

**WOMEN'S SEXIST LANGUAGE AS A TOOL OF PATRIARCHY:
A RE-READING OF NWAPA'S *EFURU***

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Abstract

Sexist language is any discriminatory language that is either spoken or written which implies an unwarranted bias against a particular sex. Patriarchy is a concept that empowers men to see themselves as superior, while women are subordinate. It is said to be at the root of sexism, and is usually practised by men against women, as revealed by various research works. There is, however, a dearth of research works on sexism as practised by women, specifically in works of fiction. This work therefore is poised to examine selected utterances of the female characters in *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa so as to show how these utterances reflect sexism, and so help to sustain patriarchal ideology. The theoretical framework is Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, and Sara Mills' criteria for evaluating statements for sexism is used for the descriptive analysis. This paper is of the view that women use the indirect form of sexist language thereby helping to sustain and perpetuate the patriarchal ideology of male domination and female subordination.

Keywords: Sexist Language, Patriarchy, Subordination, Perpetuation

Introduction

Patriarchy is a system of practice that sees men as being superior to women. In a patriarchal society, there is an unequal power relationship between women and men as it makes men to be in control of women's life. The male sex is taken as the standard, the norm; while the female sex is seen as being sub-standard, as according to Beauvoir, "She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the subject; he is the absolute. She is the other" (26). Invariably, Beauvoir frowns at Aristotle's view that just as the soul has the body as its subject, men who by nature are superior to women are rulers, while women are ruled (Lerner 208).

Aristotle, according to Lerner, reasons that women are biologically inferior to men "a mutilated male", and as such are inferior to men in their capacities, reasoning, and decision-making (207). For Aristotle, therefore, it is a man's world. Men control and dominate everybody, specifically the women, around them. Lerner continues that men are given dominant and masculine attributes which are "rational, strong, endowed with the capacity for procreation, equipped with soul and fit to rule"; while women get subordinate and feminine ones like "passionate, unable to control her appetites, weak, providing only low matter for the process of procreation, devoid of soul and designed to be ruled" (209).

In a patriarchal society, the male sex (man) is hierarchically superior to the female sex (woman). According to Kate Millet, in this society, sex as a biological category is therefore turned into a status category that has political implications (24). Man is, thus, the privileged sex, and in the words of Dale Spender, "has the potential to order the world to suit their own ends, the potential to construct a language, a reality, a body of knowledge in which they are the central figures, the potential to legitimate their own primacy, and to create a system of beliefs which is beyond challenge" (142-43).

The patriarchal world believes that women are naturally ordained to be under men, as Katherine Frank quotes a Ghanaian Daily saying, "A woman may gain the whole world but she would have lost her soul if she doesn't become a male's extension or somebody's mother" (17). Consequently, the travails of the female folk are heaped on the altar of patriarchy, a system in which women face

different sorts of marginalization, subjugation, and exploitation, all in the name of culture. All these place women perpetually under the shadows of men. According to Gloria Fwangyil,

Women are subjected to male oppression and suppression at various stages of life. Unfortunately, female oppression is deeply ingrained in the culture of the societies which ensures the continuation of patriarchal control. This situation makes it impossible for women to seek ways of liberating themselves because doing so will be tantamount to challenging the age long tradition and customs of the people. (15)

Based on this inequality of the sexes, the patriarchal society creates some linguistic structures that reinforce and sustain the seeming male superiority. Language thus becomes a powerful tool in the transmission and perpetuation of patriarchal ideology, as in the words of Cameron in *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* (henceforth '*Fem.Ling.*'), men appropriate language and so "are able to exercise subliminal control over their subordinates and maintain their own power" (100).

According to Kendall and Tannen, the book *Language and Women's Place* (LWP) by Robin Lakoff, was the first of the studies that looked at language used by women and men as dictated by the society, and, which has contributed to reinforcing the status of women as subordinates to men (640). In her work, Lakoff herself argues that gender inequality is mainly demonstrated through language use, and that linguistic discrimination against women reflects in the way women are taught by the society to use language, and in the way general language use treats them (46). From their childhood, girls are trained by their parents not to talk rough like the boys, but rather, to talk like a lady.

