarchal setting, there still exist avenues for female assertiveness. Together they create characters who celebrate womanhood in diverse ways and capable of taking independent decisions. But more importantly these women characters are portrayed as being responsible for their actions.

The works of the selected writers under study in this thesis resonate with a strikingly similar theme of the unanimity of all feminine experience. Through their literary works they create female characters who brave the odds to succeed. Not all the characters are successful though, thereby demonstrating the essence of negotiation if they are to succeed in the odds against them. Other African feminist theories are seen played out in the novel but their flaw seemed to be the single-minded focus on the woman, her sexuality and her culture. Again there is much emphasis on the assertion of the individuality of the female, an act that

itches them against the dictates of their society thereby setting them up for a fall.

The fact that these women writers belong to separate linguistic traditions makes little difference. Beyond the fact that their countries have been colonised by separate colonial masters, their documentation of the lived experiences of women remain pretty much the same. They all denounce the existence of a patriarchal society but offer different strategies for what they see as the ‘emancipation’ of the woman. The differences in the offered strategies stem from their cultural specific situations. That they are passionate about the secondary role society accords woman is evident in the different layers of aesthetics they employ in the presentation of their female characters.

The heroines in these stories; Halle, Esi, Flo and Efuru are all truly extraordinary women. They possess no supernatural capabilities that make them super human. Like ordinary people they all make mistakes and learn from them. Kuoh-Moukoury was speaking for all the other women writers when she said this about her work in an interview, “... I told myself that one could make a good novel that includes a good story, which would interest women, and through which one could also subtly communicate other messages, and without threatening men. And, voila! My project”. All the writers are engaged in the aesthetic of subtlety, their successful characters are endowed with the politics of restrained manipulation. Through compromise and negotiation they are able to attain a status of equality with the men. The female characters who take a radical stance like Esi in *Changes* are hemmed into a life of solitude. A subtle

demonstration of the theory that communalism as against individualism is a much more fruitful approach to the issue of gender imbalance. This is an actualisation that all the female characters gravitate towards. It is a reality that they grow to accept and embrace as they mature into more responsible characters. They come to the knowledge that it is vital that the position of the man is not aggressively challenged. Compromise then becomes the rudder in the navigation of a woman's desired course.

Liking stresses her commitment as a writer in an interview. She states: "I come from a culture where the role of the artist is not very different from that of the priest. For the one and for the other (the artist and the priest), it's all about leading others to the contemplation and elevation of the soul, in its aspirations to strive toward the infinity of the divine, toward beauty and pleasure, toward being and knowing, but, to put it more simply, it's also about tolerance and harmony in our daily existence, about motivation and dissuasion And that's also why I am called a priestess". (Interview 2002)

It is this priestly role that perfectly plays out in the casting of a character like Halla Njoke. A character that emerges courageous even after many buffets. In Halla therefore Liking achieves her artistic agenda of replicating resilient African women who still remain strong in spite of suppression. In casting female characters like Njoke, Aunts Roz, mothers Naja and Grandmother Madja, Liking paints a perfect picture of African women who bravely bear the scars of brutality.

Women who are not living traumatised lives because of what they have been through, but their experiences have made them stronger.

Abena Busia's comment on the literary preoccupation of Ama Ata Aidoo proves insightful indeed. According to Busia "Aidoo challenges, deconstructs, and subverts the traditional voicelessness of the black women trope". (81) It is this backdrop that informs her aesthetics with regards to character presentation. Aidoo, like Liking, Nwapa and Kuoh-Moukoury create characters that are set up differently to challenge the existing order. The striking feature about her aesthetics of representation is how the different characters are set up to achieve their 'subversive' agenda. For instance it is difficult to ascertain the validity of Busia's statement in the light of a character like Esi Sekyi. What Esi explored as her individuality resulted in her isolation at the end of the story. Esi's actions then pointed to her inconsistency as a character.

African women writers are concerned with 'issues' closer home. In their works they engage an aesthetic of representation that speaks to their African experience. This confirms Ba's argument that "...the African social context being characterised by the glaring inequality between man and woman, by the exploitation and the centuries old, savage oppression of the so-called weaker sex, the woman writer has a special task. She must, more than her male counterparts, paint a picture of the African woman's condition." (7) This implied that the task of the African woman writer has been cut out for her; she must be religiously devoted to the issues concerning women in Africa. Above all the African woman

writer must employ an aesthetic of representation that truly reflects the African woman.

