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# Choice and discovery: An analysis of women and culture in Flora Nwapa's fiction

Mary D. Mears

*University of South Florida*

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Choice and Discovery: An Analysis of Women and Culture in  
Flora Nwapa's Fiction

by

Mary D. Mears

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of English  
College of Arts and Sciences  
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Rosalie Murphy Baum, Ph.D.  
Hunt Hawkins, Ph.D.  
Lawrence Broer, Ph.D.  
Deborah Plant, Ph.D.

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## Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my family members who have encouraged me throughout the years. To the memory of my parents, John and Mary F. Mears, my oldest brother, John Mears, and my youngest brother, Clifton Mears, I thank you for all the love and encouragement you gave to me. For those who are still with me, thank you for understanding and going the extra miles with me: my brother Bernard Mears, sisters-in-law, Anne and Sarah, and special nephews, Larry Kellam and Justin Moore. To Anne who said, "It's about time, but I am glad that you did not give up," and to Larry, the son I never birthed, but the best nephew/son, you have been a source of constant inspiration to stay the course. Finally, to others who told me to finish the degree just for my own satisfaction, I thank you for your support.

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Choice and Discovery: An Analysis of Women and Culture in Flora Nwapa's Fiction

Mary D. Mears

ABSTRACT

My dissertation is in the tradition of redressing the critical imbalance that has undervalued or neglected African women writers by considering Flora Nwapa's three best-known novels, analyzing from a feminist and dialogic perspective what choice and discovery mean for Nwapa's female characters in *Efuru* (1966), *Idu* (1970), and *One is Enough* (1981). 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 analyzes 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. Instead, they wish greater freedom than traditional Igbo customs allow in the domestic and public realms; but their beliefs and values have been transformed by Christianity, western education, and an increasing emphasis upon the individual. The women in Nwapa's novels speak to the needs of both collective and individual female identity within their culture. They seek love and respect from the community and acceptance of the choices they make. As Nwapa's novels evolve, her female characters become increasingly independent, aggressive and self-styled: they become women with a mission to realize themselves.

I have drawn upon the criticism of Barbara Smith, Obioma Nnaemeka, and Barbara Christian to ground my study. The definition of African feminism comes from Carole Boyce Davies' introduction to *Ngambika*. The discussion of language, dialogue, and heteroglossia relies upon the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Mae Henderson. The dissertation focuses upon all important characters in *Efuru*, *Idu*, and *One is Enough*, but especially on the dialogue and actions of central female characters in order to analyze the never-ceasing polyphonic dialogue that Nwapa's female characters have between self and society, between self and self-consciousness, and among themselves. In a world where they struggle to blend their traditional culture and institutions with western influences, they seek both independence and a communal cohesiveness in which many voices and choices can survive in a complementary manner.

## Introduction

Sub-Saharan African literature is increasingly popular among critics and general readers throughout the world. Until fairly recently, feminist issues in African literature have not received the attention they deserve, for example, in the works of Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Grace Ogot, and Ama Ata Aidoo. According to Florence Stratton, women writers have too often been written out of the African tradition and dismissed by critics like Eustace Palmer, Eldred Jones, and Gerald Moore, who have attempted to point out flaws in the characters, plots, themes, and dialogue of these writers and accused them of triviality (81-82). At the same time, these critics have often praised the treatment of characters, plots, themes, and dialogue in men's writings that I and critics like Stratton and Lloyd Brown consider similar in quality to the work of female writers. One only needs to read Palmer's and Jones' critiques of Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and Elechi Amadi's *Concubine* (1966) to experience the undervaluing of the women writers.

Lloyd Brown, in his book-length study *Women Writers in Black Africa* (1981), points out that women have been excluded from most studies of African literature. In his introduction, he explains how women writers have often been overlooked:

The women writers of Africa are the other voices, the unheard voices, rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in the repetitive anthologies and the predictably male-oriented studies in the field. Relatively few literary magazines and scholarly journals, in the West and in Africa itself,

have found significant space or time for African women writers. The ignoring of women writers on the continent has become a tradition, implicit rather than formally stated, but a tradition nonetheless--and a rather unfortunate one at that. (3)

Brown gives several reasons for this situation, such as male-oriented selectivity, Eurocentricism, colonialism, and traditional mores that reflect male supremacy in most African cultures. However, Brown contends that such practices perpetuate ignorance of much African literature, and specifically of female African writers, throughout the world. Too many people are not even aware that African women writers exist.

Brown's groundbreaking work is still respected although it is dated, and more recent scholars like Mary Modupe Kolawole, in *Womanism and African Consciousness* (1997), and Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, in *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women & Critical Transformations* (1994), agree with Brown even though Kolawole offers new reasons for the undervaluing. First, she notes that women face diverse problems on the continent due to colonialism, as well as regional, ethnic, and religious practices. Thus, the multiple voices that are fighting to be heard are handicapped. Kolawole emphasizes "that African women who have transcended the borders of silence are intercepting certain existing notions" that suggest women should remain silent and let the men speak for them. She believes if critics examine contemporaneous feminist discourse, its validity in representing African women's reality, and the way women are negotiating their own space, they will see a change is occurring (7). Kolawole gives special credit to Irene D'Almeida's *Francophone African Women Writers: Destroying the Emptiness of Silence* (1994) that provides an extensive study of the emergence of African women's feminine

ideology for making a difference in attitudes. D'Almedia is credited with destroying the so-called voicelessness of African women's ideology. She emphasizes the role of literature for self-expression, self-definition, and self-discovery in the works of Francophone-African women writers like Ken Bugul, Calixthe Beyala, Aminata Sow Fall, and Werewere Liking (5). Ogundipe-Leslie also believes African women are not voiceless, but cultural critics do not look in the right places. Ogundipe-Leslie asks,

Are African women voiceless or do we fail to look for their voices where we may find them, in sites and forms from which the voices are uttered? . . . We must look for African women's voices in women's spaces and modes such as in ceremonies, worksongs . . . kitchens, watering sites, kinship gatherings, and women's political and commercial spaces. . . . (11)

My dissertation will be in the tradition of redressing the critical imbalance that has undervalued or neglected African women writers by considering Flora Nwapa's three best-known novels, analyzing from a feminist perspective what choice and discovery mean for Nwapa's female characters in *Efuru* (1966), *Idu* (1970), and *One is Enough* (1981). *Efuru* is the first novel published in English by a Nigerian woman. As a result, in 1978, Nwapa was given the chieftaincy title "Ogbuefi," meaning "killer of cow" (Umeh 12). According to Edeh and Umeh, this title is usually given to men except in Oguta society where women of wealth and integrity can acquire it. Nwapa also received other prestigious awards from the Nigerian government.

*Efuru* is a novel with a heroine who consciously decides to break one major rule of tradition: she decides to get married before the brideprice is paid to her family, but this is the first of several customs she manipulates as a matter of choice and freedom. The

novel ends with Efuru living happily among her people while helping them and worshipping Uhamiri, who gave her wealth and happiness but no children.

*Idu* examines traditional beliefs as expressed through the conversations of village women. Several characters, male and female, disobey traditional customs, and the voices of the women analyze whether their actions are right or wrong or whether times have changed because of western influences. Thus, the voices are not sure what to expect from the tribal young, and they question if it is fair to judge the youth harshly. The first two novels are set in rural Oguta where life is slow, and the river and market are prominent in the lives of the people.

By contrast, *One is Enough* is set in a modern urban environment, such as Lagos. The environment presents its own view of what is expected and acceptable from its inhabitants. By portraying diverse settings for females who make choices, Nwapa is emphasizing that one approach will not suffice for all. People need the freedom to choose what works best for them in a given environment while still respecting tradition and ancestors. Therefore, *One is Enough* emphasizes the decision of one woman, Amaka, who decides to take responsibility for her own future by leaving her rural village, by divorcing her husband, and by moving to Lagos. Six years of a childless marriage was enough for her. After arriving in Lagos, Amaka learns the conniving methods of achieving success as a business woman. She decides never to marry again even though she does have children. She concludes that women can be happy, fulfilled, and successful without being married as long as they have their own money.

In my dissertation I will focus on the consciousness of all important characters, but specifically on the dialogue and actions of central female characters in order to

analyze the conversations that Nwapa's female characters have between self and society, between self and self-consciousness, and among themselves. I am seeking to determine what the characters discover by making certain choices. The term "self-consciousness" as used in this dissertation means one's awareness of self and society and the role one is expected and desires to fulfill in society. I will focus on questions Nwapa raises by the speech and actions of her characters. Are the conflicts ever resolved? If so, how? How does the resolution of the conflict affect the community and the individual?

Flora Nwapa writes about women and their lives, issues, and concerns within the traditional culture of Oguta society. As she explores and analyzes many of the characteristics of her tribal group, she posits the women's desire for change, choice, and acceptance within a society in which they wish to participate fully as human beings not just as women traditionally expected to participate in a limited, culturally-defined way. The women in Nwapa's novels speak to the needs of collective and individual female identity within their culture. They seek love and respect from the community and acceptance of the choices they make. As Nwapa's works evolve, her female characters become more independent, aggressive, and self-styled: increasingly, they are women with a mission.

Clearly colonialism is responsible for many changes that Nwapa describes in her works. Some of the changes are due to the spread of western education and Christianity, beginning in the mid-1840s but later in Igbo villages. The ideas and customs taught in the schools often contradicted traditional Igbo values, beliefs, and habits, thus creating tension and ambiguity in individuals, families, and the whole community. The changes were most noticeable in social, cultural, economic, and political arenas.

Christianity gave the Igbo social options not available through traditional beliefs and customs. Multiple births—twins—became acceptable and mothers kept their children; the mothers were no longer ostracized by the community. In addition, Christianity encouraged young people to get married in church or in court whereas the traditional custom was for the families to meet, discuss details, and then agree that the couple should marry. According to Victor Uchendu, the young people preferred the church ceremonies and monogamy because of economic opportunities, education, and religion (49). Another major change was that the young educated girls were being taught to marry before having children; traditional custom did not necessarily dictate this order. Moreover, educational training prepared individuals to receive a degree, find employment in civil service, and live their lives to suit themselves. Again these actions did not agree with traditional expectations where the young people were to return to their villages and help the family. In the first decades of the 1900s many educated women and men moved to cities and worked as teachers, civil servants, contractors, and nurses. The educated individuals wanted to follow the western lifestyle of living alone, not marrying, and not having children, or at least not immediately. Thus, many Igbo married later in life, and many couples chose to live as nuclear families instead of as part of extended families. These changes brought about because of education and Christianity created a state of moral and social confusion that Flora Nwapa examined in her novels. Uchendu maintains that during the colonial and post-colonial periods the Igbo supported individual achievement and initiative but says it was rooted in group solidarity (103). In addition, Uchendu believes there have been many different options for people and the people were

“willing to accept changes resulting from European contact” (104). He sees change as the means of attaining progress and success.

In terms of progress and success, Tony Falola and Matthew Heaton in *A History of Nigeria* discuss the growing number of European-educated Nigerians during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, referring to them as the African middle class: “African in heritage, but with many European tastes and values” (128). These Nigerians worked in the colonial administration, lived in cities, built European style homes, and bought luxury items (128-29). Culturally, however, the European-educated Nigerians were caught in a double bind and lived lives of double consciousness. Even though they enjoyed the benefits of education, they realized that the colonial government would allow them to have only certain jobs and viewed Africans as inferior (129). Over time this educated group began to display signs of ethnic pride by wearing traditional garb, demanding that indigenous languages be taught in their schools along with English, and changing customs in church services that better reflected the Nigerian culture while teaching Christian values (130).

Christianity and colonial education also influenced the economy. The British employed tactics that changed the types of crops that were desirable, manipulated the cash flow, and changed the roles that women played in the economy. The British destroyed the informal businesses by exporting raw materials—cash crops and minerals—and importing European finished goods (119). Roads, railways, and harbors were improved and built to move products from interior regions to the coast and larger cities; and many men left villages to help carry out the business plans implemented by the Europeans. According to Falola and Heaton, the new European plans caused men to work

for lower wages, have to pay a middleman to transport products from interior regions to cities, and accept cash in British currency, thus undermining the Nigerian economy and traditional methods of conducting business (119). A ripple effect occurred when women had to take over the production and cultivation of cassava farms which had been men's work. Cassava was thought of as a subsistence crop, so it was secondary to palm oil, groundnuts, cotton, and cocoa. In the past, women had cultivated and controlled the palm oil business. Femi Nzegwu in *Love, Motherhood and the African Heritage* also discusses how the subordination concept was applied to women in Nigeria because of European training: women were relegated to lower, less prestigious jobs than men. During pre-colonial times, women had held positions of authority within their age-groups, communities, and women's organizations. In addition, they controlled many informal businesses, such as palm oil, but "through the appropriate European cultural-based schooling of Africans, the structure of African society and the position of women therein become irrelevant, relegated to a position of political marginalization of both thought and action in the ordering and maintenance of societal norms and values" (85).

Politically, Falola and Heaton explain how the British dismantled the traditional method of governance by chiefs and kings, instead employing a concept called "indirect rule." Certain chiefs, kings, and others were selected to be intermediaries or "warrant chiefs," but their power existed only if the Nigerians followed the orders given by the British. Some men selected to be intermediaries, however, did not have any special rank within the traditional village; thus, it was difficult for Nigerians to respect such individuals who had been appointed by the British (113). Anti-colonial activities—beginning in the 1930s but including the Women's War of 1929—and post-colonialism—

with independence in 1960 and the Nigerian Civil War, sometimes called the Biafra War, from 1967-70—seriously affected political and economic ideals and institutions.

Divisions arising from regionalism, ethnicity, and religion; differences between rural and urban values and styles of life; and dependence upon European companies for the country's export economy threatened to undermine a national identity. In addition, according to Adeline Apena, the Nigerian Civil War transformed social values and almost revolutionized gender relations and attitudes towards sexuality (284). Apena identifies many social effects: the emergence of a new breed of women (for example, Amaka in *One is Enough* and Dora and Rose in *Women Are Different*), desire for material wealth, flexible attitudes towards sexual advances, urbanization and economic growth, greater mobility, money marriages, and an erosion of communal values in favor of individual ambitions. Post-colonialism, then, further complicated national, ethnic, and religious identity and culture as polyphonic voices spoke for traditional ways, modern ways, and many varying attempts to blend the two.

Femi Nzegwu agrees that the introduction of European education and values created a shift in power relationships between men and women and brought about a disintegration of traditional norms and values. The status and role of women were greatly affected (161). She believes the change in social mores actually began during the colonial period but became more commonplace after colonialism and the Biafra Civil War. Thus, one may sense a few changes in ideology and actions in a work like *Efuru* when Efuru reminds her doctor friend that young people now marry later than they did several years earlier. The change is also clear in Gilbert's double standards shown by his actions towards his second wife and children as well as his mother's comments to her friends that

young people today just act and think differently. These changes are most pronounced in *One is Enough* and Nwapa's later works.

In discussing post-colonial but especially colonial effects, critics and historians-- Uchendu, Apena, Nzegwu, Falola, and Heaton—agree that European education and Christianity displaced the roles of women and men in the community. The new ideas, often apparently contradictory, taught women to be submissive to husbands, obtain higher education, and achieve positions of prestige in their careers, sometimes at the expense of motherhood and marriage. These changes also influenced men because too often the men left their families to pursue higher education in different countries, thus creating single-parent families. In this context, women had to develop creative ways to survive. Personally, I think Nzegwu finds more negatives with the effects of colonialism than does Apena. Both recognize that Nwapa wrote works that navigate women's positions in a changing environment. Although Nwapa gives few hints in *Efuru*, with Amaka in *One is Enough*, she seems to be asking the community to embrace many of the colonial and post-colonial changes while still respecting and maintaining some traditional customs. She wants to blend a few habits, keep a few old customs, and accept some new ones; there is room for all to work together.

This study will consist of an Introduction, six chapters, and a Conclusion. Chapter I introduces critical approaches and theories helpful to my analysis, drawing upon studies of feminist critics and black feminist critics as well as the work of Jonathan Dollimore, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Mae Henderson. Particularly helpful will be Elaine Showalter's *Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory* (1985), Deborah McDowell's "New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism" (1985), Barbara Smith's

“Towards a Black Feminist Criticism”(1982), Barbara Christian’s *Black Feminist Criticism* (1985), Cheryl Wall’s *Changing Our Own Words* (1987), Patricia Hill Collins’ *Black Feminist Thought* (1990), Carole Boyce Davies’ and Anne Adams Graves’ *Ngambika* (1996), Filomena Steady’s *The Black Woman Cross Culturally* (1981), Jonathan Dollimore’s *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (1985), Mikhail Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination* (1985), and Mae Henderson’s “Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics and the Black Woman Writers: Literary Tradition” (1990).

Chapter II considers the literary criticism of writers who have focused upon Nwapa’s work: those who have not appreciated her style and narrative structure, those who have understood certain aspects of her works, and those who have totally supported her themes, style, and structure. Among those I examine, Eustace Palmer and Eldred Jones often disagree with Nwapa’s major concepts or characterize them as trivial while Susan Andrade and Joseph Asanbe offer criticism of a mixed nature. Lloyd Brown, Gay Wilentz, Mary Kolawole, Florence Stratton, Obioma Nnaemeka, and Marie Umeh are critics who seem to understand Flora Nwapa’s purpose as she allows her female characters to express their desires for changes for women in Oguta culture. Within this critical context, I will discuss the images, themes, actions, and diction of Nwapa’s characters and analyze the consciousness of these characters as well as the veiled messages they direct to society.

I should note here that a number of African writers like Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta, and Flora Nwapa have rejected the term “feminist” because of its negative connotations, its identification with western individualized philosophy, and its exclusion

of men. According to Clenora Hudson-Weems, it is the consensus of Africana women scholars that they must reconsider “historical realities and the agenda for the modern feminist movement” (18). It is believed that one major tenet of this approach is to help the “Africana womanist” see herself as a companion to the Africana man and work diligently toward continuing their established union in the struggle against racial oppression (38). Thus, the views of Carole Boyce Davies on what constitutes African feminism are especially important in understanding Nwapa’s fiction.

Chapter III briefly reviews cultural matters necessary to understand Nwapa’s fiction, especially the importance of religion and spirituality in Nigerian culture and the pre-colonial matriarchal nature of African culture. Uchendu explains that Igbo believe in manipulation and compromise to achieve what he calls “cosmological balance” (15). The balancing is often done by giving homage to ancestors. The chapter also discusses the role of Uhamiri, a water goddess who is worshipped by all Igbo people. The dissertation explains how Nwapa changes the purpose of Uhamiri in her fiction. According to my reading of Flora Nwapa’s works, her female characters seek compromise through manipulation of certain traditional practices.

Chapter IV focuses upon the choices women make in *Efuru* and the outcomes of these choices. I will examine—from a feminist, cultural materialist and dialogic perspective—the actions of the characters to determine if the choices offer happiness, confusion, conflict, or pain as the characters struggle with traditional and non-traditional options. I will also consider Mae Henderson’s communal female voice while centering the novel in its African context. The characters seem to speak of personal change for

women while still respecting some traditional habits and desiring to live peacefully within the community.

Chapter V, like Chapter IV, focuses on the choices people make, especially the women. However, in *Idu* one male character, Amarajeme, makes a choice that reflects the ills of the society. The overall subject is parenthood and what happens if one is not a parent. In addition, the chapter emphasizes the importance of women's expressing and privileging the other self to find happiness within.

Nwapa notes in her fiction that people are changing constantly because of politics and education. In light of this constant change, she questions why roles and expectations for women have changed minimally in Nigeria. I think Nwapa is subtly advocating that women must have a wider range of choices and also be free to make traditional and non-traditional choices while living within a traditional community. Can both the traditional and nontraditional co-exist?

Chapter VI explores the beliefs that in *One is Enough* all women, married or single, must be economically independent while *choosing* happiness through different avenues—marriage, children, and/or careers. I will examine how the concept of economic independence fosters the motivation and actions of Amaka, her mother, her aunt, and several other women of the community in *One is Enough*. According to the aunt, children are more important than marriage, and it is not important to marry for love. The aunt says, "A woman should never slave for her husband, never totally depend on her husband but always have her own business even if it is a small one" (9). It becomes clear that many women in Oguta society have some type of business, whether it is selling vegetables at the market or sewing clothes for the village.

The Conclusion of the dissertation briefly discusses Nwapa's other works of fiction: two collections of short stories and the novel *Women Are Different* that continue her consideration of colonial and post-colonial influences on traditional Igbo beliefs and customs with the many changes and choices that emerge, especially for women, and two novels with very different foci. *Never Again* considers Igbo society under the terrible stress of the Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafra War; *The Lake Goddess* makes a significant spiritual statement. Nwapa's women develop independent voices and explore new identities in an increasingly modern world, but they also see themselves as spiritually nurturing forces in the community.

## Chapter I

### Defining My Approach to Flora Nwapa's Novels

The recognition of the importance of women's literature is fairly recent, and several waves of feminist criticism have both "discovered" the many works written by women through the ages and provided approaches to and theories for understanding the literature, with the work of more general critics both enriching and problematizing feminist criticism. For example, Jonathan Dollimore's work on cultural materialism emphasizes exploitation on "grounds of race, gender, and class" (viii); and Mikhail Bakhtin suggests that the novel "orchestrates all its themes" through a "diversity of speech types" and "differing individual voices" (263). My study's analysis of the voices, language, and actions of characters in Flora Nwapa's novels is grounded in feminist theory, especially the work of Carole Boyce Davies and Filomena Steady, Dollimore's theory of cultural materialism, and multiple voices as discussed by Bakhtin, Hans Georg-Gadamer, and Mae Henderson.

Elaine Showalter argues that feminist criticism differs from other contemporary schools of critical theory in not deriving its literary principles from a single authority figure or from a body of sacred texts. Feminist criticism is believed to have evolved from several sources through extensive reading of women's literature; from exchanges with feminist theorists in other disciplines, especially history, psychology, and anthropology; and from the revision and reconsideration of literary theory itself (4).

In *The New Feminist Criticism* Showalter asserts that "feminist criticism has allowed women writers to search for a language of their own, a style, a voice and structure." She believes women should focus on connections between women's works

and their lives, whereas in the past they concentrated on exposing the misogyny of literary practice (4). This view is very important to Flora Nwapa's novels because in Nwapa's works the actions of her characters and the dialogue between women express themes that indicate connections and limitations between women's choices and lives; the novels do not focus on exposing the misogyny mentioned by Showalter.

Showalter reminds readers that feminist criticism can be divided into two periods, with the earlier criticism focused on exposing misogyny, emphasizing, for example, stereotypical images of women in literature and exclusion of women from literary history. However, since the 1980s,

the stance has changed to questions of sexism and gender; the focus is on the discovery that women writers had a literature of their own, whose historical and thematic coherence and artistic importance had been obscured by patriarchal values that dominate our culture. This stance led to massive recovery and rereading of literature by women throughout the world. (6)

*The New Feminist Criticism* is divided into three parts. The first analyzes literature from textbooks and other critical sources to show how the writings of women have been excluded, misinterpreted, and misread; the third examines different approaches to the literature of women--social contexts, modes, genres, themes, structures, and styles. However, the second section focuses on intellectual and political issues in feminist literary theory, such as relationships between gender, class, and race. Some of the questions asked are if each gender, class, and race had its own literary tradition and was each of these categories respected by mainstream feminist criticism.

To address the danger that gender studies ignores areas like class and race, Showalter points out that Deborah McDowell, in “New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism” (1985), argues that African-American feminists must abandon slogans and situate the study of black women’s writing in the context of black history and culture and explore its thematic and stylistic correspondences with the literature of black men as well as investigate its special uses of language and imagery (13). McDowell does not believe black women should isolate themselves from other women or black men while trying to define themselves. She questions whether a monolithic black female language exists. She asks, are there really noticeable differences between the languages of black female and black men? These are questions she raises as she analyzes Barbara Smith’s statements, in “Towards a Black Feminist Criticism.” McDowell believes Smith’s statements lack precision and detail.

In “Towards a Black Feminist Criticism” (1985), Barbara Smith states that the “politics of feminism have a direct relationship to the state of Black women’s literature. A viable, autonomous Black feminist movement in this country would open up the space needed for the exploration of Black women’s lives and the creation of consciously Black women-identified art” (169). Smith focuses on problems women encounter and suggests changes that should be made. The purpose of her essay is to point out the “connections between the politics of Black women’s lives, what [they] write about and [their] situation as artists” (169). She emphasizes how “Black women have been viewed critically by outsiders, demonstrates the necessity for Black feminist criticism, and tries to understand what the existence or non-existence of Black lesbian writing reveals about the state of Black women’s culture and the intensity of all Black women’s oppression” (169). Smith

cites the lack of a political base for support of the black woman's experiences through history, literature, and culture. She also emphasizes the need for a developed black feminist political theory from which one can study and examine black women's art. Smith concludes that without a black feminist movement like the white feminist movement, there will be very little growth in terms of black feminist literature, criticism, and black feminist women studies (170). The power is missing from the platform. Thus, she outlines what she believes should constitute a black feminist criticism. First, Smith wants a black feminist literary tradition that would allow black female writers to show consistency in stylistics, aesthetics, concepts, and themes. They would write from their social, political, and economic backgrounds; she calls these aspects "commonalities" (174). Smith cites Zora Neale Hurston, Margaret Walker, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker as examples of writers who use language and details which she sees as germane to the black female experience. Such writers must be committed to exploring how sexual and racial politics and black and female identity are inextricable elements of their works. Smith's second emphasis requires

the critic to look first for precedents and insights in interpretation within the works of other Black women. . . . She would think and write out of her own identity and not try to graft the ideals or methodology of white or male literary thought upon the precious materials of Black women's art. . . . It would owe its existence to a Black feminist movement while contributing ideas that women in the movement could use. (174-75)

In "New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism," Deborah McDowell accuses Smith of not giving examples of what she means by black female language when she

refers to Walker, Hurston and Morrison. Although McDowell does agree that “women and men manipulate language differently,” she believes there should be further inquiry; for example, “do Black female high school drop outs, welfare mothers, college graduates, and PhD’s share a common language?” (189). She also discredits Smith’s method of categorizing *Sula* as a lesbian novel; she says the designation is vague and imprecise. McDowell questions what specific ideas would add to the movement, for she does not think the criticism will change what has created problems for black women throughout history (191). McDowell agrees there should be more innovative approaches to black women’s literature. She concurs with Lillie Robinson’s statement that “ideological criticism must take place in the context of a political movement that can put it to work” (226). She also is concerned about the intersecting of black and white female criticism and wonders if the rubric will require white women to use a different set of critical tools to study black female writers. She continues by reminding readers that Andrea Rushing seems to be suggesting there will need to be a different set of rubrics because white feminist criticism is predicated on European origins, an approach that would be inappropriate for African-American women writers. McDowell has stated that she thinks Barbara Smith did good work in opening up the discussion about the definition of black feminist criticism; and she firmly believes that regardless of which theory black feminist critics choose, black feminist critics must have an informed handle on black literature and culture because the grounding will give scholarship more texture and completeness (192). In addition, the critics must not ignore the importance of rigorous textual analysis (193). McDowell also explains that whether black feminist criticism should remain a separate entity is still debatable; but she emphasizes that “Black feminist critics ought to move

from this issue to consider the specific language of Black women's literature, to describe the ways Black women writers employ literary devices in a distinct way, and to compare the way Black women writers create their own mythic structures." She believes these concerns will be "the cornerstone for articulation of the Black feminist aesthetic" (196-97).

