

IMAGES OF THE AFRICAN WOMAN IN BUCHI  
EMECHETA'S FICTIONAL WORKS //

BY  
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts  
(Literature) in the University of Nairobi.

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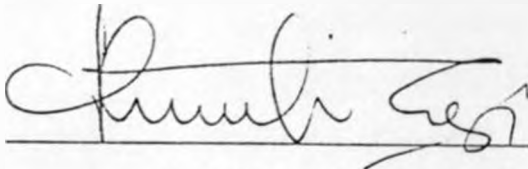


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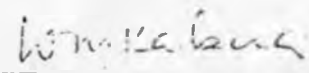


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## DEDICATION

To: My Cousin Job G. Ong'ombe who sacrificed so much for my studies. His conspicuous generosity and sincere friendship will never be forgotten; Professor Francis Davis Imbuga, my great teacher and his wife Mabel. They played my father and mother and patiently put me up throughout my two year course. I have never seen a more humane couple; and lastly to my loving sisters and brother John who kept me going in the face of uncertain financial circumstances.

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## Abstract

The study is a literary analysis of the images of the African woman in Buchi Emecheta's fictional works. Four texts that more exhaustively handle the issues surrounding the image and position of the African woman were selected.

The first section of the study is devoted to the writer and her works. Within this section a survey is done to demonstrate that the works of fiction under study have been greatly influenced by the author's own personal life experiences.

An exploration of Emecheta's main thematic concerns is then done. This study discusses particularly the themes that deal with the position and personality of the African woman. The study especially looks at the themes of motherhood, the enslavement, by tradition and man, of the African woman and that of liberation and the African woman's future.

The study proceeds to examine characters and characterisation in the texts under study. The central focus here is on the principle female characters because their integral position in the works is artistically purposeful. The primary female characters also help delineate particular themes that the artist wishes to portray. After an examination of the main characters, conclusions are arrived at: that Emecheta depicts the images of motherhood, the innocent African woman, a receptive and dynamic woman and lastly the educated and assertive one, best exemplified in Miss Bulewao of *Double Yoke*.

The study does an analysis of language use and style that Buchi uses and how they assist her to achieve her intended goals. It would appear, from the study, that Emecheta uses symbolism and irony to portray the painful reality of the African woman's position. She also uses the speeches of her characters to demonstrate how gender differences also mean differences in behavioural traits. The centrality of female characters, the use of linear plot patterns and

the narrative method are also features of style discussed in this section.

Lastly, the study comes up with conclusions about images of women in Buchi's works. We conclude that Buchi Emecheta is sensitive to the position of the African woman. We also conclude that given her background and the fact that her socio-cultural orientation informs her creativity, then her perception of the issues revolving around the plight and position of the African woman is different from a male author's.



## INTRODUCTION

### Statement of the Problem

The portrayal of the African woman in African Literature has been a matter of great critical interest. Some literary critics have argued that, with the exception of a few, male creative writers, who dominate African literature, have depicted the African woman negatively (Aidoo 1986, Davies 1986, Smith 1986, Busia 1986, Leslie 1987 and Chesaina 1987). The same critics single out three African male writers; Sembene Ousmane, Mongo Beti and Ngugi wa Thiongo, as the only African male writers who have attempted to portray women positively. Otherwise, in their view, African women have been presented as lesser beings; generally inferior to men, people who 'cannot think beyond the beds upon which they hide for the night' (Imbuga 1979).

The depiction of the African woman has been predominantly done with stereotypes. For instance, the Sweet- mother stereotype is relatively common in African literature. This image has a negative connotation that makes the African woman look the all accepting creature of fecundity and self-sacrifice. Such utopian figure is often conflated with mother Africa with eternal and abstract beauty (Leslie 1978:6). On the basis of this understanding, the foremost task of this study is to investigate how Buchi Emecheta portrays the African woman in her fictional works. We will attempt to answer the question whether or not she differs from male authors in her depiction of the African woman.

In a paper presented at the second African Writers' Conference Stockholm Sweden (1986) Buchi remarked that:

For myself ... Being a woman and African born, I see things through an African woman's eyes.

This assertion is a pointer to the crux of our study. In a way, Emecheta concurs with a number of views advanced by some critics in an attempt to

explain the dominant negative presentation of the African woman particularly by male creative authors. Perhaps, as the critics have speculated, male writers only observe the woman they do not have a chance of experiencing her plight at first hand. Thus, they are insensitive to her feelings about polygamy, wife beating, wife inheritance and many other aspects of the African woman's life. That is possibly why they do not address themselves to these issues in their works (Brown 1981, Taiwo 1984, Leslie 1987). On the basis of this contention, this study will concern itself *with what Emecheta, as a female writer sees 'through an African woman's eyes.'*

For the purposes of our study, we shall zero on our focus specifically to the issues Emecheta handles that affect the African woman. After all, she said in the same forum (*op.cit.*182) that:

Even if you don't tell me the name of the writer. I can always tell writing done by a woman. May be she has eyes to see more, where men are too blind to see.

The problem here that calls for this study's attention is What really does Emecheta as a female writer see that perhaps a male author may be 'too blind to see?' Within the scope of our study also is the question 'What does Buchi see about the African woman?

### **Research Premises**

This study proceeds from the premise that a female writer's perception of issues is likely to differ from a male writer's. Elaine Showalter (1977) argues that the advent of female literature promises woman's view of life, woman's experience, in other words a new element. Make what distinctions you please in the social world. It still remains true that men and women have different experiences.

Showalter gives insight into our view that Buchi Emecheta being a woman, with the chance of experiencing the African woman's life, may present an

image of the African woman differently from that presented by male authors.

Writing in a largely patriarchal environment where the woman is not positively recognised, the African female writer has a number of responsibilities. The most crucial one though according to Laretta Ngcobo (1986:151) is to create a liberating literature that not only forgives women their mistakes but condemns men who take advantage of women and does not condone fallibility.

Ngcobo seems to say, in other words, that the African female writer should create a literature that pays attention to the socio-cultural position of the woman. This standpoint supports our hypothesis that a female writer may be sensitive to the plight of women in her society. Thus, there is a possibility that Buchi Emecheta may demonstrate her interest in the position and plight of the African woman.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study has three objectives: first, we want to investigate how Buchi Emecheta presents the African woman. Second, we intend to find out whether or not Buchi Emecheta, being a female writer, is sensitive to the socio-cultural position of the African woman. Lastly, we aim at examining the issues that surround the position and personality of the African woman that Emecheta presents.

### **Justification of the Study**

There is paucity of criticism specifically focused on African female writers although they have contributed to African written literature. Lloyd-Brown (1981) argues rightly, that interest in African literature has, with very rare exceptions excluded women writers. She continues to say that the women writers of Africa are the unheard voices, rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in the repetitive anthologies and the predictably male oriented studies in the field. This dearth of critical interest in works by female artists has hampered the development of African women's creativity. Ama Ata Aidoo,

one of Africa's most prolific female writers contends that it is especially pathetic to keep on writing without having any consistent active critical intelligence that is interested in you as an artist and creator (1986):158). This study hopes to make a contribution towards building criticism on African female creativity.

Being a critical focus on a female writer, this study will promote creativity, particularly of African female writers. Writing is a form of communication. The creative writer and critic engage in a dialogue. A critical examination of a writer avails a response to the creative writer which will help enhance his/her creativity.

The claim that African literature is a male-dominated male-created chauvinistic art is altruism. Collections of critical essays, M.A and Ph.D theses have largely been covering male artists (Moga 1992, Imbuga 1991, Machayo 1992 Kamau 1992 etc) but for a few isolated cases even researches in African Oral literature have negated the existence of female oral artists who in any case form a substantial part of the whole world of oral creativity. It is time, therefore, literary researches were focused on female artists. The long deferred 'woman question of literary studies can no longer be dismissed (Robert Davies 1986). The study of Buchi Emecheta's fictional works in this respect are intended to build criticism of African women writers because they have contributed significantly to the understanding of the African society.

Of all women writers in contemporary African literature, Buchi Emecheta of Nigeria has been the most sustained and vigorous voice of direct feminist protest (Brown 1981:151). Yet but for a few critical essays that focus on her individual works. Buchi has not been very seriously studied. Her works have not been critically examined as a consistent output of an assertive contemporary artist in her own right. At times her individual works have been shodily compared to other artists'. This study is of considerable import since it will undertake to fill the gap created by the absence of critical attention to Buchi Emecheta who is a prolific female writer.

Since we intend to study how Buchi uses images of women to communicate her ideas, this research will be a worthwhile contribution to literary criticism in general particularly on the study of characterization as a form of communicating themes.

In a literary tradition pervaded by dominant male presentation of female, it is inspiring to study a female artist like Buchi Emecheta so as to learn the female presentation of a female personality. After all the personality and inner reality of African women have been hidden under a heap of myths so-called ethnological theories rapid generalisations and patent untruths that it might be interesting to study what they have to say for themselves when they decide to speak (Ojo-Ade 1983:151). Thus the study is timely and important in so far as it will attempt to concern itself with the woman's response to what has been written on African women, the African woman's side of the story.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study intends to proceed from the framework of the sociological approach to the study of literature. Sociologically oriented approaches to literature are viewed differently. One view is that literature and literary criticism are conditioned by social relationships (Williams 1977 and Brandbury 1971). A sociological approach to the study of literature also holds that literature is a form of sociology from which data which is not available to the sociologist can be obtained (Joan Rockwell 1974) on this view literature is a direct reflection of various facets of the social structure, family relationships, class conflict, possibly divorce trends and population composition. Also, it is held by the sociologically oriented conceptions of literature that literature may affect social change (Leon Trotsky 1960).

Within the province of the sociology of literature, it is understood that society is the wellspring of literature. This school mainly emphasises the examination of the social events that affect literary production. It also

encapsulates the view that literature manifests social facts and contradictions. These contradictions may be of an economic nature as well (Ruth and Wolff 1956). Lastly, the sociological approach to the study of literature conceives of literature as a social product as well as a social force that affects society and is continually involved in the process of development (Williams 1977: Jean - Paul Sartre 1948).

Upon the background of the foregoing statements, we shall study Buchi Emecheta's fictional works with the view that as Chinua Achebe (1988) argues, the writer and her/his society live in the same place. Therefore the events that take place in society affect her/him as well. The developments that take place in society form the raw materials for the writer's works. The artist here is expected to mirror the reality of his/her society. We will study Buchi Emecheta's fictional works as the reality of her society and in so doing examine the image of the African woman she presents as the real figure of the African woman.

However, the individuality of the literary artists should not be forgotten. This has been catered for in the sociological approach to the study of literature. One is thinking here of the fact that the writer cannot live up to the expectation of presenting the whole spectrum of society. After all the writer comes from a particular class and race and nation (Ngugi 1981:6). The more deeply an artist penetrates into his art the more he has penetrated into the genius of his age and race (Taine 1966). Thus the artist will only present the reality she/he views from her/his social group. In this respect therefore we shall study Buchi Emecheta's works as a presentation of social reality, particularly the image of the African woman, from a woman's perspective. More so, it is imperative to note that Emecheta could be presenting the reality of her class and her gender.

The sociological approach to the study of literature alongside the recognition of the artist's individuality holds on to the perception of the writer as playing a functional role (Nazareth 1978: Gugelberger 1985: Achebe 1988

and Ngugi 1981). The artist becomes a speaker, he designates, demonstrates, orders, refuses, interpolates, begs, insults, persuades, insinuates (Jean Paul Sartre 1948:) In this respect, the artist plays a pedagogical role, he/she educates society. The writer observes and interprets the norms, the values and the customs of society he or she negates or affirms those values according to his/her personal convictions. In this way he/she creates or destroys social values (Aidoo 1986:150). Thus we will study Buchi Emecheta also as the artist's own apprehension of reality and her criticism of what she does not support or affirmation of what she feels is positive.

In all these, it is of considerable importance to note that the creative writer plays a revolutionary role. He/She observes society carefully and in commenting about any issue seeks to offer his/her audience better views or alternatives. Thus, Buchi Emecheta as a female writer is expected to go far beyond just presenting the image of the African woman. She is expected to offer criticisms on what has so far been painted of the African woman. She might offer a better image of the African woman.

Form and content are inseparable in literature. (Ngara 1987). It is noteworthy therefore that whereas we are interested in the ideas, the contents, of Buchi Emecheta's works, we should not fail to take cognizance of the artistic aspects of the works. In order to communicate the artist chooses a convenient style, suitable for his/her message. Literary texts are again works of art. This contention will underlie our interest in Buchi's style or manner of communication.

### **Literature Review**

A few general studies have been done on the general position and images of women in African literature but material clearly focusing on Buchi Emecheta's fictional works is still lacking. Unlike some creative writers in Africa who are ready to talk about their works, Buchi Emecheta confesses that

she finds it pretty difficult to comment on her works (1986:17). That is why her paper entitled "Feminism with a small 'f'" Presented at the second African writer's conference in Stockholm Sweden, might be considered her major critical statement. In this paper, Buchi made strong statements against being seen as a feminist. She said that:

I am an ordinary writer, an ordinary writer who has to write because if I didn't write I think I would have to be put in an asylum.

