

**AFRICAN FEMINISM AND EXISTENTIAL APPROACH: THE WORKS OF
BUCHI EMECHETA**

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Abstract

One of the justifiable reasons for paying particular attention to the writings of Buchi Emecheta and other African female writers like her is their ability to balance the male stereotyping of African women in fiction with the women's perspective. From all indications, there are more Africans male writers than women and any attention paid to the female writers tend to assist in rescuing female writing from near oblivion and to get it more firmly into the canon of Africa's creative tradition. African women are seen by men and even themselves not as fellow human beings with voice and choice but as commodities owned by the male world either as brides to yield money for the family in form of bride wealth money or as child bearing commodities for the male world or as means of satisfying male sexual urge. Buchi Emecheta's primary concern as a feminist writer according to Ogodipe - Leslie (1983:11) is ... to tell about being a woman and to tell reality from a woman's view, a woman's perspective".

Through real and imagined experiences, Emecheta explores the various areas of the woman's psyche, which were either inaccessible or ignored by male writers. The result is a unique celebration of the black woman's extraordinary difficult life in a traditional and a changing society. Her protagonists include the deprived, discontented and social misfits, the "second class" citizens, the slaves, the pathetic mothers who give all to their families but reap no rewards, and the dynamic survivors in a society that brutalizes them. Through these images of women which she creates, Buchi Emecheta denounces fiercely sexual inequalities in African society. This paper is explored from existential point of view.

Feminism in Africa Literature

Feminism is a term which aims at bridging the gap between men and women in many spheres of life. It is an offshoot of the Woman Rights Movement of the 1960s in the United States. Referring to the term "Women Rights Movement" Burke (109) writes:

The late 20th century has been marked by a worldwide effort by women to gain rights

Previously denied them. The particular rights sought have varied from one society to another. However, economic rights, educational opportunities, and access to adequate health care are common concerns. Social freedom and political participation are also widespread goals.

This Woman Rights Movement started in far away United States and spread up to Africa and has given birth to the term feminism in Africa Literature. Writing on the subject

feminism, Owonobi (96) posits that, "Feminism is a movement which has as its major occupation, the improvement of the so called weaker sex and the need for gender equality..." Defining the term feminism, Chukwuma (4) sees it as:

a rejection of inferiority and a striving for recognition. It seeks to give the woman a sense of self as a worthy, effectual and contributing human being. Feminism is a reaction to such stereotypes of women, which deny them a positive identity.

Furthermore, Agbasiere (XIX) opines that "Feminist Movement in African Literature is a protest being registered against the double standard and apparent hypocrisies nonchalantly and arrogantly maintained by our societies governed by men".

From the above definitions, it is clear that women are marginalized in the African societies. Another important point is that this marginalization or subjugation of women is worldwide although it differs from one society to the other. However, writers like Chinweizu in his *Anatomy of Female Power* argue that women are powerful over men and so should not claim to be powerless. Contrary to feminists' view of what the subject is all about, Ejinkonye (46) feels that feminist writers "have proved themselves able models of how not to write fiction". He further asserts that the feminist writers unabashedly distort with indecency and uncanny bravado history, sociology and gender images just to make some shallow feminist point. Although different views about feminism abound, there is still no doubt that the history of mankind is a repeated injuries and usurpation on the part of man towards woman having direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. This is an undeniable fact, which can be substantiated in writings and societal mores throughout the ages.

