

## **The Significance of the Theme of Marriage to Character Development in the Novels of Buchi Emecheta**

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**Abstract:** *Buchi Emecheta is one African writer who has excelled tremendously in the area of storytelling as far as issues related to mainstream African women's experience is concerned. She has written several novels that expose the plight of women in African cultures. This study purposely selected five novels of Emecheta namely Second-Class Citizen (1974), The Bride Price (1976), The Joys of Motherhood (1979), Destination Biafra (1982) and Kehinde (1994), and explores as its purpose how Emecheta uses characterisation and theme as tools to develop her heroines. In this light, the heroines are discussed precisely by looking at the choices they make in attaining self-actualisation or self-fulfilment. The discussion also examines the elements or factors that facilitate the success or otherwise of the heroines from developing or growing from states of powerlessness and subjection to states of maturity, where they take decisions for themselves, bearing in mind the consequences of their choices. Using the feminist literary criticism approach, the study concludes that Emecheta succeeds in using the development of the character of her heroines to develop the theme of marriage in the selected narratives.*

**Keywords:** *marriage, influence, character, woman, status quo ante, theme.*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

African Literature has been the domain of male writers and critics and has lacked what might be called the feminine point of view for a long time. This has been partly due to the paucity of female African novelists. The presentation of women in the African novel has been left almost entirely to male voices like Achebe, Amadi, Ngugi, Ousmane, Laye, Beti, Armah and Soyinka who were the early writers to arrive on the scene. These male novelists, who have presented the African woman largely within the traditional milieu, have generally communicated a picture of a male-dominated and male-oriented society. Achebe, Ngugi and others have portrayed women who complacently continue to fulfil the roles expected of them by their society and to accept the superiority of the men (Palmer, 1983). Valid as this viewpoint is, these male writers were probably capturing social reality and not necessarily championing the cause of the woman in fiction.

Despite the dominance of male writers in African literature, a new generation of critics, most of them women writers, is, however, making great impact on this male-dominated area.

However, today, the works of African women writers are assigned reading in university courses in women's studies, post-colonial literature and black women's writing. It was not until about two decades ago, however, that African women writers began to receive international recognition, although their male counterparts have enjoyed such privileges since Heinemann's publication of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Among the writers whose works helped to transform the presence of African women writers in literature is Buchi Emecheta. Her depiction of the experiences of African women, in general and Nigerian women, in particular, has challenged the stereotyped and idealised images of African women found in male texts. No discussion of African or black women's writing can be complete without her since she is one of the best-known women writers in Africa today, a position she shares with others such as Ama Ata Aidoo, Mariama Bâ, Assia Djebar, Bessie Head and Flora Nwapa.

### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

Chukwuma (1989), for example, traces the developmental features of Emecheta's feminism as seen in the portrayal of female characters from the slave girl prototype to the career mother and single fulfilled woman. Allan (1996) also surveys almost all of Emecheta's novels to observe the "trajectory or rape" in the narratives. Emeyonu (1996) identifies the anthropological posturings, the improved mastery of the novel form as well as the technique of language of some of Emecheta's novels. These are some of the works on Emecheta and they, among other works, do not seem to have addressed the development of the heroine in her novels.

### 1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to find out how the structure of Emecheta's personality is reflected in art, through the presentation and development of her heroines, particularly, through the choices they make in moving from a state of powerlessness and subjection to a state of self-actualisation or self-fulfilment and the various circumstances that made them assertive and triumph over oppressive situations they find themselves in, as portrayed in the selected novels. This research will be done by examining some elements of fiction such as theme, setting and plot, as these influence the development of the character and give an idea of the place of women in the novels of Emecheta. Particular focus will be on characterisation and the theme of marriage because these are the tools the researcher identifies as being used by Emecheta to develop the heroine. The analysis will specifically look at factors like education and migration (setting) that facilitate or shape the growth of the heroines in the novels.

### 1.3. Research Questions

The study is guided by the following questions:

1. What is the significance of the theme of marriage to character development?
2. How is the development reflected in the various aspects of the novel?

## 2. RELATED LITERATURE

This part of the study looks at the critical reception on Emecheta's works, particularly, the ones selected for the study. It looks at how her presentation of the female character has changed some of the stereotypical images of the woman that have dominated literature written by men for so long. The review is done novel by novel to examine the assertiveness of the heroines in the selected novels, with regards to choice-making, and also against the status quo ante. According to Emeyonu (2004), there has been a change on the literary scene in Africa. He asserts that there has been a rapid upsurge of writing by African women in the last two decades of the twentieth century and that this is a most striking phenomenon in the development of modern literature. Also, according to Chukwuma (1989), formerly, female characters nurtured ambitions which centred on marriage and procreation. Her other female obligations ranged further to cooking the family meals, honouring her husband's bed, on invitation and other times, merging with the home environment peacefully. Hence, Akubue's customary response to a complimentary question about his family is "they are quiet" (Achebe, 1964). In the city novels of Cyprian Ekwensi, characteristically, a woman's individuality is asserted only through prostitution. This appears to be the only way of bursting the system of male domination within the marriage institution. And Emecheta makes Adaku break her matrimonial shackles in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), also through prostitution. In both institutions of marriage and prostitution, man is still dominant, the difference being that in the latter only, the female calls the tune.

It is in the background of such female characterisation seen in the novels of Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (1957), *Arrow of God* (1964) and Elechi Amadi, *The Concubine* (1966), based on our past culture, that Emecheta emerges as a welcome diversion from the canon. Chukwuma (1989), in addition, comments on the type of characters created in Emecheta's novels. She states that "the woman is presented in her accepted social roles as daughter, sister, wife, mother, aunt and mistress".

This strong and positive characterisation of the heroine as described above is a development on the previous portraiture that was accorded her in novels by male authors. It can, therefore, be said that while tradition demands silent submission from women, Emecheta on the contrary, creates female characters that are vocal, sensitive and realistic. She then puts them in meaningful dialogic relationships simultaneously with the self and with others of the same situation, as we experience in

her novels. Women whose discourse communities are now shared by emphatic and like-minded participants articulate the hopes, fears and aspirations of women.

At the initial stages of Emecheta's novels, her heroines are portrayed as powerless characters who develop or grow through situations they encounter, to the end. Thus, they become aware of their servitude and strive at independence. Brown (1981) comments on Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* that "the emphasis on individual growth and self-reliance is more fully developed in this novel than in Emecheta's first novel, *In the Ditch*"; however, he also consistently deplores the heroine, Adah, in those sections where she is obviously displaying naivety, immaturity and ignorance – qualities commonly found among protagonists of the novel of personal development. According to Porter (1996a), as with all works belonging to the apprenticeship novel tradition, Adah's innocence and naivety serve as generic markers in the initial sections of the story.

He further says that significantly, *Second-Class Citizen* starts with a reference to Adah's "dream" of going to England. Using rhetoric that clearly emphasises her innocence, Adah mentions how, with the help of her father, she goes through adolescence with an exaggerated and false conception of Britain. Like her father, she grows up believing that the United Kingdom is synonymous with heaven. She makes a "secret vow" quite early to herself that "she would go to this United Kingdom one day" and she wrongly assumes that her arrival in the United Kingdom "would be the pinnacle of her ambition". This is similar to Emecheta's own dream she has about the UK before she finally goes, and this explains the autobiographical features in this particular novel.