Buchi denies that she should be treated in any unique way. She contends that she just 'happens to be a woman and a writer'. However, the Nigerian artist concedes that as an African woman, she sees social reality through a woman's eyes, which in our view, amounts to an acceptance to the fact that as a female writer, she must be more sensitive to the social conditions that affect the female personality. In fact, she proceeds to say in the same paper that she is interested in the education of women as the solution to their present problems. Hear her; I know that education really helps the women.

These views are vital for our study. In advance, Buchi has brought light that she is particularly interested in the personality of the African woman, the conditions in which she lives, the factors that militate against her personality and the possible ways of salvaging the African woman's image. What remains then is to find out whether or not Emecheta lives up to this self-set goal.

Ciarunji Chesaina, in her Ph.D thesis entitled "women in African Drama: Representation and Role" (1987), makes a thorough and wide study of the portrayal of women in African drama, by both male and female artists. After an analysis of a wide range of texts written in Kiswahili, English and French, Professor Chesaina concludes that the African woman has always been depicted with stereotypical undertones by both male and female artists. A large portion of the available texts assign women the roles tailored for them



by society and places them in no enviable position of automatons operated on by men and subjects to men's sexual satisfaction, she argues.

Although she does not make any outright comparative study of male and female playwrights, Chesaina makes an authoritative examination of the female central characters in African drama providing a pioneer insight into studies on images of women in African drama. Her criticism which is not only an exploration of gender politics in African Literature but also a stylistic study makes a worthwhile contribution to studies on style in African fiction.

Chesaina should have, however, examined female artists in isolation in an attempt to show whether their gender aids them to portray women in a more redeemable way. However, her assertion that the term 'feminism' is western in conceptualization and orientation is contestable given that a focus on the images of women in literary works, as the case is in her thesis, is basically motivated by feminism, or the concern with the position of the African woman.

In a paper entitled "African Motherhood - Myth and Reality" presented at the Second African Writers' Conference, Stockholm, Sweden in 1986, Laurretta Ngcobo, a South African female writer, asserts that the image of motherhood is the most dominant in African Literature. This, she feels, is because the African community attaches the woman's reproductive fertility to her selfworth. Because of this, she goes on to say, the African woman's individuality and thus humanity has been eroded since the woman is always considered as someone's wife, mother or daughter. The identity of the African woman is closely appended to a man be he a son, a father or a husband.

Ngcobo feels that the erosion of the African woman's independence is manifest in African Literature in incidents where women are portrayed as undergoing heavy punishments like being beaten by their husbands. Thus, African women are hardly forgiven and seldom treated lightly in African Literature. She proposes that the African female writer be devoted to salvaging the image of the African woman. However, she does not care to go deeper to

the level of suggestion, to discuss how this can be done. Our study on the images of the African woman in Buchi Emecheta's fictional works will attempt to do this. It will make an effort to investigate really what images of the African women are presented and whether or not Buchi as a female writer makes the attempt Ngcobo wishes of salvaging the image of the African woman.

Albeit Ngcobo is right in stating that the mother stereotype denies the African woman her individuality, she loses sight of other aspects of the African woman's cultural background that impeach upon her individuality. Examples that come to one's mind here are polygamy, wife inheritance and wife beating.

At the same venue, Ama Ata Aidoo of Ghana presented a paper she titled "To be an African woman Writer - An Overview and a Detail," in which she stated that "African women Writers are a bunch of only" (1986;158) and lamented the scanty critical attention paid to them. She argues that where little attention has been paid, the critic misinterprets the texts authored by women. However, she concludes that African female writers are stronger and more commanding than their male counterparts. This is a sweeping and highly contestable view given that the author does not even state the respect in which African female writers are more assertive and insightful than their male counterparts.

However one finds Aidoo's sentiments on the experiences of African female writers largely agreeable. Her observation that no serious criticism has been done of the female writers' output is an obvious truth. Perhaps, one thinks here, it is because women are not taken seriously in Africa. The customary and traditional ways of life are such that women's views are not sought even in matters that directly affect them. This perhaps explains why their works of art have not so much attracted the literary critics.

Lloyd Brown in his famous book *women Writers in Africa*, apart from studying a Corpus of African women Writers, devotes a chapter on Buchi Emecheta's fictional works. After dealing with the socio-economic reality that

militates against the woman in Africa, Brown proceeds to analyse Buchi's literary output. Although he makes acceptable conclusions about Emecheta like the view that her works display a consistency of thematic concern, Brown's study is limited to only five of Buchi's published works. This makes his conclusions critically untenable.

Deirdre Lapin in her article "women in African Literature", published in Margaret Hay and Sharon Sticher's book *African women South of the Sahara* (1984), underscores the diversity in the perception of reality by males and females. She also laments the lack of interest by male critics in the female artists' works. She, like previous writers, revises the image of the wife-mother dominant in African literature and scathingly calls it "classic and inescapable". La Pin, however, pays particular attention to the female and male writers in Africa who have attempted to portray a positive image of the African woman. Here she discusses Sembene Ousmane, Mariama Ba and Ngugi Wa Thiongo. She only deals with Emecheta's *The Bride Price* and *Second Class Citizen* in this fairly overcrowded essay where the author seeks to handle too many issues that definitely need more space and time.

Lapin's effort to make an overview exploration of the depiction of women in African Literature is laudable. The argument she makes of the constant existence of the image of wife-mother in African Literature is a fact. However, again like past critics, she does not attend to other images that are equally dominant in African Literature in relation to the portrayal of women. One is thinking here of such images as that of the prostitute, that of the African woman being stubbornly conservative, etc. This study will seek to exhaust the images presented at least by the target author Buchi Emecheta.

Eustace Palmer in an article "The feminist point of view : Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*" published in *African Literature Today* Vol; 13 concludes that Emecheta through her heroine Nnu Ego rejects the traditional concepts of a woman which consigns her to cooking, providing comfort

for her husband and bearing children. Palmer examines Buchi's style noting that she uses the omniscient narrator perspective. The most striking strength of this essay is that the author makes a deliberate attempt to show how in her style Buchi exhibits her interest in developing the African woman's image. For example the omniscient narrator perspective is an attempt to present the whole society from the woman's point of view thus a conscious effort to let a woman's story also be heard. This, Palmer highlights clearly. However, the article has glaring weaknesses like some of critic's statements that are fairly arbitrary and whose critical justification is difficult to discern, for example "Emecheta's success with men is something less than total".

In another article published in the same journal, Femi Ojo-Ade discusses the spectre of male criticism of female works. The critic here concludes that male criticism of female works is done on standards set out by men. Four female writers; Ama Ata Aidoo, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Rebecca Njau are examined in this article. The author's attempt to confirm that female writers in Africa are more interested in the afflictions of the African woman is creditable. Otherwise, the article has a disturbing weakness. There are no clear conclusions on Buchi Emecheta as an artist let alone on any one of the female writers discussed in this, generally, rather over inclusive article.

*Ngambika*, a collection of essays on women in African literature is perhaps the most articulate and thorough text on the subject to be published to date. In this anthology edited by Carole Davies and Anne Graves, the issues affecting the position of the African woman are discussed broadly by various critics. The images of the African woman so far created in African literature are also discussed. Of interest particularly to this study is an essay by Marie Umeh entitled "Reintegration with the lost self: A Study of Buchi Emecheta's *Double Yoke*". In this essay Umeh analyses Emecheta's treatment of the theme of love and how society's division of roles hampers the woman's chances of exploiting her utmost talents. The crossroads of modernization and tradition-

alism that Emecheta's characters find themselves in like Ete Kamba and Miss Bulewao are analysed. The critic rightly observes that modernization, the adoption of western ways particularly has a hope for the African woman.

Umeh points out what perhaps would be of great interest. That Buchi Emecheta's women characters are different from those presented by Achebe and Nwapa or Elechi Amadi but she does not explain in what respect, which makes the essay a bit shallow. This study will seek to take this one and find out whether or not Buchi's characters particularly female ones have unique features hitherto unseen in African Literature. Elsewhere in the anthology issues on the images of the African woman in African Literature are dealt with but the authors opt to be too general. They do not incisively focus on particular female artists.

Oladele Taiwo's *Female Novelists of Modern Africa* adds up to the list of the scanty publications focused on African female writers. It is one very interesting survey although the author is shallow. Most attention is paid to Buchi Emecheta whose seven works are discussed. The discussions on Emecheta's works are so shallow that they are hardly better than journalistic book reviews. Taiwo asserts rightly that Emecheta is consistently concerned with the plight of the African woman and is interested in cultural practices like polygamy, wife inheriting, reproductive fertility and bride price which jeopardize the African woman's chances of gaining independence. But the critic fails to handle Emecheta's style as the form through which all her ideas are communicated. An aspect like characterization in Emecheta's works which is the cardinal device of communication is ignored. Thus, the text lives short of a concise, versatile literary criticism.

*African Literature Today* Vol 15 is exclusively devoted to essays on women in African Literature. In this volume are published articles on various aspects ranging from the responsibilities of the African female writer to the depiction of women in African literature. The anthology of critical essays is the first of

its kind to be published in the African Literature Today Series. Although the volume makes a number of authoritative statements on the African woman's image in Literature; it has a glaring shortcoming; that not a single essay is devoted to Buchi Emecheta despite the fact that she is a prolific and consistent voice of protest against the afflictions of the African woman, conditioned by African cultural dispositions.

It is apparent from the literature review that the issue of the African woman's portrayal in literature particularly by male writers has been overemphasised. Alongside this, attempts have been made by a number of critics to show how the personality of the African woman has been coloured by stereotypes. This clearly prompts this study. It remains its task now to establish how Buchi Emecheta herself, an African female creative writer presents women.

Evidently, the African female writer has the distinct responsibility of countering the already negatively painted image of the African woman. This is a pointer towards the objective of this study; that of investigating whether or not Buchi Emecheta as a female writer comes up with an image of the African woman that will respond to the dominantly negative one already existent.

However one notes that literary studies on gender so far done in Africa are general. There is lack of articulate and detailed studies on individual female authors. Yet there is a strong resentment particularly from female literary critics that male creative authors have been 'over studied'. The question of the recognition of the female writer and the study of her works can only be successfully addressed if more studies exclusively focused on women authors are done. This therefore explains why this study is not only timely but also literarily lucrative.

## Methodology

The research intends to be library based. For purposes of a concise study we will take Buchi Emecheta's four novels that are more focused on the issues that surround the position and image of the African woman. These are *The Bride Price* (1976) *The Slave Girl* (1977) *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Double Yoke* (1989). The texts chosen are representative enough for our purpose. We will then do a critical study of the texts. First of all, we will study the writer and her works as a prelude to studying the texts. This will give us an insight into the author's life and experiences which might have an influence on her works. Second, we will address ourselves to the themes or the primary concerns of the artist in her works. The next step will be a critical analysis of characterization. Again for purposes of our study, we shall centre our interest in female characters especially the main ones. It is through this analysis that we shall make conclusions about Emecheta's depiction of women. A section of this study will be devoted to the artist's style. Here the study hopes to examine the features of style that Emecheta uses in presenting the issues surrounding the image of the woman and possibly the artistic impact of these stylistic devices. We intend to make a critical evaluation of Buchi Emecheta. Here one is thinking of assessing the strengths and weaknesses in Buchi's style of presenting the African woman. At the end of the study we hope to come up with conclusions on our study.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE WRITER AND HER WORKS

Addressing the Second African Writers' Conference at Stockholm, Sweden in 1986, Buchi Emecheta emphatically said that 'my books are like my children' (1986:173). This is echoed in her autobiography, *Head Above Water*. She states that:

Most of my early novels, articles poems and short stories are, like my children, too close to my heart. They are too real. They are too me (p.1).

This presupposes the fact, which Buchi has admitted that most of her works are autobiographical, they are based on her personal life experiences and observations. Our interest in her own life and some of the experiences that have led to the writing of her books is thus justified. After all in Literature, fact informs fiction. It has been argued before that in dealing with writers, an exploration of their immediate social experiences may help inform a concise criticism. For Emecheta's case, being a female writer it is possible that the issues related to women she presents in her works stem from her own experiences. As Virginia Wolf (1929) rightly remarks:

In dealing with women as writers as, much destitute as possible is desirable; it is necessary to leave oneself room to deal with other things besides her works. So much has that work been influenced by conditions that have nothing whatever to do with art.

In this chapter therefore, we outline the life of the author and some of the experiences that are reflected in her works.

Buchi Emecheta was born in Lagos, Nigeria and was raised partly there and partly in her village Ibuza. This Ibuza village background is a common setting of her works. Buchi says that her experiences at Ibuza as a child cultivated her wish to tell stories when she was a child. Her parents came from



Ibuza and moved to Lagos in search of work. As both of them were partly educated, they embraced the Church Missionary Society (CMS) way of life. But being of the Old Ibo Kingdom, they made sure that Buchi and her brother never forgot home and life in Ibuza. She continues to say that during school holidays she had to be at Ibuza and through her encounter with the village age-mates of hers, her grandparents, uncles and aunts, she developed a deep interest in oral narratives and story telling sessions in the village.

