CHILDLESSNESS IN FLORA NWAPA’S *ONE IS ENOUGH* AND
FEMI OSOFISAN’S *WURAOLA, FOREVER*

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BY

NWANKWOR, CHIMA C.

PG/MA/08/49154

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES

FACULTY OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this dissertation is an independent study carried out by Nwankwor, Chima C. Registration Number, PG/MA/08/49154 of the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and that this work has not been presented in part or in full for the award of diploma or degree in this or any other university.

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DR. M. A. EZUGU                                             REV.FR. PROF. A.N. AKWANYA
Supervisor                                               Head of Department

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External Examiner
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to:

Almighty God, the meaning and the joy of my life.

My lovely parents, Chief and Lolo Simeon-Justina Nwankwor.

My lovely brother and mentor Dr. Iks Nwankwor and my wonderful siblings.

And to all victims of childlessness in our society.
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ABSTRACT
The ugly and humiliating treatment meted out to childless women in African societies and the subsequent misrepresentation of these women characters in the literary works pose a great problem and raise a need for this research. The image created of these childless women in African fiction is so deplorable such that they are subjected to serious oppression, humiliation and even made to know that they have not much stake in the society. These women indeed suffer the pains of both cultural and societal injustices which stem from the patriarchal domineering nature of African societies, which all through history have been unfavourable to women. Using Flora Nwapa’s novel, *One is Enough* and Osofisan’s *Wuraola, forever*, the study examines the various traumatic experiences that childless women pass through in gender-biased societies like that of Amaka in *One is Enough* and Wura, in *Wuraola, forever*. It is the attempt to redeem the image of childless African women characters, whose status have been poorly debased in literary works that this research is set to achieve. The research therefore, calls for a review of attitude, thought, and approach towards childless women whose condition demand understanding and consolation.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The undue victimization and societal humiliation experienced by childless women in traditional societies and in some African novels inspired this study. The image created of these characters is very deplorable even in African literature of the past and present. These unfortunate childless women are often vilified, victimized and even compelled to leave their matrimonial homes. Of course, women have often in every aspect of their lives, be it social, economic, educational, political or marital, not been well treated when compared with their male counterparts. This unfair treatment and prejudice stem from the patriarchal nature of African societies which blame every shortcoming in the families on the womenfolk. It is from this perspective that we are going to study Childlessness in the novels of Flora Nwapa and Femi Osofisan.

The clamour for posterity and the quest for increase in human capital have caused a lot of anxiety among married couples in Africa. The anxiety wanes with the appearance of the first pregnancy while signs of infertility after few years of marriage heighten the tension. The reason for this is that in African societies, the expectation of every family is procreation. Africans value children through marriages; for this reason, childlessness remains a lasting stigma in the lives of couples, especially the women.

Childlessness, therefore, is one major problem that disintegrates marriages especially in Africa and puts some couples in perpetual agony. In the Western world, for instance, marriages break down mainly for reasons of infidelity, lack of trust, and lack of support from either partner,
and so on. However, unlike in the Western world, the major factor that breaks marriages in African societies is childlessness. This phenomenon is often blamed on the woman who is considered the object of procreation. Childlessness therefore appears to be the greatest plague that can befall any married couple in Africa.

Childless African women not only face family hatred but also societal scorn, mockery and isolation. This stigma shatters their joy and renders them hopeless in the family where they are meant to attain fulfilment as wives. Above all, childlessness threatens the bond that unites a wife with her husband thereby reducing her to the status of an outcast in her matrimonial home. It is, therefore, the root of most family crises and unrests in African societies till date.

This ugly situation of childless women in Africa has inspired Flora Nwapa and Femi Osofisan, who use their novels, One is Enough, and Wuraola, Forever respectively to x-ray the anomalies and injustices meted to childless wives. Through their novels, these feminists expose the emotional and psychological trauma faced by childless women.

1.2 Preamble

Childlessness is a terrible situation in African matrimonial homes. It is such a topical issue that attracts the attention of every member of the society. This is because of the social, emotional, spiritual and psychological trauma it generates on both the couple and the extended family. It has raised a lot of dust that medical experts, churches, social workers, lawyers, literary artists and the entire society have joined in the campaign to address the problem and find solutions to it.

In her article, “African Motherhood-Myth and Reality”, Lauretta Ngcobo observes that “Marriage amongst Africans is mainly an institution for the control of procreation. Every woman is encouraged to marry and get children in order to express her womanhood to the full” (533).
This is because of the high premium placed on children as the symbol of family continuity and this accounts for the reason why procreation is considered the paramount and the primary purpose of any marriage contracted in Africa. For a man, it is a sacred duty towards his whole lineage to advance the family name. The failure to immortalize the ancestors, according to Ngcobo, is thus, a taboo and a shame that a man cannot bear.

In the past, childlessness was considered an irrevocable scourge that constitutes untold crises, havocs, instabilities and continuous unhappiness in several marriages. Today, many marriages collapse owing to childless. Separations and remarriages are occasioned by this particular problem of childlessness. Infidelities are rampant among childless couples as these couples often want to experiment their own fertility in another union or marriage. Low status or hidden contempt is accorded to childless couples and they have little or no say in the society.

As it is always the case in Africa societies, the woman always gets all the blame for childlessness in marriage, whether the cause is from her or not. According to Helen Chukwuma, in her article titled, “Voices and Choices”, “The female character in African fiction hitherto is a facile lack-lustre human being, the quiet member of a house-hold, content only to bear children, unfulfilled if she does not and handicapped if she bears only daughters” (131). In view of this, a childless marriage is generally recognized as ill-luck in the traditional African society. Basden accounts for this in his book, *Marriage Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, when he asserts that “A childless marriage is a source of serious disappointment and sooner or later leads to serious trouble between man and wife” (1). Often, a childless woman is considered a monster, a nuisance, a witch, and as someone who should be dispensed with in the family. She is subjected to societal mockery and isolation because of this singular problem. A common effect of a couple’s infertility usually leads to the expulsion of the woman from the husband’s house with or
without a formal divorce. A woman automatically loses her respect, value, and regard even among her womenfolk who should be more understanding and sympathetic. These undue vilifications, victimizations and injustices meted out to childless women attract the attentions of writers like Flora Nwapa, Femi Osofisan, Buchi Emecheta and others who through their novels challenge and satirize these hostile forces that make the world a hell for childless women.

In Flora Nwapa’s *One is Enough*, Amaka suffers untold humiliation, embarrassment, and oppression in the hands of her husband and mother-in-law because her marriage is bereft of children. Though she is not expelled like Wura, her life is made miserable in her marital home that she has to quit the marriage and vows never to remarry. In the same vein, Osofisan in *Wuraola, forever*, demonstrates that a childless woman is nothing but a monster and as such is treated with such disdain as a nuisance in her society. This is manifested in the cruel humiliating treatment meted out to Wura, the heroine of this novel simply because she is unable to bear a child for her husband. Not minding her kindness and virtues, Wura is subjected to societal mockery and eventually she faces the embarrassment of sudden expulsion from her marital home, while another woman is arranged to take her position as a wife.

Through the ugly experiences of these female characters on account of childlessness, Nwapa and Osofisan satirize the forces of oppression and injustice that enslave women in Africa and call for fair and humane treatment of the second gender especially in issues that demand societal understanding, sympathy and consolation for the woman. It is the attempt to analyze, interprete and give succour to childless African women, whose image has been poorly debased in literary works because of their misfortune that inspired this research.
1.3 Statement of the Problem

Female characters in African literature especially those in the novels under study are often victims of cultural and societal prejudices and hatred. Because they exist in a gender bias society and because their conditions are often interpreted from a purely patriarchal perspective, these female characters are often found to be struggling against the pains of both cultural and patriarchal injustice. This study, therefore, adds to the existing wealth of knowledge in African literature by exploring the traumatic effects of childlessness on African women characters. It equally addresses the obnoxious cultural and social norms that threaten the cohesion, love and happiness that should have cemented a happy relationship of husbands and wives.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

This research intends to examine the various implications of childlessness on married couples.

- It examines the extent to which societal scorn, isolation and victimization affect the psychological and emotional stability of childless women.
- The study equally looks into the various ways these childless female characters challenge and break off from unjust tradition that exploit, humiliate and isolate them in the society, and how they achieve in the end, a measure of independence and self actualization in life.
- Above all, the research calls for societal review of attitude, thought and approach towards childless women who suffer from social and psychological disadvantages in a patriarchal society like that of Amaka in Nwapa’s One is Enough and Wura in Osofisan’s Wuraola, forever.
• The study intends to create awareness among men and women (both married and unmarried) that childlessness should no longer disintegrate the marriage of couples so long as amicable solutions are harmoniously sought by those involved.

1.5 Significance of the Study

(a) The study has both practical and theoretical significance to the general public especially social workers, psychologists, feminist activists, sociologists, legal practitioners, religious and guidance counsellors as well as literary artists in understanding societal notion of childlessness and establishing true ground for proper appreciation of childless couples in African cultural milieu.

(b) The awareness being created by this study will eventually, if adopted by the society, put an end to the seeming endless trauma of so called childless couples and give them a sense of belonging in the society that isolate them and make the world a hell for them.

