

Silence and the Unspeakable Quest to Voice Out: A Feminist Reading of the Female Dilemma in Maxine Hong Kingston's "No Name Woman" and Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*

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Abstract

This study examined The Culture of Silence and the quest to voice out as a female dilemma in Nwapa's Efuru and Kingston's "No Name Woman". Silence impedes women from communicating their desires and problems in a patriarchal society as such it subjects them into the dilemma of choosing between speaking out or remaining silent. It is a tool used against women in a patriarchal spectrum. The study identified the reasons behind women silence, the structures that make them revert into silence, and how these structures affect women irrespective of their region and compared the attitude of the women who revert into silence despite the desire to voice out. The analysis revealed that women revert into silence because the male dominated society does not permit them to speak. It revealed that what makes women revert into silence is patriarchy and it affects the women tremendously by making them nonexistent. This study also revealed that the attitude of women who revert into silence shows fear and helplessness. The study concluded that silence is a potent tool used to suppress and subjugate women in a patriarchal society.

Keywords: *Women, Patriarchy, Silence, Dilemma & Desire to Speak.*

Introduction

This study makes a comparative analysis of the silence of women in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and Maxine Hong Kingston's "No Name Woman" a short story in her collection of short stories "The Woman Warrior: Memoir of a Childhood among Ghosts". The culture of silence and the quest to voice out in Maxine Hong Kingston's "No Name Woman" and Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* served as the nucleus for this work. The reasons and structures behind the silence of women is explicated. The study

also examined how these structures affect women irrespective of their region and compared the attitude of women who revert into silence despite the urge to speak in the texts. Silence is a dilemma amongst women which can be linked to patriarchy. A patriarchal society makes women believe that expressing their views or grievances over certain things meted on them are unacceptable. Thus, the only option open to them is to revert into silence. This has therefore led to their subjugation and marginalisation in the society. That is why the culture of silence imposed on women becomes a dilemma for them.

Maxine Hong Kingston in her collection of short stories “The Woman Warrior: Memoir of a Childhood among Ghosts” and Flora Nwapa in her novel *Efuru* have depicted silence as a female dilemma. Women in the two texts suffer from one obstacle to the other without voicing out their grievances which may be due to the fear of what the society would say. Apparently, one can revert to silence voluntarily or by compulsion, to delineate the root cause of one’s silence over a particular issue, a critical perusal of the situation surrounding such silence has to be made. Acheson (2008:536) lends credence to this when he says silence is an idea that operates and finds meaning based on context and culture. The silence of the women in the selected texts is based on the culture of their society, hence, it is a silence imposed on them. Silence is considered as a strong phenomenon be it silence enforced upon women or silence individuals revert to in a particular context or situation (Bell & Golumbisky, 2004:296).

The wrenching disappointment of the inability to voice out one’s plight can be disheartening. This invariably entails living perpetually in pains for not being allowed to speak out that is why Gal (1989:2) avers that those who are denied speech cannot make their experience known and this can influence the course of their lives and history. Similarly, Ifechelobi (2014:22) believes a voiceless person is left with no sense of belonging. This means people are compelled into silence in order to

conceal ugly experience, lose control over their own lives and loose self-confidence.

It is against this backdrop that this female dilemma is brought to the fore. Patriarchy encourages the silencing of women in the society in order to make the men appear supreme. An explication of the silencing of women within the paradigm of feminism provides an explicit explanation of how it has metamorphosed into a dilemma amongst them.

Efuru

Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, was released in 1966. *Efuru* the major character is the daughter of a prominent and well-liked man in the town; she is an industrious and attractive woman who grows up in a rural Igbo village. As Quarodima and Dada (2018:1782) rightly say, *Efuru* is a creative and aesthetic portrayal of the socio-cultural milieu of the Igbo society of Flora Nwapa. *Efuru* elopes with a poor farmer named Adizua after falling in love. She provides her husband financially through her trading activities. Adizua stops farming and joins her in the business as a result of her trade success. Adizua and *Efuru* eventually gave birth to a daughter, but she is suddenly snatched by fever. Adizua leaves *Efuru* before the baby dies, and she later finds out he abandoned her for another woman. Unable to locate him, *Efuru* makes the decision to go back to her father's house. To her surprise, he welcomes her with joy and is happy that she has come back to him.

Later, she runs across Gilbert, another male from her neighborhood. They eventually get married, and this time around, rather than eloping, they adhered to the Igbo cultures, traditions and customs as regards marriage. As equal business partners, *Efuru* and Gilbert demonstrate that their union is significantly happier than *Efuru*'s previous union. But when *Efuru* is unable to conceive, the marriage becomes acrimonious and discordant. Ulogu lends credence to this when she says Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* presents a perceived happy marriage (Ulogu,

2019:136). Because of the soreness and plethora of phenomenon in the marriage, she makes the decision to separate herself from Gilbert in order to devote her time to the lake goddess Uhamiri, whom she feels has chosen her to serve. Eventually, Efuru understands that Uhamiri is not only incapable of having children, but also shares many of her own attributes such as beauty, money, and knowledge. Her decision enables her to live as an independent woman in her community.

Being the first novel written by an African female writer, it was considered to be a mouth piece for African women. The story sets itself apart from traditional Western novels, particularly in its unique use of dialogue amongst the women in the narrative. It also shows how African women stand for each other in the society against all odds.

Maxine Hong Kingston's "No Name Woman"

"No Name woman" is a story in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* published in 1976. It is the story of an unnamed woman who passes through uncanny experience because of the patriarchal nature of her community. Her namelessness invariably portrays that she is considered nonexistent in her community as such whatever happens to her is not deemed fit to cause worry to anyone irrespective of their relationship with her.

She is lynched by members of her community for getting pregnant for someone who was not her husband. Because of the horrific nature of her offence, to mention her name is termed a taboo as such her namelessness. That is why Szmanko (2004:189) says "the namelessness of the woman in Kingston's text finds its reflection in alienation from her community". Because of the magnitude of the offense, the nameless woman who is Kingston's aunt was not given an ample opportunity to explain how she got pregnant in the absence of her husband. Kingston's mother tells her the story of the no name aunt in order to caution her against finding herself in such situation which will lead to total alienation from her community

Silence can be reverted into voluntarily or by compulsion. Women's silence is usually hinged on cultural norms which are regardless of the continent they come from. It is evident from the selected texts of this study which are *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa and "*The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*", by Maxine Hong Kingston that silence has been a female dilemma over the years. It is a universal issue amongst women who are denied the privilege of speaking about issues that hurt them in a patriarchal society. That is to say, despite the bizarre refusal of male dominance by female writers, it is also evident that female writers in their works still reaffirm a dilemma women suffer, which is silence. Voice is a prerogative of a woman, without this their grandeur is undermined. To be silenced invariably means to be marginalised or oppressed by one's oppressor. These results in making the oppressed feel nonexistent because someone who exists has a voice and shares his or her experience with others. Thus, this study is undertaken to make a critical perusal of the salient root cause of the brutal form of silence amongst women in a patriarchal spectrum despite their quest to voice out, using the two texts written by writers from different continents.