Barbara Christian's views in *Black Feminist Criticism* further clarify the differences that exist between European and African-American feminism as she examines the role of motherhood, the effect of African women's economic and social roles, and the influence of colonialism. In "An Angle of Seeing: Motherhood in Buchi Emecheta's *Joy of Motherhood* and Alice Walker's *Meridian*," Christian claims her essay is a "beginning inquiry rather than a conclusive one, which may lead to a more illuminating analysis of the experience and institution of motherhood" as found in African and African American female writers and the culture itself (211). Christian, like many other feminist critics, believes that women must tell their own stories. It is their experiences to tell. She states that even though motherhood is revered and is an important role, it is "universally imposed upon women as their sole identity, their proper identity, above all others" (212). Christian's views identify motherhood as a primary function of all societies despite other differences. To further support this view, Christian makes the following comment:

Ironically, the experience unique to women is interpreted for them through male authorities and structures, through religion, myth, science, politics and economics. What happens to these interpretations when women begin to articulate their experience of motherhood and interpret its value accordingly? How does this shift in point of view, this angle of seeing,

affect our understanding not only of the experience, but of the institution as well? How does it help us understand our position as women in our respective societies? (212)

Through comparative analysis Christian concludes there are many similarities between African and African-American women writers and their perception of motherhood as viewed in their respective societies. Christian, just like Flora Nwapa, questions the value and limitations placed on women, especially mothers, in society. Both also emphasize the women who are not mothers; these women, too, have stories to tell. In addition, both Christian and Nwapa question the ambiguity of the value of sons instead of daughters. In some societies, sons are more valued than daughters; concomitantly, daughters who become mothers have as their primary function to procreate, a role necessary to the survival of society. According to Christian, “The high regard for mothers in African society, then, has both positive and negative effects for women, circumscribing them as it makes them respected” because women’s identities are prescribed as mothers, their lives preordained (214). This concept involves playing a subordinate role and being submissive to male kin. Christian seems to be emphasizing that without women to procreate there would never be the possibility of men to exist and control the lives of women.

Christian, Smith, McDowell, and Nwapa note, of course, that the above view is the traditional view of the status of women in African societies. Christian finds that the latter view “stresses the importance of economic and social contributions that African women make to traditional societies and as a result their ability to determine, to some extent, their own lives” (214). Her discussion examines how men and women had separate work choices; the women usually engaged in trade of a different nature: fish,

vegetables, and crafts. The money made from their trade was often theirs to keep.

Because of their identity as traders and their natural relationship to their mother's family, African women maintained some sense of identity and security. However, recent scholars admit that these women still bore an unbalanced portion of labor because they worked both at home and outside of the home.

Christian concludes with comments on colonialism's influence on the traditional status of African women and notes that it is still being debated. It seems that with European influences a woman loses rather than gains autonomy:

In being relegated more and more into the "private" sphere, she lost access to the degree of economic independence she was entitled to under the traditional system, while having to suffer the limitations that had always been a part of her role. . . . The contemporary situation, however, is as varied and complicated as is the African past. (216-17)

In *Black Feminist Thought* (1990), Patricia Hill Collins agrees with many other feminists that black women must place their thoughts, experiences, and consciousness at the center of their interpretations. They must create their own realities. Collins stresses that "coalitions require dialogue with other groups" because each one brings its own "distinctive set of experiences" and thoughts to the field of Black feminism. "Through dialogues exploring how relations of domination and subordination are maintained and changed," she explains, "parallels between Black women's experiences and those of other groups become the focus of investigation" (36). Collins concurs with the views of several African feminists—such as Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta, and Flora Nwapa—who see their roles as ones that will bring about changes not just for women, but

for humankind, especially African men. This attitude reflects a difference that some scholars see between African-American and African feminism. Collins views “Black feminism as a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of the community” (39). Some African female writers like Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa refuse to call themselves feminists because the term is thought to be divisive and too European in its application. Many women of color believe European feminism divides men and women and often creates women’s hatred and antagonism towards men. In addition, since many middle class and upper class European women did not work or were not allowed to work, their sense of freedom was often different from that of their African, African-American, and poor sisters. European women’s sense of freedom came from economic and political breakthroughs. Most women of the African diaspora have always worked in some types of jobs even though the level of economic security varied. However, the one similarity is the need for all women to be respected and valued for their ideas and contributions in the workforce and at home. Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta have said they are not feminists. They argue that their works speak to the needs of the African community, with an emphasis on women having power to make choices that are not always traditional but still being respected, needed, and included in the community. These views have led to Carole Boyce Davies’ outline of what constitutes African feminism in *Ngambika* (1986).

My dissertation will be grounded in concepts of African feminism since it is more relevant to an understanding of the culture from which the work stems. For this study I will rely heavily upon definitions and criteria of African feminism set forth by Davies

and also draw from Filomena Steady's definition of African feminism in *The Black Woman Cross Culturally: An Overview* (1981).

According to Davies, in *Ngambika*, there are seven characteristics of African feminism:

First, African feminism recognizes a common struggle with African men for the removal of the yokes of foreign domination and European and American exploitation. It [this demand] is not antagonistic to African men, but it challenges them to be aware of certain salient aspects of women's subjugation which differ from the generalized oppression of African people. (9)

Second, African feminism has a deep "consciousness that recognizes the inequities and limitations that existed or exist in traditional societies" and realizes "that colonialism reinforced them and in turn introduced others" (9).

The third characteristic focuses on ancient societies in the general sense, "recognize[ing] that African societies are ancient societies, so logically, African women must have addressed the problems of women's position in society historically. In this regard there already exist, in some societies, structures which give women equality" (9). Some of these societies are mentioned by Flora Nwapa in her article "Priestesses and Power Among the Riverine Igbo" (1977).

The fourth characteristic of African feminism analyzes the positive elements of African societies and institutions such as polygamy and the extended family. Davies believes the privilege afforded men and the loss of stature for women are problems that need to be addressed:

African feminism examines African societies for institutions which are of value to women and rejects those which work to their detriment, and does not simply import western women's agendas. Thus, it respects motherhood but questions obligatory motherhood and the traditional favoring of sons. It sees utility in the positive aspects of the extended family and polygamy with respect to child care and the sharing of household responsibility, traditions which are compatible with modern working women's lives and the problems of child care but which were distorted with colonialism and continue to be distorted in the urban environment. (9)

As Davies moves from ancient societies and institutions, she emphasizes the importance of understanding and recognizing African women's commitment to cooperation within the social organization when she discusses the fifth characteristic of African feminism:

African feminism respects African woman's self-reliance and the penchant to cooperative work and social organization and the fact that African women are seldom financially dependent but instead accept income generating work as a fact of life. It rejects, however, the overburdening, exploitation and regulation to "muledom" that is often her lot. (10)

Davies proceeds to the various approaches to and changes in women's situations in describing the sixth characteristic: "an African feminist approach has to look objectively at women's situation in societies which have undergone wars of national liberation and social reconstruction" (10). She refers, for example, to the role women

played in the revolution of Guinea Bisseau and in Zimbabwe as well as the Abba war in Nigeria and the role of Yaa Aswatena in Ghana. Davies concludes her views on African feminism by writing, “African feminism looks at traditional and contemporary avenues of choice for women. Above all, African women themselves are beginning to tell their own stories. All of this must contribute to the development of a true African feminist theory” (10).

In my analysis of Flora Nwapa’s novels, I will show how Nwapa uses all seven characteristics, but my major concentration will be on the first, second, fourth, sixth, and seventh. According to Filomena Steady, in *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally: An Overview* (1981). African feminism combines awareness of racial, sexual, class, and cultural dimensions of oppression to produce a cogent brand of feminism through which women are viewed first and foremost as humans, rather than sexual beings. It focuses on liberation and has an emphasis on examination of concepts, perspectives, and methodologies used to bring about change as a basic human right (3-4). In addition, Steady points out that African feminism addresses the tensions and conflicts of post-colonialism because in traditional societies there were many complementary values and communal values that focused on cooperation rather than individualism.

Another aspect of African feminism focuses on raising men’s and women’s consciousness about the economic basis of oppression and its roots. Steady asserts that African people throughout the diaspora have been negatively affected in the name of western capitalism, and many of the African customs have been destroyed and distorted, but women have suffered a greater loss than men. Thus, women must be resourceful and self-reliant, and they must be involved in the production process. Women must hold

managerial positions in banks so they can be able to make decisions in terms of approving loans for women to open up businesses and buy more products. The current system is male-dominated.

Through the language of her characters, Nwapa portrays a male-dominated but often female-directed political and cultural worldview of the Igbo people consistent with Jonathan Dollimore's theory of cultural materialism. In *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (1985), Dollimore emphasizes that history and culture are continuously being made through different institutions and contexts. In other words, the focus of cultural materialism is brought out through what the works signify, how they signify, and which cultural field is revealed. In addition, it is Dollimore's belief that cultural materialism is not designed to neutralize politics because political significance will always exist in cultures. Its aim is to "register the commitments to the transformation of a social order which exploits people on grounds of race, gender, and class" (viii).

Flora Nwapa's novels fit the guidelines of cultural materialism since they convey messages about women's roles in society based on historical tradition. Dollimore's comment that history is not just in the past, but is being made continuously is applicable to the messages Nwapa's characters espouse. As a reader and scholar, I bring a certain understanding to her works. As I challenge and sometimes agree with roles assigned women in their given culture, I will be arguing for a transformation of the social order that exploits the women. Nwapa's characters—like Idu, Efurū, Amaka, and Aunt Anjanpu—all are still making history. They make statements and display actions that ask the community to accept change.

I will analyze Nwapa's three novels to determine how they explicate and illustrate the economic, political, social, and educational constraints placed on African women based on traditional cultural practices. The works perfectly illustrate Marx's statement that men and women make their own history but not in conditions of their own choosing. Dollimore says the latter half of Marx's statement "concentrates on the formative power of social and ideological structures which are both prior to experience and in some sense determining of it, and so opens up the whole question of autonomy" (3). Nwapa's novels dramatically illustrate that women do not choose their conditions and may be forced to make choices that may not be in agreement with traditional mores. What else can they do?

Examining and understanding these choices depends in large part upon the dialogue of the female characters in Nwapa. Most critics agree that language is culturally and politically based; thus, the dialogue the writer assigns to her characters posits a worldview about a given culture or group of people at a specific time. This study's effort to analyze Nwapa's dialogue in terms of the women's sense of consciousness and efforts to define themselves through choice draws largely upon Bakhtin's views in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1930s) and Mae Henderson's in "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics and the Black Woman Writers: Literary Tradition" (1990). The title of the dissertation--"Choice and Discovery: An Analysis of Women and Culture in Flora Nwapa's Works"—acknowledges the study's grounding in Bakhtin's theories of speech acts, polyphony, and heteroglossia and Henderson's modification of those theories to show what choice and discovery mean for the individual and community.

Bakhtin, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, writes, "The novel can be defined as a

diversity of social speech types and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized” (263). He believes the novel contains an internal stratification of social dialects, group behaviors, professional jargon, language of generations, and age groups—languages that serve specific sociopolitical purposes of the day as the novel “orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions” (263). Group behavior is often specific to a given people in a culture; therefore, the actions or voices reflect the cultural group behavior or method of socialization. It is Bakhtin’s belief that the different voices—such as authorial speech, speeches of narrators, and speeches of characters—are basic compositional unities that compete for authority and must flourish under set conditions; these voices make up what he calls utterances and languages. Thus, language is a worldview seeking understanding, and it is always in a state of “be-coming.” According to Bakhtin, the “significance of speech used in a novel is understood against the background of language, while its actual meaning is understood against the background of other concrete utterances on the same theme, a background made up of contradictory opinions, points of view and value judgments” (281). Since any utterance is a speech act, he believes the background complicates the path of the word towards the object. All words have specific meanings, but those meanings may change slightly or greatly depending on the context, point of view, and value judgment of other speech acts related to the subject. Thus, the environment given to the speaker affects the consciousness of the listener and his background responses.

Bakhtin explains heteroglossia in the novel in terms of the difference between the

author's story and the narrator's story. He says there are two levels or points of view at the same time. The narrator's system is filled with objects, meanings, and emotional expression and the level of the author who speaks by means of this story (314). The second level involves the author's telling of the story through the narrator while at the same time the author does not intrude in the telling of the story. Thus, the reader has to extract the author's intentions as presented by the narrator who often informs the reader from a non-biased perspective. Heteroglossia obviously involves the interacting of languages and speech acts. I believe that Nwapa's characters are consciously espousing ideas that women hold in their communities about the roles of women. Some female characters do support a more traditional role for women while others support a more flexible view, and some female characters show changes in their views and actions. Thus, I conclude that Nwapa's characters are in a state of becoming since many of them like Efurū and Amaka change their views and actions in the novels.

Heteroglossia is defined as a base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance. At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions--social, historical, meteorological, physiological—that will insure that a word uttered in that place at that time will have a different meaning than it would under any other conditions (291). It is Bakhtin's belief that all language is heteroglot from beginning to end because it represents the "co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form" (291). In addition, it is Bakhtin's contention that these contradictory elements do not exclude each other; rather, they all intersect with each other in different

ways. Bakhtin maintains each social group speaks its own “social dialect,” possesses its own unique language expressing shared values, perspectives, ideology, and norms. These social dialects become the “languages” of heteroglossia, “intersecting with each other in many different ways . . . . As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically” (292-93).

In reference to speech used in a novel, Bakhtin says the speech is understood against the background of the language while the meaning is made clear from the background of utterances of others on the same theme, contradictory opinions, point of view and value judgments. He seems to believe the listener’s consciousness helps the listener to understand the speaker’s intent. Thus, “response becomes very important because it creates ground for active and engaged understanding. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other” (282). As Bakhtin focuses on the speaking person in the novel, the person represents an ideology. It is believed the language spoken by the person in the novel is a “way of viewing the world, one that strives for social significance” (333). My view of Flora Nwapa’s novels is that her characters seem to more than adequately portray the view of their traditional village among a now more developed and changing culture influenced by western concepts. Nwapa’s novels simultaneously display traditional life and utterances by women who seem to advocate a need for change. The most powerful utterances are espoused by characters who desire to bring about more flexibility and options for women. Because these women are advocating changes while still desiring to be accepted within the traditional community, I see the conflict and integration or

intersecting aiming toward cooperation. The actions and utterances of the characters seem to challenge the reader to understand and respond to the situations of the characters.

Mae Henderson's essay "Speaking In Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics and the Black Woman Writers: The Literary Tradition" modifies Bakhtin's views on dialogism and consciousness to complement her approach, which involves a theory of interpretation based on what she calls the "simultaneity of discourse." In her essay Henderson focuses on how many different views of race and gender combined with interconnected relationships can structure the discourse of black women writers. Henderson says she "seeks to account for racial difference within gender identity and gender difference within racial identity" (117). She contends, "if language for Bakhtin is an expression of social identity, then subjecthood is constituted as a social entity through the role of the word as medium of consciousness" (118). Consciousness is analogized to language because a person's own environment shapes her or his consciousness. Henderson sees consciousness as a kind of "inner speech" reflecting "the outer word" in a process that links the psyche, language, and social interaction. She focuses on the process of the heteroglossic voices of the other(s) as they encounter one another and coexist in the consciousness of real people. She posits the view that the voices of black women writers are "privileged" by social position that allows them "to speak in dialogically racial and gendered voices to the other(s) both within and without" in reference to their own social, historical, and gender situations (119).

Not only does Henderson use Bakhtin's concepts, she also employs ideas from Audre Lorde, Barbara Christian, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Henderson quotes Lorde's view that black women have to deal with the "external manifestations of racism and

sexism” and the results of distortions internalized within our consciousness of ourselves and one another” (119). Moreover, Henderson believes that black women’s writings are the “privileging” rather than “the repressing of the other in ourselves.” In reference to Gadamer’s views, she sees Gadamer’s dialectal model of conversation as one of consensus, communality where one claims to understand the other better than the other understands her or himself. This view is the opposite of Bakhtin’s model, which is described by Henderson as adversarial because it is viewed as contestation. According to Henderson, Gadamer’s dialectic privileges tradition as

. . . a genuine partner in communication with which we have fellowship as does the “I” with a “Thou.” It is this rereading of the notion of tradition within a field of gender and ethnicity that supports and enables the notion of community among those who share a common history, language, and culture. (120)

Henderson believes black women writers enter simultaneously into familial or testimonial and public or competitive discourses—discourses that both affirm and challenge the values and expectations of the reader. Familial discourse is different from public discourse because public discourse challenges the values and expectations of the reader while familial discourse affirms the beliefs of the reader. She analyzes how black women compete with black men, white women, white men, and sometimes with other black women. For example, if black men and women enter into discourse as Blacks that would be familial discourse; and if black women and white women enter into discourse as women that would be familial discourse; and, yes, even women of different socioeconomic levels can enter into familial discourse with each other as women.

Henderson points out that at the same time these groups can enter into public or competitive discourse if the women compete against the men, white women compete against black women, and black women against black men.

Henderson uses the character Janie in Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) to demonstrate her point. Janie's speeches are described as examples of personal and public discourse. Henderson's best analysis of this designation occurs when Janie is on trial for killing her husband and must speak to the white, male audience and at the same time communicate with the male and female black audience--in reference to their lying thoughts and misunderstandings--to defend herself. Because Janie has to speak in a plurality of voices and in a multiplicity of discourses, Henderson calls her act of communicating "speaking in tongues." She believes this novel of development is an example of women moving from voicelessness to voice. It is this concept of voicelessness to voice through a plurality of voices and multiplicity of discourses that I will apply to Flora Nwapa's novels *Efuru*, *Idu*, and *One is Enough*.

Consciousness is reflected in the "outer word" used by the characters in literary works. Henderson says "the outer word" is a process that links the psyche, language, and social interaction (118). However, Bakhtin sees language as the idea of individual consciousness and describes the language as a "borderline consciousness between oneself and the other," arguing that it "becomes one's own only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, where he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention" (293). This view is similar to that of Norman Holland, who argues, in "Unity Identity Text Self" (1975) that each individual has an "identity theme." When she reads an author's work, she "re-creates" the author's work

that is a reflection of the author's "identity theme" in terms of her own "identity theme" (126). Thus, the language of both the writer and the reader is characterized by their own "intention" and "accent," parts of their identity.

To further explain this concept of heteroglossia, I note that Mae Henderson believes when women use their multiple voices, the writers are entering into familial or public discourse as "both affirm and challenge the values and expectations of the reader" (121). For example, when the character Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* addresses the white jurors and judicial system, she is trying to convince them and the Blacks in town of her innocence or self-defense theory. She is speaking as a black woman to a male, white audience and must simultaneously convince black women and black men, especially Tea Cake's friends, that her action was self-defense. Do all listeners accept her defense theory? It is difficult for some black men because to them it seems as if the white men are siding with the black woman against the black man. Thus, the women writers are projecting women characters who use multiple voices sometimes publicly and privately at the same time. On the other hand, Bakhtin sees the multiple voices as challenging each other and challenging the reader rather than performing for both at the same time.

Bakhtin's view of dialogism, speech acts, and heteroglossia and Mae Henderson's modified view of dialogism and consciousness, her view of plurality of voices and multiplicity of discourses, describe the complex dialogue of Nwapa's novels as many voices speak simultaneously to the same issue but sometimes from different views, as multiple voices seek communal agreement instead of contestation. Such an approach supports the theory that feminist methodology should not restrict itself to one view or

method but choose the best among many. Henderson sees the many voices as working together to offer various female viewpoints about their roles in the community. Bakhtin, on the other hand, sees varying voices competing against each other. Nwapa's characters appear to be seeking a communal cohesiveness where many voices and choices can survive in a complementary manner.

## Chapter II

### Review of Critical and Theoretical Literature on Flora Nwapa's Novels

In *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (1994), Florence Stratton accuses Gerald Moore, Eustace Palmer, and Eldred Jones of using double standards and incorrectly assessing women's novels because some of those novels do not conform to male narrative structure. According to Stratton, Eustace Palmer's *An Introduction to the African Novel* (1972) refers only once to a woman writer, labeling Flora Nwapa "an inferior novelist" (61). Stratton emphasizes that women are also absent from Palmer's second book, *Growth of the African Novel* (1979), and that most surveys, including Gerald Moore's *Twelve African Writers* (1980), exclude women. Stratton argues that Palmer and other male critics are using a western or male-dominated canon as a checklist for African literature, a canon that does not include women authors.

With Flora Nwapa, the reader is introduced to both a female African author and also to fiction in which women play the central roles. The critical reception has been diverse. Some critics question Nwapa's craftsmanship: her structure, characterization, themes, and language. Some compare *Efuru* to the popular *Concubine* by Elechi Amadi, focusing upon the shortcomings of the female novel, the excellence of the male. Critics struggle with what they see as contradictory directions, a tension between African and colonial and western influences. They struggle with Nwapa's view of the role of women, noting an emphasis upon tradition but also an emphasis upon change. And a few critics question Nwapa's accomplishments in the context of feminist criticism. What is

definitely clear is that Flora Nwapa has affected the thinking and emotions of many thoughtful readers. In this chapter I have chosen to begin by presenting the negative comments about Nwapa's works and move to the more positive comments about her works. This method is important to my study because this avenue of exploration will allow me to ease into a study that focuses on choice and discovery based on the language and actions of female characters in Flora Nwapa's fiction.

Many critics have not understood or liked Nwapa's narrative structure. Adewale Maja-Pearce takes Eustace Palmer to task for "castigating" Nwapa for what Palmer calls her "amateurism" (10). 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" (57). Palmer believes Nwapa includes too many details on the life and mannerisms of the Igbo people. It is Palmer's belief that the novel could have been cut in half since it contains too much unnecessary sociological information. He adds that he is not against sociological information, but Nwapa crams it in at every available opportunity without regard to the structure and demands of the novel she is supposed to be writing (57). Palmer suggests that Nwapa should have studied Chinua Achebe's work *Things Fall Apart* to see how to use sociological information skillfully in a work of art.

Palmer analyzes Nwapa's fiction as an attempt at a work of art and says it does not measure up to high standards. Palmer believes Nwapa has not enough psychological insight or powers of characterization to balance her overly long descriptions. For example, in *Efuru*, he contends that the plot does not agree with the outcome. He also

does not find a dominant theme in the novel: 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. (7)

Palmer argues that “the artistry of the novel should include coherence of plot and structure, language, setting, presentation of character, descriptive power” (9) and emphasizes that an author's technique should give the work its semblance of realism. Palmer explains that he is not saying sociological criticism is inadequate, for he is in favor of “a criticism which evaluates the literary quality of the work and also discusses the novelist's concern with treatment of real issues that are relevant to the lives of the people. The considerations influencing critical judgment should be human, literary, and social” (8). Palmer contends that a novel does not have to include every detail of life in a culture and that a novel's author inevitably portrays the situation from her own social or historical situation, which may be different from the views of others in the culture. The following comment by Palmer reveals much about his assessment of Nwapa's works:

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 and teach us about our societies. (8)

It is evident that Palmer dislikes Nwapa's narrative style because it contains too much sociological information. He believes that, as a "handmaid of sociology" (8), Nwapa was too concerned with background information to make readers aware of how long-standing traditional cultural habits often discriminated against women and made them feel unappreciated. To me, being made aware of difficulties is not the same as "teaching" about society. It seems that Nwapa does exactly what Palmer says she should: she portrays the situation from her own social or historical situation, which may be different from the views of others in the culture (7). For example, Efuru is reminded that even though her husband has been gone for several years and is living with another woman, she is not to worry because God will make everything all right. Efuru is told to give her husband Adizua one more year, and if he does not return to her and she has an offer of marriage from another man with a good background, she should leave her husband's compound and marry again, for no one will raise an accusing finger at her. She will be congratulated. With these examples, Nwapa problematizes instances when a marriage fails and the woman is blamed even when the community knows otherwise.

As Florence Stratton points out, Palmer charges Nwapa's *Efuru* with a whole litany of deficiencies: theme, character, plot, setting, and language. All are mishandled by Nwapa according to Palmer and Jones (82). However, Stratton goes on to show the

patriarchal thought patterns that she claims surface in the reviews of works by women and men. According to Jones, “Flora Nwapa’s novels inform about Igbo village life while Amadi’s informs about human nature. The gap is wide indeed. What Nwapa’s novel lacks is a strong overall conception apart from the obvious urge to show how Igbos live” (129). Jones calls Elechi Amadi’s *The Concubine* (1966) a “penetrating study . . . of a man with a mother fixation forced by circumstances to marry . . . an emotionally immature girl, but Nwapa’s world is predominantly a feminine world, and *Efuru* reads like a manual on how young brides are treated in an Igbo village” (130). Several questions arise when one examines the terminology Jones uses to discuss both novels. He calls Amadi’s *The Concubine* a “penetrating study” while he refers to Nwapa’s *Efuru* as a “manual” (130). What are his definitions for “study” and “manual”? Why is a “study” better than a “manual”? What does Jones mean when he says Nwapa’s novel lacks a strong overall conception? Lastly, Jones refers to Nwapa’s novel as a “manual” on how young brides are treated in Igbo culture. But the novel focuses on much more than brides: it focuses on how women—married, divorced, widowed, single, childless, and with children—are treated in Igbo culture, especially if they seem to step outside traditional roles. It even is detailed in its portrayal of male gender roles. Both *Efuru* and *The Concubine* are novels about life in an Igbo culture, portrayals of human nature, and human interactions. And, yes, *Efuru* does focus on an unusual perspective: what women try to do to satisfy everyone.

Eldred Jones says Amadi succeeds in conveying the “feeling of the Igbo community” because he chooses appropriate proverbs and idioms while Nwapa fails because her novel is full of small talk, and she employs too many details” (129). Yet one

scholar, Austin Shelton, writes that Nwapa used 18 proverbs whereas Amadi used 26 (38); and one must question whether the phrase “small talk” has a negative implication, that is, whether the phrase demeans women’s thoughts. How can Jones contend that Amadi succeeds in conveying the “feeling of Igbo community”? Can Amadi, a man, speak for all the women of the Igbo community, or is that what Nwapa offers, an extraordinary range of female voices in an Igbo community? Stratton is accurate in indicating the danger of a chauvinistic handling and dismissal of women’s voices. In evaluating Jones and Palmer, Stratton identifies some of the patriarchal bias Nwapa’s novels have been subjected.

Critics Solomon Ogbede Iyasere and Nadine Gordimer support Palmer’s and Jones’ views. Iyasere classifies *Efuru* as a type of novel that emphasizes social and political realities, but in a very pedestrian and rambling manner. Like Palmer, Gordimer has problems with Nwapa’s purpose in *Efuru*. Palmer sees the novel as “a string of episodes and wonders whether it is a personal tragedy of a pure woman or about man at the mercy of gods?” (58). Nadine Gordimer categorizes writers in Africa as either testifiers or those who are actually creating a modern African literature (7). She believes the testifiers give useful information about traditional African life and social customs and changes,

but also like their counterparts, lesser writers all over the world, they take stock-in-trade abstractions of human behavior and look for a dummy to dress in them, a dummy put together out of prototypes in other people’s books rather than from observation of living people. They set these dummies in action, and you

watch till they run down; there is no attempt to uncover human motivation whether of temperament, from within, or social situation, from without. (19)

Gordimer names two writers who fall into this category, William Conton, who wrote *The Africans*, and Flora Nwapa, who wrote *Efuru*. It is Gordimer's belief that many educated Africans think they must write a book whether they possess the skills or not. Gordimer states,

In Africa, a literature is still seen largely as a function of the benefits of education, automatically conferred upon a society which has a quota of Western educated people. The West Africa pidgin English concept "to know book" goes further than it may appear; many school teachers, clerks, and other white collar workers seem to write a novel almost as a matter of duty. (19)

Gordimer says the real writers often have other jobs, such as being President of a country, like Leopold Senghor, so lesser writers attempt to fill the gap and supply reading material for the masses.