1.6 Scope of the Study

Basically, the study is focused on African prose works with particular reference to Flora Nwapa’s One is Enough and Femi Osofisan’s Wuraola, forever as portraying the contemporary Igbo and Yoruba cultural settings in Nigeria.

1.7 Methodology

In the course of this research, we shall embark basically on library research. Equally, we shall consult the Internet for wider information on the topic. Above all, childlessness is a problem freely discussed in many social circles with the result that our own knowledge of the problem will also be useful.
1.8 Theoretical Framework

This research is situated within the Feminist Literary Theory which evolves as a reaction to women’s marginalization, oppression, exploitation, and humiliation. Feminist movement was launched officially in 1792 with a book published by Mary Wollstone Craft titled, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). This was followed by another publication by John Stuart Mills in 1869 which was titled, *The Subjection of Women*. These two texts were serious efforts to advance the course for the social, legal and cultural freedom and equality of women with their male counterparts. These were followed by various activities of women suffragette movement in the 20th Century. Later in 1929, Virginia Woolf came up with an important feminist document, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), a work that continued to address women authors who suffered from economic, social, educational and cultural disadvantages in patriarchal societies where the male folk prevent the female ones from realizing their productive and creative potentials. Based on their utmost commitment to women’s case and condition, Mary Wollstonecraft and Virginia Woolf stand out as strong exponents of feminism.

As a literary theory, feminism is applied in the analysis of literary texts and it seeks to address the misrepresentation of women in literary works. Going by this account, feminism basically is concerned with women and the sad experiences they pass through in a gender-biased society. Thus, according to Tuula Gordon, “Feminism is concerned with redefining the world on the basis of the location and experiences of women, noting their oppression and subordination” (37). Gordon’s proposition seeks to address the many injustices perpetuated against women and prompts the readers to see women as possible initiators of a new world view or as reconstructors of their own worlds. For Helen Chukwuma, feminism is a reaction to an action which is subjugating and negative. Equally Udumekwu has it that feminism is committed to righting the
wrongs against women. Boyce Davies in examining African feminism adopts Filomina Steady’s view as a point of departure, thus: “True feminism is an abnegation of male protection and a determination to be resourceful and reliant” Literature and Black Aesthetics (139). This notion reveals the efforts by African women and women characters in breaking loose from the shackles of oppression and exploitation in their patriarchal society, thereby striving for self assertion and fulfilment.

Feminist literary theory in essence, aims at defining and establishing a feminist literary canon which seeks to re-assess and re-interpret literature from a feminist perspective. It tends to unveil the prejudices inherent in the appreciation of literary works. This theory, among other things, traces a woman’s identity by challenging the patriarchal values that deny women equal opportunities with their male counterparts. It seeks to oppose the order that sees women as ‘inferior’ beings, incapable of playing active roles in families and in societies. In its place however, it proposes that authentic, active, and heroic roles be given to female characters that have been relegated to perform passive and irrelevant roles in the society and in literatures.

Feminism adopts different shapes in different parts of the world. Eurocentric feminism for instance, does not only seek equality but dominion over the male folk. On the contrary, the Afrocentric feminism calls for revolution against the patriarchal domineering nature of African men folk. It advocates fair treatment and proper representation of female characters in literary works and demand certain basic rights such as the right to education, choice of marriage partner and fair hearing of their positions in social, political, economic and legal matters. These women according to Akachi Ezigbo are not revolting against the male folk, per se, but against societal norms and laws which have made them men’s appendages thereby depriving them of their existence as authentic individuals (121). In essence, African feminists are requesting for better
treatment, recognition, self-assertion and the opportunity to live their lives as individuals independent of their menfolk. (Ezigbo, Akachi. *A Companion to the Novel*, 1998: 121). It is from the African feminist doctrine therefore, that we draw our analysis for this study.

Consequently, writers like Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Mariama Ba, Zaynab Alkali, Femi Osofisan, among others try to redeem the image, status and role assigned to womenfolk in African fiction. They not only exalt womanhood but also show concern for the material and spiritual well-being of the society of which women belong. This theory however, asserts its relevance in this study as it seeks to address the many injustices, affronts as well as cultural and societal norms that enslave childless women in male dominated societies like that of Amaka in *One is Enough* and Wura in *Wuraola, forever*. 
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Definition of Key Concepts

For a better understanding of the topic, definitions of key concepts like, Childlessness, Barrenness, and African marriage will be reviewed.

**Childlessness** – is the term that refers to a person or couple that does not have any child. It is the inability to bear children due to some biological problems or as a matter of choice. In a broad sense of it, Childlessness is the inability of a couple to achieve conception and reproduction when the marriage has been consummated.

There are two categories of Childlessness namely; Voluntary Childlessness and Involuntary Childlessness. Voluntary childlessness involves a situation where a couple postpones child bearing deliberately while Involuntary Childlessness occurs due to some biological, hormonal, emotional or psychological problems peculiar to the couple or any of them.

**Barrenness**, on the other hand, is the state (usually of a woman) of having no children or being unable to conceive and have children. It is the state of being unable to produce offspring; in a woman, it is an inability to conceive and bear children. For Africans, it is the quality of being unproductive, sterile or unfruitful.

**Marriage**, according to *Encyclopaedia Britannica* Vol. 7 is defined as a legally and socially sanctioned union between one or more husbands and one or more wives that accords status to their offspring and is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs and attitudes that prescribe the rights and duties of the partners. John Mbiti in his book, *African Traditional Religion* defines Marriage as:
The focus of existence. It is the point where all members of a given
community meet; the departed, the living and those yet to be born. All
the dimensions of time meet here and the whole drama of history is
repeated, renewed and revitalized (53).

**African fiction or Literature** implies “Creative writing in which an African setting is
authentically handled or to which experiences originating in Africa are integral” (4) (Opata and
Ohaegbu, *Major Themes in African Literature*).

### 2.2 African Worldview on the Issue of Childlessness in Marriage

An African proverb says that children are the adornment of the home. This is one
major reason why Africans marry. Generally, Africans believe that each individual, both male
and female, is a channel for the transmission of life, and that it is wrong to interrupt that
that “The basis of marriage among Africans implies the transfer of a woman’s fertility to the
husband’s family group” (533). This notion stands out as the main and primary objective of
Africans in marriage.

Equally while emphasizing the primacy of procreation in marriages, Henry Ekwuruke, in
his article, “The Predicaments of Childless African Couples” quotes Jomo Keyatta thus: “The
desire to have children is deep rooted in the heart of both man and woman and on entering into
matrimonial union, they regard the procreation of children as their first and most sacred duty”
(2). Ngcobo also submits to this notion when she remarks that, “Marriage among Africans is
mainly an institution for the control of procreation. Every woman is encouraged to marry and get children in order to express her womanhood to the full” (533).

For Africans, marriage is a special and an essential status in the life of any man and woman while children are the adornment of that status (marriage). For instance, in Africa, a male person is not considered a man at any age if he does not get married. In Cameroun, Feldman-Savelsbeng reports that infertility is a ground for divorce among Bangengle tribe, causing a woman to lose her access to land distributed by her husband. Where she escapes divorce, an infertile woman receives fewer gifts from her husband and is abandoned at old age with no child to till the ground for her. In Egypt, women go through a complicated ritual known as Kabsa (a form of fertility ritual) just in attempt to overcome infertility. In the Zulu tribe of South Africa, an unmarried woman is not entitled to build a house even if she has the whole money; rather, she remains in her parents’ house even when they die. In the same vein, among the Ekin of South-Western Nigeria, infertile women are treated as outcasts and their bodies are buried on the outskirts of the town with those of demented persons. Among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, childlessness is seen not only as a misfortune, but as a deviance and a curse such that childless couples have no say in the society. Basden rightly observes that in the Igbo society, “men and women are mocked if they remain unmarried”. According to him, a childless marriage is universally recognized as ‘chi ojoo’ (a misfortune). Equally, the Yoruba of Western Nigeria perceive childlessness to be caused by evil spirits, ancestral curses and promiscuity.

In a nutshell, Childlessness is generally viewed as an evil omen, a taboo and a curse in African societies such that childless women are highly stigmatized.
2.3 Importance of Children in the Family

Children are the blessings of every generation such that any generation denied of children is seen as a cursed generation. The reason for this is that the continuity of every race, generation or family depends largely on the offspring of such race or generation. Xavier Leon-Dufour observes that sterility goes against the command of the creator who desires fruitfulness and life.

In her article, “Motherhood Concept among Igbo Women”, W.J Kalu remarks that: “Marital instability is often related to the absence or presence of children from the union” (66). This notion presupposes that children play a very important role in the union of a man and a woman. The bulk of studies on childlessness have observed that children not only bring joy but foster the love between a man and his wife. They advance the family size and enable the continuity of a lineage. Children serve as wonderful companion to their parents and bridge the feeling of isolation and loneliness among married couples. They assist at home and work and serve as powerful security at old age. In her article, “Women, Love And Marriage in the Igbo Traditional Novel: A Paradigm of Pragmatic And Dynamic Living”, Rose Acholonu maintains that, “The issue of procreation is the essence of corporate living, for while its presence means the propagation of life both for the individual and his society, its absence naturally signifies the extinction of a lineage, a race” (196). In this sense, therefore, children determine the continuity of any race, society or family, no wonder Africans place high premium on them as symbol of continuity and sustenance.