Again Ba's statement holds true for the condition of the African woman as portrayed by the individual writers. She states; "...the cry that they utter, the women from these other countries, their cry will not be exactly the same as ours- we have not all got the same problems, but there is a fundamental unity in all our sufferings and in our desire for liberation and in our desire to cut off the chains which date from antiquity." (Ba in a 1980 interview) What all the writers are exposing in their own unique ways is a critique of the existing social order that delineates an inferior role for women. Like Ba said, though they are writers from different countries, they all have to come up against an existing social system that seeks to enforce a secondary status for women.

These writers employ an African theory, a recurrent feature existing in their indigenous culture, to condemn female subjugation. They betray their preference for an African society that is complementary in nature and blame western factors for the disharmony in their society. This is another deduction that can be drawn from the changing roles they assign their female characters. By casting them as dynamic, they have succeeded in putting across the message that women were not victimised. They emerge as strong characters capable of dealing with situations.

Representation in *Changes and Essential Encounters*

Both Kuoh-Moukoury and Aidoo succeed in creating a post-colonial identity of the woman. Their characters mirror the dualism that characterise the

lives of the 'modern African woman'. Toman (2004) throws more light on this. She states:

Essential Encounters therefore highlights African matriarchy in transition. The novel shows that there can be no absolute return to traditional matriarchy, and it also demonstrates that one cannot always apply matriarchal traditions to patriarchy and hope for successful results (1103)

In a way Toman asserts that *Essential Encounters* is about a society that is set on the path of change in a postcolonial world. The fact that traditional systems cannot hold in the face of change is stressed by Toman. The changing roles and status of the women characters mirror the inevitable change that is characteristic of the postcolonial society.

In casting a character like Flo, Kuoh-Moukoury shows how a return to traditional customs can sometimes be the solution to the predicament of the modern woman. Again in Flo's character, it is easy to see the differences between Francophone and Anglophone marriages. It seems that Francophone marriages seem to be much more 'open' as compared to the Anglophone ones, and that is why Flo and Joel openly demonstrate their true feelings. The same can be said for Njoke who boldly wards off the advances of a much older man though it offers her much comfort. She is expressive in articulating her needs and refuses to be covered into acceptance. Both Flo and Njoke could be contrasted with Efuru and Esi who were much more tactful in their relationships and hence less expressive in articulating their desires within the marital setting. Moreover in the

characters of both Esi and Flo we see women who were not only economically stable because of education, but were also empowered to challenge existing customs. Aidoo's dexterity as a writer comes to play in the aesthetic she employed in the portrayal of her female characters vis-à-vis the men. Her characters Esi, Opokuya, and Fusena together represent the emerging crop of the 'new African woman.' The fascinating issue about their portrayal was how they individually 'play out' their freedom. Though they had all gone through western education, they all responded differently to the dictates of custom. Esi Sekyi, the protagonist's physical stature matches her innate abilities. According to the narrator "Esi was a tall woman...." Her stature foreshadows the existence of a different kind of relationship between her husband and herself. Esi's overbearing physique puts Oko in the shadow of insignificance as long as the management of her affairs was concerned. That Esi was the same height as her husband implied that in more ways than one she was set up by the writer to be the equal of her man. This trait of superiority she is endowed with is seen manifested throughout the story. Esi Sekyi is demanding and unwavering in equal measure. Depicted as a woman unaccustomed to the consolidation of power in male hands, she always insists on holding her own. Through her then, Aidoo seemed to be making a statement about the new African woman. The 'modern' African woman, Aidoo seems to be saying through Esi Sekyi, was acculturated to the point of solitude. In this regard she was 'westernized' in her thinking. Her exposure to western ideals had set her on the path to the re-interrogation of the customs of her people.

