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# **Women's Empowerment Strategies in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*: A Negofeminist Analysis**

Zebeenay Seyoum Demissie<sup>1</sup>  
Olga Yazbec Dragon<sup>2</sup>

## **Abstract**

This study examines women empowerment as portrayed in Flora Nwapa's novel, *Efuru* (1966). It particularly explores the empowerment strategies female characters use to empower themselves in the selected novel. The study adopted Obioma Nnaemeka's Nego-feminist theory as a theoretical lens to analyze the novel. A close reading of the novel was then conducted to select extracts that elucidate how the female characters use nego-feminist empowerment strategies to negotiate with patriarchy and bring about gender equality. Based on the analysis of the novel, the study reveals that cooperation, negotiation, compromise, and chameleon imagery are identified as strategies characters use to empower themselves. The study also illustrates how female characters join hands with men to challenge patriarchy, often through finding the third space. The female protagonist, *Efuru*, forms a core of resistance against male-dominated ideology by cooperating, negotiating, compromising, and building her agency with her husband, which all bring her success while patriarchal values melt away. Finally, challenging Western feminism and adapting nego-feminism to the African context, this study promotes African indigenous feminist cultural values that can foster gender equality based on cooperation, negotiation, solidarity, and shared principles.

**Keywords:** [Women's empowerment strategies, *Efuru*, African women, nego-feminism]

## **1. Introduction**

Women's marginalized representation and stereotypical construction remain a persistent concern of feminists, writers, and activists, particularly in Africa. This negative portrayal and conception of women and the ways to overcome

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<sup>1</sup> PhD Candidate, Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, Addis Ababa University

<sup>2</sup> Assistant professor of English literature, Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, Addis Ababa University

it are not very much explored despite endeavors to reclaim women's solidarity as a spiritual sense of bonding and sisterly interconnectedness between women (Lucia and Jeni, 2016). On the other hand, research findings indicate that, except to reimagine women's social position at various local and international levels, integrated and consolidated efforts to alienate the problems of women worldwide remain a serious challenge. Solving the problems of women is always taken as an initial step to move forward. This can be done through deconstructing patriarchal dominations and dismantling oppressive social structures and, at the same time, highlighting women's concerns and projecting possible solutions to bring gender equality as part of creating an inclusive global society. Bringing women into the forefront of equality with men "underlines the need for positive transformation of women in society" (Mekgwe, 2010: 13), moving feminist theory forward.

The challenges that women face are related to patriarchy. Research findings reveal that from girlhood to womanhood, women have experienced patriarchal subjugations that hinder them from their full participation in the social sphere and the realization of their emancipation and independence. Amy (1999) argues that women bear burdens that ban them from achieving self-transformative empowerment through their capabilities. This has triggered continued struggles with gender-based systemic oppression and bias that still maintain man's superiority.

The continued struggle for the political emancipation of women at local and continental levels has helped them maintain their existence and interdependence. This also fosters women's solidarity, which in turn helps them deconstruct patriarchal structures and confront gender-based inequalities and injustices done to them. Women have built solidarities and interconnections that emancipate them from the yoke of colonization and stereotypical discrimination in local contexts. According to Onojobi (2015), advocating for women's resistance and struggle for gender justice is crucial for "fostering women's struggles for empowerment through educational access and experience sharing" (Onojobi, 2015: 90). This resonates with the main theme of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5: "women

are supposed to be encouraged and motivated to pursue formal education and improve themselves through economic independence and empowerment within their communities and countries” (United Nations, 2017: 120). Efforts for the struggles of women for gender equality and envisioning an inclusive global society have unleashed a feminist movement to foreground the advocacy for “women’s rights on the ground, portraying the images of women to expose patriarchal ideologies” (Oman, 2010: 12–13).

In response to persistent gender-based oppression for ages, women have not been passive. They have rather engaged in actions and reactions. They have formed women organizations to navigate the male-dominated society and voice for other subjugated women in their respective communities and countries, for example. Indeed, such types of coordinated efforts of women for total liberty paved the way for political emancipation and economic independence while patriarchy melts away, particularly in recent decades. In this regard, women have been active at local and global sites of solidarity to build their own women-driven communities that seek to maintain equal participation and equality between women and men. These distinct solidarities and struggles of women globally enable them to build alliances and foster the spirit of working together under feminist principles across differences to find ways for the empowerment of women at various levels.

Particularly, after feminism emerged as a political and advocacy movement for the rights of women and equal participation on the ground in the 1970s, women have organized themselves to transform their lives, seeking equality and justice in all aspects. Furthermore, feminism then has been used as a tool for portraying the images of women to expose patriarchal ideologies in myriad ways. In resisting gender-based discrimination and violence, throughout the ages, women have found ways of empowering themselves and leading a good life. Women writers also demonstrate how male writers emphasize masculine dominance and superiority in their works.

As a legitimate political movement, feminism engages to address equal rights and opportunities for women in education, employment, and political,

economic, cultural, and social sectors (Nnaemeka, 2003; Akin-Aina, 2011). It is also concerned with the representation of women as a form of expression to the social norms about women as well as social roles as a means of processing socialization. Thus, feminism is used as a tool of expression through which women strive to become empowered and self-independent.

However, feminism as a Western creation has dealt criticism, particularly from the global south. Western-based mainstream feminism has been challenged for decades, for it does not adequately cater to all cultures of the world at all times, especially in Africa (Onojobi, 2015; Cruz, 2015b). Consequently, African writers and feminists have navigated indigenous African feminist theories because they realized that Western feminist theories are inadequate to explore the realities of African women. Thus, literary and cultural representation of women is flawed, as what has been called feminism is created in Western cultural perspectives only.

To announce the lack of Western feminism to define and redefine African women, African feminist scholars have challenged it while rejuvenating consolidated efforts of African women to “fight for economic empowerment, getting formal education and training” (Mekgwe, 2010:16). According to Cruz (2015b), many African women have joined as freedom fighters since colonial preoccupations, while others have engaged in using their scholarly arguments and debates to resist marginalization, overexploitation, and misrepresentation of women (Cruz, 2015a). Moreover, some other women vigorously propounded African indigenous feminist theories to elucidate their thoughts and ideas that would “enhance emancipation of [African] women from gender-based violence that undermines the full realization of the potential of women” (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994:134). In this regard, the African-based feminist theories have been “formulated to express the local experiences and entanglements of African women” (Ntseane, 2011: 67) during the colonial period. Women have tried to exercise their agency to resist the various forms of colonial forms of subjugation by developing their own strategies of empowerment to ensure gender equality and inclusive development within the society they live in. According to Cruz (2015b), the

African feminist theories focus on African women's "specific cultural and historical location and their responses to shifting conditions" (2015b: 425). African feminist theories proposed by African female scholars emphasize "the importance of the group and their interconnectivity" (Biwa, 2021:46). According to Nnaemeka (2003), African-based feminist theories' foremost concern is human life with the acknowledgment that "each gender constitutes the critical half that makes the human whole; neither sex is totally complete in itself" (Nnaemeka, 2003: 380), seeing men as partners, not enemies, for the success of women.