Obianuju Amamgbo, while recounting the essence of children in marital union reports in her article, “Which Way Nigeria (3)—Childlessness in Marriage” that:

Children occupy the pivotal position in Igbo marriage. To a woman, the birth of a child is a practical vindication of her womanhood. Children are
the pride to their parents, a joy and inspiration in the family and the essence or foundation to every union (Amamgbo, 2009).

We can deduce from the above studies that children, as Amamgbo would have it, are “the salt of the earth or the light of the world”. In the African context therefore, children occupy a very important position as the nucleus of every marital union. They add value and fulfilment to marriages, such that they are considered the indispensable members of the family. On account of this, therefore, childless situation in marriages constitute the bane of marital joy, peace and stability.

2.4 The Place of Childless Women in Marriages

The role of women and of feminine identity has been historically and traditionally constructed around motherhood. Child birth is thus, regarded in most cultures as the rebirth of the woman. This is so because it gives the feeling of being complete to both the woman and the man. Thus, while demonstrating the place children occupy in the life of a married woman in her in-laws family, Celestine Obi remarks that:

The position of a wife in her husband’s family remains shaky and unpredictable until she begets a child. She becomes really secured after the birth of a male child. At this stage, she is specially welcome as a responsible house wife in her husband’s extended family and Umunna… the birth of the child gives her the title of wife (1).

Helen Chukwuma affirms that in marriage, women attain status worth of womanhood and come to be respected by the society, but childlessness in marriage constitutes the bane of their happiness. Often women are blamed and despised for their not giving children to their husbands.
Consequent upon this, the throbbing of the fruitlessness of their marriage is not just because they are denied of the fruit of the womb but mostly because of their placement in the society. In the African milieu, childless women are not only jeered at, but are made to realize that they do not essentially belong to the womenfolk. According to Hyer, S.J. in his article, “Women’s Experiences with Involuntary Childlessness” “All the infertile women experienced negative social consequences including marital instability, stigmatization and abuse” (6). He posits that these findings demonstrate that infertility can have a serious effect on both the psychological well-being and social status of women in the developing world (Journal of Human Reproduction. Vol.17 (6)).

Considering the honour accruing to a woman on attaining motherhood, and the disadvantages she faces when she fails to reproduce, Helen Chukwuma reports in her article, “Voices and Choices: The Feminist Dilemma in Four African Novels” that

The problem of the marriage institution in a feministic situation is the limitation it imposes on the woman. A wife loses her individuality and when she becomes a mother, her power and status are reflected in her children. If she has no children, any meaningful status evades her (Literature And Black Aesthetics (139)).

This notion is thus manifested in the life of Nnu-Ego in Emecheta’s The Joys of Motherhood, where Nnu Ego is deprived of every comfort and peace in her first marriage to Amatokwu simply because she is unable to produce a child. Her ugly experiences at Amatokwu’s house make her to submit to Nnaife, her second husband, who is able to make her a mother. Though she has no love for Nnaife, their marriage lasts because he is the only man that makes her to
attain the status of motherhood, a status that accords honour to a woman in her society. We confront a similar case in Nwapa’s *Efuru* where the protagonist, Efuru, passes through hurdles in her two marriages on account of her barrenness. Efuru is made to suffer psychological and cultural humiliation simply because she is childless. Despite her virtues, fortune and beauty, she is abandoned by her two husbands and is even accused of adultery by her second husband on his return. All these humiliations and false accusations are mounted on her simply because she lacks children. In the same vein, Pokuwaa, in Asare Konadu’s *A Woman in Her Prime* is devoid of happiness in her marriage because of her inability to bear a child. As a barren woman, she suffers the stigma, agony and humiliation that are associated with childlessness in her society. She equally suffers reproach from her relations and neighbours because she is denied the pride of womanhood. In her desperate effort at getting a child, Pokuwaa divorces her first two husbands and marries the third one, Kwado Fordwuo, a man whose first wife has had two children, yet to no avail. In her travail therefore, she consults and offers sacrifices to various deities and even to their great god, Tano, yet her problem remained unresolved. When her situation becomes so frustrating, she gives up hope, rejects her mother’s interferences and cuts off with sacrifices and herbs and decides to accept her fate the way she sees it.

Margaret Mead gives this descriptive image of a childless woman in this pitiable manner:

The figure of the witch who kills living things, who strokes the throat of children until they die, whose very glance causes cows to lose their calves and fresh milk to curdle as it stands, is a statement of human fear of what can be done to mankind by a woman who denies or is forced to deny child bearing and child cherishing (2).
In Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Ekwefi, among the wives of Okonkwo is the only one who is living in agony and disdain because she is childless. From all these accounts, we cannot but affirm with Helen Chukwuma that “women in the cultural context achieve status through marriage and become fulfilled through motherhood” (133).
CHAPTER THREE

THE TRAUMATIC EFFECTS OF CHILDLESSNESS IN NWAPA’S ONE IS ENOUGH AND OSOFISAN’S WURAOLA, FOREVER

3.1 Societal Perception of Childlessness in Marriage.

Among the Onitsha community in Nwapa’s One is Enough and Wura’s community in Osofisan’s Wuraola, forever, there is a keen belief in procreation and posterity of the family name such that not having one’s own children is considered a big failure in life. Literature, no doubt, is a mirror of the world around us. This is why Nwapa, in One is Enough, tries to x-ray Amaka’s plight in the society she belongs to. Aloysius Ohaegbu in his article, “Defining African Literature”, highlights this role of literature:

all literatures are in a way criticism of the society which it mirrors, of the human condition obtainable in the society, and even of the writer himself. The writer cannot help exposing the ugly in man and society. This is why much of African literature is a deploration of the harsh and inhuman conditions in which the African lives- poverty and misery, political oppression, excesses of the rich, liquidation of humane African traditional values, exploitation and all sorts of injustices (9) (Major Themes in African Literature).

In One is Enough, the Onitsha community believes that a woman without a child would have her old age doomed to loneliness as there would be no child to care for her or mourn her death. This belief is made manifest when Amaka’s mother advises her after her shattered marriage with Obiora (on account of childlessness), and her subsequent decision to remain single after that ugly experience saying:
But remember, make men friends and start thinking of having children. Marriage or no marriages, have children. Your 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 (10 -11).

From her advice, Amaka’s mother demonstrates that the quest for children and family posterity are the goals of every family in the community. She induces her daughters to find men who will make them pregnant within or outside marriage. For her, a man is worthless if he is unable to impregnate his wife.

Indeed, children are so highly valued among the Onitsha community that procreation is considered the one and only reason for marriage. To them, children are blessings to the community, the pride of every woman and the strength of every race. This is why Amaka’s dream as a teenager had been to get married and have children of her own. This notion is reflected in Amaka’s Aunt’s advice to her when she is tossed around by irresponsible suitors: “What is important is not marriage as such, but children, being able to have children, being a mother. A marriage is no marriage without children” (8). This clamour for children as symbols of family posterity, the pride of a woman and the bedrock of marriages, make the people of Onitsha in Nwapa’s One is Enough to think of childlessness as evil and the greatest misfortune that can befall any couple.

In like manner, in Osofisan’s Wuraola, forever, we confront another society that attaches much importance to child bearing as the ultimate goal in marriage. In Wura’s society, marriage is no marriage at all if it is bereft of children. Like the Onitsha community of Amaka, Wura’s community believes that a woman without a child has nothing to be remembered for and will have her days doomed to loneliness. Wura recalls that a childless woman leaves nothing behind.
when she dies and so can easily be forgotten unlike a mother who has her children behind to
mourn her and be remembered through them. In fact, childless women are treated with great
contempt as people who deliberately deny the unborn children their right of existence. They are
seen as evil people and branded as “witches” no matter how virtuous they might be.

3.2 The Traumatic Effects of Childlessness in the Families in One Is Enough
and Wuraola, Forever

Trauma is a condition of serious emotional or psychological stress. It is an extremely
distressing experience that causes severe emotional shock which may result to a lasting
psychological pain or torture. Generally, trauma has a negative effect such that people fear and
abhor situations that subject them to traumatic conditions. Situations of distress, sadness,
disappointment, loss, deprivation, isolation, scorn, dejection and even barrenness can lead to
serious psychological and emotional breakdown in any man or woman.

In One is Enough, childlessness is one issue that leads to serious traumatic stress and
breakdown in the marriage of Amaka and Obiora. This issue not only constitutes emotional pain
to the husband and his wife but also to the mother and father in law. This is the case with Onitsha
community in Nwapa’s One is Enough, where child bearing and rearing are considered the
primary and most valuable objective in marriage. It is this inordinate desire for children or child
bearing as the one and only value of a woman that subjects Amaka in One is Enough, to
perpetual slavery in her matrimonial home. It is the same issue that shatters her joy, peace and
marriage at the time when she needs most the care and comfort of marital life.

In fact, this novel captures the pitiable condition of a good natured and industrious woman
who is beset with childlessness in a society that sees child-bearing as the only value attached to
womanhood. In the novel, the author presents us with Amaka’s marriage to Obiora which suffers a lot of emotional and psychological trauma because it is bereft of children. As a character, Amaka is portrayed as a very industrious woman, well educated, very respectful, humble, and a good wife to Obiora. Amaka has throughout her life desired and longed to marry and have children of her own, who would call her mother and a man she could call her own, love and cherish. To her, a woman’s history starts and ends with marriage and procreation. However, this aspiration hits the rock as Amaka confronts the problem of broken relationships at dawn.