Esi explained fervently the reason behind her divorce “her husband wanted too much of her and her time. No it was not another woman. In fact, she thought she might have welcomed that even more....” (37) A product of western education, she was not communal in her thinking. Even in marriage she wanted to be respected and treated as an individual. What Esi then demanded from the marriage was what Woolf termed ‘a room of one’s own,’ where even though married she still had the chance to develop her potential as an individual.

The dualism she displayed in her decision to marry Ali as his second wife proves baffling and difficult to explain away. Perhaps in Esi, Aidoo seems to be making a statement against excess and extremism. In its place Aidoo advocates for compromise and negotiation which is a balance between personal desires and traditional demands. This is what Nnaemeka refers to as Negofeminism, an assertion of rights devoid of egoism. It is significant that by the time the novel draws to a close, Esi was left alone. Her lack of communal spirit coupled with her no compromising stance had led her into a life of solitude. Aidoo’s note of caution rings clear long after the story was over; one cannot prevail against tradition, the fight against ‘oppressive’ customs have to be subtle if any victories were to be chalked. On the other hand, it is possible to argue that Aidoo wishes to debunk the assumption that there is no fulfilment in singlehood as a woman. In the struggle between personal convictions and societal demands, Aidoo advocates for the former. In Esi then there is the conscious attempt in the projection of the individual as against the collective perception that calls for compromise and negotiation.

Esi could be contrasted with Opokuya who had mastered the art of compromise. She was able to maintain a certain level of financial and emotional freedom even in a marital relationship that demands all of her. She demonstrated her financial freedom in her purchase of Esi's rickety car. If the car was seen as a symbol of emancipation as well as the mark of 'modernity,' then it spoke volumes regarding the lives of Opokuya and Esi. Esi's flashy car spoke volumes about her insistent desire in having her own way regardless of anybody's opinion. Her new car given her as a gift by Ali propels her into the class of elite women who controlling their movement demonstrates their deftness in managing their lives in a postcolonial urban setting. Opokuya's decision to buy Esi's frail car symbolises her desire to affirm her individuality howbeit mutely. The frail state of the car mirrors the dependent state of women like Opokuya, who though have received western education are not so bent on going against tradition. Such subtle ways Opokuya chooses to affirm her individuality corroborate her Negofeminist stance which is an attitude characterised by compromise and collaboration. In a way then she was a much more fulfilled character than Esi, unless solitude counts for fortitude. Even in that Opokuya as a character was not a satisfied one since the 'joy' she hoped to attain always eluded her.

The three characters Aidoo portrays in her work are all left unfulfilled. In spite of their educated and elevated status they all had to grapple with an aspect of tradition that denies them personal gratification. It goes to prove that the 'new African woman' is stuck in a painful dilemma as she was caught in the throes of tradition against which she was no match. As personal gratification eluded each

of the female characters, then it becomes difficult to ascertain their liberated status.

This dualism that Aidoo achieves in her female characters is also represented in Flo. Kuoh-Moukoury also employs the same aesthetic of duality. She however adds a fascinating twist to the character of Flo. She is a master schemer and manipulator. On the surface she plays the role of the subservient wife, fulfilling all her traditionally assigned roles. Beneath the surface however, Flo perfectly proves the excellent manipulator. She fits into the cast of what Chinweizu refers to as the greatest psychological schemer. It was this trait of Flo that earned her ultimate satisfaction. In the end she held in her hands the “baby who would consolidate the marriage.” In her new role as the ‘mother’ of Doris’ baby, she stands fulfilled both as a mother and a wife. Her careful scheming had finally paid off. The restrained difference between Anglophone and Francophone Negofeminism becomes quite clear here. The Francophone characters in the novels under study here seem to have skilfully mastered the art of negotiation and collaboration—the basic tenets in Negofeminism. Their Anglophone partners, mirrored in Esi and Efurū come across as not too skilful in negotiating their place within the gendered setting. This argument is substantiated on the grounds that while Flo deftly searched for a solution to her problem of barrenness; a character like Esi takes a firm stance and refuses to budge on issues bothering on motherhood.