The other struggle women in Africa made is deconstructing the various cultural misrepresentations and negative portrayals of women as defined based on the socio-cultural orientations pertinent to the various ways of existence in societies. African women for decades, for example, have been negatively portrayed from Western-based perspectives, and this encourages women scholars and writers to examine, engage in, and explore issues of women in relation to political, economic, cultural, and patriarchal aspects during pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial times against the Western-based patriarchal representation of African women (Kasomo and Maseno, 2011; Imas and Garcia-Lorenzo, 2022).

Postcolonial feminist writers, including Byrne (2020), denounce the misrepresentation of women in Africa, as it has been crucial and at the same time controversial (Biwa, 2021; Byrne, 2020). Due to these contesting views and ideological manifestations, accuse feminism of being a Western construct imposed by colonialists so that it does not work for the African context. For instance, Amy (1999) critiques Western feminism as "challenging, subverting, and ultimately overturning the multiple axes of stratification affecting women" (Amy, 1999: 2), which focuses on disruptions, isolations, and deconstructions. Others, who are against the antagonistic and irrational criticism towards men, suggest alliances with men to build a progressive society, for example, in Africa (Byrne, 2020). Furthermore, Western feminism is interpreted as being anti-male, anti-culture, and anti-religion in its theoretical framework (Mama, 1997). This is regarded as a challenge as

well as a paradigm shift, for it becomes challenging for “African women who share none of these ideologies but base on the principles of give and take, cooperation, and negotiation” (Nnaemeka, 2004: 133) with men instead of being individualistic and isolated from the social constituent.

Hence, to resolve these controversies, African feminist scholars and feminist activists have challenged mainstream Western feminism and attempted to construct African feminist indigenous theories that could sustain and benefit both women and men equally on the basis of the African traditional culture. These African feminist theories are focused on the situation and socio-cultural realities of societies on the continent as sharing principles and cooperative culture (Arndt, 2002; Nnaemeka, 2004). African feminist scholars argue that since Western feminism is conceptualized by Western feminists, it does not embrace the struggle of African women during colonial times. It inadequately addresses the problems of African women in relation to patriarchy and their efforts in nation-building in pre-colonial and postcolonial periods. Therefore, it was necessary to develop African-based feminist theories on the continent. Among these indigenous African-induced feminist theories, nego-feminism is one of the popular theories used to empower women in Africa by challenging patriarchy and embracing the principles of cooperation, alignment, and complementarity, which are instituted in African indigenous cultures.

### **1.1. Statement of the Problem**

The empowerment of women through building individual agency has become a crucial issue at present, paving the way for their self-independence and ensuring gender equality and justice. Throughout the ages, women have been resisting gender disparities embedded in male chauvinism. The resistance against this disruptive practice and the ways they find to empower their capabilities enable them to engage in promoting positive social changes in their respective societies. Research studies reveal that one of the strategies women in Africa use to deconstruct gender disparities and male chauvinism is through access to social and economic responsibilities shared by both sexes (Mama, 1997; Cruz, 2015a). The complementary role in gender equality is

defined as a social role to facilitate tasks and guarantee women's protection and security in their communities. Abandoning derogatory patriarchal norms and focusing on values that promote positive change allows women to uphold values that promote gender equality, which is achieved for the creation of a participatory nation. However, the ways to come up with strategies used to empower women while patriarchal dominations and stereotypical attitudes are melted away are still a challenge.

Resistance against the misrepresentation of women and, at the same time, finding ways of women's empowerment has always been a subject of extensive discussion, controversy, and debate. Some argue that women have never been considered equal to men, especially regarding their social rights, and thus need complete autonomy through social support at all levels. Here, advocating for their rights and demanding equal status for women has occupied considerable space in literature, not just locally but also on an international level. A few years back, feminism was nothing more than a literary concept taught in schools but never practiced (Biwa, 2021; Byrne, 2020). However, after the introduction of feminism as a social and political movement, the rights and aspirations of women to be involved in decision-making roles have raised women's living standards and brought their concerns into the spotlight.

Through time, the feminist movement has taken different forms, such as implicit feminism, explicit feminism, radical feminism, European feminism, Black feminism, and many others. However, despite various forms, its essence remains the same. It is concerned with presenting women as a subject of oppression not only by men but also by the different societal institutions as wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, or any feminine being. Again, the various forms of feminism introduce women as oppressed, subdued while struggling to assert themselves in the face of the practices of men in male-dominated societies. Women have always lived in a state of war, fighting for their position in a patriarchal society or against other oppressive forces that work against them. None of these forms have tried to present women as living

in harmony with men while working jointly to improve society through empowering themselves.

Thus, understanding women's empowerment in contributing to understanding the concept of women's independence and emancipation is a crucial issue at present (Zulfiqar, 2016; Biwa, 2021). The issue of the empowerment of women and dismantling patriarchal representation of women, especially in developing countries, has been a persistent concern. Research findings demonstrate that if the attitudes and actions in the male-centered world do not change, putting women at social, political, and economic risks will perpetuate.

Particularly in African literature, literary researchers and critics have not given attention to African indigenous gender roles and the various survival strategies women in Africa use in challenging the domination of patriarchy. They overlook the problems of women in the patriarchal and colonial world, and it has currently been dismissed by postcolonial gender assumptions in Africa (Mekgwe, 2010). Besides, in Africa, feminist literary criticism and research solely concentrate on the effects of (post)colonial dominations on women, leaving the area of African indigenous gender orientation unstudied (Mariagoretti, 2020; Biwa, 2021). Significantly, cooperation, acknowledgement, collaboration, and alliance between women and men, which is justified not only for women's achievement but also for men and the well-being of society, are the concerns of nego-feminism, one of the recent trends in African feminism. Hence, this study shows that there is still a gap in exploring the role of women in the construction of balanced gender equality, inclusion, and participation, breaking through patriarchy in African literature. This implies that, so far, little attention has been paid to the application of nego-feminist strategies in the study of African literature.

Despite a growing literature on the representation of women by African writers, African feminism in African literature and popular culture remains little studied. If the attitudes and actions in the men-centered world do not change, putting women at social, political, and economic risks will



perpetuate. Biwa (2021) describes women in Africa as the most oppressed sections of society, both in the past and in the present society, and this was fueled by colonialism, neo-colonial capitalism, and the present globalization. Nkealah (2016), on the other hand, invokes us to dig into the root causes of the oppression and misrepresentation of women in Africa. She argues that women in Africa need to have decent social, political, economic, and cultural situations. To do all this, feminist theories adopted from Western societies should be decolonized to embrace African gender traditions and suggest that African governments and societies need to focus on building humanized and indigenous development processes so that it is possible to attain the true result of development (Nnaemeka, 2003; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994).