Nevertheless, her hopes and aspiration to get pregnant immediately after marriage are thwarted as she waits for six years without any sign of ever conceiving. This situation of barrenness raises a lot of anxiety in Obiora’s family and eventually shatters the lovely and peaceful atmosphere that exists between Obiora and Amaka as well as the mother-in-law. The one time lovely and understanding husband of Amaka at this time becomes apprehensive over their childless situation. This fear and anxiety of losing his name and blocking the channel of family continuity on account of his wife’s barrenness affect Obiora’s frame of mind, his attitude and his love towards Amaka, the woman who has been a powerful succour to him at critical moments of his life.

Notably, Obiora’s sudden change and rash treatment of Amaka results to a great psychological and emotional trauma in the life of the poor woman, who at this point sees herself as an outcast in her matrimonial home. The first of such strange attitude is Obiora’s violation of the law of marital fidelity by indulging in illicit secret relationship with another woman, a relationship that results in two sons, and a situation that confirms Amaka as barren. Second is his secret marriage to this strange woman who had two issues for him without Amaka’s knowledge. Thirdly, Obiora conspires with his mother to inflict injury on Amaka. A pure case of this rash
treatment is demonstrated when Amaka reminds Obiora of her contribution in buying him a car, supplementing food money and other necessities at home, buying a plot of land for building a house as well as giving herself and her resources unreservedly to her husband. Instead of being appreciative of his wife’s love and care, Obiora is rather rash. He says to Amaka:

You are being senseless ... How many mouths were we feeding? You barren and senseless woman! You forget that you are childless. You would not raise your voice in this house if you were sensible. You should go about your business quietly and not offend anyone because if you do, one would be tempted to give you one or two home truths (19).

In a normal peaceful atmosphere, a childless woman gets consolation when the husband is understanding and bears the pains with her. Her only hope and sustenance is usually the husband’s love, support and defence against external attack on her. Conversely, in a situation where the husband turns his back on the childless woman, the pain is usually aggravated and can lead to depression, frustration and in extreme cases, to trauma and death of the woman. This is the situation that confronts Amaka when her one time lovely and caring husband becomes belligerent. In fact, an account in the novel has it that, at the sudden announcement of Obiora’s extra-marital relationship with another woman resulting in two children, and the declaration that the same woman is coming to take over Amaka’s position as a wife, Amaka is utterly devastated. She begins to tremble. She could no longer control her emotions. She holds on to the bed, so she does not faint (14). This sudden heart-breaking news leaves the poor woman in a serious emotional quagmire as she pines in sorrow.

Despite this heavy blow on Amaka, Obiora does not feel for her, instead he goes further to threaten Amaka saying: “but let me warn you that if you step out of this house in protest when
my wife and my two sons arrive, you stay out forever. You must not come back” (20). In fact, Obiora’s sudden inconsiderate disposition towards Amaka, his harsh attitude to her, as well as his infidelity to their matrimonial vows, worsen Amaka’s agony. Her lamentation therefore, is that, “God had deprived her of the greatest blessing bestowed on a woman, the joy of being a mother” (20). Thus, in her sorrow and humiliation on account of the new woman married to displace her as the legal wife of Obiora, Amaka expresses her depression to her husband saying:

    Congratulations. I thought that in this sort of thing, a wife, even a barren one should have been taken into confidence. It beats me how you should do all this behind my back, be involved with a woman, have sons by her, marry her without breathing a word to your wife. You have changed a good deal my husband (25 - 26).

Amaka’s plight at this point is not just a product of her childlessness alone but a pure proof of the stereotypical image painted of female characters in African literature. Here, Nwapa demonstrates that a woman is just a figure to be seen not to be heard. Amaka’s consent is not needed in basic decision making in the family even when the decision is to her detriment. This incidence justifies Helen Chukwuma’s claim that:

    The female character in African fiction...is a facile lack-lustre human being, the quiet member of a house hold, content only to bear children, unfulfilled if she does not, and handicapped if she bears only daughters. In the home, she is not part of the decision-making both as a daughter, wife, and mother even when the decisions affect her directly (Literature And Black Aesthetics 131).
This notion supports Celestine Obi’s view that: “the position of a wife in her husband’s family remains shaky and unpredictable until she begets a child” (1). So also is Amamgbo’s position that a child is a practical vindication of a woman in marriage.

Amaka’s agony in marriage is not just because she is childless, but because her husband, who is supposed to be her defender and consoler, is now her chief tormentor. He always finds reasons to beat or inflict injuries on Amaka. On one of such occasions, knowing that he is guilty of adultery and infidelity, Obiora shifts the blame on the poor woman saying, “What have you been doing behind my back?”(26). As Amaka lays her complaint to Obiora about his infidelity and harsh treatment to her lately, the latter retorts by saying that he is a man. But when Amaka responds that she is also a woman, Obiora rushes with a great indignation at Amaka to give her a thorough beating. Amaka’s hiding in the toilet at this time when actually she has done nothing wrong is a mark of respect, yet, Obiora does not see reasons to control his anger, instead, he bangs at the door saying:

Open the door, you whore, you good-for-nothing woman, you prostitute. What have you been doing behind my back? Sleeping with other men? I am going to kill you today and take your corpse to your mother and nobody will ask questions... Open the door and I will tear you to pieces (28-29).

Obiora’s unreasonable attitude towards Amaka could be interpreted from the sheer exploitative and patriarchal domineering nature of African men, who often shift blame and intimidate women on issues they are rather guilty of.

Since Amaka could not actualize a fulfilled and peaceful life through marriage, she decides for an independent life as a single person in order to ensure her freedom and happiness in future. Thus, she breaks off from her marriage, which has oppressed, exploited and humiliated
her. In recounting the issue that shattered her marriage to Adaobi, her childhood friend, Amaka expresses her misconception about marriage thus:

. . . I thought erroneously at first that marriage involved two people. I thought the emphasis was on this unique relationship of man and woman that children did not even matter. I was wrong. A childless marriage cannot last in the Nigeria of today. So, if a wife is unable to have children by her husband, she should leave and try elsewhere (34).

Another traumatic experience in the novel is the one that arises from the friction Amaka had with her mother-in-law over the issue of her childlessness. In a typical African setting, it is believed that a child is a gift not just to the man and his wife but to the entire community. This is why issues of childlessness attract community concern. Every mother or father-in-law desires grand children who keep the home warm and serve as powerful companions to them at old age. To them, grand children are blessings to a family and they are the descendants that would mourn them at their death. Usually grandmothers have special affinity with their grand children who they see as their pride and joy. No mother-in-law ever wishes to be afflicted by the children’s childlessness as this has a great psychological effect on them more than the actual victims, that is, the husband and wife. It is in this devastating state of mind that Amaka’s mother-in-law finds herself after six years of her son’s fruitless marriage with Amaka.

Obiora’s mother, like every other mother-in-law is not happy that Amaka could not give her a grandchild after six years of marriage to her son, Obiora. She pines in sorrow seeing other women of her age carrying their grand children whereas she could not have any. In fact, the fear of having her son’s lineage ended because of his wife’s barrenness and the pains of having her old age doomed to loneliness, heighten the anxiety of the old woman and she becomes very
restive. Her fears and anxiety exasperate her mental and emotional stress that she becomes so impatient, unaccommodating and hostile to everyone around her, particularly to Amaka. She sees Amaka as a nuisance and a good-for-nothing woman who has come to inflict her ill-luck on her family. With this impression, Obiora’s mother wages a psychological war against Amaka, who she accuses as the cause of misfortune in her family saying; “I have been sleeping badly for the past year. Don’t you see how thin I am? Was I as thin as this when you married my son six years ago? So don’t complain of sleeping badly for just one night” (3). To the old woman, Amaka’s childlessness has caused her a lot of mental, emotional and even physical stress. It has cost her sleepless nights. It has sapped her joy and has affected her physical looks and beauty. Thus, in her primitive mentality, Obiora’s mother fails to see this predicament as a possible work of fate or as a problem of hormonal incompatibility. Instead, she sees it as a result of Amaka’s ill-fated nature which she transfers to her son, Obiora. At this, she could no longer hide her indignation towards Amaka saying:

And you, with your ilk talk of my son, my lovely son, my good son who saved you from shame and from humiliation. How many suitors had you before my son came to marry you? ... I told him not to marry you. I shouted it from the rooftops. I told Obiora not to marry you, that you were going to be barren (5).

This harsh and outright attack on Amaka by her mother-in-law portrays the psychological state of the old woman who must have been in pains all these years waiting for grand children. For her, a child means the whole world for a woman and without a child, a woman’s essence remains meaningless. In Amaka’s community, a childless woman takes blame for any ill-luck, hardship or failure of her husband. Obiora’s mother demonstrates this when she blames Amaka for her son’s backwardness:
The next thing I want to tell you is that you have done nothing at all towards the advancement of my son since you married him six years ago. Look around and you see others married at the time you were married. My son has not started building a house yet, nor has he done anything for his age-grade in this town (15).

