

Feminist Perspectives on Economic Emancipation and Empowerment of Women in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and Bayo Adebowale's *Lonely Days*

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Abstract

This study analyzes how Flora Nwapa's "Efuru" and Bayo Adebowale's "Lonely Days" depict women's economic liberation and empowerment in Nigeria. It explores the contextual factors influencing these tales via a sociocultural perspective, providing insights into gender dynamics in the Nigerian society. In "Efuru" by Flora Nwapa, a woman navigates social conventions to become economically independent, while in "Lonely Days" by Bayo Adebowale, the battle for empowerment against cultural limits is depicted. Through an examination of agency, entrepreneurship, and cultural expectations, this paper clarifies the importance of financial independence for women in Nigeria. It clarifies complex viewpoints on female empowerment, throwing light on changing gender roles and the obstacles women encounter in their pursuit of economic emancipation, by contrasting these foundational works. This paper concludes that financial empowerment is not merely a personal achievement but a form of resistance against patriarchal oppression. By depicting women who attain economic independence, Adebowale and Nwapa advocate for a reevaluation of the socio-cultural narratives that perpetuate gender inequality. The study, therefore adds to the larger conversations about cultural change and gender equality.

Keywords: Women's Empowerment, Economic Emancipation, Gender Dynamics, Nigerian Literature, Sociocultural Contexts.

Introduction

Gender dynamics often take center stage, serving as a powerful lens through which to explore societal norms and challenges in the literary landscape. In recent decades, there has been a growing recognition of the crucial role played by literature in reflecting and shaping socio-cultural attitudes towards gender roles and empowerment. Particularly in African literature, works by authors such as Flora Nwapa and Bayo Adebowale, among others, have provided insightful portrayals of the challenges faced by women in patriarchal societies, while also highlighting their resilience and agency in the pursuit of economic emancipation and empowerment.

Nigeria, like many other African nations, grapples with deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and patriarchal structures that often limit the opportunities available to women, particularly in the economic sphere (Adegbite, 2018). Traditional gender roles prescribe women's primary responsibilities as homemakers and caregivers, relegating their economic contributions to secondary importance. This societal framework,

influenced by factors such as colonial legacies, religious beliefs, and customary practices, creates significant barriers to women's economic emancipation and empowerment.

In Nigeria, women's economic participation is hindered by various factors, including limited access to education, discriminatory inheritance laws, unequal access to resources, and cultural stigmatization of women engaged in economic activities outside the home (Nnaji, 2016). Despite these challenges, Nigerian women have demonstrated remarkable resilience and resourcefulness in navigating these obstacles, often relying on informal networks and grassroots initiatives to generate income and support their families (Olufunwa, 2019).

In light of these sociocultural contexts, Flora Nwapa and Bayo Adebowale become well-known figures in African literature, providing complex interpretations of women's experiences and fights for financial independence. Celebrated for her breakthrough novel "Efuru" (1966), which revolves on the lives of a Nigerian woman navigating the complications of marriage, motherhood, and economic independence in a patriarchal environment, Nwapa is frequently acclaimed as the mother of modern African literature. Comparably, Adebowale's "Lonely Days" (1986), which explores themes of poverty, widowhood, and the pursuit of economic self-sufficiency, offers an engrossing account of women's perseverance in the face of misfortune (Ogunyemi, 2000).

This study aims to critically analyze the portrayal of women's economic emancipation and empowerment in Nwapa's "Efuru" and Adebowale's "Lonely Days", examine the sociocultural contexts that shape these narratives, and discuss their implications for understanding gender dynamics in Nigerian society. By interrogating the representations of women's economic agency, resilience, and challenges in these works, this paper contributes to the broader discussions on gender equality, empowerment, and social change in African literature and society.