Furthermore, in contemporary African literature, literary researchers and critics have not given attention to African indigenous gender roles and the various women empowerment strategies as portrayed in African literature by challenging the domination of patriarchy and gender-based discrimination. They overlook the problems of women in the patriarchal and colonial world, and it has currently been dismissed by postcolonial gender assumptions in Africa (Mekgwe, 2010). Besides, in Africa, feminist literary criticism and research appear largely on the effects of (post)colonial dominations on women. Significant issues, such as women's empowerment through ensuring gender equality, inclusion, equal participation, and development, are still neglected areas of study in African literature and gender studies, with the exception of a few published works (Biwa, 2021). Significantly, cooperation, acknowledgement, collaboration, and alliance between women and men, which is justified not only for women's emancipation, empowerment, and independence but also for men and the well-being of a country, are the concerns of African feminism. Hence, this study initiates that there is still a gap in exploring the role of women in empowering themselves through ensuring balanced gender equality, inclusion, and participation, breaking through patriarchy in African literature. This implies that, so far, little attention has been paid to the application of nego-feminist strategies in the study of African literature. Thus, this paper intends to explore how the female protagonist's use of nego-feminist and snail-sense feminist strategies

empowers herself in Nwapa Flora's *Efuru* (1966). The study centers on characterization, but details related to style and theme are referred to if they are necessary.

### **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this study is to critically analyze women's empowerment strategies in Flora Nwapa's novel, *Efuru*.

Specifically, this study aims at:

- identifying nego-feminist strategies the female protagonist uses to empower herself in the selected novel, and
- finding out how successful the female protagonist has been in negotiating patriarchy through the strategies of nego-feminism.

## **2. Review of Related Literature**

In this review, research studies relevant to the present study are briefly referred to. The review has been made on research studies conducted on Nwapa's novel *Efuru* and explanations on nego-feminist theory identify the gap this article tries to fill in. Literature on Nwapa's novel *Efuru* deals with the critical studies conducted on the novel since its publication. However, not all nuanced works conducted on the novel *Efuru* have been reviewed. Only a small part of the analysis has been made to review some of the more recent works on *Efuru*. From the review, most critical works on *Efuru* focus on patriarchal subjugation, women's achievement and agency, and their economic independence and autonomy.

One of the reviewed works here, however, queries what it refers to as "matriarchy and logo centrism", that is, undue emphasis on women and feminism, which, according to it, is the bane of most critical works on *Efuru* and other African literature. One of the reviewed works on *Efuru* focuses on exploring patriarchal problems women face in their daily lives. This reviewed work is Abdulkarim's article entitled "Exploring feminism in Shoneyin's The

Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives and Nwapa Flora's *Efuru*" (2020). Abdulkarim explored the challenges that face women in their day-to-day activities. Abdulkarim concludes that, with dialogue, negotiation, and collaboration, peaceful coexistence, and social harmony, women can reach their goal and achieve their development aspirations, though they bear the brunt of patriarchal domination and capitalist patriarchy.

Similarly, Mekdes, in her research entitled "Women's Sympathy as a Survival Strategy in Zimbabwean Novels: A Nego-feminist Approach" (2021), applied nego-feminist theory to analyze Chanjeri Hove's bones and Tsitsi Dangarembaga's nervous conditions. Mekdes found out that "the indigenous patriarchy could be approached through women's sympathetic approach rather than colonialism." What is sought is peaceful collaboration. Another research work reviewed related to the present study is Mariagoretti's article entitled "Women's independence as a pathway to freedom: A feminist look at Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference* 2020." In this work, Mariagoretti applied a feminist literary lens, and she then compared the representation of women's choice to seek freedom in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference*. While similar in choice of the novel *Efuru* with the present work, Mariagoretti's work does see negofeminist strategies to resist patriarchy.

Mears's research work titled "Choice and Discovery: An Analysis of Women and Culture in Flora Nwapa's Fiction" (2009) was also reviewed. In this study, Mears examined the critical imbalance that has undervalued or neglected African women writers by considering Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* from an African feminist perspective. However, the present study explores the feminist strategies *Efuru* uses to resist patriarchal oppression while embracing the African traditional culture, which is based on cooperation, balance, and solidarity. Similarly, Hogan's work titled "How sisters should behave to sisters: Women's culture and Igbo society in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1999)" was reviewed. In this work, Hogan examined the interwoven connection between women in Igbo culture as reflected in the novel *Efuru*.

Unlike the present study, Hogan analyzed the novel from a feminist perspective.

Deviating from the above research works, my study applied diverse strategies of nego-feminism used by the female protagonist in the novel *Efuru* to resist patriarchal domination. The present study also captures cooperation, negotiating patriarchy, compromise, and chameleon imagery through building solidarity and sisterhood between women as well as allying with men as a foundation for a traditional gender orientation in many African indigenous cultures.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

This study employs nego-feminist literary criticism as an approach to the analysis of Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*. According to Nnaemeka (2004), nego-feminism is, first, the feminism of negotiation; second, it stands for the value of 'no ego.' The theory adheres to most African societies, where the principles of give and take, collaboration, and cooperation are warmly celebrated (Nkealah, 2016; Kaboré, 2017).

It also examines the relationship between men and women, usually through negotiation, cooperation, and mutual understanding (Kaboré, 2017). It also examines the complicated problems that face African women from the perspective of patriarchy, (post)colonialism, and the positive impacts that nego-feminism may bring to African women. Nnaemeka (2004) argues that nego-feminism addresses the problems of African women. Chilisa and Ntseane (2010) conducted an extensive study on African gender dynamics and found out that nego-feminism uniquely advocates as a tool for the political, economic, and socio-cultural freedoms of African women, calls for diversity, and is pertinent to the ally between women and men rather than going for antagonism.

Nego-feminism is a feminist theory that was pioneered and developed by Obioma Nnaemeka in her article, *Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way* (2003). Nnaemeka argues that nego-feminism is

an African women's approach that is consistent with African indigenous principles of life as mutual cooperation, compromise, cooperative dialogue, etc., as remedies for African women's problems. She expresses this theory as:

First, nego-feminism is the feminism of negotiation; second, nego-feminism stands for “no ego” feminism. In the foundation of shared values in many African cultures are the principles of negotiation, give and take, compromise, and balance. African feminism [s] (or feminism as I have seen it practiced in Africa) challenges through negotiations and compromise. It knows when, where, and how to detonate patriarchal land mines; it also knows when, where, and how to go around patriarchal land mines (Nnaemeka, 2004: 22).

For Nnaemeka, thus, nego-feminism is a guide for dealing with the feminist struggles that occur on the continent. Nego-feminism considers the implications of patriarchal traditions and customs, aiming to dismantle and negotiate around these. Nego-feminism also hopes to detach personal gain and pride from the overall goal of achieving equity for women, as it is a ‘no ego’ approach.

