

The Traumatic Effect(s) of Childlessness in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and *One is Enough*

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the traumatic effect(s) of childlessness in Flora Nwapa's Efuru and One is Enough. It seeks to establish the idea that childlessness can lead to trauma as presented by Flora Nwapa in the two novels under. Nwapa captures the trauma that women who could not bear children in either their early years in marriages or in their entire married life go through in traditional Africa society. In patriarchal society, every marriage has a high hope of procreation or in order to sustain or continue the family lineage. When this does not happen, it leads to psychological and emotional trauma in the life of the family especially the woman who is blamed to be the source of the childlessness. The study uses Laura S. Brown's theory of trauma to explore and analyze the traumatic effects of childlessness in the two novels. One of the findings of this study is that women are always blamed for such situation. This leads to psychological and emotional pains and trauma. The women are psychologically and emotional destabilized, devastated and depressed. It makes the characters helpless and unfulfilled in their marriages and in the society as the joy of motherhood eludes them. This study has added to the corpus of knowledge on the relationship between childlessness and trauma. It would also help practioners in the field to know how to handle those that are in that state. Finally, the study posits that those that are childless should not be treated with disdain.

Key words: *Flora Nwapa, childlessness, Efuru, One is Enough, Brown, trauma.*

Introduction

In traditional or patriarchal societies, one of the reasons for contraction of a marriage is for procreation and when children do not come within a specific time or period, it is assumed that that marriage has a serious social problem: that of infertility which will bring about childlessness. The society frowns and hates such. It is always believed, in most traditional and patriarchal societies that childlessness is as a result of the woman's inability to conceive. This means that it is the woman who is blamed in such situation. The man is assumed to be innocent especially when the man has children outside marriage, that is, out of wedlock. In *One is Enough*, Obiora has a set of twins out of wedlock and this exonerates him from the family predicament of childlessness. We can also see it in the case of Dozie and Ije Apiah in Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the clouds* where Virginia claims that Dozie is responsible for her pregnancy when in reality he is not. But Dozie's mother celebrates her when she comes with the news that she is pregnant for Dozie. As a result of Virginia's claim, Dozie is exonerated from the family's predicament of childlessness until it was proved otherwise. Ifeoma Okoye in her novel *Behind the clouds* makes us look at men as the probable cause of childlessness in a family. The importance attached to childbearing and children is very high that any family that does not have children is looked down in the society. It is also assumed that such family tree has been cut down. This means lack of continuity of the family. It is also assumed that a couple's happiness and continuity of marriage is dependent on their ability to bear children or procreate. When the couple does not have children, that is, when motherhood and parenthood is not achieved within a specific period of about five years, there is bound to be friction in that family. This leads to social pressure from the relations especially that of the husband. It is this social pressure that increases the trauma associated with childlessness. The pressure comes from the mother-in-law, relations, family members and even the entire community or society because the purpose of the marriage has not been fulfilled or has failed. The woman goes extra mile to ensure that she gets a child for her husband. This may include being unfaithful, by having extramarital sexual affair, going fetish, etc. The woman especially suffers social stigma. She becomes the object of ridicule in the society. This affects her emotion and creates fear of losing her husband. She is agitated for fear of losing her husband and this traumatizes her.

Many African literary critics have used different theoretical approaches to study Flora Nwapa's novels, especially *Efuru* and *One is Enough*. The theoretical approaches focus on the feminist perspectives which can be seen in the presentation of the suffering of women in patriarchy. This work does not only align with the fact that women suffer in traditional Africa society as result of patriarchal inhibitions and the desire of the tradition but goes a step further to identify an aspect of what leads to that suffering, which is childlessness. It goes further to argue that childlessness has traumatized not only the woman but also the man: the couple. This work, therefore, interrogates the traumatic effect(s) of childlessness on the family and particularly on the woman in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and *One is Enough* (1981).

