

The Quest for Justice in Buchi Emecheta's Fictional Works

By

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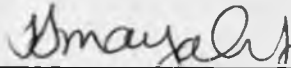
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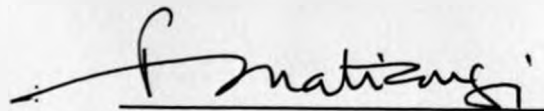
DECLARATION

This Thesis is my original endeavour and has not been submitted for examination in any other University.

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This Thesis has been submitted with my permission as University Supervisor.

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DEDICATION

*To the remembrance of
Little Sam Billy Ima, Samuel Oyepata Imopusi, and Joyce Idionyi Imopusi whose lives were an
inspiration.*

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, we investigate Buchi Emecheta's treatment of the quest for justice in four of her fictional works, namely: *The Joys of Motherhood*, *Kehinde*, *Destination Biafra* and *Gwendolen*. We scrutinize how the writer handles the subject of motherhood and leadership as a way of determining her view of justice as it relates to women and men. We set out to study how her experiences in the African diaspora influence her quest. Further, we explore the author's vision of women's advancement.

In our investigation, we establish that motherhood and how it is regarded in the societies under scrutiny is an obstacle to the quest for justice by women. It hinders or limits the nature of choices they make. Placing motherhood on a sacrosanct pedestal, even as it becomes a tool of oppression, diminishes the quest for justice as it restricts the socio-economic and political horizons of women. This negative outcome also negates the moral stature of men, as they appear intent on maintaining the *status quo* of oppression (of women) at all levels of community life.

Patriarchy is therefore identified as a hindrance to the struggle for, and maintenance of, justice. It engenders an environment in which men engage in mutual duplicity and corruption. This leads to the failure of leadership. The diaspora experience enables the author to see the problems faced by black women and their struggle for justice in perspective. However, Buchi Emecheta presents untenable situations in which only those women characters that go to London achieve some sense of personal fulfilment. This, we aver, poses problems to the establishment of situations in which the rights of both women and men are upheld right within Africa and African societies.

We further ascertain that black male characters whether in Africa or the African diaspora, are mostly portrayed as perpetrators of injustice against women and the society at large. They are treated as weak and dispensable caricatures. Conscious attempts are made to portray women characters positively at all times. However, these fail, as the women are stereotypes of individuals who are socially, politically and economically subjugated. They are incapable of achieving self-esteem and a sense of justice. Consequently, the pursuit for justice is equivocal as the affirmation of the principle in the key characters is either missing or incomplete. There is no synthesised vision of women's advancement or of justice.

INTRODUCTION

i. About Buchi Emecheta

Africa's literary history reveals that writing has been dominated by men, with comparatively few women producing literary works. This has been attributed to the highly patriarchal nature of the traditional and modern African society, which has continued to give more space for self-affirmation to men. Through institutionalised systems, women have continued to be comparatively disadvantaged when it comes to opportunities in education that is essential for self-expression and production of artistic works.

With more than a dozen novels to her credit, Buchi Emecheta is arguably one of Africa's prolific writers. Her presence within Africa's literary landscape is enhanced by the fact that she is an African writer (Nigerian to be more specific) who has lived out of her country and Africa most of her life.

Born in Nigeria in 1944, Emecheta attended primary and secondary school in Lagos, Nigeria. She obtained a degree in Sociology from the University of London. Some critics have mentioned that her university training had a great influence on her writing. She has produced a number of novels and is recognised as one of the first female writers to overtly address issues of feminism (Adeola James, 34). In 'Just an Igbo Woman', Julie Holmes indicates that the author has 'no fewer than 19 novels' (1). These include *In the Ditch* (1972), *Second-Class Citizen* (1974), *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977), *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *Destination Biafra* (1981), *Naira Power* (1981), *Double Yoke* (1981), *The Rape of Shavi* (1986), and *Head Above Water* (1986). Other Novels include *Gwendolen* (1989) and *Kehinde* (1994), among others.

