

Unpacking the Image of the Female Character: The Joys of Motherhood in Perspective

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ABSTRACT

*This paper focuses on Buchi Emecheta's depiction of the female character in her novel, *The Joys of Motherhood*. In particular, this paper examines how Emecheta directs attention at restoring the image of the "fallen" woman in the novel where the patriarchs dominate affairs. The novel achieves this aim through the narrative technique employed in the complex role of the woman figure who defies all odds to achieve her heart desires at the end of the story. The findings reveal that Emecheta presents both positive and negative archetypal images of the African woman in the novel. It is however worthy of note that Emecheta's negative depiction of the African woman far outweighs the positive ones. To an extent, Emecheta's portrayal of the figure of a woman is an affront to the way a female writer ought to present the woman with exalting images rather than images of disgust.*

KEYWORDS

*African woman; patriarchal society; *The Joys of Motherhood*;
Post-colonial feminist*

INTRODUCTION

Buchi Emecheta was drawn to write about the plight of the African woman through her personal experience as a Nigerian who has been a victim of the way some women have been ill-treated as a result of patriarchy. In the novel which is narrated from the third person's omniscient point of view, the heroine, Nnu Ego marries but her childlessness makes it difficult for her to fulfill her motherly role expected of her in the patriarchal society. She gets banished to Lagos where she remarries Nnaife and births many children. Subsequently, Nnaife inherits his deceased brother's wife, Adaku, as custom demands. The arrival of Adaku with her daughter into Nnaife's compound breeds unhealthy competition and rivalry between her and Nnu Ego.

Interestingly, Nnaife finds temporary job as a mower of grasses on the railroad while he impregnates both Adaku and Nnu Egu. Adaku gives birth to a son who dies shortly whereas Nnu Egu delivers a set of female twins namely Taiwo and Kehinde. Nnaife's children, Oshia and Adim announce their intentions to pursue higher education but Nnaife disagrees because he interprets the action of Oshia as a sign of neglecting his duties to the family as a son. Oshia obtains scholarship to study abroad; Taiwo accepts an arranged marriage with an Ibo and Kehinde elopes with a Yoruba and marries him eventually. Nnaife becomes incensed with Kehinde's father-in-law and attempts to assassinate him resulting in his incarceration for five years. After Nnaife's release, Nnu Egu returns home and dies tragically beside the road. Several years later, Oshia returns from America to hold an elaborate funeral rite for his mother in memory of all her sacrifices for them.

An overview of scholarship on *The Joys of Motherhood* reveals discussions on gender, societal and women issues. On gender, Barfi, Kohzadi & Mohammadi (2015) are of the

view that issues such as race and entrepreneurship sit at the heart of this text, *The Joys of Motherhood*.

Comparatively, Serafina (2000) on the other hand, looks at how the female character is oppressed and its effects on marriages. She does that by comparing how Emecheta and Ba have represented their women in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *So Long a Letter* respectively.

Additionally, Anitha & Bharathi (2017) make a comparative study of *The Joys of Motherhood* by looking at how women characters demand understanding of their functions as females, spouses and mothers. From the foregoing, critics have given insightful and sagacious comments on the novel; however, none has explored Emecheta's attempt to restore the portrayal of the female character in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* image of the African woman in *The Joys of Motherhood*. This paper employs a reader response criticism to investigate the portrait of the female character in a society predominantly patriarchal with the view to contributing to feminists' debate.