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework to adopt in the analysis of this work is Laura S. Brown's theory of insidious trauma. Brown (1995) in her model argues that the individual should be the focus of trauma; but her emphasis is on women and their related issues which is the core of feminist criticism. She makes to understand that the individual is affected more in traumatic events or situations. The individual that suffers should be taken into consideration. The individual's suffering is more emotional or psychological than physiological. Brown, therefore, makes us to know that it is not only events like the holocaust or war that are traumatic but situations like racism and other culture-bound

situations such as the emotional and psychological suffering which women go through especially in marriage such as childlessness. In her classic article entitled “Not outside the range: One feminist perspective on psychic trauma”, Laura S. Brown posits that:

Feminist analysis calls us to look beyond the public and male experiences of trauma to the private, secret experiences that women encounter in the interpersonal realm and at the hands of those we love and depend upon. We must attempt to find the meanings of these different sorts of events that constitute an assault on the integrity and safety of those who are not members of the dominant classes if we are to fully comprehend the meanings and nuances of psychic trauma and its presence in the lives of all humans (p.102).

Brown draws our attention to the fact that it is not only the males that are victims of trauma. She argues that the less dominant classes, especially the women, also are victims of trauma. She also maintains that some events that affect the lives of women can also be traumatizing to them. Brown goes further to state that our understanding of trauma should be expanded from sudden, unexpected catastrophic events that happen to people in socially dominant position to what is termed “insidious trauma” (Root, 1989; 1992 p.236), by which she means “the traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit” (p.107). In marriage, childlessness tends to be more felt by the woman. She is devastated and destabilized when she does not have children for her husband. She is the one that runs from pillar to post because she has not fulfilled one of the expectations of the society in marriage which is procreation. Brown finally presents her treatise when she says, “A feminist perspective, which draws our attention to the lives of girls and women, to the secret, private, hidden experiences of every day pains” (p.110); one of which is brought about or occasioned by the inability to have children in marriage.

Laura S. Brown has brought a new dimension of what trauma should be and that trauma is what happens to people, especially women, in secret and private such as inability to bear children, abandonment, wife battering, sour love relationships and others. They can also be such inhibitions which patriarchy has placed on women and which can be very traumatizing. This is especially true in Africa, where culture and traditions are the instruments patriarchy has used to keep women in traditional and social bondage. Laura Brown is a feminist psychotherapist who has shown that traumatic experiences can be both overt and covert. It can be experiences that occur and others will see it as very insignificant but very traumatizing to the one that goes through it. Brown has not left out the idea of war and holocaust but has added the idea of insidious trauma that affects women, children, the less privileged and the vulnerable more than the dominant group.

Laura S. Brown’s stance may have propelled Andermahr (2015) in his argument for the decolonization of trauma to posit that trauma theory should “Firstly, redress the marginalization of non-Western and minority traumas” (p. 501). This position has supported Root and Brown’s (1992) development of insidious trauma which has given an alternative to ‘dominant trauma aesthetics’ and address the issue of the marginalised. The marginalized are women, children and the vulnerable that may be termed the object or the other.

Craps (2013) proposed a trauma model that seeks to “take account of specific social and historical contexts in which trauma narratives are produced and received and be open and attentive to the diverse strategies of representation and resistance that their contexts invite or necessitate” (p.5). Stef Craps tries to bring in the idea of the culture of the people and the historical context of the work or narrative. This means that the perception of the trauma differs depending on the situation and context in which the narrative is produced. The concept of trauma, for instance, by the western culture will

definitely differ with that of the African culture. This can be as a result of their sociological and historical situations. Craps' proposition is in tandem with Maria Root and Laura S, Brown's idea of insidious trauma theory which will be applied in this work. The way Africa culture views childlessness is quite different from the Western perspective. The Africans are more concerned about childlessness than the West. In a way, the social milieu matters a lot in the consideration of the traumatic effect of childlessness.