Available data indicates that Buchi Emecheta has lived in London since 1962. Her experiences as a young woman growing up and coping with the London experience, therefore, influence a lot of her works. Principal among these are *In the Ditch*, *Head Above Water*, *Second Class Citizen*, among others, which

chronicles her tough experiences in London and the energies she had to expend to beat the odds.

ii. Statement of the Problem

This study is predicated on the recognition that an explicit study of the quest for justice in Buchi Emecheta's fictional works is absent. This has essentially meant that the author's conception of justice as it affects women and men has largely remained unstudied. Furthermore, available data indicates that the effects of the diaspora experience on the author's quest, has not been given due attention. No effort has thus been paid to the effects of the African diaspora experience on the author's portrayal of characters and situations. Further still, an investigation of the writer's conception of justice and women's advancement remains to be systematically undertaken. No attempts have also been made to identify the meeting point of issues handled by Buchi Emecheta and those handled by other black women and men in Africa and the African diaspora.

Studies of works by African women writers in Africa are only gaining momentum. It is just over the past decade that critical appraisal of such texts has drawn some marked interest. We propose to contribute to available critical discourse on Buchi Emecheta by attempting a systematic study of at least four of her texts paying special attention to the quest for justice.

In the past, focus by literary critics has, however, mainly been on the female characters and how they handle issues of identity and self-fulfilment. There is negligible attention that has been paid on the treatment of male characters. A study of the male and the female character in Buchi Machete's fictional works will enable us to establish a balanced view of the writer's quest for justice, and enable us to understand whether the writer's quest for gender justice makes her create positive images of both women and men. An investigation into whether there are any contradictions that either positively or negatively influence the quest for justice, therefore, becomes necessary.

iii. Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study is to conceptualise the author within Africa and the African diaspora and the quest for justice. We seek to evaluate how the writer handles the themes of motherhood and leadership as a way of determining her view of justice as it relates to women and men in Africa. Through her depiction of characters and situations, we further seek to identify the influence of the African diaspora experience on the author's quest. In the final analysis, we seek to determine her vision of women's advancement.

iv. Justification

An analysis of the quest for justice in Buchi Machete's fictional works will enable us to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of gender relations and provide a framework for understanding the author's conception of justice. It will place the writer within the same context as other male and female writers handling issues of justice in Africa and the African diaspora. The focus on gender justice will further open avenues for us to appreciate how a woman writer appreciates issues of justice as it affects a society that is populated by both women and men.

Looking at Buchi Emecheta within the diaspora context enables us to establish a framework for delving into analysis of how the writer handles issues related to justice and injustice – as it affects black people and especially black women throughout the world. It enables us to determine how a woman writer balances issues of women's empowerment and the quest for justice by and for the whole society. It enables us to gain insights into the meeting point of perspectives on the quest for justice by Buchi Emecheta and other black writers in Africa and the diaspora. The appreciation of the diaspora experience invariably opens avenues for deeper comparative analysis of black writers in Africa and the African diaspora and how they treat issues of race, justice and injustice.

The study is further justified by the understanding that **women characters** have in the past been the major focus of literary critical inquiry, and it is necessary to substantively focus on the male character *vis-à-vis* the female character as portrayed by women authors. It is important to establish whether or not the way women writers portray male characters contributes to the creation of a society that is responsive to the needs of both women and men. This study, thus, attempts to find out whether gender analysis as a methodology yields a focused treatment of both women and men. It further helps us to determine whether there is need to have a feminist framework or a set of gender analysis tools that are responsive to the realities of past or present racial relationships and the ways of life in African settings. This perspective would help us to have an insight into the way women writers portray male characters and thus help us to understand, as an example, women writer's perception of gender justice and women's advancement.