RESEARCH METHODS

The fulcrum of this study is content discussions on the depiction of the female character in the primary text, *The Joys of Motherhood* authored by Buchi Emecheta. This study centres on the various ways through which the narrator focalises the image of the African woman that some authors belittle in their works. To enrich the analysis, we explored Post-colonial feminist theory zeroing in on Nigerian literary works. The study attempts to situate the analysis in its context by tracing the development of Nigeria's Post-colonial feminist writing. After gathering enough data from the primary source, *The Joys of Motherhood*, and interrogating the role of the African woman, we conclude on the various ways that Emecheta presents the African woman in *The Joys of Motherhood*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Post-colonial Feminism: Nigerian Literary Works

A cursory look at the development of literary works in Nigeria reveals that from pre-colonial to post-colonial periods, the literary front in Nigeria has been the preserve of men. Literary artists like Achebe, Ekwensi, Tutuola and Soyinka have written and propagated the interest of men thereby making the women look helpless. However, the face of the Nigeria's literary development changed in 1966 when Flora Nwapa wrote her book, *Efuru* which attempts to correct the negative image that the male writers have carved for African women in their writings. From that time onwards, issues about women became paramount in Nigeria's literary discourse (Ogunyemi, 1988). To augment the efforts of Nwapa, authoresses like Buchi Emecheta, Adaora Ulasi, Zulu Sofola and Tess Onwuema have written extensively to address issues about African women

The late development of female writing in Nigeria is attributed to the late education of Nigerian women that did not give them a good start as far as literary development is concerned (Okereke, 1995). That notwithstanding, some writers are of the view that patriarchy which was at the heart of Nigerian society is given prominence in Nigerian literature. Consequently, male writers tend to concentrate on elevating the status of men while female counterparts are portrayed as helpless in the hands of men (Kolawole 1998). It is clear that the creative writing scene failed to acknowledge the works of women since literary writing is viewed as paternal. Moreover, the late development of the female creative writing in Nigeria is also blamed on gender roles of females as wives and mothers which do not create the conducive environment (Okereke 1995).

The inability of the female Nigerian writers to make their literary voices heard loudly was due to the problem of the women combining the duty of running the home effectively and working on the difficulty of getting their works published. This scenario precipitates patriarchy and gender inequality (Kolawole, 1998). James (1990) on the other hand buttresses the difficulty of the Nigerian women to get a publisher for her work by claiming that a publisher kept her manuscript for four years and never published it while another publisher also misplaced the only copy of her manuscript. Despite these impediments, Nigerian women were motivated to write. One of the motivations was the way women were stereotyped by male writers as witches, prostitutes, goddesses and helpless victims.

Emecheta has been regarded as the most prolific of all the Nigerian female writers whose works such as *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977) and *The Joys of Motherhood* (2008) have contributed towards uplifting the image of women. These works are pregnant with women issues and project marginalisation by using Emecheta's personal experience as a springboard in her bid to redefine the African woman; she presents men as indolent, oppressive and callous. Emecheta casts women so well that the men in her novels cannot be very effective without the help of the women.

Discussion

Understanding the African Woman in the Joys of Motherhood

For many years, writers present the position of African women as secondary importance in African society. In the place setting of this novel, Igbo, there are cultural norms that infringe on the rights of women. According to Umeh (1993), this state of affairs stems mainly from the fact that patriarchy has dominated the African society. Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* is replete with a scenario where female characters are made second class citizens. This situation is underscored by Chukwuma (1990) who posits that women in patriarchal society have been relegated to the background to the extent that they do not have say in what affect them.

In this novel, Emecheta presents to the readers a scenario where male children are seen as more important than their female counterparts. An instance is found when Enu Ego gives birth to twins who are girls. The birth of these twins, instead of sparking off excitement, becomes a source of worry to Adaku and her co-wife, Nnu Ego. These two ladies contemplate on how their husband would welcome these girls. Adaku and Nnu Ego become frustrated and apprehensive because they are skeptical about their husband accepting these female twins. Interestingly, Nnaife returns home and on top of his voice tells his wife that she should have done better than giving birth to twins who are girls. In his anger, Nnaife asks "what are these?" in referring to the female. This shows how inferior the patriarchal Igbo society perceives women. Ironically, Adaku, the co-wife of Enu Ego gives birth to a boy child and that makes Nnaife very happy. The preference that the Igbo society of *The Joys of Motherhood* has for boys is deepened when this boy dies few days after his birth. The death of this boy brings extreme sadness to the household not because they have lost a child but the fact that this child is a boy.