Having imbibed this, later on in life, these same women will be derided by the society for not being forceful in speech, which is exactly what the early socialising process prevented them from being initially. Hence, Lakoff concludes that "a girl is damned if she does (learn her lessons well), damned if she doesn't (48); just like Simone Beauvoir says a woman's wings "are cut, and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly" (731).

However, an in-depth study of the works of fiction by both men and women reveal that men may not be the sole proponents of patriarchal ideology in the male-dominated world. Women also can be culpable. Tess Onwueme rightly points out that women who at one time experienced victimization from men tend to resort to discriminatory, oppressive and abusive use of power and thus continue to perpetuate the unjust systems which they claim to abhor (306). So could it be that while decrying man's sexist attitude to them, women on their part exhibit the same attitude on themselves and their fellow women through their speech? This is a question begging for serious answer. And to do justice to the question, this study will analyze Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, as the novel is said to be a work of fiction "that vividly portrays the woman's world" (Stratton 80).

Sexism

Sexism is typically seen as any situation or case that privileges one sex above the other. An action, equally, is said to be sexist if it is based on the belief that there exists a disparity between women and men, though "not biologically justified", and which is inimical to the interests of a particular sex (Umera-Okeke³). Societal cultural, and sometimes, religious values which prize one sex higher than the other are the major culprits of the existence of this phenomenon. Sexism is a recurring decimal in many societies of the world today, and in the views of Umera-Okeke, the problem is further heightened by many people thinking it is a thing of the past (3).

According to Christie, sexism is a site for the construction and contestation of gender relations, though she regards it as "a spurious representation of real gender relations (50). Sexism is also regarded as any irrelevant discrimination, stereotyping, prejudice against women or men based on their sex (Graddol and Swann 96; Sutherland et al 687). Explaining this definition, Graddol and Swann clarify that sexism includes any discriminatory social practice, and so, according to them, a TV breastfeeding programme which focused on mothers' experiences cannot be termed sexist, but a programme on childrearing that does not include fathers may be called sexist. That is to say that sexism refers also to

attitudes and/or behaviour that exalt one sex over the other (Ivy and Backlund⁷²). This discrimination and exaltation is based on sex role stereotypes (gender) constructed by the patriarchal society for differentiating and judging people based on their sex. What this means is that both men and women can be affected by sexism, though more often than not, women are at the receiving end (Graddol and Swann 96).

Sexism manifests itself in the society not only through people's behaviours or actions, but also through the language they use. In the views of Umera-Okeke⁽²⁾, because we live in a patriarchal society that values men over women, the language we use and the way it is used reflect these values. It is believed, according to Cameron in *Feministic Critique of Language* (henceforth '*Fem.Crt*'), that "language represents the world from a masculine viewpoint" and in accordance with gender i.e. stereotyped beliefs about women, men and the relationship between them (9). Incidentally, the content of these gender stereotypes reflect the unequal status and power between women and men in the society.

From early childhood, people come to learn that certain concepts or words are associated with one sex or the other. It is based on this that people generally assume that a police officer is a man; a nurse is a woman; an engineer is a man; a teacher is a woman, etc.; hence, stereotypes are generated and perpetuated through language (Umera-Okeke 3). In line with this, Menegatti and Rubini observe that one of the means through which sexism is perpetrated is verbal communication (2). This is so because the content of gender stereotypes is reproduced in the utterances people make in everyday communication.

Sexist Language

Based on their definition of sexism above, Ivy and Backlund propose that sexist language will refer to any verbal communication which exhibits those differential attitudes and behaviour (72). For Dale Spender, sexist language is the manifestation of bias in favour of males in language (15). She also cites Berger and Kachuk as defining sexist language as any language that "relegates women to a secondary and inferior place in the society" (15). This assertion is in line with that of Weatherall who observes that sexism concerns how language in various contexts constructs gender in ways that put women at a disadvantage or demean them (76). A more encompassing definition is from Margaret Doyle who sees sexist language as linguistic terms and usages that exclude or discriminate against women; that which presume that maleness is standard, the norm, and that femaleness is non-standard, or the exception (150).