Socioeconomic Positioning of Women in Nigerian Traditional Society

Over time, there has been a very critical and compelling issue that borders on the status of women all over the world. Examining this status generally puts women on the sidelines and has them oppressively viewed through a parochial lens of patriarchy by society. With this, many have continued to consider women as the 'other figure' and a 'helper' whose rightful place is the home. Ancient philosophers and political theorists like "Aristotle, Rousseau, and Hegel contend that a woman's rightful place is her home, and that being burdened with household chores, she did not have sufficient time for politics, philosophy, art, and science" (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy 2011: 46). They project men as having leisure time to devote to public causes and universal issues, presuming that women do not feel similarly. This profane and ponderous belief left women with an escutcheon of subliminal subjectivity and 'voicelessness,' which have become immanent to them. It presents them as an appendage to men, who relegate women's roles to merely being married, giving birth, rearing children, cooking, and being home managers. Also, according to Rousseau and Hegel, women are not worthy

enough to be seen as rational entities but rather as passive or what Ikenna Dieke (2007: 2) calls “the fixed self or the observed ego”.

Moreso, African chauvinists were not left out of this as their cultures and traditions are a perpetual burden on their women. Through cultural socialization, African women are considered a “disadvantaged and deprived entity” (Eyisi and Okolo 2016: 154). One thing African women, unlike others, have in common is the undisputed fact that they are the pillars of child production, the bedrock of the family, and “the sole property of their husbands” (Equiano 2007: 21). This is also visible in their (African) literature where most male literary scholars like Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Wale Soyinka, Elechi Amadi, and Leopold Sedar Senghor, among others, represent the African female characters as victims of African male domination and of traditional customs and practices, thereby overlooking and minimizing the lofty roles of women in the development of the continent. Achebe, who has always replicated the African culture (particularly the Igbo culture) as a given, never demonstrated enough that women are worthy to be actively discussed as evident in his *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, where women are portrayed simply as housewives, and part of men’s property, until after series of vituperation that led to the production of *Anthills of the Savannah* where he redeemed the image and status of women.

Furthermore, it is pertinent to state that women in African literature have been grossly misrepresented at three levels namely: political, social, and economical. Politically, women are considered to be “a negligible and an unorganized force” (Eyisi and Okolo 154) and cannot be leaders or make laws even when they possess better qualities than men. Socially, they are not meant to engage in ‘manly’ activities such as wrestling and masquerading but can dance and shake their waist for men’s appreciation, sexual arousal, and satisfaction. Economically and most depressing, women constitute the majority of the peasant labour forces in the agricultural sector; they are not allowed, by tradition, to plant yams but cocoa yams, petty traders and other domestic occupations such as “hair-making,” broom-making, pottery, *uli*-drawing and so on. This is depressing because at the demise of their husbands, they are left with nothing to cater for their children as their husbands’ kith and kin deprived them of every available means of livelihood and sometimes even accuse them of being responsible for the death of their husbands.

Nevertheless, in the quest for freedom, equality, individuality, personality, autonomy, equal representations, and conscious refutation of the already existing deleterious patriarchal infringements on women, literary artists have imposed it upon their talents to plunge into creating female characters who break the vicious circles of oppression meted out on them. One of the things that synergized such female characters’ guts (in the novels under discussion) is their entrepreneurial nature.

Conceptual Framework

Empowerment and Women's Empowerment

The word 'empowerment' is believed to have emerged from the Spanish word "empoderam" which was adopted in a project for financing women to empower them. According to Serageldin (1991), the concept of empowerment appears at all societal interaction levels and gives the weaker and excluded groups access to resources for their futures. Olawaye (1996), however, notes that the term "empowerment" has gained popularity recently to refer to the process that allows disenfranchised individuals and groups in society to take advantage of possibilities that would not otherwise be available to them. Moreover, Udegbe (1996) highlights that empowerment entails acquiring sufficient information, confidence, and the ability to choose what is best for an individual or individuals and simultaneously motivating them to act appropriately.

The concept of empowerment also incorporates a thought of empowering people either in the form of individuals or groups who have been facing the challenges of social and economic deprivation (Kabeer, 2001). In other words, the term 'empowerment' creates a sort of entrepreneurship or encouragement among the poor sections of society who are physically and mentally willing to do certain activities in promotion of their lives' hierarchy, which is built in the social system, (Haque & Zulfiqar, 2015). Accordingly, empowerment generates power among poor communities of society.