Both Aidoo and Kuoh-Moukoury portray female characters who ‘struggle’ for space and acceptance within their societies. Both characters had to

make sacrifices to achieve their desired ends. The ‘satisfaction’ that comes to Esi at the end of the story becomes hard to ascertain. Both writers cast female characters that represent their different colonial experience. In the end they were united in carrying this message across through their female characters; the modern African woman is set on charting a course to her destiny. In the end, both Flo and Esi remain hopeful characters. Holding Doris’ baby in her hands Flo states ...”there is still hope for me...”(60) This hope is made possible because of her new attained status as ‘mother.’ Esi too expresses the hope that one day she might chance on true love. Hence one cannot expect much difference between Anglophone and Francophone Negofeminism since these language borders were created by the ‘colonizer.’ Even where differences exist, it is purely cultural.

Representation in *Efuru* and *the Amputated Memory*

Nwapa and Liking both succeed as writers to portray a holistic picture of women in African societies. Through their characters they tell the story of ordinary women who have to learn to ‘live’ in their gendered society. The aesthetic employed in their portrayal redeems the story from simplistic tendencies. Portrayed as ordinary women living ordinary lives, it is amazing how they muster courage to surf the unfavourable terrains of cultural demands. It is interesting that the duality that plagued their educated sisters eluded them. Halle Njoke the protagonist in *The Amputated Memory* matured into a strong-willed woman by the time the story ends. The events she recounted are horrific enough to break down any weak-willed character. This is where it becomes evident that

Halle was no ordinary woman, she in fact possesses extraordinary strength. The cruelties that has come to define her life, serves to make a strong independent resilient person.

She is depicted as a hopeful and determined character, a trait she proves in her escape to the city. She has no chance of survival in an urban environment which has no place for her kind. Again she wins the reader's admiration because even in the midst of hardships in the city, she is guided by the principles inculcated in her by Grand Madja her grandmother. Her independence glares through her refusal to trade her femininity for material comfort. Even in times when she was down to nothing, she was strong enough to resist a relationship with a married man that promised immense benefits. Halla would rather starve than compromise her integrity.

In Halla Liking stresses the extreme importance of traditional values. Colonialism had drastically changed the Cameroonian society. Traditional norms and values had been thrown to the wind. Girls, who did not have the chance of going to school had resorted to prostitution to survive. The narrator tells the story of a young girl who was made to sleep with an Alsatian dog at the cemetery for money. Colonialism had done the people more harm than good. It looks like women were worst off since the only thing they resort to is prostitution. Women had become mere objects of pleasure. It was against such odds that Halle manages to hold her own. In her Liking seems to be saying that Halle survived because she had been trained in the school of life. The values her grandparents taught her and which she lived by prove to be what had sustained her in a society

ridden with immorality. Through Halle then the reader was compelled to respect women and not give them a collective identity of irresponsibility. Her step-mother, who bore the same name as her mother, had benefitted from western education. She was the senior midwife in a District Hospital. In spite of her economic status, she still stands in need of a man's love and attention. She becomes dysfunctional in the absence of her husband. It was obvious that her exposure to education had not taught her self-sufficiency. Through her Liking seems to be sounding a note of caution to women who over-rely on a man. She advocates for independence on the part of women if they are to achieve anything in their life.

Through Halla's account we see how women were represented as sacrificial beings. Her aunts Roz for instance sacrificed their roles as mothers to partake in the anti-colonial struggle. These are the women who win the reader's veneration and respect. The female characters Liking portrays in her work fit into the Negofeminism theory. Grand Madja for instance calls for a return to women's ordained roles as nurturers of life. If women play out this role well, they would be able to solve the problem of disharmony that existed in their societies. Through compromise and negotiation, it would be possible for women to hold their own even in the face of unfavourable conditions.