Conceptual Framework

Giller (1999) opines that trauma "is an individual's subjective experience that determines whether an event is or is not traumatic" (p.1). She believes that trauma is subjective because it is individualistic. It is also dependent on the individual's perception of the event. She goes further to enumerate what she calls "the circumstances of the event" (p.1) which includes: "abuse of power, betrayal of trust, entrapment, helplessness, pain, confusion and/or loss." Others include "responses to powerful one-time incidents like accidents, natural disasters, crimes, surgeries, death and other violent events". She further included "responses to chronic or repetitive experiences such as child abuses, neglect, combat, urban violence, concentration camps, battering relationship and enduring deprivation" (p.1). This list is all embracing. She did not only mention those events which many psychologists and psychiatrists originally regarded as trauma events but also those ones that people never bothered to think about such as "domestic violence (wife battering), child abuse and sexual abuse" (p.3) which she called "man-made violence" (p.3). The reason may not be farfetched. She is a feminist and believes that the subjugation of women is traumatizing. She also listed what affects the generality of the people such as natural disasters, crimes, etc and what affects an individual such as surgeries, pain, death, to mention only three. It is to be noted that the subjectivity of trauma as posited by Giller is as a result of an individual perception of the event. This implies that what a person may see as traumatic may not be seen by another as traumatic. Childlessness is something that is felt more by the individual or a family (husband and wife) though the society feels concerned.

Briere and Scott (2006) state that "an event is traumatic if it is extremely upsetting and at least temporarily overwhelms the individual internal resources" (p.4). This assertion is predicated on the assumption that every traumatic event is one that the person involved can do nothing. The situation truncates the person to the extent that he can do nothing about it. The ability and capacity to act is highly limited. The person has no power of his/her own over the situation and, indeed, is at its mercy. This is the case with childlessness because the couple can do little or nothing to change their situation. Though they can seek medical attention, the possibility of getting pregnant and sustaining that pregnancy is not dependent on them. The childless person is always upset especially when uncomplimentary remarks are made about their state. It affects the woman emotionally and psychologically.

Childlessness is a social construct that is attributed to a couple that fails to get children after one year of being married. It is to be noted that a couple or a person can decide to be childless. This is what Gouni, et al (2022) calls "voluntary childlessness" (p.1). In African patriarchal society, this is a misnomer because marriage is contracted for procreation. Infertility (Childlessness), according to World Health Organization (WHO), "is a disease of the male or female reproductive system defined by failure to achieve pregnancy after twelve months or more of regular unprotected sexual intercourse." WHO has made two salient points: that childlessness is a disease which means that it can be managed and it can occur as a result of the inability of the couple to stay together to have unprotected sexual intercourse. WHO also posits that childlessness may not be voluntary which means that it is not the wish or desire of the couple to be childless or not to have children. This happens when "an individual is unable to have children for medical reasons whether known or

unknown” (Gouni, et al. 2022, p.1). It then means that it can be treated if the individual realizes it and takes appropriate measure(s) to correct it. Some people out of ignorance or fear of being the object of laughter die childless. Van Voorhis (2007) agrees with WHO’s assertion that childlessness results as a result of inability to procreate after one year or more of constant unprotected sex when she defined infertility as “not having conceived after one year of unprotected sexual intercourse ” (p.370).

Rouchou (2013) classified infertility into two, viz “primary and secondary infertility” (p.1). She sees primary infertility as “the inability to bear any child” (p.1) while secondary infertility is “the inability to become pregnant after previously conceiving, whether or not the first pregnancy came to full term” (p.1). It is to be noted that primary that both primary and secondary infertility lead to childlessness. In African patriarchal society, both of them are seen as negating societal expectation for a couple and the society at large because they have failed to get children and by extension, has destroyed the family tree.

Verkroost and Monden (2022) identified three types of childlessness and they are voluntary, involuntary and circumstantial. They see voluntary childlessness as the “choice not to have children”; while involuntary childlessness as “due to infertility” and circumstantial childlessness as “a consequence of not having (had) a partner to have children with” (p.2). Voluntary childlessness is as a result of a person or couple’s decision not to have a child. It may be for spiritual reason as we see in nuns and priests who decide to be celibate. Involuntary childlessness can be as a result of sickness or disease which the couple did not discover on time. It then means that it can be identified and treated medically. In African traditional setting, it can be attributed to wicked forces, that is, evil machinations of human beings. Circumstantial is as a result of the person’s inability to get married and the person does not want to get children out of wedlock which may be as a result of ones religious belief. It means that they can children if they are married. Verkroost and Monden (2022) assert that circumstantial childless adults are “those who are fecund, want to have children, but are currently not married (either because of never having been married or because of having been separated or divorced or widowed)” (p.8). Our emphasis in this work is on involuntary childlessness because the couple desires to have children but cannot because either the husband or the wife has a medical challenge which has made procreation impossible.