From the perspective of social sciences, the term 'empowerment' could be defined as the process of making people self-sufficient in all spheres of life such as social, religious, cultural, political, and economic for the betterment of their lives (Malhotra et al., 2002). In Gandhi (2022), empowerment is a power that enables people to act outside of their houses with immense pride. Following the definitions discussed in this section, the word empowerment is much more suitable in the context of poor and vulnerable sections of society because it creates an expansion of assets and capability of individuals or groups to promote participation, make negotiation, control over non-cooperative atmosphere, and generate influence and accountability towards the institutions, which promotes their lives. Therefore, empowerment is the process of self-strength, self-reliance, and self-power which is the dignity of the individual within the group or society (Krishna, 2003) and makes persons efficient in the process of making fast decisions and encourages them to protect their rights.

Empowerment became a popular term when women were speaking about gaining control over their lives and participating in the decisions that affect them in the home, community, governance, and international development policies (Hallward-Driemeier, 2011). According to Khandker, (1998), women's empowerment can be viewed as the component of several interrelated and mutually reinforcing aspects. Making headway in alleviating poverty and promoting equitable growth is inextricably linked to improving women's lives and increasing their participation in decision-making (Allsopp & Tallontire 2014). Haque, and Zulfiqar, (2015) argue that women's empowerment helps raise economic productivity and reduce infant mortality and it

contributes to improved health and nutrition. Therefore, women empowerment is one of the recent priority issues in developing countries, since women have fewer salaried jobs. Mayoux (1998) defines empowerment as a complex, multifaceted strategy for changing the way power is distributed. According to Krishna (2003), women's empowerment is a process that enables them to make decisions and transform those decisions into the actions and results they want.

The majority of scholars (Paulino et al., 2016) have examined empowerment from an economic perspective. Understanding women's rights and achieving more general development objectives like economic growth, poverty alleviation, and social welfare depend on women being economically empowered. Golla et al. (2011) state that women are considered economically empowered when they can progress economically and have the ability to make financial decisions. According to Goldman and Little (2014), women's economic empowerment encourages inclusive growth in many developing nations. Khandker, & Cartwright, (2006) show that a large portion of the hard-core poor population are women because they face social barriers in accessing formal finance such as savings and credits and that makes it much harder for them to overcome poverty. Conclusively, they are susceptible to becoming poor when they lose the male earning member of the family due to abandonment, divorce, or death.

On the other hand, women's economic empowerment is vital to recognizing women's rights (Handa & Davis, 2006). Economy and organizations have started to realize that women's empowerment is a win-win situation for women and the economy (Rawlings & Rubio, 2005). Furthermore, Hoddinott, and Alderman, (1997) argue that economically empowered women can enjoy well-being and also help in increasing productivity, economic growth, reducing poverty, and enhancing efficiency. Women, the major proportion of society, get a chance in all spheres of life and become part of sustainable development (Fletschner, 2008). According to Kabeer, (2001), as women held responsibilities in many facets of family structure, empowering women means empowering the whole family, because women serve families in various aspects. This falls under the category of human resources development.

Gender Dynamics

Gender dynamics, the intricate interplay of social, cultural, and institutional forces shaping the roles and relationships between men and women, constitute a fundamental aspect of human society. Gender roles are socially constructed behaviours, and expectations associated with masculinity and femininity exhibit distinct patterns across cultures and historical contexts. In many societies, men are often assigned roles associated with strength, leadership, and authority, while women are relegated to roles centered on caregiving, nurturing, and domesticity (Eagly & Wood, 2016). These patterns of gender roles not only reflect existing power structures but also reinforce gender inequalities and stereotypes.

Power dynamics within gender relations are characterized by patterns of privilege, oppression, and resistance. Patriarchal systems, prevalent in many societies, grant men disproportionate power and privilege over women, often at the expense of women's autonomy and agency (Connell, 2014). This pattern of male dominance perpetuates systemic inequalities in areas such as politics, economics, and decision-making, further marginalizing women and perpetuating gender-based discrimination.