Nwapa is accused by some, then, of not knowing what she is doing as well as not possessing the skills to write a novel as opposed to a sociological treatise. According to Gordimer, Nwapa has presented *Efuru* as a childless woman whose bewilderment and frustration are left unexplored. Further, she charges that Nwapa does not know enough about her own creation, so she fills in the vacuum with rambling details of daily life which are interesting but irrelevant (20). Flora Nwapa "only dimly senses the theme of her novel; all she has seen is the disparate series of events in the life of *Efuru*" (21).

Gordimer does not believe—as this study will argue—that Efuru’s condition as a childless woman is explored throughout the novel as Efuru searches for answers to why anyone must be blamed for a woman’s childless condition or for the death of her child. Nwapa challenges a culture in which women cannot be fully accepted even if God does not make it possible for them to have children. She asks, what about the usefulness of women as human beings whether they are mothers or not?

Other critics—like Femi Ojo-Ade, Susan Andrade, Florence Stratton, Lloyd Brown, and Joseph Asanbe—recognize, even emphasize, the effect that colonialism and western influences have had on African art. They see Nwapa’s work as very important in understanding African culture. Ojo-Ade, for example, recognizes, in “Female Writers, Male Critics” (1983), that African literature is a male-centered and chauvinistic art, with colonialism having energized traditional views in which the male is thought to be the master, the woman to be the flower, not the worker. He identifies colonial influences as the “trappings of capitalism, Christian hypocrisy and civilized charlatanism” (164). Ojo-Ade also notes that women face many problems, such as publishers’ seeking out male writers but not female, as well as cultural expectations that women keep quiet. Further, Ojo-Ade believes that taboos die slowly.

But Ojo-Ade argues that women’s voices must be recognized and their “role in the struggle to decolonialize must not be overlooked” (159). He concludes that Nwapa’s works *Idu* and *Efuru* reflect society’s confusions about the roles of women. For example, he discusses the differences between Efuru’s relationship with her first husband, Adiwere, and traditional societal expectations about her marriage in contrast to her relationship with her second husband, Gilbert, and mixed societal expectations and

responses. He believes this paradox exists in society. Further,

the more traditional Idu rebels against tradition while the more modern Efuru espouses tradition. Flora Nwapa's novels are quintessential examples of the ironies and contradictions rampant in "developing" Africa, and womanhood is part of the whole syndrome. (165)

Africans must examine their traditions, customs, and myths. But "the female writer having gone through the same, or almost the same, experience as men, should have something to say about the experience, namely Colonialism-Christianity-Civilization" (Ojo-Ade 161).

Ojo-Ade sees the character Efuru as a mouthpiece for Nwapa's personal notions of life and believes Nwapa creates great empathy for her heroine. But Ojo-Ade says those same qualities that cause the reader to empathize with Efuru also set her up as a victim of tragedy. He points out that Efuru broke several traditional rules, such as marrying without a dowry and refusing to work on the farm with her husband. However, Ojo-Ade questions why female readers denounce her husband as unfaithful and irresponsible when he leaves. He explains,

The answer to such an accusatory posture would be tradition. Man marries wives. Man makes decisions. Man is lord and master. If Efuru had been a loving, submissive wife, maybe she would not have been abandoned. Besides her problem with children, as she herself asserts, it constitutes an inadequacy that could be exploited. (163)

Ojo-Ade does not address the contradiction that her husband allows Efuru to keep her business and marry him without a dowry; that is, he is willing to be untraditional at

one time and not at another. But Ojo-Ade concludes by emphasizing that many myths about Africa need to be eradicated and that Nwapa's novel to a degree succeeds in doing just that. He believes Nwapa's use of tradition and modernism cannot be separated but also creates confusion, for Efurū represents both the past and the present. Modernism, based on Ojo-Ade's text, is the influence of colonialism on traditional customs; again, he is referring to Christianity and capitalism in terms of how they affect African society.

In "Rewriting History, Motherhood, and Rebellion: Naming an African Women's Literary Tradition" (1990), Susan Andrade also speaks of the effect of colonialism on African literature. She contends that "what interests her in Efurū 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/neocolonial situation" (97). Andrade posits the view 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" (97). It seems that Andrade believes Nwapa favors traditional discourse over modern because she emphasizes the virtue of the protagonist and the importance of Igbo customs. Efurū is, however, a character who, I think, voices a subtle protest against some traditional views and limited roles for women. There must be an emphasis on Igbo customs to show Igbo society and non-Igbo society how some customs limit women as individuals.

Florence Stratton, in *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (1994), and Lloyd Brown, in *Women Writers in Black Africa* (1981), find contradictory assertions in Andrade's analysis of the discourse of tradition and the discourse of modernity in Nwapa; they accuse Andrade of misreading Nwapa's works and using

approaches and definitions of feminism that are western and do not support African culture. Andrade believes Nwapa upholds indigenous practices like polygamy and clitoridectomy and sees this position as favoring traditional Igbo customs.

Stratton points out that Andrade has problems with the closure of *Efuru*.

According to Andrade, although the novel moves toward a celebration of Efuru's independence, economic success, and goodness, there is a constant undercurrent of doubt about the ability of women without children to be happy (100). The closing paragraph of the novel reiterates Nwapa's ambivalence about how a childless woman in a traditional culture is treated. This concern makes Andrade wonder why women continue to worship Uhamiri when Uhamiri has no children. Several critics—and I agree—think the question is ironic and rhetorical; but Andrade believes the novel's ending negates the positive ideas that Efuru has espoused throughout the novel. Stratton notes that Andrade has, however, overlooked the changes that have occurred in Efuru's circumstances and the description of the established narrative pattern in the closing lines of the novel (98). Those lines say Efuru slept soundly that night after realizing Uhamiri had no children. The lines imply peace and contentment and suggest that women should be accepted and respected just like Uhamiri whether they have children or not. Does Andrade misunderstand that Uhamiri is a symbol of traditional matriarchy and represents power, peace, and independence? All the women and men pray to Uhamiri because she represents peace, independence, power, and contentment. Andrade's misunderstanding is one reason Stratton and Brown, among others, accuse Andrade of misreading Nwapa's works. According to Stratton, "Efuru's dreams provide an alternative [speech act] to that

which gossip embodies. It is a discovery that enables Efuru to react against and transgress the patriarchal [speech act] that entraps her” (96).

Theodora Ezeigbo, in “Myth, History, Culture, and Igbo Womanhood in Flora Nwapa’s Novels” (1998), notes that the worshipers of Uhamiri are both male and female, but “Nwapa has modified this practice in her novels, allowing only women to function as devotees and worshipers of the deity” (54-55). Uhamiri is described by Nwapa as an Oguta woman par excellence, who embodies the best qualities of Oguta womanhood, being beautiful, rich, assertive, independent, hard-working, and married. The modification allows Nwapa to empower women and uplift them. Ezeigbo believes the deconstruction and reconstruction of the Uhamiri myth allows Nwapa to recreate and remodel the goddess to achieve her purpose of providing mythic, psychological as well as practical, explanations for female existence and condition in her Oguta cultural tradition (56).

Joseph Asanbe, a Nigerian critic, focuses upon the socio-historical context of both author and literary works in his study *The Place of the Individual in the Novels of Chinua Achebe, T. M. Aluko, Flora Nwapa and Wole Soyinka* (1979). He looks at how the transatlantic slave trade, Christian missionary activities in Africa, and the western European colonization of Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century influenced the portrait of the individual in African novels. It is his belief that the last two had a more profound effect than the first. Asanbe does not agree with Andrade, who states that Nwapa favors tradition over modernity since she emphasizes the virtue and importance of Igbo customs in her protagonists. Asanbe posits the following view:

She seems to believe that Igbo life does not favor full development of the individual. Nwapa often shows a great sympathy for Igbo traditions and her illiterate protagonists. She endows them with noble sentiment and deeds. Both Efuru and Idu, the heroines of *Efuru* and *Idu* respectively, generously come to the aid of their needy neighbors. Often, in the novels of Nwapa, tragic events result more from a combination of fate and character rather than from the adverse forces of tradition. (14)

Asanbe does not consider that the limitations of tradition as well as characters' personalities and choices are mostly responsible for the fate Nwapa's women confront. These female characters would rather not disrespect tradition, but they would like for tradition not to devalue them if they are not able to have children. Asanbe, however, does realize that Nwapa's female characters are happy because they exert free will and create life styles for themselves. Asanbe says they are comfortable in Igbo society; they do not contend with two cultures, African and western. He concludes that culture and fate affect what happens to a character by the end of Nwapa's novels (78).

Gay Wilentz, in *From Africa to America: Cultural Ties That Bind in the Works of Contemporary African and African American Women Writers* (1986), and Lloyd Brown are among the critics who most appreciate Flora Nwapa's accomplishment. Wilentz admires Nwapa's integration of tradition and change as well as her language. Nwapa, she writes, tried to find choices for her female characters that allow them to respect and uphold tradition 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” (16). Unlike Eustace Palmer and others, who see Nwapa’s dialogue as a “ceaseless flow of talk,” Wilentz asserts that “Nwapa focuses attention upon the sounds and voices of women” (xxiv), a technique I will examine in detail in my analyses of the community and society at large in Nwapa’s novels. Wilentz shows that Efuru protests mildly throughout the novel when she circumvents traditional customs, such as selecting her own husbands without advice from elders and family because she is determined to have her own way to a degree. According to Wilentz, women are caught in a bind because too many traditions are not to their best advantage, yet they must honor them if they want to be accepted and respected in the community (32).

Brown—like Wilentz, Asanbe, and other critics—agrees that Efuru tries to be a “conventional wife while she demonstrates a healthy disregard for norms that seem irrelevant or unduly restrictive” (142). He calls *Efuru* a female novel of growth, further stating that *Idu* and *Efuru* have the same themes, but that the tone of *Idu* is more somber because of the cycles of life and death it describes and the communal presence—pressing and insistent—that dominates its dialogic structure. Nwapa allows most of the dialogues to take place in small groups of speakers. Brown believes this technique has the effect of giving the community’s viewpoint from a personal perspective and also allowing members to speak frequently. Because of the perceived personal perspective, “there is a correspondingly greater sense of freedom in the startling nature of Idu’s final choice” (156), that is, in her refusal to marry her brother-in-law after her husband, Adiewere, dies suddenly. Instead, she seems to will her death so she will not have to follow tradition. A few critics, like Asanbe and Ezeigbo, believe she dies of a broken heart; however, this

study will support the view of a woman's making a choice within her community. Brown concludes by saying Nwapa never completely resolves the question of how a woman may achieve independence while supporting and functioning within a closely-knit communal system. However, she gives her characters other alternatives. Efuru chooses to worship Uhamiri, goddess of the lake, who is still sanctioned by the community's social and religious tradition, while Idu chooses death, a choice that allows her to join her husband and/or at the same time escape from the community's traditional choice of marrying her shiftless brother-in-law.

Because Nwapa allows certain female characters to circumvent the communal system, Asanbe calls the choices the female characters make "free will" and sees these characters as being happy and comfortable in their choices. While Brown agrees that the characters do satisfy their personal needs rather than accept the community's criteria, he calls the choice a result of Nwapa's balancing act between modernity and tradition. Nwapa has not outwardly rejected the community's expectations, for the community respects Uhamiri; thus, Nwapa's female characters escape what is perceived as complete failure by the community. Both women and community are left with a sense of pride intact. But Brown does not go as far as to say the characters are happy and comfortable or possess free will.

Inevitably in discussions of works of literature that reflect both the traditional and the modern in the lives of women, the question arises of where the work fits in feminist dialogue. Critics like Mary Kolawole, in *Womanism and African Consciousness* (1997), and Obioma Nnaemeka, in "Feminism, Rebellious Women, and Cultural Boundaries: Rereading Flora Nwapa and her Compatriots" (1995), look at the voices and language

used by the characters, especially the female characters, to determine what Flora Nwapa is suggesting to her community about women and their choices. Kolawole states that analysis of the discourse and its relationship to women's reality makes it obvious that Nwapa's women are negotiating their own space, that is, representing a change from the traditional expectation of accepting and following the prescribed traditional way of Igbo life. My study will examine the outcome of the negotiated choices made by characters in Nwapa's works.

Nnaemeka discusses how some scholars misuse and abuse feminist theory in relation to African women writers and scholarship because of their various definitions of the term feminism (84). Nnaemeka explains why Nwapa at certain times claimed to be a feminist and at other times "an ordinary woman" writing about what she knew. She also shows how Nwapa tried to project the image of women positively. According to Nnaemeka, Nwapa's explanation about what kind of woman she was varied based upon how the question was asked. Nnaemeka says if the definition or question of feminism corresponded to what Nwapa knew, she claimed to be a feminist; and if it did not correspond to what she knew, she rejected the label. She claims there is no inconsistency in Nwapa's position. What was inconsistent was the way the question of feminist identity was framed and posed; what was inconsistent was the location, physical and ideological, from which Nwapa was hounded for an answer (84). By this statement, Nnaemeka means that often westerners asked Nwapa if she was a feminist based on their ideology and definition of feminism which often conflicted with Nwapa's definition, so Nwapa responded by saying she was not a feminist. Too often the situation arose outside of Africa; for example, Marie Umeh asked the question based on Karen Frank's article,

which used the phrase “radical feminist.” Nwapa said, no, she was not a feminist because Nwapa did not choose to use the phrase “radical feminist.” According to Nwapa, she was an ordinary woman writing about women’s issues in hope of projecting positive images of women. Nnaemeka writes that

[r]eading Nwapa should not be a referendum on radical feminism. . . .

Nwapa’s work captures the complexity, ambiguities, and contradictions of her environment as they are embellished in the force that lies at the bottom of the lake, Uhamiri, the goddess of the crossroads. Her work locates us at the crossroads, inviting us to ask questions, many questions. (104)

Nnaemeka refers to Nwapa’s heroines as reformers, not rebels, for she believes they are negotiating choices within the context of cultural boundaries. Idu’s decision at the end of *Idu* is, of course, an excellent example that will be explored in detail in Chapter V.

Lloyd Brown, Mary Kolawole, Gay Wilentz, and Obioma Nnaemeka seem to most accurately understand Flora Nwapa’s works. Nwapa, I contend, focuses on choice and discovery for women within the community; the characters’ language and actions reveal their negotiation of their positions in Igbo society. Chapter III decodes cultural and gender symbols important in understanding Igbo culture. Chapters IV, V, and VI focus on what specific choices mean for women within their communities.

### Chapter III

#### Cultural Practices of the Igbo Influencing Nwapa's Novels

To understand and evaluate Flora Nwapa's views of Uhamiri and the roles of priestesses, goddesses, and women—not simply motherhood but matriarchal status in Igbo spirituality and language--the reader needs to consider how Nwapa portrays and modifies some of these concepts in her literary works. Scholars like Victor Uchendu, Emmanuel Edeh, Elechi Amadi, Sabine Jell-Bahlsen, and Theodora Ezeigbo are especially notable for their analysis of the Nigerian culture of the Igbo.

Nigeria is a very diverse country with several regions and ethnic groups like the Yoruba in the southwest, the Hausas in the north, and the Igbos in the southeast. Victor Uchendu, in *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, describes the location of the Igbo people, the physical features of the region, its climate, the population and their origin, and diverse features of Igbo culture. There are four distinct regions of Igboland: the riverine, the delta, the central and the northeastern belts. Rivers such as the Niger, Imo, Anambra, and Urashi help give the region its diverse physical features. Emmanuel Edeh, in *Towards an Igbo Metaphysics*, writes that Igboland covers Imo, Anambra, and the eastern part of the Bendel states. The river Niger divides Igbo land into unequal parts: the western Igbos and the eastern Igbos, with only one tenth of Igbos living in the western portion. The overall population is approximately thirteen million with the majority of the population living in Onitsha, Orlu, Okigwi, and the Mbaise axis (Edeh 9). Flora Nwapa was from the Riverine area, a town called Oguta in Imo state. Nwapa believed that the people in Oguta are from

Bendel state and migrated to Oguta many years ago. Uchendu begins by focusing on what he calls the Igbo world with reference to “material, spiritual and sociocultural” elements that make up its cosmology. He divides cosmology into two categories: “*ethics*, which defines what an Igbo ought to do and what he or she ought to avoid; and an *action system*, which reveals what the Igbo actually do as manifested in their overt and covert behavior” (11).

As this dissertation will make clear, elements in Igbo culture that particularly inform Nwapa’s fiction include beliefs, customs, practices, and attitudes in the areas of (1) religion, (2) gender roles, and (3) language and literature. Victor Uchendu and Emmanuel Edeh explain that the spiritual and material elements of Igbo life are interrelated. The spirit world is very real to Igbo people because the land of ancestral spirits connects the living to the dead. The ancestors are honored and are expected to guide and care for the living since the living honor them. Thus, proper sacrifices must be made to ancestors. In addition, the spirit world is the home of the deities to whom respect must be paid and is the place where the living will reside in the future. Uchendu explains what he calls the cosmological balance and stresses that it is necessary for the Igbo to maintain a balance between the social forces through divination, sacrifice, appeals to their ancestors, and constant realignment in their social groupings (13). He says the Igbo believe any disturbance can be controlled and should be manipulated by them for their own purposes. For example, according to Uchendu, death creates a disturbance in the social order, and family members must make adjustments. When a person dies, there is a disruption within the family hierarchy, and if there is any uncertainty about the person’s death, the family must seek advice from the diviner. In addition, the Igbo believe that

human beings and social relations are manipulated. They seek and enjoy compromise. It is very important for Igbos to have peace among themselves. According to Uchendu, the Igbo world is not only a world in which people strive for equality; it is one in which change is constantly expected. The world is a marketplace, and it is subject to bargain (15).

In Nwapa's works, female characters seek compromise through manipulation of certain traditional practices, such as bridewealth and mandatory motherhood. This concept of manipulation will be explored in Chapters IV, V, and VI. Further, Nwapa seeks choices and changes for women that are acceptable to both their traditional and modern communities. She wants what is best for most people. Obioma Nnaemeka calls Nwapa's actions "negofeminism" (107). Nwapa is negotiating compromises. Uchendu supports my belief, for he states that "the individual freedom of choice fostered by the Igbo culture allows innovation. There is opportunity for experimentation as well as tolerance for failure and admiration for success" (19). These are my sentiments from reading Nwapa's works. For instance, when one acknowledges that Efuru is not responsible for the death of her daughter nor her husband's leaving her, one understands that she needs to be released from the traditional requirement of motherhood. She also continues to make worthwhile contributions to several members of the community for the sake of helping humankind. Why not, then, allow her to live in peace without judgment because she is no longer a mother?

Scholars agree that the Igbo are a religious people. Uchendu says all follow the same principles, but the principles are carried out differently on local levels. He refers to the first principle as the extended family unit with its rituals that activate the lineage or

village group. Then he mentions the polytheistic religion with its emphasis on many gods or deities and, lastly, he explains that religion rationalizes the individual's ability to improve his status either in the world of man or after his reincarnation, in the world of the ancestors (94).

Igbo believe in a creator of all things; their belief is the basis of their theology. They believe in a high god who does not live among them. Most importantly, he does not interfere with daily lives as the other deities do. They can, however, always ask for his guidance; he is often called their Chi. By contrast, the other gods can be manipulated and live among the villagers. They possess the same human traits as members of the community and include the earth goddess, sun god, sky god, and river goddess, to name a few. According to Elechi Amadi, in *Ethics in Nigerian Culture*, the priests of Ifa, Amadioha, Chukwu, and other gods act as intermediaries between men and gods and interpret their commands, commands that often contain patterns of behavior (4). If the people refuse to obey, it is believed the gods or priests can cause illness and misfortune to occur. Thus, from Amadi's perspective, the outcome is to enforce an acceptable moral standard among the people.

Nwapa referred to herself as a part of the riverine Igbo community; and in her works, Uhamiri, the river goddess, is highly respected and prayed to by women, especially those who are asking for children. This concept will be analyzed in Chapters IV and V. The two goddesses most important to my study are the earth goddess, Ala, and the river deity. Ala is believed to be the source of fertility, which is very important in Igbo culture. She directs the outcome of life and land production. People pray to her for children, prosperity in trade, and increase in livestock; they pray to her before going to

war. In addition, rivers are very important in Igbo life and in Nwapa's works. Rivers are thought to be a source of life and are given great respect. In some areas, people are not allowed to fish in the rivers because everything in them is sacred. In southern Igbo communities near River Imo, for example, the imo miri deity is highly respected.

The interrelationship between the spiritual and material world affects women's choices as they negotiate the highly patriarchal Igbo society. Their gender roles as workers, wives, and mothers also help them to manipulate their situations and establish more independence than most observers might expect. From an economic perspective, Igbo women are known and respected for their hard work and ability to produce income. A woman's ability to produce income is considered when a young man's family is checking into the background of a marital candidate. Women are supposed to work the land and produce food, such as yams and cassava, to feed the family. Women are also known as traders in their villages and at the markets. Thus, their economic status is highly valued and some women have become wealthy as traders. Nwapa's grandmother was known as such. According to Theodora Ezeigbo, women can acquire land but not inherit it. In some Igbo communities, they are allowed to take titles; they are rich and powerful and sometimes even rank higher than men (Ezeigbo, "Traditional Women's Institutions" 150). Flora Nwapa herself acquired the title "Ogbuefi," which was allowed only in Oguta, not other Igbo societies. It means a woman of integrity and good standing in the eyes of the elders.

In addition to the progress women can make through their work in Igbo society, their importance as mothers affects the culture's restrictions on them. Motherhood is highly revered in Nigeria; the culture favors women who have children, especially males.

Both men and women pray to the goddesses for children. In Oguta, the local goddess is Ogbuide or Uhamiri. (Even though there are various names for the goddess, I will use “Uhamiri” and “Mammywater” because they are used most often by African writers.) According to Sabine Jell-Bahlsen, in “Concept of Mammywater in Flora Nwapa’s Novels,” Ugwuta men and women pray to the divine pair of water deities, Uhamiri and Urashi, often called Mammywater (30). Nwapa explores the traditional belief in the importance of motherhood in *Idu*, *Efuru*, and *One is Enough*, novels in which women are not able to have children or their children die. As she analyzes how the culture treats women who are childless, Nwapa advocates more acceptance and nurturing from the community.

Motherhood is the foundation on which the Igbo family is developed. This concept partly explains why a man’s family researches a woman’s family history before marriage; for it is the mothers who will not only assure that generations will continue but will also instruct the children in moral goodness and the community’s beliefs and practices. It is important for the mothers and elders to properly socialize the young ones in tradition. Children represent wealth for families either through working the land or, in the case of girls, bringing in bridewealth. Thus, a mother’s role is very important; moreover, “community life begins in the family, and a family is not formed until all marriage customs are fulfilled” (Edeh 57).

Uchendu describes the four steps that must be followed before a traditional marriage takes place, and the process can take years depending on the age of the bride. The four steps include asking the woman’s consent, working through a middleman, testing the woman’s character, and paying bridewealth (50). If the woman is of age, the

man asks her first and then her family, but if she is a child, everything is arranged by the parents and family members. The second step, which involves the middleman and other relatives, is a long drawn-out process between both families. The members meet and exchange gifts while acknowledging that their son and daughter wish to marry. The families must also be sure that the groom and bride are not of the same patrilineage and marry outside their local group. The *osu* (cult slave), however, must not marry outside the social group. Lengthy questions about ancestry are necessary since marriage for the Igbo is between families, not between individuals. The meeting and greeting continue until the bride's family accepts the amount offered for "asking money" (Uchendu 52). The acceptance leads to the third step called testing character. The future bride spends several months with her future family, and they observe all things about her, including her work habits, cooking skills, temperament, form and figure. The bride is not a "wife" and her fiancé is not supposed to have sexual contact with her, and the groom's mother is the person who ensures that the couple adheres to the rules (Uchendu 53). If the groom's family is pleased with her, Uchendu says she is decorated with *uri*, body paint, and sent back to her parents with presents, indicating she has passed the test (52). When it is time for the bridewealth to be paid, the groom's family offers the bride's family a reasonable amount after a long discussion about the good qualities of the bride and groom. When an agreement has been reached, the groom's family rises and shakes the hand of the bride's family members. The young woman must accept the palm wine offered to her by her father, sip it, and then give it to her husband who also sips the wine; then she introduces her husband to family and friends. A regal reception follows the father's acknowledgment that his daughter is now married (Uchendu 53). Edeh informs the reader

that when people get married, they become members of a family, a community; thus, it is very important for the family members to have lengthy background checks into their prospective family member's lineage (57). Nwapa takes a daring step in *Efuru* when she has Efuru live with her husband before the bridewealth has been paid. This concept will be discussed in Chapter IV; the role of motherhood and wealth will be analyzed in Chapters IV, V, and VI.

Victor Uchendu emphasizes the importance of marriage in the Igbo community and explains the many ways in which Igbo marry. Marriage is preferred over single life in the community, and polygyny is also highly acceptable, even though most people practice monogamy. There is another practice called "woman marriage," in which a wife with a living husband marries a female and pays the brideprice. This marriage occurs to validate her status in society if the wife is unable to have children. Every family is supposed to have children. The term "woman marriage" is used because the wife initiates the process and selects the woman whom she wants to come into her home and produce children for her and her husband. "Woman marriage" is used by women who have no children or no male children. Since there must be male children in order to inherit money from the husband, this practice is exercised by women who are barren or are widows in order to assure their receiving inheritances. Nwapa's characters employ the practice of "woman marriage" in her novels *Idu* and *Efuru*. When Idu realizes that she is having trouble conceiving after a certain period of time, she talks to her husband about getting a second wife for him.

To further emphasize the significance attached to marriage in Igbo society, Uchendu explains how acculturation has introduced many different ways of getting

married, such as church weddings, marriage by ordinance, and marriage by photograph. Marriage in a church involves a minister, family, and friends in accordance with Christian practice. Marriage by ordinance is a civil ceremony with a judge or appropriate official presiding over the ceremony. Marriage by photograph is a technique used by men serving in the military and unable to meet and see their intended spouse in person. The couple exchange pictures, and if they like what they see, family members are told to continue with traditional practices until the couple is officially married. People who marry in church or in a civil ceremony must obey laws about property and inheritance if the husband dies or divorces the wife. In a traditional marriage, the husband's family could claim all property after his death, including the house and furnishings even if the wife purchased them. Given European influence, church marriages today carry the most prestige, but the majority of the educated prefer civil marriage since many do not value church membership (Uchendu 87). Uchendu reminds the reader that all marriages start with communication between the two families.

Recent changes in Igbo culture have affected marriage: for example, child marriages have been abolished, but some Igbo resent the law, so the practice is gradually disappearing. Although bridewealth is still very important to some, Uchendu notes that a restriction has been placed on the amount of bridewealth (56). Educational training also determines the amount negotiated between families; and, according to Uchendu, most Igbo are marrying later in life due to educational training. In addition, many couples now reside outside the family's compound in their private residences and emphasize love rather than lineage and family. This shift is especially true for educated professionals who tend to live in cities while more traditional Igbos see village upbringing as most

important for young girls and boys to learn about their cultural and social mores. Such differences often “create intergenerational conflict” (Uchendu 56). These trends are reflected in Nwapa’s *Women Are Different* and *One is Enough*. In *One is Enough*, Amaka decides to return her bridewealth to her husband’s family and moves to the city of Lagos. People in her hometown automatically categorize her as a loose woman because she is single, lives alone, has money, and lives in a fast-moving city.