Chukukere (1995) concludes on this book that Emecheta's greatest achievement, however, is in the creation and development of the new African woman. She raises the status of women through the ideals and achievements of the heroine, Debbie. Although Debbie does not succeed in her mission of reconciliation, she displays exceptional fortitude that remains unattained with personal motives. She takes part in the actual execution of the war and in her bid to help her country out of its difficulties, she suffers humiliation and deprivation. Thus, through her bravery in times of hardship and the other women's fortitude, the audience is endeared to women as a group. Without doubt, according to Chukukere, *Destination Biafra* is the kind of novel which could have created a major impact in the literary history of Africa if it had fully realised the ambitious themes it set out to explore. Its two main achievements lie in its successful exploration of the dilemma of the woman in time of military crisis and the extent to which the new independent woman overcomes the difficulties of her times.

This novel, technically, is supposed to be Emecheta's first novel and it has also received a lot of critical attention. Petersen (1992), for example, writes about Emecheta's *The Bride Price* as "a logical development" of Emecheta's autobiographical writing.

Petersen goes on to say that Emecheta continues to explore the injustices of caste, one of her main concerns in the first two books (*In The Ditch* and *Second-Class Citizen*), but the emphasis is somewhat different. In a patriarchal society, according to Beauvoir (1949), man is considered the norm. Everything is defined in terms of the masculine. In general, all who have masculinity as their biological trait are given power, priority, preference, and privilege.

*The Joys of Motherhood*, as Cynthia Ward points out, has been a gold mine for critics seeking authentic representations of the African woman. According to her, Emecheta's novels are often read as feminist parables conveying a message about indigenous social conditions (Quoted by Felski, 2003). Christian (1985), for example, sees *The Joys of Motherhood* as the tragic story of a victim who has yet to articulate her victimisation, a necessary step for change. She is destroyed by this lack of consciousness of her situation and by the silence in her society where the personal lives of women and wider social change have yet to be related. Umeh (1996) shares this view and also comments on *The Joys of Motherhood* that "in her *magnum opus*", Emecheta makes her strongest indictment against the powerful paternal presence, where the bride's father receives the bride price and the bride gets nothing in return for even her children belong to their father.

As Palmer (1983) rightly points out, Adaku is the "forerunner of women's liberation in African literature". As far as Adaku is concerned, the so-called love and happiness that married life supposedly brings is a sham.

Also, Bazin (1990) explores the "exclusionary practices" reflected in the thematic preoccupations of Emecheta's novels. She argues that "both of Emecheta's protagonists, Nnu Ego and Adaku, in *The Joys of Motherhood* achieve feminist consciousness, an awareness of power asymmetry in a particular

community, which allows them to dissolve gender inequities that elide their humanity and right to self-determination”.

According to Chukukere (1995), in terms of conception, *Destination Biafra*, if not total actualisation, is Buchi Emecheta’s most ambitious novel to date. It is a war novel and departs in subject matter from previous preoccupations. However, she continues to celebrate the lives of women caught up in the ravages of history

Also, according to Frank (1987), in *Destination Biafra*, Emecheta moves from the guerrilla battle of the sexes in *Double Yoke* to the historical and political reality of the Biafran war in Nigeria. It is a daring departure from the domestic preserve of most novels written by African women. *Destination Biafra* is one of the very few war novels within recent memory written by a woman, and as Emecheta says in her Foreword, “the subject is as they say ‘masculine’ but I feel a great sense of...achievement in having completed it.”

In addition, Nwachukwu-Agbada (1996) says of Debbie that she is the author’s “*la femme terrible*”, her notion of the modern woman. She is the iconoclast, questioning prevalent ideas and doing things differently. She further critiques her that in the only major assignment given to her by her creator, Debbie is a failure.

*Kehinde* is another landmark in Emecheta’s prolific literary career. According to Uwakweh (1996), in terms of subject matter, Emecheta’s depiction of female independence is indicative of her ideological commitment to feminism. In contrast to her clearly articulated vision of the African New Woman in *Destination Biafra*, Kehinde’s feminist struggle is marked by cultural alienation rather than integration. She is alienated from family, children and the benefits of extended kinship and she achieves her independence at the expense of her children. Sizemore (1996) also says that in *Kehinde*, Emecheta confronts African patriarchy directly in her portrayal of Kehinde Okolo’s life both in London and Nigeria. Kehinde represents the return of the diasporic, the postcolonial. Like Emecheta herself, Kehinde learns that marriage and homeland are not the only “places” for women. She discovers that there is room in the city of London for the diasporic and the post-colonial to achieve both place and space.

In addition, Berrian (1996) comments on Kehinde and says that consciously and deliberately, Kehinde is a flexible, adaptable person in her effort to redefine her identity in London. She moves beyond the concept that her existence is inseparable from her socio-historical background. Very much in tune with her spirituality via her twin, she transcends the duality that lies within her conscious and subconscious states of mind. The lesson is that something good can be gained from something bad. Out of pain and betrayal, Kehinde grows with age and experience. Her growth began with Albert’s duplicity which prepares her for a later encounter with a wealthy Arab sheik at a hotel where she worked (when she first returned to London after studying to be a social worker).

### 3. FEMINIST THEORY

This study adopts the feminist literary theory to analyse the selected works of Emecheta. This criticism is used to examine how Emecheta creates strong and assertive heroines who develop above their not-too significant roles given them in novels by some male writers, to challenge the status quo ante. The preference for this criticism is important because since the texts for the research are presented from within a predominantly female sensibility, some of which are autobiographical, it would help in examining and answering questions on the presentation of stereotypical images of women in African literature.

It is also because feminist literary criticism is both textual and contextual: textual, in that close reading of texts using the literary establishment’s critical tools is indicated; contextual, as it realises that analysing a text without some consideration of the world within which it has a material relationship is of little social value. So, the dichotomy between textual and contextual criticism, the perennial argument about form and content, common in literary circles finds some resolution here. This approach is also relevant to the study because it identifies gender-specific issues and recognises woman’s position internationally, as one of second-class status and seeks to correct that. It also helps in analysing how Emecheta has worked her internalisation of her Ibuza traditions into art. Particularly, this will create a platform for understanding the autobiographical elements in her novels.

Code (2000) defines feminist literary criticism as: “a critical form of knowledge which analyses the role that literary forms and practices, together with the discourses of literary criticism and theory, play in perpetuating or challenging hierarchies of gender, class, race and sexuality (p. 306).”

Some feminists call their field *feminisms* in order to underscore the multiplicity of points of view of its adherents and offer ways of thinking that oppose the traditional tendency to believe there is a single best point of view. DiYanni (2000) also upholds this opinion and notes that since there are many varieties of feminist criticism as presently practised, it would be better to think of feminist criticism in the plural as the criticism of feminists rather than to envision it as a single monumental entity.

Due to the multiplicity of points of view about feminism, this study relates some knowledge on the African feminist criticism. This is done to contextualise the study and it is also based on the consideration that the texts for the study are by an African and about Africans. This is probably because of the suggestion from Davies (1986) that “the social and historical realities of African women’s lives must be considered in any meaningful examination of women in African literature and of writings by African women writers” (p. 6).