Furthermore, Nnaemeka argues that the situation of women is “an environment of unequal power relations and cultural difference,” and she aims to “build on the indigenous” (Nnaemeka, 2004:360). She also contends that “there are shared values that can be used as organizing principles in discussions about Africa,” and these values, in her view, “bind together the nations” (Nnaemeka, 2004:361). Similarly, Nkealah (2006; 2016), Ntseane (2011), and Cruz (2015a) examine the notion and scope of negofeminist literary criticism in the study of literary works in Africa. Nkealah (2016) notes that neofeminism locates women and men side by side and considers them to ally for their sustainable coexistence, placing their third space. Nkealah critiques Western feminism since it fails to cater to issues of African women and suggests the application of negofeminism to African contexts. Negofeminism is a way of understanding women from a variety of cross-cultural perspectives in African literature.

The theory challenges patriarchy and promotes the status of African women in their society through empowering women in terms of economy, political participation, and socio-cultural consciousness. It builds solidarity on those bases by cooperatively working for the interests of both victim women. As a cooperative approach, nego-feminism enables women to struggle against oppression and gender inequality. Developed by Nanmeaka and propounded by others in the 1980s, nego-feminism as African indigenous feminist theory focuses on the close collaboration, alliance, and complementarity of women with men as defining features of African indigenous culture. African indigenous feminist theorists and scholars argue that nego-feminism can best reveal indigenous feminist perspectives and gender orientations in Africa uniquely from Western feminist perspectives. They also argue that a nego-feminist perspective helps women to look outside the box and contributes to the development of gender equality and equal participation in Africa. Using nego-feminism as a literary and socio-cultural paradigm, African women use several strategies that enable them to resist patriarchy through finding the third space to empower themselves (Nnaemeka, 2004; Nkealah, 2016). Besides, it proposes strategies through which women can achieve self-empowerment in Africa by settling differences that arise in their day-to-day lives but mainly insists on women's collaborative thrives with their male counterparts in seeking to achieve their social and economic independence.

The purpose of employing nego-feminist theory in the study of literary texts authored by women in Africa, therefore, is to discover how women empower themselves through confronting patriarchal systems and possibly bring solutions through their empowerment strategies. To eradicate oppressive structures engineered by traditional patriarchy and the legacies of colonialism in Africa, women, according to nego-feminist theory, make collaborative struggles so as to create a free and autonomous society. Therefore, this article intends to explore women empowerment strategies female characters use to empower themselves in Nwapa Flora's novel, *Efuru* (1966), employing Nanmeaka's nego-feminist literary theory.

Mama (1997) states that in Africa, men and women fought against colonialism side by side. She adds that many stories of lived experiences in Africa testify to this reality. Mama further adds that “women do not throw stones at men because they acknowledge the fact that the system of patriarchy favors men over women is a colonial agenda enforced by white male supremacy to protect their agenda of dominating women (Mama, 1997: 47). Gatwiri (2016), on the other hand, challenges western radical feminism as it views men as enemies to women. He adds that this does not work in Africa, where women and men are partners rather than enemies. Ntseane (2011) states that nego-feminism is about coordination and complexity rather than conflict between women and men in the patriarchal system. Cruz (2015a) also suggests using nego-feminism to examine the relationship between women and men. Cruz investigated the experiences of African women during pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial times and concludes that nego-feminism can enrich perspectives of African women's social, historical, political, and economic situations. Therefore, in this study, the researcher analyzes the novel *Efuru* based on these strategies of nego-feminism the female protagonist uses to resist patriarchal oppression of women. The strategies (principles) of nego-feminism as a conceptual framework are briefly discussed herewith.

### **3.1 Conceptual Frameworks**

#### **3.1.1 Strategies of Nego-feminism**

Nego-feminism offers a framework for challenging patriarchy through key strategies that encourage promoting mutual cooperation, negotiating with patriarchy, applying compromise, and utilizing chameleon imagery for survival, each of which is discussed below.

##### **3.1.1.1 Mutual Cooperation**

The term mutual cooperation has various applications and significances in various fields of study, say, for example, biology, sociology, business, etc. Mutual cooperation is also a win-win model and the most preferable approach in human environmental communications. According to Nnaemeka, mutual

cooperation is one of the tenets of nego-feminism. In her article, *Nego Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way* (2003), mutual cooperation is the cooperation of both/all parties to the benefit of themselves equally. Nnaemeka argues that mutual cooperation is a possible tool for solving African patriarchal problems facing African women both inside and outside the door. Men's and women's costs and benefits should be maintained with mutual understanding and cooperation. This is because both men and women are important in the African indigenous community. One is mutually dependent on the other.

As Nnaemeka (2003) states, cooperation is the involvement of both/all parties to benefit both (all) of them equally. Awareness of this kind of culture gives a full sense of success and prosperity, as it demands understanding and working together towards a common shared aim. According to Ntseane (2011), women in Africa collaborate with their male counterparts since they believe that men are lovers, husbands, brothers, fathers, partners, and agents for the success and growth of women. In many African societies, men and women are farmers, traders, mothers, nurses, and administrators (Ntseane, 2011). They do not divide jobs, but both men and women remain cooperative and harmoniously coexist. Ackermann (2008) writes that women in Africa closely help their husbands in several working activities and also realize that cooperation helps them defend patriarchy. Nnaemeka (2003) argues that cooperation between African women and men is a possible tool for solving African patriarchal problems facing women both inside and outside of the door. Men's and women's costs and benefits should be maintained with mutual understanding and cooperation, as both sexes are important in the African indigenous community, or one is mutually dependent on the other.

### **3.1.1.2 Negotiating Patriarchy**

Negotiation is a method by which people settle differences under various circumstances in a certain environment. It is one of the most important tools for resolving conflicts among traditional and modern societies. It is also a process by which compromise or agreement is reached while avoiding argument and dispute (Nnaemeka, 2003: 77). In any disagreement,



individuals understandably aim to achieve the best possible outcome for their position or perhaps an organization they represent. However, the principles of fairness, seeking mutual benefit, and maintaining a relationship are the keys to a successful outcome. Specific forms of negotiation are used in many situations, such as international affairs, the legal system, government, industrial disputes, or domestic relationships, as examples. However, general negotiation skills can be learned and applied in a wide range of activities.

Negotiation skills can be of great benefit in resolving any differences that arise between you and others. In order to achieve a desirable outcome, it may be useful to follow a structured approach to negotiation. For example, in a work situation, a meeting may need to be arranged in which all parties involved come together (Arndt, 2002:120). The stages of negotiation can be grouped into preparation, discussion, and clarification of goals; negotiating towards a win-win outcome; agreement; and implementation of a course of action.

Negotiation, according to Arndt (2002), is a cultural practice used to settle differences under various circumstances in a certain environment in order to achieve a desirable outcome in life. Naemeka (2004) calls negofeminism the feminism of no ego, no self, and negotiation feminism. According to Zulfiqar (2016), negotiation is a basic process where either one or both parties give up something that they want in order to get something else they want more or reach an agreement for mutual benefit.