The summary of these definitions is that sexist language is a language or speech which reflects values and thought patterns that see men as superior, the ultimate but women as second-class, and the subordinate. It must be pointed out here that a language becomes sexist based on how it is used, not on what it is - a system of communication, for according to Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams:

Just as the use of some words may reflect society's views towards sex or natural bodily functions or religious beliefs, so also words may reflect racist, chauvinist, and sexist attitudes. Language itself is not racist or sexist but reflects the views of various sectors of a society. Such terms, however, may perpetuate and reinforce biased views, and be demeaning and insulting to those addressed. (490)

On how a language reflects and connotes sexist attitudes in the society, Fromkin and Rodman, and Hyams quote a school journal, *The Balloon* thus:

A businessman is aggressive; a businesswoman is pushy. A businessman is good on details; she's picky. ... He follows through; she doesn't know when to quit. He stands firm; she's hard. ... His judgements are her prejudices. He is a man of the world; she's been around. He isn't afraid to say what is on his mind; she's mouthy. He exercises authority diligently; she's power mad. He's closemouthed; she's secretive. He climbed the ladder of success; she slept her way to the top. (482)

The descriptions above throw the women in bad light, while the men are described honourably. This goes to show that the journal or its society has a demeaning and debased view of businesswomen, and it reflects in the language used of the women.

It has been established that women are at the receiving end of most linguistic structures and usage in the patriarchal world, as according to Lakoff, "The marginality and powerlessness of women is reflected in both the ways women are expected to speak, and the ways in which women are spoken of" (45). Supporting this, Cameron states that "sexist language teaches us what those who use it and disseminate it think women's place ought to be: second class citizens, neither seen nor heard, eternal sex-objects and personifications of evil" (*Fem.Ling.*'91). Sexist language manifests in various forms to give a glimpse into the place of men and women in the society.

Types of Sexism

Sara Mills in *Language and Sexism* distinguishes between two types of sexism, namely, overt/direct sexism, and covert/indirect sexism (11-12).

A. Overt Sexism

Overt sexism is language use that is clearly identified through the use of linguistic markers or through the analysis of terms that have long been associated with the expression of discriminatory opinions about women, and which are interpreted to mean that women are inferior to men. In collaboration but with more insight, Benokraitis and Feagan add that overt sexism is the act of unequal and harmful treatment of women that is readily apparent, visible and observable and can be easily documented (30).

Forms of Overt Sexism

Mills in *Feminist Stylistics*, and *Language and Sexism*, (henceforth '*Fem.Styl.*', and '*Lang.*' respectively) enumerated different types of overt sexism. Some of them are discussed below.

1. Generic Forms

These are terms which are used to refer to male human and also all humans (Graddol and Swann 101). According to Mills, the use of these generic form presents the male as the unmarked form, the norm; and the female as the marked form thereby contributing to the invisibility of the human female in a language, and in the society (*Lang.*'47). Supporting this view, Spender asserts that using the symbol, 'man' at the expense of 'woman', supports the visibility and primacy of males; hence, the male is seen "as the worthier, more comprehensive and superior sex and we divide and organize the world along these lines" (153).

Under generic forms, there are generic nouns and generic pronouns.

a. Generic pronouns

According to Mills, the pronoun, *he/him/his/himself* becomes generic when it is used to refer to both the female sex and the male sex (*Fem. Styl.*'65; '*Lang.*'47). She further explains that this usage can be confusing because when it is used to refer to groups of people, one may not know if it is used generically or sex-specifically, as in the example, "Every child should come to school with his parent on Monday."

b. Generic nouns

The noun, *man* is the most well-known generic word. It is used universally to include both women and men, though most times, it is male-directed (Mills '*Lang.*'49). Examples are manpower, mankind, man-made, chairman, foreman, workman, etc. (Mills '*Fem.Styl.*'67).

2. Insult Terms

For Braun and Kitinger (cited in Mills '*Fem.Styl.*' 52), terms of insult which are used for women are sexualized, and include words like: bitch, ho, pimp, faggot, prostitute, etc. These terms, Mills points out, objectify women and incite violence and abuse towards them (Mills '*Lang.*' 52). Stanley (cited in Graddol and Swann 110) found out that there are 220 words used to describe a sexually promiscuous

woman, while there are just 20 for a sexually promiscuous man. One wonders why this should be so, if not for male glorification, because promiscuity takes both sexes to occur.

