

REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN

*Paix – Travail – Patrie*

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UNIVERSITE DE YAOUNDE I  
ECOLE NORMALE SUPERIEURE  
DEPARTEMENT DE D'ANGLAIS

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REPUBLIC OF CAMEROUN

*Peace – Work – Fatherland*

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UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDE I  
HIGHER TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGE  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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## **GENDER ESSENTIALISM IN BUCHI EMECHETA S THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD**

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Higher Teacher Training College (ENS) Yaounde in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of a Postgraduate Teacher's  
Diploma (DIPES II) in English Studies**

Par :

**BRENDA SIRRI EKWE**  
**Licencié en études bilingues**

Sous la direction  
**Dr. YVONNE IDEN NGWA**  
Senior Lecturer

Année Académique  
2015-2016





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## **DEDICATION**

To

My husband

NKONDJE MBELLA Yves

And

Kids

Jeyden and Syana MBELLA

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My sincere gratitude goes to my supervisor, Dr Yvonne Iden Ngwa, whose role as mentor and guide has served as a constant source of inspiration for me. I cannot adequately convey the depth of my gratitude to her for providing me with critical feedback and for deepening and developing my academic potential.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to all my lecturers of The Higher Teacher Training College most especially those of the English Department, for their valuable guidance throughout my training and for their lectures which have opened my mind to critical thinking.

I am also thankful to the following people who have encouraged me in one way or the other either morally or financially. They are: my father, my in-laws, my adoptive children and my Pastor and family.

Finally, I would like to thank all my friends and classmates for reshaping my views and for making my stay in school an unforgettable experience. I thank most especially , Sandrine Achu, Khiki Ngala, Etoki Nsouli, Bernice Nchamba , Maxime Fopa , Bimela Kinyuy, Esperance Ngando , Chritine Kamdem , Belle Remy and Sister Veronica. I acknowledge all my classmates for making my stay in school a happy and fun filled one.

## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the various ways in which the black woman is subjugated in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. It contends that, in spite of this multiple subalternity, the woman can assert herself through redefinition. The dissertation adds that the novelist suggests the possibility for this redefined woman to live complementarily with the man in an utopic society. The Gender and Womanist Theories have been used as the work's conceptual framework. While practices such as gender role distribution, gender categorization and mis/representation are the strategies used by patriarchy to oppress the woman the oppression of black men and the fragmentation of black families pose as colonial practices that worsens the black woman's lot. The study's conclusion is that the specificity of the African woman's plight necessitates solutions that are specific to her hence the relevance of Emecheta's novel as a complementary text in Cameroonian secondary schools to create awareness in young Cameroonians.

## RESUME

Cette étude porte sur les différentes manifestations de la marginalisation de la femme africaine dans l'ouvrage de Buchi Emecheta intitulé *The Joys of Motherhood*. Il en ressort que malgré cette subordination, la femme peut s'affirmer en s'émancipant. Dans le texte, l'auteur suggère des possibilités que cette femme émancipée peut être complémentaire à un homme dans une société utopique. La théorie des genres et la théorie dite "womanism" comme cadre conceptuel de l'étude tandis que les pratiques telles que la distribution des rôles selon le genre, la catégorisation et la mauvaise représentation sont des stratégies utilisées par le patriarcat pour opprimer la femme. L'oppression des hommes et la fragmentation des familles noires se présentent comme des pratiques coloniales qui aggravent la condition de la femme noire. En somme, la spécificité de la situation critique de la femme africaine nécessite des solutions spécifiques à sa condition, d'où la pertinence de l'œuvre de Emecheta comme un ouvrage complémentaire dans les établissements d'enseignement secondaires au Cameroun pour conscientiser les jeunes camerounais.

## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>DEDICATION</b> .....	i
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	ii
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	iii
<b>RESUME</b> .....	iv
<b>GENERAL INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
<b>CHAPTER ONE : THE SUBALTERN POSITION OF THE AFRICAN WOMAN</b> .....	14
<b>CHAPTER TWO : FROM OPPRESION TO EMPOWERMENT</b> .....	30
<b>CHAPTER THREE: THE REDEFINED WOMAN AND GENDER EQUITY</b> .....	44
<b>CHAPTER FOUR : THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD: APPRAISAL, IMPLICATIONS AND PROSPECTS</b> .....	58
<b>GENERAL CONCLUSION</b> .....	65
<b>WORKS CITED</b> .....	Erreur ! Signet non défini.

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The issue of gender is as old as human existence itself given the fact that the cohabitation of men and women has existed from creation on planet earth. As a concept, gender constitutes a fundamental theme which has caused a lot of controversies the world over. These heated debates have been as a result of the fact that women have, more often than not been considered as inferior. According to men, a woman is not only biologically inferior but is equally created from the man's rib and therefore is relegated to the second position. The societal construct of the woman's inferiority, on its part, is based on the premise that men are leaders, rulers, holders of virtue and boldness and the plinth of the best management.

As regards literature, gender has also been the source of ongoing debates which resulted from the fact that male writers, who initially had the monopoly of writing, represented the woman as inferior in their works. In view of the above, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and especially in the 1960s, a wave of female consciousness swept through the Western world. This awareness ranged from the rising of women's movements and associations to the rising awareness of equal rights in the third world at the end of the century. A great deal of this awareness was presented mostly in writing, that is, in literature and the others in debates and television programs. Maggie Humm sums this up in her preface to the collected book of feminist essays—entitled *Feminism, a Reader*—when she says: “Feminism radically questions our understanding of men and women and the social structures which maintain their differences” (1).

The differences between men and women are many. Biologically, they are different, and so are their way of thinking and acting different. It takes a lot to understand these differences as Humm puts it. The man sees himself as superior and considers the woman as being inferior. Hence, existence becomes male-dominated characterized by patriarchy which is a means of female oppression especially in the Third world. To add to Humm's idea, Ama Ata Aidoo—on her part—submits that “female writers bring into focus their femaleness/ femininity in their narratives and, in doing so, highlight power differences between men and women.”(2). The African woman is conscious of the fact that she is a secondary citizen and through her writings, she does not only highlight the domains through which the man considers her as different but asserts herself by bringing out her values and creating her own space which also includes the man. Based on this premise, the woman wants at all cost, to regain her agency in a male-dominated society and world.



Elaine Showalter maintains that “gender has become an analytic category whether the concerns are representations of sexual difference, (re)shaping masculinity, building feminine values” (3). Gender roles have been stratified and categorized. The man has always been given more value than the woman. This categorization can be seen at the level of her race, colour, and biological construction and even in her role in society. These ideas endorse the fact that there is a gender problem which has been the focus of many scholarly discussions. These discussions have also centred on how the woman has been struggling to have an identity in the midst of a patriarchal-dominated world. From birth, the woman is made to look soft and weak. The colours of her dresses are pink; she is trained to be the mother of the house, the wife, just to mention these few. She is categorised right from birth.

This female consciousness (that swept through the Western world at the time) however had a weakness that of generalizing the problems women face. This group did not take into consideration the fact that the black and Third World women have different problems and face different realities from the white woman. Mohanty quoted in Carolyn Kumah– in her paper “African women and Literature” affirms that,

Western Feminism has three major drawbacks which are: the consideration of women as a coherent group, unsubstantiated universality, and lastly the binaries within the discourse which presents Third World women as ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition- bound etc, while the white feminist is educated, modern and has a control over her person (4).

This statement presents another form of the Black Woman’s oppression which is categorisation. To this effect, Third World feminists raised their voices for the need of a separate canon of their own as is evident in the writings of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Sera Suleri, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty just to mention these. With this new turn of things, most African women such as Florence Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta expressed a reluctance to be called feminists. Emecheta in “Feminism with a small ‘f’” states that

I am just an ordinary writer who has to write. Being a woman and African born, I see things through an African woman’s eyes chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African woman I know. I did not know that by doing so I will be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist, I am an African feminist with a small ‘f’. I do believe in the African kind of feminism. They call it womanism. (16).

Emecheta, in this statement, rejects the idea of being a feminist because she thinks it is Euro-centric. She prefers to take the place of an African woman so as to give a vivid description of the African woman’s realities. These African female writers presented forms

of oppression which the African woman faces in situations such as wifhood, motherhood, polygamy, inheritance, struggles, race, gender inequality, identity, categorization, colonialism, and patriarchy because of their gender category. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, in most if not all African societies, the woman did not have a place or even a say in the socio-political, cultural, economic and religious configuration of the society. The woman was reduced to child-bearing, child nurturing, home making and mothering among others.

African writers, such as Emecheta, have therefore taken the responsibility of redressing this mistake and re-defining the meaning of being an African woman. Based on her personal experience, she wants women to regain agency in the face of these multiple oppressions. It is however contradictory that this female writer represents a heroine who is totally crushed by the traditional patriarchal system of her people as well as the white hegemonic society in the city in *The Joys of Motherhood*. The depiction of such a protagonist can shed doubts on Emecheta's avowed mission. This work therefore seeks to investigate whether Emecheta forfeits her mission of restituting the African woman's dignity in the text under study. The highlights of the multiple subalternity of the black woman in the work and parallel assertive female characters show that, despite Emecheta's submissive protagonist, the writer advocates the redefinition of the African woman so that she can regain agency. In view of these, the study attempts to answer the following questions:

- ❖ How do gender representation and categorization foster the oppression of the woman in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*?
- ❖ In what ways does the African woman redefine herself in the face of this multiple oppression?
- ❖ Which ideal image of the woman does Buchi Emecheta advocate in *The Joys of motherhood*?
- ❖ How can Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* be used as a complementary text to educate high school students?

This work is based on the premise that the African woman is variously oppressed by the society in *The Joys of Motherhood* hence the need for her to redefine herself in order to regain agency. Subjected by the yokes of patriarchy and colonialism, Emecheta's female characters in the text react differently to their plight. Yet the author's unambiguous stance for the restoration of the woman's dignity creates the essence of this work.

This work revolves around the plight of the African woman, in general and the Nigerian woman in particular as a subjugated caste. The study focuses on Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. The choice of this novel is justified by the fact that it presents two epochs which are relatively different hence making a varied perception of the African woman's oppression possible. One environment presented in the novel is one which colonisation has not affected. It is a milieu in which the African culture and tradition are respected. The other environment is Lagos which has gone through colonisation and the people presented there are emancipated. This bidimensional view of the woman's subjugation provides a good arena for analyzing the work and the topic. Lastly, the author of the chosen text –Buchi Emecheta is well-known for her dynamism and her unending desire to make the African woman have a name and the place she deserves. This is another reason that accounts for the choice of *The Joys of Motherhood*.

This research endeavour acts as an eye-opener to the African Woman. It shows that, despite the fact that she is oppressed at all levels; the solution to all the problems she faces can only come from her. The work is also important in that it paves the way for the African woman to ameliorate her status and to create an identity for herself. The African woman should be able to empower herself despite all the barriers and obstacles she has on her way. The study sheds light on how issues of gender are evolving in view of the oppression African women endured. It is obvious that the world is evolving and the place and value of the woman has to change with it. The woman should stop being just a housewife, a mother and a house-keeper. This study is also significant in goading the Cameroonian and African woman to self-empowerment and rehabilitation, so that she can fully assert herself socially, culturally, economically, and even politically without necessarily waiting for the man's assistance or depending on some tradition which limits her. It equips the woman to know that she has equal opportunities and rights as the man.

Since the study examines the question of gender essentialism in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, certain key words that are relevant to the study have to be defined. These words are "gender" and "essentialism".

Etymologically, the word gender originates from a Latin word "genus" which means "type", "kind" or "sort". In 1926 Watson Fowler states that the word pertains to its grammar related meaning. He says "Gender... is a grammatical term only to talk of persons... of the masculine or feminine (gender), meaning of the male or female sex; it's either a jocularly (permissible or not according to context) or a blunder" (14). Watson focuses his definition on

the biological facts and states that “gender” takes on meaning according to the context. The American Psychological Association defines gender as the attitudes, feelings, and behaviours that a given culture associates with a person’s biological sex. Behaviour that is compatible with cultural expectations is referred to as gender-normative behaviour. This association presents the cultural part of gender because it implies that each culture has a way of attributing gender roles that is the common denominator between the preceding definition and the definition of gender in this work.

Some cultures attribute roles based on the fact that individuals accept and live by the rules set up by the society. For example, if a society accepts gay’s gender roles are categorised based on this. In this research endeavour, gender can be seen as a social construct which asserts that the expectations, capabilities and responsibilities of men and women are not always biologically determined. The gender roles assigned to men and women are significantly defined structurally and culturally in ways which create, reinforce and perpetuate the relationships of male dominance and female subordination. The construction of masculine/female, father/mother, and husband/wife, superior/inferior is a social process of gendering power in society. The last definition shows how gender roles have been defined such that the man is always superior to the woman. It is obvious that, for the woman to have a place in society, she has to redefine herself by refusing to accept the existing status quo. This is the focus of this work.

Meanwhile, Diana Fuss defines essentialism as “a belief in real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the ‘whatness’ of a given entity”( *Essentially Speaking : Feminism Nature and Differences* ) (12). This definition explains the essence of this work in that gender essentialism refers to the association of males and females with separate and fixed biological and psychological characteristics that leads to hierarchical social power dynamics within society, which is generally unfavourable and particularly oppressive to the female. The woman has biological characteristics such as ovulation, menstruation and childbearing. Society equally categorizes her as a weaker sex and these make her inferior. Men, on their part, have muscles and are presumed to be of greater intelligence and strength than the woman and this makes them superior. The above definitions illustrate the fact that the woman’s morphology disfavours her because society stereotypes her and assigns her to subordinate roles. Thus, she needs to redefine herself and this in essence is what this work seeks to show.

To better understand the context in which the novel under study was written, it is necessary to know who the author is. Buchi Emecheta was born in Lagos, Nigeria. Her father, a railway worker, died when she was very young. At the age of 10, she won a scholarship to the Methodist Girls' High School. But she had left school by the time she was seventeen; she got married and had a child. She accompanied her husband to London where he was a student. At the age of twenty-two, she finally left him and took an Honours' Degree in Sociology while supporting her five children and writing early in the morning.

Her first book, *In the Ditch*, chronicles her experience as a poor, single parent in London. It was followed by *Second-Class Citizen*, *The Bride Price*, *The Slave Girl*, published in the years 1974, 1976 and 1979 respectively. *The Slave Girl* was awarded the Jock Campbell Award in (1979). *The Joys of Motherhood*, her novel of international renown, was published in 1979. Some of her other works are *Destination Biafra* and *Kehinde*. It is evident from these titles that Emecheta has great concern for the black woman's lot as a second-class citizen. She has also written a number of children's play books and a play, *A Kind of Marriage*, which was produced on BBC television. Her autobiography, *Head Above Water*, appeared in 1986 with much acclaim. In 2005, Emecheta was presented with an honorary OBE (Order of the British Empire) in recognition of her services to literature.

The biographical facts above portray the autobiographical overtones of Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. In this book, she actually paints a picture of what she endures as a single mother in raising her five sons. It is evident in the novel that the protagonist (Nnu Ego) faces the same challenges as the author while raising her children almost alone given that her husband is severally absent. Emecheta uses this piece of art to create and present a new identity for the woman.

Considering the subordinate position of women according to societal construct presented in the work and their struggle to break away from them, the Gender Theory and Womanism are apt interpretative resources for this analysis. The Gender theory came to the forefront of the theoretical scene first, as a feminist theory, but has subsequently come to include the investigation of all gender and sexual categories or identities. The Gender Theory has a link with or is considered as a subset of the political theory and owes a lot to the Feminist theory. The feminist gender theory was concerned with the rights of women in contemporary societies, women's identity and the representation of women in media and culture.

Founders of the theory are Judith Butler, Michel Foucault and Simone de Beauvoir, renowned theorists who are usually associated with other theories. Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, observes that men have the freewill to choose in life but women are dependent beings, controlled by the men. To Beauvoir, the woman is called ‘the other’ and that is why she says “one is not born a woman, but however becomes one” (31-36). In other words, women are given subordinate roles because they have accepted them. This makes the woman the other or a secondary person.

The Gender Theory focuses on the clear differences between biological essentialism and cultural constructivism in terms of male and female sex and sexuality. It also focuses on the assumption that masculine is authority and power while feminine is subservience. Finally, gender is performative and not in-born. Genders being performative mean roles are ascribed to both men and women according to whether they are masculine or feminine. This is inconsiderate given that Gender is not in born because one’s biological sex should not necessarily determine what a person can do or not. This theory could, in other words, be termed “sexuality theory.” The era of Gender Theory was one of ever-tightening regulation of male/female relationships and coupling. The Gender theory focuses on the dichotomy that exists between the man and the woman.