Writing on the topic, "Woman Today, Travails of the African Woman" Iwobi and Nwokolo report: that the basic problems of the African Women today remain the question of gaining respect as people. To help regain the respect of women all over the world, the United Nations, from its inception has recognized and promoted the rights of women. This principle is etched in the universal declaration, which proclaims that, "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights (13). The United Nations to further draw attention to women stereotyping declared 1975 as the United Nations International Women's year. Subsequently, the period 1975 to 1985 was declared the United Nation's Decade for Women. World conferences were held in Mexico City in 1975, in 1980 in Copenhagen and in 1985 in Nairobi to mark the end of the United Nation's Decade for women. Various activities during and after the decade for women have substantially increased public awareness of the iniquities and injustices faced by women in virtually all societies. Reports from across the globe at the year 2000 United Nations special session on women to review the gains of the 1995 World Conference in Benjing, China has it according to Enujobi (2000) that, "There are 60 million fewer women in the world then there as should be". Another report according to the Guardian Newspaper (2000) has it that 20 to 50 percent of women are victims of domestic violence such as wife -battering and this has depreciated the total population of the world's women by 60 million. In Africa, one of the reports says, women constitute only 17 percent of

the total number of persons featured in the media. It was also reported that the percentage of women with children under 3 years of age who are in employment in the Western world is alarming. One can then imagine the number of African women who sweat the hours away with underweight and malnourished babies strapped to their backs, not mentioning the teeming number who return to their corporate "desks" six weeks after delivery. This goes on to point to the fact that women are no bread-caters neither are men the ever-sweating breadwinners.

No wonder Ojukwu and Okpala (1998) are of the opinion that, "The popular notion is that with the exception of women in the developed world, women in poverty-stricken - countries of Asia and Africa are more or less, an endangered specie"(54). Their reasons for making this assertion are that a woman is subjected to despicable experiences and may eventually be sent out of her matrimonial home for not having a male child, a practice found among various Nigerian ethnic groups.

Statistically, according to this newspaper still, women constitute 70% of the 1.3 billion "Absolute" poor people in the world. This results from the fact that women in some African countries do not have right to education or carrier but are restricted to the farm and kitchen. Instances of this denial of right to education of the girl child abound in African countries. The women in Tsi Tsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Condition* are typical example. Tambu, the heroine of the novel, is forced to stay at home and farm and learn how to cook from her mother while her brother Nhamo goes to school because he is a boy. Ironically, Nhamo's school fees are paid through the money raised by their mother through the sale of vegetables and other produce and not from her husband the man. To worsen Tambu's anger about what Noyana (21) refers to as "gender apartheid" Nhamo tells Tambu, "it is the same everywhere, because you are a girl". Equally important is the fact that most traditions in Africa perpetrate cruel womanhood practices such as dietary taboos, and women are denied rights to land ownership, wife battering as well as female genital mutilation. National Baseline survey of Positive and Harmful Traditional Practices Affecting Women and Girls in Nigeria, could hardly come up with live traditional practices, which are positive towards women. Data according to Egunjobi (2000) were collected on 30 states and the Federal Capital Territory Abuja. Questionnaires were given to 12,293 household heads, 13,228 adult women, and 5,293 female children. The practices highlighted include: female genital mutilation (F.G.M), harmful delivery practices, food taboos in pregnancy, at childbirth and during breast feeding, early marriages and teenage pregnancies, male-child preferences, widowhood practices, unequal gender division of labour and responsibilities and the notorious wife battering. The detailed analysis of this study is available but cannot be documented here for want of space.

Surprisingly, even nature is not left out in this gender bias against women as nature ensures that mere boys are born than girls in countries where boys are preferred. The total biological ratio stated the *Guardian Newspaper* is 93 to 96 girls to 100 boys. It can however be argued that nature may not be totally responsible for this as selective abortions against girls is the order of the day in such countries where there is an over-bearing male-child preference.

It is important to note that the main reason which advanced for these harmful traditional practices against women is that, "it is the tradition", a case of blind adherence which is defended by men and women to promote male sexuality. Patriarchy is strong and it is upheld unfortunately, by women who believe it as part of life and accuse other women of being insubordinate when they protest. Patriarchal values place emphasis on male inheritance and maintenance of family, which leads to poverty. Yet in Asia and Africa, women work 13 hours a week more than men as reported in *Sunday Guardian Newspaper* of 15th March, 1998 (p. 12). This report also has it that in developing countries, women grow most of the food and contribute increasingly to cash-incomes. After all these, women are still expected to fetch wood and water, clean and cook, wash and shop, look after the old and ill and bear and care for children and even their husbands. The contribution of women to both domestic and economic life is consistently undervalued and consequently both the need and the potential of women are usually neglected in the allocation of resources, investments, credit, training and technology.