3. Semantic Derogation

a. Unequal constructions

Here, terms associated with women and which initially had positive meanings, overtime degenerated to have wider reference, but their male equivalents retained their high-status meaning (Schultz cited in Mills' *Lang.* '56). For instance, *master* and *mistress* were both used of a person who has control, authority or ownership; but nowadays, whereas *master* still retained that predominant sense, *mistress* has degenerated, and taken the additional and more common meaning of 'a woman in an extramarital and sexual relationship with a man' (Graddol and Swann 113). Maggio (cited in Ivy and Backlund 87) presents the wedlock declaration: "I now pronounce you man and wife" as another unparallel construction where the man remains a man, but the woman becomes relegated to a wife, an identity that is subsumed in man's identity. Another instance, according to Hellinger and Bussmann (cited in Mills' *Lang.* '58) is where terms which refer to professions associated with women have lesser status than those associated with professions where there are more men. Citing as example, they reveal that in French, *couturier*, a masculine word refers to fashion designers, and can be used by both women and men; but *Couturi`ere*, a feminine word, refers to just seamstresses or tailoresses.

b. Diminutives as Affixes

Another form of semantic derogation is seen in suffixes which not only refer to a female counterpart of a male referent, but also carry an additional negative meaning for the female (Hellinger cited in Mills' *Lang.* '59). Some of these affixes are -ette, -trix, etc. The suffix, -ette, is a diminutive term. Giving an example, Graddol and Swann observe that one can be the manageress of a launderette or a cake shop, but not of a bank or a company, in which case, *manager* will be used as the generic term (100).

4. Naming

In this case, women are forced by the society to identify themselves in relation to their marital status, e.g. through the use of *Miss* or *Mrs*, but for men, no equivalent distinction for marital status exists. The only title used is *Mr* (Mills' *Lang.* '64). In the part of Igboland where this writer comes from, traditionally, married men are commonly addressed by their native titles, while married women are identified as *Mama* with their child's name affixed, as in *Mama Uche*, meaning *Uche's mother*. The patriarchal nature of language finds it worthwhile to make women's marital status visible, while obscuring that of men (Ivy and Backlund 91). Spender describes it thus: "The practice of labelling women as married or single also serves supremely sexist ends. It conveniently signals who is 'fair game' from the male point of view" (27).

In addition, for naming, some words of endearments which men use for women can be demeaning (Mills' *Fem. Styl.* '89). Mills cites as an example, 'my chick', which equates women with 'cute small animals' (89). Coming closer home, in the researcher's area, the term, 'tomato Jos' is used to refer to women, and for Mills, it implies something that is good for consumption. Furthermore, she added that these words of endearment "reproduce asymmetric patriarchal power relations" (89).

5. The Order of Names

The order of address terms usually places the male term first before the female term thereby giving a subtle indication that males are superior and more prestigious (Ivy and Backlund 87; Mills' *Lang.* '62). Examples are Mr and Mrs, men and women, boys and girls, husband and wife, brothers and sisters, his and hers, etc. Regarding this, Malkiel (cited in Willis and Jozkowski 139) asserts that the paired words are ordered according to the hierarchy of values in the structure of a society. Consistent with Malkiel's assertion, Hartman and Judd (cited in Willis and Jozkowski 139) argue that male-firstness syndrome reinforces the second place status of women.

B. Indirect Sexism

This type of sexism is variously called new sexism, retro-sexism (Mills 'Lang.' 134), subtle sexism, and covert sexism (Benokraitis and Feagin 30; 31). It denies responsibility for an utterance through irony and humour and embeds sexism at the level of presupposition or prefaces it with disclaimers or hesitation (Mills 'Lang.' 135). Indirect sexism is difficult to identify because, according to Lazar, its workings in discourse are taking on more subtle forms (1). In line with this, Sutherland et al note that in this type of sexism, stereotypes that support inequality are retained but nuanced, hence making it difficult to detect and challenge (687). Supporting this, Benokraitis and Feagin, add that indirect sexism is seen as normal, natural, acceptable and customary (31). They give an instance as when a male faculty member is congratulated and encouraged for becoming the chairperson of the department, but a woman who attains such a position is likely to be asked how she could combine the job with her family schedule.

Giving further insight into indirect sexism, Mills points out that sexism does not reside in words and phrases alone, as explicated under overt sexism ('Lang'. 3). In an utterance, there may not be a word that has sexist denotation or connotation, but the belief system articulated in the utterance may be sexist. She argues that it is not just enough to discuss the language elements of sexism i.e. the linguistic features of words that reflect sexism, rather the more subtle indirect sexism should be focused on (3). This should be so because, according to her, in certain utterances, gender is not oriented to explicitly but the "presuppositions underlying the utterances are gendered and based on sexist beliefs" (128).