The theoretical framework chosen for the study is feminism. As a context-based theory it sees the very concept of literature as inevitably constrained by institutional conventions and institutional contexts. It seeks to see a novel from cultural contexts. Lending credence to this is the assertion made by Peter Lamarque "there would be no literary works without the institution (Peter, 2009:62). Invariably, all literary works are hinged on certain codes of conduct, societal structures, experiences, imaginations, and beliefs of a writer. Certainly this is true because Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1997:167) also asserts that "literature does not exist in a vacuum". There is an underlying cause that surrounds every piece of literary work. Literature is an art that describes something, explains something, reveals something and tells the reader something. It reflects life in its entirety.

To this effect, the feminist criticism is considered suitable for this topic particularly Elaine Showalter's Gynocriticism which encapsulates the four models of difference in women's writing. Thus, the four models are supposedly aimed at giving a defined direction through which a feminist analysis can be carried out. These concerns include the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women, the psychodynamics of female creativity, the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution of laws, of a female literary tradition.

Gynocritics offer many theoretical opportunities. To see women's writing as their primary subject forces them to make a leap to a new conceptual vantage point and to redefine the nature of the theoretical problem before them. To them it is no longer the ideological dilemma of reconciling revisionary pluralisms but the essential question of difference. Invariably their task is how can they constitute women as a distinct literary group? What is the difference in women's writing?

The four models of difference include: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic and cultural difference. This is deemed appropriate to avoid wondering in the wilderness just as Showalter posits "feminist criticism has not had a theoretical basis, it has been an empirical orphan in the theoretical storm" (Showalter, 1985:308). Invariably, the four models which she classified as Women's writing and woman's body, Women's writing and women's language, Women's writing and women's psyche and Women's writing and women's culture will serve as a paradigm on which this study can have a clear direction

Women's writing and woman's body: In this model, Showalter states that the study of biological imagery in women's writing is useful and important as long as we understand that factors other than anatomy are involved in it. She also believes that ideas about the body are fundamental to understanding how women conceptualise their situation in the society, but there can be no expression of the body

which is unmediated by linguistic, social and literary structures. To this end, the difference in women's writing should be seen in the writing of women and not in the make-up of their body.

Woman's Writing and Woman's Language: Under this model, Showalter believes that the appropriate task for feminist criticism is to concentrate on women's access to language, on the available lexical range from which words can be selected, on the ideological and cultural determinants of expression. This is because the problem is not that language is insufficient to express women's consciousness but that women have been denied the full resources of language and have been forced into silence, euphemism, or circumlocution.

Women's Writing and Woman's Psyche: Here Showalter illustrates that although psychoanalytically based models of feminist criticism can now offer us remarkable and persuasive readings of individual texts and can highlight extraordinary similarities between women's writing in a variety of cultural circumstances, generic and economic factors, to consider these issues, one must go beyond psychoanalysis to a more flexible and comprehensive model of women's writing which places it in the maximum context of culture. *Women's Writing and Woman's Culture:* Showalter says a theory based on women's culture can provide a more complete and satisfying way to talk about the specificity and difference of women's writing than theories based on biology, linguistics, or psychoanalysis reasons being that it incorporates ideas about women's body, language, and psyche but interprets them in relation to the social context in which they occur. She believes women's culture forms a collective experience within the cultural whole, an experience that binds women writers to each other over time and space.

Under this model, the task of gynocentric criticism is to plot the precise cultural locus of the female literary identity and to describe the forces that interest an individual woman writer's cultural field. A gynocentric criticism would also situate women writers with respect to the

variables of literary culture such as modes of production and distribution, relations of author and audience, relations of high to popular art and hierarchies of genre.

Silence, Superstition and Patriarchal Dominance in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*

Introduction

Nwapa uses *Efuru* to depict the life of women in a patriarchal Society. She also depicts women who are faced with the reality of male dominance which is not convenient for them but would rather remain silent about it because of the nature of their society. The society depicted in the text practices a brutal form of patriarchy. That is to say it is a brutal patriarchal society. The novel also depicts instances of women's silence and some obnoxious superstitious beliefs that affect women immensely.

It is against this backdrop that this text is viewed through the lens of feminist theory by Showalter since it portrays the issues of women silence, how patriarchy affects women and male dominance.

Silences in *Efuru*

Nwapa's *Efuru* showcases instances of women's silence which enables male dominance in the society. Hence, silence serves as a potent phenomenon to conceal ugly experiences meted on women in the text. *Efuru*, the heroine and other female characters in the text are depicted as being silent over daring issues mainly because of the male dominated society they find themselves in. A society which celebrates male supremacy over the woman. The woman is expected to remain silent on matters that injure or cause distress to her. She is mistreated by the men and she is never allowed to speak against such actions because confronting the men is considered derogatory.

In the text, *Efuru* finds herself in a society where the silencing of women is considered normal. As such no matter the quest to speak against the men, women consider silence as the best option so they

endure whatever form of cruelty they are faced with. Lorde lends credence to this when she says “when one remains silent; there is always that one little piece inside you that wants to be spoken out” (Lorde, 1984: 4). That is to say the silence of the women in *Efuru* is an imposed kind of silence that makes them repress every desire to speak. Hence, some of the female characters are trapped between two opinions; to speak or remain silent. To this the latter seems to be the safest opinion because it keeps them away from all forms of criticism of going against the norms and established rules.

Efuru is compelled into silence by her society which does not permit women to speak about issues that bother them. She is depicted as being silent about what her husband Adizua does to her. This establishes the position of a woman which makes it difficult for her to speak explicitly on issues that matter since the society considers it a norm the women live with their problems despite their desire to speak out.

Adizua symbolises the males who do despicable things to women in the society and expect them to remain silent. For instance, he begins to do cruel things to his wife Efuru such as sleeping out without prior information to his wife, keeping away from her food and having a relationship with another woman which resulted into neglect for his wife. This instance is captured in the text thus: “At this time Adizua was missing his meals. He would return from the market, have his bath and disappear. Efuru would wait for him and when he did not return, she would eat without relish. Then she would go to bed very sad” (p.50).

Despite the rift between Efuru and her husband, the society she finds herself in makes her believe it is all her fault. This is rightly captured in the text thus:

At midnight, Adizua would come back and knock, Efuru would get up quickly and open the door...Shall I bring food for you? No, I am not hungry. Efuru would then go

to bed and think. 'What is wrong?' she would ask herself.
'How have I offended my husband? What am I going to
do to win him back? Has he found another woman?' (50)

As seen from the excerpt, Efuru takes all the blame for her husband's actions and could not even speak about it obviously because the society does not permit her to speak against a man's actions. Therefore, the society considers her to be the master minder of the rift thereby making her carry the guilt alone. The society also represses her desire to speak as such she relapse into self-communication in order to find solutions to the problems in her marriage.