The myopic mentality of the old woman is that the infertility of her daughter-in-law witch-hunts her son’s progress in business as well as his general success in life. The old woman’s rashly forgets that Amaka was greatly instrumental to Obiora having a Peugeot car in order to save him from societal scorn and other inconveniences. Equally, the old woman also rashly ignores Amaka who has saved her son, Obiora from being sacked in the ministry. Indeed, when Obiora could have been fired in the ministry for his carelessness and over trusting nature, it is Amaka who protects his interest and saves the situation by meeting with her husband’s permanent secretary at Enugu and pleading his course. In the end, Amaka’s care and efforts are turned down by Obiora’s mother simply because Amaka is childless.

In *Wuraola, forever*, Osofisan depicts the agony and the emotional stress that the situation of childlessness brings on both the victims and the extended family. Wura, for instance experiences what it meant to be childless in Yoruba cultural setting. In the novel, Wura’s marriage with Segun is devoid of happiness because it lacks children. Despite her virtuous qualities, love and fidelity to her husband, Wura is despised and made to know that she has no place in her husband’s house. Just like Amaka in Nwapa’s *One is Enough*, Wura is made to experience difficulties and torments by her husband just because she is childless. Instead of getting some consolation from her husband, Wura gets harsh treatment, abuses, and even beating from her husband after eleven years of their fruitless marriage. By this time, Segun who was once a caring and loving husband turns so inconsiderate and harsh that he maltreats his wife with
impunity. He sees Wura as a nuisance and the cause of his misfortune in life and this drastically affects his attitude towards her. He starts keeping late nights, drinking and keeping other women to the detriment of his wife’s comfort. However, when confronted by his wife over his infidelity and his lousy behaviour, Segun beats her and reminds her of his fruitless wasted efforts on her for the past eleven years saying: “You witch! You daughter of a witch! Eleven years now since I’ve been wasting my food and semen on you! And what do you have to show for it all? Only your flat chest and dry stomach! Yes, just your barren accursed womb” (6).

In the real sense of it, it is diagnosed that Wura is biologically sound and fertile, while Segun is found impotent, which makes him always avoid medical checkups. But maliciously Segun transfers the entire blame to Wura as a face-saving device, a scapegoat for his inefficiency. In fact, Wura’s self esteem is seriously demeaned as she is belittled and made to understand that she is of no value in the marriage by the man who should appreciate her worth most.

Consequently, things start getting worse between the couple on daily basis such that their quarrels become the talk of the community. On one of such occasions, Wura is made to sleep outside in the night because she has gone to safeguard the life of a woman in painful labour. Despite all explanations, Segun refuses to open the door for Wura. Eventually, when he manages to open the door after much appeal from the wife, Segun gives her a heavy blow, asking her to go back from where she comes from and sleep with anyone she likes. Battered by this cruel and inhuman treatment by a man she loves and cares for so much, Wura goes berserk and rushes with a heavy heart to smash the car gift that she bought for her husband in their good old days saying; “Let me smash it! Burn it! He won’t ride it again. Never again! Not the car I bought with my sweat! Never! Never again” (17). In fact, this cruel attitude by her husband towards her when
she is really innocent and from a rescue mission shatters Wura’s emotional and psychological state and she bursts into tears of sorrow. Thus, Segun’s attitude towards his wife, Wura depicts the patriarchal oppressive nature of African society which maligns the woman and inflicts injury on her for any misfortune in marriage.

Another traumatic experience that Wura goes through is from her mother-in-law and her sister-in-law who are made to believe that the problem of childlessness in Segun’s family is that of Wura alone. To them, Wura is a nuisance in Segun’s house and must leave by all means. Her mother-in-law demonstrates their outright hostility and rejection for Wura when she brings in a new wife for Segun to take over Wura’s position as a wife. Out of sheer indignation, the old woman delivers her judgement on Wura to vacate her son’s home for the new wife saying:

This one, she is packing her things and going back to her father. Now, Today! Return to sender that is all... after all these fruitless wasted years she’s eaten enough free food in our house! Free food and free boarding! Ah-ha! for how many years? O ti to! Let her try her misfortune elsewhere now! A woman who cannot make a child after so many years cannot claim any right of belonging, so, O pari, Let her go back to where she came from! (36).

Even when Segun protested that he does not need more than one wife, let alone giving consent to the decision of marrying another wife for him, Segun’s mother insists that Wura must vacate the house since she is unproductive. Thus, despite her status as a working class and her powerful financial succour in the family, Wura is not appreciated by her mother-in-law. She is rather considered a parasite. Her mother-in-law addresses her as an alien and a tenant in her own matrimonial home saying:
Don’t bother to talk to her. However long it takes, a tenant must one day vacate the house for the owner. Your lease has ended here, Wura or whatever you call yourself. Whether you greet me or not, it doesn’t matter. Just go now and pack your load. Even including the things we bought for you with our money. But today you must pack out, for over there. We’ve brought a real woman at last to our son (32).

The climax of Wura’s agony as a childless wife is on the evening of the day she reconciles with her husband. Segun’s objection to his mother’s and sister’s decision of bringing in a new wife for him on account of Wura’s childlessness gives Wura a kind of consolation and assurance that her husband still has some regards for her. This protest against a second marriage in her favour soon brings about reconciliation between the couple such that they begin to appreciate the love that initially binds them together. As a matter of coincidence, Wura is offered study leave by her company that same day. Thus, with the joy of a happy reunion with her husband, Wura storms the market to buy a special dish for Segun in order to celebrate their reconciliation. But unfortunately, on her return to the house, she notices that all her belongings are thrown outside the compound by her mother-in-law and sister in law. The sight of what she sees immediately sends cold shivers down her spine and shatters her reawakening joy.

The two women call Wura names, rain abuses on her, lock her outside the house, pour stinking water on her and above all, tear her clothes to pieces as she tries to protest. Despite their so called reconciliation, her husband remains mute throughout the whole episode leaving Wura disappointed and in a state of emotional and psychological trauma. That horrible experience teaches Wura that there is no place of honour for a childless woman in the society no matter how virtuous she might be. In her anguish, Wura realizes at last that, “Happiness does not exist at
least not for the childless woman and all our virtuousness is a myth” (57). All the maltreatment meted out to Wura on account of her childlessness causes her tearful, sleepless nights. Her erstwhile principles of fidelity to her husband now appear stupid and absurd. Regrettably Wura concludes:

Without children the value of being faithful wear rapidly thin and the honey in the bowl of marriage drains out very soon like rain from a leaking bucket. The husband, disappointed and frightened becomes bitter, the in-laws and particularly the female among them grow savage. They are ready to throw you out into the street, scornful of your many years of faithfully loving. And all your friends will only look on, some even with approval as your life changes like the story of a discarded apple in some dungheap (56 - 57).

This unreasonable victimization of the innocent woman deepens her depression and subjects her to emotional and psychological trauma.

3.3 Impact of Societal Scorn on Childless Women in One Is Enough and Wuraola, Forever

Practically, the traditional society has a way of moulding or destroying individual characters. Because man is a social being and an integral member of the human society, all his actions and thoughts are interpreted and judged based on the societal norms and ideological beliefs of the immediate community. In literary works, a character’s actions and reactions to issues are conditioned by the geographical setting of the work and the ideological belief of the community of the text. In Nwapa’s One Is Enough for instance, the Onitsha community’s
concept of childlessness as a misfortune and a curse affects their general attitude towards childless women.

In her article, “Motherhood Concept Among Igbo Women”, W.J Kalu observes that “Both the women and men feel threatened in their self-esteem in terms of manhood and womanhood. The man has a special threat related to lineage and the woman in relation to her position in the man’s family” (66). This threat is the basis of the anxiety that grips childless couples, especially the woman in African literature. In Nwapa’s One is Enough, childless women are held in great contempt. They are disregarded, humiliated and rated low in the society as people who are cursed.

In her book, Childless by Choice, Merran Faux relates the issue of childlessness to witchcraft. She opines that ‘witch’ has become a metaphor for the childless woman. It is this notion that confers societal hostility towards childless women as witches who deny the unborn children their right to existence. Given this notion therefore, the question of showing compassion or understanding to childless women is pointless. Such outright victimization, isolation and rejection impose great psychological and emotional trauma on childless women. Among the Onitsha community in One is Enough, childless women are not only jeered at, but are made to realize that they are not important to the community.

In the novel, Nwapa explores the psychological repercussion of societal scorn on childless women. This societal scorn, indifference and isolation towards childless women affect them drastically and provokes in them, terrible feelings of depression and hopelessness. For instance, Amaka’s marriage with Obiora collapses because of societal mockery and undue victimization. Obiora who is seen initially as a caring and loving husband and who will stop at nothing in seeing that Amaka is comfortable, turns hostile, owing to societal scorn and the pressure from his
immediate family. Thus, after six years of their childless marriage, his mother sees him as a
disappointment and as a stubborn son who is insensitive to her advice. In the anguish for her
son’s condition, Obiora’s mother shuns him when he wants to intrude in her discussion with
Amaka. Her embarrassment and disregard for Obiora on account of their childlessness affect
Obiora’s tender and loving attitude towards his wife, Amaka. Thus, Obiora turns so cruel and
hostile to Amaka such that he always finds reasons to beat her up at any slight provocation and
misunderstanding. Equally, in order to satisfy societal demands of furthering the family lineage,
Obiora breaks the moral principles of marital fidelity to indulge in secret relationship with
another woman who eventually gives birth for him two sons.