A study of motherhood as an institution will enable us to establish how a hitherto celebrated institution affects the quest for justice. A study of how the writer handles issues of leadership in her works will enable us to determine how she balances her commitment as a woman writer and the quest for better leadership that seems to preoccupy other writers in Africa. In this way we shall be able to determine the author's view of justice as it relates to women and men.

The whole premise of the study – the quest for justice and the diaspora experience – is a recognition of the fact that Buchi Emecheta as an African writer in the African diaspora has a currency of existence alongside other black writers in the 20th Century. One would expect that her concerns would be not too dissimilar to those of these writers. In the final analysis, we contend that this study will fill the gaps that exist in the available critical discourse on the author.

v. Research Hypotheses

Our study is predicated on the hypothesis that the diaspora experience has negative influences on the quest for justice in Buchi Emecheta's works. We also proceed from the assumption that Buchi Emecheta's novels form an artistic continuum, which reflect a consistency in the positive treatment of male and female characters. We also aver that like other Black writers in Africa and the diaspora, Buchi Emecheta is concerned with the quest for justice in society. In the final analysis, we seek to investigate the hypothesis that the writer has a gender responsive vision of society.

vi. Literature Review

In our endeavor to study the fictional works of Buchi Emecheta, we look at existing critical works on the author, and other perspectives on the role of women's writing in Africa and the African diaspora. The first step in our effort would be to recognize, from the onset, that the popular view – that men have largely dominated the African literary landscape – cannot be taken for granted. This scenario has over the years gone hand in hand with the feeling that male writers like Chinua Achebe made presentations that were biased against women.

Florence Stratton in *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (1994) restates that African women writers "have been rendered invisible in literary criticism" (2). This means that to Stratton, there has only been piecemeal attention directed at women writers, while male writers have enjoyed immense literary appreciation. This is the same view held by Susan Arndt who, in 'Buchi Emecheta and the tradition of *Ifo*', states that African male writers "silenced African women in their texts" and proceeded to portray them "stereotypically and thus excluded them not only from literature but also from history" (30). Although the scenario has continued to change over the years, as we shall shortly see, there is an understanding of the need to

accelerate the mainstreaming of studies of women writers. This is precisely why we seek to investigate how Buchi Emecheta treats male characters.

Arndt's article traces Buchi Emecheta's interest in writing to her initiation into the oral literature of her Ibuza community. The influence of the *Ifo* culture of story telling, Arndt tells us, explains why Buchi Emecheta "employs narrative modes which originate from the oral narrative tradition" (30). She gives the example of Nnu Ego's 'barrenness' during her first marriage which, in *Ifo* narrative, is a sign that the woman "cannot find happiness" by pointing to the fact that Nnu Ego is not guilty but is instead suffering from the "afflictions ... of patriarchal conventions" (49).

Responding to the unequal relationships between men and women in the African society and literature (by male writers), it was not surprising that women started the quest for recognition by portraying women characters more positively in their works. Some critics have averred that it was in the mid 80s that women writers started being taken seriously by critics in Africa. It is Oladele Taiwo who in *Female Novelists of Modern Africa*, says: "For the first time, a whole volume is devoted to (the female writers) attempt to present past and contemporary African society in a way generally favourable to the standpoint of the woman"(ix).

Taiwo recognised the folly of ignoring women's literary contributions. He restates the fact that the domination of the literary landscape by men had led to the creation of "an image of the African woman which needs to be closely re-examined against the background of her traditional role and the social and economic realities of the present" (1). Here, Taiwo is asking for a redefinition of the social relationships in society, the adoption of the belief of the importance of personal choice and justice for present day Africa. He is asking for the creation of a new tradition that does not entrench conformity by constant reference to the need to safeguard cultures that continue to confine women into social, economic and political straitjackets.

In the Introduction to *Perspectives on Women in African Literature*, Ciarunji Chesaina Swinimer concedes, "African Literature, from its traditional past, has always been functional". She goes on to say: "It has always served the role of helping society maintain its equilibrium in adapting to cultural changes" (n.p). The question is: To whose advantage was the 'equilibrium'? Looking at the patriarchal nature of traditional African life, it would not be superfluous to state that the changes that Swinimer alludes to are favourable to men. This is precisely why we agree with her when she asserts that there is need for the "reassessment of gender relations and particularly the position of women in society" (n.p).