The importance of marriage and motherhood in Igbo society even leads to careful cultural practices related to birthing among traditional and uneducated Igbo. Generally, Uchendu explains, no particular foods are avoided, unless a specific village sets a restriction. There are taboos about the birth of twins because it is believed that only animals should give multiple births. In some villages, twins are abandoned or killed, and the mother is ostracized (58). There are festive ceremonies surrounding the cutting of the umbilical cord and naming of the child. According to Uchendu, an Igbo who cannot point to the burial of his navel cord is not a diala-freeborn; the umbilical cord is supposed to be buried under a tree, and the person is supposed to plant around his tree in the future. Names may reflect the time of the year, an ongoing event, day of the week, or birthmark (59-60). One ceremony, called an “outing” or “churching,” is designed to honor the birth of the child and bestow gifts upon the child and parents. It used to take place in the market, and people would bring gifts and money and in return receive prices on meats based on a third of their financial contributions (60). Some people would give more than they could afford and find themselves in debt and unable to honor their pledges. Recently this practice of honoring the child has been moved to the church even though some of the traditional practices of drumming and feasting have been maintained (61).

Igbo children are expected to participate in children's games and activities as well as participate in adult social and work activities, such as going to the market, funerals, and religious ceremonies.

In addition to the degree of independence emerging from the importance of their work and economic resources and their roles as wives and mothers, the ways in which Igbo women can assert independence are increased by women's organizations, tribal practices like *Nlukia*, and the role of priestesses. In fact, Theodora Ezeigbo, in "Traditional Women's Institutions in Igbo Society: Implications for the Igbo Female Writer," attempts to clarify the misconception that African women have been docile and willing sufferers for centuries and have learned to accept their situation in a patriarchal society with grace. Ezeigbo argues the opposite. She credits the success of Igbo women to their "remarkable ability to manipulate and exploit the existing systems in [their] society to strengthen [their] position, to carve out and secure a healthy place for themselves in spite of the weakness patriarchy might have imposed on [their] positions" (151). Giving them political clout and some ability to control their own affairs are two major women's organizations—the *Alutaradi*, the Association of Wives, and the *Umuada*, the Association of Daughters, found in each community—as well as organizations called *Nlukia* and age-grade groups. The *Alutaradi* exhibits its strength through the members' ability to unite by going on strike until their demands are met. Often they refuse to cook. Based on the culture, cooking or anything related to food is definitely a woman's role in the household. Nwapa calls this group the *Umunwunyeobu* in "Priestesses and Power Among the Riverine Igbo" and describes it as the family or clan into which one marries (422). Since its role is to keep peace, the women educate the

newlyweds into the proper customs and habits of their husband's village. They also protect each other from abuse by husbands. According to Nwapa, if a wife leaves her husband, the members are supposed to convince her to reconcile with her husband (422). But Nwapa and Ezeigbo agree that the women of Alaturadi can—under certain circumstances—wield considerable power by refusing to cook and sleep with their husbands until their demands have been met. However, at death, the women of Alaturadi are buried in their fathers' compounds, but if they are wealthy, they can leave instructions asking to be buried in the husband's compound.

The second major organization, Umuada, gives Igbo women great power in their birth homes. For instance, they are allowed to give advice and make decisions without any disagreement from the men of their father's descent. In "Priestesses and Power Among the Riverine Igbo," Nwapa discusses this extremely powerful group that she feels may "wield more negative than positive power" (422). There are three leaders; the oldest woman is the chairperson, and the next two oldest are the "right" and "left" hand women of the organization. Each woman knows her place and respects the order. They show solidarity and make sure all dictates, such as gathering to honor men who take titles and "keeping vigil until the dead is buried," are carried out properly (421). Men do not challenge them. Nwapa indicates they gather to mourn and celebrate brothers and sisters in the community. It is an honor to belong to Umuada especially when the members are well to do. When Umuada carries out its duties, people listen and respect them. Its strength is in its collective ability. Nwapa states, Umuada can act negatively during funerals when a woman is in mourning. They make her sit on the floor and go barefoot, and she is not allowed to change clothes until the husband is buried. They also treat her

badly unless someone else intervenes (421). When members of this organization die, they can be buried in the homeland of their fathers or choose to be buried in compounds of their husbands. Nwapa contends that even in death, a woman never loses her independence, for the husband has no claim to her body (422).

Ezeigbo also mentions a third group, called Nlukia; and Nwapa discusses age-grade groups based on birth order. The practice of Nlukia, which allows women to remain in their fathers' compounds if their father has no male children, gives women considerable power: their male offspring belong to their fathers and help carry on the patrilineage, making sure that someone male inherits the property. These daughters are called male daughters. Women belonging to an age-grade group, made up of former playmates, support each other when there are deaths or other losses. These women can also make demands on each other that must be met. Age-grade groups can be very positive for their members. They can, for example, intervene in marital affairs, and husbands must listen. If a woman is falsely accused of a crime, she can appeal to her age-grade group. Nwapa has Efurū appeal to her age-grade group when Gilbert, her husband, believes the rumor that she has been unfaithful to him. Many scholars and writers such as Theodora Ezeigbo, Flora Nwapa, and Patrick Uchendu, in *Education and the Changing Economic Role of Nigerian Women* (1995), attest to the power and organization of the women's groups.

Nwapa and Jell-Bahlsen also recognize the role of priestesses in asserting power and independence in women's personal lives and in their communities. Nwapa, for example in "Priestesses and Power Among the Riverine Igbo," discusses how people in Oguta, her hometown, worship Ogbuide, a goddess believed to be beautiful, ageless, and

partial to women. Her priestesses wear white and red and place earthenware pots filled with water from the lake at a corner of their bedrooms (415). Nwapa says the image called Mammywater came into existence when competitive Igbo women tried to influence the British and French male traders by giving them young African girls as their mistresses. The offspring were light complexioned with flowing hair and were called Mammywater, meaning beautiful women from the water (418). Sabine Jell-Bahlsen explains why Mammywater is so popular and revered in her essay “Eze Mmiri Di Egwu, the Water Monarch is Awesome: Reconsidering the Mammy Water Myths.” Worshippers believe Mammywater gives life, wealth, good health, and happiness. Jell-Bahlsen describes a poster of Mammywater, a picture of a woman with long, wavy, flowing, uncut hair with a pair of pythons and the colors white and red in the background. White indicates transition from life to death and represents a method of communicating with the spirit world. It is also associated with childbirth, fertility, mobility and death. White chalk is used to decorate the eyes and foreheads of the priestesses and priests. It is used to mark corpses, for initiation ceremonies, prayers, and in drawing sacred symbols (110). Red is present in all Mammywater rituals in combination with white. The contrast stands for procreation and life: “ Yellow chalk, edo, called ‘red’ just as red blood, red kola, and red cloth stands for life force and virility” (113). Jell-Bahlsen reports that red and white are the symbolic representations of male and female procreative expressions. Jell-Bahlsen sees the long hair as being out of the norm for West-African Igbo hairstyles that are usually precisely crafted and well-groomed. She questions why Mammywater has long hair. Maybe Flora Nwapa’s statement about offspring between Europeans and Africans is correct in terms of the image of Mammywater. The snake represents life because it can

shed its skin and continue its life-giving process. Thus, it is comparable to water with its fluidity and ability to give life. Supposedly, Mammywater is described as white or yellow because white represents purity and mystery. In addition, white represents life and death and the ability to communicate with the spirit.

According to Jell-Bahlsen, Mammywater can be regarded as a modern expression of divine woman in pre-colonial Igbo religious beliefs. In some respects, Igbo culture gives women power and status equivalent to male power to ensure “procreation, reincarnation and continued existence within the circular flow of time” (130). Most goddesses, including Obguide, have a male counterpart. Obguide’s is called Urashi. These two deities are still respected in modern day Nigeria as Flora Nwapa indicates in her works. The water goddess, Obguide, through her priestesses, emphasizes and reinforces the female power in Igbo cosmology: the necessity of male and female complementarity for procreation and continuity of life and the extraordinary power of women based on the notion of the supreme water goddess at the crossroads between death and life (Jell-Bahlsen 130).

The way in which language is used is very important in Igbo culture—not surprisingly in a culture in which there is an emphasis upon cosmological balance and manipulation of social relations—and Nwapa’s works reflect this importance, especially as she speaks for women. The Igbo take social communication very seriously and prefer face to face communication. According to Emmanuel Edeh, “in local communities the spoken word is used as a means of establishing harmony and friendly relations among parties” (46). For important social occasions, lengthy and elaborate conversations take place along with the serving of kola nut. These conversations also allow the practice of

using proverbs and folktales to carry messages, solve problems, or just further the conversation. Igbo pay attention to small details and spend much time greeting people. Thus, Nwapa was simply being accurate in her portrayals when she was criticized by several scholars, like Eustace Palmer and Eldred Jones, for giving too much attention to details. One critic even counted the number of adjectives Nwapa and Amadi used in their works in order to chastise Nwapa as a poor writer who spent too much time including unnecessary details. The frequent use of proverbs is important because they show unity and connection with the community: they are used by elders to show wisdom; by others to show feelings and to educate the listeners. Folklore represents the oral history of a people and is passed down from generation to generation. The folktales must carry a moral message. In Igbo society, they constitute informal education. Edeh reminds the reader that proverbs and folktales are the key to understanding the role of language as a channel of communication for the Igbo (55).

To clarify the importance of language in Nwapa's works, in this study I will examine the diction of female characters in the novels to help readers decipher the voice and message that Nwapa is sending to her listeners in the community. Nwapa uses the Igbo goddess Uhamiri in her novels to establish the complexity of women's positions: their struggles and power. Her novels call for respect for all involved in the conversations about the plight of Igbo women. My study will focus on the language used by Nwapa's characters to give voice to the women who seek to bring about changes through compromise in hope of gaining acceptance and respect for both tradition and modernity in Igbo Nigeria. My emphasis on language will reflect the views of Mikhail Bakhtin and

Mae Henderson, showing how multiple voices can speak at the same time and express a desire to coexist peacefully within the community.

In his discussion of manipulation of human beings and social relations in order to maintain a balanced Igbo cosmology, Uchendu explains that the Igbo expect its people to find female authors who recreate the experience of the Igbo in their works. These authors become the voice of their people. Nwapa—in *Efuru*, *Idu*, and *One is Enough*—has female characters who espouse views that seek change. For instance, *Efuru* has lost her only child and her husband has left her; however, she goes on to become a successful businesswoman who is called upon by many people in the community to assist them. Why, then, does traditional society still marginalize her as a woman without child and husband? Ezeigbo, on the other hand, raises the question of whether an Igbo female novelist can interpret the culture and history of her people, articulate her vision for changing and challenging the outmoded values that negate life and progress in her society, and support the positive suggest that the answer to Ezeigbo’s question is “yes.” Flora Nwapa definitely honors tradition in her novels and also creates voices of women who manipulate tradition to bring about changes that will be beneficial to all, especially to Igbo women.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Nwapa used the name “Uhamiri” in her works and changed the spelling of the word, probably because of her British training and education. Scholars Umeh and Jell-Bahlsen confirm that the words “Ogbuide” and “Uhammiri” are used by the traditional Igbo. It is the opinion of scholars that the British changed the spelling and pronunciation of many

words such as “Igbo” to “Ibo,” “Ugwuta” to “Oguta,” and “Uhammiri” to “Uhamiri.”

Jell-Bahlsen says “mmiri” in Igbo means water, so she uses “Uhammiri” in her writings except when she writes about Nwapa’s works.

<sup>2</sup> According to my analysis of several articles written by African and non-African writers, the following words are spelled differently: “Uhammiri,” “Uhamiri,” “Oguta,” “Ugwuta,” “Mammywater,” “MammyWater,” and “Mammy Water.” Most African writers use “Uhamiri,” “Oguta,” and “Mammywater,” and I have decided to follow their lead even though some scholars discuss which spellings are original Igbo spellings rather than British spellings.

## Chapter IV

### Voices of Tradition and Change in *Efuru*

This chapter will examine the words and actions of characters in Flora Nwapa's novel *Efuru* in the context of traditional customs and beliefs dictated by Igbo society. Nwapa's emphasis upon choice and discovery and consciousness of self helps the reader gain insight into Igbo culture as well as how deeply colonialism may have penetrated the culture. My analysis will question and discuss choices that female and sometimes male characters make to try to evaluate whether the characters are satisfied with the outcomes of their choices. Do certain female characters seek compromises not just for themselves but for the community at large? As the words and actions of characters are analyzed, the reader will be able to determine whether the implied author and narrator agree or disagree. The final outcome will indicate if conflicts have been resolved between female characters and the community as well as what effects choices have on the female characters and the community.

Flora Nwapa in her first two novels, *Efuru* and *Idu*, addresses the conditions of women in traditional Igbo society with emphasis on their expected roles as wives and mothers within the community. Throughout the novels, the reader is introduced to several characters, male and female, who express traditional and nontraditional views about choices that women make as well as the reasons for those choices. As I discuss these choices revealed through dialogue and action, I will analyze them in the context of Mae Henderson's and Bakhtin's views on voice, voicelessness, and dialogism. I will also draw

upon the work of Carole Davies, Chikwenye Ogunyemi, and Victor Uchendu for feminist and Nigerian issues.

It is my hypothesis that Nwapa's characters, especially those in *Efuru* and *Idu*, express their choices for change and compromise through words and actions. The characters speak and act in subtle ways to convey their views to the audience. It is my intent to emphasize how several actions by Efuru in regard to her husbands are mostly within traditional cultural boundaries. However, there are circumstances that her husbands create and the community demands—as well as bias—that make life difficult for her. The double standard and the blaming of the women often create the conflict and desire for change and acceptance that Nwapa allows her characters to address in the novel. Wayne Booth's ideas in *Rhetoric and Fiction* (1961) about “implied author” and narrator will be mentioned occasionally to consider Nwapa's relationship to the narrator and suggest her cultural position (73).

Ogunyemi finds 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, and the second half is “corrective and instructive” because Efuru marries Uhamiri and finds a peaceful existence as mother of the community (146). The novel traces the ideological confusion, political awakening, material nurturing, and spiritual development of Efuru (147). Ogunyemi's thesis is correct because the overall focus of the novel is on Efuru's making her own choices and then evaluating the consequences. She has to determine the effect her choices have on self and society.

### Courtship and Marriage in *Efuru*

*Efuru* opens with the major character, Efuru, choosing her own husband and marrying without seeking permission from her father and without her husband's paying a dowry. Her act is a serious disregard for traditional customs. As discussed in Chapter III, a traditional marriage involves the community, with the families' meeting and discussing terms for the marriage and a dowry paid to the bride's family. The bride is supposed to carry herself in a way that does not disgrace her father's home because his name and reputation are important. Adizua asks Efuru to marry him after a brief courtship and before he meets with her father and male relatives to seek permission. They have met at a festival where young people go to find prospective companions. Shortly afterwards, Efuru insists that they marry or she will drown herself. Adizua, however, is not able to pay the dowry and tells Efuru that he does not have the money. She decides that they are "going to proclaim themselves married" (7). Adizua 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'" (7). Efuru moves into the home shared by her husband and his mother; and when the mother-in-law returns from the market and learns about the situation, she says, "'You are welcome my daughter. But your father, what will you say to him?'" Efuru responds, "'Leave that to me, I shall settle it myself'" (8). The words spoken by Efuru's mother-in-law indicate that the proper avenues have not been followed, and this female speaker shows concern for tradition even though she is quite happy that her son has married the daughter of one of the most powerful men in the village. At the same time, she fears what Efuru's father and his family will say or do.

Efuru and Adizua act as individuals with their own agenda instead of members of a collective family. Adizua's family is supposed to go visit Efuru's father and family to announce Adizua's interest in marrying Efuru. After the two families talk for a while, which could be hours or months, the young lady's father gives a signal that he wishes to accept the young man's offer of a dowry. Then wedding plans begin, followed by a big festive celebration. In addition to not following these traditional customs, Efuru does not select a young man from her same social and economic background. Her father is Nwashike Ogene, a great man of his time, but Adizua's father is not known. Thus, Adizua's mother has every right to be concerned since her son has not followed tradition and respected the great Nwashike Ogene. However, Efuru's response shows that she is not worried about following tradition; she chooses her own way, as indicated by her words, "I shall settle it *myself*" (8 italics mine). One must question why Efuru chooses not to obey traditional customs, especially considering her father's position in the community. Is the implied author speaking through the character Efuru? Efuru evidently has decided to bend the rules to suit her purpose, which is to "proclaim themselves married" now and pay the dowry later. Obiora Nnaemeka refers to this type of action as "negotiating realities" (107). Even the word choice "settle" indicates a type of bargaining.

Efuru and her husband fulfill one tradition but not until about a year later when they have earned enough to pay a dowry. Only then does Efuru allow her husband's family to make the trip to meet her father and have conversations. Her father accepts Adizua's family and his request to marry Efuru and gives his blessings to the marriage. According to the narrator, Efuru and Adizua go home and "for the first time since that fateful Nkwo day the two *felt* really married" (24 italics mine). In fact, Ogunyemi has

suggested that Efurú is refusing to be bought by any man since it is part of her money that pays the dowry (147). The words and actions of Efurú clearly indicate a young woman who has decided she should make her own choices and who will be able to handle the consequences. The words of the narrator that “the two *felt* really married” indicate an ideological struggle between Efurú’s evolving opinions and her traditional values. Most readers focus on Efurú’s action of choosing her own husband without the dowry’s being paid instead of the fact that later the couple pays the dowry *together*; however, her father probably does not know that the money belongs to Efurú and Adizua, not just Adizua and his family. Thus, yes, once again Efurú subtly maintains control of her life.

Certainly, the words spoken by Efurú and the actions she takes indicate a need for change within the community; however, the narrator of the novel also supports respect for older customs. In the first year of Efurú’s marriage, people in the community question Efurú’s father’s inaction and are told he sent two groups of men to check on Efurú, but the men are not able to convince her and Adizua to talk with her father. Members conclude that her father is old and does not have any fight left in him. In addition, community voices say that ““Things are changing fast these days. These white people have imposed so much strain on our people”” (11-12). Thus, the narrator suggests that colonialism has introduced new ideas and methods that are now influencing some people in the community. The people are not sure if they want to accept change but realize that the new will probably replace traditional values and customs.

Efurú, in addition to deciding to marry Adizua without a dowry, chooses not to go to work on the farm with her husband but to stay in town and trade at the markets. Again, her actions indicate a sense of independence. She tells Adizua, ““If you like . . . go to the

farm. I am not cut out for farm work. I am going to trade” (10). Again, choice is the message that Flora Nwapa, the “implied author,” is advocating through the narrator, community voices, and Efurú’s individual actions as well as the words spoken by Efurú. Many voices of the community condemn her for not following her husband: ““Why does she remain in town and not come to the farm with her husband?”” Someone responds, ““She refused to go to the farm. She is trading instead . . . And I don’t blame her. She is beautiful. You would think the woman of the lake is her mother”” (12).

At first, Efurú and Adizua have a successful marriage, enjoy each other’s company, and even create jealousy among some women. But since they work in different locations, Adizua gets lonely for her, and he creates all types of excuses to come home to be with her. At first she does not mind the attention, and she cooks whatever foods he brings home to her. Another example of the good times in their marriage occurs after Efurú has her “bath.” Instead of Adizua’s returning to work in a timely manner, he decides to spend extra time at home pampering his wife. This period of contentment continues for several years, including the birth of their child. They laugh and enjoy each other’s company, but Adizua’s profits begin to decrease on the farm. Efurú then suggests he trade with her in town; however, he is not skilled at trading. Eventually, Adizua starts to come home later and later until Efurú begins to realize there are problems in the marriage. At first, Adizua starts coming home after Efurú has gone to bed. He wakes her up and she cooks food for him. Later he stays out all night and begins to refuse to answer any questions about his actions. After conversations with Adizua and his mother, Efurú starts to ponder what will become of her if Adizua decides not to return to her. Adizua does not explain his actions to his wife or mother; he just abandons the marriage and

child, Ogonim. Even when his daughter becomes ill and dies, he does not return for the funeral. Clearly, the marriage is over. Booth concludes that “our sense of the implied author includes not only the extractable meanings but also the moral and emotional content of each bit of action and suffering of all characters” (73). A reader is quickly able to detect Nwapa’s desire for choice without condemnation if the choice steps outside of the norm.

Not only does Efuru encounter mixed views about her first marriage to Adizua, but she faces similar problems with her second marriage to Gilbert Eneberi, a former schoolmate who has been educated in a Christian school and has adopted some western customs. First, by allowing Efuru to return to her father’s house after a failed first marriage, the narrator is advocating alternative choices for women and men. It is at her father’s house that Efuru meets Gilbert while she is searching to find herself and her space within the community. Efuru is allowed to be happy and to help people in the community even though she is widowed and without children. Because Efuru is a very successful business woman, many people seek financial assistance from her, and she never refuses them. She even intercedes to seek western medical help for them. Even though Gilbert and Efuru appear to be nontraditional in some ways, they must safely negotiate choices within the traditional environment. The concepts of marriage and motherhood will also be problematic for the couple. A male friend of Efuru’s is concerned because Gilbert has not been married before. The doctor friend says, “‘He must be young then, for our people marry young’” (128). Efuru responds, “‘We are in the same age-group and I knew him as a boy.’” Her friend says a second time, “‘And he has not married? Why has he not married?’” There is concern that Gilbert has not followed

traditional customs instead of joy that Efuru has found a prospective husband who is more on her socio-economic level. Again, Efuru comes to Gilbert's defense by saying, "You forget that he went to school and that those who go to school do not marry early" (128). The words spoken by Efuru remind everyone that society is changing; it is being influenced by outside views and norms. Furthermore, her tone indicates that one should not worry about continuing to follow tradition. Once Efuru's friend accepts her response, an understanding takes place. Bakhtin states this is what makes language polyphonic, and even heteroglot from top to bottom, for here it is evident that there is a co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present (educated) and the past (traditional non-educated). Moreover, Efuru is fighting for the "different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth." The so called "languages" of heteroglossia, contextual within a language, intersect each other in many ways, forming new socially typifying "languages" (Bakhtin 291).

Efuru and Gilbert Eneberi present a cultural connection between past, present, and future. They marry according to traditional custom; Gilbert and "some of the members of his family went to Efuru's father's house" where they shared palm wine, kola nuts, and homemade gin (135). The purpose of the meeting is to ask Efuru's father and family for permission to marry. According to custom, Efuru tells her family to drink the wine signifying her wish to marry Gilbert. After her father gives his approval and Gilbert pays the dowry, the father proclaims "you have done like a man. . . . Men of these days are not as responsible as [they] were in our days. They want to marry wives but they don't sit down and count the cost . . . but as I can see, you look good and responsible. Look after my daughter well" (135). As with the early period of her first marriage, Efuru and her

husband Gilbert have what looks like a happy marriage; they spend time together, go to the beach, and just enjoy themselves, a bit too much for some people. The couple has what appears to be a happy life until the motherhood issue emerges. The concept of motherhood is present in both marriages and creates difficulties for Efurú.

### Motherhood in *Efurú*.

Only a few years after Efurú's first marriage, the concept of motherhood soars in the novel and becomes Efurú's major problem. Obligatory motherhood is the downfall for Efurú based on cultural concepts. Her traditional community expects and demands that she become a mother. Approximately two years after her marriage to Adizua, she is concerned about her state; she says to herself, "I am still young, surely God cannot deny me the joy of motherhood" (24). Her mother-in-law believes, however, that God is in charge and "a child would come when God willed it" (24). The statements of both women are significant. Interestingly, Efurú, who has ignored courtship and marital traditions, shows concern to obey cultural traditions about motherhood while her mother-in-law recognizes that a higher power has control. However, she, too, secretly wants to keep negative voices away from her family. These women are struggling to please several groups—society, self, and family—and finding the struggle difficult, and even impossible. An examination of the words used by these women further illustrates this point. Efurú often says to herself, "God cannot deny me the joy of motherhood" (24). The strength and determination of the words "cannot deny" in contrast to "will not" indicate that Efurú has already made her choice for her future. What about the meaning of the words "joy of motherhood"? These words imply a rich and fulfilling role in life. It is

clear from the diction assigned to Efuru that Nwapa is supporting motherhood. However, the words used by Efuru and her mother-in-law—emphasizing God’s will—indicate to the reader and community that whether one becomes a mother is not just based on desire and tradition but biological health as determined by a superior power. The words used in the two sentences above indicate a struggle among women themselves, for they do want children, but at the same time realize it is God’s choice whether they are able to bear children or not. These words suggest what Don Bialostosky calls the “mixed diction” of Bakhtin’s dialogism (216-17). Mixed diction occurs when the characters speak and the narrator also speaks as she reports the characters’ speech. The two women seem to speak and think with one voice, but they oppose and reinforce each other at the same time. Both know the truth, but the mother-in-law privately wishes Efuru and her son would marry a second wife to give children to the family and remove social stigma from the family.

The concept of motherhood is a major concern for Efuru, Adizua, and Adizua’s mother. According to Carole Davies, the second characteristic of African feminism is called into question. This attribute focuses on the inequities and limitations found in traditional societies, conditions that create the struggle that Efuru and her mother-in-law reflect through their speech acts. They realize God will determine when and if a woman should become a mother. However, society still ostracizes women who are not able to get pregnant and even blames the women when the men have physical medical problems. One must ask why does someone have to be responsible or made a scapegoat for a nonhuman situation?

After Efuru and Adizua try many times to conceive a child, they seek traditional avenues to help the situation. To remedy the problem, Efuru and her father visit a dibia

who tells them Efuru will have few children and they must come back to see him for further information; he also gives specific instructions for her to follow, which includes making sacrifices to the ancestors on Afo Day, buying certain items at the market, then placing them in a calabash basket, and allowing the basket to float away. After obeying the instructions, she and Adizua have a baby girl. Efuru has her baby in a quiet and unobtrusive manner while her husband is sleeping in the house. He awakens afterwards when he hears a baby crying and exclaims that the birth is not a dream; it is real. He says to his daughter, “Welcome my daughter. Your name is Ogonim” (32). It is the custom for individuals to show their thanks to the dibia; Adizua and Efuru visit him and take gifts; however, when he opens several kola nuts, he sees something that bothers him, and he tells the couple to return to him on a certain day. Unfortunately, the dibia dies before their second visit. A connection is implied between the dibia’s earlier comment about Efuru’s having few babies, the opened kola nuts, and the couple’s future; and subsequent events confirm the connection. Although Ogonim acts like any normal child for two years, playing with her nurse maid, Ogea, and other children, the marriage begins to fail—for example, Adizua does not sleep with Efuru for six months—and Ogonim suddenly develops a fever, starts having convulsions, and eventually dies. The family makes preparations for Ogonim’s burial, but Adizua fails to attend his daughter’s funeral. According to Efuru, the death of her daughter is a sure indicator that her marriage to Adizua is over; there is no bond between them.

The women in Efuru’s natal village also discuss what is best for young, beautiful Efuru, who is now a deserted wife and motherless woman since her child died. She is greeted by well wishers and nosy neighbors. One woman tells her not to say her husband

left her but to say she left her husband because “‘Wives leave husbands not the other way around’” (90). Efurū laughs that “‘It is the same thing to me,’” but the woman, the voice of one part of the community, insists that “‘it is not the same thing’” (90). Others say she has made the right choice to return to her village. They remind her that she is young and beautiful, from a good family; thus, she will find a husband in the future. The most profound comments come from her maid Ogea’s parents. They acknowledge hearing about Efurū’s marital problems and state they have no intention of judging her, but they do condemn Adizua’s not returning to bury his and Efurū’s only child as repugnant. They conclude, “‘It showed that he hates [you]. So you have done well in leaving him. You are young, so the day is just breaking for you, other suitors will come. Just have patience’” (94). Thus, many voices give Efurū advice as to whether she should leave Adizua’s homestead. Her father and mother-in-law have been the most hesitant at first, but they eventually agree it is in her best interest to leave and find a new life.