Forms of Indirect Sexism

Mills in *Language and Sexism* identifies various forms of indirect sexism. Some of them are highlighted below.

a. Humour: According to Mills, research has shown that humour can be used to "reinforce unequal power relations" (141). She argues that women are usually at the receiving end of jokes by men who use their "stereotypical knowledge" of women "for comic effect" (140).

b. Presupposition: Sexism at this level is difficult to challenge because the sexism inherent in an utterance can be masked hence giving way to the speaker to deny any intended sexism (145). This is as a result of what Christie (54) terms 'textual polysemy', which is a piece of text being open to several interpretations and meanings. This can be seen in Cameron (cited in Mills 'Lang.' 146) where advertisers use verbal play and presupposition, and so cannot be accused of sexism. Citing also as an example, Mills demonstrates that in the phrase, 'So, have you women finished gossiping?', there are presuppositions which should be unravelled, like: that women's talk is trivial; that women gossip more than men; that where two women are talking together, they are assumed to be gossiping, etc.), before an answer can be given (145-146). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet also add that "beyond what we say overtly, we often *imply* much more" as in the utterance, 'She is tall' (192). The implication here, according to them, may be that her height may make it difficult for her to get a boyfriend, and therein lies the sexism in the utterance (192). They therefore conclude that most times, it is implications that create and sustain gender ideologies more than explicit messages. In collaboration, Mills states that it is only through metastatements which underlie statements that indirect sexism can be exposed ('Lang.' 153).

c. Collocation: This has to do "with the company that words keep" (148). According to Mills, some words associated with women usually have negative connotations, though they may not be sexist per se, e.g. divorcee, single mother, lone parent, etc. (149).

d. Euphemism: Here, certain experiences in the lives of women are spoken about metaphorically, or by using male-centred terms for them (Mills 'Fem.Styl.' 89). Mills cites as an example, 'menstruation' which is referred to in several terms. In this researcher's locality, it is called 'the red visitor'.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is premised on the framework of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth Feminist CDA) as espoused by Michelle Lazar (2007). The argument of Feminist CDA is that power and ideology in discourse work to sustain a hierarchically gendered social structure (Lazar 141). Since this working is assuming a subtle form (for instance, through indirect sexism) in the society, Feminist CDA aims to reveal the subtle ways in which these taken-for-granted power relations are produced, sustained, negotiated and challenged in the society (142). This calls to mind the focus of CDA on exploring ways that “social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (Dijk352), but feminist CDA, in addition to that, pays a detailed attention to gendered assertions in such discourses. Being that one of the principles of Feminist CDA is to investigate how gendered relations of power and gender ideology are constructed and deconstructed in discourse, Feminist CDA, therefore, critiques discourses that sustain a patriarchal social order, i.e. power relations that see men as the privileged social group, while women as a social group are disadvantaged, excluded and disempowered through textual representation, and through interactional strategies of talk (Lazar 149). Based on this principle, therefore, this paper will examine the utterances of some of the female characters in *Efuru*, written by Flora Nwapa, so as to expose how their speeches propagate sexist attitudes and practices against themselves and against other women, thereby helping to sustain and perpetuate patriarchal ideology.

Sexist Language Used by the Female Characters in Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru*

Sara Mills brought out some criteria for gauging statements for sexism in her books, *Feminist Stylistics*(64-96); and *Language and Sexism* (1-5; 133-52). As has been mentioned earlier, Mills is of the view that attention should be focused on indirect sexism because that is where gender ideology usually lurks. Hence, the analysis of the selected utterances by the women will look at the covertly expressed meanings in communication so as to uncover the subtle and complex renderings of patriarchal ideological assumptions and power relations (Lazar 151) inherent in them. Some of these criteria as summarised by the researcher, and with some modifications by Darweesh and Abdullah (2016) are presented here. So, for Mills, a statement is sexist if it has any of these attributes:

- a. Reliance on stereotypes about women (e.g. female as dependent on men)
- b. Propagates patriarchal ideals (Male as norm, the standard)
- c. Trivializes women’s experience/activities
- d. Presents women negatively
- e. Female self-sacrificing/suffering for men
- f. Maligning/disparagement of women
- g. Reference to women based on physical attributes rather than personality.