Despite his cruel disposition towards Amaka, Obiora is seriously affected both
psychologically and emotionally. His aggressive and cruel attitudes towards Amaka can be
attributed to the depression occasioned by societal mockery and isolation. His poor
psychological state affects not only his actions but also his physical appearance. Obiora is seen
ageing fast and emaciating on daily basis as a result of emotional and psychological stress
necessitated by his condition of childlessness. Thus, according to his mother, Obiora is getting
older and older everyday while Amaka is getting younger and younger everyday (15).

Another impact of societal scorn on Obiora is inducing him to indulge in extra-marital
affair which ordinarily he might not have opted for. Obviously, Obiora before this crisis loves
Amaka and is impressed by her attitude and assistance. The first misunderstanding he has with
Amaka which leads to his beating her makes Obiora to take one week sick leave from his
company just to stay with Amaka and take care of her. This is done as a proof of his love and
remorse for offending such a wonderful lover and wife as Amaka.
On the other hand, Amaka’s trauma as a childless woman stems from both societal mockery and cruel disposition of the in-laws on her. This societal scorn and cruelty subject her to great emotional and psychological torture. This attitude of isolation has a devastating effect on Amaka, who pines away in loneliness and depression. Her presence is no longer appreciated and her efforts are no longer valued. Amaka finds herself in a great emotional stress and isolation, where staying married is as painful as quitting the marriage.

Consequently, the dramatic and sudden change in attitude by Amaka’s in-laws as well as the entire community result to a strong feeling of isolation and loneliness on Amaka. She is seen most of the time thinking, lamenting and bearing her burden all alone in silence. The people that are supposed to console and encourage her turn out to be perpetrators of her agony. Even her own mother could not spare her but scolds her for failing to play her card well when she found that Obiora is incapable of impregnating her. However, because she is guided by a strong moral principle, Amaka rejects her mother’s advice to look out for men outside her marriage, who could impregnate her. This issue of rejecting the old woman’s advice and insisting in the ideals of fidelity to one’s spouse creates friction between Amaka and her mother to the extent that the old woman rejects Amaka as her daughter when she pours out her feelings about her situation.

I told you, four years ago to leave him or if you did not want to leave him to go to other men and get pregnant. You are my daughter. We are never barren in our family, never. Even in your own imbecile father’s family, There was nothing like barrenness. But you refused to take my advice. You were being a good wife, chastity, faithfulness my foot. You can go ahead and eat virtue. Here are your belongings sent to me in this disgraceful manner, my daughter humiliated in this way. You are not my daughter (32).
This rejection by her own mother, together with the harsh and hostile treatment meted out to Amaka in her matrimonial home, leaves her in a psychological no man’s land. She is all alone without any consolation.

In the same vein, Osofisan explores the extent to which societal mockery can affect the peaceful atmosphere of a marital relationship. In the novel, Wura’s marriage with Segun witnesses an eclipse of joy and peace because of the pressure from both the immediate family and the society at large. It is observed that the joy and peace that characterize Wura’s marriage with Segun begin to wane after some years of childlessness. By this time, the in-laws and outsiders had started interfering in the private affairs of the couple, embarrassing and taunting the innocent woman in her matrimonial home. With their intrusion, the onetime peaceful marriage is threatened. Suggestions to eject Wura and replace her with another wife are made and when it seems that Segun is reluctant about the whole idea, his mother and sister impose their decision on him. This instigates in Segun a strong feeling of hatred and disgust for Wura. Thus, the relationship that has been operating on the platform of love and peace becomes a cat and dog affair. The negative impact that societal scorn creates in the life of these two soul-mates is now obvious.

Just like Amaka, Wura is subjected to constant feelings of isolation, depression and dejection on account of societal scorn. This is evidenced by the hostile treatment shown her by Deko’s wife on the day she runs to their house for safety when she is ejected from her husband’s house by her in-laws. In the ordinary sense of it, being the wife of her husband’s best friend, Wura would expect a friendly and accommodating attitude from Deko’s wife, knowing her predicament, but the reverse is the case. Instead of a warm and friendly welcome, Wura receives a cold and hostile welcome from Deko’s wife. She is not even offered a seat nor allowed to touch
Deko’s child because she is regarded as a witch that devours other people’s children. It is not until Wura forcefully rescues her (Mama Layiwola’s) dying son from convulsion that Deko’s wife expresses remorse over her hostility towards Wura and confesses what prompted such attitude saying:

Sista, I am sorry for my behaviour earlier on. But... but... well, I’m sorry to say it, but you must know yourself what people say about you. One of the warnings is to always beware of childless women. They say we should never let you touch our child that you use other people’s children for witchcraft and that’s why you can’t have any of your own. So you see when you came, and Layiwola was ill, I was quite terrified seeing you... (55).

Societal scorn also exposes a childless woman to constant state of insecurity and depression. Wura for instance gets a warning letter in her office by an unknown person requesting her to stay clear from other people’s husband lest she destroys their homes. Though this letter has no substantial proof of Wura’s illicit involvement with any man, the threat is informed by her childlessness which is seen as a threat to any man who may have a kind of sympathy or concern for her predicament and perhaps renders any help. It is on this note that her boss’s intervention in her predicament attracts for Wura an embarrassing warning letter which orders her:

Better be warned, as from now on. For we shall have no mercy. That you have no child doesn’t mean you can destroy other people’s homes. We saw you this morning. We have been seeing you with Mr Fowokan all these days. How he
always locks the door when you are with him. So you have no shame. Leave other people’s husband alone, I am warning you. Or blame yourself (59).

In the real sense of it, Wura has no clandestine dealings with her boss except that the latter, out of sympathy, sees it as a point of duty to alleviate the problem of the hapless, childless woman. For Wura, the letter she gets from her office by the people she feels she is in good terms with, is a clear indication that she does not have many people’s sympathy. The fact that she is rejected in her husband’s house, isolated in the society and humiliated among her peers and colleagues creates enough insecurity around her. Faced with this kind of circumstance, Wura finds a better home outside her marriage.

3.4 Feminist Struggle against Social Injustice in Nwapa’s One Is Enough And Osofisan’s Wuraola, Forever

The major goal of African feminists is to ensure fair play, proper representation and due recognition of the woman both in the society and in literary works. They are not in any way neither fighting for equality with their male counterparts nor attempting to overthrow the patriarchal authority. In A Companion to the Novel, Akachi Ezigbo rightly points out that African feminists are requesting for better treatment, recognition, self assertion and the opportunity to live their lives as individuals independent of their male folk (121). For this reason, African feminists are found always struggling against the oppressive patriarchal tradition which subjugates, exploits, oppresses, and reduces them to inconsequential beings in the society. In this sense therefore, the women in the words of Ezigbo, are not revolting against the male folk per se, but against societal norms and laws which have made them someone’s appendage, thereby depriving them of their existence as legitimate individuals in their own society.
The true spirit of African feminism entails, according to Filomina Steady, “an abnegation of male protection and a determination to be resourceful and reliant” (139). It follows therefore that for a woman to be free in the African patriarchal society; she must disregard restrictive traditional mores, struggle for self assertion, demand her rightful place in the social set up of her society and have a spirit of independence as well as self will to survive. This feminist spirit is demonstrated in the character of Amaka, who despite the ups and downs she encounters in her marriage because of childlessness never relents nor resigns to fate, instead, she struggles for self assertion and survival. Her struggle for self assertion begins when she is engaged in the fight that brings her husband and her mother-in-law to hospital after enduring for long the exploitation, humiliation and oppression which they subject her to. To achieve this, she ensures that she is financially independent by engaging herself in contract business through which she even fends for her family.

Having endured for long, the affronts, exploitation and injustice meted out to her on account of her childlessness, Amaka decides to take her destiny in her hands. She quits her marriage and decides firmly to survive in life without depending on any man. Just like Efuru in Nwapa’s *Efuru*, Amaka breaks away from the barriers of culture and religion by asserting her identity, and freedom in her society. Amaka’s reaction to the unjust or biased culture of her society depicts Nwapa’s view that women should learn to be self reliant in or outside marriages, with or without children of their own. Thus, from the repulsive action of Amaka, Nwapa draws attention to the fact that women need not suffer social or cultural inhibitions but must stand up to challenge or break off with these inhibitions and choose their own better alternative.

In the character of Amaka, we see the feminist spirit of independence and determination to survive as well as the spirit of not succumbing to humiliation and defeat. She achieves a
remarkable success in business that changes everything and makes her the envy of the village. In fact, Amaka’s actions and achievements support Helen Chukwuma’s position that “economic independence is a source of female assertion, breaking loose the shackles of subjugation and establishing choice as the basis of interaction” *(Literature and Black Aesthetics)*.133.

Another area that Amaka demonstrates her feminist wit is in taking a decision concerning her marriage. She never allowed societal scorn to deter her from working out her success and happiness in life. Instead of dying in the protective umbrella of marital oppression, Amaka breaks out from her marriage with Obiora and moves to the city at Lagos to establish herself and ensure her freedom and peace as an individual. Finding herself in Lagos, Amaka approaches life with a new philosophy. Her decision not to marry again is a firm demonstration that women are capable of standing on their own and are capable of working for their survival outside marriage if one is not lucky having babies.