Gender identity (the deeply held sense of being male, female, or non-binary) is influenced by a complex interplay of biological, psychological, and sociocultural factors. Patterns of gender identity encompass a diverse range of experiences, including cisgender, transgender, and gender-nonconforming identities (APA, 2021). While traditional gender norms prescribe rigid binaries of masculinity and femininity, contemporary understandings recognize the fluidity and diversity of gender identities, challenging established patterns and fostering greater inclusivity and acceptance.

The patterns of gender dynamics have far-reaching implications for individuals, communities, and societies at large. Persistent gender inequalities limit women's access to education, economic opportunities, and political participation, hindering social progress and economic development (UNDP, 2019). Additionally, rigid gender norms contribute to the perpetuation of harmful practices such as gender-based violence, discrimination, and gender disparities in health outcomes (WHO, 2019). Addressing these implications requires concerted efforts to challenge existing patterns of gender dynamics and promote gender equality and social justice.

Gender dynamics encompass a complex web of patterns that shape the roles, power relations, and identities of individuals within society. By understanding and critically analyzing these patterns, we can strive towards a more equitable and inclusive world where individuals of all genders are afforded equal rights, opportunities, and dignity.

Review of Related Literature

In every human society, there are always conflicting interest that defines how people exist. These are factors that shape competition and rivalries in the society. Schwab (2017) states that talent is one of the most essential factors for growth and competitiveness. To build future economies that are both dynamic and inclusive, everyone needs to be given equal opportunity. When women and girls are not integrated as both beneficiaries and shapers, the global community loses out on skills, ideas, and perspectives that are critical for addressing global challenges and harnessing new opportunities, (Schwab 2017). The statement above underscores the relevance of gender equity in the aspects of development.

Egobueze, Ogele, and Onyekwere (2022) examined the socio-cultural milieus and gender inequality in Nigeria with an appraisal of options for promoting gender mainstreaming in perspectives. They claim that the journey of guaranteeing gender equality began some decades back, with the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985. This, they maintained was followed by the Fourth Conference

of Women which was held in Beijing, China in 1995. The document that arose out of the conference became known as the 'Beijing Platform for Action' (BPFA). Despite these efforts, their study revealed that inequality associated with gender has continued in Nigeria. The study observed that socio-cultural contexts are impediments to gender equity and recommended legislative options that would guarantee equity in representation by both the female and male genders in public and private services in the Country, as a panacea to resolving this imbroglio. This work, by recommending a parliamentary approach to solving the gender issues in Nigerian society, differs remarkably from the present study, which rather sees the economic emancipation and financial independence of the female gender as a remedy to the evergrowing gender subjugation in Nigeria. The present study does this from the standpoints of Nwapa's *Efuru* and Adebowale's *Lonely Days*.

Kumari (2020) who defines women's empowerment as a criterion for sustainable development and the fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), confirmed that Women's economic empowerment would lead to an expansion of women's labour force to participate as an important factor in the inclusive growth of the country. The main purpose of his study is to provide an integrative review of the antecedents and consequences of Women's Economic Empowerment. A comprehensive review of women's economic empowerment is presented as an important topic for policymakers and future researchers. Based on the findings, determinants of women's economic empowerment are mainly, Decision-making power, Controlling the use of income and expenditure, Leadership in the community, Control over time allocation, and Financial well-being. Among the total consequences, inclusive growth was revealed as the main consequence. The compendium of antecedents and consequences of women's economic empowerment can be used by policymakers for their policy decisions to identify the most significant antecedent to improve economic empowerment and to formulate new economic strategies to achieve inclusive growth as a main consequence of women's economic empowerment. The overview and integrative framework of previous studies on women's economic empowerment, including its causes and effects, are presented in this study promptly. However, unlike the reviewed study, the present research is interested in the condition of the African women's economy and emancipation, through the viewpoints of two great African writers: Flora Nwapa and Bayo, Adebowale.