All along Efuru is aware that her husband's awkward attitude is because he has found another woman but she cannot speak about that to her husband. She is under obligation by the society not to speak about something of that nature. This instance is depicted in the following extract:

When Adizua left the room Efuru sat down on her bed and began to think. Adizua is not going to Ndoni alone, she said to herself. I am quite sure a woman is in this. His every movement suggests this. Adizua must be in the influence of some woman. And what's more this woman must be well to do. He is still pleasing to my eyes, but I am not pleasing to his own eyes anymore and I cannot explain it. How long will this last? How long will I continue to tolerate him? There is limit to human endurance. I am a human being. (Pg 53)

Despite her immense desire to speak to her husband about what she perceives in her heart to be the cause of his unwarranted action towards her, she reverts into silence. This lends credence to one of Showalter's Model in the feminist criticism which says "the problem of women is not that language is insufficient to express women's consciousness but that women have been denied the full resources of

language and have been forced into silence, euphemism, or circumlocution". Showalter believes that women are often denied the right to speak as portrayed in the case of Efuru who represses her thought to herself rather than speaking them out to her husband.

Efuru is unhappy about her husband's actions as depicted in this instance: "when it was time to go to the market, Efuru went. She sold her things quietly and sadly. One of her customers asked her why she was sad and she told her to mind her business" (Pg 54). Though being unhappy, she resorts to silence because obviously she cannot speak as a result of the norms and rules of the society she finds herself in. The embargo on speaking seems to deprive her of happiness. As Showalter avers "women have been forced into silence" as such they cannot express themselves.

Adizua in the text represents a male dominated society that maltreats women and is structured in a way that does not permit the women to speak. Invariably, Adizua can be regarded as the symbol in the society that forces women into silence. Therefore, if Efuru confronts her husband headlong about the cause of his actions, the society will tag her as a bad woman who does not want her husband to have a second wife. As such she has no liberty to speak against his actions and must remain silent as regards the issue of taking another wife. She says "What is wrong in his marrying a second wife. It is only a bad woman who wants her husband all to herself" (P. 53). Despite her premonition about the cause of his actions she only keeps this to herself in order not to give the society the impression that she is not in support.

Ossai, the mother of Adizua and Efuru's mother in-law is another example of a woman who represses her desire to speak against the bad things mated on her by a male dominated society which allows a man to do as he wills to a woman regardless of her feeling. Ossai recounts her experience with the father of Adizua who also abandoned her and her son. She says to Efuru "I have been patient all my life. You don't

know what my life had been" (P. 59). She resorts into silence about all the ill treatment meted on her by her husband. Her action of resorting into silence meets up with the societal expectation of every woman. Hence, she encourages her daughter-in-law Efuru to emulate her as captured in these words: "My daughter, I cannot doubt what you have said. My son has neglected you. But as my sister Ajanupu has advised you wisely, be patient. It pays to be patient. I have been patient myself all my life" (P. 59). Ossai endures a lot of pains and hardship in her marriage to Adizua's father in order to receive societal applause. "... you wanted to be called a good wife, good wife when you were eating sand, good wife when you were eating nails" (P.79). Obviously, Ossai is left with no option other than maintaining the status quo the society has prescribed for her. Despite the heart wrenching experience, she chooses to be patient; a disposition that is expected of her by the society.

Efuru is depicted as being silenced on another occasion in the text when asked about her marriage to Adizua. "Did I hear that you have left your husband? Yes, he has left me. Don't say that my daughter, don't say that. We say that a woman has left her husband, but never say that a husband has left his wife" (P. 90). Undoubtedly, the society chooses what she says and the manner in which it has to be said invariably pushing her to silence. As Abdul (2014) puts it "the silence of women is borne out of the fact that women find it difficult to have their opinion towards the man". This means there is obviously an invisible barricade that hinders women from being heard about the things meted on them by the men. What a woman must say about a man must be filtered by the society which is saddled with the responsibility of determining its appropriateness. This perhaps aligns with Showalter's opinion that women have been denied access to language that can adequately speak their mind thereby forcing them into "silence".

Efuru's marriage to her second husband Gilbert endeared her into more silence. Gilbert is another symbol of a system that forces women into silence despite their desire to speak. Gilbert takes his wife Efuru on a business trip and abandons her. He returns in the morning acting as though nothing happened or it was a normal thing to have treated her in that manner. Efuru, on the other hand, is angry but has no option rather than repressing her feeling. This is captured in this excerpt: "When Gilbert arrived in the morning, Efuru greeted him as if it was quite normal that he should leave her in a strange place all night" (140-141). The society in which Efuru finds herself is one that allows the men to do as it pleases them, hence keeping the women perpetually at the receiving end. The society itself teaches Efuru how to control her desire to abhor discussing issues she finds disturbing and destabilising. Invariably, she acquires a queer self-control that is imposed, not voluntary.

Another instance of women's silence is depicted in the text through the character Nkoyeni, Gilbert's second wife. She is compelled into silence by her brother Sunday, who is another symbol of male dominated society that forces women into silence. Sunday is a friend to Efuru's husband Gilbert. Before Gilbert's marriage to Nkoyeni, he visited his friend Sunday and teases Nkoyeni of being his "wife" (189). Nkoyeni in a way to show her disapproval of what Gilbert says begins to "cry" (189). Sunday a symbol of a society that compels women into silence exemplifies this as captured in these words "the little girl began to cry... enough of it you little fool: if you don't stop that nonsense I shall get a whip and break it on your body ... won't you be glad to have somebody like Gilbert as your husband, you fool? (189). Nkoyeni is hushed into silence having no opportunity given to her to speak her mind because the man is regarded as one who does a woman favour that is why she is subsequently made to marry Gilbert.

Nwapa explicates the silence of woman in this text using the major character Efuru and other minor characters such as Ossai and Nkoyeni

to bring to the fore the dilemma women are faced with in a society that places value on the men more than the women. All these women are exemplified as being gruesomely victimised by the men in their lives having no opportunity to speak out. Invariably any feeling these women have is being repressed as Lawrence puts it “silence marks uncertainty about what life is and about the reality of any feeling” (Lawrence 1991:20).

Patriarchal dominance in Efurú’s Society

The society of Nwapa was patriarchal in all facets. Hence, she uses this text to depict a typical Igbo society that upholds patriarchal rules which entails the subjugation and oppression of women. The major character Efurú and other minor female characters in this text suffer one problem or the other in the patriarchal society they find themselves. Women are subjected to suffering because they are considered inferior to the men. The woman is regarded as a creature which is only answerable to the man because of the supposed wide range dichotomy between the men and the women.

Nwapa provides readers with an explicit picture of a patriarchal society through the relationship between the men and the women in the text. The relationship as portrayed in the text is that of the superior (men) and inferior (women) gender respectively. The men are considered superior being while the women are considered the inferior being. Nwapa uses divergent situations to reflect how the patriarchal society operates.