In her new resolution, Amaka firmly rejects married life, since it is a life that has caged, exploited, humiliated, oppressed, and reduced her esteem in life. To detach herself from the shackles of marriage therefore, she pays back her bride price to Obiora’s family, thereby freeing herself of whatever her community may think of her earlier childless life. Later, Amaka goes to the village to host a feast for her age-grade, thereby, proving that childlessness is not the end of a woman’s life or happiness. In fact, through Amaka, Nwapa affirms that a woman need not be subsumed by marriage, neither should she be intimidated by spinsterhood. *(Feminism in African Literature)* (125).

The climax of Amaka’s feminist prowess is made manifest when she successfully seduces Rev. Fr. Mclaid, a renowned priest and a man respected for his integrity. Thus, Amaka’s relationship with Fr. Mclaid results into her first ever conception, a situation that proves her a
woman amidst societal misconception and mockery. Though Amaka is ashamed of her scandalous action of seducing an anointed man of God, she is at the same time happy that at last, she has obliterated societal stigma that she is barren. In fact, she carries her pregnancy with joy and celebrates her delivery in a grand style, as a proof that she is a woman, as fertile as other women.

Despite his reputable personality, his position and influence in the army and later in the government (as a federal commissioner), Amaka turns Fr.Mclaid down when he requests her hands in marriage. Though Amaka has her long time dream actualized through this priest, she never allows her emotions to override her will. Thus, as a true feminist, she insists that she would not marry a man she does not love. In fact, her mother and sister’s persuasion that Amaka should consider Mclaid, being so responsible, caring and influential, yields no fruit for Amaka has decided not to marry again.

Having forgotten marriage, Amaka cherishes her freedom as a single woman. According to her, there is something in that word ‘marriage’ that enslaves a woman. Consequently, she never wants to sacrifice her comfort again for any married life. Her reason remains that one marriage is enough in a woman’s life. Through Amaka’s odyssey as a married woman and later as a single woman, Nwapa demonstrates the various measures that the exploited female characters could adopt in order to break loose from unjust tradition and culture that exploit, humiliate and deny women their pride of place in the traditional society.

In the same vein, Osofisan in his novel, *Wuraola, forever*, presents to us an assertive, independent and non-conforming woman who refuses to succumb to the patriarchal injustice of her society. He depicts to a great extent the true spirit of feminism in the character of Wura, the
protagonist, who suffers childlessness in a society that venerates child bearing and motherhood. As a childless woman, Wura suffers terrible patriarchal injustice and oppression in her marriage. Wura just like Amaka in *One is Enough*, never relents or resigns to fate; she struggles to break loose from the oppressive patriarchal tradition of her society. She questions the customary glorification of motherhood in her society by proving that a childless woman can still be very useful, resourceful and productive in other aspects of life.

As a feminist, Wura fights her cause when her in-laws conspire to drive her away from her husband’s house. Wura is determined not to allow them deny her of her legitimate place in her matrimonial home. In that same spirit of feminism, Wura stands out in protest and fights against her husband’s unreasonable cruelty and exploitation. She proves that a childless woman is as useful and resourceful as those who are opportuned to have their own children. Her actions are equally enough proof that childlessness does not make a woman evil, or monstrous. This is seen in the way she attends to and resuscitates Deko’s dying child despite the wife’s hostile attitude to her that same day. Also her patience, financial help and fidelity to her husband irrespective of the latter’s cruelty towards her are proofs of such rare virtues of a childless woman. Thus, instead of being cruel, a childless woman usually tends to be more humane, tolerant, resourceful and accommodating.

In Wura, we also see the feministic spirit of independence, self reliance and determination to survive. Despite the pressure mounted on her because of her childlessness, Wura succeeds through hard work, financial strength and strong will to survive. She carters for herself and her husband. She buys a car for her husband when the latter is handicapped. She furnishes their parlour and equally renders great financial assistance to the general up-keep of her matrimonial home. When another woman is brought to replace her, Wura faces the challenge
boldly and confidently because she is industrious and financially independent. She is certain that she does not depend on her husband for survival and so, she sees the challenge as an opportunity for self assertion and fulfilment. Because of her hard work and financial strength, she is able to manage the stress occasioned by her sudden ejection from her husband’s house by her in-laws. Through this action, Wura justifies Helen Chukwuma’s claim that “economic independence became a source of female assertion, breaking loose the shackles of subjugation and establishing choice as the basis of interaction” (Literature and Black Aesthetics(133)).

In the spirit of true feminism, Wura, beyond all odds, struggles for self actualization and fulfilment. Having seen that her marriage with Segun is turning sour, Wura never allows herself to be consumed by rejection and isolation. Instead of dying in matrimonial bondage, she opts for separation with her husband and furthering of her education. Opportunity for this occurs when her company, through the effort of her boss, offers her study leave.
CHAPTER FOUR

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND LITERARY TECHNIQUES IN

NWAPA’S *ONE IS ENOUGH* AND OSOFISAN’S *WURAOLA, FOREVER*

This chapter undertakes a comparative analysis of the two novels under study. In doing this, we are going to examine how Nwapa and Osofisan represent the issue of childlessness in their two different cultures. To undertake this study therefore, we are going to look into the similarities as well as the differences in these novels in terms of setting, diction, characters and narrative techniques explored by the authors to enhance the beauty and impact of their works.

4.1 Setting

This entails the historical time, place and social circumstances or the particular location in which the events in a work of art take place. The locality or the time of the event usually influences the character’s line of action. In *One is Enough* for instance, Nwapa presents us with two settings; the rural and the urban settings which are represented by Onitsha and Lagos respectively. This oscillation of action between the rural and the urban settings enables her to present the different possibilities and attitudes of her characters to the social realities of their societies.

In presenting these two settings, Nwapa shows the extent that societal set up can affect the psychological, emotional and physiological lives of childless female characters. For instance, Amaka in the rural setting (Onitsha) is a total different person from Amaka in the city of Lagos. Thus, while the village life confines her to a reserved, humble and subjective life, the city life in Lagos exposes her to a social, individualistic and independent life. For Amaka, Onitsha, her home town enslaves, humiliates and restricts her because of her childlessness, a course which is not of her making, while the city of Lagos signifies new hope, liberation, consolation and
restoration of her lost glory. Lagos as an urban city, presents a morally relaxed environment which aids Amaka to attain self assertion and self fulfilment as a woman. In Lagos tables are turned. According to the narrator, “Lagos was good for her, Lagos was kind to her” (45). With respect to time, the novel is a post independence text depicting the social realities; oppression, exploitation and injustice that are so rampant in patriarchal society like that of Amaka in *One is Enough*, where childless women are given no pride of place in the society.

In like manner, Osofisan in *Wuraola, forever*, presents us with two settings; the life in the city and the life on Campus. Though the name of the city is not mentioned, we see the kind of diversified life where everybody lives his life the way he likes it. This is quite different from life on Campus which is a global village of its own. On Campus, there is more liberty and freedom to live one’s life without societal constraints. However, unlike Amaka, the city signifies both favour and bondage for Wura. It subjects her to untold agony, humiliation and depression. In aspect of favours, Wura receives a scholarship grant from her company in order to further her education, an opportunity that will groom her for better position or promotion in the company. Equally, the study leave affords her an opportunity to move away from the environment which has been very hostile to her because of her childless situation. Thus, while the city life signifies both favour and bondage for Wura, the Campus life signifies freedom, liberty and a detachment from cultural and societal norms and constraint. With regards to time of the event, the novel is set in the contemporary period of African literature.

The area of difference between the two novels lies in the cultural background of the novels. Thus, while Nwapa in *One is Enough*, chooses her setting from the Eastern part of Nigeria, (Onitsha) precisely, Osofisan’s in *Wuraola, forever*, draws his setting from Yoruba cultural background and on Campus respectively. Again, while the city signifies hope, freedom,
consolation and fulfilment for Amaka, the city signifies rather bondage, oppression and humiliation for Wura. Instead, it is the Campus setting that brings a kind of relief and freedom for her. According to Amaka’s mother-in-law, Obiora, her son should not marry Amaka because she is going to be barren. Later, she advises Obiora to pick a second wife since Amaka is barren after six years of marriage. Consequent upon this, the sorrowful old woman refers to Obiora as a stupid son who takes after his useless father by making a lot of fuss without backing it up with action (13).

4.2 Characters

These involve male or female who play one role or the other in a literary work. These characters give life to what the novelist has written and through their actions and interactions drive home the message of the literary artist. In One is Enough, the main story of the novel revolves around Amaka, who happens to be the protagonist of the novel. Through the character of Amaka, Nwapa exposes the inevitable lot of a childless woman in a patriarchal society like Onitsha which venerates child bearing and motherhood. In the character of Amaka, Nwapa presents a business woman, who is very humble, tolerant and submissive to the core, the virtues that make her to endure all affronts and persecutions in her matrimonial home without grudges.