The inspiration to write, thus developed at an early age and was nourished by her desire to tell stories like her aunt Nwakwaluzo Ogbueyin (Emecheta 1986). Buchi's inspiration also came from the schools she attended that greatly valued oral composition and story telling. She attended Ladilak School (which features in her novel *Second Class Citizen*). Reagan Memorial Baptist School and Methodist Girls High School. In upper secondary Buchi was taught by Mrs Mabbel Jolaoso (Now Mabel Segun) one of the earliest Nigerian female graduates and herself a writer. Buchi could not resist the traditional requirement of getting married.

She says that:

I stayed at school until I was sixteen then I could no longer avoid family pressures. I refused all men kept for me and married the man I called Francis in my other books but whose real name is Sylvester Omodi, a dreamy handsome local boy who, though older than myself thought he too would make it in the U.K. (1986 :25).

From that experience Buchi grew to hate the cultural dictates of her society that never gave freedom to the girl to grow and make her own decision about her marriage. Such practices as society choosing one's marriage partner are clearly the objects of Buchi's scathing criticism in her books like *The Brideprice* (1976) and *The Slave Girl* (1977).

At the tender age of sixteen Buchi found herself married but she got a nice job at the American Embassy in Lagos. She calls it 'a classy job'. The income she earned from this job enabled her to travel to London to join her husband who had gone there for studies. On arrival in the United Kingdom.

Buchi got a culture shock. She was terribly discriminated as a black person. Part of this experience and her culture shock make up the subject of her novel; *Second Class Citizen*

Before long Buchi and her husband Sylvester could not cope. She had no other option other than divorce or separation. After this experience, she found herself entirely on the mercy of the London City Council Welfare Programme. She, like her fellow underprivileged members of the London Community moved to the charitable residence which she calls pussy cat mansions. At this stage, Buchi decided to use her experiences in Britain as the raw material for her fictional works. This is particularly attested to in her first novel which reviewers have called autobiographical, *In the Ditch* she says about it, that:

I decided to start writing again about my social reality — Because the truths were too horrible and because I suspected that some syncs might not believe me, I decided to use the fictitious African name of Adah meaning “daughter”, well, time proved that to be a vain hope. People could tell straightaway that Adah’s life was over fifty percent mine, but meanwhile I continued to wallow in my ignorance. I wrote the story of my life as if it was somebody else’s (1986.62).

*In the Ditch*, is therefore an autobiographical novel. It is a tale of Adah, a Nigerian woman who leaves her home in Nigeria for Britain. While in Britain she separates from her husband. Adah is to shoulder the difficult task of taking care of her five children in a very harsh economic environment. Buchi puts forward a number of issues in this moving story. In Adah, her protagonist, she handles the problems of single parenthood and especially the risks of single motherhood like Adah’s case is an indictment of the careless and unfeeling nature of the man. *In the Ditch* or at the Mansions where Adah spends most of her life, single motherhood is not unique though.

This novel portrays an exclusively woman’s world. It is as if the author seems to argue that the woman can always succeed on her own. However, this predominantly female world refuses the reader the chance to see the society’s

treatment of the woman. It is only subjective inference that may help portray the perception of the woman in this society. Male-female relationships are not developed in this novel. Were it the case, one would have perhaps thought of exploring the male assigned image of the African or any other woman. What we have is a cohort of women handled together with their children. They paint a picture of the refuse and discard of a rigorous 'clean' society. The author concentrates on the struggles of the single mothers. Her depiction of Adah is a statement on the double tragedy of a single black mother in a foreign land.

*Second Class Citizen* seems to develop the theme Buchi starts *In the Ditch*; the double misfortune of a black woman in a foreign land. First, she is a black person then second, a woman, while the whites regard her as a second class citizen because she is black, the man regards her as a second class citizen because she is a woman. Buchi creates a woman faced with the inevitable socio-cultural changes in her movement from her home at Iboya to London. Adah, however, is receptive to these changes and is ready to experiment with new modern ideas like the use of contraceptives. Although she is accommodative to the various changes that are taking place in her new world, Adah's Ibo consciousness is not completely eroded. She is even ready to get more children for her husband. Unlike Adah, Francis her husband is very reactionary and not at all prepared to abandon his Ibo forms of conduct. He upholds the mannerisms typical of any African man of perceiving the woman as a second class citizen, a reproduction automaton and an ignoramus who should 'have sense beaten into her until she gave in, to be ordered out of bed after he had done with her' (Op cit., 181). He is an African 'through and through'.

Emecheta is apparently of the view that the African woman is more receptive to change, especially cultural change because it contributes to positive development of her image. On the other hand, the African man would want to have the African cultural tradition that safeguards his authority remain. This idea is clearly contained in Adah's receptivity to cultural

change which totally unmatched her husband's consistent conservative behaviour. Her hopes that her husband will change come to nought. In the final analysis it appears that it is the black people who give her problems and consequently become an obstacle in her way to cultural integration, and thus liberation from the rigid Ibo ways of life. Her Nigerian co-tenants particularly find it difficult to cope with her because of what they perceive as sophistication and ready acceptance of British styles.

In this novel Buchi seems to compare the life the couple lived in Lagos and how they live in London. Lagos life was peaceful perhaps because their parents were close and could offer counsel. Another reason was the status quo that was intact and undisturbed. The inevitable changes of the cultural environment that the couple faces in London seem to be the primary cause of the challenges their love and unity face. The point Emecheta is making here is that the harmony in African marriages is coercive. The authoritative domination and unquestionable position of the man bullies the African woman into submission and subservience. Thus whenever the woman comes to an environment that might accord her some respect or achieves some amount of educational awareness and economic independence, her husband's authority will be threatened. Emecheta suggests that the African man will always want to be reactionary as long as the past old styles of life preserve his control over the woman. The artist's standpoint here seems to be that the woman should accept the changes brought about by the western way of life because they are liberating. The African woman in this novel is placed in two worlds; her African background and a new western orientation. Her experiences in these two worlds provide the basis for Emecheta's conclusions. Because of these two different contexts one is tempted to think that the actual perceptions of the African society about the African woman are not fully developed.

There are clear parallels between Francis and Adah's life on one hand

and that of the author and her husband Sylvester on the other. From her autobiography *Head Above Water*, it is evident that Buchi's husband Sylvester is not ready to recognise his wife's talent and give her way to develop her ability to write. He burns her first novel *The Bride Price* because, seemingly he does not believe a woman can write anything sensible. Sylvester appears to have always wanted to stick to his traditionally or culturally favoured position of the indisputable authority of the home Buchi might have wanted to change the African myth of womanhood; that of being dependent on her husband. She wanted to write and read. This was too much for her husband.

My first attempt to write a book called *The Bride Price*, was resented by my husband. He too like my English teacher told me that 'pride goes before a fall'

In *The Bride Price*, Buchi's setting is wholly Nigerian. The historical setting is that of the 50s a time of British entrenchment in Nigeria. The novelist deals with various aspects of the social life of Nigeria during this time, like the disparity between town and rural life. She also deals with the customs and cultural practices that affect the woman directly like the issue of the bride price or bride wealth, and the choice of a marriage partner. Akunna and Chike the central characters face two big obstacles in their love and marriage; one is that Chike is of slave origins and is not expected to marry the 'freeborn' like Akunna. Secondly, Chike is not Akunna's parent's choice. Nevertheless, the positive attributes that Buchi gives the two characters underlines her statement that with the approaching influence of the white man's culture and the enlightenment brought about by education. Individual freedom should flourish in all human transactions. This is the only way the African woman especially, will be liberated from the bondage of tradition and custom.

Again, Buchi in writing this novel, her experiences provided the resources she needed. She says that

In the *Bride Price* I created a girl Akunna, who had an almost identical upbringing to mine and who deliberately chose her own husband because she was 'modern' but was not quite

strong enough to shake off all the tradition and taboos that had gone into making her the type of girl she was — the concept behind this book is tradition (Opc.it: 164-165)

A revolution in the customary ways of parents choosing partners for their children is portrayed again in Buchi's fourth text *The Slave Girl*. Ojebeta sold to slavery by her brother Okolie arranges with Jacob to get married. This is unusual in the tradition of their community but the two are ready to break this tradition. Ojebeta in this condition appears to hold a message from the novelist that the African woman is almost a slave throughout her life.

The African man is here portrayed as the source of his female counterpart's tribulations. Okolie, Ojebeta's brother trades her for selfish reasons of obtaining some amount of money required for an age-group dance. Jacob, Ojebeta's husband, is not so much better than a slave owner. In fact Ojebeta calls him 'master and new 'owner' Although she talks of feeling free in belonging to a new master 'from my own town Ibuza (189) the slave-master mentality has not been clearly eradicated from her mind even in marriage. This novel like the previous one raises very interesting issues on the position of the African woman and the image projected of her by society. The image of slavery and servitude will be followed in details later in this study.

It is noteworthy to emphasize that the plot of this novel, *The Slave Girl* is almost a real story the author experienced only that it involved her mother.

She narrates in the autobiography *Head Above Water* that:

My mother Alice Ogbanje Emecheta that laughing, loud voiced, six foot-tall black glossy slave girl, who as a child suckled the breasts of her dead mother; My mother who lost her parents when the nerve gas was exploded in Europe; — My laughing mother who forgave a brother that sold her to a relative. In Ontisha so that he could use the money to buy ichafo silik-silk headties for his coming of age dance (p3)

There is a parallel in the physical posture of Buchi's real mother, as described in the autobiography and Ma Blackie, Akunna's mother in *The Bride Price* and also between her mother's experience of being sold and that of

Ojebeta of *The Slave Girl*. The novel, *The Slave Girl* is, this autobiographical in way.

*The Joys of Motherhood* Buchi's fifth text is perhaps the most complex yet most outright in dealing with issues that surround the image of the African woman. Most of the themes dealt with in the previous novels are handled here in great detail. The novel is a tale of Nnu Ego, an Ibuza bred girl who marries husbands of her parents' choice. First, it is Amatokwu with whom she does not get a child, then comes Naife with whom she stays in Lagos and gets seven children. Buchi through the life of Nnu Ego which she follows into details, delineates the socio-cultural conditions that militate against the woman like the issue of bride price, polygamy, and reproductive fertility. The position of the African woman both as wife and mother takes centre stage in the novel. The dominant image of motherhood recurs here again. The novelist puts up a scathing criticism of the male constructions of the African woman. Through insensitive male characters like Naife, Buchi Villifies the male egocentricism and castigates the male ordained tradition of making women slaves and beasts of burden.

Yet again Buchi makes use of her experiences as an African woman and her observations of the village life at Ibuza here. She has stated in the autobiography *Head Above Water* that:

In *The Joys of Motherhood* I created a woman, Nnu Ego who gave all her energy, all her money and everything she had to raise her kids. She chopped wood for sale, she dealt on the black-market, she did everything except being a whore herself to raise money — In that book I said that "the joy of motherhood" was a beautiful funeral — In a way that book like *Second Class Citizen* made me accept my lot (p.239)

*Destination Biafra* is different from Buchi's other novels in that the author pays more attention to the political history of Nigeria, than the plight of the African woman. The author presents the political scene of Nigeria right from the pre-independence to the secession of Biafra and the civil war which ended with the triumph of the idea of an indivisible Nigeria (Taiwo 1984). The



author here deals with the decadence of upright political governance and conduct. In such characters as Odumosu and Durusaro Buchi enacts the decayed morals of the African politician. Even schooled leaders like Dr. Ozimba and Dr. Eze are not any better than their uneducated and corrupt counterparts in the government. The army cannot be relied on. Within it are recklessly ambitious fellows who can destroy a country at the expense of their individual interests. The novelist proceeds to show that the Biafran war was more or less a betrayal of the people of Nigeria because it was very much linked to the divide and rule tactics used by British colonialists.

Amid the historical concern in the war and political events in Nigeria, Buchi spares time and space to attend to the diversity of perspectives of the male and female Nigerians involved in the war. Debbie Ogedemgbe is given crucial roles to play at very crucial stages of the war. She joins the army to show that even women can play the roles men claim are exclusively theirs. She steadfastly believes in her humanity and independence from the traditions of her people that consign the woman to backstage of socio-political and economic transactions.

Debbie is sent to Abosi to oversee peace and in the process encounters a lot of hardships which decisively withstands and continues her mission. She however becomes resourceful later, abroad as a propaganda officer of Abosi and Biafra. She loves Alan Grey, a non-African in a 'highly tribal era'; a time when her male counterparts are so conservative about their customs and origins. This is Buchi's statement — that women are more receptive to change and long to depart from the enslaving African customary life.

More interesting about this novel, one of the longest by Buchi, is that she has a curious interest in the plight of women in the circumstances of war. They are raped, starve and suffer all sorts of abuses and inconveniences brought about by men's selfish thirst for power. The men here are culpable. They are the main actors in the drama of power seeking and thus are responsible for the



havoc wrecked on society as a result of their ambitions. However, Buchi does not pay attention to this novel in her autobiography. Unlike the early novels, *Destination Biafra* is purely a fictional work although it draws its main story line from the historical event of the Biafran war. Although the historical events alluded to really took place, the scenes, were not experienced by the author. The text is thus a fictitious tale created by the author to communicate her perception of a historical event that took place in her country.