The study employs both the Western and African views about feminist literary criticism to analyse the texts. Thus, the reference to the African brand of feminist criticism is made to aid the researcher bring out how a little more oppressed the African woman is than her Western counterpart. Thus the study uses the feminist literary criticism to focus on the texts to bring out how Emecheta presents her heroines to rise above their powerlessness to make informed choices to assert their individuality in a predominantly male dominated society. The criticism also deals with the author’s internalisation of her culture and how that influences the type of characters she creates and also how her heroines react to the situations they encounter in the novels. It, invariably, looks at how Emecheta has been influenced by her society and how she uses this influence to create characters who are given a voice to challenge the norms and structures of the society that oppresses women. That is, how Emecheta creates another invisible character who communicates with the heroines and guides them to attaining self actualisation.

#### **4. MARRIAGE AS AN INSTITUTION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HEROINE**

This study focuses on an analysis of the selected texts for the study, with particular focus on theme. The study analyses marriage and its role in the development of the heroine. It will also answer the two research questions: “What is the significance of the theme of marriage to character development?” and “How is the development reflected in the various aspects of the novel?” This clearly helps to bring out the significance of the theme of marriage to the development of the heroine. Emecheta tackles the subject of marriage in all the five selected novels but in varying ways. In *Second-Class Citizen*, the focus is on the woman as a single mother of five, in *The Bride Price*, the young bride; *The Joys of Motherhood*, motherhood; *Destination Biafra*, the woman as single or a spinster and in *Kehinde*, the woman as a mother in a polygamous home. In all of the situations in which the heroines find themselves, they make life-threatening choices, which either make or break them. It is on the level of the difficulty of the choices the heroines make and what informs the choices that the study seeks to establish the development or growth of these heroines. The study gives an insight into the concepts that are used for the analysis and an analysis each of the novels under study, indicating the various aspects of the theme of marriage and how they apply in helping the heroines assert their individuality in each of the novels.

Thus, Emecheta employs the theme of marriage to give readers insight into a specific aspect of human nature or of the human condition as conveyed through the actions and imageries of the heroines (Adah, Aku-nna, Nnu Ego, Debbie and Kehinde) in her novels. This study, therefore, examines how Emecheta uses theme as an essential tool of development of the heroines in the selected novels under study.

##### **4.1. Second Class Citizen**

The theme of marriage is first introduced when the heroine, Adah, makes an important decision concerning her marriage to Francis. Against the request of her mother, Ma and the other members of her family, Adah chooses to marry Francis, an accounting student, instead of one of the old and wealthy baldies who could pay the huge bride price placed on her.

The true test of the woman continues to be the marriage institution. In this closed-in arena, every married woman is to fight out her survival as an individual. The marriage paradox lies in the fact that it is both sublimating and subsuming. Through it, a woman attains a status acclaimed by society and fulfils her biological need of procreation and companionship. Through it too, the woman's place of a second-class citizen is emphasised and too easily, she is lost in anonymity to the benefit and enhancement of the household. Adah in *Second-Class Citizen* is made to understand just that: she is married and so is subsumed completely to her husband's people - her earnings, her attention and her entire self. This is heightened in her own case because she is estranged from her family for the non-payment of her bride price. Adah's situation in this male-dominated society does not get any better from this point onwards. The hold of patriarchy on Adah grows from bad to worse until she eventually breaks free from her marriage to Francis.

To begin with, when both Adah and Francis decide to go to the United Kingdom, Francis' parents convince Adah to "stay in Nigeria, finance her husband, give his parents expensive gifts occasionally, help in paying the school fees for some of the girls, look after her young children..." (p. 24). Thus, Adah, who has nurtured a dream of going abroad and has worked and saved up enough money for herself, her husband and children to travel, finds rather that she is to stay back in Nigeria, saddled with the responsibility of paying for Francis to go alone. Even though this set-back frustrates Adah in her plans to travel abroad, she does not give up on her dreams. She changes her tactics and instead of direct confrontation and antagonism, a stance that will end in futility, she decides to be "as cunning as a serpent but as harmless as a dove..." (p. 24). With that, she succeeds in enforcing her wish by getting her parents-in-law to acquiesce to her joining her husband in London.

When Adah finally arrives in London, she is given a cold welcome and this is captured in the title of the chapter titled, "A cold welcome" (p. 32). This cold welcome Adah receives on her arrival in London foreshadows the eventual difficulties that she goes through and also the final break-up of the marriage between her and Francis. He points out to her that:

"You must know, my dear young *lady*, that in Lagos you may be a million publicity officers for the American; you may be earning a million pound a day; you may have hundreds of servants; you may be living like an elite, but the day you land in England, you are a second-class citizen (p. 37)."

Adah begins to notice that the country England is far different from the fairyland she had been brought up to conjure. Worse, she realises that Francis, who had always been dependent on her, has become even more manipulative - in England. His lifestyle is now characterized by gross antisocial behaviour, a feeling of inferiority, laziness and utter irresponsibility. Adah tries at first to support the family and take care of the home but it also becomes clear to her that Francis' irresponsibility is in direct proportion to his desire to create more children. When Adah confronts him with this obvious domestic problem, Francis becomes defensive and begins to brutalise her.

There are incidents that culminate in Adah finally leaving Francis. The decision to leave him is conceived of when she gives birth to Bubu. When Francis does not show much concern to her at the hospital, Adah warns him that:

"If you don't go out of this ward, or stop talking, I shall throw this milk jug at you. I hate you now, Francis, and one day I shall leave you (p. 127)."

When Adah decides to go in for family planning (the cap) without Francis' consent, he beats her so much so that their neighbours have to come in to save Adah. This embarrasses Adah and she decides that their marriage is over:

"Her marriage with Francis? It was finished as soon as Francis called in the Nobles and the other tenants. She told herself that she could not live with such a man. Now everybody knew she was being knocked about, only a few weeks after she had come out of the hospital. Everybody now knew that the man she was working for and supporting was not only a fool, but that he was too much of a fool to know that he was acting foolishly (p. 155)."

At this point, events in the story are almost at the climax. Adah realizes that Francis can never change and also would want his failure to be her failure too. This also marks the point where the will of the female is asserted and she decides to confront the patriarchal representative in the form of Francis, her husband.

This incident marks the climax of the novel and Adah makes the final decision to leave Francis: she leaves with the children. When Francis still traces them to their new home and attacks Adah again, she resorts to the law: “No, the law must step in”. (p. 184).

The finality in the tone of voice and the determined manner in which Adah decides to formally accept responsibility for the children (which had always been hers anyway) are decidedly different from her behaviour in most of the earlier scenes, situations in which she was invariably portrayed as a compliant character. She obviously understands now that she was totally wrong in looking up to Francis as a source of support; she also realises that if she wants to succeed both in her creative endeavours and in the rearing of her children, she has to take full control of her life and this she does. Thus, in the end, Adah asserts her psychological independence. Adah’s reaction and the decision she takes, under the circumstances she finds herself in, is similar to what Emecheta herself does in her life. She also eventually leaves her husband, when life with him becomes unbearable, and decides to take control of her life and those of her children. In this way, she (Adah) shows that she is now ready to be in complete control of her own and her children’s lives.