Commenting on this neglect of women's contribution, the 1993 UNICEF report asserts:

The imbalance between the many kinds of contribution women make, and the many kinds of discrimination they suffer, represent not only one of the world's greatest injustices but also one of its greatest inefficiencies.

Surprisingly, even the Holy Bible account points to the fact that man is considered more important than woman; a striking instance can be drawn from St. Matthew's Gospel account of the feeding of the five thousand people by Jesus with five loaves and two fish. In that biblical account, only the men were counted to make the five thousand people while the women and children were not counted. Yet this is considered normal to the Jewish tradition. It is worthy of, note that many of the edges in the various tales which contribute to fashioning people's way of thinking cast derogatory looks at the women folk. For example, in many African tales across linguistic and ethnic groups, it is always the stepmother and not the stepfather who is wicked to a fault towards other women's children entrusted to her. It is equally the co-wife who is permanently jealous of her mate or mates while the polygamous husband appears as an innocent and powerful law maker in the house. One cannot help smelling a rat when such social orientations maintain silence over bad aspects of male behaviour. All these I believe will leave no one in doubt that women are marginalized in our society.

It is common to find some of the expressions in human languages that point to the fact that male superiority thrive almost undisturbed. In English language for example, no distinction is made between a married and an unmarried man. Both are addressed as "Mr." But the same language distinguishes between a married woman and spinster: One is addressed as "Mrs." While the other takes the title "Miss." In this way, unmarried ladies are forced to carry a social stigma, which their male counterparts do not. At this point, one may be tempted to ask, what really gave rise to feminist writing in African Literature?

When written African Literature emerged sequel to the contact with the Western world, the focus was inevitably on the oppression and domination of the African continent by European powers. This tendency has been contrived with varying colorings reflecting the exit of the colonial administration and its replacement with indigenous oppressive dictatorships both by the civilian and military leaderships. The sad situation placed both African men and women at the same receiving end of the colonial and non-colonial processes in their recognized advantages and their multiple disadvantages.

In the early African writings; female characters were portrayed in an idealized way as found in the poetry of Senghor, Diop and other Negritude writers. Among the fiction writers, Achebe, Aluko, Munonyc and their likes, it is believed that they treat their female characters with such crude realities in accordance with the views of the man who control feminine destiny in the society. This picture of the African women was not questioned until the feminists spoke for themselves and for the rest of the female population in Africa. From then on, the feminist literature in Africa emerged. Some of such writers are Mariama Ba, Flora Nwapa, Aminata Sow Fall, Buchi Emecheta, Tess Onwueme, Ama Ata Aidoo, etc. However, some of the male writers from Africa are interested in this feminist literature. Such writers include Osmane Sembene in his *Xala*, Henri Lopes *La nouvelle romance*, Mongo Beti -*Perpetus* and Isidore Okpewho - *The victims*.

Female critics on the other hand delight in exploring the works of these male feminist authors so as to bring out possible facts of the protest literature. Some of the critics include, Helen Chukwuma, Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, Catherine Acholonu, Julie Agbasiere, Marie Umeh and so on. In addition to female critics, there are also male critics of various shapes and opinions who try to look at feminism objectively or passionately as far as their masculine privileges and prejudices can allow them. These include Emmanuel Obiechina, Abiola Irele, Charles Nnolim, Femi Ojo - Ade, Ernest Enenyonu, Niyi Osundare, Obioma Nnaemeka and others.