Gouni, et al (2021) see childlessness as “the absence of children in an individual’s life” (p.1, Miettinen, 2015), whether married or not. This happens when adults of the age of procreation live together, whether as husband and wife or in friendship relationship, and having regular unprotected sex but fail to have children. Such relationship in the patriarchal African traditional society and culture is bound to fail as a result of the importance attached to children in the family.

Olga Gouni and his colleagues trace the negative attitude to “childlessness and especially childless woman to antiquity” (p.3). They cite the examples of Babylon where “a husband could divorce a wife if she was infertile” and the Hammurabi (750 BC) law where “an infertile woman can give a slave to her husband to impregnate” (p.3) as we see in the case of Sarah in the Holy Bible.. This means that from antiquity, men are considered to be potent while women are not; therefore, the cause of childlessness is most often attributed to women.

Synopsis of *Efuru*

In *Efuru* (1966), Nwapa presents *Efuru* as beautiful (in character and otherwise), wealthy, dutiful, philanthropist, and understanding woman who is not blessed by a child after the death of her only daughter and child, Ogonim. She marries twice, first to Adizua and later to Eneberi (Gilbert) and is traumatized in all of them because of her inability to get children. It is believed in patriarchal

societies that it is only when the wife gets children that she is seen as part of that family. This means that a woman is fully accepted as a member of the family when she fulfills one of her marital obligations: procreation. Efurú's childlessness is seen from the spiritual perspective: she is a worshipper of Uhamiri who gives wealth but not children; "she cannot give me children, because she has not got children herself" (*Efurú*, p. 165).

Synopsis of *One is Enough*

Nwapa also in *One is Enough* (1981) presents Amaka, a beautiful educated business woman who does all in her powers to make her husband happy but is looked down and maltreated by her mother-in-law as nobody. This is because she has not been able to have children in her marriage. She fails in her husband's home and family because she does not have any child. She tries all in her powers to get pregnant but without success. She is even told that she will get children, but Obiora, her husband, never bothers to find out what is the cause of their barrenness. Obiora becomes unfaithful and gets twins out of wedlock. In the ensuing marital squabble, as a result of the decision to marry the mother of his two children, without taking the wife into confidence, Amaka nearly kills Obiora. She leaves Obiora and travels to Lagos where she, not only becomes wealthy but also has a set of twins through a Catholic Priest, Rev. Father Izu Mclaid, "a special man" (*Efurú*, p.22) as predicted by a female native doctor When Father Mclaid decides to abandon the Church to marry her, she vehemently rejects him and makes it known to all that one marriage experience is enough for her.

Nwapa in these two novels identifies the fact that childlessness is the bane of women in marriage in patriarchal African society. This work tries to look at the trauma that goes with childlessness in the two novels under study. It is no gain saying that the women are emotionally and psychologically traumatized when they are not able to bear children in their marriages. Ouarodima (2018) posits that "a conventional marriage itself is by no means a guarantee for the success of a marriage if a woman remains childless" (p.57). It means that a marriage without children is not worth being called a marriage because what they perceive as the essence of a marriage is defeated or lacking. Usman (1998) puts it in a more pathetic manner when he says that "in the marriage, it is not the companionship, love, friendship or the mutual emotional satisfaction of the couple that matters but the children born out of the marriage" (p.96). Ouarodima (2018) concurs when she says that "a happy marriage is certainly a marriage blessed with children" (p.59). This is the dilemma of a childless marriage; there is no happiness in such marriage. This work will identify and analyze the traumatic situations and their effect(s) on the family and especially on women.