The people drank. Schnapps was poured in a glass given to Adizua to drink. Whilst he sipped it, Efurú was called. She was given the glass by her husband and when she was about to drink the people shouted: kneel down, kneel down, you are a woman. Efurú quickly knelt down and drank and left immediately (p.23 & 24).

The above excerpt depicts the patriarchal nature of Efuru's community. Obviously the words "...kneel down, you are a woman" (p. 24) are used to instill the notion that a woman is inferior to the man. Invariably, Efuru's action of not kneeling when given the drink is deemed an outright attempt to break the code of the patriarchal society. As such her immediate decision to kneel down in obedience to the instruction given to her by her father's "people" (p21) shows total acceptance of the supposed status quo of a woman in a society permeated by patriarchal rules.

In a patriarchal society the woman has no right to make any decision; the man is the only one with exclusive right to make decisions. Efuru is portrayed in another instance telling Nwosu the father of the little girl her mother in-law brought to help her carry her baby thus: "My mother in law told me about your daughter. My husband has just gone to the back of the house. He will soon be here. A woman has no say in these things" (39). These words reveal the position of a woman in the family. Efuru's action towards the situation at hand gives the reader a vivid picture of the inferior status of a woman. This instance lends credence to Makama's assertion which says "patriarchy is a set of structures of social relations which enables men to dominate women (Makama, 2013: 116). Patriarchy aides' male dominance over woman as such Efuru acknowledges her husband must be the decision maker in all she does. In line with this, Amouzou (2006:99) also argues: "patriarchy is a form of social organisation in which males exercise power and thus create for female inferior status".

A patriarchal society makes the female gender feel less important. Even when a child is born into a family, everyone desires that the child should be a boy especially when it is the first child. For instance, Efuru's child with Adizua is considered not a desirable gender being the first child of Adizua and Efuru as depicted in the text:

A distant relation of Efuru came and fell on her feet. Efuru, she began very slowly. I am very sorry. I am indeed very sorry. So all your suffering has come to naught. Efuru, in what ways have you offended our ancestors? What is the reason for this – a child who was more than two years old. You were married and for a long time you did not have a child. Then our gods and ancestors opened your womb and you had a baby girl. We all rejoiced for you. A girl is something though we would have preferred a boy (72).

Obviously, patriarchy has made women to see themselves as insignificant beings. This feeling creates a palatable ground for the subjugation and oppression of the women. The women's preference for a male child could also be hinged on the fact that the women do not want to bear female children like themselves who will also be susceptible to the hardship and cruelty of a patriarchal society.

Another instance of the cruel nature of patriarchy in this novel is exemplified when Nwosu unabashedly threatens his wife saying: "Woman stop your nonsense. If you don't stop this nonsense now and I raise my hand and descend it on you, you will not know yourself for days" (98). This reveals that Nwosu sees his wife as a punching pad since the society considers the woman as an insignificant being that does not require fair treatment. Nwapa uses this to depict how a patriarchal society empowers the man over the woman. Hence, the woman only lives at the mercy of the man to do whatever he pleases with her.

Female characters in the text experience so much hardship and pains both physically and psychologically because of the unwarranted ill treatment meted on them by the men. Efuru's mother-in-law for instance confirms this when she says: "My life has been one long suffering" (157). Since Efuru's mother-in-law affirms that her life has

been ravaged by pains, this attests to the fact that a patriarchal society only inflicts pains on women. This proves that Nwapa's text is written based on the context of her culture which allows patriarchal norms to pervade the society. In essence, the cultural context of Nwapa serves as a major factor to the depiction of scenarios of female subjugation in the text.

To show how patriarchal Efuru's society was women are not praised for being great mothers because this is considered insignificant. The men are held in great esteem and always praised. Efuru's father is described as:

“..., the mighty man of valour. Ogene who, single handed fought against the Aros when they came to molest us. Nwashike himself proved himself the son of his father. He was a great fisherman. When he went fishing, he caught only asa and aja. His yams were the fattest in the whole town. And what is more, no man has ever seen his back on the ground” (11).

Since men are at the top of the social ladder in a patriarchal society, any effort made by them is always taken into cognisance. Women's efforts are often simply ignored and thwarted.

Patriarchy creates a fertile ground for men to exude undue authority over women. The women in a patriarchal setting live their lives bearing in mind that they are inferior to the men, a status quo created by the men in order to dominate the women. This domination leads to ill treatment of the women thereby making them helpless. Apparently, patriarchy is a system that permits male dominance an act which leads to oppression of women.

Efuru in Nwapa's text is exemplified as a female character who is being ill-treated by her husband Adizua. Adizua refuses to eat Efuru's food few years after their marriage because he found another woman. As a

result, Efuru decides to stop keeping food for him. One night Adizua comes to the house demanding to be served his meal but his wife informs him that there was no meal for him that night. He insists that his meal be prepared as captured in this instance: "I want my food tonight" (52). Left with no choice, Efuru decides to prepare the meal only to realise that Adizua has left the house after instructing her to prepare him a meal. Thus:

Efuru went to the kitchen and prepared something for her husband. When it was ready, Adizua was called and when there was no reply from his room, Ogea was sent. The room was empty. Efuru left the food on a tray and went to bed (52).

Apparently, Adizua puts his wife under such undue pressure to make her feel she is only but a woman that must do his bidding anytime. It is obvious that he wants his wife to continue keeping food for him even though he does not eat it to serve as a sign that he is above her. His attitude is borne out of the fact that he is superior to her as such he has no regards for her feeling. His action is aided by patriarchal norms that saddle the woman with the exclusive responsibility of cooking for the man. So whether the man eats the food or not she is under obligation to prepare his food.

Superstition in *Efuru*

Nwapa depicts a typical Igbo society where superstition permeates everyday activities. This society believes there are mystical powers behind everything that happens to an individual. Efuru's childlessness for instance is linked to the superstitious belief that she has been chosen by the goddess of the great lake to be her worshipper. Efuru says to a *dibia*: "I dream several nights of the lake and the woman of the lake" (146) her dream is considered as a sign that the woman of the lake has chosen her to be her worshipper as seen in the words of the *Dibia* thus:

“The woman of the lake, our Uhamiri, has chosen you to be one of her worshippers”. (147)

Efuru’s wealth is also said to be a blessing from the woman of the lake. Invariably, since she is Uhamiri’s worshipper, she will accumulate sufficient wealth. The Dibia whom Efuru and her father consulted says: “You are a great woman. Nwashike Ogene, your daughter is a great woman. The goddess of the lake has chosen her to be one of her worshippers. It is a great honour. She is going to protect you and shower riches on you” (153). This means the woman of the lake is believed to have abundant riches in which she generously shares with her worshippers.