### 4.2. The Bride Price

Like in *Second-Class Citizen*, the title of the second novel for the discussion, *The Bride Price*, embodies the economic value that is placed on the woman. That is, the aspect of marriage dealt with in this novel is the issue of the bride price. *The Bride Price* (1976) is Emecheta’s first fully-fledged novel and pursues with the same vigour previous concerns, especially those that relate to the disadvantages of women (Chukukere, 1995).

In this novel, the theme of marriage is introduced right at the beginning of the novel and its economic importance to the members of the bride’s family, other than the bride and heroine’s personal fulfilment is accentuated in the title of the book and also in the name of the heroine, Aku-nna (father’s wealth). Like Adah, Aku-nna is also insignificant in her patriarchal society and the only benefit she is expected to bring to her family, for which reason she is kept in school, after her father’s death, is the wealth her family will get when she is married. It is for this reason that Okonkwo manifests his attitude in his response when his son, Iloba, asks him why he (Okonkwo) should waste money on Aku-nna.

This theme is developed further when the heroine, Aku-nna, begins her menstruation, which also marks her maturity. Her rapid maturity corresponds with the awareness of the limitations in her roles in traditional Ibuza society. She bears a double burden by the single act of marriage, which is the main focus of this chapter. But Ma Blackie’s plans of college for her son, Nna-nndo and the burden of raising the entire Odi family from poverty to wealth rest on her shoulders. Consequently, the arrival of her menstrual cycle signals for Okonkwo and others her readiness to accept the responsibilities of wifedom and motherhood.

The complications in the story arise from the heroine’s confrontation with and defiance of the unwritten law that forbids a marriage between a free-born and a person of slave ancestry. Aku-nna’s social exposure through education has combined with an individual will to enable her to direct her life the way that suits her best. Rather than become a passive actor, she demonstrates through her revolution, the women’s right to choose her own husband and this is a clear instance of the female standing up to what she believes in and the feminist criticism serves this well.

Through the careful depiction of the love between Aku-nna and Chike, Buchi Emecheta ensures the audience’s sympathy for them. Both characters are convincing enough and show boundless love for each other. Chike is not only the source of Aku-nna’s academic emancipation but he fulfils those roles which Ma Blackie’s undue involvement with Okonkwo’s family enables her to neglect. Thus, he provides the heroine with emotional, psychological and physical support as she matures into a woman. Chike’s humane and gentle treatment of Aku-nna is sharply contrasted with the rough and uncouth attentions which his rivals, Okoboshi and Chigboe’s son pay the heroine (p. 120-125). In Aku-nna’s love and pledge of undying devotion to Chike, she recognises those qualities that nurture human affection.

The heroine not only suffers the indignity of attempted rape by Okoboshi but through her own admission of moral laxity, she is exposed to further humiliation at the hands of his family. Aku-nna fights for her honour and bravely escapes Okoboshi’s ultimate defilement. She figures out a way to play the traditions of her people against themselves. She makes up a story telling him that she is not a

virgin. Okoboshi believes her, spits on her, curses her and knocks her out of his bed into unconsciousness for that night. Aku-nna sacrifices her pride and her reputation of being a virgin, highly valued in the Igbo culture at that time, and thereby succeeds in keeping the purported marriage from being consummated the marriage night. Since their tradition determines that this act with a descendant of a slave is a taboo, Aku-nna wins a victory. She delays the rape by insulting Okoboshi and this sets up her ultimate escape to freedom.

However, as she elopes with Chike to neighbouring Ugheli, her dilemma intensifies, for Okonkwo will not still accept the bride price from Chike's father, the elder Ofulue. The marriage thus remains traditionally unrecognised. Although the couple marries and settles down, Aku-nna is unable to totally rise above the limitations of tradition against which she has rebelled. Her nightmares or hallucinations about the consequences of the unpaid bride price become real enough. Although Chike protects her through a continuous reinforcement of his love, social tradition has become so ingrained in the heroine's mind that she is finally destroyed by fear and the psychological torture she goes through.

Finally, the novelist's statement encapsulates the core of Aku-nna's dilemma. Her revolt against entrenched notions of female subjugation through limiting social norms has not been wholly successful. This is because rather than bring ultimate self-fulfilment, it has attracted grave consequences. And the heroine's final destruction, according to Lloyd Brown, (1981), "... is itself a demonstration of the degree to which her will is dominated despite her conscious act of revolt" (p. 52).

#### 4.3. The Joys of Motherhood

Also, the third novel, *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), is described by Lloyd Brown as a "culminating achievement in the literary career of Buchi Emecheta". The aspect of the theme of marriage that is explored to the heroine's disadvantage in this novel is motherhood. The novel is set in both rural Ibadan and urban Lagos and is a culminating achievement in the literary career of Buchi Emecheta (Chukukere, 1995). Against the background of a society characterised by well-articulated and defined sexual roles, the writer pursues her concern with the fate of women by creating heroines who develop above the status quo ante. That women remain poor, oppressed and sexually manipulated is powerfully demonstrated through the heroine, Nnu Ego. She is the daughter of a very important and titled man and her only desire is to become a mother, above all a mother of sons. Because she is unable to conceive during her first marriage, she is humiliated and eventually made to leave this family and return to her father's compound. She is sent to Lagos to marry the less attractive Nnaife whom her family thinks will be more patient and kinder to her because he is not a handsome man.

Nnu Ego later gives birth to a boy who brings her great happiness but the boy dies suddenly and she, in complete despair, attempts suicide. She recovers and after a time, she is rewarded with many children. Yet her life is tarnished by disappointment, nail-biting agony, regret and misfortune. Her life in Lagos is one of economic hardship and often-acute poverty, so that her children are often malnourished. She bears all these sufferings in the hope that her children will later take care of her. She submits to a joyless marriage with a negligent and often absent husband. Her sons, rather than supporting her in old age, leave home to study overseas and do not give her the gratitude she expects. In the final poignant pages, Nnu Ego dies alone and unattended by the side of the road, with no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to.

Against the background of a society characterised by well-articulated and defined sexual roles, the writer, Emecheta, pursues her concern with the fate of women. That women remain poor, oppressed and sexually manipulated is powerfully demonstrated through the central female character and heroine, Nnu Ego, one of the most complex creations in the entire Buchi Emecheta canon (Chukukere: p. 186) Although informed by similar traditional and social conventions, Nnu Ego's experiences proceed from where those of Aku-nna and Ojebeta terminate. In *The Bride Price* and *The Slave Girl*, the significance of the heroine's dilemma lies not as much from within their marital lives as it does from forces external to them. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego's dilemma arises from the discord within matrimony, specifically, motherhood, which is discussed as the theme used to oppress the heroine. Through Nnu Ego, the writer states her most convincing case against female oppression and male intransigence.



Emecheta uses this theme of motherhood not only to construct Nnu Ego's subjectivity but also to reconstruct women's sexual identity, to move beyond gender as sexual difference. Gender identity is portrayed as biologically achieved through birth and nurturing (especially of sons). Nnu Ego's experience is no idealised or romanticised picture of motherhood. Her identity, though biologically achieved through childbirth, can only be understood with the context of sexual politics around which having children is inscribed and valued in Ibo society.