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler says “though sex is biologically determined, one’s sexuality and gender is designed and controlled by the culture he or she belongs to” (63). This quotation implies that, unlike one’s sex, one’s gender is not a natural phenomenon. Society decides the way in which things function. There are societies where men act as wives and women as husbands. In other cultures, men are considered to be superior while women are considered as being inferior. There are societies where gay marriages and lesbianism are taboos as is the case in Africa. It is worth noting that culture is particularly patriarchal in Africa and this justifies the woman’s great subordination. This work will shed light on the disadvantageous position of the woman portrayed in the text under study.

In *History of sexuality*; Michel Foucault notes that “power is centralized and coordinated by a sovereign authority who exercises absolute control over its subject through threats and violence” (254). The critic highlights the vantage position of the man over the woman. Society has organised things in a way that the man is superior at all levels and runs the world based on this premise. The coercive measures that subject and relegate the woman are evident both in the rural and urban settings in the work under study. Chapter One of the

work dwells on the power wielded by patriarchy over women. To add, Liz Mackenzie in an article entitled “*On Our Feet*” that features in *A Handbook on Gender Issues* observes that, man’s gender affects his or her expectations. This is because society distinguishes ones gender either in masculine or in feminine terms. Stated otherwise, societies are gender-regulated. There is generally a powerful and a weak sex. In most African societies, the man dominates and subjugates the woman and she has to accept this underprivileged position because society says so.

The Gender Theory is useful for the analysis of the text in that it presents gender as being performative and in-born. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, this performative dimension of gender penalises the woman both in the rural and urban environments. The Gender Theory will make it possible for the study to portray this. In the novel man is dominant and incarnates authority while the woman is subservient, subordinate and is considered to be the “other”. There is therefore the need for the woman to reclaim agency by redefining herself. The resulting power relation between the man and her also justifies the choice of the Gender theory. The theory will show how she is both represented and categorised by society and how she clamours for recognition.

Another theory that has been used in this work is African Womanism. Womanism arose out of the gaping fissures in revolutionary movements that stood for marginalized categories in terms of race and gender. As a concept, it emerged from the African American community highlighting the issues pertinent to black women. Civil Rights Movements in America and Feminist Movements were found wanting. The former focused on equality for African American men while the women were left in the background and the white women conveniently forgot their sisters of ‘lesser light.’

Though the term Womanism was first used in 1863 with similar meaning as ‘feminism’, it gained popularity when Alice Walker used it in her collection of essays, *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens: Womanist Prose*. The Womanist Theory centres on the feminist efforts of black women. Womanism grew because many activists felt that the feminist movement did not cater for the plight of the black woman. Walker explains that the womanist is a black feminist or a feminist of colour. She is one who is responsible and capable. The writer adds another definition to Womanism which states that, “womanism seemingly supplies a way for black women to address gender oppression without attacking black men” (34-38). In other words, the woman has to wake up and break away from all the forms of oppression she undergoes without necessarily challenging the place of the man.

In Africa, other proponents of this theory are Chikwenje Ogunyemi and Mary Kolawole. Womanism, according to these two, is an Afro-centric form of feminism that does not concern itself with gender issues but equally shows interest in matters of class, race, politics, ethnic relationships, religious intolerance, colonialism and neo-colonialism in their consciousness. Ogunyemi affirms that womanism arose out of the desire nurtured by black women to name their experiences and perspectives within a specific socio-cultural and political context. It emphasizes understanding of sexist relationship. Womanism came as a medium through which the African woman could voice and expose her predicaments in a masculine and patriarchal society.

Ogunyemi states that: “Black women are disadvantaged in several ways; as Blacks they, with their men, are victims of white patriarchal culture; as women, they are also victimized by black men, and as black women they are also victimized on racial, sexual and class grounds by white women” (*Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English*,63). This quotation highlights the fact that the African woman is marginalized because of her colour. She is made a slave and racially segregated against by white men and women who do not even understand the realities of her culture and life. The black man exerts his masculinity by giving the woman a secondary position. Seen in this sense then, a black woman is a victim of interlocking forms of oppression. Womanism affirms the traditional gender structures embracing a holistic view of emancipation without downplaying the oppression of women. The theory equally confirms the fact that the African woman is under several forms of oppression.

Womanism seeks to address issues that white feminists just passed over especially those issues imperative to the day-to-day life experience of the black woman. Therefore the liberation of the black woman from the multiple oppression forces of race, class and gender is the ultimate need of the hour. Hence, the theory is used in this research to show how Emecheta encourages the post-independence woman to assert herself and create her own identity. This post-independence African woman is variously subjugated by the different oppressive forces cited above and womanism will make it possible for the work to highlight this. It is also suitable in this work because the theory proposes that the woman alone can solve her problem and can get this patriarchal yoke off by herself. This is partly the aim of this dissertation. Moreover, the theory makes allowance for the study to show how the black woman’s story is told by black women themselves. As stated before, *The Joys of Motherhood* can be considered as being fictional autobiography because it somehow recounts the writer’s



own story. Finally, the elevation of women to the rank of goddess as in the text echoes the womanist interrogation of the male Judeo-Christian God.

Writing about gender is far from being a new venture. Acknowledging the fact that critics and researchers have written profusely on these notions, the present researcher read this existing literature. The study will presently examine such works especially those that are related to the author and the work under study. Janet Dodd stresses the importance of this undertaking by postulating in the “ACS Style Guide” that the review of literature is important in the sense that “reviews integrate, correlate and evaluate results from published literature on a particular subject.” This assertion sheds more light on the fact that, no research work stems from the air, others must have written something about it and this acts as a guide to the new researcher who exploits the unexamined issues and comes up with a new solution to a discovered problem.

Where generalizations can be made, “the woman question” as it was called in debates of the time, has been seen as a tendency to define the role of women in terms of private domesticity. From the nineteenth century, scholarly debates changed and then focused on gender issues: taking into consideration sex, gender, race and sexuality. This was at the general level and involved feminists and men who did not take into consideration the realities lived by Black women (in particular) and Third World women, in general. This brought in a new wave of scholars who then concentrated their debates on African women and their oppression by the society, men, colonialism, and categorization just to mention these.

One of such scholars is Gabriel Constanza. In her article, “*The State of Gender Relations in Africa*”, she observes that,

In common with most under-developed areas of the world, women in African societies are, to varying degrees, limited by their gender. It is appropriate to generalize about patriarchal cultures and social barriers to women, who usually live as homemakers, child-bearers and wives. It is also fair to say that in many such cultures, women spend their youths under the authority of their fathers, and their adulthood under the control of their husbands. Men dominate the lives of women in most spheres and limit the ability of women to change their own circumstances (47).

It is outrightly clear to go by Constanza’s words above, that the woman’s status is of less importance as far as the regulations of the society is concerned. The woman is not given much value or attribution since almost all her life she belongs to the man in one way or the other and also spends her time serving him. From birth and throughout her youth, she is under

the dominion of her father. And when she gets married she is considered as being an object (her husband's property) and there is no room for emancipation. This representation of the woman's lot is echoed in Nnu Ego's life and the first chapter of this work examines these different facets of the woman's domination by patriarchy.

Rosaldo Michelle and Louise Lamphere in *Women, Culture and Society* alludes to the degree to which women are dominated by men when they posit that "All contemporary societies regardless of kinship organizations are characterized by a considerable degree of male dominance. They add that there is no society in which women have publicly recognized power and authority exceeding that of men" (65). Stated otherwise, the woman has always occupied the secondary position. These critics' declaration that there is "no society" in which women wield more authority than men shows that the woman's subjugation is a universal phenomenon. Once more, this work is interested in the woman's underprivileged position in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. But it also probes into ways in which the subjugated African woman asserts herself through redefinition in the work under study.

More specifically, Elleke Boehmer, comments on Emecheta's art in *The Joys of Motherhood*. She describes Emecheta in these terms:

Almost uniquely of her time Buchi Emecheta, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, takes to task an embedded tradition in post-independence African writing of raising mother figures on symbolic pedestals, a tradition that has produced what novelist Zadie Smith calls 'a new fetishisation of the black female. *Stories of: Women Gender and Narratives in Postcolonial Nations*. (76)

This quotation points to the fact that Emecheta, in her novel, presents two epochs: one of them is the era before independence when all traditions were respected and the woman accepted everything without complaining. Her roles as mother, wife and second-class citizen were her lot and the man took care of his wife and family. The post-colonial era, ushered in many changes and the woman viewed things from a different perspective. She realized that she had been subjugated and oppressed for a long period of time and there was the need for her to redefine herself by breaking away from patriarchal dominion and other forms of oppression. Emecheta uses characters in the novel under study to show how the woman can achieve this. Against the traditional backdrop, she raises both her heroine and the latter's female ancestor to the rank of deities. This is probably the "fetishization" that Boehmer is talking about. The work aims at exploring every other venue female characters in the work use to liberate themselves.

Adding more flesh to Boehmer's assertion, Holst in *First Things First: Problems Of a Feminist Approach to African Literature* confirms that:

Buchi Emecheta can recreate the situation and difficulties of women with authenticity and give a valuable insight into their thoughts and feeling. Her prime concern is not so much with cultural liberation, nor with social change. To her the object seems to give women access to power in the society as it exists, to beat men at their own game. She lays claim to no ideology, not even a feminist one. (254).

Kirsten Holst clearly states what Emecheta has been trying to do as an African writer in the above excerpt. The critic notes that Emecheta portrays a vivid picture of the plight of women in Africa given that she is one of them and has lived some, if not all, of the oppressions that the African woman faces. She is a mouth-piece of these women. She even rejects the idea of being a feminist because what she is saying does not require one to be a feminist to say it. Her re-empowerment of women does not target equality with men. Rather, she is for the fact that women should assert themselves and have an identity of their own without necessarily being subjugated. In the wake of what the critic says, this research endeavour shows how the woman can achieve this.

Among the many writers and critics who have drawn the attention of scholars to the ways women have been silenced, stereotyped and marginalized, are Charles Fonchingong and Mary Mogundipe. These two focus their arguments on the oppression of the African woman as they contend that African literature is male-dominated where the woman is given subordinate roles. They equally posit that traditional and diverse norms in many African societies are also other forms through which the woman is marginalized. Fonchingong describes African women as the "Subaltern" in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as she alludes to situations in which the woman may speak but cannot be heard. These two authors further explain that female character in the works of most prominent African writers were made marginal to the plot of fiction. They give examples of Senghor and Ngugi.

The above critics, in one way or the other, affirm the fact that gender roles in the African society are not equally distributed. The men wield power and oppress the women not only in the customary domains already mentioned in this work but also in literature. Against this backdrop, this term paper examines how the woman redefines herself in the midst of this chaos through the voice of a female writer who is speaking for women. Her specificity as a female writer having female aesthetics is one of the concerns of this work.

The work comprises a general introduction, four chapters and a conclusion. The general introduction gives a general overview of the work and the methodology used. Chapter One, captioned “The Subaltern Position of the African Woman” presents how gender role distribution and other gender stereotypes contribute to the oppression of the woman. Chapter Two, “From Dis-empowerment to Empowerment” looks at the revolutionary actions the woman takes to redefine herself. The chapter sheds light on ways in which the woman frees herself without external help. Titled “The Redefined Woman and Gender Equity”, Chapter Three shows the writer’s ideal of the emancipated woman and her vision of an utopic African society. It shows the ideal society that result from the woman’s self-assertion. The last chapter which is “The *Joys of Motherhood*: Appraisal, Implications and Prospects” it analyses how The *Joys of Motherhood* can contribute to the educational, social and cultural construction of Cameroon if used as a complementary text in high school. The conclusion summarizes the findings of the work after re-stating the aim of the study and the critical tools used in it. It also makes suggestions for further research.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE SUBALTERN POSITION OF THE AFRICAN WOMAN

This chapter examines how gender stereotypes affect the woman's position in the society. According to Nfah- Abenyi, the concept of gender has influenced defined and oriented literary discourse for a long period of time. Gender, as a concept, disputes the naturalization of sexual differences in many scenes of conflict. Men and women are socially constituted and position themselves in relations of hierarchy and active opposition. Some writers have been able to look at gender beyond the limits of sexual differences. They differentiate sex from gender. Sex is a person's maleness or femaleness, while gender refers to the cultural or behavioural aspects of sex, a group of attributes or behaviour shaped by society and culture. It would seem that all women are oppressed all over the world. However this oppression is different depending on the various socio-cultural settings.

According to Wilfred Guerrin, women are subjugated and marginalized within a patriarchal culture. A culture organized in favour of the men. The woman is considered as the "other", an object that is theorized by a male dominated society. In this regard, the woman's identity is constructed by a culture which is predominantly patriarchal. These points out the way women are oppressed and silenced by a native patriarchy which is not limited to a particular race. However, limiting this part of the work to gender roles will not be right for the Third World woman who is the main focus of this work. Patriarchy, customs and traditions, motherhood, marriage, women's reproductive rights and others will be forms of subjugation and marginalization under discussion.

The term "subalternity" refers to a condition of subordination brought about by colonization or other forms of economic, social, racial, linguistic, and/or cultural dominance. According to Chakravorty, the Subaltern is a person or a group of people that have been excluded from society. They do not have a voice and are lost in the world due to assimilation and colonialism. And as far as subaltern women are concerned, they are women subjected to oppression and marginalization. No one is aware of the daily struggles they face; they are ghosts where they reside. They have no place and go through many torments without being helped. This last definition suits the intentions of this work because the women in the work under study go through a lot.

Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* deals with the portrayal of the African woman. The book focuses more on the woman of the Eastern part of Nigeria. The use of main characters in her novel shows what it means to be a woman and a mother in the Nigerian society (in general) and the Ibo tribe in particular. Her major concern is the plight of the rural and urban women whose efforts to satisfy the man are trivialized. The oppression and rigours of motherhood of the female folk is clearly portrayed in Buchi Emecheta's novel. She shows how sexuality and the ability to bear children can sometimes be the only way through which femininity is determined and this is just one form of oppression among many others. There is evidence that the woman's subalternity is multiple in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. She is oppressed by customs and traditions, motherhood, wifehood colonialism, marriage and just to mention these. Nnu Ego is sent out of her marital home because she cannot bear children. She is forced to marry a man she has never seen because she wants to please her father and society.

Most customs and traditions in Africa disfavour female folks and, more often than not, favour the men. As Africans we cannot do without the customs and traditions of our land because they not only spice our existence and are a mark of our identity, but are treasures passed on from one generation to another. The women have been caught in the web of these traditions. However some of these practices affect women and the society takes it lightly. According to Reina Lewis, "African cultural practices have been weapons for enforcing women's obedience.... Culture has been seen as an edifice of unchanging institution, traditions and identities...." (62). Women are forced to obey these traditions, not because they really want to, but because they are obliged to do so. These customs and traditions then become ways through which the women are oppressed and marginalized by the society. Women in *The Joys of Motherhood* cannot complain when their husbands bring in new wives inherited from their brothers for fear of going against traditions. They accept the situation no matter how unbearable it can be to their existence. When Nnaife's elder brother dies, he inherits his wives, and one of them Adaku has to come and live with them despite the fact that they have just a single room. Nnu Ego does not like the idea but has to accept the situation because tradition and customs requires it to be that way.

Traditionally and in most African societies, women are often considered as being less important and do not have a say in the making of the laws of the land. Worst still, they are not allowed to speak out their minds. In Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego's mother is not allowed to get married by her father Umonna. She accepts and does not question her

father's desire. Women are silent as culture demands it to be so. The men are the ones who make all the laws and the women are obliged to respect them without questioning even if these laws do not favour them. Female slaves are buried with their mistresses a law made by men on women who cannot be questioned. Female children traditionally are not recognized. They are seen as assets through which their male children can be sent to school. James reports this in Buchi's novel when he says: "Nnu Ego and her husband, Nnaife, give up everything so that their eldest son, Oshia can have the benefit of an education" (2). The leftover money, if there had been any, would go to educate their second son Adim, there is never any thought given to educating their daughters. Daughters are seen as investments. Mention is not made of the girls because they are only prepared for marriage and child bearing. Education is not meant for them. Boys are groomed from childhood to know that they are superior to the girls and cannot be ordered around by women even if they are older than them. This is evident in the novel when Adaku commissions Oshia to fetch her water and he responds "I'm not going! I am a boy. Why should I help in the cooking? That's a woman's job." (143) This young boy is already aware of the fact that he is a man and is not supposed to be ordered around by women despite their ages.

To add to the aforementioned, Dangarembga Tsiti says: "can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother, learn to cook and clean, grow vegetables" (41) This simply describes the role of the African woman as carved out by tradition. She is reduced to being a housewife, mother and farmer. She cannot be anything beyond that. Buchi Emecheta, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, presents us with a protagonist (Nnu Ego) who suffers hardship humiliation and even rejection as a result of her craving for motherhood. This is because society has designated motherhood as the only means by which a woman's relevance and acceptance as a human being can be measured. She fails to bear children for her Amatokwu (her first husband and only true love) and is rejected. She returns to her father's house and is married off in an arranged marriage to Nnaife, a laundry man for white residents Dr and Mrs Meers in Lagos.