In *Double Yoke* published in the early 80s Emecheta explores the impact of the Western influence particularly formal education on the African society. The ramifications of these changes on, especially the woman form Buchi's major concern. The modern educated woman like Nko stands to be unacceptable in her society because she is thought to be 'the head strong know-better kind'. On the other hand, she also has her own aspirations; she would like to be well educated, get a job and earn her own money; But the situation is such that she has two masters to serve to fulfil the demands of tradition, get married and get children for her husband; and achieve her own goals of a better future. Tradition and modernity are thus a double yoke under which the African woman lives. In Nko and Ete Kamba's relationship Buchi demonstrates the dilemma of the modern African woman. She seems to be asking the question - 'does education and modern day lifestyle threaten or strengthen the position of the African woman in society?'

The other works by Buchi Emecheta are really lesser concerns about various aspects of our social life for instance *The Moonlight Bride* and *Naira Power* are apparently targeted for a children's audience. The author says nothing about them in her autobiography. Other works by this assertive and consistent novelist are plays *A Kind of Marriage* and *Juju Landlord* which she does not so much refer to herself although they are also based on her experiences in the United Kingdom. Their unavailability poses yet another problem for the interested readership.

A close survey of Buchi Emecheta's artistic, output avails the conclusion that in her debut to creative writing she found it very vital to start with her personal experiences. Her life is thus mirrored in the lives of her characters. Her experiences as an African woman and her observations of the day to day life of fellow African women, whether in her home village Ibuza or in the urban environment of Lagos and in foreign lands like the United Kingdom form a concrete basis for her interest in the portrayal of the African woman. This justifies this study's intention of examining the images of the African woman in particularly the early works whose creativity and composition was informed by the author's own experiences. We will therefore study *The Bride Price* (1972) *The Slave Girl* (1977) *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Double Yoke* (1982).

## CHAPTER TWO

### EMECHETA'S THEMATIC CONCERNS

A deep exploration of the main themes that Buchi Emecheta concerns herself with in her works is important at this stage. In this chapter therefore we intend to examine the cardinal issues that form the thrust of Emecheta's concern as a female writer. The prime goal here is to demonstrate Emecheta's devotion to the issues that surround personality and image of the African woman. Second, one projects that by the end of this treatise on Buchi's thematic concerns, a strong basis would have been provided upon which the main problem of this study- the portraiture of the African woman, will be studied. Three broad themes that ran through the four texts will be discussed. They are the theme of tradition and position of the African woman, the theme of motherhood and that of liberation and the African woman's future.

Buchi Emecheta's social setting is African. The African environment is the stage on which we should study the depiction of the African woman. Throughout her works Emecheta is consistently concerned with the way in which the Ibo tradition and by extension therefore African tradition treats and handles women.

One notes that throughout the texts the woman is portrayed in an environment that does not regard her individuality as a human being with her own unique, individual past, needs and expectations. The society's traditions and cultural sense do not provide for these. The society always appends the identity of its female members to the male ones be they brothers, fathers or husbands. Right from birth and early life women are treated from the perspective of whose sisters, mothers or wives they are. The author describing this tradition in *The slave Girl* says that:

All her life a woman always belonged to some male. At birth you were owned by your people and when you were sold you belonged to a new master. You grew up, your new master who

had paid something for you would control you (p.112)

A girl was owned in particular by her father or someone in place of her father or her older brother and then in her group of homestead (p.157)

Further testimony to the cultural disregard of the woman is the traditional practice of bride price and the culturally recognised style of marriage. Traditional etiquette in the Ibo community requires that the marriage partner of the girl be chosen by her parents or her family. Then the girl has to fetch some bridewealth for her father. When the bride wealth is not paid bad omens are expected to interfere with the marriage. This happens to Akunna and Chike in *The Bride Price*. The bride price expectation is even contained in the names given to women in this community for example Nnu Ego which means "twenty bags of cowries" or Akunna which means "father's wealth". The names sound like price tags. Tradition therefore relegates the woman to commodity status.

With the cultural practice of bride price in place in Emecheta's society, the act of marrying is more or less a commercial transaction. This is even emphasised by the fact that the woman in marriage is treated, more or less, like the husband's property, or that of the husband's family. In Buchi's works there is close semblance between male-female (especially husband and wife) relationship and owner-property relationship. several times in *The slave Girl*, *The Bide Price* and *The joys of motherhood*, the author substitutes the title husband with 'owner'. The author tells us this of Akunna in *The Bride Pri:ce*

She did not mind belonging to him and being his wealth she would like to be owned by a man like chike (p.93)

She would belong to him for life and never be able to return to her parents (p.103)

In Emecheta's books, this idea of a woman being owned is very closely linked to enslavement. The woman, in that position of being 'owned' is also enslaved. The traditionally tolerated treatment of the woman leaves little difference between her and a slave. This Emecheta demonstrates clearly. In *The slave Girl* and another novel *The joys of motherhood*, these ideas are

developed. The connection between the African woman and slavery is done in *The joys of motherhood* when the artist links the main character Nnu Ego's life to that of a slave. In fact the story of the life and death of a slave informs the novel.

When Agbadi's wife Agunwa dies, as tradition dictates, she has to be buried with her slave. However, during the burial, her slave attempts to resist the fulfilment of the cultural expectation. The men in the vicinity deal her a blow that throws her into the grave. Agbadi, Nnu Ego's father, expresses some sympathy when he tries to prevent further mutilation. The slave woman tells him that:

Thank you for this kindness Nwokacha the son of Agbadi. I shall come back to your household, but as a legitimate daughter. I shall come back. (p.23)

The dibia or medicineman called to attend the problem of Nnu Ego's lamp, when she is born confirms that:

The child is the slave woman who died with your senior wife Agunwa. She promised to come back as a daughter. Now here she is. That is why this child has the fair skin of the water people and the painful lamp on her head is from the beating your men gave her before she fell into the grave. (p. 27)

In this incident which is alluded to in Emecheta's other novel *The slave Girl* (p. 62), the artist juxtaposes her main character's life with that of the slave in what seems to be a deliberate attempt to show that Nnu Ego the mother lived as a slave; slave to tradition, slave to her husband and children.

Traditions sanctions conditions that are favourable for the enslavement of the African woman. It denies her identity and individual freedom. This remains the central focus in *The Slave Girl*. Emecheta closely links marriage to slavery. In reference to Ogbbanje Ojebeta's being sold to slavery in *The slave Girl*, Emecheta tells the reader that her brother Okolie thought he was "marrying" her sister away to the woman relative ma palagada.

Emecheta's treatise on tradition and the enslavement of the African woman is an attempt to make tradition culpable for the plight of the African woman. The author seems to hold tradition responsible for the ordeals that the African woman is subjected to.

In the world of the Ibo tradition the woman's submission is advocated for. "Most Ibuza men", we learn from Nnu Ego in *The Joys of motherhood* "like submissive women, women who would feel helpless without them". This is a pointer to the central mentality that not only places low premium on the women but inflicts degrading actions on them. In *The Bride Price* we learn that "most Ibuza men seemed to beat their women" thus the impression that the woman is a lesser being to be corrected only by beating. Emecheta stresses this disregard of the African woman so much. She points out in *The Bride Price*: When you have lost your father, you have lost your parents. Your mother is only a woman and women are supposed to be boneless. A fatherless family is a family without a head a family without shelter, a family without parents, in fact a non-existing family such tradition do not change very much (p. 28).

The patriarchal tradition evident in the foregoing description disregards the woman. Apart from refusing to accord the woman her rightful and natural place as a mother, this extreme patriarchy turns a blind eye to the fact that the woman is a worthy party in any family. Besides, this tradition makes demands that renders the womans's humanity 'void', for instance we read in *The Bride Price* that:

There were men who would go about raping young virgins of thirteen and fourteen and still expect the women they married to be as chaste as flower buds (p. 84)

It is traditionally acceptable to inherit a brother or cousin's wife in the event of the husband's death. Regardless of the impact this has on one's first wife, the Ibo culture recognises it. This is the experience Nnu Ego undergoes when Naife inherits his deceased brother's wives. When Adaku, one of the inherited wives moves to Lagos, she adds to the already over congested small

apartment that is Naife's home. It is intriguing for the reader to learn the pain of the experience Nnu Ego undergoes when she leaves her bed for another wife. Surprisingly, but culturally in order, Naife makes love to Adaku in the same room to Nnu Ego's emotional destabilization and resentment. To Nnu Ego this is an emotional torture. However, this is the artist's enactment of the mean regard for the woman's emotions. Here Naife treats women as sex objects. He deals with one in bed while the other one waits.

Ma Blackie in *The Bride Price* also undergoes the same experience. When her husband dies, she, together with her two children, is inherited by Okonkwo her husband's brother. Throughout the novel we do not see any mutual interaction between Ma Blackie and her new husband apart from incidents of coition of making decisions about the marriage of Ma Blackie's daughter (now Okonkwo's inherited daughter also), Akunna.

Sharing a husband as the case is in polygamy, clearly deprives the woman her conjugal rights starves her of love and the mutual protection of her husband. This is the experience Nnu Ego undergoes in Lagos in the presence of Adaku. For a while, Naife turns his focus and interest away from Nnu Ego when Adaku comes to Lagos. Earlier on in the novel we realise that polygamy has an impact on the women. They are not satisfactorily provided for. When Naife turns his interest away from Nnu Ego, she tends to lose weight and is greatly disturbed. But this as Ato her friend says is common in polygamous homes.

You forget that like you I was brought up in a large compound and have seen neglected wives all my life. You have the same look in your eyes, seeking something yet not knowing what (p. 76)

The effect of polygamy can also be seen in *The Bride Price*. This is specifically in Okonkwo, Ma Blackie's inherited husband's home. The many wives Okonkwo has married have nothing in common other than the fact that they share him. There is intense jealousy amongst them and extreme dislike for

one other The negative attitude between the wives surfaces when Akunna, Ma Blackie's daughter is taken to school and does well. In the understanding of the other wives and their children, educating Akunna is a waste of resources. After all traditionally she is only expected to be married and fetch bride wealth. This jealousy of other wives is the source of the intense pressure on Okonkwo to have Akunna get married. In turn the pressure of marrying makes Akunna decide to marry before she has accomplished her plans of completing the primary education and proceeding to high school. It is the artist's contention that this cultural practice of wife inheritance and polygamy negates the woman's individuality and her humanity. The husband tends to grntedly treat his wives as a group and hardly, takes into account their individual whims.

The Ibo tradition and cultural practice which form Buchi Emecheta's setting, do not have room for a woman's claim not only to property ownership but also ownership of children and even gods. A woman does not own anything because she herself ~~is~~<sup>is</sup> owned. Also she does not have any gods to whom she can appeal, she is only expected to appeal to the gods of her husband and possibly those of her people although she is expected to forget the latter as soon as she gets married her husband himself is somekind of God. This traditional construction is echoed clearly in Buchi's description of social arrangements in *The Slave Girl*

If a good wife was in trouble of any kind, instead of clling on God to help her, she could call on either the name of her husband or the god of her husband's people certainly not the gods in the huts of her own father (p. 11)

Traditional arrangements therefore entertain some undue limitations for the woman. Buchi's idea seems to be that tradition is the first culprit in assigning responsibility for the African woman's plight, while the man is the second. However, Emecheta's depiction of cultural or traditional inhibitions on the woman leaves a lot to be desired. One wonders why Buchi sees nothing



positive about tradition's treatment of women. The sheer traditionally accepted position of wife deserves positive portrayal. In any case the same tradition that provided for wife beating also demanded that the future husband part with a huge amount of bridewealth. There is certainly a positive element in the payment of bridewealth the high esteem or premium placed on a marriageable girl. The general understanding of the society is that once a girl has reached the age of marriage, she is a precious part of the family whose value is so high. The aim is not to defend the cultural practice of bridewealth but to point out that Buchi's portrayal of tradition and its treatment of women cannot go unchallenged.

An equally important theme that Buchi seems interested in her works, is that of motherhood. In handling this issue, Emecheta presents two prominent perspectives from which the concept of motherhood is examined. First and foremost, the artist gives the communal or general social perspective to the issue of motherhood. She then concerns herself with the woman's own perception of the issue. The two perspectives as we will realise have a casual relationship in that the general communal expectations of the woman or the mother for that matter, inculcate in the woman's psyche, particular anticipations and goals. Thus, the two most important questions that one has to answer in dealing with the theme of motherhood are: How does the society on which Buchi sets her works regard or understand the concept of motherhood? and what is the woman or the mother's own understanding of it?

Buchi's social setting understands the concept of motherhood in several ways. The foremost being that the woman is only accomplished as a mother as long as she gives birth particularly to male children, to continue her husband's lineage, "Girl children, concedes Buchi in *The slave Girl* "were not normally particularly prized creatures" (P19). Motherhood, especially of sons measures the worth of the woman. Even at an early age in life young girls are

targeted to be married and become mothers. The future of any little girl is projected towards motherhood. Ete Kamba in *Double Yoke* for example hopes for the future motherhood of his girlfriend Nko.