Nnu Ego's problems are set off, like the other heroines being discussed in this work, with her first marriage to Amatokwu. Similar to Aku-nna, her name has an economic attachment to it: "twenty bags of cowries". In effect, just like all of Emecheta's heroines, the only benefit their families expect from them is the bride price they will get when they get married. That is, a daughter's value to her parents is only as high as the bride price she can fetch. The Igbo's way of thinking is that daughters are raised to glorify another man when her turn comes to produce male offspring. It is against this background that when Nnu Ego is not able to bear children in her first marriage with Amatokwu, she is brutalised, traumatised and cast out of her husband's affections, moved to a nearby hut reserved for older wives and put to work in the farm – for "if (she) can't produce sons at least (she) can help harvest yams."

It is in her attempt to avoid a re-occurrence of the psychological trauma of having and losing a baby that when Nnu Ego has other children, she chooses to devote her all to raising them. She, as did other women in the Igbo society, bore many children in the hope that she would have someone to take care of her in her old age, as this was an Igbo custom.

Nnu Ego struggles to take care of her children, to the extent that she deems it better for her to draw with poverty in sacrifice for a better future for her children than for her to live a fashionable life. Her sons are trained at school: Oshia goes to the United States to be more educated; Adim persists through secondary school at St. Gregory's College and later goes to Canada. Taiwo marries well to an Ibo educated man in church but Kehinde, her twin sister, the "one", runs away to a Yoruba man, the son of a butcher to get married. Only Taiwo of the grown children is a consolation to her parents.

After all her struggles to be a mother in a predominantly patriarchal society, Nnu Ego philosophises on her situation and her apparent reward for her motherhood. The only acknowledgment she gets is the remark by dreamers like the lorry driver:

"Oh, you are a rich madam. You must tell me where you stay; I like to know important people. You see, when you talk to them, they give you ideas of how they made it. A son in America? Goodness, you must be full of joy, madam! (p. 223)"

She, however, does not deem it worth the while to reply to this driver who "preferred to live in his world of dreams rather than face reality". She questions the premium placed on motherhood and rationalises that perhaps, her own reward is not measurable in material artefacts as cars, clothes and jewellery but rather is predicated on the satisfaction of bearing them, of being the instrument of their being and education and so of their success.

She finally breaks down and dies by the roadside, a broken woman, a poignant reminder of Virginia Woolf's observation that "Often nothing tangible remains of a woman's day". In Nnu Ego's case, days made up of repetitive tasks coalesce into a lifetime of intangibility. She, however, receives, in death, the attention which her sons deny her in life. Nnu Ego's dilemma is that of a woman whose aspirations crumble at the hands of the children to whom she has devoted her life. Buchi Emecheta argues, through the heroine, that women in Nigeria need not achieve status through motherhood. This is because motherhood does not always guarantee social and financial security. Viewed thus, the title of the story becomes ironic.

Emecheta draws provocative images of polygamy that contradict existing literary models. Through her presentation, she denies the social and economic benefits of the institution and the common view that it does not erode a woman's self-respect. The novelist is at pains to link poverty with polygamy. Although it is seen to serve its purpose in the traditional sector where the socio-economic forces enable a man to control his vast empire of wives and property, in the urban sector (with its emphasis upon money economy), male privileges are often eroded thus, Nnu Ego finds upon arriving in Lagos that she has to contend with a type of poverty unknown to her at Ibo. Nnaife's brother's death compounds their difficulties as Nnaife is forced by tradition to inherit his brother's four wives. Also, having had her husband to herself in Lagos, Nnu Ego is emotionally unable to accommodate the presence of Adaku, the junior wife, who arrives from home to join them. Female jealousy ensues and

Nnu Ego is deeply affected as Nnaife gleefully makes love to Adaku in her presence. Both women soon grow to suspect each other's intentions towards their children and each one is on her guard lest the other might harm her own children.

It must be noted that in spite of the author's anger at this scenario, it is possible to glean from the novel the economic and social reasons that must have given rise to polygamy. Thus, the arrangement whereby Nnaife inherits all his elder brother's wives on the latter's death seems to ensure both sexual and economic provision for the wives within the traditional set-up. It, therefore, seems to make sound sense. But the author concentrates on the misery and deprivation polygamy can bring; far from being an economic panacea, it can lead to economic disaster. While the traditional woman might accept it placidly, Nnu Ego, who has become somewhat alienated during her sojourn in Lagos, is powerfully aware of its disadvantages and through her, we are made to see the misery that polygamy can bring, particularly in the urban situation.

It might, of course, be objected that even in the novel itself, polygamy survives triumphantly in the traditional milieu within which it was meant to operate originally and that the strains begin to appear only when it is translated to the urban situation where the stresses of urban life – the scramble to ensure a decent standard of living and the subsequent erosion of the husband's authority – would inevitably result in its death knell. The objection is valid and one might perhaps argue that it is unfair of Emecheta to make a judgement of polygamy based on the urban experience. However, Emecheta is generally concerned with the fate of women, not merely with an analysis of polygamy. In the drift from the rural traditional to the urban area, polygamy has been translated in many African societies, with grim consequences for women and Buchi Emecheta, therefore, opposes polygamy both as a source of female humiliation and as the reason for the economic deprivation which its victims, especially women, suffer.

Furthermore, the high value placed on having children, especially the male issue, enables the novelist to make important contributions about the position of women. Through the experiences of Adaku and Nnu Ego, she calls upon society to review its placement of high value regarding the importance of children in the lives of women. Having sons is what consolidates a woman's marriage and endear her to her husband and his family. When Nnu Ego gives birth to her second set of twins (both girls), her husband, Nnaife

“...was not very pleased with the outcome: ‘all this ballyhoo for two more girls! If one had to have twins, why girls, for Olisa's sake?’ (p. 186)

The arrival of the twin daughters also has a subduing effect upon Nnu Ego and makes her feel more inadequate than ever. To this, the author comments: “Men-all they were interested in were male babies to keep their names going. But did not a woman have to bear the woman-child who would later bear the sons? (p. 186)”

Her awareness of the fact that her role as wife and mother imprisons her in a life of toil for others, at the expense of her own well-being, is expressed with the intensity of a primal scream and this constitutes the strongest feminist statement in the novel. The heroine's death reinforces the irony of the fate of the woman in the typical African society. It asks the African woman to re-examine her role in her suffering, for she is indeed the author of her own misfortune. The author's appeal to the African woman is conceived on a much higher plane than appears to be manifested on the surface. Emecheta seems to be ideologically urging African women to rise, for they have nothing to lose but their chains. This is the idea that is surreptitiously woven into the apparently deceptive title, *The Joys of Motherhood*, for in her present circumstances, the African woman has no joys alive or dead. In “after-death”, when she attains a higher place, she is still beset by problems arising from men's fundamental image of the woman in their midst and women's unquestioning acceptance of that image and all that it entails. Despite the insights that Nnu Ego gains about her present predicaments, she becomes handicapped in liberating herself and she remains, to the end of her life, both victim and collaborator. Her psychological awareness of her situation, however, is a step in the right direction towards self-liberation.