When feminism emerged in Africa, it was received with mixed feelings. Many African women are opposed to its radicalism, which runs counter to African cultural practices. Some of the women see it as a disorder, a deviation, extremism associated with misguided frustrated and disgruntled women. Actually this is not what feminism is all about. In its most objective form, feminism according to Chukwuma (1994) is, "... a reaction to such stereotypes of women which deny them a positive identity" (p. ix). For Chukwuma, women conditioning in Africa is the greatest barrier towards a fulfilment of self. This she says is seen in the religious, socio-cultural and economic life of women. Most African women are trained and oriented from infancy to realize themselves and their true worth outside themselves, thereby negating any knowledge of self. This is so when we consider the full essence of fulfillment. A woman's greatest aspiration is finding a mate and therefore bearing children. Every other thing is secondary; education, a career, material wealth, and social acclaim. All these are subsumed to marriage. Over the years, women started showing a marked resentment of limitation and circumspection of these roles. They yearned for a wider spectrum. For another form of fulfillment other than the traditional ones. In effect, women developed and became more aware and more

questioning. Their discontent is predicated on the state of the society where roles are worthwhile only if they stand up to the harsh dynamics of economic latent. The idle wives and mothers suddenly become household burdens which the male loathe to carry, or take on so readily. Marriage is delayed and the brides-to-be must offer more than their pretty faces and fertile ova. They are expected in addition to their traditional wife-hood and motherhood to equip themselves for life in modern times by being not-only consumers but producers and co-producers of the family income. Thus their social expectations become more complex and demanding. The women therefore strive to upgrade their worth and peddle these as bait to men for marriage. As literary artists depict the social, religious and economic events in the society, no wonder these events and the change in societal values and economic roles of women are depicted in the writings of the feminist writers. The lesson in Flora Nwapas' *One is Enough* is a typical example. Amaka, the protagonist of that novel was advised by her mother to develop herself as a financially independent female. This she did and it paid her off when trouble sets in her marriage.

What this all means is that the African women within the last decade started developing a sense of self, started striving for self-actualization. In effect, the light is now turned inwards in search of the real woman. It is also important to note that this search inwards is a reaction to a situation that most women increasingly find themselves in: a situation where their real being is questioned as seen in Amaka's outburst in *One is Enough*. Amaka is successful in career, material acquisition and even her relationship with her husband but is childless. She then asks whether a woman is worth nothing because she is unmarried or barren.

Feministic writing in Africa explores the different ordeals of the woman in the process of self-actualization. The African woman has now realized the need for her to look inwards and discover her real self and not what people think she is. Feminist literatures in Africa therefore, trace this process of self-knowledge and selfhood. Self-actualization is in itself revolutionary and different and in most cases radical. The cause cuts across the social - cultural norm and in the process set the old ways aside in order to carve out a new one. This new way is what we read today as feminist literature in Africa.

Buchi Emecheta and the Philosophy of Existentialism

The central proposition of existentialism is that 'existence precedes essence'. This means that the actual life of an individual is what constitutes the essence instead of any predetermined essence that defines what a man should be. It portends therefore that the essence of human being is to be whom, and not what they are. Although Sartre was the first to coin the term, similar notions can be found in the thoughts of many existentialist philosophers, from Kierkegaard to Heidegger. The likes of Buchi Emecheta are those who struggle to make a living out of the ashes of their existence. Refusing to be subdued, she dragged her drowning head up and gaped to be heard which was later applauded. Her historical background attests to this fact.