To enjoy the continuous blessing of the woman of the lake, Efuru is expected to keep her laws. Disobedience to any of her laws is considered a grievous offense. That means throughout Efuru’s life time she must observe the norms that govern the worship of the woman of the lake. The Dibia tells Efuru about the things she must do thus:

Now, listen to me. Unhamiri is a great woman. She is our goddess and above all she is very kind to women. If you are to worship her, you must keep her taboos. Orie day is her great day. You are not to fish on this day. I know you don’t fish, but you should persuade others not to fish. You are not to eat yams on this day. You must not sleep with your husband. You have to boil, roast or fry plantains on orie days. Unhamiri likes plantains very much. ... when you go to bed you must be in white on Orie nights. You can sacrifice a white fowl to Unhamiri on this day... Above all you will keep yourself holy. When you do all these, then you will see for yourself what the woman of the lake would do for you. (153 & 154).

Efuru's childlessness is the result of being chosen to be a worshipper of Unhamiri. She is trapped between a patriarchal society and a society that believes in superstitions. Patriarchal in the sense that the society expects that a woman's essence of living is to bear children as such anything devoid of this renders her completely useless. Also enshrined in her society is the superstitious belief of worshipping certain gods of the land. For Efuru, she is said to be a chosen worshipper of Uhamiri.

The belief that a woman is responsible for childlessness in a home showcases the female experience in their societies and the numerous things they have to deal with because of their gender. Efuru as a character is used by Nwapa to explore the dilemma of a woman who has no child to call her own. Marriage in an African society is for procreation as such when this is absent in the marriage the wife is usually blamed, thereby, she bears the burden alone. The excerpt below reveals Efuru's travail in her moment of childlessness:

Efuru was very worried in the second year of her marriage. My mother had only me; she said one night to herself. 'My father told me so and also that she found it difficult to become pregnant. Am I going to be like her, then I too will have a daughter like her. But what if that is denied me? What if that also is denied me? What will I do? Oh, what will I do?' she wept. (24)

Her worry over her childlessness is because the society will pin the blame on her and exempt her husband who is part of the marriage. Besides, it is the duty of the woman to carry a child in her womb and not the man's duty. Therefore, the society is not concerned about knowing the cause of childlessness which could be from the man in as much as a woman does not have a child.

Though Efuru later conceives and had the opportunity of bearing a child who died when she was two years, the society still considers her a childless woman. This is because she could not bear a child anymore.

Another child would have served as a deterrent to those who consider her childless or better still the only child she had would have been living in order to shut the society from mocking her.

Living in a patriarchal society that only permits the man to marry a second wife if the first one cannot bear a child enables Efuru's second husband Gilbert to marry Nkoyeni. Efuru knowing the type of society she lives in makes frantic efforts to get a new wife for her husband who can bear him children. Her conversation with her mother-in-law succinctly captures this: "You are taking keen interest, my daughter, in getting a wife for your husband. It is good. I am happy. I want my husband to have children. I am barren" (180). The woman has no right to marry another man for being unable to bear children with her husband but for the man the rules are different. That means if all the women a man marries are not able to bear children as a result of lack of potency from the man the society will enjoin them to remain in the marriage and die without children.

In this story the society also frowns at a man who treats a woman who has not borne him children, well. Gilbert is considered a weak man because of his love for Efuru despite her childlessness. This is exemplified when some women were discussing about Gilbert and Efuru thus: "seeing them together is not the important thing ... The important thing is that nothing has happened since the happy marriage. Marriage must be fruitful of what use it is if it is not fruitful" (137). In Efuru's society, a happy marriage is hinged on the ability to have children. However, Efuru and her husband seem happy without children that is why the society frowns vehemently at it.

No matter the achievement of a woman in this society, she can only be considered a great woman if she has a child. Efuru despite her wealth is faced with the challenges that come with childlessness. "It as a curse not to have children. Her people did not just take it as one of the numerous accidents of nature. It was regarded as a failure" (165). That

means the success of a woman is weighed by her ability to wbear children. A woman without children is considered an outright failure.

Oppression, Fear and the Quest to Speak Up in Maxine Hong Kingston's "No Name Woman"

Introduction

Maxine Hong Kingston's "No Name Woman" portrays the plight of Chinese women who have no voice because of their gender. Being a woman in the Chinese society of Maxine Hong is tantamount to being an animal because the woman is equated to an animal. This jeopardises the reasons of a woman's existence because she is forced by the society to act as if nonexistent. The story repudiates instances that portray suppression of women, living in fear and the quest to voice out issues they find disturbing.

One of the things gynocritics tend to look out for in a text is the themes encapsulated in it which reflect the cultural context in which such text emanates from. There is no doubt that the themes in Kingston's "No Name Woman" reflect the cultural context of her society in its entirety. Themes reflected in the story include: oppression and fear. These themes repudiate the nuanced nature of Kingston's society.

The Storyline of "No Name Woman"

The short story begins with the narrator telling readers how her mother instructed her never to tell anyone what she was about to tell her. The mother tells her that her father had a sister who committed suicide by jumping into the family well though no one makes mention of her because she is regarded as someone who never existed. The mother says the aunt jumped into the family well because she became pregnant in the absence of her husband who traveled to America.

Her mother tells her the story of the no name aunt to caution her against indulging in anything that will make her fall victim of the circumstance of her aunt who was considered nonexistent because of getting pregnant for a man other than her husband and committing

suicide subsequently. The narrator resonates about her aunt's death and concludes that her aunt must have been forced by a man to have sexual intercourse with him considering the way women were treated in China.

She says the man that got her aunt pregnant must be someone known to her aunt because their community housed no stranger. She says the man must have been granting her aunt favour which is why she could not resist his demand for sex knowing that as a woman she could not have rejected what he asks of her. She also says the man must have ordered her aunt not to mention that he is responsible for the pregnancy after being informed by her. Therefore, he organises the people in the community to raid the family house of the no name aunt and not the house of her husband. The narrator wanders why the aunt was not in her husband's house but in her father's house instead.

As the story progresses, the narrator's mother re-emphasises the need for the narrator never to tell anyone she had an aunt because she is considered nonexistent, as such she must not be mentioned. This makes the narrator to say there is more to the silencing. She feels the family only want her to participate in the punishment of her no name aunt. The no name aunt's punishment according to the narrator is the act of deliberately forgetting her name and not even the raid. Even in death her family refuses to forgive her in order to make her suffer for a life time.

Oppression

The derisive nature of patriarchy leads to the oppression of women. It makes the women live in the shadow of themselves resulting to oppression. Given the wrenching impression it leaves on the women, they struggle continuously to break free from the male dominance patriarchy offers. Walby (1990:46) argues that patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women.

It is evident in the story that the female characters are exposed to all sorts of unjust treatment in the hands of men who serve as tools of patriarchy. The narrator in the story is a victim of patriarchal oppression. She is unjustly forced to remain silent about experiences of her aunt in the hands of the people of their village as a result of patriarchy. This is revealed in this instance: "you must not tell anyone ... what I am about to tell you" (1). This is a form of unjust authority over the will of the narrator. The narrator is supposed to have the right to speak but obviously the right is denied her through oppressive norms that consider a woman not capable of living for herself.