This social conception of motherhood underlies the relationships between men and women particularly husbands and wives in Emecheta's works. Husbands expect their wives to give birth to children particularly male ones. When they don't, the marriage contract comes to an end. Nnu Ego's case with her first husband Amatoku illustrates this. When Nnu Ego cannot bear any children, she is sent back to her parents. Thus it would seem that in this community motherhood determines success in marriage. But bearing children is not the only thing a woman or mother is expected to do. There are other roles assigned to her like, bringing the children up, cooking for the husband and attending to the husband's sexual needs. Ubani's consolation to his friend Naife in *The joys of motherhood* exemplifies this understanding. "She is to cook and bear children", he tells Naife about his wife.

The society demands the fertility of the woman and this is the foremost criterion of assigning worth. Alongside this expectation the community entertains the idea that the woman has to mother sons. One who does not bear sons is scorned like Adaku is. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, when Nwakuor and other men come to solve the differences between Nnu Ego and her Co-wife Adaku, it seems that Adaku is not so much listened to because she has only mothered girls. Nwakuor tells her.

I know you have children, but they are girls, who in a few years' time will go and help build another man's immortality. The only woman who is immortalising your husband you make unhappy with your fine clothes and lucrative business. If I were in your shoes, I should go home and consult my chi to find out why male offspring have been denied me. (p. 166).

The traditional requirement of the woman's fertility is even enforced harder in individual marriages. Every man, afraid of society, wants to have

male children. Thus every husband expects of his wife sons who will immortalise him. The mentality on women's fertility, widely expected by society, is that if no sons are born in a marriage, then it is the wife to blame. This mentality has been deeply instituted in the society on which Buchi sets her works to an extent that men are always impatient about the absence of a male child in a marriage,

Emecheta tells us that:

Though Ibo men admired a hard-working and rich woman, her life was nothing if she left no male children behind when she had gone to inherit the wealth, children who were her own flesh and blood (1979: 166)

'The men's demand for male children is so stiff that in Nnu Ego, the main character in *The Joys of Motherhood's* mind men's idea of reproductive fertility is like the most precious thing in life'. She says:

The men make it look as if we must aspire for children or die—  
but who made the law that we should not hope in our daughters

Demands such as that on raising male offspring are patriarchal in nature since the prime rationale behind the society's demand for male children is the issue of inheritance of property. Buchi here presents a point to note; that the Ibo society has a biased patriarchal tradition which, through its treatment and demands on women is out to perpetuate itself.

Traditional provisions for infertility seem to be tilted against the woman. Whereas the man might be allowed to get a brother or relative to bear children for him, the barren woman is despised and even prohibited from particular cultural rites. An example here is Iyawo Itsekiri, Nnu Ego's neighbour in Lagos who is given a name with a negative connotation and is looked down upon by her other neighbours because she is barren. Nnu Ego herself is scorned when she fails to bear any children for her first husband and she is even sent back to her parents because of it. But society will stop at nothing in facilitating the achievement of complete and 'true' motherhood. This

explains the existence of dibias or the medicinemen who are specially provided for by the social setting.

Ma Blackie in *The Bride Price* goes to see such a specialist in order to bear more children and become, in the community's, understanding, a more complete mother.

Communal demands or requirements of motherhood inculcate in the psychology of the woman a particular perspective from which she perceives herself and sets her expectations. The woman, because she feels that she might not be regarded unless she is a mother, tunes herself also to believe that she is nothing until she bears children particularly male ones. This becomes her burning aspiration. This becomes the goal of every woman in the society. Right from an early age in life, female members of society look forward to a time they will be married and have children. Nko, for example, in *Double Yoke* looks forward to a time she will "be a woman with her own children", Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood* enthuses the view that of everything, her motherhood is the most important. When she turns to look back at her life as a mother she says:

I don't know how to be anything else but a mother. How will I talk to a woman with no children? Taking the children from me is like taking the life I have always known, the life I am used to (p. 222)

To Nnu Ego it does not matter how miserable her life has been as long as she lived it as a mother. In fact early in the novel she is about to commit suicide because her life is closely tied to motherhood. Her first child Ngosi dies under mysterious circumstances just after birth. 'The little Ngosi made Nnu Ego proud and even changed her attitude towards her husband Naife when he dies, Nnu Ego feels she has come to the end of the road in life and wants to jump into the river'. She is only saved by Nwakusor. The same issue of getting children, and more children at that, is the source of Ma Blackie's worries in *The Bride Price*.

Children become the mothers' Investment: investment of hope, of the future, the assurance of the mothers' lives in the community. This is the notion that underlies the African woman's sacrifice and devotion in life. Nnu Ego typical of this contention labours so hard and spends all her time on her children, she hawks and does all sorts of odd jobs to secure a fortune to educate and feed her children. Likewise, Ma Blackie's all important goal is to see to the education of her daughter Akunna and Nnaando. These struggles that actually wear and tire the woman is what in the Ibo society, and by extension African community, regard ironically as "the joys of motherhood". Through Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Buchi Emecheta enacts the sad paradox and irony of the social arrangement that confines the woman's life and vision around the expectations of motherhood.

At least, in Emecheta's understanding motherhood is not the happiest of positions in community. Whereas the society enthuses motherhood with so much romance and fondness, Emecheta, critically perceives the condition as enslaving confining and demeaning. She does not conflate motherhood with positive features or institutions like the negritude enthusiasts who conflate motherhood with Africanness. Emecheta's conception of motherhood is thus a departure from not only negritudist forms of thought but also from the fairly common African notion of motherhood.

Is there any hope or future for the African woman? What is the most convenient way of ridding the African woman's condition of slavery' to both tradition and the male partners in life? Put another way, what is the future of the African woman. These are questions that Buchi is interested in, in her works. She does not provide solutions to the plight of the African woman but concerns herself with what lies in store for her in the light of the socio-cultural environment in which she operates. This leads us to the third broad theme of liberation and the future of the African woman.

In her fictional works, Buchi Emecheta does not concretely articulate

her position on the issues related to the future of the African woman. However, it will appear that she perceives the African woman's problems as mainly results of her overdependence of the male counterparts and her slavish obedience to tradition and cultural dispositions of her community which militate against her. Therefore Emecheta seems to favour the African woman's efforts or any developments that might enable the African woman depend on herself or 'make her own life'. The author thus, apparently, advocates for a separationist style of life and rebellion to tradition. Emecheta seems to support the idea that the African woman should come out and rebel against traditions that disregard her individuality and humanity- such as the demand for male children. This is the impression we get from the portraiture of Adaku in *The Joys of Motherhood*. Adaku, fed up with the demand for male children tells her co-wife Nnu Ego that:

I am not prepared to stay here and be turned into a mad woman just because I have no sons. The way they go on about it one would think I know where sons are made and I have been neglectful about taking one for my husband (p. 169).

Adaku decides that she will stay away from her husband Naife and, interestingly "set her own standards" (p. 169) Buchi's standpoint here is that the African woman should go against the odds of tradition and live on her own. In this way, she will set her own standards and have the freedom and independence to do what she deems important to her. Testimony to Emecheta's positive view of the separationist type of life is her depiction of Adaku after her departure from Naife's home. Adaku's health and manner of dress changes when she begins to live on her own. She becomes a source of jealousy for her married friends. When she comes to bid Oshia, Nnu Ego's son, farewell, she is well dressed and generally better off than her co-wife Nnu Ego. Mama Abbey remarks about this:

— after all you were not particularly happy with Naife when you were living with us. All these yards and yards of abada material. (p. 189).

Another aspect of positive change that couples Adaku's "rebellion" is her decision to educate her daughters. A suggestion made here by the author is that the African woman's rebellion against tradition will enable her to decide on a "likeable" fate for herself and her offsprings. Even more supportive of this separationist lifestyle is the enactment of successful single motherhood in Mama Abbey. We do not come across her 'husband' anywhere in the novel *The Joys of Motherhood*, yet she lives so happily with her only son. Another suggestion is added to this separate life proposition - that a break from tradition and domination of the husband will enable the African woman to have a small number of children, which in any case will be an advantage to her health.

The irony of Emecheta's suggestion that the woman should separate from the man is that the separation leads to prostitution. Adaku says that when she leaves her husband, she is going to be a prostitute:

I am going to be a prostitute — I am leaving here tomorrow with my girls I am not going to Ibuza. I am going to live with those women in Montgomery Road. Yes I'm going to join them, to make some of our men who return from the war happy (p. 168)

Adaku is in a great dilemma. She leaves a man who mistreats her to go to others who exploit her. However, this is indicative of the unfair arrangement of society where the man is not only well off but also the controller of social transactions given that he is more able financially. It is of considerable import therefore to note that Buchi is so ambivalent about the future of the African woman. Separation from the husband is not a plausible step after all because it does not lead the woman to a better alternative. After all separation as long as the African woman thinks of children, just as Adaku and mama Abbey do, does not end the ills of patriarchy.

Education promises hope for the African woman. Nnu Ego expresses this bluntly.

I am beginning to think that there may be a future for educated women. It would be really something for a woman to be able to earn some money monthly like a man. (p. 189)

Evidently in Nnu Ego's *Understanding* an educated woman could easily get economic means of survival that will set her free from the control of her husband or any other men. However, judging from Emecheta's portrayal of Nko in her other novel *Double Yoke* and Akunna in *The Bride Price*, one can rightly say that education alone is not enough to secure the African woman freedom from tradition and men. Akunna for example receives education but she wants to be married. She clings on to chike and is eventually married to him. She undergoes the pains of pregnancy and has to do for her husband what any other woman does, cook for him and prepare his bed. Nko's case is even a more glaring converse of what Buchi Emecheta expects of education. Nko has got good education but we are told that she still was:

a simple young woman whose ambition was to be a modern wife with a career and children of her own  
(p. 107)

As long as Nko aspires to be 'a wife and have children', then her freedom is not guaranteed. As a wife she will be subjected to the whims of her husband. The demands of motherhood, will come to bear on her just like any other mother educated or uneducated. Here again, Emecheta's position is not so clear. Suffice it to say that Buchi's vision for the African woman is far from clear.

In conclusion therefore, this chapter demonstrates that Buchi Emecheta with a deep interest in the experiences of the African woman within a traditional and cultural environment that has scanty respect for her, the woman's experiences as a mother and the future of the African woman exhibits devotion to the personality and image of the African woman. Emecheta depicts the woman in the background of the Ibo cultural dispositions. Here the woman does not own property and cannot lay claim even on



her own children. She is always owned from the time of birth to death. As a mother, society demands of her male children without who her worth is not tenable culturally. With children she finds her life always tied to them, their needs and their growth to an extent that she has not time for herself. Buchi attempts to propose ways in which the African woman can evade her plight and cultural enslavement. She suggests separation from the man but this is not helpful since the separation leads the woman to the immoral and much degraded condition of prostitution. She proposes education, which is not a complete measure either because it does not guarantee the African woman's independence. It only promises economic satisfaction.

After the analysis of Emecheta's thematic concerns, one would rightly say that Buchi has a deep awareness of the conditions in which the African woman operates. A question that remains to be answered is, how does she portray women? The issue here is whether or not Emecheta presents women who succumb to or rebel against the cultural doctrines, whether or not Buchi's women characters act to help themselves out of the predicament cultural demands place them. These issues clearly lead to our discussion of characterization in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CHARACTERIZATION

Characters are the vehicle by which the artist communicates his/her ideas. The possibility that Buchi Emecheta uses her characters to show the kind of treatment the African woman undergoes cannot be ruled out. We set out to study characters and characterization in Buchi's fictional works first to attempt to examine the themes the author delineates through particular characters, secondly we contend that the creation of particular characters is essentially an effort on the part of the artist to strike a particular image or images. Thus a study of Buchi's characterization will certainly aid any logical conclusion about Buchi's portrayal of the African woman.

For the purposes of our study we shall examine the treatment of women characters especially the main characters in Buchi's fictional works. We have chosen the female main characters because their centrality is artistically purposeful. Secondly, any critical reader would expect that, with regard to the plight and position of the African woman, Buchi would concentrate more on the female characters compared to the male.

Basing our analysis on the foregoing rationale, we shall study characters like Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Ma Blackie and Akunna in *The Bride Price*. Nko in *Double Yoke* and Ma Palagada and Ojebeta in *The Slave Girl*. We will look at the roles these characters play artistically and the roles they are assigned by the societies on which the works are set.

It is worthwhile, though, to note that Buchi's women characters are presented in groups. At least the artist makes an effort to present women in their society the way they are widely seen by society. The Ibo society apparently lumps its women together. There is the tendency to attribute certain behavioural traits or actions to women generally. Society has forced women to see themselves that way. This possibly explains such expressions

as “we Women —”, “Ibuza Women” or generally “mothers” etc. This prejudicial perception of women characterizes Buchi’s creativity. Consequently, in her works Buchi presents few independent (or is it individual) women. Much as this is an attempt on the part of the artist to present a hateful aspect of her society, it is also a weakness because it inhibits concise characterization.