Similarly, the concept of motherhood becomes a major concern in Efurū’s second marriage, to Gilbert. Again, after two years of marriage, Efurū is not pregnant. Several women in the community represent the voice of tradition and express their feelings because Efurū and Gilbert are happy but Efurū is not pregnant. They exclaim, “‘We are not going to eat happy marriage. Marriage must be fruitful’” (137). Further, “‘A woman, a wife for that matter, should not look glamorous all the time, and not fulfil [sic] the important *function* she is *made to fulfil* [sic]’” (138 italics mine). These words indicate that some women believe women have only one function or purpose in life and that is to procreate; the words “*made*” and “*fulfil*” suggest there are no other options for women. These women represent tradition and refuse to make any exceptions. The above

comments support what Davies in *Ngambika* calls “obligatory motherhood” (9). The comments do not go unchallenged, for Gilbert’s mother, Amede, defends her son and Efuru by declaring that ““Young people of this generation are different”” (139).

The views and diction of the women represent tradition, but Gilbert’s mother represents flexibility and change. One should consider the words “*function* she is *made to fulfil*” (138 italics mine). They only seem to be concerned with completing a requirement and suggest pregnancy is the ultimate goal of females. The women are completely upset that the couple is happy without signs of a child. By contrast, Gilbert’s mother uses the following words: “*this generation*” and “*different*” (139 italics mine). These words indicate a willingness to accept changes, many brought about through education in schools taught by missionaries. Her son Gilbert is a product of such schools, and he has acquired some western habits. Thus, having children immediately is not a major issue for him, nor is he interested in marrying several wives or so he says.

### Second Wives in *Efuru*

According to Igbo customs, it is permissible for husbands to have several wives, but the current wife should be consulted first. One wonders why Adizua does not communicate with Efuru and resorts to secrecy when he leaves home to see another woman. He and Efuru had broken traditional customs to be together as husband and wife; she easily accepts non-traditional avenues, so why has Adizua chosen not to be honest with his wife? His actions are infrequent at first when he misses meals, comes home, bathes, and leaves, only to return home at midnight and refuse to eat his dinner. Eventually, he stays away from home for days at a time until he stops coming home at

all. Efuru's mother-in-law encourages her to be patient and give Adizua time to mature. She says, "Have patience, my daughter. . . . Everything will be all right. Don't mind my son. It is only youth that is worrying him and nothing else. He will soon realize what a fool he has been, and will come crawling to you. . . . Men are always like that" (51). At one point Adizua tells Efuru that he is going to Ndoni to buy groundnuts, but Efuru senses that he is going to another woman and begins questioning herself.

Through her questioning, Efuru begins to develop a new sense of self-worth. She says, "There is a woman behind this indifference. A woman whose personality is greater than mine. . . . I must face facts. . . . Perhaps she is very beautiful and has long hair like mine . . . . Is she as stately as I am" (54). She admits she still loves Adizua and finds him handsome, but she wonders if she is still pleasing to Adizua and how long she will tolerate his actions. Efuru asks herself, "How long will this last? 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. . . . I don't object to his marrying a second wife, but I do *object* to being *relegated to the background*" (53 italics mine). These words, especially the ones I have italicized, are firm and spoken with determination to be respected. The self-questioning by Efuru allows the reader to determine the possible outcomes of Adizua's actions and permits the consciousness of the character to privately and publicly admit a change must occur. Gadamer concludes that since conversation "presupposes a common language," a dialogue is shared. I acknowledge that dialogue is usually considered to be a conversation between two people; however, here I see the dialogue within a character, between the selves of the character, as an attempt to reach an understanding. A person or character can question herself to determine a solution to a problem. Gadamer writes, "To

reach an understanding in dialogue is not merely putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were" (379).

Nwapa as "implied author" allows the character Efuru—through the narrator—to consider new ways of thinking and acting and to realize what I consider a new consciousness of self. The self-questioning leads to the outcome Nwapa intended. The questioning occurs when Efuru wonders how she compares to the other woman and if her marriage is over when her daughter, Ogonim, dies and Adizua does not come home to the funeral. Messages are sent to Adizua in Ndoni, but he never responds. After waiting a set number of days based on custom, Ajanupu and others perform the rites for the funeral to please the ancestors. Now Efuru is childless and without a husband. She has lost the two people she wants most in her life. People in the community sympathize with her. Again, Efuru questions her purpose in life: "Ogonim has killed me. My only child has killed me. Why should I live? . . . Oh, my chi, why have you dealt with me in this way?" (73). The words "why should I live" indicate what motherhood has meant to her; without it, death is a possibility. Davies interprets this view as the fourth characteristic of African feminism because the woman believes she must be a mother at all cost, or her life is worthless.

Efuru's second marriage poses problems similar to those of her first marriage. Again, she has married a man who gives the impression that he is not interested in second wives. However, because Gilbert lives within the traditional community, he eventually finds himself caught in a double bind when Efuru does not become pregnant four years into their marriage. He eventually marries three wives and has children by the second and

third wives as well as by another woman. But earlier when Efuru—following Igbo custom—first mentions finding a second wife for Gilbert because she has not become pregnant, he appears not interested. Instead, Gilbert disobeys tradition by not asking Efuru about having children by another woman; he just has an affair and a child by an unnamed woman, only admitting the truth when he has little choice. Here Gilbert seems to ignore one cultural tradition while fulfilling another—ie , to have a child—and to act according to his own desires without any concern for his wife. Could Gilbert’s actions be the result of a western education, which focused more on self than community? Why do both Adizua and Gilbert break Igbo custom by not involving a (willing) Efuru in their relationships with another woman? Coincidentally, Gilbert’s unnamed woman is from Ndoni, the same place where Adizua lived with his woman.

Gilbert explains to his old school friend, Sunday, that he has a boy, but he is not Efuru’s son; she has no child and he has not told her about the boy: “‘I haven’t the courage. . . . I am sure it is going to upset her’” (190). Gilbert tells Sunday that his son is two years old, and Sunday asks if he is sure that no one, including his wife and mother, knows about the child. Gilbert is advised to tell Efuru before she finds out from others. They live in a small town and people love to gossip. One must ask why is Gilbert afraid to tell Efuru? Is it because she has lost her only child, the child she had with Adizua? Two years is a long time not to gain enough courage and respect to tell one’s wife the truth. After all, Efuru has been presented as a woman willing to accept changes and one who can endure difficulties. At this point, Barbara Christian’s views about motherhood seem appropriate. She says, even though motherhood is revered, it is “universally imposed upon women as their sole identity, above all others” (212). One must ask

whether Efuru is being forced to accept second place as a wife since she cannot bear children? Does she lose her right to respect and honor from her husband? Christian questions what happens to women when they tell their own stories? How does the information told from a feminine point of view “affect our understanding, not only of the experience, but of the institution as well” (212)? Does Gilbert believe the lack of motherhood will destroy his marriage to Efuru?

Gilbert’s actions have far reaching implications for all: society, marriages, and Efuru. His first relationship—with an unnamed woman—shows a collapse between traditional habits and his personal desires. It is possible he has been influenced by colonialism. Later, Gilbert marries Sunday’s sister, Nkoyeni. She and Efuru do not have problems, but when Gilbert’s son comes to visit from Ndoni, it is Nkoyeni, the younger wife, who is very upset; it is believed she wanted to be the first wife to have a son for Gilbert, but finds that someone else has usurped her place. Efuru welcomes the boy, but the pregnant Nkoyeni’s anger is so great that Gilbert’s son is sent back to his mother in Ndoni after three days.

One must question why Gilbert chooses to marry Nkoyeni if he already has a child by someone else? Why not bring the mother of his first son into the marriage circle through traditional avenues? Was his son the result of a short-term rendezvous? Does he want to live a modern or a traditional lifestyle? What kind of psychological impact will his actions have on Efuru? Later, the town’s gossip, Omirima, chastises Gilbert’s mother, Amede, for allowing Gilbert to marry Nkoyeni. Amede responds by saying she does not want to interfere; the world is now that of the “white people,” not of the Igbo “grandparents” (194). Again, Omirima questions Amede’s logic and actions; she

reminds Amede that mothers are supposed to interfere in their children's marriages.

However, Amede represents change; she is willing to allow the younger generation to do things differently.

The disappointments and pain of Efuru's life continue as her father dies, and Gilbert does not return for the funeral, just as Efuru's first husband did not return for the funeral of their daughter. Gilbert's actions are unheard of: his father-in-law is a great chief whom many people respect. Seven rounds of the cannon are fired during the day, "announcing the departure of a great son, the last of the generation that had direct contact with the white people who exchanged their cannons, hot drinks and cheap ornaments for black slaves" (203). Messages are sent to Gilbert, but he does not return for the burial. More than a month passes and there is still no message from him. It is considered a sign of "disgrace" and Efuru thinks of killing herself (204). Why does he not return to show his respect and support his wife? Ajanupu, who represents a compromise between tradition and modernity, asks "'What is wrong with men these days? . . . A man like Nwashike Ogene dies and Eneberi does not come home'" (206). It is interesting that she does not blame Efuru or women. It is inexplicable for a man not to attend his daughter's funeral or his father-in-law's funeral. One wonders how the same fate can occur to the same woman twice? Later, Gilbert finally admits that he was in jail for three months, but he refuses to tell why, so Efuru and Nkoyeni do not know if he is telling the truth or not. Eventually, Efuru accepts his statement, but not Nkoyeni.

The effects of Gilbert's actions—not attending his father-in-law's funeral, not explaining why he was in jail, not telling Efuru about his two-year-old son until he came to the house—all have a lasting effect on Efuru and her marriage to him. She becomes

ill, and there is no apparent reason. Many dības are consulted, and they give different opinions, so the town's gossip, Omirima, spreads the rumor that Efurū has committed adultery. One dībia confirms the rumor, and Gilbert believes it. The question is who is Gilbert to accuse someone of adultery when he himself has committed adultery? There does not seem to be a sense of forgiveness, and there is a double standard. Another dībia tells Gilbert's mother that Efurū has neglected the woman of the lake; she must make sacrifices if she is to live. When Efurū is proven innocent of adultery through an age-group ceremony, she returns to her father's house a second time. She explains to her doctor friend, "I am not an adulterous woman. So here I am. I have ended where I began—in my father's house" (220). Efurū has accepted her place and condition in life; she has concluded that her gods do not intend for her to be a married woman with children. Her doctor friend still seems perplexed and is surprised that Efurū is not considering going back to her husband. He talks about her youth and beauty; obviously, he represents tradition and the male perspective, which is to forgive and remain with an adulterous husband who falsely accuses his wife in spite of the evidence.

Filomena Steady's definition of African feminism—"combining awareness of racial, sexual, class, and cultural dimensions of oppression . . . through which women are viewed first as humans"—is relevant to Gilbert's action. It addresses the tensions and conflicts of colonialism in traditional societies that have promoted complementary values and communal values rather than individualism (4-5). Gilbert's acknowledgment that he is afraid to tell Efurū about his son indicates he recognizes she has feelings as a human being and that he has disobeyed traditional customs which would have allowed him to marry the other woman and bring his son into the family. Did colonialism have an impact

on his decision to keep certain facts to himself? Did colonialism cause him to suspect and reject his wife at the end of the novel? Gilbert has been aware of his actions from the beginning to the end.

It is clear that Gilbert vacillates between following tradition and adopting western customs he learned through his colonial-based education. Gilbert is an excellent example of the conflict that exists in African societies when two cultures first begin to blend or one culture conflicts with the other. The new ideas and customs which may be accepted by some members often create a feeling of loss of identity for others. For Efuru, the concept of choosing for one's self has given her a sense of freedom, but it has also allowed her actions to sometimes reject or modify communal customs. Nwapa uses Efuru and Gilbert as vehicles to promote a blending or acceptance of colonial ideas with traditional ones.

#### *Efuru* as Dialogic Text

According to Wayne Booth, all authors take sides with certain characters regardless of their attempts to be impartial (75). I believe Nwapa, as implied author, has consciously and subconsciously created a narrator and assigned polyphonic dialogue to her characters that conveys to readers the intended purpose and meaning of their actions and words. The reader must be familiar with the setting—historical, cultural and symbolic—to understand the interactions. Booth states, “nothing is real for the reader until the author makes it so” (108). He emphasizes how language through the implied author supports a particular value system which the reader will accept or reject depending on the intended outcome and his or her values.

Efuru is presented as a mouthpiece for women who want to have as much freedom of choice as possible about their lives without any rejection from the community. Efuru's analysis of her situation is clear. What is a woman to do when her husband leaves her and refuses to return? Should her family return the dowry so she will be free to marry again? Indeed should a dowry be necessary? Should she remain in her marital home forever? There does not seem to be one answer among the multiple voices engaged in dialogue within *Efuru*.

Several women give their views. Efuru's mother-in-law, Ossai, recognizes that Efuru will not stay with her forever as Ossai did when Adizua's father deserted her. She believes her daughter-in-law is not meant to suffer but to live life fully. She is afraid that Efuru will leave her home. On one occasion Ossai says, "My daughter . . . . My son has neglected you. But as my sister Ajanupu has advised you wisely, be patient. It pays to be patient. I have been patient myself all my life" (59). On another occasion Ossai explains, "My daughter, I can only solicit patience. Have patience. You may not wait as long as I did. I gained nothing from my long suffering, so the world would think, but I am proud that I was and still am true to the only man I loved" (61). Aunt Ajanupu expresses a similar view when she says to Efuru, "But don't worry, it will be all right. By the power of God, it will be all right. Adizua has wronged you . . . . Give Adizua . . . just a year, and if he does not come back to you and you have an offer of marriage from another man, with a good background and wealth, leave him and marry the man. Wait for . . . just a year . . ." (83). It is believed that if she waits one year no one will have reason to make judgmental comments about Efuru.

The words of Ossai and Ajanupu as they discuss what Efuru should do when Adizua does not come back to her form the voice of tradition, justifying why Efuru should leave her marital home as well as explaining the right amount of time before she leaves. Gary Morson has interpreted Bakhtin to suggest that an audience shapes an utterance as it is being uttered. Thus, Morson agrees with Bakhtin that an “utterance is a two sided act” because there is a speaker and a listener. Morson explains the utterance is called “a bridge” because it depends on people on both sides (4). In other words, both speaker and listener participate in the thinking and speaking acts of a polypohonic exchange in order for meaning to be conveyed. Efuru’s expectation, her pain and sadness, clearly motivate much of what Ossai and Ajanupu say; thus, as listener, Efuru both motivates and is comforted.

However, Efuru also listens to her father who gives her a different perspective. He gives advice at two different times. When Adizua first starts staying away from home and before the death of Ogonim, Efuru’s father suggests that she be patient, not keep her husband to herself and be a good mother to her daughter. Later when Ogonim dies and Adizua does not come to the funeral or come home at all, her father asks Efuru whether she has heard from her husband and if she wants to go look for him. He has heard that Adizua is not planning to return to his home village. He offers to send people with her or on her behalf to find Adizua. Why would her father make such a suggestion? It is possible that he wants his daughter and Adizua to either reconcile or admit the marriage is over so Efuru can publicly start a new life. He does not mention a time limit for her decision.

After Efuru takes her father's advice—to go to Agbor, Ndoni, Akiri, and Ogwu to look for her husband—she returns to her mother-in-law to state her decision: “Mother, I cannot stay any more. . . . I cannot wait indefinitely for Adizua, you can bear witness that I have tried my best. I am still young and would wish to marry again. It will be unfair both to you and your son if I begin to encourage men who would like to marry me while still in this house” (88). The words “indefinitely” and “anymore” indicate an endless period of time, for Efuru has no idea when and if her husband will ever come home again. Moreover, Efuru uses diction that suggests a future for herself; she talks about marrying again and encouraging men to indicate she plans to move on with her life. Efuru announces to Ossai that she is leaving her home because she cannot wait forever for Adizua; she is still young and may wish to marry again. She will not be able to entertain suitors while still living in her marital home. Her mother-in-law does not reply. The mother-in-law is saddened to know she will lose her daughter-in-law, be left alone, and lose the prestige that has come with having chief Ogene's daughter as part of her family. However, Adizua's mother knows her son has mistreated Efuru and that Efuru's leaving will soon happen. On the other hand, Ajanupu, Adizua's aunt, wants Efuru to stay because she likes her. Recognizing that Efuru must move on, even Ajanupu has told Efuru before Ogonim's death to wait a year and then leave and none would have a reason to say inappropriate things about her. The above indecisions and decisions represent a bridge between past and present and future; the women and men recognize that a change must take place. Bakhtin's belief that heteroglossic exchanges focus on speech acts that represent the “co-existence of sociological contradictions between the present and past”

are evident over the months in which the women and the community discuss Efuru's position but conclude with understanding among the women and most of the community.

Mae Henderson modifies Bakhtin's views on both heteroglossia and dialogism, suggesting that dialogism is adversarial, but heteroglossia is complementary with a multiplicity of voices interacting to find themselves. Through heteroglossia, she argues, characters find their consciousness and achieve what she calls the "privileging" rather than the repressing of "'the other in [themselves]'" (Bakhtin qtd. in Henderson 119). She reminds the reader that even "if language for Bakhtin is an expression of social identity, then subjectivity (subjecthood) is constituted as a social entity through the 'role of the word as medium of consciousness'" (Bakhtin qtd. in Henderson). She emphasizes "consciousness, then, like language, is shaped by the social environment" (118).

Henderson also refers to consciousness as inner speech that reflects "the outer word" in a process that links the psyche, language, and social interaction (118). This position supports my view that the characters in *Efuru* engage in many polyphonic dialogic exchanges: they have dialogues with other characters, dialogues with themselves, and dialogues with society. Efuru's earlier dialogue with herself about what she should accept from her husband and how long she should wait for him as well as her comment "I am not a piece of wood" shows consciousness at work. This inner personal dialogue with self and questioning of self allows Efuru to make decisions about her present and future life. In addition, near the end of the novel, Efuru reasons that Uhamiri, the woman of the lake, cannot give her children because Uhamiri does not have children herself. In Efuru's dream she asks, "Can she give me children?" She responds to her own question with,

““She cannot give me children, because she has not got children herself”” (165). The words spoken aloud result from an inner dialogue with self. Throughout the novel, several female characters express their views about marriage and motherhood. A few even consider their own wishes to create alternative methods for women to achieve happiness within the community.

Wayne Booth contends that the moral and emotional feelings a reader gets from characters are supplied through the implied author (73). Nwapa has permitted the female characters to question traditional society and self. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer, in *Truth and Method*, questioning is a major part of hermeneutics as the questioning engages the reader in the polyphonic dialogue and requires interpretation. Moreover, questioning allows the narrator to suggest possibilities. The answer or outcome requires an understanding or agreement (379). Questioning involves dialogue in which one person listens to the concerns of the other person. The dialogue should allow the listener to “consider the weight of the other’s opinion” (367). Gadamer would say of *Efuru*, whenever a “text is made the object of interpretation; it means it puts a question to the interpreter (reader). . . . Thus, a person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question” (369-70). In addition, Gadamer notes the voices of the characters that speak to readers from the past and the questions the voices pose. These questions present several possibilities for the situation and thus permit the reader to explore. The female voices in *Efuru* are being explored and analyzed to develop a more viable alternative to living an acceptable lifestyle in their communities whether they are mothers and married women or not. They are questioning the worth of single women or motherless women in society. Are they not

humans too? Moreover, should not women have choices about their lives? The narrator seems to be suggesting that, yes, women should have choices, and they do not necessarily need to conform to traditional expectations. This is why Nwapa's major characters—like Efuru, Idu, and Amaka—exhibit non-traditional actions and make bold declarations about what they are willing to accept. Booth believes all authors take sides with certain characters regardless of their attempt to be impartial (78): “The author through ‘second self’ reiterates certain points over and over again” (79). I find Flora Nwapa's voice clear in *Efuru*, both through the narrator and the polyphonic dialogue.

The narrator realizes that Efuru has exhausted all of the regular cultural traditions expected of her as a woman and must find an alternative outlet to survive. Therefore, Efuru is allowed to have a dream about the woman of the lake, Uhamiri. According to the Riverine Igbo, Uhamiri was worshipped by all, men and women; however, the narrator reconstructs the view to give Efuru and women other options. Efuru informs us that Uhamiri ““smiled at me and asked me to come in. I went in [to her house under the water] . . . . Then she showed me all her riches’” (146). Later, Efuru realizes that the woman of the lake does not have children and concludes, ““She cannot give me children, because she has not got children herself’” (165). Efuru is finally able to sleep peacefully. Scholar Patricia Collins would support Efuru's discovery and acceptance since Collins agrees that women must place their thoughts, experiences, and consciousness at the center of their interpretations (36). Efuru now recognizes that although she is not barren and has had a daughter who died (165), she will not have other children, and Efuru is at peace with herself.

The narrator has given Efuru a way out of the traditional role of women by ascribing to her the qualities of a follower of the woman of the lake. The diction she “*asked*” me to come in and “*I went*” (148 italics mine) shows a choice was made by Efuru. There is give and take between the two women. In addition, the words, “she cannot give me children . . . she has not children herself” indicate an acceptance, according to the narrator, of “reasoning” based on logic rather than the intuition that usually “did their reasoning” for women (165). Efuru’s realization that any husbands she has must depend upon another wife for children and her contentment with this situation is acceptable to the community because Uhamiri is one whom they respect and revere. Even though the realization is not considered a traditional preference, it must be accepted; the reader is informed that Efuru sleeps soundly that night. According to Ogunyemi, Uhamiri allows Efuru to become a mother figure to the community through her wealth, charity, and nurturing of the community (154). She describes the outcome as a Nigerian worldview: motherhood is not limited to the biological view, but includes the social realm where women nurture everyone. It seems that Efuru has found an answer to her past conflicts: no living children and two failed marriages. Her consciousness has been awakened to her truth, for she understands that she is not going to have children and that she can be happy only if she accepts this truth. Efuru’s sleeping soundly indicates her struggles with the community are over from her perspective. According to Gadamer, the “fusion of horizons that take place in understanding is actually the achievement of language” (378). In reference to historically affected consciousness, he believes “the course of events brings out new aspects of meaning in historical material” (373). Further, Bakhtin’s heteroglossia—the perspective and ideological positioning of implied author,

narrator, and polyphonic novelistic voices—overtly turns the monologic with never-ending dialogue.

Efuru's final acceptance as a worshipper of the childless Uhamiri comes after many other attempts to live a compromised lifestyle in a traditional environment. Thus, the actions of characters indicate some type of understanding. The understanding shows a correlation between the present and tradition. It is Gadamer's opinion that the "voice speaks to us from the past" and causes one to seek answers (374). The female character has been permitted to make distinct choices within the bounds of her nature but not without pondering the effects the choice will have on self and society. In some instances, preservation of self-happiness must come first. However, the woman still chooses to remain in the community, thus indicating a desire to be accepted as she is. In Efuru's case, she becomes a nurturing mother figure for the community. Nwapa has allowed her female characters like Idu, Efuru, Ajanupu, and Amaka to display the privileging of the other self, the one that is not always accepted by the community. This privileging of the other self is displayed in the character, Idu, in Nwapa's second novel, the focus of Chapter V.

## Chapter V

### Voices of Tradition and Change in *Idu*

This chapter will examine how privileging the self means allowing individuals to express the “other” in themselves. Like *Efuru*, *Idu* analyzes the customs, conditions, and beliefs of traditional Igbo society, exploring not only the problems encountered by women but those encountered by men, not only motherhood but parenthood. The characters’ words—both internal questioning and dialogue—and actions in *Idu* are more clearly in conflict with traditional cultural customs than in *Efuru*. Both novels portray conflict, a need for change, and a double standard that tends to blame women more often than men. Thus, there are significant parallels between the two novels, but *Idu* is much more complex with interesting differences. As both Chikwenye Ogunyemi and Gay Wilentz clearly indicate, Flora Nwapa’s novels address “communal and national rehabilitation” (Ogunyemi 134) in a world of confusion and contradiction. Mae Henderson’s and Mikhail Bakhtin’s views on voice, voicelessness, and dialogism as well as the work of Carole Davies, Chikwenye Ogunyemi, Emmanuel Edeh, and Victor Uchendu on feminist and Nigerian issues clarify the roles of characters, *Idu*’s narrator, and Nwapa (as Wayne Booth’s “implied author”) in portraying an Igbo culture in pain and transition.

What is the message that Nwapa is asking the community to consider? What are the outcomes she is seeking? These questions will be addressed through discussion and analysis of words and actions of characters seeking consciousness of self and community.

Interestingly, *Idu* appears to begin as a somewhat more traditional novel than *Efuru* since the major character chooses early on to follow tradition in terms of marriage. However, *Idu* examines how law and order have broken down. As Ogunyemi points out, “The subversiveness in the worship of the goddess Uhamiri in *Efuru* turns into an open rebellion in *Idu* with women’s growing political acuity” (158). Ogunyemi also believes Nwapa is advocating growth through women because characters like Idu and Ojiugo make drastic and unforeseen choices to achieve their goals.

The main character of *Idu* is, according to Ogunyemi, named after the legendary Idu n’ Oba, of the old Bini kingdom, a never, never land of folklore, a place where chaos occurs, but where moral equilibrium always asserts itself eventually. The name “Bini” means “Queen Mother.” She “is represented as a senior chief and equated with a male (Kaplan 386); she represents power behind the throne, and tradition exiles her (Ogunyemi 157). No doubt Nwapa wished to identify that power with her female characters and also to suggest the sense of “exile” a woman could experience when she does not follow traditional Igbo customs. The choices of two of the women in *Idu*—both Idu and Ojiugo—are very much at odds with traditional behavior, and readers will no doubt disagree about whether their choices establish any kind of equilibrium, much less moral equilibrium, in their communities. (I find a sense of equilibrium, but not necessarily moral equilibrium.)

Ogunyemi identifies three significant subjects in *Idu*: “child bearing problems, which [reflect] the barrenness of society . . . ; Adiwere’s sickness, which indicates a sick society; and the stream as a [traditional] meeting point but an unexploited spiritual (palliative) for a society in disarray” (158). Traditionally, water represents peace and

harmony, but not in *Idu* (158). Ogunyemi is correct in reminding readers that confusion exists within the community and on many levels, individual and familial. She further suggests that the deaths which occur in the novel are signs of rupture and chaos within the community. This study will focus more on the first and third subjects: child bearing problems and the barrenness of society and the stream as a meeting place to discuss ills of society. It will also discuss the way in which Nwapa describes not just illness and deaths but moral laxity in the community and catastrophic natural events as further evidence of the disorder in a community attempting to redefine itself.

#### Courtship and Marriage in *Idu*

The concept of marriage is not a major problem in *Idu*. There are several types of marriages, but there is no major cultural dispute about following tradition before marrying. Idu and Adiwere have a very good marriage and prefer a monogamous relationship. The text does not say, but it appears that they married following traditional customs. People comment on their happiness together and the fact that no one has heard them quarrel. The women in the community discuss how marriage to Idu has changed Adiwere; one of them says he “was not that magnanimous before he married Idu, but now the two of them are about the kindest couple I know in this town” (3). Even though Adiwere briefly marries a second wife, who will be discussed later in the chapter, he refuses to respect the second wife and treat her properly. Idu reminds him that he has not been sleeping with his second wife. He refuses to acknowledge his actions, and he and Idu plan how to get her to leave on her own accord. As for Adiwere’s brother, Ishiodu, it

is revealed that Adiwere arranged the marriage between Ishiodu and Ogbenyanu, suggesting one traditional type of courtship and marriage.