Anggeria (2019) examined how gender is portrayed in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists* and argued that understanding gender entails understanding how men and women fit into societal roles. Due to the lack of equality between men and women, gender studies have frequently been regarded as taboo in Africa. Talking about feminism and gender are inextricably interwoven. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is an African woman of great influence. Her essay *We Should All Be Feminists* and speech both redefine the term feminism by providing a balanced view and promoting feminism. This study examines Adichie's language using Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The research uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

as its technique and contains both quantitative and qualitative data. Library research supports the understanding and accuracy of the information and data sources. While Anggeria's research focuses on the language used by Adichie in *We Should All Be Feminists*, the present study aims to investigate how women's economic emancipation and financial independence can foster gender equality and social justice.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts Radical Feminist theory to critically analyze and explicate Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and Bayo Adebowale's *Lonely Days* in the study of their main characters namely: Efuru and Yaremi respectively. As one of the tenets of Feminism, Radical Feminism, according to Jone Johnson Lewis (1982), is "a philosophy emphasizing the patriarchal roots of inequality between men and women, or, more specifically, the social domination of women by men. It views patriarchy as dividing societal rights, privileges, and power primarily along the lines of sex, and as a result oppressing women and privileging men". Radical Feminism, however, opposes existing political and social organization in general because it is inherently tied to patriarchy. Thus, radical feminists tend to be skeptical of political action within the current system and instigate cultural change that undermines patriarchy and its associated hierarchical structures. Also, the contravention of this existing patriarchal order, through self-economic empowerment, defines the radicality of Radical Feminism.

Analysis of the Major Characters in Both Novels

Efuru in *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa

The character of Efuru is a paragon of a radical entrepreneur who through her enterprising nature can debunk the assumption that women are less enterprising compared to their male counterparts, as has always been the deduction in Nigerian traditional societies. Irrespective of the fact that her father, Nwashike Ogene, is a wealthy man, she thinks it wiser to establish a trading business that would enable her to be economically independent of her father and men in general. This is because depending on her father's wealth would impede her from thinking outside the box and sticking to every command from her father, who has become tired of talking to her due to her obstinacy to certain orders.

Throughout the novel and despite her ordeals as regards traditional injunctions and business risks, Efuru is portrayed as not only an enterprising woman but also generous in sharing the profits of her business with people around her by way lending them money without interest and sometimes, giving them money with no intention of getting it back. Nwosu and his wife, Nwabata, (both farmers) are beneficiaries of Efuru's benevolence which undoubtedly spurs Ossai, Aduzia's mother and Efuru's mother-in-law, to proclaim that "you cannot see two like her. She is such a nice girl ... I am glad my person married her" (page 16).

Also, although Efuru "is so beautiful" (p. g 12) that would make one "think that the woman of the lake is her mother" (12), she never allows her physical appearance to

blur her enterprising spirit. She can raise money within a short time to help her renegade husband, Aduzia, pay her pride price – an act one could consider as ‘first-of-its-kind’ in an antediluvian (even in modern) Igbo society, where it is culturally mandatory that every man pays his wife’s bride price and do all necessary traditional rite – *igba nkwu*, before taking his wife home. But Efuru, having possessed the money and gut, contravenes such traditional order and “... took a few of her belongings and went to her lover’s house” (pg. 8). However, to prove that Efuru is not extremely radical in her approach to the traditional injunctions, she leaves home in her father’s absence because of great deference she has for him knowing full well she can still leave the house when ordered not to have made up her mind. This is also evident in the jovial way she treats the two sets of delegates sent by her father to bring her home. She greets them and serves them with “a bottle of home-made gin – a very good one that had been in a kerosene tin for nearly six months” (pg. 9) that spurs the two sets of delegates to return a compelling message advising Nwashike Ogene to give Adizua time to enable him to get money to pay Efuru’s pride price. It takes a wealthy woman like Efuru to provide such a good and inducing local gin.