Emecheta was born in 1944 in Yaba, a small village near Lagos, Nigeria. Her parents, both from eastern Nigeria, died when she was a child. Emecheta was taken in by foster parents who mistreated her. She grew up listening to the women around her telling stories, but in her culture women were not expected to be writers. She attended a missionary high school in Lagos until she was sixteen and then married a man to whom she had been promised since age eleven. At nineteen, Emecheta followed her husband to London. She had two children at the time and was pregnant with her third; she eventually became a mother of five. During this time in London, Emecheta began to write. Her husband was so upset over her intention to become a writer that he burned her first novel, and after this, Emecheta decided to leave him. She later rewrote the novel and published it as *The Bride Price* (1976). While struggling to become a writer, she worked part time jobs to support her family and earned a degree in sociology at the University of London. Emecheta's early writing efforts initially met with repeated rejections from publishers. Her break came when the *New Statesman* accepted several of her essays about her life in London; these eventually became her first published work, the novel *In the Ditch* (1972). Three of Emecheta's works focus on events in her life. Her first two novels, *In the Ditch* and *Second-Class Citizen* (1975), are loosely based on her own experiences as a single parent and are regarded as her most accomplished works. Both books revolve around a young Nigerian woman named Adah and her search for a better quality of life. In the first book, Emecheta depicts Adah's struggle to raise five small children while depending on welfare payments, attending college, and attempting to complete her first novel. The second book recounts Adah's immigration to England and her marriage to a domineering man who attempts to thwart her educational and professional aspirations. Their marriage dissolves as Adah, influenced by the women's liberation movement, begins to assert her individuality. *Head above Water* (1986) is a nonfiction work detailing Emecheta's childhood in a small Nigerian village, her career as a social worker in London, and the problems she encountered in securing a publisher for her writings.

Three of Emecheta's novels dramatize the problems that African women typically encounter in a traditional, male-oriented society: *The Bride Price*, *The Slave Girl* (1977), and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). *The Bride Price* centers on a young woman who defies tribal custom by marrying a man outside her social class. After her husband fails to pay her dowry, or bride price, she dies in childbirth, as prophesied by tribal myth. *The Slave Girl*, which accuses the patriarchal social system of treating females as commodities, focuses upon the coming of age of an orphan girl whose older brother sells her to a distant relative. *The Joys of Motherhood* relates the story of a young Ibo woman named Nnu Ego who feels inferior when she is unable to give her husband a child. She flees her village to the city of Lagos and begins a new life with a new husband. She becomes a mother several times over, but the joy of fulfilling her dream is tempered by the reality of having to feed a large family with the little income. After her children grow up and move away, Nnu Ego dies alone on the side of the road.

Emecheta explores the tenets of African feminism within the confines of the existential approach to criticism. She uses her major characters to instigate the assertiveness to life and living. Since existentialism views human existence as having a set of underlying themes and characteristics such as anxiety, dread, freedom, awareness of death and

consciousness of existing; Buchi Emecheta employs all the existential traits in portraying her characters. Man should have an outlook to life with the ultimate aim of living and existing.

Joys of Motherhood

The story of *Joys of Motherhood* is that of the dilemma of Nnu Ego through matrimonial discord. The Ibusa society found in present day Delta State of Nigeria in which part of the story in the novel is set is a society characterized by well-articulated and defined sexual roles. In this community, the woman remains poor, oppressed and sexually manipulated. All these are powerfully demonstrated through Nnu Ego and other female characters in the novel such as Adaku, Ona, etc. Ibusa society is that which recognizes male supremacy over their female counterparts. There, a marriage without a male child is as good as one without a child at all. No wonder Obi Umunna consents to his daughter's friendship with Nwokocha Agbadi so that she can bear a son who will be an heir to his lineage. Though this did not work out eventually but Obi Umunna and every other member of the community did not see anything wrong with that arrangement. The relationship between male attitude, social belief and female dilemma is very important to Emecheta's design. Note that Obi Umunna equally dedicates his daughter Ona, to the gods so that she may produce sons in the name of the family rather than for her husband. He therefore decides that Ona will not get married. In order to satisfy her natural instincts, he treats her like a boy because he wants her to be one. This restricts her self-fulfilment. She becomes a bone of contention between her father and man-friend, Nwokocha Agbadi. In truth she does not like the situation and declares this on her death-bed when she begs Agbadi to allow their daughter Nnu Ego to be free and leave a life of her own, marry if she wants (p. 28).

However, Agbadi did not respect this injunction. He chooses husbands for Nnu Ego, first Amataokwu, and second Nnaife. Each of these choices was not the good option for the cherished daughter which led to Nnu Ego's predicaments in each case. Note that the African woman has no say in the choice of a husband. It is her father who decides whom she marries. The man chooses a wife but the bride's father decides for the woman. At the man's death, the woman is inherited by the man's brother just like any other property owned by the diseased man. At the same time, the man marries as many wives as he likes, keeps as many concubines as he likes even to the full view of his wives, yet the society finds nothing wrong in these. The woman condones all these in silence.