But there are not only traditional marriages in *Idu*; a few marriages do not follow the usual cultural format. For example, Amarajeme marries his first wife at Great River without first seeking her father's permission. The father, just like Efuru's father, is upset and he sends people to intervene on his behalf. But unlike Efuru, who refused to listen to family members, this woman accepts the intervention and the father gives Amarajeme and his daughter his blessing. Even though family members settle the marital dispute, the marriage ends tragically when her canoe capsizes and she drowns. Amarajeme mourns his wife's death for quite a while. It is believed that her death helps to settle Amarajeme's carefree spirit. After his wife's death, he returns home to his family and is introduced to Ojiugo by Idu. There are no specific details about their marriage, but it seems to have been performed according to traditional customs. Their marriage is described as happy and full of love, but there is no child. For reasons not clearly stated, Ojiugo decides to make a very unconventional choice to fulfill her desire to become a mother. She leaves her husband, Amarajeme, and moves in with his best friend, Obukodi, who has several wives and many children. This type of marriage arrangement is not a part of the traditional custom; and the people in the community express concerns about Ojiugo's non-traditional behavior. They say, "she has gone to Obukodi. She is Obukodi's wife now." They wonder what his other wives will say and declare that Ojiugo's actions are wrong. More specifically, they say, ". . . this thing is bad. That's not how our people behave. Obukodi and Amarajeme are friends. What's wrong with them?" (105) Why does Ojiugo choose this alternative when her culture permits the "female husband"

concept where Ojiugo can marry a second wife for the family and also permit the second wife to “choose Iko (lovers) who are acceptable to them to beget children” (50). Yes, it would have been obvious that Amarajeme was impotent (hence the need for Iko) and that Ojiugo did not give birth, but the child would still belong to Ojiugo and Amarajeme. One must also ask what point is Flora Nwapa asking the reader to consider when she or he acknowledges there are several types of marriages in the novel. Each marriage works for a particular couple or person, so I conclude that Nwapa is recommending there should be several options available depending on the persons involved.

#### Motherhood in *Idu*

The opening voices in the novel *Idu* represent tradition in the Igbo community. They speak of joy and peace and they honor the young married couple; but they also express concern because the couple does not have children, spends too much time together, and is well off financially. Actually, the dialogue of the novel begins at the stream, which is supposed to represent healing, and, according to Ogunyemi, is the place for people to meet and discuss the ills of the community. Two women—Uzoечи and Nwasobi—see Idu at the lake and inquire about her husband. Idu tells them he is sick, and they wish him well. After Idu leaves, Nwasobi, says to Uzoечи, “Is Idu pregnant yet?” Uzoечи, replies, “No, she’s not. It’s time she was. What’s wrong?” (3). Nwasobi replies, “Who knows? Sometimes when the woman starts with money, children run away.” “That’s true. Have they plenty of money?” asks Uzoечи. Nwasobi replies, “They are comfortably off. Idu is a child of yesterday” (3). Uzoечи advises, “Give them time. Idu will be like her mother. She wasn’t barren. No, none of her people is

barren. What I like about them is the way they live their happy marriage” (3). Booth would note that this exchange is one example of a rhetorical device for making the reader aware of the Igbo value system (112). The reader learns about the background of Idu’s mother and the financial status of Idu and Adiwere. According to cultural historians Uchendu and Edeh, family lineage is important to marriage. It helps family and community determine if a woman is likely to bear children and to know whether the family is honest, hardworking, and decent. The reader is also reminded by the exchange that money, as in *Efuru*, often complicates the childbearing situation of couples. But the most important issue of the exchange is clearly the women’s concern about the role of motherhood for Idu.

The traditional beliefs about motherhood and barrenness are explored in the conversation between the two women. For example, Uzeochi’s words “wrong” and “it’s time” suggest Idu has failed to do something. These words do not leave space for flexibility within a marriage. Traditional society expects all married couples to have children even though there is no written law. People in the village will begin asking questions and talking behind a person’s back if there are no signs of pregnancy by the end of the first year of marriage. Uzeochi’s comment “give them time” suggests a speech act of multiplicity of voices seeking a solution (3). Uzeochi admits that Idu and Adiwere have been married for a while, three years, but she is not willing to declare that Idu is barren. She chooses to compare Idu to her mother, for some women do not get pregnant early in their marriages. Another character, the nosy, difficult Onyemuru, stresses, however, the importance of following Igbo tradition in which wives “allow” husbands to marry other wives so there will be children in the family. Onyemuru says, “If Idu can’t

have a child, let her allow her husband to marry another wife. That's what our people do. There are many girls around'" (33). Tradition is important to the female characters, for Nwasobi responds to Onyemuru by saying, "'You speak the truth. . . . I shall speak with Idu'" (34). Moreover, in an earlier conversation Uzoechi appears to have convinced Nwasobi that Idu will be pregnant in due time. It is obvious that the women of this Igbo village believe children have a very important role in marriage and family. No one seems to suggest that Idu is not a good woman; they seem to give her the authority to "allow" her husband to marry a second wife, so there will be children in the family. Her willingness to share her husband for the sake of children and tradition will make her a good woman. However, the conclusion of the conversation between the women is that there must be children. Therefore, motherhood takes on the semblance of a mandatory requirement; it is obligatory.

The first problem of the novel, childlessness, is addressed in the second and fourth characteristics of African feminism presented by Carole Boyce Davies. The second focuses on the consciousness of women that there are inequities and limitations in society due to traditional customs as well as those introduced and reinforced by colonialism. Thus, Idu and Ojiugo are aware that society expects them to find avenues to make motherhood possible. Motherhood is mandatory. The fourth attribute examines the concept of motherhood for its positive and negative effects. It respects motherhood but questions obligatory motherhood. It sees utility in the positive aspects of the extended family and polygamy (Davies 9). Davies understands that polygamy can allow senior wives the freedom to conduct businesses while the younger wives take care of household chores and the husband's needs, especially if the senior wife is unable to have children.

Often the women have special time to spend with the husband, all of them, then, having some freedom.

Nwapa also has the narrator examine parenthood and motherhood through the lives of another couple, Amarajeme and Ojiugo. After several years of marriage, they do not have children, and Ojiugo realizes that her husband is impotent. The need to fulfill her traditional role as a mother causes Amarajeme's wife to take drastic measures to become a mother. She moves into Amarajeme's friend Obukudi's house with his other wives. Uzoechi is shocked when she hears the news and asks, "what's wrong with them? . . . I don't know what Ojiugo wants in Obukudi's house. What does she want? Is it because she has no child by Amarajeme?" (105). This action by Ojiugo is not the norm since Igbo culture allows women to procreate by other men if their husbands are sterile, but remain in their marital home; the children are considered to belong to the husband even if people suspect otherwise. When Idu and Adiwere discuss the situation, Idu is surprised at the revelation that Amarajeme is impotent, but Adiwere explains that Ojiugo has known for about two years. He says, "She wanted a child. Do you blame her when she went to the man who could give her one?" (112). The diction choices—"do you blame her" and "man who could give her one"—indicate Adiwere's acceptance or understanding of why Ojiugo chooses an alternative or unheard of method to solve her problem. Again, the character has used the word "blame" instead of "hold responsible" to indicate the seriousness of her choice. Nwapa is asking the reader to consider if women should take such measures to ensure motherhood at all cost. Must one consider the moral implications for Ojiugo, Amarajeme, and the community at large? Evidence throughout the novel confirms my position that the author is negotiating choices for women within

the traditional community. After all, it is the community that insists on motherhood for acceptance even when it knows men and women could have medical problems that prevent fatherhood or motherhood. Joseph Asanbe discusses the possibility that fate can prevent women from attaining certain goals such as love and children in the same marriage (81). He believes there is a question that must be considered: “can a person find an individual way to become and act in a reality in which culture and fate determine what one can do and what one can be?” (81). Ojiugo’s decision to leave her husband’s marital home in order to achieve her personal and cultural goal seems quite selfish at first, but if one examines her choice from a cultural perspective, she has negotiated a choice, although an unusual one. Asanbe refers to her actions as using free will to dictate an outcome (192).

Culture does influence Amarajeme’s actions; even though he is heartbroken and refuses to eat, according to cultural custom, there is nothing that can be done to appease the gods if a wife leaves her husband’s home for another man. He chooses to believe that his wife will return to him even after hearing she is pregnant. Eight months later upon hearing that she has given birth to a baby boy, Amarajeme exclaims, ““Wait, a baby boy. Wait, it’s my boy, my first son, mine, mine. No, but wait. She left my house eight months ago so the child must be mine. He is my child. But why did she leave me? Why? Then?. . . . Am I not the father of the boy? Am I not?”” (129). These words finally seep into his consciousness, and he now understands what everyone else has known. His name is now disgraced, and he is humiliated. One must ask why does Ojiugo leave him if she has already committed adultery with Obukodi? Why does she not return after the baby is born? Is there a hidden message the authorial voice is advocating through Ojiugo’s

unusual actions? Maybe Nwapa is implying that it is time for the truth to be revealed and accepted publicly, for many people in the community have been aware that Amarajeme is impotent. It is time to admit that men and women may have medical conditions that prevent births of children; moreover, everyone knows that all children do not live, and it is not the fault of the mothers if God chooses to take the children. People in the community must stop placing all of the blame on the women. Barbara Christian's thoughts coincide with Davies' views about obligatory motherhood. Christian does not harbor ill feelings towards motherhood. But she does not wish for it to be "universally imposed upon women as their sole identity, above all else" (212). She questions what happens when women tell their stories about motherhood. Personally, I think Ojiugo's actions when she marries Obukodi reveal to us what she feels about motherhood: one must become a mother at all cost.

Clearly Nwapa has dealt with motherhood in a different manner in *Idu* than in *Efuru*. When one realizes that Ojiugo has other options according to Igbo cultural beliefs, one must question Ojiugo's decision to leave her husband's home and live with another man and his family to have children. Surely, Ojiugo could have found a way to become impregnated without calling attention to her husband's medical condition. Why does Nwapa have her character make such a choice? I think the operative word is "choice." Joseph Asanbe firmly states that Nwapa gives her characters free will to choose; thus, he does not see them as pitiful women demoralized by society, but rather women who make choices to suit themselves (78). Obiora Nnaemeka uses the term that I prefer; she says the characters "negotiate" choices. "Negotiate" means to select the best options in a difficult choice; thus, the choices are not as free willed as Asanbe suggests. His other point that

culture and fate can determine what one can become and do is valid to a degree. It is the beliefs of the culture that cause Ojiugo to take such drastic action to become what society expects of her, but at the same time she tramples upon the feelings of her husband, Amarajeme. To what extent does Ojiugo contribute to Amarajeme's suicide? Or is his decision to commit suicide based only on the culture's belief that if he cannot produce children, he is not a man and not to be respected. I do recognize that Amarajeme does not negotiate; he succumbs to society's beliefs. Yes, choices have been made by individuals, but those individuals have felt demoralized and useless.

#### Second Wife in *Idu*

The custom of the Igbo people is to marry and have children, and the tradition provides several alternatives to ensure that all families have children. Men are expected to marry several wives if the first wife cannot produce children, but the man must talk to his wife first since the added woman or women will be part of a large family and share responsibilities. The concept of "woman marriage" also exists, permitting the women to "marry" by paying a brideprice for another woman and asking the husband to carry out the arrangements for them (50). Some even believe that Igbo women enjoy polygyny because it allows them to work their businesses and reduce their domestic and marital responsibilities.

The issue of a second wife is handled according to traditional expectations in *Efuru*. Efuru is a successful businesswoman who has problems conceiving a child, and she gladly agrees to Gilbert's marrying Nkoyeni, who has a baby boy. Later in the marriage, Efuru accepts Ogea, her former maid, as another second wife. The family is

portrayed as a happy family. Thus, the problem of having a childless marriage is no longer an issue for Efurū.

By contrast, if a man does not marry a second wife, it is assumed by the community, especially women like Onyemuru, that the wife is not amenable to the solution, and she is thought of as a selfish and bad person. Men are never thought to be against this tradition, but in *Idu* Adiwere is. According to the narrator, Adiwere is not at heart a polygamist. All he wants is one good wife and children (51). However to keep peace in the community, Adiwere allows Idu to encourage him to marry a second wife so there will be children in the family and she will not be thought of as a bad woman. He listens to his wife, but his heart does not want anyone else. It is quickly discovered that Idu is pregnant, but, more importantly, the second wife does not like the way she is treated by Adiwere. The actions of the second wife are not submissive at all; she does not show respect to Idu as the senior wife nor to Adiwere as her husband. She refuses to allow Idu and Adiwere to treat her like a maid. She says to Idu,

“No, I don’t want you or anybody to talk to me like that. I don’t want you to. Why should you talk to me like that all the time? That’s how Adiwere talks to me. . . . I have not come here as a maid, but as a wife. What kind of married life is this? Did I beg your husband to marry me? Eh, did I beg him? Please leave me alone. I can go back to my mother’s house.” (48)

The second wife leaves the house without saying anything to Idu. At this juncture, Idu explains to her friend Nwasobi that it is time for the second wife to go. Idu accepts the blame because she has encouraged Adiwere to take a second wife to quell rumors that she is a selfish and bad woman. Adiwere checks the second wife’s room and discovers

she has taken her personal belongings; she also spreads the lie that Adiwere is impotent. Ogunyemi refers to Adiwere's actions of treating his second wife as a servant and not carrying out conjugal relations with her as a disruption of polygynous marriages, thus creating an embittered woman who spreads lies (158). Adiwere does not attempt to change his actions nor does he seem interested in pleasing the community, only himself and Idu. Moreover, Adiwere later refuses to marry another second wife even after his son Ijoma is four years old, and there is no sign of a second pregnancy. However, Adiwere's refusal to follow tradition because his heart and personal preference indicate otherwise shows a change occurring in society. According to Davies' description of African feminism, the sixth and seventh characteristics seem to be fulfilled. The sixth attribute deals with new views and changes since Nigerian independence and reconstruction, and the seventh emphasizes an examination of traditional and contemporary avenues of choice and telling one's own story (9). Specifically, the Women's War in Nigeria in 1929 proved to Britain that women wielded clout and were serious about being respected. Ten thousand women attacked the British government to prevent taxation of their products. They asserted their independent wills. Thus, as the reader examines the actions of the female characters in *Idu*, it is not surprising that the characters find alternative, non-traditional ways to achieve their goals. The seventh characteristic of feminism suggests women must begin to negotiate cultural expectations by making choices not sanctioned by the community while still aiding the community in other ways. Efuru is one example because she helps her community financially and showers it with love. Amaka is another example as she leaves her husband and relocates to a different city to start a new life. Even though she encounters some criticism, she has found her sense of self. The choices

that Idu, Efuru, and Amaka make outside of the traditional norms illustrate women forming and telling their own stories.

#### Changes in Family Structure and Behavior

Many other differences—for example, in family behavior—in *Idu* appear to reflect a developing tension between traditional and western customs and areas of choice, including the behavior of children; actions of young, pregnant women; domestic patterns of men; and acceptance of twin births.

Uzoечи and Nwasobi, the voices of tradition, discuss changes in children's habits from the past to the present. Children, they say, now make decisions without consulting their elders. For example, a conversation about Idu's sister, Anamadi, notes that she leaves home without telling anyone. Nwasobi declares, "Children of these days are so bold. . . . How can a child of Anamadi's age, a child of yesterday, how could she decide on her own to go to Okporodum farm?" Uzoечи responds, "children behave in a queer way these days. I don't know what the cause is" (28). Later, it is discovered that Idu's sister has borrowed Onyemuru's canoe without permission, and Onyemuru, the town gossip, blames Idu since the sisters' mother is dead, accusing Idu of "bad breeding" (33).

Uzoечи, Nwasobi, and Idu also have a conversation in which they discuss the unusual habits of young pregnant women and the different cultural habits of the Europeans. Idu expresses concern and disbelief when the European doctor tells pregnant Idu to bring some of her unborn baby's clothes to the hospital. Nwasobi is also surprised and says, "These white people are queer." Idu responds, "You don't even know

whether you are going to have a baby or not and you begin to make clothes for it. That's not how we act in our town. So I told the nurse to tell the doctor that we don't make clothes for an unborn baby. . . . God forbid" (77). This is one of the few passages in *Idu* in which Nwapa has characters directly identify cultural differences between the Igbo Nigerians and the Europeans although it is likely that much of the tension in the Igbo community, much of the conflict between traditional and more modern practices, results from new, European ideas and customs that are affecting the young people especially. There are some young women who have adopted western habits. Uzoечи tells about a young pregnant woman who is lying down or resting in the middle of the day while her husband cooks. Nwasobi exclaims, "Men of today are so queer. You mean her husband cooked!" Uzoечи replies, "Cooked I say. He split the firewood, he fetched the water, and he cooked and took some to his wife to eat" (197). They are shocked because when they were pregnant, they cooked, cleaned, and carried firewood almost until the time of delivery. They definitely did not rest during the middle of the day. These older women are voices of tradition and have difficulty understanding the younger generation. It is possible, however, that Nwapa allows some of the voices of tradition to show flexibility because she wants the community to begin to understand there are several ways to live peacefully within the community.

Attitudes toward twins also appear to be changing in the Igbo community.

According to Victor Uchendu, twins were considered taboo among the Igbo: the mother was isolated and the babies were destroyed. It was thought to be unnatural for humans to have multiple births (58). Uzoечи and Nwasobi discuss two situations of twins. One woman's husband refuses to see his wife and the twins. People in the community say

terrible things about her. Nwasobi contends, ““It is true, he [the husband] has not come. The world has changed, you know. When the world used to be the world, a woman wouldn’t have lived to see her twins. How can a human being give birth to two human beings, if she is not an animal. It is only animals who have two or more babies at a time.”” Uzoechi responds, ““*Everything is different now. Sometimes you wonder why it is so. Our people don’t mind these days*”” (198 italics mine). Another husband, however, Okara, supports his wife when she gives birth to twins. It is said he sharpens his knives to harm anyone who attempts to hurt his wife and twin baby boys. He already has three girls, and his boys are revered in his eyes. His family and age-group ridicule him. He says he will send his boys to school, and everyone frowns at his decisions. Nwasobi comments, ““Things like these are the cause of these strange happenings we have in the world today. Just as on one bright day we had darkness in the midst of day”” (199). Nwasobi is concerned about what the ancestors will say about these changes and wonders, ““How can they believe it? . . . They were pure. They kept all the laws of the land. So *they lived a different life from the life we are living now*”” (199 italics mine). The above italicized phrase is repeated throughout the novel for a reason. Change seems to be the idea that Nwapa is implanting in the minds of characters and readers. Once change occurs in the consciousness of the people, it will bring about different beliefs and eventually actions and acceptance from a wider group within the community. Indeed, the effects of colonialism and post-colonialism have influenced the decisions of members of the community. It is evident by the choices made and words spoken that people realize they have more choices in life, and these options permit freedom for the individuals. These different options bring joy as well as division to the Igbo community.

## Unexplained Illnesses and Untimely Deaths

Illnesses and deaths occur throughout *Idu* from beginning to end. Some of the illnesses are unexplained and the deaths make significant cultural statements in a community in which custom and order are under duress, a community experiencing changes it does not understand. Characters like Adiwere suffer from stomach ailments and dizziness while another man experiences mental illness inherited from his family. Nwapa also deals with eating disorders. Clearly, Ogunyemi's idea that the "dominant" perspective in Nwapa's novels is "communal and national rehabilitation" (134) is especially pertinent to *Idu* in the scenes of illnesses and deaths. Ogunyemi reminds the reader that "Nwapa wobbles between the individual and the community, with the latter triumphing over women (and men) who had dared to be different in her two novels, *Efuru* and *Idu*" (134).

Adiwere's stomach illnesses are not clearly defined and explained. A dibia tells him that he should never suffer from stomach trouble again and to not take purgative medicines. This information is incorrect, however, because later Adiwere does get sick again. He is found lying on the floor vomiting blood. Nwasobi attempts to help Idu with him. Another dibia comes to see Adiwere and asks if he has slept with another man's wife and whether he has eaten food elsewhere. All of this speculation indicates the community does not know what is wrong with Adiwere. These incidents of sickness continue and Adiwere also suffers from dizziness. No conclusive medical diagnosis is ever found, and Adiwere dies at the end of the novel. It must be noted that when several bouts of his illness occur, either Adiwere, Idu, or Nwasobi and others are at the river. What role if any does the river play in these incidents? According to Ogunyemi, the river

is supposed to be a place of healing for the community. However, if one observes the actions of the women, they are found gossiping about others while at the river. The day that Adiwere is found lying on the floor, he has just come back from taking his bath in the stream and has eaten breakfast at home. In addition, when his sister-in-law, Anamadi, discovers Adiwere on the floor, she rushes to the river to get Idu and Nwasobi. The river is significant but not in a healing manner.

Not only is physical illness evident in the novel *Idu*, but so is mental illness. There is a young man who has “bad eyes” and sometimes runs around naked. He also roughly handles the younger children through intimidation. He even disrespects grown women like Idu and Nwasobi. Nwasobi suggests he is mentally ill like his father: ““Didn’t you see his face?”” Idu responds, ““It must be his family’s madness you know”” (115). The two discuss how the family waited too late to cure the father. It is believed if one runs naked in the market, there is no cure. The young man’s father has been sent to Ibo country to be cured, but the process is slow. It is believed his forefathers angered a man by eating food meant for Arushi; thus, the gods punished them, and the punishment has been passed down from generation to generation.

A second case of madness involves a well-respected grown man who is quite handsome and, according to rumor, poisoned by a jealous friend who wants his job. This madman also has been known to walk through town without proper clothing, and one day he is observed strutting through the market with a beautiful cloth, which turns out to be a special cloth that belongs to the church and is used to cover the pulpit. Why has Nwapa described different types of illnesses in the community? Is she suggesting that the society needs cleansing and healing? What has brought on such illnesses?

Deaths of two major characters in *Idu* are particularly significant because they are suicides. Amarajeme's discovery that his wife's baby is not his makes him realize that he is impotent. This revelation causes him great embarrassment because now the entire community also realizes that he is impotent; he is not a man according to traditional views. He begins to question his usefulness to society. The one person he loves has deserted him for his best friend, just so she could become a mother. Amarajeme feels as if he has no other purpose in life, so he commits suicide. Is it fair to trample the love and feelings of an individual just to please self and society? Gay Wilentz and Asanbe are correct in stating that the culture of the community determines what is acceptable for people, thus deciding their fates.

Idu's relationship with her husband is a loving one; but when he dies, she decides that she no longer wants to live without him, even though she is a mother and expecting a second child. Immediately upon announcing Adiwere's death, Idu makes her intentions clear and refuses to weep for him. She says, "Weep for what? . . . We did not agree this would happen. We did not agree on what to do if this sort of thing happened. . . . I am going with him" (210). Idu clearly explains that she and Adiwere had made some plans, but they had not considered what would happen to her if he died first. She continues to explain by saying, "Who will I live with? Who will be my husband, the father of my only son? Who will talk to me at night?" (210). Idu declares, "I am going with my husband. Both of us will go there, to the land of the dead. So, Adiwere, my husband, wait for me after you have crossed the stream. I am coming to meet you there, and we shall continue our lives there. It will even be better there" (211).

Idu continues to make non-traditional choices during her period of bereavement when she refuses to scrape her hair and wear black for mourning. Her friends do not understand her actions and wonder about her mental stability, but Idu has a plan. She arranges for Okeke's son to go back to his people and for Ijoma to live with his uncle, Ishodiou, the irresponsible one. She says she will have the child in her womb "in the land of the dead" (216). Surely, everyone thinks she has lost her mind, but she has a plan, a plan to die and join Adiwere. She chooses to starve herself for several days, but then decides to have her last meal before death to pay homage to her ancestors. Idu requests that Anamadi cook her a meal, throws morsels to honor her ancestors, and eats "as she has never eaten before" (218). She then tells her sister, "It is well. . . . I am going to sleep. I am very tired" (218). Idu has joined Adiwere in death. According to Wilentz, the decision to "will" oneself to die only looks like a choice when the alternative in living is destructive to a sense of self. Further, "[t]he response . . . is 'Afracentrist' since it exposes the complexities of women's experiences within an African culture" (149). Asanbe seems to vacillate between whether culture or tradition has a greater effect on the outcome of a character's life. At first he states that tragic events happen more from a combination of fate and character than adverse forces of tradition; but later in his dissertation, he states that culture and fate affect what happens to a character in the end. He looks at the choices that Idu makes and believes she is a free agent "masterminding" her life (78). The reader is reminded that Igbo culture did not mandate that the woman follow the levirate system and marry the brother-in-law even though the practice was preferred. Idu could have remained a widow. Because she refuses to live without Adiwere, Asanbe concludes,

however, that Idu prefers love over children. (Similarly, Ojiugo has preferred motherhood over love.)

It is clear that the community's beliefs have a serious effect on the actions of characters and the outcome of events. Both Amarajeme and Idu choose death as a better alternative to living among community members and enduring their opinions about manhood and widowhood. At the same time, Wilentz posits the view that their actions fall within what is considered acceptable to the community (149). I believe that Nwapa is asking the community to change some of its traditional expectations by allowing individuals to have several options, ones that may be different from past expectations. The overall goal is for people to compromise and respect each other while living together in the community.

#### Aberrant Behavior and Natural Disasters

Nwapa describes both lapses in moral behavior and natural catastrophes to further emphasize changes within the Igbo community. When one considers that the Bini kingdom experienced chaos but concluded with moral equilibrium, one can perhaps anticipate peace and balance emerging from the confusion and chaos in *Idu*; but Nwapa does not describe this balanced condition at the end of the novel. Some of the disturbing events she does describe are thefts, murders, an eclipse, and fires. Gay Wilentz sees these events as "representing a community out of balance where the needs of the individual versus demand of the community are in constant and everpresent stress" (146). All of the human events indicate a moral laxity or type of barrenness in society.

Stealing is not the norm among the people of the village, but Nwapa describes several incidents in which money or other items are taken from the compound by individuals or groups. For example, Onyemuru accuses someone of stealing her hen, and she comes to Adiwere's compound to complain and ask for the return of her hen. After she refuses to name the thief, Adiwere asks her to leave. Onyemuru is not only a victim; she also steals yams from a woman at the market. She places a yam in her basket and attempts to leave the market without paying the trader or without negotiating with her. Onyemuru claims not to have changed her money and tells the woman to follow her home. Unfortunately, the trader allows her to leave with the yam, and when she gets to Onyemuru's house, Onyemuru refuses to pay. Stealing by a group of thieves who attack families and villages becomes even more serious. In some instance the thieves kill people who refuse to obey their demands. One man outsmarts the thieves by leaving his compound and allowing the thieves to take what they can find; they put the stolen belongings in their canoe, but become greedy. They go back to find the liquor and then get drunk and sleepy. As a result, the man and his family are able to escape in the thieves' canoe with the family's belongings. This incident upsets the thieves the next day, and they become bolder in their actions. People in villages begin to keep watch vigils to protect their villages. Most seriously, a band of robbers kills Okeke, the business friend of Idu and Adiwere. Okeke gives them his bicycle and money and begs for his life to no avail. Adiwere asks, "What we are going to do to these thieves is what is eating my inside out" (169). He continues to discuss what should happen to thieves and murderers:

"The murderers. We have to do something about these thieves. Nobody is safe in this town. Here was a man who was alive and breathing, and see

how he met his death. What will he tell his ancestors? Something must be done in this town. If not, one day someone will be returning from the beach and they will meet their death. People will say that was the person's fate." (170)

Peace is briefly restored to the village when several members of the group are jailed for murdering Okeke. One must ask why are such thievery and violence occurring? What has happened to cause the Igbo to disrespect each other? Stealing is not an acceptable practice in Igbo society; and, according to Elechi Amadi, there are penalties based upon the reason for stealing and the quantity taken. Some thieves had to pay an exorbitant fee; others were sold into slavery.