It is worth noting that the likeness for a boy-child foments envy and unwarranted jealousy among Nnaife's wives, Adaku and Nnu Ego. This is evident in the scuffle that ensues between Nnu Ego and Adaku, and instead of the elders rebuking Nnu Ego; they declare her innocent by virtue of her having given birth to a male-child. We also read about Oshie, the son of Nnu Ego, who dreams about his step-mother, Adaku. In the text, Oshie dreams about her step-mother, destroying him. When he tells his mother, instead of looking at it as a mere dream, she quickly consults a medicine man for advice. This medicine man fuels the suspicion of Nnu Ego by retorting: "You must protect your son

against the jealousy of the younger wife..." (144). This implies that the African tradition sanctions the relevance of patriarchal system by ensuring the protection of the male-child. The projection of the male-child creates imbalance between female and male to the extent that feminist writers advocate for egalitarianism between male and female children.

Emecheta, in addition, presents the female character in the novel as very assertive. Chukukere (1995) explores the crucial role of the heroine in the unfolding of the narration: "the female protagonist often displays her mettle in terms of her initiative and dynamism" (10). Emecheta portrays Adaku as someone who is very bold, ambitious and capable of taking daring decisions when the need arises. In a patriarchal Ibo society, Emecheta depicts Adaku as someone who takes steps that are beneficial to her family when it dawns on her that Nnaife abhors her daughter and her. She focuses on giving her daughters the best of education without following the custom and traditions that make provision for only boys to enjoy western formal education to the detriment of girls who receive home training because their place is the kitchen. Adaku highlights her assertive nature as she soliloquizes:

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 the future...Nnaife is not going to send them away to any husband before they are ready. I will see to that. (188)

Emecheta employs the pattern repetition: "I will spend" [NP+VP]; "They shall stop" [NP+VP]; "I shall see" [NP+VP] to highlight the intent of Nnaife. The syntactic parallelism identified in the structure above presents Adaku as a courageous woman who intends to fight the status quo that reveals the stereotypical representation of women as only good for marriage. Adaku's singular action is in line with the African feminist's goal of advocating for the need for equity between men and women, and removal of all entrenched practices that elevate men above women. This will make it possible for all the negative entrenched cultural practices perceived as detrimental to women to be eradicated significantly. Among these cultural practices, include the position of African married woman.

Emecheta presents African women as people whose only honour is in getting married and giving birth to children. In the novel, Nnaife is recruited to fight for the colonialist and as a result Nnu Ego goes to her father with the intention of coming back to her husband if he returns from the war. Nnu Ego's father tells her to return to her husband and the reason he adduces for Nnu Ego's return is typical of a father who lives in a patriarchal society:

Have you ever heard of a complete woman without a husband? You have done your duty to your father, a man with such nobility of spirit it defied explanation. Now it is to your husband that you should go'. 'But,' Nnu Ego began to protest, 'he is still fighting in the war. I have not neglected him as such'. 'Suppose he has hurried home to see the new man-child you have borne him, only to be met by Adaku and her whines and ambitions?' (177)

This is a clear indication that in a patriarchal post-colonial Ibo society of Nigeria, a woman's dignity lies in her being married. Okpe (2005) explains patriarchal society as system which prevails in various spheres of life where men take absolute control over everything. In most cases patriarchy results in oppression of women; some women do not have any choice than to accept patriarchy with its associated problems. In patriarchal society there is preference for boys over girls especially when he is the first. To show the seriousness with which the society prefers boys over girl, Wentworth (2005: 4) asserts that

in most cultures if a father does not give birth to a male child, his virility is questioned. In effect, an unmarried woman does not receive recognition irrespective of her exploits in the society.