However, having paid her bride price herself, Efuru continues to build her business empire which later employs her husband, Aduzia – a farmer, and makes him abandon his farming business which is nothing to write home about. At this point, it would be imperative to state categorically that Efuru’s decision/refusal to farm, in such a period when “agriculture is their chief employment; and everyone, even children and women, is engaged in it” (Equiano 28) is a conscious one as she is not hoodwinked into taking such a decision. She prefers trading to farming, having realized “she was not cut out for farm work” (pg. 12). Her enterprising nature and prowess change the mentality of people in her environment especially men who constantly feel threatened as one of them proclaims that “after seeing this type of woman... one hisses when one sees one’s wife” (pg. 12). Efuru, also, builds a house to further complicate her social standing.

Nevertheless, the absconding of her first husband, Adizua, the death of her only daughter, Ogonim, the death of her beloved father, Nwasike Ogene, the betrayal of trust by her second husband, Gilbert (Eneberi), and her inability to conceive again never deter her entrepreneurial spirit, rather, she continues to relentlessly move forward, hence, discovering and realizing things herself. She thinks for herself and makes logical decisions as she begins to grow “logical in her reasoning” (pg. 165) even to her bewilderment. Bewilderment – because the environment she finds herself molds her to believe that it is “unusual for a woman to be logical [because] usually, intuition did their reasoning for them” (pg 165). This rather radicalized self-discovery and self-awakening by Efuru confirms that women can think, even better than the failed men like Aduzia and Gilbert who allow their salacious desires to over-cloud their sense of reasoning.

Yaremi in *Lonely Days* by Bayo Adebowale

There is no gain in saying that Yaremi, the protagonist in Adebowale’s *Lonely Days*, is a replica of Efuru in her conscious act of contravention of traditional injunctions and

women's prejudice. Yaremi's contravention, like Efuru's, comes through her refusal to remarry some years after the death of her husband, Ajimobi, as demanded by tradition. Having economically empowered herself through her dyeing and selling of 'taffeta' clothes, Yaremi's approach, by radically rejecting and objecting to the mundane tradition of the people of Kufi, is in the form of open-confrontation (unlike Efuru's is more tactful and subtle) which would be explained later on.

Having found herself in the rustic village of Kufi, where women are thrown into an obnoxious state of widowhood by the death of their husband, Yaremi faces dreadful humiliation and loneliness and struggles for survival at the demise of Ajimobi. For her, like Efuru, the best way to fight back is to become enterprising and hardworking. The narrator trenchantly reveals that "for Yaremi, it was work, work, and work – a workaholic! The will to survive was there, putting determination into her bones and vigour into her nerves And gradually, she began to accustom herself to the hard fact that she was a widow" (pg. 11). Thus, resorting to "taffeta" business is the sure way to living an independent life and as a result, refuses to be hoodwinked into accepting traditional injunctions of widow inheritance and remarriage set by her society. Unlike Yaremi, other widows like Dedewe, Fayoyin, and Radeke, who pass through different degrees of humiliation after their husbands' death, are conformists and yield to accepting traditional injunctions of Kufi village.

Having become economically self-reliant and assertive even to the extent of donating "bowels of cassava-flour and perches of locust beans to her colleagues in the village, and had given out measures of dry corn and cramps of tobacco powder," (pg. 89) Yaremi assertively stands her ground as she shields off randy male admirers, proclaiming her love for the late husband, Ajimobi. Her total economic independence from men and their phallocentric authority makes "a good number of the village women secretly envy Yaremi for her acquired liberty and freedom, and for what she was: a 'comfortable' woman, courageously coping with the challenges and disappointments of life" (pg. 89). Furthermore, unlike Efuru, Yaremi is more aggressive as she openly confronts and shields off men like Ayanwale, Olonade, and Lanwa who make advances to her on different occasions. One of the men she rebuffs thus:

And, by the way, Lanwa, you must stop preaching the sermon of your people's old customs and traditions. This your long story of kinsman and cousin and half-brother connection with my late husband cannot catch me like deer in a snare! I reserve the right to the type of life I want to lead. It could be that of a woman deliberately aloof in self-contentment, untouched by the victimization and oppression of the man; or that of a woman sulking over the anger of an injury, protesting humiliations heaped on her, over the years by the men. (pg. 103)

Consequently, Yaremi airs her full self-realization and total rejection of traditional injunctions of the Kufi people during the "Cap Picking" ceremony organized to facilitate

her remarriage which she blatantly refuses. As a result, the village elders threaten to confiscate her husband's property and banish her from the village. However, due to her economic empowerment, she can withstand the threats having possessed the will and determination to survive despite her predicaments as a widow. Economic power earned through entrepreneurial engagements makes things very much easier for women like Yaremi and Efuru.