Traditions and customs also blame the women who are not able to bear children especially male children. Given that in the African society a man expresses his masculinity by the number of sons he has, any man who marries a woman and she does not bear him a son can do anything to her including battering her. These women, in some cases, are even considered as being outcasts and witches and are maltreated by their husbands. Nnu Ego's father feels sorry for his daughter because she is beaten by her husband for not being able to

give him a son: “pity your ideal; Amatokwu almost beat you to death because you did not bear him a son.” (51) Her father can only sympathize with her but cannot react because customs and traditions give rights to the husband.

Women are treated as sub- humans to an extent that they can be replaced at any time like new cloths. In *The Joys of motherhood*, Agbadi marries few women in the traditional sense. But as he watches each of them sink into domesticity and motherhood, he is soon bored and goes out to look for some other exciting tall and proud females. Emecheta highlights this when Nnu Ego states that: “She was not surprised when Amatokwu told her casually one evening that she would have to move to a nearby hut kept for older wives, because his people had found him a new wife”.(30). Nnu Ego is chased out of her matrimonial bed because she does not have children. She is moved to another room by her husband without any remorse because, according to him, she is useless. The woman’s emotions are trivialized by the men who take decisions without due consideration for women’s feelings.

Women are commercialized in the name of bride wealth. Amadi comments on this when she says:

It seems we are marketable objects to be disposed off with speed, to the highest bidder and when we have been sold off into marriage, it seems we are expected to sit meekly in the houses of our lords, nursing out thoughts and feelings within the enforced privacy of a silence we have never asked for (52).

Like goods ready to be auctioned women are used by their parents to earn money and wealth. Female children are given out for marriage even when they are not yet of age just because of the money and gifts which will be offered their families. Emecheta presents this as a tradition in Ibuza village where the girls are given out in marriage so that the male children can be sent to school. Nnu Ego, the protagonist, looks forward to getting the bride- price of her daughters so send her sons to school as advised by Adankwo: “And if you are ever in a bad patch with the boys’ education, don’t you know that girls grow very quickly, the twins bride- price will help out” (141). She suggests that Nnu Ego should count on her daughters’ bride price so that her sons should go to school. Nnaife forces his daughter into early marriage just because he wants the bride-price. Emecheta confirms this when she says,

Nnaife quickly approved of this man, knowing that his daughter was striking a good bargain, and he was in a hurry to get as much money as possible from his children before retiring. Thank goodness, he had no older brother, so the whole bride price would come to him” (229).



Nnaife chooses a husband for his daughters - Kehinde and Taiwo- not caring about their happiness. He is determined to kill his daughters if they refuse to marry the men of his choice all because of the huge bride price. He says: "I shall still kill you; no child of mine is marrying a tribe that calls us cannibals" (243). Nnaife forgets about his daughter's feelings; he cares only about the bride-price. He knows that if his daughter marries a Yoruba man, the bride price will not be as much as that of an Igbo man. This makes him refuse a Yoruba Man as a son-in-law. This assertion also brings to the lime light the rivalry that exists between the Igbos and Yorubas in Nigeria. Nnaife even expects more added to the bride price because Ibuza's culture demands that when a wife is found a virgin, gifts should be offered to the bride's family. Agbadi confirms this:

Agbadi's heart was full to bursting point when, on the second day, the people from Amatokwu's compound came to thank him for giving them his precious daughter Nnu Ego. They did so with six full kegs of palm wine. Agbadi smiled contentedly and invited everybody in his own compound to drink. My daughter has been found an unspoiled virgin. Her husband's people are here to thank us. (29)

Customs and traditions in Ibuza village also emphasize female sacrifice. The female sacrifice in the novel under study is not limited to shedding of blood to appease the gods of the land. It goes as far as getting women to sacrifice their careers and even their lives. When Agunwa, Agbadi's first wife dies, her female slave is buried with her despite the slave's refusal and resistance. As far as the Ibuza tradition is concerned, a female slave is supposed to voluntarily jump into her mistress's grave. Such dehumanization is reserved to women under the guise of customs and traditions.

Then her personal slave was ceremoniously called in a loud voice by the medicine man. She must be laid inside the grave first. A good slave was supposed to jump into the grave willingly. Happy to accompany her mistress: but this young and beautiful woman did not wish to die yet. She kept begging for her life, much to the annoyance of many of the men standing around. The women stood far for this was a custom they found revolting. The poor slave was pushed into the shallow grave, but she struggled out, fighting and pleading, appealing to her owner Agbadi (20)

The girl is sacrificed despite the fact that she pleads to be left alive. Other male slaves could be used for the sacrifice but it's not the case because the woman has no say or place in this society. She can be treated badly and she does not have to oppose or argue. Her fate has already been pre-established by some custom and tradition. The woman is also used to appease the gods of the land. Ona, Nnu Ego's mother, is sacrificed to the gods for worship and sacrifice. Her life is destroyed as she cannot get married to any man despite her

love for them. Emecheta explains this by stating the fact that Ona's father did not have a son and so decided to sacrifice his daughter to the service of the gods. She could have any man of her choice and bear children for him, especially a male child, but could not get married to any because she has been dedicated to the gods of the land.

Also, marriage is another way through which the woman is subjugated and marginalized. According to Rebecca Stefoff and some Western feminist scholars, men invented marriage to oppress women through such ways as rape kidnappings and the use of force or threats to establish their dominance over the woman. This influenced the men to have predominant control over the woman's sexual activity and reproduction by ensuring that the children the women bore were theirs. (36) In the *Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta gives details of the marginalization of the woman within the patriarchal institution of marriage. In marriages the woman is considered as a subject and loses all her individuality. She is considered as the men's property as being a "commodity" that still appeals to the owner whilst it is still new, (Nyanhongo 72). Moreover their lives are controlled by the men who only see them as reproductive machines. Their principal role is to attend to their men and bear children, especially male children, without which they are useless.

The above is evident in Nnu Ego's case when she is unable to conceive for her first husband, Amatokwa. Her husband does not take it lightly with her and decides to send her out of her matrimonial room: "Her husband tells her she should move to the nearby hut kept for elder wives, because his people have found him a new wife" (30). She is dismissed and disregarded by her husband. He speaks to her just when necessary. He does not care about how she feels. Even when they go to the farm together, he barely speaks to her and orders her about like a servant. She is considered useless because she does not have children.

Marriage is limited to childbearing and there is no affection between the woman and the man. When Nnu Ego even tries to complain about the deplorable situation in which she finds herself, her husband answers "what do u want me to do? (...) I am a busy man. I have no time to waste my precious male seed on a woman who is infertile. I have to raise children for my life" (31). This extract highlights the height of the woman's dehumanization. Women are not only reduced to a means of reproduction, but when they fail to have children, they do not deserve any attention; neither do they have a life of their own. They are men's property and appendage. This is evident in the novel when Agbadi confesses "Ibuza men want women who could claim to be helpless without them." (35). Men of this community militate for the woman's dependence and subservience, and in this community, the reward for a

woman who has many sons is a befitting burial. Women are made to realize that they cannot be given any other relevant role in the society than that which their biological make-up has prepared them for, bearing children.

Moreover, women are not allowed to choose their spouses. In the Igbo society, women are not allowed to love or to even choose the man they want to marry. Their society makes choices for them to the benefit of men. It is the father's responsibility to choose a husband for his daughter. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego is not allowed to choose her husband. She is given her first husband (Amatokwu) by her father just because he comes from a respectable family. When her marriage with her first husband does not work out, her father looks for a second husband -Nnaife. It is a man she does not know nor has ever met. The only information that is known about him is that he lives in the city and works there. Nothing is said about how he looks nor if he will make a good husband. Yet Nnu Ego is sent off by her father to meet this man. This is to illustrate the fact that, women's emotions in this society are not taken into consideration. The woman gets married to whom the society wants her to get married to.

According to tradition, when Agbadi's village raids other villages, he has the right to bring back with him the most beautiful women as wives or slaves. These women have nothing to say about what is happening, they just have to respect his wishes whether they like it or not. In the same vein, Nnu Ego is obliged to accept Nnaife though she does not admire him at first sight. Her lack of admiration is such that he notices it (43). This can be seen through the description Emecheta gives of this man:

Nnu Ego was grateful for it, and was just falling asleep when in walked a man with a belly like a pregnant cow, wobbling first this side and then to that. The belly coupled with the fact that he was short, made him look like a barrel. His hair unlike that of men at home in Ibuza, was not closely shaved; he left a lot of it on his head, like a woman mourning for her husband. (43)

Just this description alone is a foresight of what women have to endure under patriarchy. She is obliged to deal or stay with this man despite his ugliness because she cannot return to her father who has chosen this man for her. It is the fear of insults that keeps Nnu Ego from fleeing when she meets Nnaife. Nnaife's recollection highlights the fact that women in this society are really not allowed to marry men they love: "He had seen a wife brought to an Ibuza man run away at the sight of her future husband, so that friends had to help the poor bridegroom catch the runaway bride" (44). Despite the fact that Nnaife is aware of this, he

does relate this to his own situation because he probably feels secure in the superior position society gives him as the man. When women even go as far as daring to choose a husband for themselves, the consequences are disastrous. When Kehinde (Nnaife's daughter) refuses to marry the Igbo man chosen for her and prefers her Yoruba love, Nnaife is not only imprisoned, but his whole family set-up equally collapses (232). All of these show the objectification and marginalization of women in the Iboza community and other societies where such practices are prevalent.

Women are not only deprived of their individuality and subordinated to men, but are also insulted. Consoling Nnaife on the loss of his first son, Ngozi, his friend Ubani says:

How can a woman hate a husband chosen for her by her people? You are to give her children and food, she is to cook and bear children and look after you and them. So what is there to hate? A woman may be ugly and grow old, but a man is never ugly and never old. He matures with age and is dignified. (75)

This quotation shows the importance given to men in the Igbo society- in general- and the Iboza village in particular. Women are trivialized and not considered as important individuals who can contribute to the structural organization of the society. She can be considered as ugly and is said to grow old, while the man only matures and becomes more dignified. Ubani's words simply imply that Nnu Ego has to accept everything Nnaife does, be it good or bad, because she is his property. Men are privileged over the woman even in old age. The woman's oppression does not end. it is a continuous cycle. The Iboza culture is very cruel to women.

All of the above greatly affect Nnu Ego so much so that, when she is questioned in court following Nnaife's attempted murder case, she confesses that "Nnaife is the head of our family. He owns me just like God in the sky owns us. So even though I pay fees, yet he owns me. So in other words he pays" (245). This simply shows how culture has brainwashed women into accepting subjugation and viewing themselves as objects. They are not deemed worthy of sympathy or support in times of distress. Nnu Ego's words show that she has internalized the subordinate position ascribed to her as a woman. The reason for which Mohanty comments when she says: "women are always regarded as an already constructed group, one that has been labelled powerless, exploited, sexually harassed and so on"(23). Men have a grip over women even in death. Nnu Ego's father still controls her even in death. She thinks of how her father will feel if she does not allow her husband take in another wife. Even in death, Nwokocha Agbadi rules over his daughter. She belongs to the two men: her father

and her husband. Lastly, she belongs to her sons. This lady is never allowed to attain self-actualization and to acquire a sense of independent selfhood.

Also the couple's procreational life is controlled by the men. The man cares very little about the woman's readiness or even her age. All he does is exercise his dominance over her without her consent. She is obliged to accept this without questioning because of the environment in which she finds herself. The environment is one in which the man, is the one who decides on everything. In the novel, this is explained through the fact that Nnaife is not always present. But when he returns from wherever he has been, he gets his wives pregnant. When he returns from the war, he gets Nnu Ego and Adaku pregnant. Immediately after that, he goes to Ibuza to visit his elder brother's widow, Adankwo, and equally gets her pregnant despite her advanced age. Baffled by the situation at hand, Nnu Ego complains "have you been commissioned by the Whiteman you fought to replace everybody who died in the war? Why don't you let other men do the job? Even Adankwo whom we regard as our mother is pregnant for you, just you." (184).

This extract is humorous yet explains how patriarchy dominates women's bodies for its own sake. Women are denied the right to decide for their own bodies and their lives. They are subjugated to patriarchal hegemony. Childbearing destroys women's bodies and makes them look old. Nnu Ego deplors the fact saying " (...) Naife looks younger than his age, while she Nnu Ego was looking and feeling very old after the birth of just three children. The arrangement was so unjust." (133) This extract shows how tormented the woman is at all stages of childbearing. The man is just concerned with getting her pregnant and deriving honour from the number of children he has. He cares very little about the effect childbearing has on the woman's appearance and on her health to some extent.

Even in their marriages, women are oppressed with their own emotions. Emecheta, displays how men can be disrespectful to their legal wives in Ibuza even to the extent of causing their death. Agbadi and Amatoku are examples of such men. Agbadi brings his mistress home and makes love to her in the middle of the compound to the hearing of his other wives. He does not care about how these women will feel. This huge disrespect, leads to the illness and eventual death of his senior wife. Emecheta confirms this in these words:

Agbadi's senior wife Agunwa becomes ill that very night. Some said later that she sacrificed herself for her husband , but a few had noticed that it was bad for her morale to hear her husband giving pleasure to another woman in the same court yard

where she slept, and to such a woman who openly treated the man they all worshipped. (18)

Nnu Ego also faces such disrespect in her first marriage when she is unable to bear children. Her husband's family looks for another wife who can give them children, especially male children. When the new wife comes, Nnu Ego is shamefully sent out of her matrimonial bedroom by Amatokwu, her husband. The Ibuza culture does not favour even the senior wife as she is moved out for the junior wife to take her place and she does not have to complain even when it hurts her. Nnu Ego is in so much pain that she expresses her fear to her father: "father my position as the senior wife of the house has been taken by a younger woman" (31). The degree of her pain is too much and her father cannot do anything because her husband has the right to as many wives as he desires. When Adaku comes, Nnaife sleeps with her in the same room and she screams to the hearing of Nnu Ego and all Nnaife does is to laugh about it.

Domestic violence and maltreatment in marriage are other forms of oppression the woman is subjected to. This violence ranges from the battering of the woman, through denial of marital rights to the desertion of the family by husbands. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, women are beaten by their husbands because they cannot bear children. Amatokwu beats Nnu Ego mercilessly and instead of consoling her, Nnaife uses this as an insult when he says to her: "pity your ordeal: Amatokwu almost beat you to death because you could not bear him children".(30) The beating is so violent that Agbadi goes and takes his daughter. Despite the terrible condition he meets, Agbadi simply tells Amatokwu that he does not blame him for beating his daughter so badly. Emecheta treats such men as irresponsible as she comments through Agbadi: "I don't think much of men who ill-treat a woman because she has not borne them a child. Amatokwu refuses to care for his wife when she needs him most because of her childlessness. As if the beating is not enough, he adds insults referring to her as a "barren desert". All of these proceed from the fact that men do not consider women as human beings in their own right.

Added to the above, Emecheta presents a society in which men are considered as lords and only their desires must be met by women. Nnaife demands for sexual pleasure without taking Nnu Ego's readiness into consideration or minding the fact that she is tired. He only wants to satisfy himself sexually. The Ibuza culture makes the man the lord who owns the woman as property and can do with her whatever he wants without taking her emotions into consideration. Nnu Ego, baffled by the situation, highlights this fact: "He demanded his

marital rights as if determined not to give her a chance to change her mind. She had thought she will be allowed to rest at least on the first night after her arrival before being pounded upon by this hungry man, her new husband". (44)

Nnu Ego has not yet recovered from the shock of her new husband's awkward physical appearance but he pounces on her not minding whether she is ready or not. She cannot reject him or stop what is happening because she is a woman and has no say in whatever is happening. Men are selfish and are not ready to consider a woman's emotions. Nnu Ego asserts: "all men are selfish. That's why they are men". (177)

Another pertinent aspect of the woman's oppression in marriage which Buchi exposes in the text is polygamy. According to the Chambers 21<sup>st</sup> Century Dictionary 6th edition, polygamy is defined as a practice of having more than one wife at the same time. African culture has not discovered that polygamous practices are one of the practices that pose a threat to women. Most African communities, based on their patriarchal configuration, are of the opinion that men can marry as many wives as they deem fit. The number of wives a man has determines his greatness and respect in the society and among his fellowmen. This configuration has not taken into consideration the fact that polygamy is one of the practices that poses a threat to the existence of the woman. This practice presents the woman as one who can be replaced at any time. And, if she dares refuse that her husband should not take another wife, it is considered a taboo and even a scandal.