Halla Njoke's portrayal bores some resemblance to that of Efuru. She was also trained in the traditions of her people, had great respect for their customs. Portrayed as a strong successful beautiful woman, the only problem she had to grapple with was that of infertility. Her courage in the face of what her

people deemed as a woman's greatest failure was noteworthy indeed. Her traditional education had taught her the importance of polygamy and she exploited this practise to her advantage. The perfect Negofeminist character, her willingness to compromise and negotiate her way even in hostile circumstances wins our applause. At times she is portrayed as compromising yet resolute. This she demonstrates in decision to leave Adizua her first husband. Again she demonstrates her strength in divorcing Eneberi her second husband. Efuru was able to display such courage in the face of adversity because she was fulfilled in herself as a woman. This implied that she did not define her worth in marriage. Her internal conflict as a character was resolved when she accepted her ordained role as the worshipper of Uhamiri. In the joys of others she was able to find gratification. It was significant that Efuru as a character is portrayed as barren. Through her Nwapa seemed to be putting across the message that it was possible for a woman to find contentment even in the absence of children. This was a very important message especially in a society that measures a woman's success in her ability to have children. Efuru's personality was so influential that nobody dared to use her barren state against her. That she remained a commanding voice culturally is significant indeed. In relation to her, other women with children were cast as lacking something that made them envy Efuru. For instance Nwabata who was saddled with many children remain indebted to Efuru. She and her husband had to pawn off one of their children to Efuru. Nwapa's message becomes clear; a woman's life does not consist in only having children.

It is possible for her to live a fulfilled life even in the absence of children. This point of view is supported by Arndt (2002). She states:

Efuru, the pioneering novel of African-feminist, offers a partial criticism of the gender and power structures of Igbo society (Nigeria). For one thing, the criminalization of the free choice of partners is criticised, for another the belief that womanhood is defined by wife-and motherhood is challenged....the novel's central claim is however, that women should have the courage to admit to themselves that marriage is not the only source of happiness and fulfilment in life. (102)

Nwapa seems to be making a statement that a woman's central role does not consist of childbearing alone. Motherhood definitely plays a crucial role in a woman's life. This means that even in the absence of children, a couple can be happy. Nwapa re-echoes what Joel told Flo "there can be happy couples without children."(48) The fact that children are a woman's glory is not muted in the novel. Ajanupu for instance was praised by other women characters for being the mother of many children. Her children became her source of pride, and she was the only woman brave enough to perform the burial ritual for Efuru's baby. Moreover she was the one they called upon in the event of any crisis on the part of children. The fascinating twist to Nwapa's work is the sense of balance embroiled into the personality of especially the women characters. Efuru for instance had great respect for the customs of her people. Yet she knew that those customs should not restrict her liberties as an individual. She was able to find a

way to carve out a personal space that allowed for self-gratification. The decision to serve Uhamiri then comes to satisfy the maternal nurturing instincts of Efuru. She had the opportunity of proving her motherhood by caring for the second wife's baby as well as Nwabata's girl. Nwapa makes it clear in an interview:

I think the message is, and it has always been that whatever happens in a woman's life...marriage is not the end of this world; childlessness is not the end of everything. You must survive one way or the other, and there are a hundred and other things to make you happy apart from marriage and children.

Again Nwapa's work condemns discrimination against women by women. The novel condemns actions by women that oppress other women. A character like Omirima is shunned by all as being despicable. She is portrayed as bitchy and a noisy busy-body. Ogea's naked hatred of her attested to this fact. It is noteworthy that Ogea, though a mere child, openly denounces Omirima. This way Nwapa is able to state how out of place a character like Omirima is. Ajanupu was also vocal in condemning Gilbert's mother, calling her a 'troublesome woman.' Men like Adizua and Gilbert are heavily criticised for not behaving like men. In effect then condemnation is not gender based. Both men and women who prove to be social deviants are criticised by all. Efuru's success as an admirable character stems from the fact that she has, according to Nnaemeka, negotiated realities. Her means of self-assertion was devoid of egoism. Efuru and Halla Njoke win our admiration as strong-willed characters because of their Negofeminist stance.

African Women's Writing as a Weapon of Denial and Assertion

Ba's statement as quoted by Nfah-Abbenyi in a way sums up the conclusions drawn by this Study. According to Ba "We cannot go forward without culture, without saying what we believe. Without communicating with others. Without making people think about things. Books are a weapon. A peaceful weapon perhaps, but they are a weapon." The selected Anglophone and Francophone women writers have used their writing as a weapon of both denial and assertion. In the aesthetic they employed in representing their female characters, they have collectively succeeded in debunking notions. In the same vein their literary quest to paint a realistic picture of their societies was fruitful.