However, only three of these criteria are selected and analysed here.

Reliance on Stereotypes about Women

Extract 1: **Who will look after me and my children? Let’s see how you will die and leave me with these children to look after**(p.98). The speaker of these utterances is Nwabata. She laments that Nwosu, her husband, is going to the hospital for treatment and she feels he would die there. Nwabata sees herself as gullible without the protection of her husband; that her survival and that of her kids is dependent on the existence of her husband. By implication, Nwabata is saying that a woman has no life nor identity of her own unless it is linked to a man’s.

Ex.2 **Efuru told him that she would drown herself in the lake if he did not marry her** (p.7). This utterance goes to show that Efuru does not value her life much. The stereotype of woman as an emotional being and an appendage to man is what she presents here. She forgets that if she kills herself, Adizua will definitely look for another girl.

Ex.3 **Bend down and sweep like a girl**, Ajanupu commanded (p.45).

Ex.4 **Put your legs together and sit like a woman** (p.45). Ajanupu uses gender as a stereotypical tool. Gender is constructed by the patriarchal society and assigns social roles to women and men. A stereotype that is usually used for female characters is that of household management (Mills

2008:127). Women are assigned the roles of housekeepers and child-rearers, and from early childhood, they are indoctrinated to take up the role as they grow up.

Ex.5 **But can't the husband do anything about it? He is to blame for letting a woman rule him** (p.175). The female speaker here presents the stereotype of man as lord in a marriage, and head of the family. She believes women to be the subordinates of men and so should not undertake any other role that places her otherwise.

Ex.6 **Amede, your daughter-in-law will die. She is guilty of adultery** (p.215). This is Omirima speaking here. She cast herself in the mould of the village gossip. It should be noted that gossiping is one the stereotypes which the patriarchal society attributes to women. It is a negative behaviour that keeps women in a subordinate position (Liladharcited in Mills 2008:128).

Propagates Patriarchal Ideals

a. Male as norm, the standard

Ex.1 A female relation who came to console Efuru said to her: **A girl is something, though we would have preferred a boy.** (p.72)

Ex.2 Omirima says: **What is annoying is when some women have about six children and all of them are girls. What one will do with six girls I don't know** (p.184). The preference for a boy-child is another way a patriarchal society subjugates women (Nmah 64). It has been observed that male children are preferred more in Nigeria than in any other West African country (Ibanga cited in Izugbara 8). When a male child is born, there is greater jubilation than when a female child is born. In a patriarchal society, a woman who has daughters only but no male children for her husband will not inherit any of her husband's property. This is because it is only male children who inherit their father's property, and their mother gets a share of the property through them. The lineage of a family is perpetuated also through male children, but not the females. In *Efuru*, women voice their preference of boy-child over the girl-child thereby lending support to the culture that treats women as second-class citizens.

b. Marriage as the ultimate for girls

Ex.1 **Bend down properly, you are a girl and will one day marry** (p.45); **Remember she is a girl and she will marry one day. If you don't bring her up well, nobody will marry her** (p.45).

Ex.2 **How is it that a grown-up girl like that is not able to wash clothes properly? How can she live in a man's house?** (p.181) Ajanupu and Amede are the speakers here. One of the patriarchal beliefs is that marriage is the ultimate goal for a girl child. This is reflected in an Igbo saying "Ugwunwanyibu di ya" which translates as "Having a husband bestows status on a woman". In the words of Chukwuma, "Marriage still remains the most greatly desired state of being for most young girls in every African society. ...there is nothing else that bestows as much status and social worth on a woman in a patriarchal society where her worth is predicated on male interest (80). The strategies of socialization and metamessage are employed here. Socialization is one agency through which the stereotypes of the sexes are transmitted from one generation to the next, and it is a woman's greatest handicap in achieving a positive fulfilment in life. Through indoctrination, female children are raised from infancy to believe that they are only fit for the domestic roles of wife, mother and housekeeper. Once these are achieved, every other thing becomes a trivial matter. The female speakers of these utterances perpetuate patriarchal ideology by implying that the major aim of training a girl or instilling good housekeeping skills in her is for her to be able to get married and fare well in her marital home. For instance, in pointing out that Ogea cannot wash clothes properly, why correct her with the aim for her to be able to wash her husband's clothes when she gets married? Why not for the simple aim that it is for her sanitary well-being?