Gloria Chineze Chukukere, in *Gender Voices and Choices*, states that it is the fact that society does not appreciate women in real life that contributes to their being ignored in literary criticism and negatively portrayed in literary works. She says:

The unsatisfactory appreciation of the significance of women in life has spilled into imaginative literature. Through their own points of view, the majority of male writers often present their cultural reality as the cultural reality. The paucity of African female writers and critics has equally encouraged the perpetuation of an unbalanced perspective (6)

It is with this appreciation of the woman's position in the traditional African society that we pause to raise several issues of concern, especially as pertains to culture. In terms of women's empowerment, it would be inconceivable that it would have justice for women and men as a unifying principle. In this case, it provided no hope for African women, as the advantages were tilted in favour of men. Therefore, African women stood to benefit very little from a culture that had for centuries ensured that they remained at the bottom of the socio-political and economic ladder.

Post-independence African literature focused on issues of colonial oppression, and the efforts at dealing with the trauma of reconstruction. Needless to say, this oppression arose from the belief by the West that Africa and Africans were barbaric and, therefore, occupied a sub-human status and

rating within international human relationships. Women's writing did not go in a very different direction. However, their fight against oppression was two-pronged. First, it dealt with the issues of colonialism and post-colonialism as Buchi Emecheta has, for instance, done in *Destination Biafra*. Secondly, it dealt with the oppression that was directed at women. Women writers arose to make a case for their recognition as human beings, deserving of certain rights and privileges. Buchi Emecheta has done this in *Kehinde* and *The Joys of Motherhood* where the quest for justice and self-affirmation pre-occupy both protagonists. With this scenario, it would not be surprising for the confusion in the quest for justice to be there. Race and gender, the opposing dichotomies of the quest, led to the necessity of maintaining a balance. In short, discourse on justice and Africa could not possibly ignore the issue of race and gender.

The search for a liberating idiom for women began upon realisation that the scales of justice were tilted in favour of men. This involved making affirmative steps towards creating a literature of their own to counter the scenario where "a woman's honour and dignity ... consist of her adherence to idealised norms of wifehood and motherhood" (Chukukere, 7). Writing, therefore, became a vocation, a creation of a new nuances and scenarios where women characters asserted themselves and claimed the space that men, it was believed, had hitherto occupied. This was an affirmation and realisation of a new vision of society, a vision that needed to be communicated to other women and men of good will.

Micere Mugo points out that her role as an African woman writer is "assuming sides with oppressed women". She states that in her works, she comes together with other women in their effort "to liberate themselves and fellow oppressed humankind from the shackles of imperialism and neo-colonialism" (qtd in Wilkinson, 120). Micere Mugo's words underscore the fact that men dominated the social, political and economic arena, leaving no space for women. Implicit in this is the view that justice had take a dominant male hue, which was essentially giving women in society a raw deal in terms of access to the benefits of labour and fair competition. However, by going further to

embrace 'humankind' in her endeavour, Mugo acknowledges the injustices that have been faced by Africans and black people and – by extension – all oppressed people of the world.

Within the framework of the quest for justice, it would appear that African women were relegated to living invisible lives, while men lived more public, influential and relatively easier lives. Poverty and despondency becomes a significant feature of women's lives. This can be appreciated as the reason why African women writers are critical in the quest for gender justice. They fore-grounded the voices of their oppressed colleagues, thus providing "a concentrated vision of female experience". This is because they ensured "that women play crucial roles in the unfolding of the plot and in our appreciation of the story" (Chukukere, 10). Gloria Chukukere continues to say that placing a woman character in positions of consequence enables her demonstrate a high level of "initiative and dynamism". She continues to say: "If she operates within the confines of motherhood and wifehood, she displays enduring qualities of dignity and industry" (10).