Although the heroine, Nnu Ego, dies at the end of the novel, Emecheta's handling of her situation not only reveals her maturity in her treatment of her theme but also manifests her remarkable growth.

#### 4.4. Destination Biafra

As was seen in the previous discussions, there is a shift from documentary novels such as *Second-Class Citizen* to more fictionalised narratives such as *The Bride Price* and *The Joys of Motherhood*. *Destination Biafra* constitutes another stage in Emecheta's writing. Here, a woman is at the centre of political events and her issue is that she would prefer to be a spinster than to be in a marriage of convenience. Debbie Ogedemgbe in *Destination Biafra* (1982) is a young Oxford-trained lady, an intellectual, who comes back to her country to encounter an impending major civil war. Rather than marry according to the expectations of her rich Government Minister parents, she also *chooses* to join the Federal army as a teacher in the academy. Events change when she is assigned by His Excellency, the duty of persuading the rebel leader, Abosi, an old acquaintance of hers, to stop the war. Debbie undertakes this perilous journey to the Eastern part of the country without government protection and is raped twice by both federal and rebel troops. When she does get to Abosi, it is already late and the human cost great.

She rejects an offer of marriage made by her white boyfriend, Alan Grey and chooses to devote her life to caring for the orphaned children of the war. Most importantly, she promises to write the story of the war: "I shall tell those orphans the story of how a few ambitious soldiers from Sandhurst tried to make their dream a reality". Thus, Debbie, in her humanitarian outlook, projects the female's widening social options for achieving individuality. Her role in this novel shows the shift of the author's focus on the heroine from domesticity to the warring nation and this emphasises the point that Emecheta's heroines have grown out of their domestic confinement.

The theme of marriage in this novel is introduced to readers right from the beginning. Readers are left in no doubt over Debbie's feminism: neither marriage nor motherhood is a tenable option for her. She states her ideological beliefs quite early in the novel.

Debbie's philosophy is significant for several reasons. Her belief in the individuality of the female alienates her from her parents' lifestyle, especially the passivity of her mother. The new woman is one that shuns wealth and ostentatious living, preferring rather to demonstrate her significance through more concrete and nationalist goals. Debbie's revulsion at her father's greed and extravagance shows the extent to which a man's inordinate ambitions condemn him in the eyes of his children. She rejects the easy submissive role her parents expect her to play with regard to their choice of a marital partner for her. In a society that is essentially patriarchal, her total liberation and independence of mind represent the author's vision of the woman who has finally shed the burden of obedience to outmoded social values, as experienced by Nnu Ego in the *Joys of Motherhood*. Thus, in effect, the consciousness Emecheta created in her earlier heroines has developed or grown into independence of mind and boldness to make self-actualising decisions in her new woman.

Through Debbie's relationship with Alan Grey, the novelist finally creates a woman who asserts her independence in a most radical manner. Debbie is black and Alan Grey, white. Both are lovers and this is without any commitment towards marriage. Indeed, Debbie insists that the relationship should be purely one of convenience.

Her choice of a white lover in rural Africa is perhaps meant to show the extent to which the novelist believes in women's liberation and freedom. This makes Debbie not just a new woman but an extra trail-blazer. As Oladele Taiwo notes, "The fact that she is openly in love with a white man in a tribal society shows to what extent she has become detribalised" (1984: 122). It is worthy of note that Buchi Emecheta has not allowed the liberation of African women to evolve naturally from existing social structures and situations. In her haste, she has crudely imposed upon her heroine an obnoxious practice which is neither commonplace in Africa today nor characterises the pattern of lives of European women from whom she has obviously derived some of her ideals.

Debbie's dilemma in her fictive experience consists in the denial of the legitimacy of her self-conceived roles, her bitter experiences in pursuance of her ideals and the extent to which these ideals finally remain unfulfilled. So completely and psychologically liberated is Debbie from limiting traditional social norms that her actions often embarrass elders like Mrs. Stella Ogedemgbe, Debbie's mother. Mrs. Ogedemgbe berates her and other girls for carrying guns and smoking cigarettes instead of being responsible wives and mothers (p. 108). Thus, Emecheta's new woman in Debbie is a prostituted variety of the patriarchal woman. Also anticipating the difficulties Debbie might encounter during her trip to Biafra, Mrs. Ogedemgbe advises her not to travel. The heroine, on the other hand,

has grown into a toughened independent woman and insists, through her refusal, upon her right to determine the course of her life. In her independence, however, she is either refused recognition or becomes sexually exploited. We are told that the Igbo soldiers she disarms view her attempts at soldiering with "...undistinguished amusement as if to say, 'Whatever you do, however much you are armed and in command now, you are still a woman'" (p. 75).

This type of social attitude is what Chijioke Abosi (one of the senior officers of the military) draws her attention to when Debbie informs him of her wish to join the army. In a more humiliating way, Grey exploits Debbie's show of independence to his own sexual advantage. He enjoys sex with her without any commitment to marriage. He feels disgusted at her rape and does not associate with her on that level anymore. However, prompted by pity, he half-heartedly proposes marriage to her in order to salve his conscience and show his magnanimity. But Debbie is already attuned to the false notes in Grey's behaviour and rejects him precisely because of those reasons for which he proposes marriage. This is how she makes the final break with Alan and the exploitative tendencies that he represents.

Debbie's vow to "mother" the orphans is in itself an acknowledgement of the centrality of children in African culture. This role defines her African female identity, her recognition of women's roles as nurturers and preservers. More importantly, it also makes her a veritable symbol of Emecheta's African New Woman, indicating that the African woman has grown and enacting the author's own psychological development.

#### 4.5. Kehinde

The last of the novels for the discussion in the study is *Kehinde* (1994), a novel which focuses on polygamy and men's infidelity to their spouses. With *Kehinde*, Emecheta returns to the background and plot that gave rise to her first successful novels. The book tells of the collapse of a happy marriage of two Nigerians living in England. However, the heroine of this new tale is no longer a 'second-class citizen'. On the contrary, she is early on described as a competent bank clerk in line for promotion to the post of branch manager and as a woman who shares with her husband ownership of a house in London. The novelist uses this new situation of economic independence to deal with an especially unfair predicament in which African women can be caught.

Kehinde Okolo has been married to Albert Okolo for over eighteen years. Bored in London, Albert is so determined to return to Nigeria to be someone, to show off his own lifestyle and his material success that he insists on his pregnant wife aborting her foetus so that he can go home in style. After the abortion, Kehinde makes the mistake of remaining in London to sell their house, while Albert, followed by their children, Joshua and Bimpe, moves to Nigeria. Once home, it does not take long before Albert marries Rike, a university professor and gives her two children. Although Kehinde is unable to sell their house, she takes the advice of Taiwo, her dead twin who appears in a dream, and warns her to go home and give Albert "the attention he needs to survive" in Nigeria. In Nigeria, Kehinde – jobless and lonely – finds her polygamous household unbearable. When her London-based friend, Moriammo, sends her a plane ticket to return to England, Kehinde chooses to accept the offer. That is, she considers what is in her best interest and for her own benefit. Since her own rejects her, she makes a decision for the foreign which seems more accommodating. Back in London, Kehinde earns a first degree, secures a good-paying job and begins an affair with a younger man.