Furthermore, negotiation is used to settle differences under various circumstances in a certain environment (Arndt, 2002). It is a useful tool for resolving conflicts among traditional and modern societies. In any disagreement, individuals understandably aim to achieve the best possible outcome for their position or perhaps an organization they represent. However, the principles of fairness, seeking mutual benefit, and maintaining a relationship are the keys to a successful outcome. Notification is also a process by which compromise or agreement is reached while avoiding disputes and conflicts (Nnaemeka, 2003).

### **3.1.1. 3 Compromise**

As a useful principle of nego-feminism, compromise is applied in difficult circumstances to decide. A compromising woman negotiator's main concern is finding middle ground and doing what's fair for both her and her man. Women would rather compromise and settle for less than anticipated in order to satisfy the needs of the other party (usually husbands or partners). They may rush negotiations and make concessions too quickly, which can ultimately lead to a loss.

For Zulfiqar (2016), compromise is a basic negotiation process in which both parties give up something that they want in order to get something else they want more. In compromise situations, neither side gets all of what they really want, but they each make concessions in order to reach an agreement that is acceptable to both. It is a basic negotiation process in which both parties give up something that they want in order to get something else they want more. Compromises usually occur in win-lose situations—when there is a fixed pie to be divided up, and whatever one side gets, the other side loses. In compromise situations, neither side gets all of what they really want, but they each make concessions in order to reach an agreement that is acceptable to both.

Compromise is another strategy of navigating and resisting patriarchy. For Zulfiqar (2016), compromise is a basic negotiation process in which both parties give up something that they want in order to get something else they want more. It is applied in difficult circumstances to decide. A compromising negotiator's main concern is finding middle ground and doing what's fair for both parties. They would rather compromise and settle with less than anticipated in order to satisfy the needs of the other party.

In compromise situations, neither side gets all of what they really want, but they each make concessions in order to reach an agreement that is acceptable to both. It is a basic negotiation process in which both parties give up something that they want in order to get something else they want more of (Nnaemeka, 2004). Compromises usually occur in win-lose situations when

there is a fixed pie to be divided up, and whatever one side gets, the other side loses. In compromise situations, neither side gets all of what they really want, but they each make concessions in order to reach an agreement that is acceptable to both.

#### **3.1.1.4 Chameleon Imagery**

Chameleon is a useful principle in nego-feminism. A chameleon is a lizard that changes skin color to match what surrounds it so that it cannot be seen. Like that, African women should be attributed to this strategy. The women need to be encouraged to resist patriarchy, being a person who changes her opinions or behavior to please other people. By exhibiting inconsistent behavior in rough environmental situations, she is able to quickly adjust to new circumstances so that she saves not only herself but also other sections of her wider community. Changing the color is simply the purpose of matching the surroundings, but changes will depend on the personality of the woman herself and who she is.

Chameleon imagery is a strategy of resisting patriarchy through looking at different directions of life and changing mechanisms (Nnaemeka, 2004) that suit women without affecting men, their counterparts. The word chameleon is taken from lizard, an animal that changes skin color to match what surrounds it so that it cannot be seen. Women in Africa find this strategy a resonating principle to use to change their situation when required instead of going for conflict with men and the patriarchal system. Being a chameleon means being a strategist in quickly adapting and adjusting oneself to a new environment and circumstance in order to change one's life as well as others (Nnaemeka, 2003). Like that, African women should be attributed to this strategy. The women need to be encouraged to resist patriarchy, being a person who changes her opinions or behavior to please other people. By exhibiting inconsistent behavior in rough environmental situations, she is able to quickly adjust to new circumstances so that she saves not only herself but also other sections of her wider community, but changes will depend on the personality of the woman herself and who she is.

#### 4. Research Method

This study relies mainly on the qualitative content analysis method of research. It applies the theoretical tool of the nego-feminist strategy of women's empowerment in its analysis. Content analysis, according to Frey et al. (1999), is a research method “used to identify, enumerate, and analyze occurrences of specific messages and message characteristics embedded in texts” (Frey et al., 1999: 236). Thus, literary study as qualitative content analysis seeks to examine meanings associated with messages as they occur in the text. Therefore, the nature of the present study makes this choice of qualitative content analysis method appropriate. The study critically examines the strategies female characters use to empower themselves by challenging patriarchy and multiple forms of subjugation and injustice in Flora Nwapa’s novel, *Efuru*. The issue of women's empowerment strategy is quite topical in our contemporary society, where the still-gender gap and inequality persist, so the present writer finds it necessary to use the concept of nego-feminist empowerment strategies employed by women in African societies as the theoretical framework for the present study.

Therefore, the primary data consists of Flora Nwapa’s novel, *Efuru*. It is selected through the purposive sampling technique. The secondary data are journal articles, dissertations, and other online sources that are used to write the review of related literature, the theoretical framework, and to enrich the analysis. Close reading is used to select relevant excerpts for analysis from the novel.

This study is limited to the analysis of the concept of women empowerment strategies about the wife and two husband characters, Efuru and two husbands, Adizua and Gilbert, in Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru*. The writer has limited her study to this area because there are several other studies, including the present writer’s works, focusing on the female characters in *Efuru* and the feminist and gender roles theories. This study is thus significant and would fill the gap of women's empowerment in literature on African nego-feminism theories, as it relates to Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru*.

The theoretical framework is drawn from paradigms selected from Naemeka's feminist theory, nego-feminism. As discussed in the review, nego-feminism is a shift from Western feminism. Western feminism is individualistic and inadequate to deal with the issues of women in Africa and to analyze African literary texts. Paradigms for the analysis of literary texts written by African writers should spring from knowledge of the indigenous culture. Thus, the representation of female characters, their relationships and interactions with their respective husbands, and the patriarchal system have been taken into consideration in the analysis of the novel. Thus, this article focuses on how female characters are made to make sense of the social patriarchal world in the narrative. Textual analysis is used to critically analyze the strategies of nego-feminism that the female protagonist uses to achieve her goals in the patriarchal world. The strategies (tenets) of nego-feminist theory are applied to uncover the meanings embedded in the text.

## **5. Analysis and Discussion**

Much has not been done in terms of exploring indigenous women empowerment strategies in scholarly works, even though the concept has been frequently used in the global literature (Cruz, 2015b; Onojobi, 2015). Women empowerment strategies can be interpreted in various forms, such as women's capacities, women's agency, or the psychological and moral readiness of women to act using their ways of doing, learning, and practicing. This study examines the different forms of women's empowerment strategies employed in the novel *Efuru*. The main objective of the analysis, thus, is to demonstrate how Flora's novel, *Efuru*, portrays women's drives to empower themselves by embracing male characters as a principal domain of African indigenous ways of existence and gender orientations.