Instead of restoring their image and gaining recognition in society, the African women perceive their fellow women as their own enemies. Emecheta personifies the woman as an individual who does anything possible to sabotage and demean her fellow woman. The narrator recounts the quarrel that ensues between Adaku and Nnu Ego. In the novel, Nnu Ego acts in a way that would make Adaku jealous of her sons. To achieve her aim, Nnu Ego seizes every opportunity to make her rival jealous. The narrator brings this element of jealousy out this way: "She did everything she could to make Adaku jealous of his sons. She looked for every opportunity to call the names of her children in full" (181).

Consequently, women in patriarchal African society contribute to the afflictions of their fellow women as Nnu Ego and Adaku occasionally engage in petty quarrels because of the fact that Adaku has no son, so Nnu Ego sees herself more privileged than Adaku. Ironically, Emecheta exposes the permanent place of African woman as the kitchen. A case in point is a scene where Adaku tells Oshie, a boy to go and fetch water. He refuses to fetch the water and this is captured this way: "I am not going! I am a boy, why should I help in the cooking? That's a woman's job" (143). After this declaration, Oshie goes out to join other boys to play.

We can infer that these stereotypical roles that have been assigned men and women sometimes lead to the domination by men in a patriarchal society. Emecheta presents the effects of such roles on the women in *The Joys of Motherhood*. We read about Nnaife who returns home after going out to play guitar with his friends. On his return, he realises that his wives have not cooked his meal. Instead, they leave the money meant for cooking in a covered bowl. Nnaife expresses his astonishment and consternation "in bitter anger. His voice was tremulous and he directs his displeasure at Nnu Ego who seems to shrink under his stare" (14). In a reply to Nnaife's question, Adaku compares Nnaife's responsibility as a husband to that of other men who are able to provide for their wives: "other men give their wives double the amount you give us" (149). Suddenly, Adaku screams from the room "help! help! He's going to kill me - you madman" (149). Nnaife thumps Adaku who is pregnant for him, and it takes the intervention of Nnu Ego and other co-tenants to rescue Adaku from the claws of Nnaife. Even though the wives refuse to provide their husband food, Nnaife has no moral justification to place Adaku in confinement and beat her up. Nnaife's reaction towards his pregnant wife buttresses the depiction of men's role in a patriarchal society. No one raises any alarm about Nnaife's behaviour because in a patriarchal Ibo society, wife battery is not frowned upon because the women themselves consider it as part of their marital lives.

Additionally, Emecheta projects women as characters who are dictated to and they have no opportunity to make choices that will improve their lots. It is in the light of the above that Nnu Ego soliloquizes and interrogates God on purpose of the woman:

God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage? After all, I was born alone and I shall die alone. What have I gained from this? Yes, I have many children... I am a prisoner of my own flesh and blood. Is it such an enviable position? Men make it look as if we must aspire for children or die. That's why when I lost my first son I wanted to die, because I failed to live up to the standard expected of me by the males in my life, my father and my husband and now I have to include my sons. But who made the law that we should not hope in our daughters? We women subscribe to that law more than anyone until we

change all this, it is still a man's world which women will always help to build (209-10).

From the foregoing, it could be deduced from the extract above that the plight of the African woman has contributed in relegating them to the background. Paradoxically, Nnu Ego accepts her situation as God's design to create her "alone" which contradicts the original plan of God to create the wife as a helpmate to her husband. For Emecheta, in African marriages, men seem to imprison women and the repercussion is that some of these women desire to die. Nnu Ego expresses her misgivings and fears for the men in her life "my father, my husband and my sons", and describes the society as "man's world". It is on the bases of this that the African feminists seek for space for women that will make them free to make their own choices and not live on the whims and caprices of men.