The narrator's no name aunt is also a victim of ill treatment by patriarchal structures. Her entire life as exemplified in the story resonates despotism in its entirety. The humiliation she receives from the villagers in the text shows how women are being given unjust treatment. She is said to be pregnant in the absence of her husband. The narrator's mother never believed the narrator's no name aunt is pregnant as depicted in the text: "She could not have been pregnant, you see, because her husband had been gone for years" (1). This offence would have been probably excused if it were committed by the man knowing that he has been away from his wife for years. Obviously, the judgment is not the same for the woman. The society expects her to remain alone no matter the period of being deserted that is why when the villagers noticed the narrator's no name aunt was pregnant, they decided to raid her family house on the day they expected her to deliver her baby. The mother of the narrator says "the village had also been counting. On the night the baby was to be born the villagers raided our house" (1). This shows the magnitude of the cruelty meted on women. None of the villagers cared to look for who was responsible for her pregnancy because the one responsible is superior and not capable of committing an offence or on a lighter level it is all the fault of the woman, thus, she must bear the consequences.

The cultural opprobrium gives no room for the man to be called to justice, therefore the no name aunt of the narrator is held responsible. That is why the villagers inflict all kinds of ill treatment on the pregnant woman to show their resentment for women. "They ripped up her clothes and shoes and broke her combs, grinding them underfoot" (1). This shows that patriarchy has no regard for women that is why the form of oppression mated on women in a patriarchal society knows no bounds.

Patriarchal norms that aid the oppression of women permeate the society of the narrator in "No Name Woman" with its devastating effects on the women. Women are relegated to the background as non-existent beings. They are subjected to all forms of oppression by the men with no structure to deter the men from such. Apparently, the men are considered superior to the women who are deemed to be inferior beings. Inferior in so many ways which include lack of freedom to make decisions for one's self, lack of privilege to speak on issues you want to talk about nor ask questions on things that do not seem alright.

As a result, the narrator is being asked not to speak about her no name aunt who obviously is considered a non-existent being. The patriarchal society they lived in oppressed her till she decides to take her life and that of her child. The words of the narrator's mother replicate this: "You must not tell anyone", my mother said, what I am about to tell you. In china your father had a sister who killed herself; she jumped into the family well. We say that your father has all brothers because it is as if she had never been born" (1). The memory of her no name aunt is deliberately wiped out because she is only but a woman who has gone against patriarchal norms thus, must be forgotten.

Having been warned by her mother never to tell anyone about her no name aunt, the mother of the narrator proceeds to tell her why the no name aunt is completely forgotten by the family. She is considered nonexistent because she got pregnant for someone other than her

husband. This is an offense which is not handled with levity in her community. The narrator's mother says:

I remember looking at your aunt one day when she and I were dressing, I had noticed before that she had such a protruding melon of a stomach. But I did not think, she's pregnant, until she began to look like other pregnant women, her shirt pulling and the white tips of her black pants showing. She could not have been pregnant, you see, because her husband had been gone for years. (1).

On discovering that the narrator's no name aunt is pregnant in the absence of her husband the entire village kept a watch on her by counting months so that she would not escape the punishment meant for her. "The villagers had also been counting. On the night the baby was to be born, the villagers raided our house" (1). She is obviously being monitored by everyone in the village with no attention given to the man who got her pregnant. Biologically a woman cannot get pregnant alone, therefore the two culprits are supposed to be held responsible for their actions. The woman is punished and the man is not punished as evidently seen in the actions of the villagers.

Bearing in mind the wrenching things that will happen to her and her new born baby, she decides to end her life and that of the baby in order to have peace. Death is the only solace left for her baby and herself. According to the narrator's mother: "the next morning when I went for the water, I found her and the baby plugging up the family well" (1). She could not spare the life of the innocent child because the child is a girl knowing how volatile life would be for the child because of her gender. In death she could not stand the fact that her society will not treat her daughter fairly. As such, she decides to drown with her. The narrator says: "Carrying the baby to the well shows loving. Otherwise abandon it. Turn its face into the mud. Mothers who love their children take them along. It was probably a girl: there is some hope of

forgiveness for boys" (4). Getting drowned with the child is a deliberate attempt by the no name aunt to save her daughter from the cruelty of patriarchy. A system that treats women with no regards. She would have saved the baby's life. However, she decides to take it along in order not to endanger the life of the child.

Kingston makes a deliberate attempt to show the patriarchal nature of her society. This agrees with Showalter's assertion that in feminist criticism one must consider every issue around the text in the context of culture. It is expedient to say that the patriarchal nature of Kingston's society is hinged on the societal culture. The culture gives more reverence to the male gender and considers the female as nothing. The story reveals how women are repressed and maltreated. For instance, the no name aunt and the narrator are forced into silence because of their gender.

The no name aunt also symbolises how patriarchal society forces the woman to take the blame of the offence of the men. She bears in silence, the consequences of an action carried out by a man till her death. Notwithstanding, her death serves as the only escape route from the hands of the people in her village. No one had remorse for her death because she was only a mere woman. As Achiri (2019:42) rightly says "patriarchy is exhibited through depriving women not just the right to speak or to express one's self but every single right".

Kingston exemplifies the gloomy and mysterious effects of patriarchy on women. This pervades the entire story and reflects the real cultural context of her society. Her exposition of the bewildering circumstances that pose problem to women in her society reveals the cultural context. According to Showalter, in a feminist reading the critic should endeavor to read women's writing keeping in mind the cultural context it emanates from. As such the quest to speak that the women in this story have been denied emanates from the culture of their society.

Fear

The horrible effects of patriarchy lead women to phobia. They cower in fear as a result of the inhuman nature of patriarchy. Fear makes it difficult for them to express themselves. Thus, making life seems unbearable and unpleasant. Invariably fear leads to cowardice and servitude.

It is evident that the female characters in the story live in fear – fear of the men in their community. They live in servitude because the societal construct has made it so for them. The instruction of the narrator's mother to the narrator not to reveal what she told her about her no name aunt is borne out of fear of what will befall her should anyone know that she still speaks about the woman whose memory has been erased. As rightly captured in her words to her daughter, the narrator: "you must not tell anyone" ... "what I am about to tell you". In China your father had a sister who killed herself" (1). Apparently, the mother of the narrator is afraid of the resultant effects of allowing her daughter to speak about the no name aunt. As such she compels her to remain silent about all she will tell her.

Fear of patriarchy also makes the no name aunt of the narrator to remain silent even in the face of humiliation from the villagers. "On the night the baby was to be born the villagers raided our house ... they ripped up her clothes and shoes and broke her combs grinding them underfoot" (1). Afraid of greater harm that would be done to her, the no name aunt never made an attempt to retaliate. She probably resigns to fate, since there is no place of hope.