On the other hand the generic presentation or portraiture of women has a positive angle. That of amplifying the plight or general experiences of one individual woman to encapsule the whole spectrum of the African woman’s life. Therefore, but for the main female character, Buchi hardly develops other female characters. On the basis of this nature of characterization, it would appear that Buchi intends to communicate her themes and put up an image or images of the African woman through the main female characters.

Nnu Ego, the main character in *The Joys of Motherhood* is a product of passionate love between Nwokacha Agbadi and Ona. She is the only daughter of Ona because once she is born her mother passes away. Right from an early age in life Nnu Ego is ‘destined’ to be a wife and mother, at least that is her parents’ wish. Her mother even wishes her a happy marriage, her last wish before she dies. She tells Nnu Ego’s father Agbadi:

However much you love our daughter Nnu Ego you allow her to have a life of her own, a husband if she wants one. Allow her to be a woman.

Interesting to note here is that, Nnu Ego’s mother has an anti-Ibo traditional concept of womanhood. She tells her husband to let Nnu Ego live a life of her own, to have a husband only if she wants one. There is an implication in this ‘will’ that to be a complete woman Nnu Ego’s mother thinks that one had to be left to live a life of her own, to be independent. But Nnu Ego does not live up to the wishes of her mother. At least tradition could not let her. She is married at an early age not so much out of her own will but that of her father.

Right from her early marital life, Nnu Ego is obsessed by the wish to be a fulfilled mother, to have children of her own. With this zest she enters marriage. This urge to have children is cultivated by social demands on one hand and her father's wish on the other. Her father wishes her well "to grow and rock your children's children". The failure to achieve the end for which she is obsessed is the prime reason for her shock and sadness. However, while in this predicament and facing the society's criticism, Nnu Ego remains calm and patient. She is hardworking in her daily duties as a wife. Her patience however is shortlived for at a particular time she feels that she had been cursed and forsaken.

When the second marriage starts, Nnu Ego's desire to mother children is still inflexible. She wishes that "may be the next time I come back (to her father's house) I shall come with a string of Children". Like any other innocent Ibo woman, Nnu Ego walks into marriage with Naife with very scanty knowledge about her father's choice of a husband. She makes no effort at all to resist the dictates of tradition and hardly sets out any other goals for herself apart from that of being a mother with "a string of children". Meanwhile the keen obsession she has for children is till steadfast. This explains why she almost commits suicide when her first product of her marriage to Naife, Ngosi is dead.

Nnu Ego's reaction to her condition is typical of cultural conformity. She is innocent and her relationship with her husband is almost purely sexual and for reproductive purposes. She detests the "jelly of a man" that her new husband Naife is but she is ready to accept him if he 'gives' her children. However, Nnu Ego's encounter with the urban environment has an impact on her personality. She becomes brave. When her husband Naife admonishes her and tells her how it is bad behaviour, traditionally to look a man in the face, Nnu Ego replies that "That only applies in Ibuza not here"

As time goes by, Nnu Ego develops to become defiant and assertive.

Contrary to the conventionally accepted reverence for husbands she tells hers off. At one point she tells her husband:

If you dared come to my father's compound to ask for me, my brothers would have thrown you out. My people only let me come to you here because they thought you were like your brother not like this — You are not only ugly but you are a shatterer of dreams. I imagined that when I told my husband of my coming child I should tell it nicely (p. 49).

Apparently with the influence of the urban environment Nnu Ego becomes even more analytical and critical questioning the rationale of African men acting as the white men's woman washing clothes and cooking for them. In this way we get the image of a receptive and dynamic African woman, capable of looking at reality from a number of perspectives not a pot of culture totally immersed in the Ibo ways of life.

The social background on which the novel *The Joys of Motherhood* is set, assigns its members roles according to their gender. The woman like Nnu Ego is expected to bear children and thus her foremost role in society becomes the rearing of children. As her family grows Nnu Ego's attention is consistently focused on her children more than anybody or anything else. Her main preoccupation is the welfare of her children; provision of education, clothing and shelter. She is a hardworking mother for she engages in hawking and all sorts of odd jobs including buying and selling cigarettes in the black market for the sake of her children.

Nnu Ego's struggles in bringing up her children deny her a lot of pleasure. She cannot make new friends nor does she have time to herself to think about and improve her own condition. Ironically this kind of self-sacrifice, at the expense of one's children is what to her is supposed to be the joy of motherhood. The portraiture of Nnu Ego here posits an image of a determined mother indefatigably interested in the welfare of her children.

The experience in marriage is definitely not a smooth one for Nnu Ego, she is jealous like any other women, when, her husband inherits his brother's

wife Adaku. She is jealous of Adaku's youthfulness and appeal to Naife. Here the image of a tortured African woman, a victim of polygamy emerges. However, Nnu Ego is proud of her two sons and feels herself more worth than Adaku. This satisfaction and self-fulfilment is characteristic of the Ibo tradition. The mother of sons is more respected in this community than the mother of only daughters. Therefore Nnu Ego's reaction to her husband's praises for her because she has mothered sons, decks her as a typical Ibo woman whose aspirations in life are clearly shaped by social anticipations ;and constructions.

Nnu Ego is not opposed to their daughter Taiwo's marriage outside the tribe. In fact she goes ahead to marry off the daughter in the absence of her husband an indication that although she is obedient to the traditions and cultural ways of her people, she is receptive to the demand of social-cultural changes.

It is vital to emphasize that Nnu Ego does not live her life a free woman. She is not only imprisoned by the cultural or traditional demands of her community but she is also chained to the needs and life of her children. When she looks back at her life as a mother towards the end of the novel.

Nnu Ego told herself that she would have been better off had she had time to cultivate those women who had offered her hands of friendship; but she had never had time. What with worrying over this child, this pregnancy and the lack of money, coupled with the fact that she never had adequate outfits to wear to visit her friends. She had shied away from friendship, telling herself she did not need any friends, she had enough in her family .....so busy had she been building her joys as a mother. (p. 224).

From the portrait of Nnu Ego, Buchi concisely develops the image of motherhood. The writer also depicts the African woman here, not as intransigently opposed to changes but as one who is receptive to social changes. Emecheta does not, however, wholly embrace the African concept of motherhood where the bearing and bringing up of children however taxing it might be, is considered the noblest of goals of life. Through the suffering attendant

to the role of motherhood, which she highlights, the author demolishes the romantic myth normally built around motherhood for instance by negativist artists. Through her treatment of Nnu Ego Emecheta argues that the roles of motherhood demand strong self-sacrifice and self-denial at the expenses of the health and comfort of the mother.

The first time we read of Ma Blackie, in *The Bride Price*, we learn that she has left her urban residence to attend to medication by a dibia or medicineman. The reason for this is that she does not have as many children as she is expected to. One problem, however with Ma Blackie, as the case is with many of Emecheta's characters is that she is not fully developed and her appearance in the novel is very scanty. Thus, it is difficult to discuss her characterization. In spite of this poor development and inconsistent portrayal Ma Blackie appears, from the first incidents we come across her, to be an innocent woman taken advantage of. In accepting to be treated by the dibia to bear more children, she simply responds to the whims of her husband's family and whole community. While at Ibuza undergoing treatment we notice her 'slavish' obedience and reverence to Okonkwo her brother-in law.

Ma Blackie is a cultural conformist. Her anticipations like those of any other Ibo woman have been decided for her by the community. She knows and wants to anticipate for more children. She innocently reverses tradition and takes her position just as tradition dictates it. This explains why she doesn't question the idea of getting more children. She derives her understanding of her self-worth from the social perception of women. On her part therefore she will be a more accomplished woman with more children.

Ma Blackie however, insists on educating her daughter Akunna amid strong opposition is the idea by other family members. Although her reaction to the situation is not so clear, it is noteworthy that her determination to educate her daughter is an intention to depart from the cultural disregard for women. As an Ibo mother however, Ma Blackie hopes that her daughter

Akunna will be married happily. She is not obsessed with the issue of bride price though, as is her inherited husband Okonkwo. Again because of poor development, we do not clearly see Ma Blackie's reaction to Akunna's marriage to Chike, a slave's descendant. Therefore, all that is possible to say about Ma Blackie is that she also, like Nnu Ego is not so reactionary. She gives room for social changes and is ready to part with her social orientation on the treatment of women.

Akunna, Ma Blackie's daughter is a sharp and clever girl. As the novel opens these qualities are clearly shown not only in her performance in school but also in her keen and critical perception of reality. Although she is so young, at the age of thirteen, she is able to understand the injustice and prejudice there is in her father's insistence that Ma Blackie should see a medicineman. Akunna understands the unfairness in the arrangement where her mother is referred to as being childless despite her being a mother of two.

Because of, predominantly urban upbringing, Akunna is very cynical about the Ibo traditions and ways of life like bathing in the open. She cannot understand why she should not marry Chike although her society calls him a slave. Therefore Akunna is not keen on subscribing to the socially recognized laws on relationships between slaves and free borns. She loves Chike and is ready to get married to him despite all odds. This standpoint attests to Akunna's independent mindedness and determination to live her own life, free of the dictates of Ibo traditions and customs.

Akunna's reaction to her situation and independent mindedness is different from her step sister, Ogugua's conformist behaviour. This perhaps tells a lot about the artist's conception of the urban and rural upbringing. Akunna's urban upbringing and her acquisition of formal education seem to have liberated her or inculcated in her a sense of freedom. Thus her perception of herself and other people is clearly more objective than that of Ogugua who is brought up in the rural, dominantly Ibo community where her decisions are



shaped by cultural etiquette. In *Akunna* therefore, Buchi depicts the positive impact of formal education and urbanization; that of inculcating freedom of thought and conscience. The image stricken here is that of the dynamic receptive African woman. The juxtaposition of *Akunna* and *Ogugua* is the author's way of presenting a conservative woman in the later and the dynamic fast changing young African woman in the former.

The African woman is not an ignoramus. At least this is what Buchi wants to say in the lengthy portrayal of *Akunna* interacting and relating to men. *Akunna* is not only brilliant at school but also very witty. She shines in her class and performs well in her examination. On the other hand she clearly outwits *Okoboshi* and her family and escapes her forced marriage. She deceives *Okoboshi* that she is not a virgin any more, a trick that works perfectly well. She slips through the fingers of a traditionally sanctioned, forced marriage and gets married to *Chike* her choice. The wit and determination to have her way confirm that *Akunna* is a defiant African woman, defiant to tradition and cultural confinement. These are positive attributes that strengthen the image of a determined woman and an independent minded one.

However, one notes that at the back of *Akunna*'s mind is the submissive spirit characteristic of *Ibo* and by extension African cultural adherents. When she thinks of being married to *Chike*, she submissively concludes that, she would want him to own her; "She would belong to him for life and never be able to return to her parents". One notes that although really *Akunna* is independent minded and defiant to tradition, she is not opposed to marriage. This is possibly *Emecheta*'s own position on the condition of the African woman. *Emecheta* seems to say that the African woman could be independent and free of traditional confinements but still honour and respect marriage. The artist is not against patriarchy as long as its attendant practices which are usually against the woman are avoided. One such practice of course is that of lack of choice of a marriage partner. This is a point on which Buchi differs

from western feminists who see patriarchy as the prime source of the woman's woes. Apart from Ma Blackie and Akunna, other women characters in this book like Ma Beauty, Ogugua and her mother are not well developed. In fact they are merely mentioned in the novel.

The setting of *Double Yoke* is a modern world. Most of the events in the novel take place at the University of Calabar and most of the characters are academics. Although the author uses a number of women characters particularly learned ones like Dr Mrs Edet and Miss Bulewao, it is around Nko that the story revolves. However, compared to other characters Miss Bulewao is fairly developed. Thus apart from Nko, one would look at the depiction of Miss Bulewao. Miss Bulewao, an educated woman and a writer herself is a representation of modern day post-colonial development. She represents the new order which gives change to the woman to pursue education to high levels. She is assertive and outspoken. The fact that she is unmarried underlines the idea that education ensures freedom and independence of the African woman. Independence from traditional dictates that consign a woman to marital confinement at an early age.

Miss Bulewao is popular as a creative writer and thus gifted, brilliant. Her personality is commanding. This is seen in the response of the students to her. Apparently, Emecheta presents a strong woman academician like Miss Bulewao to emphasize the idea that the African woman is capable of great achievement. The author paints a positive image of an able brilliant writer in Miss Bulewao. Again like many of Buchi's female characters, Miss Bulewao is not well developed. We cannot therefore successfully assess her response to her condition, what she thinks of being educated, a writer and a single woman.

Nko, the main character in *Double Yoke*, unlike Miss Bulewao is fairly developed. When we come across her at a church service at the beginning of the story, she looks innocent. We learn that she is clever and performs exceptionally well in her academic work. Her ambition is that of becoming an

accomplished woman. Her idea of an accomplished woman is to be married, have children of one's own and yet have a career. Thus, we realise that she is not opposed to marriage. We also realise that she is ambitious and determined to make it in life. Her mother's influence on her is notable especially on the question of marriage.