Emecheta's representation of the "man's world" empowers fathers to wield excessive power over their daughters. In Igbo society, marriage is seen as a union between the families of the couple and the fathers play very crucial roles in their daughter's marriage. Before the marriage is contracted, the father of the groom accompanies him to his in-laws' family for an introduction. After this introduction, another day is set for the fathers of couple to negotiate the bride price of the bride. This role of the Igbo father in their children's marriages is found in the novel. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, fathers' quest for materialism leads them to exploit those who propose marriage to their daughters. We read that the fathers perceive their daughters as their property and use them as avenue for amassing wealth. This is evident through the exorbitant bride prices that fathers decide to charge their prospective son in-laws, and in most cases their daughters are married off to affluent men. The narrator of *The Joys of Motherhood* paints a vivid picture of how fathers prefer to give their daughters out in marriage to very wealthy suitors. In the narration, the narrator describes the speed with which Nnaife agrees to her daughter marrying a wealthy man:

Nnaife quickly approves 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 brothers, so the whole bride price would come to him (229).

In contrast, while Nnaife approves of Taiwo's suitor, he does everything possible to frustrate Kehinde who agrees to marry a butcher. The obvious reason for resenting her daughter marrying a butcher is that he does control considerable amount of riches and that it is not likely he would benefit immensely from such an in-law.

Clearly, Emecheta portrays the woman as an object of sacrifice. This condition is revealed when Agbadi loses his first wife, Agunwa. Agbadi is a very wealthy local chief whose speeches are usually laced with proverbs. He is very arrogant; he is born in an era where a man's physique determines his position in his society. He is very handsome and as result he is chosen to be the natural leader of his community. Because of Agbadi's attractive physical appearance, he wins the attention and love of most women. Agbadi consequently marries a lot of women. When Agbadi dies, customs demand that a slave dies with her. A female slave is thus chosen to die with her. This slave, Nwokocha, a beautiful woman goes through a lot inhuman treatment meted out to her by men because she refuses to die calmly.

We see the nuance that exists among the women fraternity. While a class of women emerge as higher above the social ladder, others lack recognition in the society. The society discriminates among women depending on the family one comes from. In the novel, Nwokocha prays and requests of the gods to make her a member of Agbadi's family

in her second coming into the world ostensibly to escape being sacrificed in the next world. Similarly, innocent young women in *The Joys of Motherhood* are made to commit their whole lives to the gods of their communities and in this period of commitment, these women are not expected to marry and procreate. This issue is exemplified in the way Nnu Ego's mother became a devotee of the gods. The narrator brings this issue to our attention this way:

How else could she behave since she could not marry? Because her father had no son, she had been dedicated to the gods to produce children in his name, not that of any husband. Oh torn she was between two men. She had to be loyal to her father, as well as to her lover Agbadi (17-18).

Surprisingly, Ona feels helpless for her disloyal to her two lovers. She is torn between satisfying her father's wish and following her heart. This uncomfortable situation Ona finds herself renders most women destitute in the sense that the women are compelled to follow the dictate of the male counterpart. For Emecheta, African women like Ona appear as prisoners in their own households. This is symbolic of the fact that Nnu Ego sacrifices all that she has including meeting the needs of her family. She effectively agrees that she has become a prisoner throughout. She makes it abundantly clear when she picks quarrels with Nnaife over the meagre housekeeping money he gives her and the co-wife to cook. Nnu Ego comes to the realisation that she has been imprisoned by the love that she has for children and her duty as a senior wife to the extent that she cannot ask for more money for the upkeep of her family (153). Tied to the above is the fact that in the novel, Nnu Ego is again, imprisoned by the entrenched cultural practices of the people of Ibuza. This level of imprisonment overwhelms her as she unequivocally brings out her experience as: "I am a prisoner of my own flesh and blood. Is it such an enviable position? The men make it look as if we must aspire for children or die. That is why when I lost my first son I wanted to die because I failed to live up to the standard expected of me by the males in my life..." (210). Nnu Ego's imprisonment by the entrenched culture of her community and her household brings into mind the fact that in some African countries women have been made prisoners due to their desire to strictly adhere to some cultural and religious practices in their communities.