Kehinde is happy in her marriage and happy in London. She has a secure place in her joint ownership of the house, her supportive family and a good friend at the bank (a Muslim Nigerian woman named Moriammo), as well as the freedom of a well-paying job and the status of being a married woman.

Albert, however, is anxious to go home and this desire reveals him as a traditional African patriarch. His sisters urge him to return to Nigeria and take his place as head of the family. Albert "played to perfection the role of the Igbo family man in London. But he was far from satisfied with its restrictions...he needed more room to breathe. As Kehinde was perfectly well aware, behind the veneer of westernisation, the traditional Igbo man was alive and strong, awaiting an opportunity to reclaim his birthright" (p. 35).

Albert reveals the selfishness in his desire to return home when he forces Kehinde to have an abortion so that she will not miss her promotion at the bank and thus be able to pay for their passage home. Both as Roman Catholic and as a Nigerian, Albert knows abortion is wrong but he rationalises that they "are in a strange land, where you do things contrary to your culture" (p. 15). Albert does not fully

realise, however, exactly how contrary to his culture the abortion is. After the abortion, Kehinde has a dream in which Taiwo, her *child*, her personal spirit who is also the spirit of her twin who died in the womb, comes to tell her that the baby that she aborted was the spirit of their father who was returning to protect Kehinde. Kehinde is devastated and feels estranged from Albert.

Kehinde is culturally ambiguous and her identity crisis is evident in three areas of experience: her marriage, her motherhood and her rebellion (Uwakweh, 1996). For the purpose of this chapter, only marriage is discussed, to find out how this theme is used by Emecheta to develop the heroine, Kehinde. Her portrayal raises a crucial question: Can the message of African feminism be projected through a culturally ambiguous protagonist? The character of Kehinde fails to integrate successfully the author's own African feminist aspirations and I am inclined to attribute the protagonist's identity crisis to Emecheta's own feminist ambivalence.

The marriage institution has always been a site of feminist struggle (Chukwuma, 1990). Emecheta opens with this scenario and leads us through Kehinde's final rebellion. Her sexual revolt is comparable to Amaka's in Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough* (1982). But unlike Amaka whose initial perception of her role and her conditioned acceptance confines her within the traditional cultural belief of her society, Kehinde is already assertive in marriage as her story unfolds; she has achieved a degree of equality with her husband in their sixteen years of marriage. She talks to her husband, Albert, less formally and relates to him as "a friend, a compatriot, a confidant." These are the very qualities that Debbie Ogedemgbe saw lacking in her parents' marriage, causing her to reject the submergence that the marriage institution imposes on the African female. Artistically, this novel is told from the feminist point of view and Kehinde's initial assertiveness erodes the significance or import of her rebellion at the end of the novel. Furthermore, her cultural ambiguity projects her identity crisis. The warning signs of this crisis are exhibited at the outset. In a heated argument between Albert and Kehinde over the need for an abortion, she asserts categorically, "my dreams about home are confused. I haven't a clear vision what I'm supposed to be looking for there" (p. 22).

Being a traditional Nigerian male at heart, Albert regrets the restrictions of their marital relationship. He pines for male freedom in a Nigerian environment, a luxury he could not afford in Britain. Albert regrets the erosion of male authority and rights that residence in Britain has imposed on his marriage. When he gives in to his sisters' demands to come home, it is not just because "he pined for sunshine, freedom, easy friendship, warmth;" it is also because he wants to build his own house, to be someone by Nigerian standards, something he feels he has not accomplished in Britain. This bespeaks a basic insecurity in his relationship with his wife, Kehinde, focused on his lack of claim over the house on London Terrace. Kehinde's professional and legal status as wife in Britain also appears to threaten his male ego.

In addition, in marriage, to say that the female's search for independence is directly linked to her subjugation is stating the obvious. Interestingly enough, Kehinde's experience within the patriarchal institution of polygamy reflects Emecheta's ambivalence on this issue. There is a peculiarly Western oriented individualism to Kehinde's struggle which contrasts with Emecheta's dramatisation of the African communal lifestyle inherent in this institution.

If Kehinde is meant to illustrate the positive aspects of polygamy, Emecheta's depiction of the protagonist reveals a tension between her feminism and her allegiance to African culture. Kehinde's experience in polygamy appears to expose a traditional institution which devalues and humiliates women. Simultaneously, Emecheta delineates its positive aspects in terms of extended kinship and sharing of the responsibilities of child care.

Having taken the trouble to go home, Kehinde does not wait to assess the possibilities of her new marital situation or to resolve the problem of her unemployment. She is driven more by the humiliation and the trauma of being a dependent senior wife without status, the lack of attention from Albert and her unfulfilled dreams of a celebrated "been-to" madam. There is neither the squabble common among co-wives in a polygamous marriage nor any strong suggestions that Rike's behaviour is anathema to Kehinde. Exhibition of jealousy in this polygamous relationship is on Kehinde's part alone because she sees herself as older, less attractive and dependent. As a result, she feels cheated, unrecognised and undervalued in her new position. Kehinde sees herself more and more as an outcast, a situation that deepens her alienation from family and the benefits of extended kinship. When her inability to find employment further erodes her self-confidence as a senior wife, Kehinde strikes out alone, taking the first opportunity that presents itself.

Also, Kehinde's letter to Moriammo is a painful *cri de coeur*, a plea for release from the humiliation of her financial dependence on a husband who has betrayed their love. The single most compelling factor of female subjugation was her economic dependence on the male, and the social demands that made a woman give all her earnings to the home because her identity lies there (Chukwuma, 1990).

## 5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study has discussed the theme of marriage and how Emecheta uses it to develop the heroines in the selected novels. That is, the heroines move from a state of powerlessness and subjection to a state of self-awareness and maturity where they are able to take decisions for themselves, to break away from all forms of oppression (patriarchy inclusive) and to assert their individuality. It has been revealed from the discussion that the main characters are all females, just as the feminist criticism prescribes. Thus, from Adah through Aku-nna, Nnu ego, Debbie to Kehinde, these heroines find themselves in marriages in predominantly patriarchal societies which uphold the values of males at all standards.

The analysis shows that when Adah realises that she is not able to succeed in her marriage to Francis because he wants his failure to be her failure too, she opts out of the marriage with her children and from the narration, she begins life afresh with a promising future ahead, just as Emecheta does in her life. When Aku-nna is kidnapped and forced into an arranged marriage to Okoboshi, she rejects him and elopes with her chosen lover, Chike, who is an *oshu* (slave). This brings a lot of shame on Aku-nna and her final death when she gives birth to her first child. Also, in Nnu Ego's marriages, motherhood is a major issue. Thus, a woman's worth is measured by the number of children (males preferably) she has. A childless woman is, therefore, considered "a half woman", a failed woman. She is despised and eventually sacked by her first husband, Amatokwu, when she is not able to have babies in her first marriage to him. Eventually, when she is able to have a number of them in her second marriage to Nnaife, she decides to sacrifice her all to give them a future so she can enjoy her old age. This, however, does not happen, for she dies a loner. In addition, Debbie, who is the daughter of a wealthy finance minister, also asserts her independence in a most radical manner. Though black, she dates a white boyfriend, Alan Grey, and turns down a possible chance of marriage with him and opts rather, for a role in the army to fight for national peace. She turns his proposal down because she "would never agree to a marriage like" her parents', "in which the two partners were never equal".