According to the narrator, the predicament of her no name aunt could be as a result of fear. She feels the man who got her aunt pregnant must have instilled fear into her. The narrator says: "His demand must have surprised, then terrified her. She obeyed him, she always did as she was told" (2). Her partner in the offence she is being punished for must

have instilled the fear of imminent consequences should she make any attempt to mention his name.

The unknown man must have really terrified the no name aunt, which is why he was able to get her pregnant. It is obvious that she agrees to get pregnant for the man out of fear because she obviously knows the consequences of getting pregnant for a man other than her husband. She has to obey him because the society she finds herself makes the man a superior being. And the man also knows that no one will come after him for committing such offence as such he has the leverage of forcing vulnerable women like the no name aunt into having sex with him.

Even in the most critical moment the no name aunt "... kept the man's name to herself throughout her labour and dying; she did not accuse him that he be punished with her. To save her inseminator's name she gave silent birth" (2). Probably her reason for concealing the man's name could be out of fear for what the man threatens to do to her should she mention his name. However, it could also be as a result of what the villagers would do to her for accusing a man since the law of the land considers him to be supreme. In order to be on the safer side she resorts to silence.

After having her baby all by herself the no name aunt decides to end her life and that of her baby in the family well. This action is not far-fetched from the fear of what will be done to her child should she spare the child's life considering that the child is a girl. The narrator says: "carrying the baby to the well shows loving. Otherwise abandon it Mothers who love their children take them along" (4). This shows the love a mother has for her child. Mothers hardly bare to see their children in pains which is why they protect them through whatever means possible. For the no name aunt killing the child alongside herself is the best form of protection she can offer her child at the moment.

Based on the findings of the study, it is evident that silence is a female dilemma that cut across several cultures. That is to say the silencing of women which is a patriarchal norm is a universal phenomenon. It makes women helpless and subjects them to all forms of cruelty from the men in their society. The women are given the status quo of inferiority and considered nonexistent or people without a voice as such must remain silent.

The methods used in silencing women in a patriarchal society could be implicit or explicit order. Explicit when the women are told directly to remain silent and implicit when the women choose to remain silent because of the fore knowledge of existent laws or norms that frowns at a woman who speak against patriarchal structure.

Also, the structure responsible for women's silence is patriarchy. In a patriarchal society women are considered an inferior gender as such must remain silent about any cruelty mated on them by the men. Hence, the women are left with no other option than reverting into silence.

The study also reveals that the reason for women silence despite the unspeakable desire to voice out is the fear of patriarchy. The female characters in the texts know the consequences of speaking against the men in a patriarchal society. Therefore, they revert into silence.

Finally, women who revert into silence in the selected texts do so distinctly. In Nwapa's *Efuru*, the female characters resigned to fate and choose to continue with their lives in silence while in Kingston's text the no name aunt chooses to end her life in silence.

The quest to speak up in "No Name Woman"

Like *Efuru* and other female characters in Nwapa's *Efuru*, the narrator in "No Name Woman" and other female characters also experience silencing despite their desire to speak out. The narrator, the no name aunt and the mother of the narrator in the short story are restrained from speaking about issues that affect them. This entails repressing all

forms of desire to speak about issues that the society forbids them to say.

Kingston explores the intensity of the female dilemma in her society by weaving it explicitly in this short story. She brings to bear the repression of women as seen in the life of the narrator. The narrator is portrayed as a character that is forced into silence explicitly unlike Efuru whose silence is not as a result of explicit instruction but as a result of existing laws in her society that compels women into silence on certain issues.

Comparative Analysis of Nwapa's *Efuru* and Kingston's "No Name Woman"

Introduction

This section explores the striking similarities and contrasts between the methods employed in silencing women in the selected texts. It shows that the silencing of women is a universal issue deployed differently with a single aim, that is, the subjugation and oppression of women.

Comparison of *Efuru* and "No Name Woman"

Nwapa's *Efuru* shows that the women in her society are compelled into silence. This deprives them the opportunity of being in control of their own lives. It subjects them to untold hardship which they are not permitted to speak against. Efuru for instance in the text is depicted as a character that seems helpless because of the implicit coercion into silence by the patriarchal society in which she finds herself. While being married to her first husband Adizua, she discovers that he is having an extramarital affair: "I am quite sure a woman is in this, his every movement suggests this" (53). There is an implicit law which keeps her in silence as such she can only imagine the extramarital affairs of her husband in her head without speaking about it to her husband.

Adizua's decision to abscond with his new found woman renders Efuru helpless, and then makes her to ponder on the possible cause of her husband's queer behavior. After leaving Efuru she begins to think:

When Adizua left the room, Efuru sat down on her bed and began to think. Adizua is not going to Ndoni alone, she said to herself. I am quite sure a woman is in this... Oh, if only I could know how and when I offended him. I shall ask people to beg him (53).

Efuru is compelled into silence by the implicit orders existing in her society that does not permit her to speak against her husband's affairs. Therefore, she decides to blame herself for his actions towards her. The man is never wrong about his actions in a patriarchal society. Apparently, she must endure the pains that come with her husband's action because she is a woman and must remain silent amidst the desire to speak.

Similarly, the no name aunt in Kingston's text is faced with a similar situation as Efuru because of the patriarchal nature of her society. Her silence in the face of grave danger shows her helplessness just like Efuru: "On the night the baby was to be born the villagers raided our house... they ripped up her clothes and shoes and broke her combs, grinding them underfoot" (1).

Realising the cruel nature of her society towards women she decides to remain silent in the face of this great humiliation by concealing the name of her partner and facing the problem alone. Instead of exposing her partner, she thought it wise to withhold his identity knowing that her society will not punish the man alongside with her because of the immunity patriarchy provides to men. So "she kept the man's name to herself throughout her labour and dying; she did not accuse him that he be punished with her" (3).

Even in the face of death and severe pains from labour the no name aunt's silence seems to escalate. Ordinarily, the pains of labour and the fear of death would have propelled her to mention the name of her partner but she is left with no option other than silence. Silence because mentioning her partner's name will be of no importance since he will not be punished and it might also be more injurious to herself.

Bearing the pain alone shows how helpless the no name aunt has been. Since there is no one that will help her, she resolves to help herself and her baby by taking her life and that of the new born child. This places her in double jeopardy of suicide and murder. As captured in this instance: "towards the morning she picked up the baby and walked to the well" (4). She decides to get herself and her baby drowned in the well to end their misery. Considering the helplessness of women in her society her innocent child with no idea of what transpired is dragged into this pathetic situation.

Nwapa's *Efuru* also shows that women live in fear of what the society will say when they speak against the ill treatment meted on them by the men. The society makes the women see themselves as people that must bear whatever the men do be it good or bad. Eventually, the women live in fear of breaking the code of silence imposed on them by patriarchal structures. Words which seems to be a potent tool to break the code is denied them. Every woman must remain silent in order to show her docility and level of submissiveness to her husband.