Together all the selected women writers portrayed strong-willed women characters who were not afraid of re-interrogating oppressive traditional models. Nfah-Abbenyi's observation concerning the literary creations of African women has some significance for this thesis as well. She states "...consequently, these texts can be read as "fictionalized theory" or as "theorized fiction." We have seen in the works of these women writers "indigenous" theory that is autonomous and self-determining, the theory often being embedded in the polymorphous and heterogeneous nature of the texts themselves." The 'indigenous' theory manifested by the female characters is what Nnaemeka labels as Negofeminism, the call for female assertion that is devoid of self-centredness. It can be deduced from the actions of characters like Efurū, Halle Njoke, Opokuya, as well as Flo that they were Negofeminist to the core.

The selected women writers have also proved that theory is not separate from their actual lives. The characters play out the theory in their actions. Characters like Esi Sekyi who were not willing to compromise and ‘negotiate realities’ did not fare so well in the end. Their isolation at the end of the story implied that society has no place for women of their kind. They stood a better chance of chalking any degree of success if they are willing to compromise and negotiate. Women writers have succeeded in portraying women characters who defying the odds, prevail in all circumstances. Indeed they paint a realistic picture of their societies. It seems that they are determined to correct Kolawole’s assertion (1997) that most male writers in the early phase of African literature encouraged the demotion of women in literary works. Even when women are cast as credible protagonist, according to Chukukere (1995), they are made to act within the framework of traditionally assigned roles as wife and mother.

The norm established by male authors seems to be that a woman only earns respect by adapting submissively to her assigned role. Both Nwapa and Liking portray women who gained respect though they do not fit into the perceived role for women. Their works celebrate the complementarity that existed between men and women in pre-colonial African societies. According to Van Allen (1975), Hay and Stichter (1984), Acholonu (1991) it was during and after colonization that the system of gender imbalance came into existence. In the fictionalized world portrayed by Nwapa and Liking, there seem to be a call for a return to pre-colonial society. More importantly these African women writers are calling for an end to woman to woman oppression. In all the stories

there was a condemnation of women who oppress other women. Ironically it was women who perpetuated acts of oppression against other women. Omirima in *Efuru* for instance was hostile towards Efuru because of her infertility. No single man in the story spoke against Efuru because of her state. All her detractors were women like her who in their ignorance upheld traditions that were unfavourable to women. All the women writers depict a balanced view of society by representing 'bad weak willed' female characters against 'good strong willed' ones.

The narratives in themselves are thrilling because all the writers hack away at the portrait of preconceived stereotypes of women. Each of the writers engages in an aesthetic of representation that defies the norm. Efuru was portrayed as a very assertive strong willed person. In the same vein she was a Negofeminist who was willing to compromise as well as negotiate. Flo was cast as a schemer. Her strength was of a different nature, she was intellectually strong. This she translates into scheming a way to save her marriage. Though Flo was not a strong willed person, she won our admiration because of her ability to scheme and manipulate. She also came across as a Negofeminist because she was willing to compromise her faith in monogamy in order to save her marriage. Halla Njoke's display of amazing strength, coupled with her instincts for survival amidst daunting odds marks her out as a true Negofeminist. Esi Sekyi provokes mixed feelings in the reader. It was difficult to ascertain her stance as a Negofeminist because she was not willing to 'negotiate reality.' She was self-centred to the point of conceit. All her actions were geared preserving what she

regarded as her integrity as a person. It becomes herculean to admire her display of independence since all it earned her is a half-satisfied life of solitude. On the other hand, Esi Sekyi wins our respect because her portraiture defies Strong-Leek (2001)'s assertion that women are proselytised to envision their world from a patriarchal perspective. She is unaccustomed to the consolidation of power in male hands. She stands unmindful of the intricacies of patriarchy.