Finally, Kehinde, who finds that her husband, Albert returned home to Nigeria only to claim his "birth right", which is patriarchy, decides to leave him and go back to London to continue with her life. When she realises that she cannot cope with polygamy, with its ramifications in the African context, she takes a decision to leave Albert and go back to her new "home", England.

The discussion reveals that there is a conscious effort from the writer to make her heroines assertive, in the sense that they develop or grow in the novels: from *Second-Class Citizen[s]* to *Kehinde[s]*.

We have realised the novels selected for the study are all told from the perspective of the female and her thoughts and feelings are expressed to the reader. It was noticed that it is only in a few stories that the male characters' thoughts are expressed to the reader. Additionally, it is only in one of the selected novels that the male character helps the heroine to escape the "strong" arms of her tradition: and even that is short-lived. The implication of this on characterisation is the creation of male characters that are minor, flat and unassuming, whose only claim to importance lies in their relation to the heroines. Most of them are also stereotypical characters such as the unfaithful husband and the bully, whereas the female characters are versatile. It should be noted that some male characters such as Chike arouse the sympathy of the reader as they are portrayed as struggling against debilitating circumstances in their environment, just like the female. In these situations, the writer is using these as symbols of the larger society to make certain statements.

The employment of the feminist literary criticism that prescribes that female writers should make the female character prominent in their works, can, more often than not, give rise to the above situation as exists in the texts. The writer consciously elevates the female character to a position of importance in the work so that the male character remains on the sidelines. Also, it revealed that the heroines have been made to internalise and believe marriage is the only institution through which they can assert their womanhood or individuality. It is their ability to liberate their minds that help them to actualise their self-worth in the physical.

The focus of the study was on an analysis of the theme of marriage. It was realised that marriage, with its varied forms: the issue of the bride price, motherhood, the single woman (spinster) and polygamy, was the main institution that was used by the patriarchal societies in which the heroines find themselves, to oppress them. It also became evident that the heroines' internalisation of the traditions of their societies contributed to the flourishing of their oppression. However, these heroines did not just accept their fate, they reacted in the best way they could, which was also the available option to them: rebellion.

One fundamental observation that runs through *Second-Class Citizen*, *The Bride Price*, *The Joys of Motherhood*, *Destination Biafra* and *Kehinde* is that there is a strong delineation between male and female characters and this permeates both children and adults. In most of Emecheta's novels and in all of the novels under study, the female characters are the protagonists and actions revolve around them. They are, therefore, given strong character traits to carry the story through. The women are presented as daughter, sister, wife, mother, aunt and mistress. The point in Emecheta's female characterisation is its uniqueness. The heroines, though are presented as powerless at the initial stages of the novel, finally excel in their roles. At the end, they are given voice; the reader "hears" them expressing their views about their world and they are given enough room to develop and make their own choices. That is, they are presented as forceful and articulate, thinking beings whom the reader is brought to recognise and appreciate as individuals not types. Each character brings to bear on a stifling situation her own peculiar way of solving the problem, makes certain important decisions to actualise their individuality. Hence, we appreciate them for what they are and have become, not so much what they are supposed to be.

It must be noted, also, that Emecheta does not portray only the evil side of male characters; she also portrays some male characters who are admired by readers. For instance, the similarity between the knight errant of the European romances and Chike's brave rescue of Aku-nna from her kidnapper and would-be husband cannot be overlooked. A tall, handsome young man who has had many love affairs in Ibuza (even though marriage with the women would be forbidden), Chike is the perfect romantic lover. He is one of the few types of men generally characterised in Emecheta's novels. Other male characters who are potentials to help the heroines develop their self-worth are the loving fathers who die off rather too quickly. For instance, Adah's father, Pa and Aku-nna's Ezekiel Odia die too soon (just like how Emecheta's father dies) to really make any impact in their daughters' quest for self-actualisation. It is obvious that Emecheta makes her male characters either loving fathers who die too quickly or more commonly, boorish and mean husbands. Even Chike is tainted with slavery: he is an *oshu*, a slave by descent. Thus, Emecheta tries to be realistic in her portrayal of characters and her "crime", perhaps, is that she has exposed what hitherto were bedchamber secrets, covered and sacred for the sake of mere existence. By saying it as it is, she is forcing awareness through exposure and I hope she succeeds in fostering an atmosphere of change in attitudes and beliefs.

There are implications for characterisation of the male characters being tangential in the texts. The female characters are portrayed as strong, hardworking, resilient and determined. Some such as Debbie in *Destination Biafra* are strong-willed because they are psychologically liberated from the oppressive traditions of the societies and therefore, reject society's prescription of womanhood and leading alternative lives other than those dictated for women by their society, whereas most of the male characters are not portrayed in a favourable light. The men, because they lack voice, their actions are inexplicable; they do not invoke empathy from the reader. They are presented as exploitative, conservative and strongly resisting the change in the female's position in the societal structures in place and resentful of the achievements of the female characters in the texts.

More often than not, the presence of the male character is felt in these texts and he is the cause of the heroine's problems. In these novels, the male is mostly a minor character that is nonessential to the plot of the story, even though in *The Bride Price* Emecheta tries to elevate the male character, Chike, to a major status. The trend that emerges from this observation seems that Emecheta is gradually moving away from the type of writing that is predominated by the male character and this serves the feminist critical approach well. She, therefore, can be called a feminist.

Another significant observation in the study is the use of characters as symbols in the texts. In *Second-Class Citizen*, *The Bride Price* and *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta shows the political, cultural and economic aspects of the oppression of African women. She also clearly demonstrates that many of these problems are not faced exclusively by women as is evidenced in the lives of some of

the male characters: Francis, Chike and Nnaife, but rather are part of the larger societal ills of post-independence Nigerian society. So that Adaku in *The Joys of Motherhood*, symbolises the post-independence Nigerian society where lack of education can mean that the uneducated female may have to resort to prostitution to make a living for herself and her daughters. Likewise, Nnu Ego symbolises the extent to which society exploits the psychology of the individual into oppression and makes her unable to realise her situation and the need for her to break free.

The use of a character as a symbol of the wider society has implications for characterisation. The author uses the character to make a statement about that which s/he represents and, therefore, the character's growth or development may be thwarted and restrained. For example, in using Aku-nna to make the statement about how psyche and will of the female is oppressed in her society, she is not given the option to refuse her family's choice of a marriage partner. One would have expected her to triumph at the end but the lack of this makes a bold statement about the society that fails to take Okonkwo to task, by allowing him to kill Aku-nna. Such a society encourages the perpetuation of exploitation of its people so that when Aku-nna chooses Chike over Okoboshi and she is killed for going against the "norms" of the society, no one questions Okonkwo for being the main orchestrator of her death. It is stated that Aku-nna dies because she challenges the traditions of her people. The study concludes that Buchi Emecheta succeeds in presenting the significance of the theme of marriage to character development in all the selected novels this study has considered and this she does by her careful selection of particular incidents in the narratives

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