*Efuru* is Flora Nwapa's debut novel, which is also considered the first colonial novel authored by a woman, Nwapa, who is regarded as the mother of African women literature in English. Since its publication in 1966, the novel has been a subject of discussion among women, feminism, and gender in postcolonial Africa. Literary researchers and critics have shown a renewed interest in scrutinizing the novel from multiple points of view. This study opts

for the strategies the novel's female characters undergo to empower themselves. It particularly examines the protagonist *Efuru* to explore how she becomes empowered, usually through endeavors of individual self-discovery and using the individual potential to transform life.

### **5.1 Mutual Cooperation**

Cooperation is the cooperation of both/parties to benefit both of them equally. Awareness of this kind of culture gives us a full sense of success and prosperity, as it demands understanding and working together towards a common, shared aim. Cooperation between husbands and wives, which is one of the strategies of nego-feminism that the female protagonist, Efuru, uses in the novel, deserves attention. The character Efuru lives in an environment where male dominance persists. However, Efuru, who is an industrious young woman, is deemed to get smart enough to watch her surroundings. She uses cooperation as a tool for navigating and challenging patriarchy. Besides, she is conscious that those men and women should be united for their shared benefits and interests. As the saying goes, "Two heads are better than one." Efuru cooperates with her husband to confront challenges when she faces them. She also knows what to do in a community where oppression is set at the traditional and colonial levels. She becomes a role model for her community so that husbands and wives can overcome difficulties through cooperation and understanding. She tolerates her husband Adizua's shortcomings for their benefit. Cooperation also requires understanding the needs and interests of others. Efuru is always cooperative with her husband, though he exhibits laziness as depicted below:

Life on the farm was becoming unbearable. Adizua no longer worked as hard as before. In the morning, he slept while others went to work. He was so lazy that his neighbors gossiped. Adizua is stupid. Every morning, you see him sharpening his knife, but he will not work (Nwapa, 1966: 20).

Women in Africa are deemed to collaborate with men since they believe that men are lovers, husbands, brothers, fathers, partners, and agents for the

success and growth of women (Mama, 1997). Thus, it proves that cooperation in the novel *Efuru* is depicted as a tool of empowering women. Rather than blaming her husband for his laziness, Efuru understands his weakness as a flaw. The character Efuru collaboratively works with her husband. As a result of this, the couple becomes successful because Efuru collaborates creatively. The narrator states that:

Efuru and her husband traded yams. They would paddle a canoe from their town to a tributary of the Great River and thence to Agbor. There, they bought yams and other things rare in their town and sold them at a profit. When the yam trade was bad, they traded in dry fish and crayfish; it was in crayfish that they made their fortune (Nwapa, 1966:20-21).

As depicted above, Efuru's husband, Adizua, is lazy as a man who can hardly make a living through farming. The narrator also says, "His harvest was, of course, very poor. His fellow farmers laughed at him and said unkind words behind his back. He did not make any profit at all. But his wife consoled him" (Nwapa, 1966:20). Unlike Efuru, Adizua fails to be a typical husband to fit with Efuru, a courageous and tactful woman of a wife. For Efuru, such behavior does not make her uneasy. Rather, she finds strategies for encouraging her husband; that is, she allows him to work with her trading business. She understands that laziness, whether in a man or a woman, may be found abhorrent among her people. Efuru is capable of recognizing a sense of manhood and attempts to avoid his lack of regular jobs by embracing all his faults and weaknesses. Through her cooperative spirit with him, both become successful businesspersons because they closely observe each other.

Efuru and Adizua become successful businesspersons because they work together closely. In the novel, this is expressed as:

They were the first to discover the trade that year. They sold the crayfish, making a profit of over a hundred percent. Four trips gave Efuru and her husband a huge profit. It was by sheer luck that Efuru and her husband recovered their capital (Nwapa, 1966: 22).

Through collaboration, Efuru and her husband have been able to increase their capital with an equal share. Nwapa shows that one way through which gender equality could be achieved is through gender equality. Cooperation for common interest is a foundational culture of many indigenous communities in Africa. Efuru's knowledge of the indigenous culture is manifested through cooperation. The narrator says, "Efuru and Adizua came in and sat down in the market. Adizua helped her to put the load down. On Eke day, the things were put in a basin, and Efuru carried them" (Nwapa 1966: 35).

The above details show that Efuru plays a leading role as the narrator says, 'Her husband followed her with a walking stick.' In many African societies, men and women are farmers, traders, mothers, nurses, administrators, etc. They do not divide jobs. Women closely help their husbands in several working activities (Ackermann, 2008). In the novel, Efuru helps Adizua when his crop fails and some people on the farm are unfriendly to him. This is indicated as follows: "Adizua's harvest was, of course, very poor. His fellow farmers laughed at him and said unkind words behind his back. But his wife consoled him. 'Never mind,' she said. 'What matters is health... Once you are healthy, money will come'" (Nwapa, 1966:35).

Steady (1987) argues that women in Africa are willing and cooperative with their husbands even at difficult times. Hence, Efuru maintains a cooperative environment instead of nagging about Adizua's laziness. Efuru understands and advises her husband when he faces a difficult time of crop failure. The narrator says, "But you have to wait until the harvest, and after that you can come to town... Both of us can trade together" (Nwapa, 1966: 21). Women in Africa are not in a hurry to blame their husbands for the weaknesses they exhibit. But they welcome and embrace them as their lovers, closest partners, and fathers of their children and engage in cooperative work with them for the growth and sustainability of their family, as Efuru does.

The novel also reveals the principle of cooperation between women and men through adopting a win-win strategy of living. Both Efuru and her husband



share their daily household routines. Efuru always embraces her husband and understands his weaknesses. "When her husband came back from the stream, she welcomed him and put the food before him. When he finished, Efuru asked him if he would go out to see his friends" (Nwapa, 1966: 11). Though her husband Adizua exhibits laziness and thus lacks finances to handle the family, Efuru manages all, including covering his costs. Efuru also caused her husband to join trading with her. Luckily, both husband and wife become interested in trading, and so they leave farming and turn to trading. Their trading involves a wide range of activities such as farming yams, livestock rearing, and local crafts. Such small businesses are important traditional economic activities, particularly for Efuru. By the end of the story, we see that both Efuru and Adizua become rich so that they can help other people around them. Their success and profit from collaborative trading in farms booms as the narrator says below:

Four trips gave Efuru and her husband a huge profit. The fifth trip was not so good. It was by sheer luck that Efuru and her husband recovered their capital. 'We won't go again.' She told her husband. 'Yes, we won't go again. But what are we going to do? 'We are going to look for another trade.' (Nwapa, 1966: 21)

As shown in the extract above, Efuru plays a major role in bringing success to the house. Her husband, Adizua, relies on his collaborative wife, Efuru, for direction and management of their family business and income. Efuru's entrepreneurial skill saves as well as builds the family. At the end of the novel, Nwapa says it is Efuru who provides the money with which Adizua pays for her bride price.