Agbadi shows insensitivity to the plight of his wives, who had anxiously watched him during his dangerous illness by dallying with his mistress immediately he shows sign of recovery. It is this irresponsibility that leads to the death of his first wife, Agunwa. Amatokwu is more callous than Agbadi. When he discovers Nnu Ego's barrenness, he tells her brutally to make way for a new wife and demeans her to the level of an unpaid labourer. When the new wife gives birth to a son, he prefers her to Nnu Ego and denies the latter marital rights. Even the undignified Nnaife inherits his brother's wife and brings her to share the one room accommodation where he is with his wife and many children. When Adaku finds the situation so unbearable that she leaves the house, he salvages his masculine ego by inheriting Adankwo and marrying Okpo (a sixteen year-old year old girl) even though he does not have the means to carter for such a large family. It appears in this case that the society condones everything that men do but cares very little about how the woman feels.

Furthermore, besides the already mentioned forms of oppression discussed above in the work under study, Buchi Emecheta points out the way in which women are oppressed

and silenced by native patriarchy. In this regard, she discloses Igbo women of Ibuza as victims of patriarchy and men as the oppressors. Emecheta exposes this patriarchal domination by exposing the violent oppression and exploitation of disenfranchised female characters. She presents a society in which gender determines who is superior and who is inferior, who is the norm and who is the subject. In Ibuza village, women have no place nor say in whatever prevails. Men are the lords of the land and the women just complement them as subjects. Ona, the lone child to her father, takes the place of a male child to her father who does not have any. She does so with all the power and responsibility the first son has. Hence, traditional patriarchy offers her the male power but it also gives her a sense of femininity. She is not permitted to marry. Her father remarks that she should never marry and should not keep the daughter she gets out of wed lock with Agbadi, Nnu Ego. Just after her father's death, she moves into Agbadi's house, thus disrespecting traditional patriarchy. The outcome is fatal as she dies in the course of having a second child. Interviewed on Ona's death in one of her public appearances, the author highlights the power of patriarchy over women's lives and freedom by mentioning that: "Ona had to die because she disobeyed tradition by moving to Agbadi's compound" (Willey, 6).

Moreover, the novel under study also examines the extent to which Ibuza women are disempowered and disenfranchised by patriarchal relations. The author "draws attention to some of the basic tenets of this patriarchal Nigerian society in which women are denied independent lives of their own, existing to serve men" (Nyanhongo,6). This tendency is apparent in the way Agbadi behaves towards Ona: wanting Ona, powerless and dependent on him. Agbadi has sexual affair with Ona, an affair which is unexpected and unwanted by her. It does not give her pleasure but all he thinks of is to get satisfaction. "He worked on her, breaking down all her resistance [...]. He knew he had reduced her to longing and craving for him. He knew he had won. He wanted her completely humiliated in her burning desire... (16). By this description, it is out rightly clear that Emecheta is criticizing patriarchal sexual policies which aim at female dependency and submission by any means. We are told that he knew he is a winner, this statement alone suggests women never win because they are female, powerless and always dependent on male power.

Again, another patriarchal tendency highlighted to present the subjugation of the woman is the one in which women are made to internalize their value and superiority through institutions such as family and tradition. Such set-ups dispose women to accept their inferiority and "otherness". Above all, they are themselves tricked by patriarchy to cooperate



in making the “other” silent and oppressed. Agunwa, Agbadi’s senior wife calls Ona a “bad woman” because she has power over Agbadi and treats him badly before they get into a relationship. According to their tradition, having a woman resist the advances made by a man towards her is unacceptable and is regarded as an unforgivable sin in a patriarchal society where women should be subservient and at men’s disposal. Adaku, who struggles for independence and makes a decision to quit her husband, is regarded as an ambitious woman by Adamkwu (senior wife) and as bad influence. This senior wife does not only accept the patriarchal hierarchies, but also takes sides with the men to humiliate her co-wife because she does not have a male child. She says this to Nnu Ego:

Can’t you see that you are running from the position your chi has given you, leaving it for a woman your husband inherited from his brother, woman whom we all here know to be ambitious, a woman who has not even borne a son for this family (158)

The above statement encodes the extent to which the patriarchal society makes women internalize the hierarchies and unquestionable power of men so much so that they accept male’s superiority as natural. It should be noted that the title of senior wife is given to the first wife who has at least a son. This title that carries power in itself is offered by native patriarchal tradition. Being subjugated to patriarchal forces, the senior wife has as obligation to control and dominate the other wives. Adankwo reminds Nnu Ego of her role and responsibilities as senior wife towards the new wife. She is expected to act as a male friend to her husband and control the younger wives. Moreover, she tells her, “have you ever heard about a complete woman without a husband?”(158). This sentence shows how much the woman has internalized patriarchal hegemony. According to this lady, the woman is not fulfilled without a man. Women are presented as always being dependent on men for their identity and being. She is not a complete human being without a man; a belief patriarchal discourse has developed in the society. By giving the title of senior wife to the woman, the patriarchal society oppresses her even more. The title carries with it, more expectations and responsibilities and such responsibility entails working hand in glove with the man to oppress other women. Worst still she has to co-operate with and enforce the patriarchal machinery. This is evident in Nnu Ego’s case when she is unable to complain as the author highlights:

She was too close to tears. She was frightened as well but her culture did not permit her to give in to her fears. She was supposed to be strong, being a senior wife; behave more like a man than a woman. As men were not permitted open grief, she

had to learn how to hide hers as well. She heard Adaku crying and she envied her freedom. (156)

The above statement highlights the women's oppression and domination by male power. This society simply presents women as second class-citizens who are at the bottom of patriarchal hierarchies and have no value. Buchi Emecheta, is criticizing these aspects in her novel. She questions the power of patriarchal discourse over female freedom. Her aim is to present women as victims of male violence, subjects of domination and men as the oppressors. This description suggests that the world is constructed of binary oppositions: men being superior and women inferior.

Leslie Ogunjipe describes that which is prevalent in most Nigerian societies and which have a bearing on the novel under study. In her essay, she highlights the extent to which women are undermined by the men in their lives, making the following observation: "Woman as daughter or sister has greater status and more rights in her lineage. Married she becomes a possession, voiceless and often right less in her husband's family except for what she accrues to her through her children".(134)

Nnu Ego has a prestigious position in her father's house as she is the daughter of an adored mistress. She has everything she needs as a daughter growing with her father. This is evident in the sumptuous wedding her father gives her and the quantity of gifts she takes to her husband's house. Despite all these she is maltreated in her two marriages by her various husbands who exert patriarchal oppression on her. In the course of a quarrel with her husband, Nnaife, he orders Nnu Ego not to speak any longer and when she does so, he tells her:

What did u say? Did I not pay your bride price? Am I not your owner? You know the airs you put on are getting rather boring. I know you are the daughter of Agbadi. Pity he didn't marry you himself and keep you by himself forever. If you have to be my wife, you must accept my work, my way of life. I will not have it any other way (50).

Women have been entrapped in the yoke of patriarchy where they have become commodities manipulated by men to accept their fate without questioning why it is supposed to be that way. They have to adapt to the intricacies arranged and established by societal constructs. Men become dictators who cannot be overpowered or questioned by women.

The last form of oppression women are exposed to is colonization. *The African Encyclopaedia for Students* defines this concept as the establishment of political, economic and cultural control of one state over another. Colonialism in Africa created and shaped their

political, economic and cultural development and the legacy continues to influence the history of the continent. Before the arrival of the colonizers, the African continent was structured in its own way as authors such as Chinua Achebe clearly portrayed in his novel, *Things Fall Apart*. Colonization comes with its own trends which are contrary to the already existing and pre-established configuration of the African society. In this society, men are the ones who work extremely hard to protect and sustain their families. Women take care of the children by indulging in small-scale farming activities. They have their gods or their *chis* and the man can marry or inherit as many wives as he deems fit.

Nnu Ego is abandoned to take care of the children alone when her husband travels to Fernando Po and when he joins the army. She pays for a house and lives a miserable life, almost begging to take care of her children. Even when her husband is around the little job he does for Mr and Mrs Meers cannot take care of the family. Nnu Ego is obliged to sell small things around to raise money to sustain the family. Instead of the man to take care of children and their wives, the reverse is true. Women are allowed to work extremely hard to raise children by themselves which is not an easy task. Buchi Emecheta uses this to give an insight into the effects of colonialism on the woman's lot. She is also a victim. She raises her three boys by herself when she moves to Britain.

Emecheta discloses the abusive behaviors with which the colonial patriarchal society oppresses and silences female figures in Lagos. Loomba A. comments on this when he mentions: "Colonialism intensified patriarchal oppression, often because native men increasingly disenfranchised and excluded from public sphere became more tyrannical at home" (64). Disempowered and humiliated by the British, Nnaife takes out his frustration as a washer man on his wife Nnu Ego. It is worth noting that colonialism has rendered this urbanised African man an effeminate both in his looks and his job. Both his fatness and pot belly are traits of the woman in the African context. Likewise his job of washing the white man's linen (including his mistress's under wears) is the work of the woman in African setting. Yet, Nnu Ego is expected to submit to him because he is the "man". When he comes back from Fernando Po, he becomes so authoritative and bossy around the house that he barely answers his wife when she talks to him. In this urban setting, women cannot be consoled by their husbands and cannot live a free life. When Ngozi (their first son) dies, Nnaife cannot console Nnu Ego because he has to go to work. On more than one front, the woman has to bear the additional weight of colonial yoke. For example, when Nnu Ego is

pregnant for the same child, her husband hides it for fear that his white mistress will not be happy because his wife and he are not yet married in church.

This chapter has argued that Emecheta presents a situation in which women have been indoctrinated to envision the world from a patriarchal perspective such that they have accepted and internalised male subjugation. She presents a precarious situation which reduces the Ibuza women to the men's property, source of pleasure and even accomplices in the patriarchal tyranny of fellow women. Chapter One has shown how women of this community are marginalized and oppressed in all spheres of life as daughters, wives, and mothers, by customs and traditions and through the machinery of colonialism. The woman is considered here as the "other". Chapter Two considers attempts by the disempowered woman to regain agency.

## CHAPTER TWO

### FROM OPPRESSION TO EMPOWERMENT

This chapter seeks to present another dimension of women; women as people who can regain agency. The chapter presents the revolutionary actions the oppressed woman takes to redefine herself in *The Joys of Motherhood*. Chapter one has shown how gender roles have been stratified and categorized to oppress women. It has contended that men have always been and have been considered the dominant and authoritative sex at all times while women have been shown as inferior. This categorization of women ranges from continent through colour to sexual identity. In a bid to resolve all of these, most women have written and their focuses have been geared towards reasserting women's position in the society. Emecheta's work reveals the social and cultural location of women in the West African Igbo society of Nigeria, before, during and after colonization. This writer advocates change which is geared towards getting the woman to free herself from the grip of the patriarchal society in which she lives. The woman does this through the revalorization of marriage, motherhood and even sexual re-appropriation. Emecheta uses characters such as Ona, Adaku, Mama Abby, Kehinde, Ego Obi among others to show how the woman re-asserts herself.

According to Cheryl E. Czuba, a political analyst in the United States, "empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It fosters power in people, for use in their own lives, their communities and in their society, by enabling them to take action on issues they define as important". (57). Women in the novel under study seem to have noticed that their position is not good and the idea of accepting that position seems to be burying them deeper and deeper into the already hopeless situation. They have realized that they are oppressed at many levels and the future is gloomy for anybody who is declared a woman. In a bid to change this situation, these women have taken it upon themselves to recreate an arena which suits and gives her autonomy and relevance. Kirsten Holst describes this endeavour when she posits that:

Buchi Emecheta...can recreate the situation and difficulties of women with authenticity and give a valuable insight into their thoughts and feeling. Her prime concern is not so much with cultural liberation, nor with social change. To her, the object seems to give women access to power in the society as it exists, to beat men at their own game. (254)

Women have been entrapped by customs and traditions, wifhood, motherhood, lack, education and even colonization. The same entities they are going to use to empower

themselves thus show men that the society without them is not complete. As Bertin Sosso, a journalist on the Cameroonian national television puts it, “gone are those days when women or female children were considered as liabilities and men’s assets”. The trend has changed and women should strive for autonomy and should not allow themselves to be objectified by men.

Women in Iboza and Lagos in Nigeria move from passive and inferior beings to active, autonomous, emancipated, and independent beings. Consciousness of their repressive conditions incites them to rebel against the oppressive yokes levied on them by the society to which they belong. Michel Foucault calls it resistance put up by women to gain autonomy. He says it is “resisting a state or condition which is connected with the invention of a new form of being” (168). The resistance is aimed at the recreation, of a new self of the woman. One in which she is autonomous and assertive.

The women Buchi Emecheta portrays in *The Joys of Motherhood* are those who are able to go through difficulties and, at the same time, survive these difficulties. These difficulties can be classified in terms of biology, family society, motherhood, wifehood and even colonization as highlighted in Chapter One.

As far as the society is concerned, women contribute a whole lot to it. Men are created from dust and women from the strongest bone, the rib. This makes them special beings whose presence spice existence and the society. The family, which is the most important element of the African society, exists thanks to women. The backbone of the family is the woman who has a strong grip and control over the family. Men do a lot of activities which revolve around the fact that they want to show their masculinity. Yet, all they do is geared towards the woman. When they go to war, their best gifts are beautiful women and female slaves who later become their concubines. Their strength and manhood is established on the number of wives they have without which they would not have a name in the community in which they find themselves. In the text under study Agbadi gets most of his wives during raids in other villages and (even when he gets married) he selects women from respectable homes and families. If actually men could live without women, then he would not give himself all the trouble of capturing them during wars. The patriarchal society is made whole by women who are the supporting pillars of existence.

Emecheta uses one of her characters in the pre-colonial Iboza society, a purely traditional patriarchal society where the voice of a woman is considered a taboo, to transgress and oppose established rules against the woman and impose herself. In a society in which women are considered as being inferior, worthless and unimportant; in which they are

exposed to all sorts of subjectivity and denigrations from the cultures and communities in which they live, Buchi uses Ona, to present another facet of a woman. It is a woman who transcends all patriarchal barriers and imposes herself to the extent of being heard by men and the entire community. Agbadi happens to be the scapegoat who is dealt with by Ona. Despite his prowess in wars, handsomeness, wealth and number of wives, Ona makes this man stupid in Ibuza. Ona insults and reduces the village celebrity to dust. She uses her beauty to humiliate him. She treats him with much arrogance and is stubborn to him. She refuses to be his wife and this makes her the most respected woman of Ibuza. Emecheta uses this character to illustrate the fact that women can have authority over their lives and existence if they want to. This lady uses her beauty to control a man who is known to be one who gets what he wants and when he wants it especially when it comes to women. When Agbadi is attacked by an elephant almost to the point of dead, no woman (according to tradition) is supposed to be where the *dibia* is administering treatment. But Ona imposes her presence against the wishes of the men who are around the wounded man and stays. The author notes that:

They had to massage his heart into activity again. All his wives were shooed away, but Ona fought and clawed to be allowed to stay and would let no one touch Agbadi except herself. His people did not much like her, yet they respected her as the only woman who could make Agbadi really happy, so the medicine man let her attend to him. (10)

She is not married to Agbadi yet all his legal wives are sent away and she stays. Ona tramples on patriarchy and imposes herself. She earns respect among the men of this community because of her ability to challenge and go against laws. This shows that men objectify women yet they cannot do without them. It is these women who take care of them and make them happy when they are sick. Emecheta presents Ona as the figure of an empowered woman in the traditional and pre-colonial society, who beats men at their own game. She tortures Agbadi as Obi Adayi, Agbadi's best friend puts it: "In life you tortured him, teased him with your body" (11). This shows how Ona made herself known in the Ibuza community such that all men knew her worth. She enslaves Agbadi with her beauty and rejects him and this shows her strength as a mistress. The writer mentions this fact

One of these mistresses was a beautiful young woman who managed to combine stubbornness with arrogance. So stubborn was she that she refused to stay with Agbadi. Men being what they are, he preferred spending his free time with her, with this woman who enjoyed humiliating him by refusing to be his wife. Many a night she would send him away, saying she did not feel like having anything to do with him, even though Agbadi was not supposed to be the kind of man women should say

such things to. But she refused to be dazzled by his wealth, his name or his handsomeness. People said Nwokocha Agbadi spent all his life on this earth courting his Ona (6).