These women writers have more than redeemed the image of the African woman. They have succeeded in re-presenting her holistic identity. They have made a strong point for the return to the complementarity that existed in pre-colonial and colonial African societies that ensured the dignity of either gender. Fonchingong's observation about the portrayal of women in African fiction is worthy of mentioning here:

It is high time for male and female African writers in the contemporary era to retrace their steps, and in the process, finding a point of convergence that will provide greater meaning to the interactions of the male and female in the search for a construction of an African feminist standpoint based on our cultural specificities. As shown in the literary pieces, redefining the terrain to take full account of women's and men's changing roles and community engagements are being revisited. (3)

In their own ways the selected women writers; Nwapa, Aidoo, Kuoh-Moukoury, and Liking- are heroines. They are as Chukwuma puts it "New home-grown intelligentsia, educated, erudite and probing, fired with the zeal of having

a voice and being heard” (ii). Their efforts to present pristine, self-confident and distinctive females have helped tremendously to re-claim the skewed image that male writers have created. They deserve our appreciation for their determinations. Collectively they have succeeded in casting women in the light of who they really are; strong, assertive and complementary. Among other things these women writers will be remembered for highlighting the complementary role women play in African societies. The role that enabled them negotiate their ways in a patriarchal setting. The successes of the female characters depend on their willingness to cooperate and compromise. Through subtle means they held on to their integrity without necessarily compromising their desires.

The characters fulfil what Merun Nasser stresses have always been the traditional role of African women. She states; “The traditional role of the African woman has always been a complementary role and evidence of that fact has been widely supplied by social scientists” (21). Their stories would definitely inspire women for centuries. Furthermore it will endow them with the moral courage to face the challenges of daily existence. But more importantly the narratives highlight the key to peaceful co-existence. The key lies in the Negofeminist stance, that of negotiation and complementarity devoid of any form of egoism. Chukwuma is right in asserting that “The success of feminism in the African context derives from the discovered awareness by women of their indispensability to the male. This is the bedrock of her actions. This gives her the anchor and the voice. Thus the myth of male superiority disappears, for the woman looks inward for a fresh appreciation of self. (Chukwuma 229) This is

what the women writers have succeeded in doing and for this we hail them. The words of Ogunyemi are worth mentioning here. She states;

African novels written by women, as counter narratives, fascinate with their inherent contradictions as they reveal strength and weakness, beauty and ugliness, ambiguity and clarity, in unfolding the politics of oppression. They attempt to provoke wo/men into reassessing their position in society. Men can personalize the concerns raised as they see the male characters manipulated by authors who place them in lordly, as well as demeaning, situations. Though the portrait of men as impotent and irresponsible, dependent on women for nurturing and support might be unacceptable to a masculinist, it is necessarily diagnostic. Yet, the women writers are not run-of-the-mill feminists, for they occasionally depict women as oppressors....thus the issues emerge as women's stories, left untold or hitherto distastefully told by men, now set down in writing to counter the ephemeral nature of women's traditional orature. (4)

Findings of the study

The findings of the study defeat the existing notions about African women that have been grounded in Eurocentric biases. The portrayal of women as beasts of burden is attacked and severed in more places than one. These Anglophone and Francophone women writers can be said to rewrite the existent portrayal of

the African women as well as post-colonial theories. They are able to achieve this by:

- i. Acknowledging the existence of a multiple form of patriarchal oppression.
- ii. The conscious and subtle rejection of absolute male domination and manipulation.
- iii. There is the recognition as well as the condemnation of woman to woman oppression.
- iv. Women identities are established as autonomous; not shaped or influenced by such external forms as oppressive traditional models. There is the subtle manipulation of existing traditional system to carve out a niche and identity for themselves.
- v. There is the rejection of the woman as 'victim of tradition.' The women claim a space for themselves. Collectively the novels act as a voice of restraint. Negotiation and compromise lies at the heart of peaceful co-existence.
- vi. The novels create and redefine new spaces in the margins of women portraiture. Women are cast as dictating the pace of destiny. They are positioned to make choices that assert their individuality.
- vii. The writers argue for a politics that is independent of the traditionally accepted role of the African woman. In this they have succeeded in shaping gender relations. They come across as agents of change. This is

what makes it possible to read the novels as theoretical texts. The writers have documented the praxis of a theorized form of women struggle.

viii. The Francophone characters Flo and Halla are more willing to negotiate their place than their Anglophone counterparts, which are Esi and Efurū. This perhaps explains why at the end of the story the Anglophone characters, Esi and Efurū, embrace a life of solitude.

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