Trauma as a result of childlessness in *Efurú*

Efurú's inability to bear children in her husband's house as soon as she is married creates room for a situation that is traumatizing to her. This is because children are always expected in traditional African society as soon as a woman is married. She is to bear the blame of barrenness when there is no pregnancy. Eventually, she does not get pregnant after a year of her marriage with Adizua and her mother-in-law becomes apprehensive. Efurú's inability to get pregnant after one year of marriage calls for apprehension since it agrees with what WHO sees as infertility which will lead to childlessness. Though Efurú is concerned, but her mother-in-law becomes "anxious" (*Efurú*, p. 24). Anxiety is one of the outcomes of insidious trauma. By her inability to bear a child, she has caused what Root (1992) calls an "an upheaval and disorganization" (p.235). She becomes the object of gossip as "the neighbours talked as they were bound to talk. They did not see the reason why Adizua should not marry another woman" since, according to them, "two men do not live together" (*Efurú*, p.24). To them, Efurú is a man because she could not bear children immediately after marriage as the society expects. She becomes the object of gossip in the community. Her situation leads her to remember her own mother, who died five years earlier and had her as an only child.

She becomes restless and goes to her father, Nwashike Ogene, to see whether he can help her proffer a solution. Consequently, he goes with her to a 'dibia' who allays her fears and tells her that she will be pregnant before the "Owu Festival" (*Efuru*, p.26). It is to be noted that while Efuru is doing all she could to see that she gets a child; her husband was complacent about it because patriarchal society puts the blame of childlessness in marriage on the women. This is akin to the situation in Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the clouds* (1982) where Ije traverses the entire neighbourhood looking for a way to get children while her husband, Dozie Apia, who is the real cause of the problem, is not perturbed. Efuru becomes pregnant as predicted by the dibia and is delivered of a baby girl. Adizua may not have been happy because the patriarchal traditional system pays much respect to male children than females. Thus, females are considered and treated as second class citizens. This could be a possible reason why Adizua abandons her and refuses to return to bury the child when she eventually dies.

The marriage between Gilbert and Efuru could not produce a child after two years and Efuru becomes the object of gossip. In the river where husband and wife are happily bathing, Efuru's neighbours become jealous of their love for each other. The neighbours who have come to the stream to fetch water gossip and this leads Omirima to go to Gilbert's mother to make her realize that something is wrong with the daughter-in-law. She starts by castigating their going out to places together insisting that "a man and woman should not be seen together often whether they are married or not" (*Efuru*, p.139). This is sheer jealousy and ignorance of what love entails. It is as a result of their love for each other that has made them to stay together. Sternberg (2004) avers that when there is love, there is degree of intimacy which is "a feeling of closeness, and bondedness in love relationship" (p.258). In patriarchal society, love does not count when there is no child. This agrees with Usman's (1998:96) position when she says, "in the marriage, it is not the companionship, love, friendship or the mutual emotional satisfaction of the couple that matters but the children born out of the marriage." Having stayed two years without a child, it is concluded that Efuru is infertile; therefore, cannot bear children as stipulated by WHO.

Efuru's state is rationalized to be spiritual because she has accepted to worship Uhamiri, the goddess of the sea. The goddess does not give children which she does not have but wealth. The society values children above wealth. This is why Omirima castigates Efuru's mother-in-law, that is Gilbert's mother, for allowing Efuru to install the goddess in her bedroom. Omirima asks:

Do I hear that she now has Uhamiri in her bedroom? Omirima sneered. She has spoilt everything. This is bad. How many women in this town who worship Uhamiri have children? Your daughter-in-law must be a foolish woman to go into that.... There is nothing you can do about it now. You cannot mend a broken head. The chances of your daughter-in-law ever getting a baby are very remote now. You must marry a girl for your son whether he likes it or not (p162).

Omirima's castigation and suggestion are quickly followed by Ajanupu's suggestion that Efuru should get a second wife for her husband. Efuru's reaction depicts her trauma. The narrator tells us:

Efuru went home that night with a heavy heart. It was not the thought of another wife for Gilbert that made her heart so heavy. It was the fact that she was considered barren. It was a curse not to have children. Her people did not just take it as one of the numerous accidents of nature. It was regarded as a failure (p. 165).