In this extract, Buchi Emecheta presents what is prevalent in the Ibo society. Women are trivialized and objectified by men. She uses Ona as the image of women's power and empowerment. She makes the most respected of men in this society valueless and useless. She goes against every norm set against women by the society; she refuses to get married in a society where women could not choose a husband for themselves. The writer thus contrasts this character with that of Nnu Ego and the other women who accept everything the men do to them. She even accepts to marry a man she has never seen because she has internalized all the customs and traditions coupled with the oppressive yokes placed on her. The character of these women too is illustrated through this presentation. On the one hand there is Ona who is bold, courageous and imposing; and, on the other hand, there is NnuEgo, who is submissive and dependent to a fault. Ona is the image of women who can stand against all the forms of oppression women in the novel go through. She refuses to have an affair with the strongest and wealthiest man in her village and succeeds in putting up resistance against all that the society has pre established against women. She deplores the fact that marriage serves as a tool for female subordination in this native setting. This is seen when she reflects: "He ruled his family as if he were a god. Yet he gave her his love without reservation, and she enjoyed it; she suspected however, that her fate would be like that of the other women should she consent to become one of his wives" (11). The irony of the prevalent situation is exposed here. Submissive wives are disregarded to the credit of women who go against all the customs and traditions patriarchy has established. As such a woman, Ona, is representative of the empowered woman.

The fact that Ona dies when she comes to stay with Agbadi can be seen as resistance presented by the author to show that men cannot always get what they want from a woman. Emecheta highlights this in the novel when she writes: "Agbadi, she called hoarsely, you see that I was not destined to live with you. But you are stubborn, my father is stubborn, and I am stubborn too (...). Not long after this, Ona died". (26). She too can make decisions for herself and decide or choose what she wants to do with her life, and who she wants to get married to. The strength of the African traditions is illustrated here. Ona goes against her father's wishes when he dies by going to stay with Agbadi. The end is fatal for her as she dies.



In the same vein, Obi Umunna, (Ona's father,) has just one daughter-Ona. She is his hope for other children to be gotten especially for a son who will continue his lineage. But before that, Ona stands the gap for the son that he does not have. She is his pride and the only issue that makes him a man in a society where, a man is called a man by the number of children he has and most especially, the number of male children. But Obi Umunna has just one and she is a girl. Yet he is very proud of her. He parades her round the whole village to the dismay of the villagers who know that a girl child is no man's pride. This is presented in the novel when Emecheta comments that, "People used to find it strange that a chief like Obi Umunna would go about unashamedly pulling a tiny toddler with him. But her father told people that his little girl was his ornament" (6-7).

In effect, this can be seen as some kind of empowerment because, in Iboza, gender roles are determined by customs and traditions. And in this society the girl child has no place she is only considered as a second class-citizen. She is subservient to masculine authority and all that goes with it. She is a means to an end, her relevance is seen in terms of the amount of money and property she brings in as bride wealth when she gets married. Even the meaning of the name she is given has to do with money as it is the case with Nnu Ego whose name means six cowries. Yet Obi Umunna a chief who should be the guarantor of customs and traditions cherishes and values a daughter who is his only issue. Emecheta presents the girl child here as important too. She too can fill the gap in a man's life as much as any male child the man has can do it. She gives value and importance to Ona(who is the only child) and who takes the position a male child should occupy. She is the only child who can give Obi Umunna an identity or lineage. Moreover, she is not allowed to have a husband. Her father had demands that she should never marry and when she transgresses this traditional prescription she dies with the son her father had long awaited.

Emecheta uses Ona in this work to show how the woman can assert herself if she really wants to. Unlike Nnu Ego, Ona is aggressive as well as emotionally and mentally strong. She challenges tradition to achieve her personal fulfilment. Unlike Nnu Ego, she knows that a woman does not need a man to be complete; neither is selfhood limited to motherhood. Ona makes this point very clear to Agbadi before her death. "Please don't mourn for me long", She tells Agbadi, " and see that, however much you love our daughter Nnu Ego, you must allow her to have a life of her own, a husband if she wants one. Allow her to be a woman'." (26). Ona's idea of womanhood runs counter to the general notion that African

women equate womanhood or selfhood equates motherhood. Ona's desire and hope for her daughter is that she be given the opportunity to "have a life of her own."

In other words, Ona wants Nnu Ego to be the mistress of her fate, the subject of her actions rather than an object of other people's actions and decisions as argued in Davis Christina's "Mother and Writer; Means of empowerment in Buchi Emecheta's works." (32-33). This is what it means to be a woman according to Ona, being one's own self. To this effect, Nnu Ego's father tries as much as he can to ensure that his love's wishes are respected. He never flinches in his commitment to carry out her wishes. He allows Nnu Ego to lead a life of independence. He makes it clear to his daughter that she does not need to be married to be accepted because she is always welcomed in her father's house. It is to be noted that, even in death, Ona still controls this super hero of Ibuza village.

Again, motherhood is a reliable form of empowerment which women use to assert themselves in the society. Amadiume Ife puts it this way in *Male Daughters, Female a Husband: Gender and Sex in African Society*: "In the African system of matriarchy, motherhood was the women's means of empowerment." (114). Women are procreative beings from inception and there is nothing that can be done to change this situation. Motherhood means a lot and has different interpretations in many cultures. Cultures set conditions for motherhood. A woman who happens to be in a culture like that of Ibuza and does not fulfil the established conditions of motherhood is seen as a failed mother. So, in Ibuza, the women struggle to have children no matter what it takes. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta highlights some of these conditions which they undergo to have children (in general) and to have male children, most importantly. The novel opens with the protagonist Nnu Ego, who attempts to kill herself because she has lost her first son, Ngozi. Emecheta writes, "Nnu Ego backed out of the room, her eyes unfocused and glazed, looking into vacancy. Her feet were light and she walked as if in a daze, not conscious of using her two feet." (1).

The above extract shows the state in which Nnu Ego finds herself. Emecheta uses a flashback to reveal what puts this lady in this state of mind. The lady has been insulted, beaten up and rejected by her first husband (Amatukwu) because she could not bear him children. She has married a man she does not know nor love, just because she needs children. This man helps her realize her dream of being a mother yet her first attempt is futile with the death of her son orchestrated by her chi. She goes through all this but smiles at last in the end. The author presents women who are empowered by their children. After all her predicaments of rejection and humiliation, she ends up with eight children- boys and girls. She sacrifices all

her life to take care of these children because their success and greatness will bring her joy. She is ready to keep aside everything else in order to take care of them: “Her joy was to know that she had brought up her children when they started out with nothing, and that those same children will rub shoulders some day with the great men of Nigeria. That was the reward she expected.” (227)

Emecheta presents children here as the strength of women through whom they can survive the hardships of life and even regain agency in a society where they have no name or place. Children give women a name and command respect for her in the society. Nnu Ego survives her husband’s absence because her children help her raise funds to run the home in the absence of their father. As Emecheta highlights:

Nnu Ego still sold firewood, garri and other foodstuffs. Every morning neighbours could hear her calling: Oshia, Adim, twins, wake up let us go to the waterside! There she would buy the firewood for the day’s sale and they would all carry it home.... At home after lunch, she would sit by her stall and the twin girls will hawk the foodstuffs from street to street in search of buyers (195).

She works with her children to take care of the family’s needs. Her children are her source of empowerment. Without her children, she cannot pay rents, feed them, pay their fees, just to mention these. As they join her to hawk, things are made a little bit easier for her. Nnu Ego is not beaten up by her husband, Nnaife, when she and her co-wife Adaku decide not to cook for their husband because she has children. Nnaife says: “If you were not the mother of my sons, I would have taught you a lesson this evening.” (150). She is not beaten in this instance because she has children. They act as her backup. In the same vein she is favoured by Nwakusor when she has a problem with Adaku just because she has children.

Also, though it is generally the men that reduce women to childbearing machines, some women in the novel under study use men to get children so as to have a name in the society or to fulfil the demands of the society. It is recorded in the book that:

What had sobered her opinion of him were the children she started having in quick succession. Was that not why she had come to him in the first place, to use him as a tool to produce the children she could not have with her first husband? Now the house is full of her children, her children- none of them had so far showed any loyalty to him, their father. (231-232)

Emecheta presents this situation as one in which men are beaten at their own game. They objectify women because of children and women use them on the other end to achieve what

they desire. It is acknowledged here that Nnaife has been used by Nnu Ego to get what she wants and these are the children whom she could not have in her first marriage. Just as men think they can use women to get what they want, Emecheta presents a situation in which the woman can do same. She succeeds as she finally gets many children who turn out to be her pride and a source of empowerment.

To add, children also give women the position and value which the society has denied them. Agbadi is well known for his lack of respect for his wives he brings in his concubine as he wants and cares very little about how these women feel. But he endeavours to go out with his senior wife (Agunwa) because she is the mother of his sons. Moreover this lady is given a befitting burial because she has children. She deserves to be buried in her husband's compound because she has children. To this effect she is considered a complete woman. Unlike Adaku who thinks she cannot be buried in Nnaife's compound because she does not have male children, Agunwa gains this privilege because of her children just as Nnu Ego does. Adaku tells her: "I am going to be thrown away when I'm dead, in any case, whereas people like you, senior wife, have formed roots, as they say: you will be properly buried in Nnaife's compound" (189). Nnu Ego is preferred because she is the mother of the men-children, the ones who make Nnaife a man. Adaku will be taken away when she dies by her family. She will not be buried in her husband's compound.

Children are the assurance of women in their old age. In *The Joys of Motherhood* women invest in their children so that they can take care of them in the future. This is an aspect of empowerment. Men do think that children are only for them but they lose sight of the fact that children are often more attached to their mothers than they are to their fathers. The society even changes the woman's appellation to include that of the child she has as if to show the connection as is the case with Mama Abby. She is a lady who is fairly and well provided for. She single-handedly raises her son, Abby, and sends him abroad. Upon his return, he takes care of her. He builds her a house and changes her standard of life. Emecheta puts it in these words:

By now Mama Abby had passed child-bearing age, though she would die rather than admit it to anybody. She had the slim figure of a girl and had learned the art of looking every inch a lady. She still moved with the upper crust of the society, but she preferred to live fairly cheaply in rented accommodation and spend most of her money on her only brilliant son, for that would secure her a happy old age. (120)

This lady, who is rich, decides to leave a mediocre life so that her son can become somebody in future and take care of her when she is old. It is not said anywhere in the novel that she could not have more children. She decides to go against tradition and single-handedly raises her son. She does not fall prey to the false claims of patriarchy according to which a woman cannot do anything without a man by her side. She raises her son alone and he grows up to be a successful young man who eventually takes good care of her. Mama Abby's experience bears the autobiographical overtone of this novel because while in the United Kingdom, Emecheta single-handedly raises her three sons. She equally uses this lady as a contrast to the protagonist who thinks the woman's strength can only be displayed in the act of filling the whole place with children. The two eras are also contrasted here wherein Nnu Ego, who is a typical traditionalist, has many children and sticks so much to customs and traditions and Mama Abby, a modern woman who succeeds despite the fact that she does not adhere to all the patriarchal prescriptions.

However, it can also be said that Nnu Ego equally succeeds in the end with her children. Two of them, Adim and Oshia, end up abroad and she is given a befitting burial by her children when she dies. The author notes that:

When the children heard of her sudden death they all, even Oshia, came home. They were all sorry she had died before they could give their mother a good life. She had the noisiest and most costly second burial Ibuza had ever seen and a shrine was made to her name. (253)

She succeeds as a woman who struggles for her children. She is the one who is given a memorable burial and not her husband. Emecheta uses children to show the strength of women. Though the society uses the fact that a woman does not have children to reject, maltreat and disrespect her, these same children are the ones who gives her strength and who make her great. Emecheta makes the saying that "A mother may be educated or uneducated but, she is the best guide and the last hope in the world when you fail in your life". True Nnu Ego's children do not fail. They are a success thanks to their mother's sacrifice. She invests her love, time and money to raise them and they become her strength and joy in the end.

Another patriarchal institution which Emecheta uses to empower women in *The Joys of Motherhood* is polygamy. In most, if not all African traditional societies, polygamy is a tradition that goes from generation to generation. In the novel under study, it is a form of oppression at all levels. Women do not only have to bear the burden of having many co-wives, but also have to accept concubines and the wives of deceased brothers. Women do use

this as a means of getting back at men. Polygamy works in subtle ways to the empowerment of the woman. Though polygamy in no way can be termed a perfect marital arrangement, Emecheta shows that it suits the life style of Igbo women and contains several mechanisms which allow women to cope with its burden and use it to their advantage. As Janet Pool observes “polygamy allowed co-wives, for example to form a power bloc” that was notoriously effective in coercing an otherwise stubborn husband to behave in ways congenial to his wives.(252). Women create a common front to fight men who do not behave in the right way. They raise a resistance against the self acclaimed righteous patriarchy. In the novel, this is seen when Adaku and Nnu Ego refuse to cook for Nnaife because he does not give them enough money. Angered by the women’s prank, he decides to beat his younger wife. Nnu Ego obstructs this as Emecheta records it:

Leave the poor woman alone. Do you want to kill the new child that she is expecting? Open the door! When Nnaife opened the door, Nnu Ego grabbed the *odo* handle which she used for pounding and waved it menacingly over her husband’s head, though in the event there was more shouting than physical violence done.  
(151)

The women form a common front and gang up to resist a man who does not only run away from his responsibilities, but also indulges in wife battering or domestic violence. The defence mechanism Nnu Ego uses causes humour, yet she succeeds in stopping their husband from beating her co-wife. Emecheta uses this scene to show how women can unanimously stand together to fight some oppressive tendencies of men. In this extract, one sees Emecheta’s appropriation of language: as she uses the word *odo*, which stands for the African wooden spoon. This incident highlights the fact that women can change and use things around to their advantage in order to regain agency.

Polygamy also eases the work load of Igbo women. It is common practice for women to share domestic chores such as cooking and babysitting. This possibility encourages women to have many children who at the end, turn out to be their source of empowerment when they are old. In addition to the above, polygamy protects the economic interests of women by ensuring that a given family has enough members, that is, sufficient labour force to work for the family. In the novel, when Adaku adds to the family, she helps Nnu Ego around the house and also contributes to the financial up-keep of the family in their husband’s absence from her business proceeds. Back in Ibuza, Agbadi’s children work on the farms with their mothers and harvest bountifully at the end. The women use the proceeds of these harvests to raise their children and even educate them.

Furthermore, the woman is equally empowered by her ability to take the man's role of providing for the family with mothering. In the process of doing this, she takes care even of the men. When Nnaife loses his job with Dr Meers, Nnu Ego practically runs the home with the benefits she gains from her petty business. She feeds her husband and totally takes care of him. When Nnaife goes to Fernando Po and to the war front, Nnu Ego takes care of the children. She goes to the extent of selling her clothes to take care of her children. This may explain why when, her children succeed in the end, they take care of her and not of their father. This simply means that all eventually turns out to the advantage of women. Emecheta, seems to say in essence, that women do not always need men to be independent and to survive unlike society's claim. The author consciously or unconsciously presents the woman as being capable of being independent in two distinct epochs: in the purely agrarian pre-colonial society and in the post colonial society where she exhibits entrepreneurial and managerial skills.

Women in Lagos survive through petty businesses which they set up without the help of their husbands. Emecheta presents Nnu Ego as a strong mother who struggles to raise and educate her kids by herself. She sells firewood, cigarettes and other commodities. She even cultivates vegetables in the compound where she is renting. The proceeds of her trade enable her to educate her children in the absence of her husband. She also inculcates these skills in her daughters, Kehinde and Taiwo, who grow up to be successful independent women. Her thrift earns her the appreciation of the men and the society. Nnaife's friend, Ubani, comment: "My friend, Nnu Ego behaved very well during your absence, you know. She fought the war here too in your family" (205). Through this character's voice, Emecheta gets the men to acknowledge the woman's worth. These managerial skills of the women, also gives them strength. When Nnaife is away at the war front, he sends money home to his wives. These women use the money diligently .Nnu Ego opens her stall and Adaku uses it to single-handedly take care of her daughters. She changes her status and becomes a "big woman" thanks to the wise investment of this money. Emecheta notes that: "Nnu Ego, too, got a big stall in a bigger market in Oyinggbo where she took up selling abada cloth" (202). She opens a shop with the money her husband sends and maintains her wooden kiosks at the same time. She sends all her children to school but gets the girls to combine schooling with petty trading. This enterprise learnt from their mother turns out to be very beneficial to the girls, Kehinde and Taiwo.

As such, Buchi Emecheta uses emancipation, resistance and autonomy as ways in which the woman can assert herself. According to her, the woman alone can redefine herself. She can create an identity for herself and gain her autonomy. Adaku emerges as the model of such a woman in the text. This lady is a complete opposite of her co-wife Nnu Ego. She stands against all that the society has levied on women. She opposes customs and traditions, damns her *chi* and decides to leave the loveless marriage she has with Nnaife. Instead of sitting back to wait for his return, she decides to work, earn her own money and raise her daughters. She moves out of the house and becomes a successful independent woman.