Discussion

Flora Nwapa's "Efuru"

Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* is a seminal work in African literature, especially portraying women's experiences and roles in Nigerian society. Within the narrative, the character of Efuru emerges as a potent symbol of resilience and agency, navigating through complex sociocultural landscapes in pursuit of economic emancipation and empowerment. Efuru's journey unfolds as a quest for economic emancipation, mirroring the struggles of countless women in patriarchal societies. As a successful trader and entrepreneur, she challenges conventional norms that confine women to domestic spheres. Nwapa skillfully depicts Efuru's agency in economic endeavors, showcasing her astuteness in business dealings and her ability to carve out a space for herself in the male-dominated marketplace. Through Efuru, Nwapa emphasizes the importance of economic autonomy as a means of empowerment for women, transcending traditional roles and expectations.

Embedded within Efuru's narrative are layers of sociocultural contexts that shape her experiences and choices. Nwapa deftly explores the intricate web of customs, traditions, and societal norms that influence women's lives in Nigeria. From the pressures of marriage to the stigma surrounding infertility, Efuru grapples with societal expectations while asserting her individuality and autonomy. Nwapa's portrayal of Efuru reflects the broader gender dynamics prevalent in Nigerian society, highlighting the systemic barriers that hinder women's economic participation and empowerment.

Efuru's character embodies the intersectionality of gender, class, and culture, offering a portrayal of women's experiences. Despite facing adversities, including the loss of her children and the betrayal of her husband, Efuru remains resilient, emerging as a symbol of strength and determination. Nwapa skillfully navigates the complexities of Efuru's identity, portraying her as a multifaceted woman who defies monolithic stereotypes. Through Efuru's journey, Nwapa underscores the importance of resilience in the face of systemic oppression, offering a message of hope and empowerment to women across generations.

The portrayal of Efuru in Nwapa's novel has far-reaching implications for understanding gender dynamics in Nigerian society. By centering the narrative on a strong, independent female protagonist, Nwapa challenges traditional patriarchal notions and advocates for gender equality and empowerment. Efuru's story catalyzes critical reflection on the role of women in economic development and the need for inclusive policies that promote their participation and agency. Through Nwapa's lens,

Efuru emerges not only as a literary figure but also as a beacon of inspiration for women's empowerment movements worldwide.

Bayo Adebowale's *Lonely Days*

Bayo Adebowale's *Lonely Days* offers a profound exploration of women's economic emancipation and empowerment through the life of its protagonist, Yaremi. Set in the Yoruba village of Kufi, the novel delves into the sociocultural constraints that shape and sometimes stifle the lives of women. Yaremi, as the central character, embodies the struggle for economic independence in a patriarchal society. Widowed and left to fend for herself, Yaremi's situation is emblematic of the precarious position many women find themselves in, where the loss of a husband can mean the loss of economic stability. However, unlike many of her contemporaries, Yaremi does not succumb to these pressures. Instead, she actively engages in various economic activities, such as weaving and selling her products in the market. This act of self-reliance is a form of resistance against the economic dependency traditionally expected of women.

Radical feminist theory posits that true emancipation for women can only be achieved by dismantling the patriarchal structures that perpetuate economic dependence and subjugation. Yaremi's refusal to remarry, despite societal pressure, is a radical assertion of her autonomy and a rejection of the notion that a woman needs a man to be economically secure. As Adebowale writes, "Yaremi's steadfastness in the face of societal expectations is not just a personal victory but a broader statement on the capacity of women to thrive independently" (Adebowale, p. 45).