In Ibusa community and indeed Africa, the woman is seen by other members of the society as a means through which a man satisfies his needs and fulfills his ambition. This Obi Umunna did to Ona as well as other men in the community. This need can be of procreation, especially male children for posterity and female children for economic reasons and even to satisfy their sexual urge. Witness how Nwokocha Agbadi woos Ona irrespective of the fact that he has many wives at home. Emecheta tells us "Nwokocha Agbadi would not have minded sending all his wives away just to live with this woman" (p.12). Remember his wives are ready to worship and serve him in all things yet he goes after Ona. Agbadi even goes to the extent of neglecting his young wives sexually and

goes to sleep in Ona's house. Agbadi dallies with his mistress Ona, in his open courtyard and in the full view of his legitimate wives. His eldest wife dies of heart break on hearing that her husband gives pleasure to another woman in the same courtyard where she slept (p. 21).

In the same way, Amataokwu exploits Nnu Ego as a wife who will bear him children. However, when the children did not come, he ejects her from his house after he had taken a second wife who soon on arrival becomes pregnant and bears him a son. Any reasonable human being would be able to imagine Nnu Ego's predicament when after all the services she gives her husband, he tells her he no longer wants her because she could not bear him children, To the society to which they both belong, barrenness is equated with failure and Nnu Ego experiences the tragic consequences that befall a social outcast. Amataokwu insists she makes way for a new wife and condemns her to working in the field like a slave. He denies her the basic conjugal rights and insists that his "precious male seed" is not to be wasted on a woman who is infertile" (p. 32). He further tells Nnu Ego, "You don't appeal to me anymore. You are so dry and jumpy. When a man comes to a woman he wants to be cooled, not scratched by a nervy female who is all bones" (p. 32).

Agbadis' second choice of a husband for his daughter is as bad as the first. Nnaife lives in Lagos as a laundryman to Dr. and Mrs. Moors, an expatriate family. Nnu Ego does not like him at first sight because of his stature and occupation (p. 42). We realize he has an animal passion and sees Nnu Ego as a victim to be devoured on her first night in his house even in the presence of his senior brother. Nnu Ego sees his occupation as one that has turned him into " ... jelly of a man". She does not understand why a man should wash clothes for a woman. Thirdly, Nnaife's reverence and attitude to his master and mistress further alienates him from his wife. These notwithstanding, Nnu Ego gradually accepts Nnaife because he has vindicated her motherhood. Surprisingly as Nnu Ego accepts Nnaife, he develops hatred for her especially where he sees himself as the bread winner and head of the family. Gradually his palm wine drinking session increases and he neglects his family responsibilities, stays out late, beats up Nnu Ego at will and denies her maintenance allowance. Towards the end of the novel when their children fail them, Nnaife blames Nnu Ego, curses her and their children and even asks her to leave his house. These really portray Nnaife as a man of little thinking that lacks moral judgment. See how he lavishes his savings on merriment not minding Nnu Ego's attempts to caution him. He attacks his daughter's fiancé's family with a knife and is sent to jail.

Still of interest to Buchi Emecheta is the need to expose the African women's predicament in polygamous marriages. The novel exposes the evil consequences of polygamy as a marriage institution that propagates poverty especially in the urban areas. In the traditional setting, the socio- economic forces enable a man to control his vast empire of wives and property, but in the city where the emphasis is on money economy, the man's privileges are often tampered with. In the rural setting, the family members are to provide enough hands in the farm and the man becomes richer with more wives and children. But in the urban setting, there is no farmland to farm on and all depend on the