Nko's innocence is taken advantage of by her boyfriend Ete Kamba who destroys her virginity and turns round to refer to her as a prostitute. Total submission and reverence for the man are not Nko's attributes. She is firm and talks to her boyfriend Ete-Kamba on the face; "I have read of male prostitutes" she tells him when Ete Kamba insists there are no male prostitutes. At one time Nko shouts at her man "to hell with your mother". Perhaps this attests to the fact that Nko is determined to live a life different from her mother's reverence and submission to her father, Nko's innocence is also taken advantage of by Professor Ikot in what seems an enactment of the sad scenario of African academics and immorality. The African educated woman from Nko's experience, it is not free. She is yoked by her own aspirations of achieving academic excellence and a good career on one hand, the demands of society to marry and raise a family on the other.

Nko's reaction to her situation is that as a woman she really resents the treatment she receives from men. For instance, she really wonders if there is a difference between Ete Kamba an educated young man and any uneducated man in the village. However, the roles she plays of a girlfriend avails the author's message that education alone does not guarantee the African woman the independence and freedom she needs. That she is taken advantage of by men gives the impression that the African man educated or not is perhaps the sole source of the African woman's problems. The image availed here is that of an innocent woman with genuine love for a man who does not love her, an innocent female student with genuine respect for her male professor who however has no respect for her. In the final analysis, therefore,

Buchi Emecheta succeeds to use Nko as a female character to demonstrate that even with the advent of formal education the African woman's freedom and comfort is not guaranteed.

In the novel *The Slave Girl*, the story revolves around Ma Palagada and Ojebeta, 'the slave girl'. The background information about Ojebeta is told with an element of pathos. Ojebeta is a miserable orphan her parents having died during the felenza epidemic. Misfortune, however dogs her throughout life for the brother's hands on which she is expected to find solace are unprotective and inhuman. Okolie, her brother, sells her. In return, he gets money to get the abada cloth for his age's dance festival.

As the story opens Ojebeta appears to us an innocent girl only taken advantage of by her ambitious brother. She is ignorant about life, particularly this is why she cannot tale what is about to happen to her. Ojebeta, however is a genuine and loving sister of Okolie's. After all the trust she has in her brother does not give room for any suspicions.

When it dawns on her that she will remain in Ma Palagada's household, Ojebeta desperately attempts to escape. The attempted escape is not successful and thus she has to remain enslaved for life. While in the house of slavery, Ojebeta proves hard working and dedicated to her work. Consequently she appeals to her mistress, Ma Palagada. We learn with admiration that Ojebeta develops to be a well-mannered young woman who endears herself to the well educated Jacob. The two eventually marry.

It is interesting to note that Buchi Emecheta fails to develop Ojebeta as the main character. The author overrelies on the narrative method and uses the omniscient narrator perspective to the disadvantage of presenting under-developed characters. She does not for instance use conversation as an aspect of style that would most probably expose the behavioural traits and psychological make ups of her characters. Another shortcoming that intensely affects characterization in this novel is that the artist lumps her characters together.

For example the slaves 'employed' in Ma Palagada's household are presented as a group. Thus, hardly does one find enough data or artist's focus on one individual character.

Another character in *The Slave Girl*, who is central but also undeveloped is Ma Palagada, the slave owner, dealer and business woman. We encounter her in a limited setting that makes any analysis of her characterization practically difficult. All that one can possibly say is that she is manipulative and mercenary. She tactfully manipulates Okolie, Ojebeta's brother into accepting twenty pounds for his sister. She induces Okolie with food then pays him in bits. Apparently she uses Okolie's thirst for money to win him into a cheap deal.

Secondly, Ma Palagada appears to us a hardworking woman. She has accumulated wealth "like a man" because of her business tact and determination. This is a positive quality that the author seems to exploit to strengthen her contention that the African woman is industrious. At least this is the image that emerges through the treatment of Ma Palagada. Ma Palagada is also pretentious. It is so difficult to morally reconcile her "church-going behaviour" with her keeping of slaves in her house.

Both Ma Palagada and Ojebeta play important roles in so far as Emecheta's thematic concerns are communicated through them. Through Ojebeta, the author paints the sorrowful image of the African Woman's suffering in the hands of men. In fact the theme of slavery and the African woman's position is clearly explored through the chronicle of Ojebeta's life.

The irony of Ma Palagada's ownership of girl slaves is that whereas the African woman suffers enslavement and control in the hands of men, she also suffers in the same way on the hands of a woman. Possibly this paradoxical situation is Emecheta's indictment of the African woman; that the African woman is an enemy of herself, she does not make or African women do not make concerted efforts to rid themselves of male domination.

In conclusion, a closer look at Buchi's main characters avails a justifiable conclusion that Buchi has a particular character type in her fictional works. The primary character in almost all of her fictional works suffers in the hands of a man; the man may be a husband like the case is with Nnu ego, a husband's relation like in Ma Blackie's case, a brother as in Ojebeta's case or a boyfriend or any other man as the situation is with Nko who is mishandled by Ete Kamba her boyfriend and Professor Ikot her teacher. Another common feature with Emecheta's primary characters is that they have a high self assessment or self perception. Amid all the tribulations, we see Buchi's women central characters determined to wade through all sorts of mistreatment and odds to end well in life.

The treatment of the main female characters aides the artist to present images of the African woman and to present her themes. For example, though Nnu Ego the artist presents an image of a receptive woman though Ojebeta, Ma Blackie's, Akunna and Nko the author portrays an innocent African woman whose life is determined, at times unfortunately wrongly, by the male members of her society. Therefore, one would rightly say that Buchi Emecheta uses characterization as a feature of style, as a mode of communication.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### LANGUAGE USE AND STYLE

In literature, language is the main unit or currency of trade. Writers use language in particular chosen ways to aid them to communicate their ideas. The choice of words, phrases and sentences is a crucial component of the creative process. It would therefore be unthinkable to claim to have examined the image of the African woman in Buchi Emecheta's fictional works without devoting a section of the study to the author's use of language and style. Writing is not a mechanical process. It involves the emotive dimension of human experience. Writers use language to create their intended characters. Images in prose works are 'painted' with words. Thus, we intend to study the kind of words, phrases and sentences used by Emecheta to present her characters and the impression created about their images let alone Emecheta's use of imagery similes and her characters' speeches.

Speech is an indispensable testimony to characterization. This Emecheta is aware of. Thus, if one compares the speeches of primary male and female characters, one cannot help noting the artist's intended characterization. Even the tones of male and female characters attest to this assertion. For example in *Double Yoke* this is enacted in the speeches of Ete Kamba and Nko. While Ete Kamba 'cries' that he has never seen male prostitutes, Nko, 'remarks slowly' that she has read about male prostitutes. Male speech is always assertive and is made with a tone of absolute authority Hear Naife Nnu Ego's husband.

What did you say? Did I not pay your bride price? Am I not your owner? (p. 48)

What else does a woman want?

I have given you a home and if all goes well the child you and your father have been wanting and you still sit there staring at me with

hatred in your eyes (p. 49)

Male speech is filled with a diminutive attitude towards women. This

testifies to their treatment of women. The assertive speeches and tones that are males are clearly indicative of the male understanding of themselves, their self-assessment. They consider themselves more worthy than females and their culturally guaranteed authority is inherent in whichever circumstances they interact with women. The slow and calm speeches of female characters, with the exception of those they make when they are annoyed, are indicative not only of their submission but also of their conformity to the traditionally accepted norm of them being inferior. Thus, they can respond slowly when they are shouted at. It would appear that the behavioural traits of both men and women are explored by the artist through the speeches. Because tradition has somewhat cowed the African woman, she appears small and humble while the man, with traditional approval remains arrogant.

Buchi Emecheta in a style characteristic of common African speech patterns lumps her characters together in gender classes. Thus, we read generalisations about men and women. In her fictional works we come across such generalisations as:

Handsome men often felt it unnecessary to be loving (1979:36)

Women were all the same (1979:42)

Women were so stupid (1979:43)

These generalisations tend to give a utopian perspective of both men and women. It is the African perception of either men or women, which entails such kind of generalisations. Through them Buchi seems to exhibit the impact of lack of individuality, that society sets standards that ignore individuality and thus personal identity. Even in male-female relationships, this kind of generalisation is experienced. It is this traditional African concept of society which, conservative as it is, allowed room for the mistreatment of the African woman. Lumped together as a particular group of lesser human beings women are secluded within particular role groups by tradition, Even the most intelligent in their number, even one with more superior qualities than her husband has no chance to express herself just because she is a woman.



It interests one to find that the acceptance of this kind of general perception particularly by women themselves is tantamount to perpetuating an oppressive tradition. When the African woman accepts to be lumped together with other women she has to take, though painfully, all attitudinal inclinations attendant to such generalisations. For instance she has to accept the demands put on her as a woman generally, to bear children for her husband. "We women" remarks Adaku in *The Joys of Motherhood* "set impossible standards for ourselves" (p. 169). Evidently, Buchi's message is that society through the utopian conception of women has even inflicted a negative self image in the psychology of women.

When the male characters refer to themselves generally, they assert their authority or position. When female characters refer to them generally as men, they make references to their authority or their conduct in relation to women. The general perspective of male characters is more or less a deliberate move to preserve the status quo, to preserve their authority.

The women characters in Buchi's fictional works are presented positively. It is clear from a close analysis of the words that the female characters Buchi creates are deliberately redeemable compared to the male characters. The portraiture of male characters is negative. This is indicated by the animal and beastly images used to describe male characters' physique. For example in describing Naife, Nnu Ego's husband Buchi says:

In walked a man with a belly like a pregnant cow, wobbling first to this side and then to that. The belly coupled with the fact that he was short made him look a barrel (p. 42)

The comparison of Uteh, Ojebeta's aunt, and her husband in *The Slave Girl* also reveals Emecheta's artistic bias against male characters.

After all Uteh was a beauty and not only was she a beauty but she was a daughter born along the Eke market Yet she had condescended to marry this man with brown skin and eyes that watered all the time like those of wet chicks. His body was of the kind that after each bath looked as if he poured ashes over it.

He was never healthy neither in looks nor in reasoning. (pp. 38-39)

In describing Okolie, Ojebeta's brother, Buchi tells us her brother's head showed itself from the gape like the head of a tortoise coming out of its shell (p. 34)

Okolie is further said to be "licking his soup like an animal not a human being" (p. 67) After the felenza disaster, Buchi tells us that all men had died and what was left, the likes of Okolie were "the ghosts of men". Later in the novel, while presenting the dancing ceremony, Buchi tells us that "Okolie's waist was as small as that of a snake." In *The Bride Price*, Akunna's brother is said to be 'grunting' like a pig. When Nna-ndo eats we learn that "he was scraping off the burnt parts of the yam and chewing the good parts, gnashing his teeth like a squirrel cracking nuts" (Pa5)

Contrary to the similes used to describe male characters, images of women are positive. Female characters' physique are positively portrayed. For instance the leader of Ma Palagada's slave girl is described as "an attractive grown girl — she looked well fed and so fresh and plumb that her skin reminded him (Okolie) of smooth, ripe mangoes ready to burst open oozing out rich creamy sugary juice" (p. 47), And Ma Palagada's grand daughters are described thus: 'The girls' eyes were now as round as ripe red palm fruits' (p. 107) Victoria, Ma Palagada's daughter herself is said to have "a skin like that of young coffee beans and silky darkbrown hair" (p. 43) Akunna in *The Bride Price* is said to have had "a kind of softness about her which spelled peace" (p. 78) Even the physical appearance of Ma Blackie Akunna's mother, pronounces her commanding image and presence. Her husband Ezekiel Odia describes her as "his Amazon of a wife" (p. 9)

A question one would want to ask at this stage is, why exactly does Buchi use animal similes in describing male characters? Perhaps she enacts the inhuman qualities of men particularly in relation to their treatment of women. For instance Okolie's act of selling his sister into slavery is not human. This concurs with the author's description of him when he eats. The "animal

attributes" exhibited in the male physical appearance clearly re-emerge in their behaviour and attitudes towards or treatment of women. Thus comparison of male characters to animals intensifies the vilification of male members of society.

What about women characters who are predominantly associated with edibles? For example why does Okolie perceive the female leader of Ma Palagada's slave girls as a ripe oranges? This is on one hand evidence of the lust of men while on the other, it is an enactment of the wider social perception of women. It is like each time a man thinks of a woman, it has to be in terms of how he can have intercourse with her, one would say, it sounds that each time a man thinks of a woman he thinks of her in terms of consumption. Interestingly though, Buchi, a female writer herself does not counter this kind of construction. The female characters are not fully developed to warrant a comment on whether or not they are just a bunch of edibles. What the reader learns is that female characters are positively presented compared to their male counterparts. But this positivity is not concretely foregrounded. Thus Buchi's attempt to present endearing images of the African woman is not completely successful.