Moreover, Adaku is liberal in her way of thinking. She does not tolerate the excesses of men. She criticizes them for these and reprimands her co-wife for being submissive to Nnaife even when he is irresponsible and wayward. Adaku condemns their husband's irresponsibility below: "I don't know why our husband should stay out all evening with that forsaken guitar, drinking all over the neighbourhood. I don't think it is right. Look at us trying to make ends meet, and he squanders his money on drinks". (144-145).

She calls her co-wife to order because; she just cannot stand the excesses of their husband. She does not understand why their husband should be drinking out when they have no food to eat. This even leads her to hatch a plan with Nnu Ego: they decide not to cook for their husband in order to punish him.

Adaku puts up resistance, not only against men, but also against society and tradition. She decides to prostitute herself to gain money and says with respect to this "my *chi* be damned! I am going to be a prostitute. Damn my *chi*' she added again fiercely." (188). She is determined to get what she wants. Her desire is to be free in order to raise her children alone. She does not care about what society or even tradition thinks about her. Her preoccupation is the upbringing of her daughters. She thinks educating them will make them better people in the future. She voices this when she says:

She sighed. Everybody accuses me of making money all the time. What else is there for me to do? I will spend the money I have in giving my girls a good start in life. They shall stop going to the market with me. I shall enrol them in a good school. I think that will benefit them in the future. (188)

Adaku incarnates the emancipated woman whom Emecheta uses to give a new face lift to the liberated Igbo woman. This character presents a new aspect of women's ability to gain agency. By wanting to invest in the education of the girl-child, (her daughters), Adaku is enlisting a new formidable force against patriarchal dominion. When Nnu Ego receives the



money her husband has been sending from the war front, she does not consider the fact that she does not have dresses. The first thing she rather thinks of is the education of her children. Emecheta mentions the fact that: “with tears of relief in her eyes, she promised herself that all her children, girls and boys, would have a good education. If she herself had had one, she would have been able to call at this office, to check about the money.” (200). Adaku, decides to work extremely hard, to the point of prostituting herself so that her daughters can be enrolled in a good school. Emecheta uses the character of Adaku to recount her autobiographical experience. She gets married at a very tender age, leaves her husband and travels to the United Kingdom. There she raises her sons all by herself. Simply put, she illustrates the fact that women do not always need to depend on men for survival. They can thus violate the pre-established male-dominated rules setup by the society. Adaku’s act of independence wounds Nnaife’s pride. Nnu Ego ponders about it: “She knew that Nnaife’s pride was wounded when he found out that Adaku had left his house; from all the rumours people had been supplying him with, he knew that the young woman was doing well without him.”(205).

The last aspect through which Emecheta revalorizes is by liberating them from marriage as a patriarchal institution. She presents women who are not so dependent on marriage. Mama Abby is a single woman who succeeds all by herself. Meanwhile, Adaku leaves her marital home and succeeds more than when she is married as earlier discussed. Emecheta uses these women to show how women can succeed in life while being independent of men. A woman does not need to be married to succeed. In other words she shows how women can always survive without men. She also expresses the view that women have to choose who they want to marry and should not be given to men they have never seen or heard of. Kehinde blatantly tells her father she will not marry the man he has chosen for her and makes her own choice: “I am not going to marry that man. Father I want to marry and live with Ladipo, the butcher’s son. I don’t want an Ibuza man.”(230-231). The repeated “I” in this quotation emphasizes her assertiveness. It is suggestive of the fact that the woman has regained agency. Kehinde does not allow her father, who symbolises patriarchy here to manipulate and suppress her. Finally, the author presents an ideal marriage in which the woman is loved and respected through the marriage of Taiwo.

This chapter set out to examine how African women, especially Igbo women in Nigeria, succeed in regaining agency despite all the multiple oppressions she faces. As such, it presents how women struggle to resist patriarchal rule. The chapter looked at the strategies

these women use to overcome patriarchal subjugation. Some of these strategies are economic empowerment, education, solidarity, revaluation of the roles ascribed to them and resistance. From a gender and womanist perspective, the analysis has shown that women beat the men at their own game. They use most of the mechanisms they are oppressed with to redefine themselves. For example, the gender roles to which they are limited. It is also noticed that colonialism becomes a necessary evil because it helps women to realize that they can educate themselves, start up businesses and become independent of the men. Adaku, Mama Abby and even Nnu Ego at one time are some cases in point. Colonialism also helps women to realize that they can transgress traditions without any after effects. Finally certain aspects of the autobiographical technique of the author are presented in this chapter. The chapter that follows examines the consequences of the woman's attempt at redefinition.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE REDEFINED WOMAN AND GENDER EQUITY

Thus far, this work has shown how the African woman is severally subjugated and how she strives to challenge the patriarchal order in a bid to redefine herself. This chapter seeks to show the writer's ideal of the emancipated woman and her vision of an utopic African society. The chapter does this against the backdrop of the specificity of Igbo culture that her book is representing. Each culture has its own unique social set-up and problems arising from it. Each also develops culture specific solutions to such problems and this includes the question of the woman's status. This simply means that women from all underdeveloped countries cannot be put into the same homogenising category of "Third World women". Rather, women of each culture have to be studied specifically. The cultural differences perceptible in the collective group of, Third World women, is apparent in the works of most female African writers like Emecheta. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, she presents two settings with different categories of women; those who have internalised tradition and cannot break away from it and those who have accepted new trends as a result of colonisation and are inclined to assert themselves.

Emecheta portrays the irrelevance of the typically traditional Igbo woman in the colonial setting. Though the society changes, women are still expected to play their traditional roles as wives, economic providers and nurturers. The changes in the society and the society's expectations cause many problems to women who are striving to regain agency. As a writer dedicated to the cause of Nigerian women's liberation, Emecheta challenges certain aspects such as the conventional notion that bearing many children will bring a woman much joy. She criticises the traditional Igbo society and denounces the reproductive practices of these people. Hence, she uses this novel to expose the gender politics operating within indigenous Africa. To achieve this, the writer uses characters who are representative of the essential characteristics of the African woman. Her claim is not to clamour for equal rights with men. Instead, she militates for the official recognition of the woman. As Cynthia Ward posits in "Emecheta's Feminist Themes":

Her novels represent the experiences of the African woman, struggling to assert herself against historically determined insignificance, a self constituted through the suffering of nearly every form of oppression...that human society has created, a self that must find its true voice in order to speak not only for itself but for all others similarly oppressed.(83- 97)

The historically determined insignificance mentioned in the quotation arises from the African culture which is typically patriarchal. Meanwhile, colonisation has both worsened and improved the African woman's lot. On the one hand, it has created an additional ladder of oppression as the coloniser oppresses the African male who in turn oppresses the African woman. On the other hand, it has promoted the emancipation of this oppressed group by boosting her autonomy and reducing her dependence on men. From a womanist perspective, Emecheta presents the female self that emerges from the battering experience of these women who however emerge victorious. She portrays women as mothers and wives who, at the same time, are clamouring for gender equity. Yet they are women who solicit communal co-existence without questioning the authority of men. She therefore uses characters with equitable dynamic attributes and makes them economically independent. This makes for self retrieval and survival in their patriarchal society without affecting their feminine roles in the home.

The author's utopic society is thus one in which women regain agency yet do not challenge the place of the man in their society. It is then worthwhile, at this point, to show the coping strategies which African women in *The Joys of Motherhood* use to maintain a measure of autonomy in their roles as wives, mothers, citizens of a country and daughters. In effect the measures they take are a prelude to women's emancipation and quest for rights and status today. As Makuchi states: "African women's drum beat and war cry" can no longer be ignored; their texts and voices must be heard and what they have to say must be taken seriously"(1). Buchi Emecheta poses as an example of such a woman whose voice cannot be ignored. In her work she emphasizes the need for the woman to be listened and recognised in order for them to feel useful enough to assume self confidence. Women should be considered as humans as we are all equal before God. They should be considered as complements in the man's life as the spoon and the fork complement each other on the dining table. They should be considered as companions and not inferior humans. (BertinSosso, VOX POP Tam-Tam Week-End).

Emecheta's autobiographical novel speaks of the strength of women. In spite of all the trials and crisis in their lives, women in *The Joys of Motherhood* are resilient and hard working. As earlier stated they single-handily run the home and take care of their children in the absence of their husbands. They get into peddling and even sell their personal belongings as a means of survival. The case of Nnu Ego who takes care of her eight children when her husband is away in Fernando Po and at the war front has been mentioned. In fact, the author

ironically reverses roles when she gets Nnaife to do the babysitting while Nnu Ego goes out to peddle after he loses his job with Dr Meers. Emecheta seems to say that the utopic African society is not one in which roles are stereotypically attributed to men and women. Men and women should be able to mobilise all the resources they have and work hand in glove for the prosperity of the home and the society.

Nnu Ego's efforts are rewarded by the success of her children at the end of the book. Adim goes to Canada; Oshia to America, meanwhile her twins (Kehinde and Taiwo) get married to successful men. Their husbands and they in turn help her to take care of the younger ones. In effect, Emecheta wants to show that women do not always need men to survive. In the same vein, Mama Abby educates and nurtures her son (Abby) as said before. He too succeeds in life and later takes care of her. Adaku sends her girls to school and they all become great women. They too take care of their mother at the end. It can be said in essence that Emecheta expresses the relevance of the title of the novel by revealing the success of these children. In Africa it is the joy of parents when their children succeed. Nnu Ego suffers for her children and at the end they succeed. She is happy and fulfilled. She does not suffer in vain reaps the benefits of her labour.

Also the redefined woman is presented as one who has the choice to marry and stay in the marriage or not. It is the woman's will to decide if she wants to remain married or not. The writer suggests that women have an option in the face of subjugation and victimization in marriage. Ona, Nnu Ego's mother, refuses to be held captive by marrying Agbadi. She refuses to be enslaved by the traditional tool that the traditional Igbo marriage represents with the husband as jailer. And when she finally because of the preferred treatment she is sure of, goes to Agbadi's house she dies. One cannot help thinking that the author wants to create the impression that a woman must not marry to survive. Moreover, even Nnu Ego who is representative of the traditional woman does not get married because she really wants to. She does so because she wants children who will give her an identity. Even her husband is aware of the fact that this lady would never marry him if it were not for the fact that he could make her achieve her desire of begetting children. As Emecheta highlights in the novel:

She had not liked him. What had sobered her opinion of him were the children she started having in quick succession. Was that not why she had come to him in the first place, to use him as a tool to produce the children she could not have with her first husband?(231-232).

The redefined woman's ability, to choose to be with a man or not depending on what she has to gain without necessarily being obliged by tradition, portrays her agency. In this, the man becomes the used object who can only lament the fact that he has been used by the woman. Mama Abby and Adaku are two other examples that have been cited before. While the first remains single, the second chooses to walk out of her presumed marriage to Nnaife when she no longer finds it profitable. All of these women decide not to be entrapped by marriage, yet they succeed in achieving their set goals. In effect, it can be said that the author presents the emancipated woman as one who is free to take decisions which suit her first and is not conditioned by what society thinks.

These emancipated and redefined women are therefore women who break societal norms in order to assert themselves. The most important thing here is that these women are successful in their dissent and, though sometimes criticised, are acclaimed by the society and their husbands or the men at the end. They are consequently not condemned nor ostracised because of these acts. They are rather accorded recognition and respect. It is however obvious that certain aspect of women's deviation from norms may prove immoral for future generations. Adaku leaves her home to become a prostitute. She defies her husband and society that do not recognise her because she has no sons. She decides to use what she has (motherhood) to raise her children who will have a better life than what she has. Emecheta in this situation is advocating personhood in other words she urges women to break out of subsuming norms and situations as the marriage institution.

Another ideal society which Emecheta strives to present is that in which women are economically independent. Charles Nnolim posits that: "women shall never stop suffering in the hands of men. But the woman's saving grace, their last redoubt, lies in being economically independent" (113). Women have to be economically independent to break away from the yoke of patriarchal dominion. Current trends and events like the International Women's Day are now advocating for the autonomy of the woman. Buchi Emecheta seriously advocates and adopts this idea, as a way out for the emancipated woman in her novel. The fact that she economically empowers the women in the two settings she presents is proof that she shares Nnolims opinion that being financially and materially independent of men is the woman's saving grace. In the pre-colonial setting of Ibuza, she represents women who are completely agrarian. They depend entirely on farm work or agriculture and their proceeds for survival. They work with their children on the farms. This is contrary to the post-colonial setting where women have to work to assist men in running the house. The female characters of this milieu

are enterprising women who struggle through peddling and petty businesses to be economically autonomous.

Upon arrival in Lagos, Nnu Ego notices that what her husband earns is not enough to sustain them. She does not even have dresses and is obliged to wash and wear. She is helped by women from her village that live in Lagos who lend her some money which she uses to set up a business. The money earned enables her to buy herself new clothes and to even run the house when Nnaife does not have a job. She equally sells with her children Adim and Oshia and even the girls who go around hawking foodstuff as earlier shown. She uses this money to educate her children in the absence of her husband. Likewise Adaku, opens a shop at the market where she sells foodstuff and later opens a bigger one in which she sells *lappas*. It can be concluded that Emecheta's image of the new woman is one who does not just sit around and waits for her husband to provide all her needs, but one who gains her autonomy and wields economic power and strength. The compound in which Nnu Ego lives in Lagos is full of women who placed wooden kiosks to sell one thing or the other. This is evidence of a wind of change that is blowing and is bringing about self-realization in women. Even more significant are the future generations of intellectual women announced by these women's daughters whose mothers are determined to give them the best education they can afford.

Women cannot gain autonomy if they are not educated. In order for the woman to regain agency she has to adapt to the changes that have occurred in the society in order to have a place. One of these changes involves education, which in the past was considered a no-go zone for women. Emecheta emphasizes the need for the education of girls and women in general. Education imparts knowledge, discernment, promotes exposure and gives self esteem. Education is a mighty step forward for women in the various nations of Africa and it has been the talk of many standing debates. The education of the girl-child in Africa has for long been the cause of heated debates; the reason being that most African customs and traditions have tried to make it seem as though there is no need to educate the girls-child. This is a great challenge to women, who have been striving to break free from this yoke that has held them captive for long. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta uses the pre-colonial Ibuza community where the girl-child is valued in terms of how much money she can fetch when she is given out for marriage; how much of a good wife or mother she is going to make when she gets married, and shows how women gradually come to realise that the education of the girl-child is important. Nnu Ego is an example of such a woman as earlier portrayed. Emecheta gets her to say:

I am beginning to think that there may be a future for educated women. I saw many young women teaching in schools. It would be really something for a woman to be able to earn some money monthly like a man, Nnu Ego said looking into the distance. (212)

This reveals the new trend that revalorises women. Women are now going to school and can have jobs whereon they can earn an income like the men and also have autonomy. Nnu Ego comments like this because she meets with Adaku who has sent her daughters to a convent known to be a school with very high standards so that they can be successful women in the future. Emecheta uses the education of the girl-child to reveal a new dawn for women indeed. These are women who will be autonomous and will not have to depend on men as it was the case in the past. This bears on the autobiographical nature of her writing. She leaves Nigeria to further study in the United Kingdom.

Furthermore these women who wield economic power are autonomous can personally take initiative. Nnu Ego sponsors the naming ceremony of her son without any help from her husband. This presents her as a woman who does not have to depend on her husband to do what she wants. The need for this independence is made clear in this portion Florence Nwapa's interviews quoted by Marie Umeh in her article, "The Poetics of Economic Independence for Female Empowerment". The portion reads:

Nwapa: . . . I feel that every woman, married or single, must have economic independence. If you look at One is Enough, I quote a Hausa proverb which says 'a woman who holds her husband as a father dies an orphan'.

Umeh: My interpretation of the proverb is that a woman should be economically independent. One should not rely on inheritance or men for survival? ("The Poetics of Economic Independence for Female Empowerment: An Interview, with Flora Nwapa". In *Emerging Perspectives on Flora Nwapa*, Marie Umeh Ed, Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 664, 1998.)

These writers support the fact that a woman must be economically independent to regain agency. Women in *The Joys of Motherhood* meet this standard. From start to finish, all the women help themselves having understood that looking up to their husbands for provisions the way they counted on their fathers would simply mean their death. After living like a princess in her father's house, Nnu Ego has to endure starvation, lack and even nudity in Nnaife's house in the city. She copes and can take care of her children only when she embarks on economic activities to earn a living.