To add to the above depiction of African women, Emecheta portrays them as people who can go through difficulties and overcome them with or without husbands. This is displayed by Adaku and Nnu Ego when their husband, Nnaife is forcefully enrolled into the British Army. Nnu Ego for instance, has the singular responsibility of feeding and sending her children to school out of the petty trade she engages in. Hitherto, Nnaife takes care of the home but with his recruitment into the army she has no choice than to shoulder all the responsibilities of her husband which she surmounts. Initially Nnu Ego expresses her worry about the arduous task her husband's absence has bestowed on her as the narrator retorts: "Nnu Ego gave in to all the suppressed emotion that was inside her" (165). Nnu Ego's desperate situation makes her confine her desperation in her close Ubani as she rhetorically discloses, "How are we going to manage?' ... What are we going to do with all these children? I can't afford to feed us all as well as paying the rent" (165).

This lamentation notwithstanding, Nnu Ego is able to give her children education and also provide their basic needs and survival as well. This brings to bear the fact that the African woman who unfortunately emerges as a single parent has the capacity to survive in the midst of challenges. At the end, Nnu Ego manages to shoulder the responsibilities as she "scraped and saved to pay the last two terms school fees for Oshia and Adim, and she congratulated herself on having managed" (191). This resonates with other portrayals of the female characters in Emecheta's other works. In Emecheta's works her female

characters work so hard in order to attain their traditional roles as wives, mothers and daughters. However, most of these female characters have to work hard in order to attain their personal goals. In *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) for example, Adah works so hard to earn a pay which is three times that her husband, Francis. This development makes Francis unhappy as he says: “her pay will be three times my own” (26-27). Adah’s income eventually helps her to become independent financially of Francis which makes her the breadwinner of the family. Also, in *Double Yoke* (1982), Emecheta brings to the fore the need for a woman to be hardworking. Ete Kamba, for example, describes his ideal wife this way: “a very quiet and submissive, a good cook, a good listener, and a good worker ... (26)

Nnu Ego’s rival, Adako, on the other hand has to abdicate her traditional responsibility as woman in the absence of Nnaife to become a public woman who trades in beans and papers which fetches money to buy a larger stall for herself. In this large stall, she decides to sell “abada material” for lappers. Adako’s success in creating wealth is expressed in the words of the narrator as “Adaku was living up to the meaning of her name “the daughter of wealth” (191). Adako’s smartness is revealed when she decides to relinquish her former stall by leasing it to another person just to take care of her rent. The sudden turnaround of Adako’s fortunes mesmerises Nnu Ego who insinuates: “you mean you won’t have to depend on men friends to do anything for you?” ‘No’, she replied. ‘I want to be a dignified single woman’ (191). These exploits by Adaku and Nnu Ego are indicative of the fact that a woman can work hard to amass wealth to be able to cater for herself and her children in the absence of a man’s support.

Another quality of the African woman that Emecheta writes about in *The Joys of Motherhood* is the reverence given to children more than material gains. Nnu Ego loses her child through miscarriage and she decides to stop trading during her second pregnancy ostensibly to forestall another miscarriage. She therefore concentrates solely on having a baby thereby neglecting any opportunity to make money through trading, but she prefers having a baby to trading which might make her lose another baby. For Nnu Ego, having children and making money are two opposing forces.