All central or principal characters in Buchi's fictional works are women. The centrality of female characters is not without purpose. If the sheer placing of women at the centre of her stories is not unique then the fact that we see or encounter events in Buchi's works through the eyes of these female characters is. Buchi adopts an omniscient narrator perspective and predominantly, a simple linear plot pattern. Although the author at times delves deep into the psychology of her characters, the simple plot pattern and the omniscient narrator perspective are suitable artistic conditions for the main character to command the tale thus rendering the social realities that surround the African woman through a woman's eyes. We thus have the woman's view of society, the world seen from the African woman's perspective. The African woman

seldom finds such a place in African written literature. Thus what Buchi Emecheta is doing here is to assert the presence of the African woman; that the woman in Africa has got her own view of society which should be heard and seen.

When Emecheta makes trips into the minds of her principal female characters we encounter the woman's self-evaluation and feelings about the society in which she lives. This self and social therapy gives us a chance to learn that the African woman actually is conscious of the injustice around her: Another thought that was going through her mind made Akunna afraid. She was beginning to feel that it was unjust that she was not to be allowed a say in her own life and she was beginning to hate her mother for being so passive about it all (p. 116)

Ojebeta in *The slave Girl*, in a pensive mood when she is being persuaded by Jacob to elope with him has these questions racing in her mind. Would she ever be free? Must she be a slave all her life, never being allowed to do what she liked? Was it the fate of all Ibuza women or just her own? (p. 168)

The author's adventure into her female main characters streams of thought helps exhibit the ramifications of the demanding traditional African life. Further still, it is, apparently, Emecheta's deliberate attempt to stress that the woman in Africa should not be taken for granted. She can ably record and critique or impeach the inconsiderate standards set by the male members of her community in the guise of tradition. In the light of this understanding the artist seems to attest to the African woman's intellect and wisdom the possession of which is widely believed to be a preserve of men. One would say therefore that Buchi counters the prevalent mentality (particularly with male writers) of depicting the woman as docile both in action and thought.

Although female characters dominate the centre stage of Buchi's fictional world it is worth pointing out that they do not operate in isolation.

They interact with their male counterparts although the artist seems to indict male characters in relation to the maltreatment of the African woman. The constant contact of the female character, the victim of the culpable male and the former is the artist's advocacy for a non-separationist approach to the plight of the African woman. Whereas the radical western feminists advocate for a complete separation of the woman from the man and even go ahead to propose such measures as lesbianism in an attempt to have the woman attain full satisfaction in life without male assistance, Buchi seems to propose only a change in socio-cultural predispositions. This is perhaps the explanation for her efforts to show that both male and female need each other.

It is undeniable that Buchi attempts to universalize the plight of the African woman. Women's experiences seem to concur a lot especially those that are bitterly undergone in the hands of men. Ato for example has seen in her family the impact of polygamy and wife inheriting, the experience Nnu Ego undergoes when her husband Naife takes on Adaku his new wife. Ato tells Nnu Ego when the latter tries to conceal her emotional displacement. You forget that like you I was brought up in a large compound and have seen neglected wives all my life (p. 76)

Making the plight of the African woman universal or utopian is a suggestion that all women are sisters, they are united by their negative experiences. Nnu Ego tells the Oweri Woman who helps her deliver her baby that we are like sisters on a pilgrimage

Why should we not help one another (p. 53)

By implication therefore, Buchi seems to suggest that when a single female character is portrayed negatively that is a wide projection to the wider world of women. Thus here she rationalises the representative role of her female characters. Secondly Emecheta seems to suggest that women face similar experiences and thus need concerted efforts to deliver themselves from their socio-cultural bondage. A one woman crusade is not commendable in Buchi's

view.

True to her efforts of alleviating the female's image in African literature, Buchi creates women characters who show behavioural attributes that conventional wisdom preserves for men. For example, women characters created by Buchi can speak in sayings or can communicate in the fine Ibo idiom. Ma Palagada in *The Slave Girl* ably uses sayings of her people. She demonstrates this linguistic tact in various incidents in the novel. She says before an unruly crowd agitating against the payment of taxes;

“If you cooked dinner for the crowd, the crowd would finish it and even ask for more, but if the crowd should decide to cook dinner for you, you could never finish it “ (p. 133)

This is accurately analogous to the situation she finds herself in. When a market crowd protesting the impending introduction of taxation approaches Ma Palagada, she deems it wise to either join them or run away because she didn't think it wise to resist the crowd on her own, an individual. In an earlier incident when she is surprised at the way Okolie is eating Ma Palagada uses a fire idiom of her people. She says that “Okolie swallowed emptily so much at the sight of the food that he seemed in danger of consuming his own tongue (p. 65)

Buchi uses premonitory dreams to point out impending misfortunes. These dreams are particularly experienced by women. For instance before the birth of Nnu Ego's deceased first baby boy, she dreams that her *chi* was handing her a baby boy by the banks of Atkpo stream in Ibuza. But the slave woman had a mocking laughter on her lips. As she tried to wade across the stream to take the baby from her, the stream seemed to smell and the woman's laughter rang out in the dense forest (p. 45). Sure enough Nnu Ego gives birth to a baby boy Ngosi who dies shortly afterwards. One finds the women characters in Buchi's works accorded a treatment that clearly contrasts say the women in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* especially in the manners of speech. In

Achebe's world it is only men who possess that tact of communicating in their Ibo idiom and even use of sayings while in Buchi's world women can talk in sayings and have dreams the latter being an experience that involves them in communication with the long slept ancestors of the tribe.

Symbolism and irony are crucial features of style that Buchi uses to present her themes and characters. We have symbolism at two different levels. First, there is symbolism at the linguistic level. One is thinking here of name symbolism. Second there is symbolism at the level of characterization.

Naming in the Ibo society, apparently, has got symbolic attachments. However, the names given to various children reflect not only the social expectations of them but also some gender bias. For instance female children are given names that sound like price tags connoting the society and their individual parents' expectations that female children are supposed to be sources of wealth. Nnu Ego for example means 'twenty bags of cowries', Akunna means 'father's wealth', while Nnu Ego's mother's name Ona was derived from "Priceless Jewel". Surprisingly enough the male characters are given names associated with their places of birth, physical phenomena or circumstances surrounding their birth, most likely an indication that they are as "everlasting" or 'eminently present" like the physical phenomena. An example here is Okolie, Ojebeta's brother's name which means born near and on the Olie market day. Other male children's names have positive connotations. An example here is Owezim's name which means "I am no longer bitter with my lot". The same thing almost applies to Nnu Ego's son Oshiayu whose name means "the bush has refused this"

It is noteworthy that the name symbolism helps to avail the tradition and socio-cultural treatment of male and female children. The high premium placed on male children is even reflected in their names while the traditional mentality of girl children being "fetchers of wealth through bride price" is also reflected in the names they are given at birth.

If the act of naming is meant to reflect the linguistic patterns of the community, then the naming of children in Buchi Emecheta's fictional works reflects the traditional Ibo (and by extension African) conception of women by men. In other words, one would say that naming then appears to be a male domain, otherwise how would one explain the grossly "material naming" of women closely connected with the traditionally male ordained anticipation of women bringing wealth once they are married? The woman's worth is demeaned by the naming. This Buchi seems to castigate. Essentially her message is that the whole spectrum of life even linguistic behaviour is determined by the male members of society.

At the level of language also is the symbolic titling of Buchi's books. For instance when Buchi titles her novel *Double Yoke* - she created the impression of slavery and colonialism which has already been created by her other title. *The Slave Girl*. The impression created by the titles accurately analogises to the situation in which the African woman finds herself. Double yoked to her interest of attaining education and having a career on one hand and fulfilling the cultural demand of getting married and raising a family on the other. The second example *The slave Girl* also analogises with the condition of the main character, that of being sold and bought as a slave. At a deeper level though, the condition of slavery is a pointer to the cultural condition of the African woman. Thus the use of symbolic titling creates suspense and cultivates interest in the reader. At the same time, symbolic titles aid the author to present more vividly her intended message.

At the level of characterization, one finds that almost all the main characters in Buchi's fictional works play symbolic roles. They represent the wider society in which they live. Thus the woes of Nnu Ego's motherhood, for example, are symbolic of the tribulations of the African mother.

Irony plays an integral role in Buchi's fictional works. The anticipations of society and the understanding of the Ibo community about the position of



motherhood for instance is a case of glaring irony. The Ibo community greatly enthuses motherhood, the individual woman like Nnu Ego also exposes and cherishes the ability to raise offspring. Ironically this is not the case. Reality is the converse of the imaginations and anticipations of the society. The so called joys of motherhood are actually woes of motherhood because the demands attendant to it, the health depletion as a result of constant struggles and so many pregnancies are far from sources of joy. Thus Emecheta uses irony to depict the plight of the African mother.

Choice of setting is also an aspect of style that suits the artist's intended themes. Buchi sets her works in a predominantly rural and intensely cultural setting. This Ibo environment is ideal for the exploration of the implications of cultural practices like polygamy on the African woman. When she wants to present a changing socio-cultural situation and the ramifications on the woman's position, she chooses the fairly urban and university setting of *Double Yoke*

In conclusion therefore, Buchi Emecheta uses the speeches of her characters to portray the difference between male and female behavioural traits. She centralises female characters to give the reader a chance to get the African woman's version of reality. She uses symbolism and irony to present some of her primary themes while her choice of setting prepares an ideal background to the issues affecting the African woman she wants to handle.

## CONCLUSION.

From the study of Emecheta's fictional works, we can draw a number of conclusions. First and foremost, it is evident that Buchi Emecheta is sensitive to the position and plight of the African woman. She clearly demonstrates this interest in her thematic concerns. It is evident that Buchi deals with themes like that of traditional demands on the African woman. All these themes are focused on issues that surround the personality of the African woman. Buchi's sensitivity in the African woman is also demonstrated in the creation and portrayal of women characters. Throughout the works studied, women characters occupy centre stage and through the use of the omniscient narrator device Emecheta presents events and various developments in society through the eyes of the African woman.

We can also conclude that Emecheta presents women characters positively. This is attested to in the positive portrayal of her protagonists. Buchi's primary female characters predominantly have positive attributes like tolerance, ambition in life, hard work and wisdom. Buchi therefore suggests that the African woman is not as helpless and as hopeless as she has been depicted especially by male authors.

It is evident from the study that African traditions and customs are the main sources of the African woman's tribulations. Emecheta points this out in dealing with the traditional and cultural dispositions in Africa which militate against the personality of the African woman. These are such practises as polygamy, wife inheritance, demand on women for reproductive fertility and bride price. We conclude from the study that Buchi Emecheta's position on the plight of the African woman is that life would be better lived if some African customs and traditions are discarded altogether.

In depicting the African woman and in presenting issues surrounding her personality, Buchi conveniently chooses predominantly African environ-

ment where polygamy, wife inheritance and exorbitant dowries are the order of life. The demand for reproductive fertility and placing of high premium on male children are also attributable to African cultural dispositions. Therefore the choice of setting also goes a long way to aid the artist in presenting what she sets out to.

From the study, there are however a number of issues we would like to raise possibly for future studies on Buchi Emecheta; for instance, although like the western feminist, radical, liberal or conservative, Buchi sees the man as a contributor to woman's woes. She does not suggest lesbianism or separatism. It is interesting to note that although patriarchy is responsible for the African woman's woes, she does not condemn it. She apparently advocates for a co-existence of male and female members of society. Her women characters do not live in isolation although they suffer in the hands of their male counterparts. Perhaps one may be interested in this aspect of Buchi's works as an exploration of what may be called the African female writer's view or African feminism.

Regarding the portrayal of women, Buchi fails dismally to successfully handle the urban educated and complex modern woman like Dr. Mrs. Edet and Miss Bulewao in *Double Yoke*. In Buchi's fictional works, the urban educated woman is "normally" sketchily presented with a domineering aura around her. In a way Buchi here agrees with the wide prejudice, even evident in African literature by men, that the educated woman is inaccessible or just unique feature of any one African society. One is thinking here the example of Okot P'Bitek's in *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*.

Closely related to the depiction of urban and educated women is Emecheta's characterization. Buchi's characters, both male and female are poorly presented. The author tends to, monotonously use the narrative and descriptive method of presenting her story. Thus although the women characters she presents are positive, she does not really allow them especially through

conversations to come and avail evidence to justify the author's intended positive image. The result is that the characters scantily presented and not artistically complete.

For the artist to achieve compete positive images of the African woman, Buchi should have attended to male-female relationships particularly of her major characters. Surprisingly these relationships are also poorly handled. The most devastating weakness in this connection is the author's deliberate subversion of the male image at the expense of the female one. Thus, virtually in all relationships between male and female characters, the artist villifies the male character. This she does for instance by use of animal images when depicting men. Secondly, Buchi puts her strong female characters along unequalled or wealthy male ones. Examples abound in her fictional works; one is thinking here of the determined and strong Nnu ego against the slow thinking lackkadaisical Naife, the brilliant and visionary

Buchi is artistically biased against her male characters, one would think, from the images she uses to describe men (e.g snake, tortoise, chameleon, etc) that there is no single man in Buchi's world view who qualifies redeeming portraiture. Thus, it would appear that Emecheta's presentation of both male and female characters exhibits reverse chauvinism. Wont a male chauvinist see this in Buchi's works? Perhaps this and many other issues will need to be investigated in future readings of Buchi Emacheta.

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