There are also natural disasters occurring that people do not understand. One such event is the solar eclipse. It happens during Idu's pregnancy and is thought to be a bad-luck omen. People think the world is coming to an end because there is darkness in the middle of the day. The one Christian woman in the compound is sure she has lived to see the end of the world, but "[t]o the simple folks of the town, it was a great phenomenon, unexplained. Who could explain it?" (82). People are afraid to leave the compound. When light reappears, no one can explain what has happened: "'It is deep . . . . The world is a unique place. God only knows the explanation to things of this world'" (84) is all the community can say. And Idu gives birth to Ijoma on this day even though the dibia has prayed that the baby will not be born given the unnatural event. He believes, however, that Idu and the child will be all right if the proper sacrifices are made to the gods and ancestors.

A second natural disaster is a fire that destroys homes and property. The fire— with the exact cause unknown—quickly burns mud wardrobes, plants, floors, zinc roofs, and especially houses with thatched roofs. It is rumored that a woman has been cooking food for her men friends and her fire gets out of control, but instead of getting help, she flees the village. Some folk who are in town selling their products sense that a disaster has occurred and start towards home. Town folk question how the fire can do so much damage:

They shook their heads. . . . there was something very deep behind it all.

There was something wrong in the town, and the elders would have to do something about it. In the good old days, fire did not just break out and burn a whole village destroying everything. It was their enemies who had caused it: their enemies, and so the elders should go to a *dibia* to find out the cause of the troubles. (98)

Not only do the people lose their homes and property, but Uzoechi is burned badly when she enters her house to retrieve a piece of fabric that she has not paid for. After the fire, some family members give their belongings to “sympathizers,” often relatives (99), for safe keeping, only to discover later that their friends and relatives have used them or simply refuse to return them. Clearly the community is disintegrating. Ogunyemi describes the incidents as cosmic mysteries that represent the “dislocation and disorientation of the entire body politic” (7). She reminds the reader that *Idu* was published right after the Nigerian Civil War that showed a fractured and divided country.

## Water as a Symbol

Water often symbolizes cleansing, healing, and new life in literature. Water or, more specifically, the stream and beach, are important elements in *Idu*. The stream is the place where members of the community gather to bathe, wash clothes, play, and share information about each other. Ogunyemi states that the stream is “the meeting point, an unexploited spiritual palliative for a society in disarray” (158). Her statement appears true, but closer examination suggests that many destructive events in *Idu* are directly related to the stream or occur while characters are at the beach.

At the beginning of the novel, several women have gathered at the stream for their daily ritual—to wash clothes and converse about events and people in the community. It is here at the stream that Nwasobi and Uzoechi first learn that Adiwere has been ill and give Idu advice. However, after Idu leaves them, Nwasobi and Uzoechi discuss her childlessness. The stream in this example is a “palliative” for these women, for they dispense medical advice on the one hand and, on the other, consider Idu’s childlessness and thus her position in the community, hoping she will simply be late like other women in her family. They see themselves as therapists for the community; and the stream appears to be significant as a meeting place for exchanges about communal concerns.

But often the stream appears to be linked with negative events in the characters’ lives. When Adiwere’s second wife returns from the stream with a pot of water, she asks Idu to help her with the pot and then disrespects Idu when Idu playfully asks what has taken her so long. She accuses Idu of treating her like a maid, not a wife, and says she will not tolerate the situation. In addition, when Amarajeme and Ojiugo spend time at the stream together, Amarajeme appears to think their relationship is healthy but discovers

differently when Ojiugo is nowhere to be found at the end of that day. He is also highly perturbed upon discovering that Idu has known Ojiugo is leaving him:

“So she told you? . . . Eh, so she told you? But she did not tell me. She deceived me. On that day she left we got up as usual. Both of us went to the stream. There she washed my shirt and after having our bath, in the stream, we came home. I was going to Osu that morning, and she was going to the market. We ate together and I left. . . . When I arrived home, I did not see Ojiugo. ‘Where is my wife,’ I asked the boy.” (108)

In addition, Idu and Nwasobi discuss Amarajeme’s and Ojiugo’s situation while washing their clothes at the stream. Nwasobi tries to get specific details from Idu, who refuses to give the specifics because Ojiugo is her best friend.

Does the stream then serve as a force to release stress or reduce problems in the community? I think not based on the above exchanges; it seems only to serve as a place of communication because people are there for practical purposes, that is, to use the water. It is clear from the conversations that “society is in disarray” (Ogunyemi 158). In addition, Nwasobi and Idu witness the sad event described earlier in this chapter while at the stream. A young man whose father is considered mad splashes water on everyone, including the adults, while frightening the children, and runs around naked, very inappropriately considering his age. The young man’s mother clearly does not see the stream as soothing; she says, “‘He lives in the stream. . . . His own madness comes from the water. His head seems directed to the water’” (123). Interestingly, Idu attempts to help the young man and his mother; thus, Nwapa places a person, not the stream, in a "palliative" role.

The stream plays a major role in the disastrous events in the lives of Amarajeme, Idu, and Adiwere. First, Amarajeme discovers Ojiugo has left him after they spend a morning at the stream. Later, Amarajeme sends his male servant to the stream to wash some clothes; and when the servant returns home, he finds that Amarajeme has hanged himself. One day while Idu is at the beach, Adiwere becomes ill and she rushes home to him. On another occasion, Adiwere goes to the beach to have his bath and returns home for breakfast, but later that evening begins vomiting. Later Adiwere goes to the beach again and complains about dizziness before returning home. Due to his weakness, Anamadi prepares his bath water for him at home; and a few minutes later, she finds Adiwere vomiting and passing blood. Anamadi rushes to the stream to get Idu, but it is too late. Adiwere is dead. Thus, losses, illnesses, and deaths are associated with the stream and beach at the same time that people continue to go to the stream every day to carry out their chores, to greet each other, and to discuss the lives of members of the community. The question is whether Nwapa considers the stream and water to be a bankrupt symbol for the Igbo. The stream and beach are central to the lives of the people but no longer appear to have the spiritual or “palliative” effect that the ancestors would have expected. This change may be further confirmation of Uzoechi’s belief that “[t]he world is bad these days” (199).

### *Idu* as Dialogic Text

From the opening scene at the stream when Idu, Uzoechi, and Nwasobi discuss Adiwere’s illness to the closing scene in which Idu talks with Nwasobi and Anamadi before dying, *Idu* clearly offers the kind of dialogic exchanges that Bakhtin describes,

with characters' speeches juxtaposing, complementing, supplementing, and contradicting a range of viewpoints through the narrator's voice. *Idu* offers an excellent example, in Bakhtin's words, of "the co-existence of social ideological contradictions between the past and the present" (291). Nwasobi appears to acknowledge the tension between Igbo tradition and the colonial influences of education, religion, and politics. Uzoechi appears to be the voice of flexibility within a multiplicity of voices. It is she who says, "'Give them time'" (3) when the community begins to gossip about Idu's and Adiwere's childlessness. Idu and Adiwere appear to be the most individualistic of the novel's characters, aware and sometimes disturbed by the strictures of tradition, but often following their own preferences—Adiwere's lack of interest in a second wife, Idu's suicide to be with her deceased husband—without analysis of the forces that may have contributed to those preferences.

Mae Henderson sees the multiple voices and social heteroglossia of Bakhtin as emphasizing an adversarial interrelationship and favors Han-Georg Gadamer's model that she finds more complementary, communal, and consensus-oriented. She observes the multiple and complex social positions of the women in *Idu*, their dialogic exchanges, as a "dialectic of identity" with aspects of self shared or not shared with others (119). In addition, Gadamer declares that questioning is important (thus desirable) in terms of understanding and interpreting information as well as determining outcomes. It allows individuals to question themselves and discover self-identities, as seen especially in Amarajeme's words and actions.

I suggest that the authorial voice of *Idu* is quietly suggesting to the Igbo community—through the narrator's voice and innumerable verbal exchanges, both

complementary and adversarial—that everyone does not need to follow traditional rules to be happy, that there is room for different styles of life. People must be allowed to make individual choices, and such a change in expectations will bring healing to the community.

But, interestingly, in this novel Nwapa relies upon the actions of the characters even more than their verbal exchanges to make a statement about the ideological contradictions, especially between the past and the present, in Igbo life. At first reading *Idu* appears to be more traditional than *Efuru*, but upon closer inspection the reader realizes that Ogunyemi is correct in declaring *Idu* to be an “open rebellion” against tradition (158). Ojiugo leaves Amarajeme rather than have a child by another man and parent with Amarajeme. Adiwere has no interest in a second wife. And after Adiwere’s death, *Idu* refuses the tradition of marrying her husband’s brother and sends her son, Ijoma, to live with the irresponsible Ishiodu because she plans to die to be with Adiwere. These actions—especially *Idu*’s—are subversive in the context of Igbo tradition.

Critics have debated the meaning of the novel’s conclusion. Joseph Asanbe offers a romantic perspective: *Idu* loves Adiwere so much that she chooses to die and be with him (79). Ogunyemi compares *Idu* to an Obanje because she chooses to go on a lonely journey to death. She “refuses to be subjugated by the claims of motherhood.” Ogunyemi believes *Idu*’s actions, especially her death or “unwillingness to live,” are politically motivated: she sees *Idu*’s suicide as a strategy to provoke the community to take a closer look at itself (160). She labels *Idu* an openly rebellious woman who makes her own choices and even suggests that Nwapa’s name “*Idu*” is a pun on the pidgin sentence “E do”: “It is enough,” or, when uttered in exasperation, “Enough is Enough.” Ogunyemi

suggests that Nwapa “is saying E do to the cruelty inflicted on women, children, and other helpless people in the society” (162).

Idu’s actions support Carole Davies’ second and seventh characteristics of African feminism. The second recognizes the inequities and limitations that exist in traditional societies as the crux of problems. Society’s traditional expectations cause Idu to choose death instead of living and marrying Ishiodu and cause Ojiugo to publicly humiliate Amarajeme when she chooses motherhood at all costs. The seventh examines traditional and contemporary avenues of choice: women tell their own stories, and Idu definitely tells her own story, chooses her own way. No one expects a pregnant mother to die and leave her son motherless, because motherhood is revered, respected, required. In addition, by allowing Idu to die, Nwapa demonstrates a characteristic of black women writers identified by Henderson: they enter into familial and public discourses that both affirm and challenge the values and expectations of the reader (120-21). Thus, the women in Nwapa’s novels enter into familial discourse with other women, especially Igbo women who understand their situations based on culture, tradition, education, history, and politics. However, at the same time, Nwapa’s female characters enter into public or competitive discourse with African men as African women and with European men and women as African women. Too often, the African women are fighting several conflicts at the same time—familial and public. Henderson refers to these simultaneous discourses as multiple voices fighting to be heard and respected.

As Nwapa’s novels progressed over time, her women seem more and more liberated and happy with choices they make even though the community may not be completely satisfied. The women also recognize that happiness comes from within. The

search of female characters for self-healing and happiness in a world in which they encounter and overcome innumerable traditional, cultural, political, and emotional roadblocks continues in *One is Enough*, the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter VI

### Voices of Modernity and Change in *One is Enough*

Flora Nwapa's third novel, *One is Enough*, was written in 1981, approximately fifteen years after the publication of *Efuru*. The novel explores how women must speak and act for themselves to discover self-identity and happiness. Often they must make choices that will go against tradition; these choices force members of the Igbo community to reexamine past views, customs, and options for women and men. In many cases, the Igbo family discovers that education and Christianity have changed their lives in unexpected ways, and now the Igbo people must learn to embrace the changes. Through the voice of the narrator and the voices of the characters, it becomes evident that colonialism has introduced new ideas about courtship, marriage, motherhood, roles of women, careers, education, and religion in general. Often these new ideas create friction among members of the community, especially in reaction to the younger, educated members who are trying to adhere to their cultural traditions and also live up to ideas and methods they have learned in Christian schools, a double bind that can present conflicts. The female characters in *One is Enough* display a new spirit of determination and exuberance inspired by the aftermath of post-colonialism. These women take charge of their lives and make choices that bring them happiness even if they break some traditional cultural customs.

In the analysis of this novel, I will focus upon the choices made by female and male characters, with an emphasis on Amaka, and upon the diction of the narrator and

characters. The analysis will reveal an ending very different from the endings of the Nwapa novels previously discussed, showing how a young woman has changed from trying to follow the dictates of two different cultures to following her own beliefs as she seeks happiness and joy within her life. Many of Amaka's choices involve a blending of different cultures; other choices exemplify her preference for one culture over the other as it offers peace in her life. Again Mikhail Bakhtin's and Mae Henderson's views about language and dialogism will guide the discussion, and the feminist concerns will be grounded in Carole Boyce Davies, Chikwenye Ogunyemi, Teresa Njoku, and Obiora Nnaemeka's ideas. From time to time, I will also refer to Hans-Georg Gadamer's work to support my views on Bakhtin and Henderson. In addition, in discussing the narrator and implied author, I will apply the concepts and definitions of Wayne Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction*.

To better understand the accomplishment of the novel, it is necessary to consider the setting of *One is Enough*. The work begins in a small village called Onitsha and ends in a large, modern city, Lagos. Both settings indicate a major difference between cultural practices at home, school, and work. Even though the influences of colonialism and post-colonialism have invaded the small town of Onitsha, some people try to remain dedicated to traditional Igbo expectations. By contrast, those individuals living in Lagos tend to adopt non-Igbo practices. Nwapa carefully assigns different characters a different level of consciousness; and the characters grow through awareness of self, education, religion, social customs, and history. Amaka's developing consciousness is tested throughout the novel, beginning with the conversation between Amaka and her mother about how women should live their lives.

As in Nwapa's previous novels, marriage and children are at the center of the conflicts, but the outcomes are quite different and revealing in *One is Enough*. The major character, Amaka, is a new, self-styled woman who quickly and easily negotiates a lifestyle that suits her. Amaka is presented as a caring, thoughtful, ambitious, and determined young woman who, at sixteen, wants to be married and is "going to show everybody that a woman's ambition was marriage, a home that she could call her own, a man she would love and desire and cherish, and children to crown the marriage" (1). Amaka attends schools where the missionaries often teach children different ways of thinking, acting, and living. The instruction is from a European perspective and from a Christian point of view. For example, church and court marriages are introduced. The missionaries also teach that marriage must come before motherhood, a concept which does not follow the traditional teachings of Amaka's mother. Amaka begins her career as a teacher before she becomes a successful contractor in Onitsha. However, she does not become a contractor until near the end of the Biafra War when she sells lumber, sand, and food. She realizes working as a contractor is a very lucrative profession. She is a part of the "attack trade" (trade with the enemy) that many women find the only way to survive during this time period.

Gay Wilentz, in "Not Feminist but Afracentrist," reminds the reader that "the novel takes place after independence and the Biafra War, and it identifies many of the problems of post-colonial Nigeria, which involves a clash of traditional values versus contemporary lack of values" (152). She believes the actions of characters show each individual's preferences winning at the expense of the community's traditions. Wilentz says this cultural conflict not only reflects a discord in familial/community values but

also problematizes the whole notion of generational continuity and women's cultural production within a contemporary West-African society (152). The disagreements about marriage, courtships, and motherhood are definitely reflected in the discussions between Amaka and her mother as well as between women and men of the community. Some individuals support tradition—Amaka's mother and aunt—and others prefer accepting some changes as exemplified by the actions of Amaka, her sister, Ayo, Father McLaid, Adaobi, and Obi, Amaka's very first suitor.

#### Courtship and Marriage in *One is Enough*

Courtship and marriage are difficult for Amaka because of traditional expectations in the community. Amaka encounters many problems while courting, and these difficulties are indicators that her married life will be full of complexities. Her first suitor, Obi, is well liked by her mother and comes from a well-respected family. According to the narrator, "The understanding that both families would be in-laws had been fully established when news came to Amaka's mother that the young man had married another girl in church" (6). This unexplained change in Obi's actions indicates a break in tradition. He and Amaka have been promised to each other through their families' negotiations at an earlier time; however, Obi attends Christian schools and learns ideas that differ from Igbo cultural practices about marriage. Thus, he decides to exercise his option to marry a young lady whom he chooses without considering cultural expectations, even the binding commitment that has been made for him, and he does not exhibit any concern for Amaka's feelings or the expectations of the community. In addition, the narrator reveals that Obi has married a young woman in church, with the

church marriage reflecting the introduction of European customs, customs that conflict with traditional Igbo customs and, in this case, create emotional stress for Amaka and her family. Amaka is heartbroken for quite a while. Her mother advises her to “forget the man,” declares he is not good for her, and says it is good he left her before the marriage. However, the reader should remember that Amaka’s *sole* ambition is to be a *wife* and *mother*. One might ask at what point Nwapa wants the reader to recognize that Obi has disrespected the custom of keeping his commitment to Amaka and her family. What about the fact that he has a church wedding and no mention is made of a traditional wedding? Do Obi’s European education and new Christian religion influence him to change his mind? If he makes the choice, shouldn’t he have spoken with both families about his change of plans? These are issues that I believe Nwapa wants us to consider.

While grieving her loss of Obi and trying to move forward with her life, Amaka, who is only sixteen years old, meets Isaac, who seems like a perfect mate. He teaches her about sex and love, but is slow to propose marriage. After Amaka and Isaac date for a year, people in the community begin to question Amaka, causing her great embarrassment. Several friends suggest that she date other men while seeing Isaac. Amaka refuses to take their advice even though she really wants to get married. It is clear the community voices are supporting marriage. Then tragedy enters Amaka's life again: Isaac is killed in a car accident. Amaka begins to wonder what fate is doing to her. During this period of bereavement, she meets playboy Bob, who does not take time to get to know her. He proposes within record time. Because marriage is a family event and Amaka has some doubts about Bob, she consults her aunt before accepting his proposal. After her aunt researches Bob’s family, she tells Amaka that Bob has not properly cared

for his mother and advises Amaka not to marry him. Bob also has impregnated his mother's young servant girl, refused to marry her, and demanded that she have an abortion. Her aunt advises Amaka that "a good man will come. But let me make it clear to you. Please don't bottle yourself up. You are not going to be in a nunnery. What is important is not marriage as such, but children, being able to have children, being a mother" (8). Carole Davies finds this view of the aunt unacceptable because it supports obligatory motherhood. Davies is not against motherhood, but does not want it to be forced on women, nor does she want them to suffer or be ostracized if they are not mothers.

It is evident the Igbo community believes in motherhood at all cost, but Amaka is concerned about getting married first and then becoming a mother. Her education from the European teachers and missionaries has taught her to get married first and then have children; Igbo culture does not insist upon that model. Amaka's situation with Bob is solved when he, too, is killed in an automobile accident. One questions why the implied author has allowed three suitors to elude Amaka. Is this a sign that maybe she should not marry? Amaka questions whether or not God has saved her from widowhood twice. Amaka struggles to maintain some semblance of friendship with her age-group and maintain her sense of dignity while continuing with her contracting business. Even her mother encourages her to buy land and become wealthy because a husband will appreciate her wealth and treat her better. Her mother, just like her aunt, encourages motherhood at all cost with or without a husband.

Finally, Amaka's courting days come to an end: she meets Obiora when he transfers home from the North to work as an executive officer in one of the Ministries

(11). He is described by the narrator as “quiet and gentle” (12). Obiora makes the proper preparations with Amaka’s family and his family. The two marry in a church after a six-month courtship and after completing the traditional ceremonies. Now Amaka has achieved one of her two major goals, to get married. Thus, becoming a mother should be easy or is it?

Six years later Amaka and Obiora still do not have children, and conflict emerges—a clash of traditional values and contemporary values about motherhood. Amaka’s relationship with her husband disintegrates, and she leaves the marital home after discovering Obiora’ infidelity, fatherhood, and secret (second) marriage.

After leaving Obiora and moving to Lagos, Amaka is involved in two other relationships, one serious and the other fleeting. Amaka’s friendship with Alhaji is only to receive contracts; there is no significant intimacy between them. The relationship is purely sexual, a way of rewarding Alhaji for giving her contracts. The two do not mingle in public nor do they have any future expectations together. The second relationship is a seriously intimate one. Amaka and Father McLaid are committed to each other, but because of their positions, they keep their relationship private. Amaka is still married to Obiora, and Father McLaid is a priest. Amaka’s courtships and marriages do not offer the inner happiness she has been seeking; and the characters, male and female, experience many difficulties and changes due to conflicting or incompatible social, educational, and religious influences.

## Views on Motherhood

Motherhood is one of the most important issues in the novel. Because of the influence of Christianity and education on the younger generation, several views of motherhood emerge, and they do not agree. Since the implied author is empowering Amaka to make choices that are good for her, Amaka listens to and evaluates many points of views about motherhood. In school, “[t]he good missionaries had emphasized chastity, marriage, and the home. Her mother was teaching something different. Was it something traditional which she did not know because she went to school and was taught the tradition of the white missionaries?” (11). Her mother has instructed her to have men friends while waiting to get married and to have children, marriage or no marriage. In addition, her mother states, “[y]our children will take care of you in your old age. You will be very lonely then if you don’t have children. As a mother, you are fulfilled” (11). It is evident that Amaka and her mother have different ideas about how to live life, and it is clear that western education has complicated the situation for Amaka. What is Amaka to do? The views of Amaka’s aunt about motherhood are similar to her mother’s. She tells Amaka that marriage is not as important as children, as important as being able to have children. According to her aunt, “A marriage is no marriage without children. Have your children, be able to look after them, and you will be respected” (8). Here the emphasis is on children, motherhood, and respect, with motherhood being the ultimate goal. Amaka’s aunt sees marriage as mostly an avenue for producing children. She explains that she didn’t like her husband when she married him but had seven children by him and then decided she did not want to sleep with him anymore. She had accomplished her mission: motherhood. She then finds a second wife for her husband and focuses upon

her business. What choice is Amaka to make after realizing that love has had nothing to do with her aunt's and her mother's marriages; motherhood was their goal. Her aunt actually explains how to get what one wants out of a relationship and then move on. These thoughts seem very selfish and self-serving. However, her aunt does seem to understand the importance of education, for she tells Amaka how she educated her children from the profits she earned from her business. She also makes it evident that women must have their own businesses and never depend entirely on husbands. The aunt says, "Never slave for him. Have your own business no matter how small, because you never can tell" (9).

The above sentiments support Carole Davies' views about African Feminism. Davies reminds the reader that the African woman is aware of the inequities and limitations in traditional society, a view espoused by Amaka's mother, who explains why she did not marry for love and what she did when she had had enough children by her husband. Amaka's mother and aunt also support Davies' fifth characteristic of feminism, which focuses on women's being self-reliant and never depending completely on the husband. Again, Amaka's mother explains that she married younger wives to take care of her husband's sexual needs while she pursued her business interests. Lastly, both women encourage Amaka to have children whether she is married or not; it is a "traditional and contemporary avenue of choice" Njoku contends that the actions of the aunt and mother push Amaka towards a "womanist consciousness" when they advise her to be financially independent of her husband (6).

An evolving female consciousness is the basis of Nwapa's thought process as expressed through the narrator and voices of various characters. As these characters

develop their views and find their voices to speak out for themselves, it becomes evident that motherhood is important to them; however, they do not want to be humiliated or rejected if they are not able to have children. After marrying, Amaka and Obiora appear happy with each other, with their jobs, and with their friends, but there is no sign of the pregnancy expected by traditional Igbo standards. Six years after marriage, Obiora and Amaka still do not have a child, and the situation has created some friction between them. To complicate matters, Obiora's mother insists "Obiora must have an heir because all his brothers and sisters have an heir" (12). Amaka feels unfulfilled and tries to find a way to satisfy her mother-in-law. She tries to make her mother-in-law believe that she has an appointment with a medical doctor, but the mother-in-law knows the truth. To further humiliate Amaka, the mother-in-law blurts out that Obiora has two sons by another woman, and the woman and her sons are coming to live with Obiora and Amaka. How is Amaka to overcome such hostility and emptiness at the same time? Amaka begins to wonder if she is "useless to the world because she was childless? Was she unfulfilled because she had no child?" (22) She goes through a period of confusion because she remembers the missionaries who appeared happy. She wonders who will take care of them in their old age. Are they completely happy doing God's work on earth? Amaka is trying to find her self according to traditional, colonial, and post-colonial expectations. She is trying to develop an independent nature in order to find security and happiness within her self and within the community.

Amaka's search for self fulfillment continues after she leaves Obiora and moves to Lagos. While Amaka is adjusting to life in Lagos, she meets Father McLaid, a priest, and develops an intimate relationship with him. She seduces him to get contracts, but this

relationship produces twin boys. She is quite surprised to learn that she is pregnant because she thought she was barren; however, she is very happy. Both apologize to each other for manipulating each other for selfish purposes. Father McLaid admits, “Darling Amaka, I knew what I was doing. You did not use me. I rather used you. I have no regrets. The baby must be born. I am responsible. All I ask is that you keep this secret until I sort things out. . . . There are times in one’s life when one is left with a choice” (104). The birth and joyous acceptance of Amaka’s twins indicate that Igbo society has adopted some Christian practices because during this period twins were either killed or left to die in the forest. They were considered bad luck because only animals gave multiple births. McLaid himself has first hand experience of this custom because he is a twin and even though his sister dies at birth and his mother dies a few months later, no one from his family came to the Catholic hospital to claim him. Thus, the Catholic Church adopted him, and Father McLaid, Sr., raised him as his own son. By contrast, Amaka’s family and friends are glad to hear that she has become a mother at last, suggesting a significant change in cultural attitudes.

#### Second Wife in *One is Enough*

Another area of the novel in which traditional Igbo customs are not followed involves the taking of a second wife. Obiora chooses not to discuss his second wife and two sons with Amaka. Amaka is not asked or told about the second wife before Obiora marries her and before the birth of children. Thus, Obiora has decided not to obey customs. Why? In addition, Amaka is not shown any respect from her husband or mother-in-law when they inform Amaka that the second wife and the boys are coming to

live in the house with everyone. After the wife and boys arrive, Obiora continues to insult Amaka by demanding that she recognize the new family members according to his expectations. The narrator indicates that Amaka makes an attempt to be gracious but also to stand up for herself. She asks, ““Where is the mother of your sons?”” and Obiora responds by saying, ““You mean my wife?”” (25). Thus he tells Amaka that she must refer to the woman as his wife. Amaka congratulates him and reminds him that a wife, even a barren one, is supposed to be consulted before the husband marries and has two children by another woman. Amaka states, ““You have changed a good deal, my husband. I too could change you know”” (26). These words lead to a physical fight between Obiora and Amaka, and she decides it is time to stand up for herself. Eventually, the actions of Obiora and his mother cause Amaka to permanently sever her relationship with him and move to Lagos to find her self and happiness. At this juncture, Amaka finds a voice to defend herself and shows a determination to forge ahead and take charge of her future on her own terms. Amaka’s new-found voice, severed relationship, and strong determination to find individual happiness are cultural barometers that suggest a change in family structure.

#### Changes in Family Structure: Single Life and Economic Independence

*One is Enough* reveals many changes in Igbo family structure and the behavior patterns of both traditional married and single life, with European customs an important influence. These changes are most noticeable when individuals leave rural towns and move to cities like Lagos; the customs are most acceptable to individuals who have studied abroad or who have received educational training based on European standards.

Increasingly, women are comfortable being single and increasingly they pursue financial independence.