One can see Efuru in a painful situation. She is worried and believes that she has failed as a married woman in a society that has a premium on children. She could not sleep that night as she is in deep

thought “all night” (p. 165) as a result of her state of barrenness. It is only one that is traumatized that can have a sleepless thoughtful night caused by the fact that she cannot have children again.

Trauma as a result of childlessness in *One is Enough*

In Nwapa’s *One is Enough* (*OIE*), Amaka is presented as an obedient, caring and loving wife but unfortunately could not bear a child. So her travails in marriage can be attributed to her childlessness and the actions of the mother-in-law and the woman who gives birth to two children for Obiora out of wedlock and who finally takes over the home. Those that are expected to sympathize and be in solidarity with her, her fellow women, become her albatross. This is what Nnolim (1992) calls a “house divided” (p.248).

Amaka’s mother-in-law becomes a thorn in her flesh because she has not been able to bear grand children for her. She makes life unbearable for her. When she wakes up one morning to plead with her mother-in-law “to forgive” her and “not to throw her away” (*OIE*, p.2), she gets the worst treatment of her life even when she has told her that she would be going to see a doctor in Benin. The mother-in-law out rightly berates her for the family’s inability to bear children and goes further to inform her that she is against the marriage because she knows that she will be barren. The narrator explains that Amaka is “shocked and confused” (*OIE*, p.5). The mother-in-law alleges that she “has done nothing to enhance or advance Obiora’s personality or status since he married her” (*OIE*, p.15). All the berating is because Amaka has not been able to give her grand children. As a married man, Obiora’s social status has not appreciated because his wife, Amaka, has not been able to get children for him. This is a traumatizing situation for her. She reflects on her old life to see what will warrant such berating from a mother-in-law who should be able to understand her better than her husband. Amaka could not do anything to her mother-in-law but resigns herself to fate. This agrees with the trauma theory of learned helplessness in which Cox (2012:430) avers that the traumatized becomes helpless and resigns herself to fate because the victim can do little or nothing to help herself. In Amaka’s situation, she cannot do anything to change her situation so she has to resign herself to fate. Amaka’s mother-in-law does not bother about her feelings or emotions.

Obiora gets children out of wedlock and marries the mother of his children without taking his wife, Amaka, into confidence. When he informs Amaka, it was a mere mention of it and when she asks question, Obiora’s answer is a stunning one, “well, what was I to do? Remain childless because my wife is barren? What impudence! What a stab from a dear husband! What a traumatizing experience for a childless wife. It was indeed an emotional and psychological torture for Amaka. It was most painful because it came from a dearly beloved husband. Obiora’s action is in accordance with Gouni, et al (2022) assertion that “women who cannot have children may experience problems such as exclusion, ostracism, infidelity, divorce or being threatened by their spouse with second wife” (p.31). Obiora’s action of having children outside marriage and marrying the woman without informing the wife was the last straw that destroyed the marriage.

Amaka’s emotional and psychological pains can further be seen when Obiora asks her if she has seen the children and his wife, the mother of the children. In the ensuing discussion, Amaka tells Obiora “I am happy and sad as well. Happy because you have proof of your manhood. Sad because I cannot have a baby and your proof is also the proof of my barrenness” (*OIE*, p.25). Again, Amaka in narrating her ordeal to Rev. Father Izu Mclaid says, “I wanted to get out of the place (Onitsha) where I suffered most. I don’t want to be reminded of my life with my husband. It is too painful” (*OIE*, p. 53). From the above statements, one notices Amaka’s bitterness and sorrow occasioned by her state of childlessness.

Traumatic effect(s) of childlessness in Nwapa’s *Efuru* and *One is Enough*

Children are the desire of every married couple in every patriarchal society like Nigeria in particular and Africa in general and, indeed, all over the world except where the couple agrees to remain childless. It then means that when a couple fails to get children after one or more years of marriage, there are bound to be some negative reactions from the family and the society at large. It is to be noted that children are very important in bringing about social coherence and that is why every family looks towards them for maintenance of the family lineage or genealogy. It then means that when children are not born, the family goes into extinction. Little wonder children are highly cherished or valued and any couple or family that does not have any is seen as an aberration and misnomer to the society.