men's earning. Therefore poverty prevails in such polygamous homes. To make matters worse for Nnu Ego, Nnaife inherits his late brother's wives. Adaku the most junior of these wives moves over to live with them in Lagos. Nnaife gleefully makes love to Adaku in Nnu Ego's presence and female jealousy ensues. Both women began to suspect each other and Nnu Ego is forced to consult a native doctor to prepare some charms for her. Nnaife goes to Ibuza and impregnates his late brother's eldest wife, Adankwo, and even comes back to Lagos with another wife, a sixteen year old girl who continues to procreate for the family. With these numbers of wives and children, one is forced to see polygamy from a disadvantaged side. One will not then blame Nnu Ego for looking at it this way. Her exposure to urban life has somehow alienated her from rural norms that support polygamy. The novelist therefore opposes polygamy both as a source of female humiliation and as the reason for economic deprivation which its victims, especially women suffer.

Motherhood is another aspect of the woman's life Buchi Emecheta exposes in this novel. African societies see motherhood as a means of achievement of status for the women folk. But contrary to this belief, children do not always determine a woman's position in the society. Adaku in *Joy's of Motherhood*, the last wife of Nnaife's late brother who he also inherited has only female children. By this she is disadvantaged according to the culture of her people. Rather than brood over her seeming problem, she goes about her business and grows into a wealthy businesswoman. She feeds and clothes her children well and even sends them to the best boarding schools in Lagos. At the settlement of the quarrel between Adaku and Nnu Ego, Ubani and Nwakusor remind her that she has no sons to ensure her husband's immortality. They spoke to her thus:

...If I were in your shoes, I should go home and consult my chi to find out why male offspring's have been denied me" (p. 166).

According to them, Adaku should respect Nnu Ego because she has male children for her husband. However, these male children never attracted higher status for Nnu Ego. While Adaku rebels against male dominance, Nnu Ego's experience takes a pathetic turn. Nnu Ego after going almost naked in order to give her male children good education, food and care, none of them thought it wise to care for her at her old age. She cracks up after a long wait to hear from her sons two of whom were abroad, Oshia and Adim (p. 224). She dies on the roadside and it was only at her death that those sons came home to give her a befitting burial.

Buchi Emecheta argues through Nnu Ego that women in Nigeria and indeed Africa need not achieve status through their motherhood because motherhood does not always guarantee social and financial security. It does not equally guarantee sound existence. No wonder the ironic title of the novel, *The Joy's of Motherhood*. Still on the achievement of high status through motherhood, Emenyonu sees Nnu Ego's death as the irony of the fate of the woman in African society. It asks the African woman to re-examine her role in the suffering for she is indeed the author of her own misfortune (p. 84). Emecheta seems to be urging African women by this novel to rise and break off the chains of slavery and inequality of the sexes. She warns that women find no joy in

motherhood just as Nnu Ego's grown children did not give her joy. She spoiled her male children and they become selfish and egocentric. While dying, she did not have the support or comfort of any of her children. Nnu Ego dies on a roadside thinking she had arrived home. She died quietly with no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to her (p. 224).

CONCLUSION

As can be seen from this paper, Buchi Emecheta's feminist concerns centre around the woman's unique confrontation with male superiority, female subjectivity and socially endorsed norms that inhibit her progress. The predicament of poverty, unhappiness, brutality and childlessness are existential forces which Nnu Ego and other female characters struggle to conquer. These characters in spite of deeply ingrained notions of dependency also possess sometimes an innate determination to succeed. Although they may not always break free, yet through their attempts, the writer contends that even in the most stilling circumstances, the individual never loses the potential for choice and strength. Emecheta seems to be ideologically urging the African women to rise up to the challenges of asserting themselves in a male dominated world in order to better their lots in life; just as she did in real life as the African woman has no joys alive or dead. It should be noted that although Buchi Emecheta lives and writes from London. She is essentially an African or third world writer. Her vision is shaped by her African experience and her concerns are with the unique limitations of the African woman. These she espouses in all her novels. She according to Gloria Chukwukere, " she has produced more novels than any other female writer in Africa" (p. 212). Her concern in these novels is espousing the woman's experience in a male dominated world through existential tenet of assertiveness in a world of reality.

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