Lagos represents freedom, opportunities for women, and female solidarity. The narrator explains that Amaka has come to Lagos to look for her identity and have a clean break (38, 45). A clean break implies a new beginning without limitations but with many expectations. The reader observes the implied author's views on single life as well as "the moral and emotional content of all actions and sufferings of characters" (Booth 73). For example, Amaka's sister, Ayo, lives in Lagos as a single successful woman and mother, but she is kept by a married man. Traditionally, there were some single Igbo women who had children, and these women did have some type of business to sustain themselves. The major change is that the sister is kept by a married man. Amaka finds her sense of independence and self-worth as a woman after she is introduced to Alhaji, who is instrumental in helping her get contracts. Through these contracts, she is able to become financially secure and rent her own apartment, buy a car, build a house in her hometown, and divorce her husband legally and traditionally as well as give money to family members. These steps represent freedom and opportunities for Amaka. Further, her freedom to live the single life allows her the opportunity to date and meet Father McLaid, who unwittingly helps Amaka to achieve her most desired goal—motherhood. The narrator describes Amaka's joy upon discovering that she is pregnant and not barren as thought by her former mother-in-law. The most important indication of Amaka's freedom, I think, occurs when she decides she does not want to and will not marry Father McLaid just because she has children by him, even though he wants to marry her to save his moral reputation with the public. Amaka's words express her freedom:

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)

Amaka's adulterous affair with a willing priest exemplifies how much the Igbo people are changing.

The financial pursuits of Amaka's friend Adaobi and the "Cash Madams" further illustrate changes in Igbo culture. Adaobi lives in Lagos with her husband and family, and Amaka shares her financial success stories with Adaobi. At first Adaobi listens with envy as Amaka describes her rise to freedom and financial security, but Adaobi then begins to ask questions. The questions evolve into positive energy as she decides to get contracts so she can build a house for her family; her husband works for the civil service and is so loyal that he cannot believe his family will ever be forced out of the home where they are living, even though they are allowed to live there only as long as he works for the government. Amaka helps Adaobi get contracts, and Adaobi builds a house for her family without her husband's knowledge. I think this is an example of the power of women to collaborate for self-advancement and family security. The house is finished just as the government undergoes a coup, and Adaobi's husband loses his job and the home in which they have been living.

Female solidarity is dramatically exemplified by the group called the "Cash Madams," women who own their own land and houses in Lagos and their hometowns. They represent a new breed of female entrepreneurs and invite Amaka to join them. Six

are widows; four have left their husbands to start a new life. The “Cash Madams” become successful during the Biafra Civil War when they sell products to soldiers on both sides to feed their families. They are often referred to as being part of the “attack trade” for selling to the enemies. The “Cash Madams” find it necessary to move to Lagos after the war in order to remain economically independent. They do not define themselves solely by marriage and children.

Even though the “Cash Madams” are quite successful financially, they disagree on whether they should remain in Lagos and raise children with a completely new set of values and learn many languages or return to rural hometowns and rear children in a more traditional and communal setting with all the financial benefits. The voices represent "the co-existence of contradictions . . . different socio-ideological groups in the present" (291) that Bakhtin describes in his discussions of the diversity of human voices and ideologies. Some want their children reared in rural areas to maintain traditional continuity and values; others prefer to live in modern Lagos and allow their children to become bilingual and learn different customs. Will people have to lose traditional customs in order to survive in modern Lagos, or is it possible for people to respect the customs of both rural traditional areas and of modern Lagos?

#### *One is Enough* as Dialogic Text

*One is Enough's* dialogical sphere is rich in questions and responses, different affirmations and negations, undramatized voices especially of the traditional past and dramatized voices of a period of fluctuation and change. Many characters are in a state of becoming or of defining themselves, especially Amaka and Adaobi. Thus, I posit the

view that the implied author is offering layers of diverse and particular voices and ideologies through her narrator while offering a strong objection to a world in which Igbo women are not allowed to pursue self-realization.

The views expressed by Ayo, Amaka, Adaobi, and the “Cash Madams” indicate that a new breed of women is willing to work to make their own paths in society. The positive outcome is that the women are now being accepted by society, especially in cities, and some of the new ideas are transmitted to rural counterparts who desire the same results. These women see themselves as human beings first (Steady) and not just sexual beings for procreation.

Nwapa’s characters do not always agree upon how people should live their lives or solve common problems. This disagreement reflects changes in consciousness and ideologies of the young and old, of age-groups, or, as Apena says, of the “first generation of new women” (285). Amaka, her sister, and Adaobi are a part of the first generation of new women, exhibiting more flexible ideas about how to live life, as shown in the discussion of marriage and motherhood between Amaka and her mother earlier in this chapter. Amaka, who represents the younger and educated generation, accepts motherhood but does not believe it is the only goal in life and does not think the lack of motherhood should detract from a person as a worthwhile individual. The conflict between the views of the older and younger generations can be attributed to the differences between Christian/European and traditional Igbo beliefs in a changing world. Gay Wilentz suggests that the conversation between Amaka and her mother on this subject indicates a breakdown between the educated and uneducated but points out that the mother’s knowledge is respected in the exchange (153).

A discussion about whether Amaka should marry Izu also indicates a difference in thinking between age-groups. Amaka's mother uses a tone that is hostile and demanding towards her own daughter, who is an adult with her own thoughts. The mother wants Amaka to marry Father McLaid for several reasons; he will protect Amaka from other men, and Amaka needs some help rearing the boys. Amaka's sister, Ayo, reminds their mother that Amaka does not love Father Izu McLaid, but their mother does not find love a requirement for marriage. Even though the mother is aware of Amaka's troubles with her former husband, Obiora, she says, "You will marry Izu. . . . I am your mother" (140). These words do not leave room for negotiation. The values and ideas of the women are products of their age-groups as well as formal education and traditional training, examples of the other-languagedness defined by Bakhtin, the intersecting of the "languages" of heteroglossia (291).

The marital views of Amaka, Ayo, and Nanny, on the other hand, are similar despite their other-languagedness. Even though Nanny never actively participates in the open discussions of the mother and daughters, she finally tells Amaka, "If you don't feel like it, don't do it . . . . I am much older than you are, and know how you feel. So I can see you do not want him [Izu] as a husband. Don't let your mother push you into this kind of marriage" (148-49). Nwapa is advocating that women stand up for their rights even if family members disagree, for women must be happy with the choices they make. Amaka finally tells Izu "that the journey to her home for the marriage rites [has] been postponed indefinitely" (149); in other words, there will be no marriage. These words indicate Amaka's sense of self-discovery. She is satisfied being a single mother of twins. The choice is one that allows the woman the option of finding her sense of freedom,

peace, and space within Igbo culture. Obviously, a few individuals are not happy, but the choice is Amaka's.

Amaka does not quickly or easily reach her decision, for she questions herself in terms of her past, present, and future. She invites Obiora to visit her at her mother's house after she has given birth to the twins. During the visit, she questions herself, seeking the truth: "Was this man the husband with whom she had lived for six years? She felt nothing for him anymore. . . . Was this the man she loved so much and married? Why did she feel nothing towards him any more?" (119). Amaka also considers what the people in her village will say if they know that a priest is the father of her children, what the thoughts and actions of her family members and friend Adaobi will be. She asks her sister, Ayo, about the situation, only to be urged to follow her own feelings. Finally, she recognizes that she does not feel anything special for Izu. She wonders what is wrong with her and whether she is incapable of loving anyone anymore. What has "happened to her these three years in Lagos?" (120). Amaka comes to the conclusion that she does not want to love anyone except her twins and family. She arrives at a clear understanding of what is best for her as a woman, a mother, and a businesswoman. Her dialogue with self and others has given her strength and transformed her consciousness. Perhaps her dialectic is an example of the art of seeing things in a unified manner to ascertain truth, as Gadamer asserts (368).

Not only has Amaka's evolving consciousness been explored, but so has the consciousness of Amaka's mother, aunt, sister, and friend Adaobi. Each woman offers a story about how she has handled her husband, motherhood, and business. Each woman explains the importance of being free from a husband's expectations and engaging in

business ventures that make her economically independent of her husband. This approach supports Carole Davies' second characteristic of feminism, that an African feminist consciousness focuses on the inequities and limitations of traditional societies, while indicating that colonialism may have reinforced them and introduced others (9). Is it really necessary, for example, to be married before becoming a mother as taught by the missionaries? All emphasize both motherhood and economic independence although the details of their lives differ depending upon age group and education. According to Mae Henderson, the various ideas within a cultural environment create a "dialectic of identity" as the women are sharing their ideas with each other (119). Each woman is privileging herself while recognizing that she speaks "from a multiple and complex social, historical, and cultural [position]. . . ."(119). Although the novel explores traditional and contemporary choices for women, there seems to be a greater need to examine contemporary choices for women.

The novel *One is Enough* most definitely invites the reader to ask questions. Nnaemeka has stated that "Nwapa's work captures the complexity, ambiguities and contradictions of her environment . . . Her work . . . invite[s] us to ask questions, many questions" (104). The reader asks whether the Igbo women should have to choose between traditional and modern avenues in life. Why can't they use a combination of customs and still be accepted by the community? Is one method better than the other? Does a woman have to be a mother to be respected and accepted as a person? Does education help or hinder growth and development in the community? What about the differences between Christianity and traditional religions? Education and Christianity are supposed to be positive influences on a culture, but if their introduction causes future

generations to no longer respect Igbo traditional heritage, then something is lost or forever compromised. The ambiguities and contradictions that exist between traditional Igbo culture and modern European teaching create much of the tension of Amaka's life.

However, *One is Enough* actually ends with a satisfied female character, one who does not leave the reader wondering if she is happy at the end as Idu and Efuru do. The two earlier heroines appear happy with their later decisions in life, but there is ambiguity about some actions they have taken. With Amaka, however, there is no confusion at the end of the novel. It is evident that she is sure about the choices she has made in her life. The reader feels joy, freedom, and finality in her words and actions. Again, I refer to Amaka's very specific words, "I don't want to be a wife anymore. . . . As a wife, I am never free. . . . No, I am through with husbands. I said farewell to husbands the day I came to Lagos" (127). Self-preservation and identity have been the key factors in Amaka's decision to remain a single mother; and her difficult journey from a single woman to a married, childless woman to an unmarried mother who is a successful businesswoman shows that a woman can achieve her goals and find personal happiness within society. She represents independence for women within an evolving post-colonial society. Nwapa, through her narrator, also suggests that tolerance must exist within the community, and people must respect each other's individual choices while acknowledging differences and difficulties.

Nwapa allows Amaka and the other female characters to privilege themselves in newly emerging, evolving levels of consciousness while establishing their dignity and earning respect from people in their rural hometowns as well as Lagos. Thus, Nwapa has successfully navigated the options for women in Igbo society and is advocating balance

and diversity within the community. An adjusting traditional consciousness and an emerging contemporary consciousness form the driving force that creates the novel's dialogue within self and between self, family, and society—all embedded in the narrator and guided by the implied author—that has come full circle from *Efuru* to *One is Enough*.

### Conclusion

After introductory chapters offering background information—a review of feminist and dialogic theories in relation to African literature (Chapter I), a survey of literary criticism on Flora Nwapa’s novels (Chapter II) , and material on Igbo culture (Chapter III)—this dissertation has focused upon three of Flora Nwapa’s six novels: *Efuru* (1966) and *Idu* (1970), her first two novels, reflecting early colonial culture in the Oguta area of Igboland but dominated by traditional Igbo customs and mores, and *One is Enough* (1981), her fourth novel, beginning to reflect a post-colonial and even modern world.

Between *Idu* and *One is Enough*, Nwapa published a third novel, *Never Again* (1975), that is a narrative about the Biafra War, sometimes described as semi-autobiographical, and two collections of short stories focused upon specific cultural issues affecting women in Western Africa, *This Is Lagos and Other Stories* (1971) and *Wives at War and Other Stories* (1980). After *One is Enough*, Nwapa published *Women Are Different* (1986), a work continuing her portrayal of the Igbo post-colonial world, and wrote *The Lake Goddess* (1995), an unpublished novel left with the Jamaican professor Chester Mills, in which she reverts to the traditional, turns from Christianity “to the indigenous, religious source Uhamiri” to find “spiritual strength in the return to African traditional religions in times of great stress and uncertainty” (Ogunyemi 10). Obioma 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” (104). Such questions are often those of her female characters: What do choice and discovery mean for Igbo women expressing their awareness of self and their growth first in a colonized, then in a post-colonial, world? How successful are Igbo women in attaining personal satisfaction? Are they happy and respected in their communities and do they find their lives meaningful?

It is clear that Nwapa sees women as having come a long way over a twenty-year period from voicelessness to voice even though they have encountered many difficulties. With women’s voices becoming louder and bolder from *Efuru* to *One is Enough*, Nwapa’s women achieve significant levels of self-consciousness and personal identity. Nwapa’s emphasis is, I believe, upon the exact areas Asanbe identifies in the work of Wole Soyinka: the “individual human being, individual sensibility, and individual modes of reacting to specific problems” (180), but Nwapa also emphasizes a communal ethic and happiness. My conclusion is that Nwapa’s women find respect; some find happiness; some discover their self-identities as they move from voiceless to voice. Language empowers them and the community.

Clearly tradition, colonialism, and post-colonialism complicate the many changes in the lives of women and men and in Igbo culture that Nwapa emphasizes in her works. Because of the differences between ideas and customs, many Igbo in her works are in a state of moral and social confusion, and Nwapa advocates a range of solutions or compromises through the characters. Her works reflect her desire to open the avenues of communication between people of different ages, education, regions, and sexes as they find individual happiness and a sense of self. She asserts that members of the community

must find avenues to permit individuals to make choices that may not necessarily reflect past generational expectations; that the community needs to be mindful that many people have been educated in western traditions; and that the community must engage in a sensitive and intelligent dialogue that enables individuals to help resolve conflicts. Usually her foci are gender issues in Igboland—particularly courtship, marriage, motherhood, and female choice and independence in both personal and public, especially economic, areas—but her treatment of the Biafra War in *Never Again* also offers a universal statement about war and *The Lake Goddess* makes a significant religious statement for Nigerians.

#### Short Story Collections and *Women Are Different*

Nwapa's short stories and *Women Are Different* focus upon many of the issues and develop many of the themes of *Efuru*, *Idu*, and *One is Enough*, works in which strong women struggle to find their way in a traditional and patriarchal Igboland increasingly influenced—even disrupted, as symbolized by disease or natural disasters—by western values and behavior. *This Is Lagos* (1971) reflects traditional and colonial tensions; *Wives at War* (1986), traditional, colonial, and post-colonial. Brenda F. Berrian suggests that Nwapa “reinvents the African woman” in *One is Enough* by disproving that a woman must have a husband to attain respect and success, even self-realization (“Reinvention” 54). Four different versions of that new woman appear in *Women Are Different*.

*This Is Lagos and Other Stories* includes a number of narratives in which men and women and children and their parents make many adjustments as they live in a world of both traditional and western cultures. For example, in “The Traveller,” a young man

sees a former classmate many years later and immediately wants her to have a quick sexual relationship with him. When the young woman says no, he is surprised. Both individuals have changed due to age and education, but his expectations of wanting the woman to submit to him without getting to know him bothers her. His assumptions, she feels, indicate that he does not recognize that a woman may have a moral code and respect for herself. “The Road to Benin” and “This Is Lagos” depict young people who have gone to school and learned western values and habits. The young man in “The Road to Benin” disrespects his mother when he returns home from school by asking her to serve his friends and him beer in the family home; he also gets arrested for drugs and needs the family to pay his fine. His mother is deeply shocked by such behavior that demonstrates a lack of respect for the mother, the female figure. Similarly, the young woman in “This Is Lagos,” like Efuru and contrary to Nigerian tradition, decides to marry without consulting her family, and a year later the couple still has not been to visit her parents. This collection, then, like Nwapa’s earlier works portrays women who “voice their frustrations, pains, and joys. . . . They assert themselves through their determination to take charge of their lives; they attempt to control their destinies as far as that is possible, given the odds against them” (Horne 442).

Fifteen years later the collection *Wives at War* focuses upon the kinds of suffering women endure and the types of adjustments they make during the Biafra War. There is a sense, however, that the word “war” is also metaphoric, to include struggles between men and women in relationships and a cultural war between women and their families. For example, “Mission to Lagos” focuses upon a young Igbo woman who has fallen in love with a white man, but is afraid to marry him because of the traditional views held by her

family members; “The Chief’s Daughter” portrays an educated daughter who breaks cultural tradition by marrying without her father’s permission rather than running the family business as her father has hoped. “Wives at War” explains the difficulties women experience during the civil war when they realize the kind of propaganda they have been given and begin to discover more about the dangers surrounding their families and the town. The women also attack the leaders for not respecting their remarkable efforts, such as cooking for the soldiers and caring for the sick. “Certain Death” portrays the harsh realities of war for the women. The main character loses her sister-in-law, nieces, and nephews in an aerial raid on the village. Her husband is in America and has no plans to return to Nigeria or Biafra at the time. Thus, she has only her grieving brother left, and the military wants to conscript him into the army. This woman pays a young man, whose family badly needs money, to take her brother’s place.

Nwapa’s fourth novel, *Women Are Different*, focuses upon four women who meet as young girls in grammar boarding school, follows their very different paths in adulthood, and concludes with the grown women reflecting upon their past experiences. Kolawole refers to *One is Enough* and *Women Are Different* as works that express a new reality—“the dilemma of the westernized African women, which has often created a divided self” and believes that this new reality is being resolved (159). I concur with Kolawole’s statement that the female characters of these works “search for and [demand] self respect, dignity, self assertion, and new moral values in a quest for redefinition and self esteem” (160). The fact that a civil war has occurred and changed some ways of life deeply affects the choices that the four protagonists of *Women Are Different* make. Three

of them marry and have children, but none of the marriages last. One character, Rose, never marries or has children, but is quite successful in her career.

Each woman's life tells a different story of a post-colonial world marred for years by civil war. For instance, Agnes interrupts her education beyond secondary school because her parents have selected a husband for her to marry. Gossiping women at her wedding refer to people who will "sell their daughters" (53) and describe the husband as an "impostor," actually a drug dealer pretending to be a medical doctor. After years of pretending to be a good wife and giving birth to four children, Agnes registers for advanced classes to obtain a college degree; and, when her husband objects, she threatens to reveal that he is having an affair with her stepmother. This dysfunctional marriage ends with Agnes finding a lover, leaving her husband, receiving a degree from the University, and becoming a teacher with her own apartment and car.

Dora marries a young man whom she met in grammar school, becomes a nurse, and eventually opens a bakery. Her husband refuses to work with her in the bakery, but works (for the Registry) in the High Court and accepts bribes, and then abruptly decides to go to England to study law. After managing to support her family by herself through the Biafra War, Dora locates her husband in Germany living with a German woman. She returns to Aba and obtains a divorce by traditional native law and custom so she can move on with her life.

Comfort, the most unique of the four girls, who never listens to rules but makes her own as she goes along, cautions Dora, Rose, and Agnes never to really get emotionally involved with a male, never invest everything in one person, and plan to marry for money, not love. She plans "to live life fully" and if a man cannot maintain the

standards she wants, “[she] will be on the move” (30). Rose, on the other hand, is the obedient one who takes Christian teachings very seriously, graduates from the University of London with a diploma in Education, and teaches math in Nigeria, eventually becoming the Head Education Officer at Queen’s College. Romantically, however, despite several courtships and even a pregnancy of several months, Rose never marries or has children.

At the end of the novel, when the four women come together to discuss their choices in life, they are satisfied with some choices but not all of them. Agnes and Dora accept their failed marriages, but are not pleased with the moral and economic choices their children are making, such as leaving husbands, moving in with other married men, and selling drugs. Comfort believes in loving and staying in a relationship until one gets what one needs and then moving on; she accuses Rose of holding onto missionary beliefs about life. Rose is somewhat disappointed because she never lived the married life. She thinks it was best to have married even if it does not work, but the others envy her freedom. Ironically, Rose gives the best advice to the group, especially to Dora. She advises that ““Whatever we do, we must not impose our will on our children. . . . We have to make allowances for all that happened when we were young children and now”” (111). She acknowledges that the young people of the second generation have their own set of rules just as their parents had and no doubt are experimenting with ways of life just as their parents have experimented. At this point, the women are trying to make peace with their past experiences and choices in life. Their speech and actions demonstrate that Igbo society as well as Nigeria has changed given Christianity, European education, post-colonialism, and the Biafra Civil War. Both men and women display actions strange to

other Nigerians. There is less communal respect for each other. In particular, Nwapa's strong "Igbo heroines pull from both the traditional and Western cultures and create a new world in which social values, attitudes, and their contradictions can be evaluated from various angles" (Berrian, "In Memoriam" 998).

*Never Again and The Lake Goddess*

In two of Nwapa's novels gender issues are secondary to, on the one hand, the horrors of warfare and, on the other, to the search for spiritual survival and healing. Nwapa, even though focusing on the perils of war and its aftermath, still emphasizes the importance of women, not only at this difficult time, but in society in general. *Never Again*, an account of the Biafra War based on Nwapa's own experiences, presents a war-torn Ugwuta in which propaganda misleads the people, any questioning of military or governmental decisions is considered treachery, and death—and madness and disease—seem to be everywhere. The half-crazed narrator, Kate, struggles to survive so she can tell the world what it means "to be at war—a civil war at that, a war that was to end all wars. I wanted to tell them that reading it in books was nothing at all" (1). Many people believe only the goddess of the lake, Uhamiri, can save the town, Ugwuta, from destruction. When a boat of Nigerians sink in the lake, the event appears to support the people's belief that the lake will save them and also complicates their relationship to Christianity and indigenous Igbo beliefs. As in Nwapa's earlier and later novels, Uhamiri—and thus woman—plays a nurturing and healing role in a world of intense psychosocial troubles and pain. Ogunyemi describes the remarkable achievement of *Never Again* and the wonder of its narrator:

At least, one person will survive the holocaust to tell the story—the maddened woman whose narrative in the open confessional of the autobiographical mode disseminates knowledge of the bloodiness and wastefulness of war. She heals herself magically by dissociating herself from lying propaganda and telling her war story—a female version which has hitherto gone unheard—that more women and children die or are injured in wars than male soldiers. Telling her story generates hearing voices. (13)

In a 1995 interview with Marie Umeh, Nwapa suggests that women could not ever be restricted again after the Nigerian Civil War. During the war, she explains, women “saw themselves playing roles that they never thought they would play. They saw themselves across the enemy lines, trying to trade, trying to feed their children and caring for their husbands.” They also, however, began to enjoy “their economic independence. So what they tolerated before the war, they could no longer tolerate” after the war (“Poetics”26). As Nwapa evaluates the gender situation in Nigeria after the war, she is describing parts of her 1981 and 1986 novels, *One is Enough* and *Women Are Different*. If a woman discovered her marriage did not give her “satisfaction” or that her in-laws were worrying because there were no children, “whatever the case may be,” the woman could “just decide to leave that family and go to the big city,” to Lagos, an urban world in which the woman was “anonymous, where nobody seemed to care what [she did] for a living” (26).

In her last novel, *The Lake Goddess* (unpublished), however, Nwapa proposes a very different path for woman in a destabilized and painful world. Calling the work a

woman-centered radical novel, *Amadiwe* sees it as the most religious of Nwapa's novels with a radical feminist reconstruction of woman's place in Igbo traditional religious beliefs, particularly emphasizing the idea of spiritual submission (517-18). The novel covers many issues, but of special importance are the father-daughter relationship, tensions between both tradition and modernity and between Christianity and indigenous Igbo beliefs, and the pursuit of happiness and contentment. Ona, the major character, has a stronger more balanced relationship with her father than with her mother. She can be described as a person with a mental illness who refuses to submit to society's traditional expectations if they do not suit her needs or as an individual with the gift of prophecy who receives dreams and visions from Uhamiri, whom she is destined to serve. Early in the novel, Ona's mother, referred to as a Christian fanatic since she totally rejects Igbo tradition, and other women convince the midwife to fake Ona's circumcision while the women perform an elaborate ritual celebrating the procedure. (It is important for the community to believe the circumcision has occurred; otherwise, no man will want to marry Ona.) Later, the product of a mission school, Ona does marry and have three children, who bring her neither happiness nor satisfaction. The tensions of her life are finally resolved when her family and the community recognize her divine calling: another wife is found for her husband and Ona's parents raise the three children. Ona herself, as disciple of the powerful but kind Lake Goddess, becomes mother, nurturer, and healer of the community, "a higher responsibility [than motherhood] since it signifies an ennobling duty and calls for Ona to devote her time and energies both to act as spokesperson for the Lake Goddess and to mediate between the Lake Goddess and the people" (Umeh, "Finale" 117). Linda Strong-Leek argues that Ona "never completely conforms simply to

be accepted, nor does she allow society or her family to totally dictate her life” (542). She believes Ona’s life answers Efuru’s earlier question about why women worship Uhamiri. Uhamiri (or Ogbuide or Mammywater)—an important figure in all of Nwapa’s works clearly wants all women to have voices. Further, as Ogunyemi explains,

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)

#### Coda

Flora Nwapa (1931-93) was the first West African woman to publish a novel in English and to be published internationally. She was perhaps the first author to attempt to develop authentic and individual identities for African women; she also undertook to demarcate “the important role women play in the transmission of culture from one generation to the next” (Wilentz, “Afracentrism” 43).

Nwapa’s readership has always been problematic. She never lived in the United States or England for any extended period of time even though her primary audience has been western feminists (Gardner qtd. In Nnaemeka 103). With her works regarded as “minor” or “Third World,” they were not distributed internationally by her first publishers. In addition, the people who might have constituted her largest reading public, Nigerians themselves, could often not afford to buy her books in the 1980s and 1990s. In

fact, Nwapa became the first female African publisher, establishing Tana Press, in an attempt to distribute her books herself (Umeh, "Poetics" 22).

Although all critics acknowledge the greatest influence upon Nwapa's writings as being the voices of her literary foremothers in the oral tradition, Nwapa also spoke, in a 1995 interview, of the influence of Chinua Achebe, Ernest Hemingway, and Charles Dickens on her work.

She spoke with passion about her writing, explaining

I write because I want to write. I write because I have a story to tell. There is this urge always to write and put things down. I do not presume that I have a mission. If you continue to read my books, maybe you could find the mission. But I continue to write because I feel fulfilled. I feel satisfied in what I'm doing. (Umeh, "Poetics" 126)

Nwapa denied "any autobiographical elements" in her works, declaring "None! I am not like Efurū, neither am I like Idu, neither am I Amaka in any way" (Umeh, "Poetics" 126).

Critics have reacted very differently to Nwapa's fiction. Some emphasize what they see as the highly negative qualities of the western style Nigerian life she describes: the destruction of traditional beliefs and behavior, the disruptive influence of Christianity and western customs and mores, and the chaos and decadence ensuing. This dissertation has instead emphasized the positive changes that have occurred in West African women's lives, often resulting in positive changes for the whole community. Hopefully future studies will focus upon the nature of dysfunctional marriages, the role and flight of husbands, father-daughter relationships, and mother-son relationships. Much also needs to be done on the role of the narrator in Nwapa's fiction: how consistent the narrator's

voice is both within and between different works and to what extent the narrator's voice reflects that of Nwapa, the implied author. Another area calling for extensive work is reader response to Nwapa's work, especially when there is a major difference in culture between reader and characters. Can a reader become an "inoutsider"? And as Nwapa's narrator permits characters immersed in traditional ways to negotiate choices and changes, how will the reader become a part of the negotiation? Most interestingly, how aware can the Christian, western reader be of the nuances and complexities of Igbo culture? Finally, since male voices tend to be less defined in Nwapa's works, who will speak for these silent ones perhaps more puzzled than the women who are developing their voices as Igbo patriarchy and western patriarchy encounter each other.

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### About the Author

Mary Mears was raised in Virginia, but she has lived in Georgia since graduating from college. She holds a B.A. degree in English Education from Virginia State University and a M.A. degree in English Literature from Clark Atlanta University. Ms. Mears began her teaching career in the Atlanta public schools. From 1980-84, she taught at Clark Atlanta University; from 1984 to the present, she has been teaching English, Reading, and African-American Literature at Macon State College in Macon, Georgia. Ms. Mears' special interests include African Literature and working with the Southeast Model African Union (SEMAU). Over a number of years she has presented many papers at conferences of the College Language Association.