Chukukere's words above could serve as an apt description of Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood*. In this novel by Buchi Emecheta, the protagonist succeeds in bringing up her children and educating them single-handedly. As to whether she has enduring qualities of dignity and industry is debatable. This is partly because of what Chukukere says in her exposition of motherhood in Buchi Emecheta's fictional works. She states that the concerns of the author's protagonists "centre around the woman's unique confrontation with male superiority, female subjectivity, and socially endorsed norms that inhibit her progress". In the same vein, she adds:

The predicaments of poverty, unhappiness and brutality are forces that her heroines try to conquer. These heroines, in spite of deeply ingrained notions of dependency, also possess sometimes an innate determination to succeed (166)

Chukukere contends that the heroines “may not always break free” but that their attempts demonstrate they are essentially able to live meaningful lives (166). Chukukere proceeds to explore the instances in which motherhood becomes a symbol of oppression for women. In her analysis of *The Slave Girl*, the critic states that Buchi Emecheta “exposes the worthlessness of a slave, especially a female one” (180). Chukukere states that it is the men who are to blame for the protagonist Ogbanje Ojebeta's predicament.

Chukukere, however, fails to point out the role of women like Ma Palagada in Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* is one of the key culprits involved in perpetuating the (female) slave trade. It is as if there is a man's shadow lurking behind Ma Palagada and darkly influencing her actions. There is a mention of the “inhumanity” of men's actions, as demonstrated by Okolie, who sells his sister for a meagre sum and the fact that men's “greed is a betrayal of confidence” (181). The fact that Okolie is short-changed by the woman Ma Palagada is also mentioned but the corruption and injustice perpetuated by Ma Palagada is glaringly ignored. Above all, the issue of the quest for justice is not addressed.

While looking at *The Joys of Motherhood*, Gloria Chukukere states that traditional Africa regards women “as a vehicle through which a man satisfies his needs and fulfils his ambition. A truly virtuous woman should neither question nor rebel against these conventions” (186). She goes on to state that the difficulties that inform the lives of characters like Nnu Ego “reflect both the intransigence of traditional norms and the ways in which these norms ... become afflicted by contemporary values”. She adds: “These regulations and their limitations find particular expression in the heroine's relationships with their families, and children”. (187).

In her exposition, Gloria Chukukere essentially focuses on the phenomenon of patriarchy as solely responsible for the problems facing women in Africa. There is no apparent regard for the positive aspects of culture, or the influence of modernity on the very rubric of patriarchy and more still, on the

social and economic relationships. The influences of western democracies, globalisation and economic reforms are ignored.

The search for peace is also essentially looked at from women's eyes, with men standing on the other side, as oppressors. There is no mention of the quest for justice in unequivocal terms, neither is the diaspora experience mentioned. The male character is, in actual fact, not addressed in positive depth. He is simply mentioned in passing – as an oppressive force. In the critic's analysis of *Destination Biafra*, only the horrifying deeds of men are given prominence. However, Chukukere contends that Debbie Ogedemgbe, the protagonist in *Destination Biafra* is not entirely realistically portrayed. In her words, Debbie "lacks the psychological depth" (203) which stops her from making choices at some point, as she is not very sure which side of the opposing armies she supports. She writes:

Thus, although she travels to Biafra in the hope of convincing Abosi to abrogate the concept of Biafra, she also firmly believes in the legitimacy of the state of Biafra and the people's right to exist independently. She even decides to support Abosi and undertake a propaganda mission on his behalf to Europe. Issues take a rather confused turn as Debbie is made to switch over once more to the Nigerian side and, with Alan Grey's assistance, plans to exterminate Abosi (203).