## **5.2. Negotiating Patriarchy**

Negotiating patriarchy is another strategy the female protagonist uses in Nwapa's *Efuru*. In the novel *Efuru*, negotiation is also used as a tool for resisting patriarchy as well as promoting an indigenous context in which African women can be empowered. Negotiation between Efuru and her husband Adizua brings them into allying, understanding, and respecting each

other. They also negotiate private and public spaces as they put the capital to use. Nwapa demonstrates the couples' negotiation on their businesses as follows:

Adizua was not good at trading. 'Efuru, I think it is time you should face your trade. Your baby is old enough to be left with a nurse. My mother will see that you get a good nurse. You have to think over this, my dear wife: 'I have thought of it. You are right. I have to get a maid who will help me with Ogonim. We are not only making no profits; we are losing our capital. So, we must do something about it. We have to put our heads together because our fathers say that if you don't think before you sleep, you break your head (Nwapa, 1966: 37).

Efuru is skilled in managing trade better than her husband, and they discuss this issue, both sitting side by side for negotiation. Negotiation helps them reach a common agreement that does not privilege either sex but benefits both. Instead of going for conflict over individual interests, both husband and wife choose formal discussion to overcome any challenge they face and enjoy a shared benefit. This is drawn from African traditions.

Furthermore, Nwapa portrays Efuru as an artful woman who is capable of negotiating and arguing about patriarchal and socio-cultural issues not only with her husband but also with the culture. According to the culture, when her mother-in-law asks for Efuru's father to come before Efuru marries Adizua, Efuru confirms, "Leave that to me; I shall settle it myself" (Nwapa, 1966: 8).

The word settle signifies confronting the culture. Efuru here is represented as a woman who can negotiate with the realities and maintain social rules that allow women to make decisions on their rights and abilities. Nwapa tries to show that African women should learn to make decisions concerning their future and their lives. In the context of the novel, Efuru implies that she has a say in what concerns her marriage to Adizua. Efuru married Adizua for love. Her parents did not intervene in her choice of partner. She rejected the

dowry, which made her father unhappy. This is because she does not want to be considered an object but a woman who has selfhood and can decide for herself.

Women in Nwapa's novel are also represented as effective business leaders. Because she has been empowered through negotiation with her husband and the culture as well, Efuru has been able to provide instructions for trading to her husband and others. The narrator says that after the fifth trip, which is unsuccessful, Efuru becomes aware of and seeks better alternatives to win the greater market share, as stated below.

We won't go again,' she told her husband. 'Yes, we won't go again. But what are we going to do?' 'We are going to look for another trade. These women spoil trade so easily. When they see you making a profit in one trade, they leave the trade they know and join yours, and of course, in no time, it is no longer profitable. So, we shall look for another thing to do, but we have to go to my father now that we have money, and he agrees (Nwapa, 1966: 21).

The negotiation made between Efuru and her husband helps them look at the situation with a better understanding. Efuru's initiative to change her mind does not irritate her husband, but he understands his wife. With negotiation, both Efuru and her husband benefit and are equally embraced, as both sexes are important entities in life. Steady (1987) states that "each sex needs a complement, despite the possession of unique features of its own" (p. 8). Nwapa shows that the African traditional culture provides space by inviting both the wife and the husband to bring solutions to the problems they face. An individual sex alone does not bring fruitful solutions to Africa. Both husband and wife are equally important, as they are complete as a couple. Nwapa reveals that complementarity can benefit both men and women in African culture. To negotiate with patriarchy and bring about gender equality, Efuru's tactic is to embrace men and join hands with them to find the third space.

A negotiating culture can destroy negative patriarchal values and empower women. Efuru can empower Gilbert, her second husband, and others in her community. She is motivated and has become successful so that others follow her as a model for change. For example, Gilbert's mother refers to this fact as follows:

Any trade she put her hand to was profitable. Soon Gilbert began to contemplate building a house of his own and buying a canoe. Efuru advised him that buying a canoe would be better at that stage, so they bought a canoe and gave it out on hire, and this raised money for them. In no time they bought another canoe, which they also gave out on hire, and when Efuru saw that they could afford to build a house, they began the house (Nwapa, 1966:136).

Nwapa also portrays Efuru as a diligent woman. By advising her husband to trade with her, both have been able to build more capital. Women in African traditions serve as negotiators and advisors to their husbands in the house as well as in the outside sphere. Both Efuru and Gilbert "talked at length about how best to solve the problem. At last they agreed that Efuru should see the doctor while she was pregnant" (Nwapa, 1966: 143). Gilbert always helps her on the way to the hospital. This proves the capability of African women and men to challenge patriarchy and build a collaborative welfare society if they join hands together for negotiation and understanding.

### **5.3 Compromise**

The compromise between women and men is also revealed in Nwapa's Efuru. Efuru seeks compromise through the manipulation of certain traditional patriarchal practices, which celebrate her financial independence, economic success, connectivity, and well-being. Nwapa expresses the choices for change and compromise through the words and actions of Efuru, which are exhibited through interactions with her husband and her society, as seen below:

They saw each other fairly often, and after a fortnight's courting, she agreed to marry him. But the man had no money for the dowry. He had just a few pounds for the farm and could not part with that. When the woman saw that he was unable to pay anything, she told him not to bother about the dowry (Nwapa, 1966: 1).

Efuru accepts his marriage invitation despite his low financial status. Here, Efuru finds a middle ground that is fair for herself and her husband. She realizes that the most important thing in their lives is reaching an agreement for marriage through concession but not paying a dowry. Efuru also confirms, "My husband is not rich. In fact, he is poor. But the dowry must be paid. I must see that this is done" (Nwapa, 1966: 11).

Efuru is determined to please her husband. So, he had to pay the dowry through hard work, and she helped him in that regard. Efuru's cultural consciousness is revealed in this way. Efuru compromises with her husband at both traditional and colonial levels. She is aware of the changes going on in her society, mainly influenced by colonialism and its legacy, and at the same time, she embraces African traditions. When her friend asks her to marry Gilbert, as he has not married before, saying, "he must be young then, for our people marry young" (Nwapa, 1966: 128), Efuru responds, "We are in the same age group, and I knew him as a boy." Efuru's friend asks Efuru again, "And he has not married? Why has he not married?" (Nwapa, 1966:129). Efuru's friend's concern is that Gilbert does not adhere to the tradition as he is a modern, educated young man. However, Efuru defends this by saying, "You forget that he went to school and that those who go to school do not marry early" (Nwapa, 1966: 128).

It can be seen that Efuru compromises with tradition and modernity to claim a third space, a space where a wife's and a husband's private space emerge from interactive discussions between the couple for common understanding (Nnaemeka, 2003).