Ex.3 **Why must they go to these places together? It is your fault for allowing them to be together always. Are they companions?** (p.138) The speaker here, Omirima, restates the patriarchal belief that marriage entails a relationship between a superior (man) and a subordinate (woman), and should not be turned to a relationship of equality. She implies here that a woman is expected to always be at home tending to hearth matters and assisting the husband.

Ex.4 **She will have to leave school if we decide to have her as Eneberi's wife** (p.180). Here, the speaker is Ajanupu. The future of a girl-child is compromised here because of early marriage. Early marriage is one aspect of culture that subjugates women, disempowers and keeps them at the periphery in the society (Ebo242). This goes to buttress the patriarchal saying that a woman's education ends in the kitchen.

c. Circumcision

Ex.1 One day, Efuru's mother-in-law called her ... she said to her, **You have not had your bath.**(p.11).

Ex.2 A female neighbour of Efuru's said: **Efuru is having her bath. Poor girl, it's so painful** (p.14). **Bath** here is used as euphemism for circumcision, otherwise known as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). According to the news bulletin of World Health Organization (2020), FGM refers to all procedures involving "partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons" (www.who.int/). According to WHO, this practice does not have any health benefits; rather it has grave health consequences like pain, infection, and haemorrhage. In the cultures that practice FGM, it is said to be done so as to protect a girl's virginity before marriage, ensure fidelity in marriage, and increase the sexual pleasures of a husband (Nandini439; Okpala and Utoh-Ezeajugh15). Kalokoh (1) also points out that it deters women from sexually-deviant behaviours, and ensures the control of men over them. In collaboration, Althaus notes that in societies where lineage is traced through fathers, female genital mutilation decreases the uncertainty which surrounds the paternity of children by discouraging women from being sexually active outside of wedlock (131). In *Efuru* (p.14), it is said to make for a smooth pregnancy and childbirth. Women support and encourage FGM even though it is a painful act. During Efuru's circumcision, we are told she "screamed and screamed" and that the act was very painful. Her mother-in-law was there to console her by telling her "It will soon be over, my daughter, don't cry (p.14). This subjugating act of circumcision is carried out by women on women and in the presence of women. How then does one explain this women's violent act on women? In many patriarchal societies, men lay down the rules for an acceptable female image, circumcision being one of them, and women, through their utterances, wholly acquiesce to the rules so as to gain a high social status and also be deemed marriageable (Monagan169).

d. Polygamy

Ex. 1 Efuru said to Adizua, **I am losing hope again. Don't you think it will be better if you begin to look around for a young girl for a wife** (p.26).

Ex. 2 Efuru sat on her bed and began to think, **What is wrong in his marrying a second wife. It is only a bad woman who wants her husband all to herself** (p.53).

Ex.3 Ajanupu said to Efuru, **Only a bad woman would like to be married alone by her husband** (p.57).

Ex.4 Efuru to her father: **No father, I don't object to his marrying a second wife. I don't object to it at all** (p.63)

Ex.5 Ajanupu said to Efuru, **It is about you and your husband. Don't you think you will begin now to look for a young girl for him?** (p.164)

Ex.6 Efuru's mother-in-law told her, **You are taking keen interest, my daughter, in getting a wife for your husband. It is good. I am happy** (p.180)

Ex.7 **We want to marry again**, Efuru said laughing (p.214). Here, she is talking about getting a third wife for Gilbert, her husband.

Research has found out that the practice of polygamy accords with the self-interest of men and is also a means to control women (Okin15). From the female characters' utterances in the novel, it could be seen that they totally accept and encourage polygamy. They are even the ones who bring up the issue of marrying more wives for already-married men. They employ the strategy of the cliché, *only a bad woman would like to be married alone by her husband* to perpetuate and reinforce the patriarchal ideal of polygamy. In the case of (7) above, the purpose of getting another wife is for the second wife to have another woman to compete and contend with, thereby, limiting the wife's ability to assert her

rights and objections in marriage. This is one of the aims of polygamy. It gives men power to marry more wives if they feel their wives do not fulfil their matrimonial duties adequately.