Another aspect which Emecheta proposes is an environment that makes allowance for the woman's personal space. She shows that subjugated women who want to regain agency must have their own space which can be considered their space for personal struggle. Such space should not be under any form of control. Women remove themselves from the environment in which they are subjugated and marginalized and move to an environment where they can freely assert themselves. *In the Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta uses Adaku to elucidate this. Adaku is Nnaife's late elder brother's wife who comes as second wife despite the little space Nnaife and Nnu Ego have as lodging. She is not fortunate to have a son and so is neither valued nor respected by her husband nor the community. She sees no need to stay in a marriage in which she is not respected and decides to move to freedom. She succeeds in this new space of her own to the envy of her co-wife and even the men in the society. Nnu Ego commends her co-wife when she says: "Try to forgive my condemning your leaving Nnaife when you did. I am beginning to understand now."(246). Nnu Ego acknowledges the fact that sometimes to be free from marginalization women have to move away and create their own space.

Another apparent characteristic of the redefined woman is the fact that she should be able to know that women must not always marry to succeed or does having many children guarantee women's happiness. In *the Joys of Motherhood*, the author uses Ona, Mama Abby, Adaku, and Nnu Ego to expose this issue. Ona refuses to be held captive by marriage to a man who objectifies his wives as if they were valueless pieces of nothing, yet she is venerated amongst men for her grip and control over the strongest man-Agbadi. She decides to remain a mistress. Adaku gets fed up with the way society and her husband disrespect her and decides to leave their marital home to live a free life. The success she records as a single parent was earlier mentioned. Mama Abby is single because her husband leaves her while she is still very young. Yet she decides not to remarry and her success at raising her soon was also earlier mentioned. To end neither Nnu Ego's motive for marrying, her chosen partner nor her marriage experience portray the institution as appealing.

Being a writer dedicated to exploring the afflictions faced by Nigerian women, Emecheta challenges the conventional notion typical of Igbo begetting many children will bring a woman much joy. Omar Sougou puts it this way: "In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego becomes the medium through which ideas of motherhood are interrogated"(98). Not only does Nnu Ego live in a society in which the ability to conceive is believed to make a woman complete, but she also earns respect if she produces male children and faces humiliation and

neglect if she does not have any. It seems as if women are recurrently obliged to produce proof of their womanhood. This pushes women to have as many children as possible and this not a guarantee of joy. Nnu Ego has eight children yet dies lonely on the streets in Ibuza, rejected by her husband's people because of these same children.

The ending of the work gives another reading of the book's title. It can be said that the point Emecheta is making with the ironic title is that there is no joy to life or motherhood for a woman who chooses an isolated life in a changing world just because she wants to take care of her children. Questioned to this effect, the writer responds in an interview with Ogundele that, "She creates a woman who has eight children yet dies alone by the road side. Despite the number of children she has Nnu Ego dies in her old age alone."(455)

Hence, this message conveyed could be that having many children neither means wealth nor fulfilment. In view of the aforementioned, one may arrive at the conclusion perhaps that perhaps this is the reason why Nnu Ego is silent after her death to the prayers of women who pray to her chi asking for children. She seems to be saying that these women do not understand the consequences of their request.

From a more critical perspective, Nnu Ego's refusal to grant children to her worshipers is seen as the beginning of her self-assertion-an independent decision of a woman who has suffered the consequences of having numerous children without having any joy for herself. Her rebellion in death, despite being labelled 'wicked' woman, shows the shedding of her old traditional Igbo ways. In death, the protagonist is not a defeated heroine. She simply echoes Emecheta's intentions in implying that, there are other options for women other than motherhood.

At the societal level, Emecheta also unmask the excessive importance attached to males in the Igbo society and the extent to which the society undermines women or the girl child. Girls are considered as commodity in the family, their value is seen in terms of how much they will cost as bride wealth. She gives more value to the girl child in the novel. She presents them as autonomous hard working and successful. Unlike the male children, they are the ones who take care of their mother at the end despite the fact that she did not accord them as much attention as the boys. Girls are the ones who suffer deprivation when there is economic crisis in the home yet they are the ones who stay close and attached to the family. Kehinde and Taiwo are obliged to stop school so that their two brothers, Adim and Oshia, can continue. They hawk foodstuff around the city so as to raise money for their brothers' education.

In contrast to Nnu Ego, Adaku shows that she is in touch with the changes taking place in her society, as she says:

Everybody accuses me of making money all the time. What else is there for me to do? I will spend the money I have in giving my girls a good start in life. They shall stop going to the market with me. I shall see that they get enrolled in a good school. I think that will benefit them in future. Many rich Yoruba families send their daughters to school these days; I shall do the same with mine. Nnaife is not going to send them away to any husband before they are ready. I will see to that! (188).

Adaku becomes the first woman in the novel to embrace the emancipation of the girl-child. She does not pass on subservience to her children. Thus, as is evident above, she is a new kind of mother who seeks to break free from the longstanding pattern of patriarchal oppression and does not wish that her daughters should suffer the fate of women of her generation. She displays determination, vowing that Nnaife will not “send” her daughters away into marriage before they are ready. To crown it all, she also displays strong will power as she says “I will see to that”. The “I” she uses reveals the woman’s strength. She is the opposite of Nnu Ego who thinks female independence is unheard of.

Despite this difference, Nnu Ego also believes her daughters’ lives can be different. She thinks that they can be strong and can experience the kind of freedom that she herself could not attain. On realizing this, she too later decides to send her daughter to school. The success of her venture can be assessed by the fact that they are the ones who take care of their mother at her old age. When she is heading to the village after the hardship in town, her daughters prepare her journey by buying all what she needs to carry along. They even pay for a comfortable seat for her to the envy of other passengers. In fact, driver comments that: “it’s nice to have daughters.”(252). This remark makes Nnu Ego cry. She regrets the fact that she did not give the girls enough care as she was supposed to. She invested the best of her resources on Oshia who turns out to be a self-centred young man. When leaving for Ibuza, she insists on the fact that Taiwo and her husband should properly educate the former’s younger sister. Emecheta remarks that: “Nnu Ego stepped in like a queen to her coronation. Then she looked down and said to Magnus. ‘My son, take care of Obiageli. See that in fifteen years’ time she becomes a well educated miss’ (252).

It can be deduced from these facts that an utopic society is one in which gender equity prevails. It is a society in which equal opportunities are given to boys and girls. The equity of the child does not therefore depend on his or her sex. Instead, it depends on the child’s intrinsic values that determine the type of person he or she will become. Nnu Ego realises this

at one point in the book. For instance, this is evident in the names she gives to her last daughters. She names one Obiageli, meaning “she who has come to enjoy wealth.” This suggests that, even though she herself has neither enjoyed literal nor figurative wealth, she believes her daughter can.

It is of interest to note that, African customs and traditions, or way of life gives credit to communal life. This means that solidarity characterises the life of people who live together in community. Better said, communal life is central to most African communities and this is characteristic of most of Emecheta’s novels. Women use this characteristic to their advantage. *In The Joys of Motherhood*, when Nnu Ego marries Amatokwu and is unable to have children for him, her co-wife (who happens to have had a son) decides to leave the boy with Nnu Ego. The author highlights in these words:

Nnu Ego’s relationship with the other women in the Amatokwu compound was amicable. The younger wife did not keep her new son to herself but allowed Nnu Ego as the senior wife to share in looking after him. Many an evening neighbours will hear Nnu Ego calling the younger woman to come for her crying baby.”(32).

This gives us insight of the fact that the young Amatokwu wife sympathises with her co-wife and leaves her son with her to fill the gap of not having children. The women happily live together. Nnu Ego, gets to feel the warmth of being a mother by babysitting this child. Likewise, when she marries Nnaife and their economic situation is not good, Igbo women residing in Lagos contribute and lend her some money to start off a business as earlier mentioned. This eventually helps her survive the hardships brought about by colonialism and its socio-economic changes. Added to these, Ibuza women have their monthly meeting in Lagos and this marks the constructed solidarity among them. They help each other in order to both make life easier for each other and to have a life of their own. These facts are documented in the following extract. “Whilst Nnu Ego suffered from poverty, other Ibuza women taught her how to start her own business so that she would not have only one outfit to wear. They let her borrow five shillings from the women’s fund and advised her to buy tins of cigarettes and packets of matches” (52). This quotation, discloses the common context of struggle among black women who are colonized and re-colonized by power structures and their struggle to reassert themselves by themselves. It is impossible to miss out on the recommended synergy for the success of their ventures.

Additional evidence of the synergy is seen when Nnu Ego is abandoned by her husband and a neighbour comes to her rescue. Life becomes unbearable and survival becomes

difficult. She can neither feed herself nor her children. She cannot even get them treated when they are sick. To this effect, Oshia gets seriously sick and the illness is partly caused by malnutrition. A neighbour in the person of Iyawo Itsekiri, (a married and childless woman), feels compassion for her fellow woman, cooks food and takes to them. The author notes:

Iyawo Itsekiri cooked a delicious yam stew the following afternoon. Alone in the kitchen, she thought of this likeable Ibo woman with her two sons, one on the verge of dying. The mother was not far off from death, for the little flesh she had on her was being sucked away by the new baby at her breast. Iyawo made a lot of the stew, hoping that she will be able to tempt both Nnu Ego and Oshia, for she still suspected that malnutrition and not malaria was the cause of the boy's illness. Why otherwise had his stomach become so huge and the hair on his head light brown instead of its normal black? (116)

This extract shows how women are each other's keeper and the essence of this. Iyawo is not even from the same village as Nnu Ego. Yet she offers her fellow woman help when she is in dire need of it. Nnu Ego and her children have not had anything to eat, she has to breastfeed and her son is sick. There is no hope of survival for her children and her but another woman comes to her aid. Here the author seems to say that women can solve their problems only by themselves. The redefined woman is the woman who is humane, dedicated to the cause of ameliorating the lot of her kind and a preserver of life. These traits can both be seen in Iyawo and Nnu Ego.

Another prominent aspect of communal life that Emecheta highlights is the help given by literate women to those who are not educationally ready. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, the protagonist is not educated, she can neither read nor write and this limits some of her activities. For instance, when her husband sends her a letter she cannot read it. Worst still, when he sends money, she cannot collect the money from the post office because she cannot read the withdrawal documents. She is therefore obliged to solicit the assistance of Mama Abby each time she has to go to the post office and each time she has a letter. The latter happily helps her fellow woman. She even advises Nnu Ego to save some of the money in a post office account and the five pounds saved eventually help her when things get extremely hard. Once more the author advocates the importance of formal education to a woman. Lisa Iyer uses the term "sisterhood" to refer to this notion of mutual help amongst women. (*The Second Sex Three Times Oppressed: Cultural Colonisation and Collusion In Buchi Emecheta's Women*". *Writing the Nation: Self and Country. The Post Colonial*

*Imagination. 19-37*). Women are each other's keeper and sister and are therefore there is supposed to share mutual love and understanding.

It was earlier noted that, even though Emecheta advocates women's reassertion and autonomy, she does not completely erase the man from the woman's life. Better still; unlike white feminists she does not advocate equality between men and women. Instead, she is for companionship and equal co-existence. She stands for the fact that women and men should respect each other mutually. They should respect each other's space and personality for a peaceful stay in the new society. As Leslie Ogunjide posits:

It's not about warring with the men, the reversal of role, or doing to men whatever women think that men have been doing for centuries, but it is trying to build a harmonious society. The transformation of African society is the responsibility of both men and women and it is also in their interest. (*Moving the Mountains Making the Links. In Bhavnani, K, Ed. Feminism & Race. 13-18*)

Womanist are not at war with men. They rather advocate coming together as a common front to face the new challenges brought about by colonialism. It is obvious that like women, men are affected by what is happening. Nnaife is reduced to a washman: something a virile African man will not do. He is insulted and treated as an animal by Dr Meers and his wife. Mrs Meers, refers to him as a 'baboon' and this is a form of oppression because he is a Black. One of the concerns of the womanists is to militate for the cause of the marginalised such as black men and children. There is the need for peaceful co-existence between black men and women if this is to be done.

Emecheta further presents the fact that both men and women need each other to raise the family which is the basic unit of every society. This is highlighted when she says: "she was looking forward to Nnaife's return; the work of looking after his large family alone was beginning to wear her down." (192). Nnu Ego admits the fact here that she cannot take care of the family by herself. It is a herculean task for the woman to raise the family alone. Though Nnu Ego admirably struggles as much as she can to sustain the family, she still needs help from her husband. He actually gives this help through the money he sends from time to time to his wife for the upkeep of the children. This gives him a place in the life of his wife who worries at one point about how he is faring. This can be seen when she says: "No, please let me know the worst. You know, this morning when I got the letter I was concerned to know what he might have written to me and whether he had sent us something to live on. Now, all I want to know is that he is still alive". (199).

Nnu Ego worries about her husband being alive or not because, despite his flaws, he cares about his family and provides for them. All the money he risks his life for is sent to his wife to take care of the family. These show the need for the two parents to complement each other to raise the family.

Also, Nnaife assists in the education of the children. He uses all his savings to send Oshia to a very big school meant for rich kids. This means he also has hope on the future of his children. This act eases his case in court when he is jailed for protecting his daughter, Kehinde, from the Yoruba family she wants to marry into. His wife appreciates him in all aspects when she says:

Nnaife was the best of fathers, the best husband a woman could wish for. Yes, he spent all his army money on his children, he had never stopped working, and even the sons of his dead brother had been trained by him up to standard six. He loved his children dearly. (244)

Emecheta uses this to reveal the fact that women need not compare themselves to men or seek equality because each of them has a role to play in the society. Each should respect the other's position and place. The author does not completely paint men black but gives them some credence to show that men have their worth.

Emecheta also uses colonialism to introduce changes in the local Igbo community and expose the female gender to the need of change of perspectives in the face of recent global trends. Colonialism changes women's prescribed roles as 'wives' and mothers'. Women are challenged to see themselves outside these changing roles, to view themselves as 'women' and achieve a sense of female autonomy. Women gain autonomy by striving to take care of themselves and the family, to educate themselves and give their daughters the chance to go to school and have a better life. It also raises women's awareness on the fact that they are not owned by men. This is evident in the novel in this exchange between Adaku and Nnu Ego: 'Things have changed, but Nnaife still owns us, does he not?' I'm afraid even that has changed. Nnaife does not own anybody, not in Nigeria today.'(246). Adaku's reply here creates awareness in her co-spouse who becomes conscious of the changing trends. Women have a chance to redefine themselves only if they keep abreast with the evolution of gender questions worldwide. This gives them the chance to interrogate gender definitions and relations at home and abroad, and to choose what will best foster their fulfilment

To conclude, the aim of this chapter was to show the consequence of the woman's attempts at redefinition both in terms of the profile of the redefined woman and the norms.

Buchi Emecheta presents women who have regained agency despite the difficulties they encounter. These women are awakened by the changes brought about by colonialism and adapt to these changes rather positively and to their own benefit. It is important to highlight the fact that, though Emecheta uses characters who are emancipated and who challenge certain pre-colonial customs and tradition, these women do not completely dissociate from their normal and biological functions as wives and mothers

Hence, for Emecheta, the redefined woman is one who is economically empowered, who can raise funds for herself and her family. She is one who has a sense of initiative and is autonomous; is literate and invests in the education of the future generations of women through the education of the girl-child. This redefined woman also lives in solidarity with the others, she is compassionate and a preserver of life. And finally she keeps abreast with changes in the world without totally rejecting her culture. Finally the most important of all is the fact that, this redefined woman does not seek equality with men but companionship and a happy co-existence. Emecheta also shows that, although, the parity between the sexes has achieved universal proportion, the resolution of the conflict emanating from male insistence on women subjugation however is still in progress. This is because what patriarchy is willing to compromise is not enough to define women as equal to men. So, she proposes that women and men should be companions and help each other not women struggling to be equal to men. It is however evident in the work that, Emecheta is of the opinion that, women should be given their own space to express what they feel freely with the help of men. She advocates the fact that men and women should come together as a common front, to surmount challenges presented by colonialism and life and society rather than create a war front which seems unending, thus she is for gender equity.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD: APPRAISAL, IMPLICATIONS AND PROSPECTS.

In effect, this work has shown the multiple ways through which the African woman has been oppressed. It has also presented the various ways through which she has struggled (despite many challenges) to regain agency. In conformity with her vision of an ideal society, the work also has shown the various domains on which the writer insists for the creation of an utopic society. Given that the work under study reflects most, if not all oppressive yokes the African woman is saddled with, the solutions proposed by the writer to the woman's plight can be beneficial to all African women and, most especially, to Cameroonian women. The woman is redefined in all spheres of life in such a society: in the economic, social, cultural, and even educational domains as illustrated thus far. This chapter therefore attempts to assess how the values examined in the work can help the Cameroonian woman and society in general.