Nwapa's novel does not show men as a cause for patriarchal oppression in terms of power. Rather, men in the novel are portrayed as romantic and escapist when things are not the way they wish them to be. Nwapa claims, "Men are such queer people... They are so weak that when they are under the thumb of a woman, she does whatever she likes with them (Nwapa, 1966: 70). Hence, husbands fall in the grip of their wives. Adizua, Efuru's first husband, is not a clever farmer and is unable to pay the dowry and tells Efuru that he does not have the money. He says to Efuru, "You will come to me on Nkwo Day. Every place will be quiet that being market day. Take a few clothes with you and come to me, "We shall talk about the dowry after" (Nwapa, 1966:7). Similarly, Gilbert, Efuru's second husband, is well educated, and at the beginning, he seems to be culture-conscious and a loving husband. But in the latter days, he fails to be this kind of husband. Thus, Nwapa's *Efuru* demonstrates the noncommittal and harmful behavior of Efuru's respected husbands, Adizua and Gilbert. Nwapa portrayed the two men characters as reluctant to prompt decisions made.

#### **5.4 Chameleon Imagery**

Chameleon imagery is another important strategy of negofeminism. The female protagonist resorts to combating the injustice against women. Being a chameleon means being a strategist in quickly adapting and adjusting oneself to a new environment and circumstance to change one's life as well as others (Nnaemeka, 2003). In this regard, the character Efuru is represented as a conscious woman who adapts the challenges that she faces into opportunities to advance her and please others around her. After her circumcision, her mother-in-law wants her to feast for two months, but Efuru does not want to stay idle longer, and she convinces her mother-in-law as follows: "No, mother, one month of confinement is enough. We have not got much money, and I want to start trading. Again, we have not paid the dowry yet. I shall go to market on Nkwo day" (Nwapa, 1966:17-18).

Efuru challenges patriarchy through working hard as the only solution to solving the problem of lack of money, which makes women prone to domination and oppression in the modern and colonial world. Efuru finds

strategies through which she can manipulate patriarchal discriminations, and she changes problems into opportunities. Also, when Efuru is unable to have a baby, she does not despair but finds courage in herself.

Besides, Efuru is cautious and faithful and often says to herself: "I am still young; surely God cannot deny me the joy of motherhood" (Nwapa, 1966:25). Whatever difficult situation they are in, women do not blame an external body around themselves for the cause but feel hope, confidence, calm, and sympathy towards others. Such an attitude protects women from frustration and despair. For Efuru, hard work is a strategy of empowering herself economically and contributing to the welfare of her society. In this respect, the narrator says, "But what pleased Gilbert's mother most was the fact that since her son had married Efuru, things had moved well for him; any trade she put her hand to was profitable" (Nwapa, 1966:136).

Efuru not only gets trading as a means of empowering herself, but she also quickly learns ways of managing her house and coping with patriarchy by building capital that makes her independent. She has been financially empowered; she also empowers her husband too. And this helps her to break down the grip of patriarchy. By doing this, she also empowers her husband too. Economically empowering women means empowering men as well. Nwapa also shows that African women respect and help other people around them. Efuru is conscious of what is going on in her surroundings and helps people in her community, though she is without children. The novel states that. "She gave women beauty and wealth, but she had no child" (Nwapa, 1966: 222).

Beauty is a stereotypical trait that Efuru possesses. As already indicated, she possesses such qualities that make her conspicuous. Efuru helps the needy who are in difficult situations. She commands respect in the community because of her kindness and courage. An African woman is respected if she looks into her surroundings, seeks immediate solutions to problems she faces, and supports others (Mama, 1997). In turn, everyone respects her, Efuru. She becomes cheerful and sympathetic to everyone, and everyone loves her, as

the narrator says: “She, a mother who is more than all mothers, a good mother in the real sense of goodness” (Nwapa, 1966:70).

Efuru has good words from everyone. Everyone wishes God gave Efuru strength to bear all the challenges she faces. The narrator comments, “Efuru was well known in the town. She had given generously to her friends who were bereaved, so these friends also gave to her generously. A good woman who greets you twenty times if she sees you twenty times in a day; a woman with a clean heart who respects her elders (Nwapa, 1966: 78).

From this quotation, one can learn that respect, hard work, and sympathy towards others are defining features of women in Africa. Attributes of such qualities bring women into the spheres of success. Efuru is culturally and communally sensitive to various situations that matter to her and her people. This is another defining attribute of chameleon imagery. As a woman who adopts the behavior of the chameleon, Efuru is conscious of circumstances that hinder her from her success. She looks for solutions by herself rather than finding dependency on others, mainly men. When her husband works on the farm, Efuru stays in town and trades at markets. She tells her husband, Adizua, “If you like. go to the farm. I am not cut out for farm work... I am going to trade” (Nwapa 1966: 10). Here, Efuru has realized that trading becomes a more profitable sector than farming. She notices that situations vary, and based on circumstances, her ability to understand the way forward is smart so that she finds paths to bring her husband success through working with her. So, the clever woman, Efuru, decides to run a business that she believes can bring profit, which will help her support her family. She does not shun family responsibilities but rather strives for mutual benefit.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study reveals the female character’s empowerment strategies in Nwapa Flora’s novel *Efuru*. It broadly examines female characters’ interactions with the patriarchal system as well as how they join hands with men to resist patriarchy through finding the third space. Thus, the nego-feminist analysis



of the novel shows female characters' cooperation with their male counterparts, though they are in the brunt of patriarchal domination.

The female protagonist, Efuru, is equipped with knowledge of African culture. According to Nnaemeka, indigenous knowledge is significant for African women in order to resist gender inequality. The character, Efuru, is well aware of African indigenous culture. She respects her husband. Efuru is not aggressive. She also tries to adhere to the customs and values of the community. She also solves economic and personal problems through negotiation and dialogue.

The findings also reveal that the female protagonist is clever and intelligent. She knows when to compromise with her husband, Adizua, and how to skilfully convince him that some of the methods he uses to solve the trade problems they face will not be effective. Negotiation involves discussing problems and solving them peacefully. Life is difficult in patriarchal society, but it takes a wife like Efuru to reach peaceful settlement of problems. The novel also demonstrates that African women are tactful. Likewise, Efuru's tact is exhibited through adopting the right move depending on situations, like the chameleon, which has the ability to camouflage. Efuru is not docile but gentle and loving. She can also be assertive when the situation demands. The African woman possesses such qualities that enable her to cope with gender inequality. Efuru's conversation with her mother-in-law concerning marriage issues also exhibits that she is conscious of selfhood and independent. Unlike Western society, gender equality can be achieved through indigenous survival strategies that African women adopt.

In Nwapa's *Efuru*, women empowerment is achieved through negotiation, cooperation, compromise, and through adopting the behaviour of the chameleon for peaceful interaction and resolution of conflict. The novel also shows that complementarity is the pillar of successful marriage and successful living. Efuru's intelligence, decision-making ability, and tact are displayed through the negofeminist strategies she applies as the situations demand. Efuru, who is aware of her selfhood, is a wonderful helpmate for her husband. Furthermore, Nwapa's novel was published in 1966. Nnaemeka

published her book on negofeminism in 2004. Amazingly, the character Efuru has the mind-set of twenty-first century African women. Thus, we can say that this female character is ahead of her time.

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