The socio-cultural context of Kufi village is crucial to understanding the gender dynamics at play. The patriarchal norms are deeply ingrained, dictating that women should be subservient and dependent on men. Widows, in particular, face immense societal pressure to remarry to regain social and economic stability. Yaremi's decision to remain single and her success in sustaining herself economically challenges these norms. Her actions highlight the inherent strength and capability of women, undermining the patriarchal ideology that women are inherently inferior or dependent.

In radical feminist terms, Yaremi's defiance can be seen as a form of rebellion against the systemic structures designed to oppress women. The societal expectation for widows to remarry is not merely a cultural practice but a mechanism to maintain male dominance and control over women's lives. Yaremi's independence is thus a significant act of feminist resistance, emphasizing the need for structural change to achieve true gender equality. Yaremi's story has broader implications for understanding gender dynamics in Nigerian society. Her empowerment and economic emancipation serve as a critique of the patriarchal system and an inspiration for other women. Adebowale uses Yaremi's character to show that economic independence is a crucial component of women's liberation. By depicting a woman who successfully navigates and ultimately transcends the limitations imposed by her society, Adebowale advocates for a reevaluation of women's roles and capabilities.

Moreover, Yaremi's resilience and success highlight the potential for societal change when women are allowed to empower themselves economically. The novel suggests that when women are economically independent, they can challenge and change the socio-cultural narratives that oppress them. This aligns with radical feminist theory, which argues that economic independence is essential for dismantling patriarchal structures and achieving gender equality.

In *Lonely Days*, Bayo Adebowale provides a compelling narrative of a woman's struggle for economic emancipation and empowerment within a patriarchal society. Yaremi's journey is a testament to the resilience and capability of women to defy societal expectations and achieve independence. By using radical feminist theory to analyze Yaremi's character, this criticism underscores the importance of economic independence in the fight against patriarchal oppression and highlights the need for societal change to achieve true gender equality in Nigerian society.

Conclusion

The radical feminist theory perspective through the study of *Lonely Days* by Bayo Adebowale and *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa reveals the extent of socio-cultural manifestation that depicts economic emancipation and empowerment. Both authors explore the complex interplay between culture, gender, and economy to identify how Nigerian women navigate life in a male-dominated society where their economic contribution's value is often disregarded because of their gender identity. These narratives also illuminate the prevailing patriarchal socio-cultural systems that constrain and limit women's life-altering practices and their resistance and alliances within such structures.

In *Lonely Days*, Yaremi's disassemblage process is illustrative of the struggle for economic independence in an intense masculine-centric culture. Her decision not to remarry and her success in crafting and launching weaving and marketing businesses indicate her efforts to subvert social and cultural norms that restrict women's economic opportunities. This narrative aligns with radical feminist theory, which argues that dismantling patriarchal structures is essential for women's liberation. Yaremi's resilience and determination illustrate the potential for women to assert their economic independence and redefine their roles within their communities (Adebowale, 2006).

Similarly, in *Efuru*, the protagonist Efuru defies traditional gender roles by becoming a successful businesswoman, despite the cultural norms that prescribe a more subservient role for women. Efuru's economic success and her rejection of societal expectations regarding marriage and motherhood highlight her agency and autonomy. Nwapa's portrayal of Efuru challenges the notion that women must conform to patriarchal norms to achieve fulfillment, instead presenting economic independence as a crucial aspect of empowerment (Nwapa, 1966).

Both books place a strong emphasis on the idea that economic empowerment is a kind of struggle against patriarchal tyranny as well as a personal accomplishment. Adebowale and Nwapa promote a reevaluation of the socio-cultural myths that sustain gender inequality by featuring women who achieve economic independence. These

narratives demonstrate that when women are economically empowered, they possess the agency to challenge and transform the patriarchal structures that seek to oppress them.

The implications of these narratives for understanding gender dynamics in Nigerian society are significant. They highlight the need for societal change that supports and promotes women's economic empowerment as a pathway to achieving gender equality. The resilience and agency displayed by Yaremi and Efuru serve as powerful examples of how women can overcome sociocultural barriers and assert their independence.

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