Female Self-suffering/Self-effacement for Men

Ex.1 **We did not want to disturb you** (p.32). In this situation, Efuru had just been delivered of a baby. The husband questioned why he was not called to be part of the event, but she replied that they (Ossai and Efuru) did not want to disturb his beautiful sleep! This is the father of the baby in question. The women preferred to bear the burden of the sleepless night alone. The metamessage being sent here is that Adizua is the lord and master of the house, and so deserves an undisturbed rest while the women can forgo their sleep when it comes to seeing to domestic affairs.

Ex. 2 Gbonu, my daughter. **It is what every woman undergoes. So, don't worry**(p.15). This was said by Ajanupu. According to Okafor(60) women have invented some expressions for articulating their subordinated positions. An instance is "uwaumunwanyi": an Igbo expression that translates as the world of women; women's lot, and which signifies "separation from the mainstream which is male" (60). Women are at the periphery; the world does not revolve around them. They are the relegated group. By Ajanupu telling Efuru "it is what every woman undergoes" when she came to see her after her circumcision, she is indirectly referring to "uwaumunwanyi": an expression of resignation and acceptance of the fate of women in the patriarchal world.

Ex.3 **My mother asked me to leave my husband's house, but I refused. I still had faith in him ... But when I was well, I went back to my husband's house** (p.60).

Ex.4 **I gained nothing from my long suffering... but I am proud that I was and still am true to the only man I loved** (p.61).

Ossai's utterances here exemplify what Mills ('Lang.' 128) regards as sexist beliefs being embedded in the presupposition underlying an utterance. Based on what Lazar's points out as the discursive construction of ways of being a woman, Ossai here presents the patriarchal image of the ideal wife who has to endure whatever she sees in a marriage, while the husband goes about sowing his wild oats. As noted by Adebayo (cited in Mutunda96), Ossai makes herself "the prototype of the objectified woman, always wronged but eternally forgiving, preferring to suffer from emotional paralysis." She assumes that her happiness is tied to a man. Instead of her to get on with her life and independence, she prefers to let it waste waiting for her husband to come back to her. Of course, in the end, the man returned to her but after he had contracted a disease which killed him a few days after returning. So what did she gain from the long waiting? Nothing. Rather, she is proud that she fulfilled the stereotypical role of the enduring wife.

Ex.5 **Give Adizua one year ... and if he does not come back to you ...** (p.83). Ajanupu advises Efuru to stay in wait for Adizua for one year to know if he would return to her.

Ex.6 **But I say, stay. I have no reason whatever for asking you to stay, but stay** (p.88). Ossai, the very woman who said she gained nothing from long-suffering for her run-away husband is here advising a young woman to follow her footsteps. Since she saw there was no gain in the venture, if she had truly loved Efuru, she would not have advised her thus. Lazar terms this, 'gender relationality', and it has to do with how women perpetuate sexist practices against their ilk. As agents of patriarchy, Ajanupu and Ossai seek to ensure subservience, under the guise of family honor and fidelity, by advising Efuru to stay in wait for Adizua.

Ex.7 **Your husband will come back to you after all his wanderings. Men are always like that.** (51) Using the instrument of metamessage and cliché, the speaker justifies and legitimises the waywardness of men in marriage. As for women, they are to 'grin and bear' it so as to be seen as good wives.

Conclusion

It has been widely acclaimed that the novel, *Efuru*, celebrates the emancipation of women from voicelessness by giving voice to its female characters. But how did the women utilise this emancipation? By resorting to sexist language in favour of the menfolk. Sexist language results from an underlying patriarchal ideology. The attributes of sexism which are seen in the utterances of the female characters in *Efuru* can be said to be a consequent of the women seeing reality from a male point of view. It is quite obvious that their utterances portray men as the superior sex, while they place women at a lower level; hence, constructing a sense of inequality between the male sex and the

female sex through their speech. These women use a number of interactional strategies to achieve this. The strategies of metacommentary, socialization, insult, and gossip are identified in this work as the frequently-used strategies which the female characters employ to cast themselves in the mould of second-class human beings. The sense of unequal power relations between men and women embedded in their utterances show that women, too, use sexist language in favour of the men, thus helping men to sustain and perpetuate patriarchy – an ideology that maintains male superiority, and female subordination and subjugation.

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