Efuru's silence about her first husband's behaviour towards her when he found another woman shows that she is afraid of taking a confrontational stance. Instead of confronting him headlong about the new woman she feels he has found, she rather resorts into THINKING instead of SPEAKING, "...Obviously, it is only in her thought that she can adequately express herself for fear of what the society would say should she speak about her husband getting involved with another woman.

Ossai, Efuru's mother in-law also reverts to silence for fear of what people would say about the disappearance of Adizua's father. He leaves her and her son to suffer and returns home after so many years without being questioned about his irresponsible act. This shows that his wife is afraid of speaking about the situation: "three harvests after, my husband came home without any warning, I welcomed him, I embraced him and wept for joy" (60).

It seems she is afraid of losing him again as such she decides to keep quiet about his prolonged absence in the past years that subjected her son and herself into suffering. Indeed, the fear instilled into her must have been the cause of her suppressed desire to speak because leaving her alone to take care for their child Adizua is enough reason to be angry with him and speak against his action. However, she has to be silent for fear of the society that provides immunity for men.

Ossai, having spent all her life in pain because of her husband's absence could not confront the man behind her misery when he returned to her probably for fear of what people would say. As she says, "No woman of today can suffer as I have suffered" (59). Her husband's absence subjected her to suffering. She suffers alone to fend for herself and her son. The pain she experiences is more may be partly because the supposed father of her child is alive and not available to take up his responsibility as a father. Indeed it might have been less painful if the man were to be dead. The same man who abandons her and her son returns to her when he was completely helpless for her to take care of him:

Three harvests after, my husband came home without warning. I welcomed him, I embraced him and wept for joy. He begged me to forgive him and promised that he would be faithful to me. I took him for his word. We lived together. He could not go to farm anymore. His life had changed completely and he brooded most up the

time. One Nkwo day he disappeared. ...then six months later my husband came back. This time he was very ill. He had contracted a disease and had come to me to cure him (60 & 61).

It is obvious that Ossai's attitude to her husband despite his unscrupulous behavior, could be out of fear. Ordinarily as a human, she would have spoken against his action but it seems she is afraid of the repercussions of the patriarchal society. Knowing that in such society a woman must accommodate whatever the man does. If the tables were to be turned, the man would not have accepted her. That is because the man is considered super human who deserves an unconditional reverence.

Similarly, the no name aunt in Kingston's text reverts into silence for fear of societal rebuttal should she speak up about her predicament. She remains silent despite all that the people in her community subjected her to for fear of adverse reaction. Firstly, her fear could be hinged on uncalled criticism which could probably be accusation for indecent dressing as the reason for being impregnated. In patriarchal societies when there is a situation that involves sex, the woman is often blamed. The man, the primary actor, is not considered an offender, while the woman is often accused of doing something wrong for being involved in a sexual relationship.

Secondly, the society could probably accuse her of lacking self-control knowing that her husband has been away: "she could not have been pregnant, you see because her husband had been gone for years (1). The society does not consider her husband's absence as a major contributing factor which could lead to extra marital affair that resulted in pregnancy. Since she is a woman she must remain celibate until her husband returns.

The narrator's obligation to remain silent about the story of her no name aunt is also borne out of the fear of what the patriarchal society

she lives in would say. In this instance her father serves as a symbol of patriarchy. Her mother tells her to remain silent about the story of her no name aunt for fear of what the father of the narrator would do should he be reminded of his sister whom he has forgotten: “you must not tell anyone, my mother said, what I am about to tell you. In China your father had a sister who killed herself... Don’t let your father know that I told you. He denies her” (1). Being a woman considered to have committed an offence unpardonable to patriarchal society; the no name aunt’s memory is completely erased and considered to have never existed.

It could also be the fear of what the society would say that makes the no name aunt to withhold the name of the man that got her pregnant: “she kept the man’s name to herself throughout her labour and dying; she did not accuse him that he be punished with her. To save her inseminator’s name she gave silent birth” (3). Her silence could be because she has been threatened by her “inseminator” never to mention his name as such her resolves to remain silent. The pain of labour is enough to make her mention his name but the fear of what he has probably threatened to do to her kept her bound. Unable to speak she resorts to silence which is purportedly the only option within her ambiance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the methods used in compelling the women in the two texts into silence differ. In *Efuru*, it is evident that there is an implied imposition of silence. The female characters are not told to remain silent through direct instruction rather the patriarchal structure forces them into silence by frowning at any woman who speaks against anything that is mated on her by a man. Hence, the women remain silent in as much as what they want to say is against the men. *Efuru* for instance resorts into silence about the behaviour of her husband Adizua despite the desire to speak in order to maintain the status quo of the women which embodies silence. No one explicitly instructed her

to remain silent but knowing how the patriarchal system works, she resorts to silence and only reverts to thinking about unpleasant situations in her heart probably because she feels that it is the safest place to speak about her husband's attitude – Adizua.

The words as seen in her thoughts are not words that patriarchy would allow her say to her husband as such she must remain mute. It is evident that she desires to confront her husband headlong but the implicit rules that do not permit her to speak against her husband's action consistently holds her bound. Her heart becomes the only place where she could speak to herself and gets answers from within her.

Kingston's text on the other hand reveals explicit imposition of silence on the female character. The narrator is explicitly instructed by her mother not to speak about the story of her no name aunt which falls victim of patriarchy that entails punishing a woman and sparing a man because he is covered by the immunity of patriarchal dominance. Her mother cautions her to remain silent and never speak about her no name aunt for she is considered non-existent by the family members. Her only crime is getting pregnant while her husband was away. No one even bother to unveil the identity of the man who could be responsible for getting another man's wife pregnant only the woman faces the consequences of the offence committed by two: "... she could not have been pregnant; you see because her husband had been gone for years. On the night the baby was to be born the villagers raided our house" (1). Obviously the raid was not carried out in the house of the man responsible for getting the no name aunt pregnant. The villagers rather raided the family house of the no name aunt which reveals in its entirety the means through which the men dominate by giving unequal treatment. Thus patriarchy appears as "a set of structures of social relations which enables men to dominate women."

The silence imposed on the narrator deprived her of so many opportunities of knowing some details about her no name aunt.

Though she immensely desires to get the details, the instruction to remain silent has to be followed by her in order not to incur punishment: "In the twenty years since I heard the story, I have not asked for details nor said my aunt's name, I do not know it" (4). Certainly, the desire to know her aunt's name exists but she is left with only the wish of expressing that desire.

In the final analysis, the two texts reveal that women from across the different continents where the texts emanate suffer silencing which renders them helpless and fearful. Silencing as depicted in the texts makes the women hopeless without strength to defend themselves. The most potent weapon that would have probably helped them is taken away from them thus, leaving them in an awful state of internal rumination.

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