In the two novels under study, childlessness brings about stigmatization and name calling. Neighbours gossiped Efuru in *Efuru* and Amaka in *One is Enough*. They are referred to as men because they have no children. The neighbours tell others that two men are living together in a house. This can be traumatizing especially to the woman.

Efuru was abandoned by both Adizua and Gilbert. Adizua eloped with another woman and never came back when Efuru was delivered of a baby girl. When the girl died, Adizua did not also return to bury her, probably because she was a girl who was not esteemed like the boy child who will carry on the family tree or lineage. Adizua's action is in consonance with Gouni, et al (2022) assertion that "the birth of daughters, especially if only daughter come to the family, was considered to be a big humiliation for the man who is unable to participate and fulfill his social role" (p.16). Adizua did not see Ogonim as worth being celebrated and so saw no need to return home. This was a traumatizing situation for Efuru who had expected her husband by her side; it was a painful, humiliating and traumatizing experience for Efuru.

Childlessness affects the emotional and psychological well-being of the woman as childlessness becomes part of her identity. It reduces her personality and makes her a nobody. Amaka is berated by her mother-in-law and Obiora does see her as worth being taken into confidence in a matter relating to marriage (*OIE*, p.25). This affects the quality of the life they live. Amaka had to run to far away Lagos to start a new life and avoid derogatory remarks.

Childlessness could bring about negative perception as a result of her inability to have children. Both Efuru and Amaka are perceived as people who have not fulfilled their role in the advancement of humanity. Efuru is even advised to get another wife for Gilbert since she cannot bear children (*Efuru*, p.165). She has been written off as barren. Dyer, et al (2002) posits that "fertility determines the presence or absence of a woman, and therefore, a woman might feel that she is nothing if she cannot give birth" (p. 1665). The woman feels emotionally destabilized because she cannot help herself and, therefore, suffers in silence. The importance attached to childbearing is succinctly captured by Ouarodima (2018) when she asserts that "a woman is blessed if she is fortunate enough to be both a wife and a mother in the Igbo patriarchal society" (p.56). The reverse happens when the woman does not have children, that is, when motherhood is not achieved. According to Lee and Zvonkovic (2014), "social pressure seems to get stronger a year or two after couples get married and starts to decrease after about five years"(p.537) (Bartlett, 1994; Houseknecht, 1987).

The assertion of Olga Gouni and her colleagues that, "childlessness potentially causes severe psychological symptoms such as anxiety, depression, guilt, sorrow, anger, bitterness, loneliness, disappointment, insecurity, fear, exhaustion, pressure, stress, frustration, interpersonal sensitivity and hopelessness" (p.31) is true and apt in the lives of Efuru and Amaka. Almost all of the above are experienced by Efuru in *Efuru* and Amaka in *OIE*. Efuru is disappointed and frustrated by both Adizua and Gilbert by abandoning her. Gilbert not only frustrated her but also accused her falsely of adultery which made her angry, depressed, sorrowful, bitter and finally led to divorce. Amaka on her

part is depressed, frustrated, lonely and disappointed by Obiora which brought about her divorce with Obiora and interpersonal sensitivity in her relationship with Father Mclaid, and indeed, all other men.

Conclusion

Childlessness is a source of emotional pain as far as traditional African patriarchal society is concerned. It leads to destruction of family cohesion and depression on the people especially women. This paper has explored the effect(s) of childlessness traditional patriarchal society like Nigeria, in particular, and Africa, in general. Childlessness has negatively affected the psyche of the individuals concerned as they have become the objects of ridicule in the society. Nwapa in *Efuru* and *One is Enough* depicts and captures the trauma that childless couples go through in traditional African society. This work has significantly added to the corpus of scholarly literature on childlessness and trauma. It will make scholars to ask questions on issues pertaining to childlessness and trauma which will lead to further research. It will also help professionals in the field to find suitable solutions on how to deal with and assist in integrating the childless into the society to reduce frustration, depression and negative effects associated with childlessness.

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