Again, Emecheta presents African women as people who should not resist the sexual pleasures of their husbands even though they might not be in the position to offer them. A case in point is when Nnaife welcomes his second wife to her marital home. Nnaife epitomises this depiction of women when he does not allow Nnu Ego any respite. Nnaife persistently demands to sleep with her as “his marital right” (44), and she has no option than to succumb to his sexual desires. To an extent, Nnu Ego perceives her husband as an unreasonably self-centered person whose only interest is to have sex with her: “being pounced upon by this hungry man” on the first night (44). The manner in which Nnaife exercises his sexual desires with his wife shows how women in patriarchal society are seen as object of men’s sexual gratification. It is therefore not surprising when Nnu Ego feels very much tired in the morning. The act of Nnaife pouncing on Nnu Ego and having forceful sex with her makes the reader aware of the fact that women in the patriarchal Ibo society regard men as their lords and that they could do anything they like to the women.

In addition, Emecheta depicts the African women as people who ensure peace and tranquility in the household. Agunwa, the first wife of Agbadi is characterised as someone who is peaceful and has the ability to calm down all her co-wives to ensure that they co-exist in Agbadi’s compound. Agbadi himself recognises this attribute when after Agunwa’s death he does not mince words in describing her as a woman who is caring and able to take good care of the household. By this assertion, Agbadi sees Agunwa as indispensable in her

courtyard and it is noteworthy that he gives her a befitting burial, by burying her in his compound.

Another woman who represents the peaceful nature of the African woman is Nnaife's first wife. When Nnaife brings Adaku, his late brother's wife home, any woman in her situation would have protested but she decides to create a peaceful atmosphere in the home for all of them to co-exist. She controls her temper and composes herself so well that those around will not see her as being overly jealous and unhappy. She remains very cool, calm and collected in the face of the emotional trauma that the presence of this new wife brings. Nnaife tries to tease her by telling her "try to sleep, too, senior wife" (138). In the face of all these challenges, she remembers that she has to let peace prevail. To smoke peace pipe, Nnu Ego decides to make peace with her co-wife to bring sanity to their home. Consequently, she pretends to be happy with the arrival of the new wife. She follows their tradition which enjoys a senior wife to instill peace in the house. The narrator thus presents Nnu Ego when he says: "A happy senior wife makes a happy household". (133).

It must be emphasised that in the patriarchal society of Iboza, the novelist Buchi Emecheta, presents the female characters as persons who prefer children more than their husbands because it is a belief that children tend to celebrate mothers more than fathers. To buttress this point, in this novel, Oshie gets the opportunity to travel abroad but Nnaife knowingly does not show up and only surfaces when Oshie has emplaned to United State of America. On Nnaife's arrival to the house in the evening, his wife demands to know why he has stayed away. Nnaife's reason for showing up late is that when in future his children become well to do it is their mother who will be the greater beneficiary not him, so it is better he goes to work and get money than to accompany the son to the airport (227-228). To add to the phenomenon of preference for men is the situation where in the novel women are regarded as people who are good at making babies only. In this light, any woman who is unable to give birth is given names. In the same breath, when Nnu Ego finds it difficult to give birth during her first marriage, her husband, Amatokwu sees her as useless and less human deserving of any good treatment.

Lastly, in the midst of male hegemony some women are willing to break new grounds to fight patriarchy. Consequently, the African woman is portrayed as someone who is capable of making some changes in her life when all odds are against her. The beautiful Owulum twins for example, did not have the opportunity of getting formal education but they later learn how to read and write against all odds. Also, Nnu Ego breaks new grounds in the mist of male hegemony by intimating that she would do all that she can to make sure her girls have the best that the world could offer to them. True to her words she offers a practical step to the realisation of this ambition through this speech: "I am not prepared to stay here and be turned into a mad woman just because I have no sons" (189). She does set her own standard by making sure that all her female children are educated.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussions, Emecheta has presented the African women positively and negatively in her novel even though the negative image far outweighs that of the positive. Positively, women appear as peaceful, assertive, enduring and caring mothers. Conversely, African women seem to be their own enemies, inferior to men, appendages of men, prisoners to their own husbands and created to give birth. This paper has explored issues central to the condition of the African woman such as, the gender imbalances in our patriarchal African society and the need to bridge these gender imbalances and the way forward.

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