Looking at the pedagogical implications of this work, it is important to note that works authored by Africans are often left out of African school programs. When opportunity is even given for a selected few, those of female African writers are most often not considered; whereas foreign female texts are given more credence. These foreign female texts are mostly feminist texts which mostly discuss the plight of women in general without taking into consideration the fact that women's realities are not the same everywhere. African women have problems peculiar only to them of which white women are not aware. For example, white women are independent women who are guided by their state's laws. But in Africa, this is not prevalent. At the Ordinary and Advanced Levels novels such as *Jane Eyre* and *Anthony and Cleopatra* are prescribed for students. In these texts, though women are marginalised in one way or the other, their problems are not reflective of those of the African women. It is therefore important that texts such as Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* be used by teachers in schools as complementary texts so that students can learn and appreciate certain values present only in the African society.

To add to the above, prescribed texts suggest that there are no texts written by women which can be approved and programmed for studies in Cameroonian schools. The majority of the texts selected are male-authored and even if there happens to be a selected female, they

are the literary productions of white women like Charlotte Bronte for example. Such women have not lived in Africa nor can they talk of African realities or of African women and their plight. The texts written by men marginalise women while those authored by white female writers speak only of the realities of white women, ignoring Third World Women and their problems. These texts, more often than not, are written by feminists who suggest equality between men and women.

Meanwhile texts such as *The Joys of Motherhood* advocate women's autonomy without clamouring for the rejection of men. Given the assertion that literature is one of the most effective means through which information is transmitted, students grow with the impression that women cannot author texts. They also grow without knowing the realities of African women or without knowing how they can survive the patriarchal hold of most African societies. This assertion simply highlights what Virginia Woolf states, in *A Room of One's Own*. She asserts that women can never be good artists, and in cases where they attempt they can only be "scribblers". There is need to correct such categorizations by revisiting the texts on programme. One way of doing so, is by using complementary texts.

Also, it is of relevance to highlight the fact that there are still areas in Cameroon where the education of the girl-child is still considered a taboo; these areas are the Northern and Eastern Regions. When girls from these areas go to school, customs and traditions do not allow them to talk freely in the class or to share their opinions because they have been trained to know that men or the male-children are those who really deserve education. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta discusses the education of the girl-child as one of the means of empowerment. Reading the text under study in school will reveal the fact that women can change things by educating themselves and having a good life thereafter. In Emecheta's novel, Nnu Ego, the protagonist is not educated and she is of the traditional school which holds that girls are only meant to stay at home and take care of their husbands and kids. But she later transcends these patriarchal barriers to accept the education of her girls. She even solicits, Taiwo's husband's assistance for the education her last daughter, Obiageli. She does this because she sees hope in the education of girls.

The future Emecheta advocates by soliciting the education of the girl-child is yielding fruits in present-day Cameroon. The education of the girl-child is now gaining more grounds as the years pass. In most schools nowadays, the number of girls in classrooms is always more than the number of boys. Assessing this from a critical perspective, it means the ideal society Emecheta advocates is yielding positive fruits. She suggests that parents should invest in the

education of the girl-child for future generations. One can say this vision has been achieved as women are becoming more educated as the years go by. Even rural women are not unaffected by this wind of change that is transforming women's lives.

There are many programs (both nationally and internationally) which are encouraging the education of girls and even women in rural areas. Much is already being done by the Cameroonian Government to ensure that no stone is left unturned as far as the education of the girl-child is concerned. For example, activities marking the celebration of the last International Day of the Girl-child on the 11<sup>th</sup> of October 2015, reveals the fact that there is a lot of improvement as far as the education of the girl-child is concerned in Cameroon. Statistics given by the Cameroon Journal online says there is an increase of up to 80% of girls who are sent to school. All of these is thanks to the programmes organised by the Cameroonian Government to ensure the education of the girl-child and of women in general. Other prominent initiatives among these programmes include the United Nations "Let Girls Learn Initiative" which is aimed at ensuring the education of over sixty two million girls living in rural communities and suburbs in African countries. Cameroon is one of the countries earmarked to benefit from the programmes. The government of Cameroon is also creating adult schools for women who did not have the opportunity to go to school while they were young. There are also the "Millennium Goals Initiatives" which are being renewed with the collaboration of the Korean Government. The initiative aims at providing education opportunities to the girls in most African countries beginning with Cameroon. The African Union is not left out because, during their last summit in Cameroon, they created a program known as "Operation 2065" which is aimed at increasing educational opportunities for the girls and women.

The education of women on which Emecheta insists, will also help to protect illiterate women from certain dangers which would have been avoided if they were educated. There is the serious problem which the world and Cameroon are facing today. It is the threat from terrorists groups such as the Al Qaida, Jihadist Movements and Boko Haram. These terrorist groups have developed new strategies of attack which involves using women. CNN journalist, Todd Brian, calls it; "the radicalisation of African women as terrorists" (Source CNN News, 4<sup>th</sup> December 2015). Women are being used as suicide bombers because they are ignorant. They and are accused of being those influencing men to become terrorists. If these girls and women are educated they will certainly not get involved in such acts. Terrorists lure them into the act because of their ignorance.

Emecheta, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, discusses the fact that women should be economically empowered. For a very long time, most African women (especially the rural and uneducated women) have been considered as economically dependent. The aim for the education of the girl-child and women is to get them to become economically empowered. They should have a sense of initiative and should be autonomous. In the work under study, women are economically empowered and they succeed in taking care of their families and in educating their children. They end up succeeding in life. An educated woman is able to break many boundaries and to grab many opportunities. This is evident in the fact that one can hear of African women who are the richest women of the world, richer than Americans like the Oprah Winfreys. An example of such women is the Nigerian born Folorunsho Alakijawho is the richest woman now in the world. There are also such examples of Cameroonian women. For instance, we have the vibrant broadcaster and media entrepreneur (Krystn Enem) is making news the world over with her wealth and skills as a media woman.

Economic empowerment is not only limited to the educated woman but also to the rural woman who survives thanks to her agricultural skills. Most African states, with Cameroon inclusive, are creating opportunities for women of all levels to become economically empowered. For example, in Cameroon, rural women are supported by the government through their Common Initiative Groups to produce food crops that could be sold at the international markets. Women are being trained to process things like cassava, and make garri which is exported to other countries. These women also become economically empowered and stable when these initiatives yield profits. Also, the Cameroonian Government trains one thousand rural women on Information and Communications Technologies in every region through the African Institute of Computer Sciences. The aim of this initiative is to give these women opportunities to be economically empowered by using what they have learned to get employments. For the farmers, it enables them to advertise their products to the world market and to other regions for sale. Hence, one can say that Buchi Emecheta's appeal is being heeded.

As concerns autonomy, women have been dependent for long. The trend is gradually changing as focus, both at the international and national levels, is presently on ways of getting women to become more autonomous. As the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon rightly puts it, "we have shattered so many glass ceilings. We created a carpet of shadows now we are sweeping away the assumptions and biases of the past so that women can advance across frontiers". (International Women's Day speech, 8<sup>th</sup> march 2016). The

International Day of the women's day theme for 2016 insists on women's empowerment and on their ability to face and overcome challenges.

Through several platforms, women try by themselves to rethink strategies of how they can be empowered and become autonomous. African women are doing many things in order not to be dependent on men. Women create their own enterprises and petty businesses which enable them to become autonomous. In Cameroon, there are programs which assist women in becoming autonomous. These programs include the "Orange Foundation" which goes round training women in Cameroon on how to become autonomous by teaching them how to use the internet to earn a living, to produce soaps and even to cook. The American Embassy Cultural Affairs Department also organises training programs for rural women. They are shown how to make sanitary pads which they can sell to take care of their families. This echoes Emecheta's characters who survive thanks to their involvement in their petty businesses they do.

Moreover, Emecheta advocates gender equity. The African cultural belief which holds that the male-child is superior to the girl-child is questioned here and is even proven to be untrue. The novelist upholds the fact that male and female children should be given equal opportunities in life so that they will each get the chance to express their potentials. Since it is believed that children take care of their parents when they become adults, it is wise for girls and boys to be treated equally so as not to be faced with Nnu Ego dilemma In *The Joys of Motherhood*. Her husband and she focus more on educating their son, Oshia, to the extent of sending him to the United States and give very little attention to the girls. At the end of the day, these girls take care of their mother to the envy of the people around.

It is therefore reasonable to suggest therefore that there is no need to value one sex more than the other. This is a good lesson which students should learn. In some areas like in Government High School Bafia, there is a Gender Club that has been created supervised and sponsored by the cultural Affairs Department of the American Embassy. The aim of this club is to encourage equal opportunities between girls and boys, and to express the need to educate girls. It is a laudable endeavour among many others. The creation of many such clubs can be encouraged in schools all over the national territory.

The gender equity the writer advocates also goes further to present the fact that women, in general, should be given equal opportunities in life so that they can express their potentials. In the world today, there are women holding very important posts of responsibility. Christine Lagarde is the Secretary General of the International Monetary Fund while Sri Muiyani is Director of Operations in the World Bank. In Africa, women have occupied

unprecedented posts of responsibility. There is the recently appointed first female International Football Organisation Secretary General, Fatma Samba Diouf Samoura, the first ever in the history of a football-governing body. There is also the Malawian born Yolanda Kaounda who is the first African female pilot to fly a plane as Flight Command Captain. Within the confines of Cameroon, there is an increase in the balanced distribution of posts. There are more women in politics and government now than in the past. The number of female ministers, senators, parliamentarians, and Mayors are on the increase. Once more; that Emecheta's vision for future generations of women is being achieved.

Socially, it has been noted that the writer describes the redefined woman as one who lives in solidarity with others and is a preserver of life. Women should encourage each other and help one another in their endeavour as it is the case with the women in the novel. When Nnu Ego reaches Lagos women contribute some money and give her to start a petty business. She is helped by her neighbour when she and her children are malnourished.

The cultural and historical background of the novel under study acts as a case study for other African countries which have similar traditions. Some African countries still face the oppressive tendencies elaborated in this work. The findings of the work can be of help to women of such areas. It can help them to develop and assert themselves by becoming autonomous and by educating themselves. The work also disputes the claims of African cultural hierarchies which hold that women's roles are limited to being daughters, wives, and mothers. Emecheta challenges this and reveals that it is not the number of children that a woman has that determines her success. She reveals this through the protagonist of her novel. She also reveals that women have other potentials which they can use to assert themselves like the ones discussed earlier.

The last cultural aspect which is also of utmost importance is the fact that, no matter how exposed women are to new cultures, they should never completely forget their customs and traditions. Women should keep abreast with changing trends but should not totally reject their culture. This is a very important lesson to take home because nowadays, girls and women copy things from the West, which do not reflect the African cultural heritage. Fashion trends, for example, get most African women to almost go nude on the streets. They should copy what is relevant and which can be of help to them and should not mimic what can destroy them. Nnu Ego does not completely forget her customs and tradition. She copies only that which is profitable to her and can foster her well-being and her family's.

This chapter has assessed how the values taught in *The Joys of Motherhood* are helpful to the Cameroonian society. From the point of view of pedagogic relevance, the chapter has presented the fact that most texts authored by African women writers are neglected to the benefit of white authored texts which do not reflect the realities of African women and culture. The chapter has therefore suggested that teachers can use texts such as the one under study as complementary texts. This way, the values suggested in the texts will be learned by the students. The chapter has also argued the fact that giving equal opportunities to children enables them to realise and express their potentials which can later be helpful to both the children and parents. Moreover, it has revealed the fact that the Emecheta's vision is yielding much fruits now as women are gradually being given a place in the society. They are gaining political recognition through appointments to posts of responsibility and autonomy through economic empowerment

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

The issue of women's oppression and empowerment has been a major theme discussed in African Literature and research in the last few decades. There is no doubt that this has been a late but necessary response to the realisation that women have been exploited and undermined for a long period of time. Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* describes the experiences of African women under the yoke of patriarchy and colonialism. It also shows and how they fight for their independence and autonomy. This work sets out to examine the various ways in which women are oppressed in the traditional and post-independent Nigeria. The women presented are oppressed both by patriarchy and colonialism. They are reduced to housewives, child bearers, and as if these were not enough, they are obliged to work to sustain their families in the absence of their husbands. In the midst of all of these, strive to regain agency by turning the very avenues used to oppress them to their own advantage. The children they give birth to help them to raise money for the family as they act as the work force of the family. These women invest in their children, and when these children become adults they take care of their mothers.

The work also presents the ideal society in which women have regained agency and have become autonomous. Women reject the marriage institution and decide to stay on their own to take care of their children. The work like wise revalorises women through the education of the girl-child and their enterprising skills. It reveals the fact that raising many children does not guarantee a happy future or end for women. The ideal society also advocates the economic empowerment of the woman. The redefined woman should have a sense of initiative and should be autonomous. The utopic society also presents women as being compassionate and preservers of life. They are each other's keeper and helper. Finally though women strive to keep abreast with changing trends, they do not totally forget their culture neither do they compete with men.

The Womanist and Gender theories are used as tools of analysis in the work. Through their tenets such as the womanist requirement that black women's stories should be told by these women themselves, author is presented as one who takes the place of the African woman to express what she has lived. She lives in the traditional society and the new society that emerges in the post-colonial period. And unlike Feminists who advocate gender equality, the work reveals through the Womanist theory that the writer is for gender equity where



women and men are given equal opportunities in life to express their potentials. While doing so, they live in peace and are complementary to each other.

The work is made up of a general introduction to the study, four chapters and a general conclusion. The general introduction marks the beginning of the work and comprises a brief introduction to the research work, the research problem and questions that the work has thus far struggled to answer, the aims, the hypothesis, the scope and significance of the study, the definition of the key terms, the theories used to analyse the work, the author's brief biography. The general introduction also includes the review of literature which illustrates the fact that, others have already written on the text under study but none of them attempted to examine Emecheta's suggestions for the woman's redefinition and self assertion. The work thus explores this new domain.

Chapter One, captioned "The African Woman and Multiple Subalternity", presents the various ways in which the African woman is oppressed. The study identifies patriarchy and colonialism as venues through which the woman is subjugated. Gender role distributions, the commodification of the girl-child and oppressive traditional practices have been portrayed as ways in which patriarchy suppresses the woman. Meanwhile, colonialism further burdens the woman by worsening her lot. The separation of black families because of colonial demands or the oppression of black men only gets her to suffer more.

Chapter Two, "From Disempowerment to Empowerment", examines how despite the woman's multiple subalternity she succeeds in asserting herself. The chapter reveals how women use men to achieve the societal demands of having children. The protagonist Nnu Ego uses Nnaife to have eight children. These children become her insurance at old age as they take care of her. It has also been shown that women use polygamy to beat men at their own game. They team up against their husbands to compel the latter to meet their demands and provide mutual help and support to each other. The woman is also emancipated through her exposure to the new colonial trends and becomes autonomous. She wields economic power and therefore sees no need to be held captive by marriage.

Entitled "The Redefined Woman and Gender Equity" Chapter Three has presented the utopic society that is created by Buchi Emecheta. This chapter gives a new face lift to the woman. It presents a woman who has regained agency and has asserted herself. Economically she is empowered as she has gained entrepreneurial skills and has become independent of the

man; she also has a sense of initiative and is autonomous. The woman is shown as literate and has invested in the education of women of the future generation. Socially the redefined woman lives in solidarity with other women and is compassionate. The woman is also presented here as one who keeps abreast with the changing world without totally rejecting her culture. Finally the chapter has revealed the fact that it is necessary for both the girl-child and the boy-child to be given equal chances.

To end, Chapter Four is “The *Joys of Motherhood*: Appraisal, Implications and Prospects.” It has been shown in the chapter that *The Joys of Motherhood* can be used as a complementary text to the text on programme. As a text written by an African woman on African realities, it is better suited to acquaint young Cameroonians with societal realities that pertain to them as Blacks. In this wise, the chapter has illustrated the visionary undertones of the author which are becoming a reality as most of the things she has advocated are drawing great attention now. For example, the Cameroonian government and other international organisations are working hand in glove to ensure that women become more autonomous and active in the society. The education of the girl-child is no longer considered a taboo; on the contrary the number of educated girls and women is fast increasing.

This work has not only examined the various ways in which the woman is oppressed but it has also shown how despite this multiple subalternity she succeeded in asserting and redefining herself in *The Joys of Motherhood*. It has also confirmed the fact that Emecheta succeeds in achieving her set goals of suggesting a way out for the subjugated African Woman. As such, its aims have been met. As earlier mentioned, the significance of the work cannot be overemphasized. It both provides insight into issues of gender discrepancy suffered by the black woman and serves as an eye-opener as it incites this subjugated caste to redefine themselves.

The malaise caused in the family circles because of the imbalanced power relations between men and women as a result of gender essentialism can inspire the conduct of further research. It is possible, for example, to investigate the dysfunction of black families in the postcolonial context presented in Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood*.

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## **TV PROGRAM**

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