In Wuraola, forever, Osofisan uses the character of Wura, to depict the untold agony and humiliation that a childless woman is subjected to in marriage, even among the so-called enlightened ones. But, unlike Amaka, Wura, is a graduate and a working class. In Wura, Osofisan portrays a very responsible, decent and courageous woman whose utmost goal in life is to assert her freedom, identity and fulfilment. Just like Amaka, Wura is a non-conforming, self-reliant and very courageous woman who is determined to restore her self-esteem at all cost. She exhibits a spirit of independence and has concern for other people’s plight. This is seen when she
rescues the two young men that are arrested with her by the military men on duty. Again, she demonstrates this humanitarian spirit when she rescues Deko’s child from convulsion. Just like Amaka, Wura is very resourceful and a powerful succour in her husband’s house. But unlike Amaka, she lacks patience and does not submit to oppression and humiliation. This is why she fights her way out of her in-law’s oppressive forces and also retaliates her husband’s brutality. Through these two characters, Nwapa and Osofisan prove that childless women are not as spineless, unproductive and evil as the society terms them.

Equally, in the character of Amaka and Wura we see true feminist spirits and ideals. The two women in their respective capacities struggle against oppression and exploitation which marginalize childless women in their own society. In that same courage, they struggle and break off from the unjust traditional norms which enslave them and deprive them of any meaningful status in their own society. These two women, despite their ugly experiences in their respective marriages, never relent but fight for self assertion and fulfilment. This is made possible because of their hard work, courage and self reliant. These common features in their character make them unique and powerful agents of change in their respective societies.

Despite their ideological semblances, there are some contrasting features between these two women characters. Thus, while Amaka is being portrayed as humble, submissive, tolerant and loyal to the traditional norms of her society, Wura is portrayed as non-conforming, assertive and objective in her philosophy and thought. She can hardly succumb to any kind of intimidation simply because she is termed, ‘barren’. Again, while Amaka voluntarily breaks off from her marriage because of her ugly experiences, Wura is ejected by her in-laws against her wish.

Amaka ends up a fulfilled woman, having worked out her own success in life and having actualized at last, her life time dream of motherhood. Wura, though a promising civil servant,
who attains a considerable success in life, experiences an aborted joy, as she is made to pay with her life for indulging in an illicit sexual relationship with her friend’s (Labake) husband; a relationship which resulted in her first ever pregnancy. Thus, having involved herself in an illicit relationship, Wura faces the judgement of her society and that of her friend, Labake, who sees her action as a betrayal of trust. The shame, embarrassment and thorough beating she gets from this incident from her friend, Labake, put her into serious emotional and psychological trauma. Thus, while Amaka enjoys a fate of self actualization and fulfilment, Wura’s fate is fraught with aborted joy and painful death.

### 4.3 Narrative Techniques in the Novels

The major narrative technique employed by Nwapa and Osofisan in these two novels, is the omniscient third person narrative technique. In this technique, the writer is already aware of all the sequence of events in the novel and so plays the role of God, the omniscient, who knows what will happen to each character in the novel. The technique also enables the author to intimate the readers on the psychological and traumatic experiences of the characters especially, the protagonist. In *One is Enough*, for instance, Nwapa stands aside as the omniscient narrator to tell us the pathetic story of Amaka who passes through hurdles in her marriage with Obiora because of her condition of childlessness. In doing this, the narrator probes the minds of few characters like Amaka’s husband, mother-in-law, aunt, mother, etc. and reveals their inner-most thoughts about childlessness in marriage. While telling the story, the narrator is aware of the past and present situation of these characters and stands a better position to predict their future. Equally, in *Wuraola, forever*, Osofisan assuming the role of an omniscient narrator, tells us the story of Wura, a middle aged woman whose life was made so miserable because she is beset with childlessness in her marriage. Through the dialogue of the characters like Segun (Wura’s
husband), Segun’s mother and sister, Deko’s wife, Labake, etc., the narrator brings to light the inner most contempt the society has for childless women. Through the interactions of these characters, the narrator reveals the characters’ philosophy of life, their beliefs, their emotional and psychological state as well as their relationships with other characters.

4.4 Diction

The diction is one of the most important elements of a novel. The message of the literary artist or his story is being told by the use of language. Through the author’s choice of words, we come to understand his cultural background, the background of his text as well as his message. The diction also reveals the literariness of the text, the standard of the text and those linguistic elements employed by the author to embellish his work.

In One is Enough, the author uses simple but standard English to tell her story. This makes it easy for any average reader to understand and appreciate the text. All the characters in the novel speak good English not minding their level of education. There is a stylistic blending of simple, complex and compound sentences to enhance the flow of the story. There is little or no use of idiomatic expression and proverbs. Apart from the names of the characters and the setting which traces the cultural background of the text, the language is selected to suit the understanding of every average reader.

On the other hand, Osofisan in Wuraola, forever uses mainly standard English to tell his story. There is an extensive use of figurative expression like metaphor, irony, hyperbole, etc., to enhance the quality of the work. However, unlike Nwapa’s One is Enough, Osofisan gives the language of the novel a local colour by selecting the names of her characters from the Yoruba cultural background and by choosing villagers who use vernacular most often in their exclamations and certain remarks. Such remarks trace the cultural background of the text to
Yoruba and enhance the linguistic method of analysis known as code-mixing and code switching. Such remarks like; “O ti to!, Awon were!, yeepa, awon paturolu!, missis, Emi ni ma, Olosi, Okobo, etc are carefully employed by the author to give the language of the novel a local colour. There is a stylistic blending of vernacular with good English to bring in the elements of African culture and tradition in the work.
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

This research has examined the various traumatic effects of childlessness especially as they concern women characters in African literature. In doing this, the study has taken into consideration how societal mockery, isolation and victimization affect both the psychological and emotional stability of childless women and how these unfortunate women challenge and break off from the unjust traditional norms that make the world a hell for them.

The study reveals the calculated attempts by two African novelists Nwapa and Osofisan to expose the horrible fate of childless women in patriarchal domineering societies like that of Amaka and Wura. Their novels One is Enough and Wuraola, forever expose the ugly experiences and treatment meted out to childless women in both traditional and contemporary African settings. Their works highlight the importance attached to children and motherhood in Africa. They also stress the lot of childless women in a gender biased community like Onitsha in One is Enough and Yoruba community in Wuraola, forever. Their works equally demonstrate the various changes in the attitudes of women as they move from the rural to the urban settings. Thus, because of their low placement in the society and the continuous victimization these childless women are subjected to, they are often found struggling against patriarchal oppression and societal prejudices.

In the two novels, Nwapa and Osofisan refute the traditional notion of childless women as useless, nuisance, wicked and inconsequential entities in the society to establish the contrary view that these women are as useful, relevant and even essential pillars in their families and the society at large. For instance, Amaka, is said to be the bread winner in her matrimonial home due
to her hard work and sense of responsibility. Wura, on the other hand, is a strong pillar in her matrimonial home and the brain behind her husband’s progress in life.

Through these female protagonists, Nwapa and Osofisan emphasize the need for economic independence and propagate self assertion for African women as means of actualising their freedom and self fulfilment in life. Nwapa demonstrates through the character of Amaka that childless women can achieve success and self fulfilment through other means. Through Amaka’s hard work and remarkable success in business, she is able to command the community’s respect despite her barrenness. Her success and economic dependence lead to her freedom and self assertion. Equally, Wura is able to withstand the sudden ejection from her matrimonial home and still insists on certain conditions before reconciling with her husband because she is financially independent and does not depend on her husband for her survival. Through the efforts and remarkable success of Amaka and Wura, Nwapa and Osofisan prove that childless women have multiple possibilities and alternatives for self actualization and fulfilment rather than resigning to the hopeless condition which their society subjects them to.

This study also reveals how Nwapa and Osofisan have succeeded in satirizing the thorny issue of male dominance and cultural inhibitions that prevent childless women from actualising their happiness and fulfilment in life. In their desperate effort at redeeming the image of the female characters therefore, they prove that so many things said about childless women in African societies are fraught with prejudice and misconceptions.

5.2 Conclusion

From a general assessment of the havoc caused by childlessness in marriages as presented in African literature, we notice that both the immediate family and entire society contribute to the agonies suffered by childless women in African traditional settings. To ensure
self actualization and fulfilment in life, the two protagonists (Amaka and Wura) refute the societal scorn that they are barren and useless and indulge in extra-marital relationships which result in pregnancies, a situation that prove them fertile and save them from further societal scorn. Though they achieve their aims of getting pregnant, their various means are all reprehensible. Thus, while Amaka seduces a priest to achieve her long desired pregnancy, Wura uses her best friend’s husband to prove that she is still as fertile as other women. In the two novels, Amaka and Wura throw societal moralities to the winds by seducing most unlikely acquaintances. Much as they have achieved their heart desires and fulfilment as ‘mothers’ they have offended societal morality. One may wish to conclude that the same opprobrium that has been their lot in their respective husband’s houses follows them inevitably to the graves.

An important question hangs in the air: why have Nwapa and Osofisan chosen to use a priest and a married man to prove the fertility of their heroines? It could be to prove that most men are more unfaithful than the women or to state that Amaka and Wura would not have been declared “barren” by the society, if they had indulged in extra-marital relationship while remaining with their respective husbands. Or above all, to say that only men are infertile, not their women.

Finally, this study draws attention to the fact that childlessness is not a curse nor a crime as it is generally seen in most African societies and literatures. We therefore call for a review of attitude, thought and approach towards childless women whose condition demands understanding, tenderness and consolation. To achieve this, this study is of the view that literary artists need to establish through their writings, a framework for proper appreciation of childless women in African cultural milieu.
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