This shows that in Gloria Chukukere's view, Buchi Emecheta apparently becomes overzealous in her portrayal of Debbie Ogedemgbe thus giving her conflicting attributes. She however concedes that to a larger extent, Debbie assumes the stature of "exceptional fortitude that remains untainted with personal motives" (205). The same, apparently, cannot be said of her Oxford trained male compatriot, Chijioke Abosi who is incidentally one of the principal culprits in the Biafran conflict.

In 'Images of Women in Buchi Emecheta's Fictional Works', Okeng'o Matiang'i looks at how Buchi Emecheta portrays African women in her writings. Through a stylistic and thematic analysis of selected texts, Matiang'i

makes incisive critical postulations on the state of the woman in the author's novels. He focuses on five of the writer's novels namely *In the Ditch*, *Head Above Water*, *The Joys of Motherhood*, *The Slave girl*, and *The Bride Price*.

Matiang'i has further attempted a study of Bessie Head, Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta in 'The Treatment of the Theme of Women's Identity and Self-definition in the Fictional Works of Mariama Ba, Bessie Head and Buchi Emecheta'. In this work, Matiang'i asserts that in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta "deploys irony prominently ... to interrogate the prevalent conceptualisation of motherhood as an institution" (185). In essence, Matiang'i concedes that Buchi Emecheta 'reveals' to us the vagaries of motherhood as a project idealised by the masculine society. We do not see issues raised by the author looked at in the context of the quest for justice and the diaspora experience.

In *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*, one finds perhaps one of the most comprehensive papers on Buchi Emecheta's works in one volume. In the introduction to the work, Marie Umeh states that Buchi Emecheta "exposes oppressive relationships that are sanctioned by myths and customs, such as the rigid sex-role socialisation practices" (xxvi). She further explains Buchi Emecheta's dissatisfaction with the institution of marriage as rooted in the author's own serious disenchantment with the institution.

However, Marie Umeh does not go further to inform us whether Buchi Emecheta's experience of marriage is typical of marriage relationships in Africa. Furthermore, we are not enlightened on the influences of the writer's diaspora experiences on her 'attitude' towards justice. Such information would enable us to make a decision as to whether Buchi Emecheta's attitudes and perspectives are guided by the desire for genuine justice in society or by the desire to purge herself of the demons of her own experiences.

In '*Orality and Patriarchal Dominance in Buchi Emecheta's The Slave Girl*', Tom Spencer-Walters asserts that the author, in her works, "gives voice to women who have suffered under neglect not only from male writers but from

the very cultural traditions such writers evoke and volarize so freely” (Umeh, 126). This is, of course, true, but Spencer-Walters does not go further to expound on the dynamics of male-female relationships in Buchi Emecheta's works. We also do not get to know whether women writers engage in actions aimed at thwarting the negative portrayals by male writers just for the sake of it or whether their intention is to create an alternative gender sensitive environment where the practice of justice for both women and men is the norm. Furthermore, we do not get a clear assertion of whether Buchi Emecheta's depiction of characters and situations provides a gender responsive vision of society. At this point, we wonder whether we are not just confronted by yet another hackneyed discourse on the oppression of women, and patriarchy as the principal culprit. The plausibility of such presentations is questionable.

This is precisely why we agree with Ezenwa-Ohaeto who, in *'Replacing Myth with Myth'*, states that Buchi Emecheta's works describe men as 'degenerate' and the women 'angelic', even when they are making mistakes (Umeh, 160). In reference to Buchi Emecheta's *Double Yoke*, Ohaeto further states that the “fallacy here is that village life is synonymous with crude behaviour” perpetuated by the men. He asserts: “Emecheta is gradually losing touch with authentic African experience, for Africa has changed considerably” (Umeh, 161). This is probably one of the most outright efforts by a critic to provide an alternative view of Buchi Emecheta's work.

From the above analysis, it is apparent that there is no available discourse on Buchi Emecheta that focuses on the quest for justice and the influence of the diaspora experience in her works. Most of the critical works bring out the effects of patriarchy in general and specific terms, while a few give us a glimpse of the contradictions in the writer's works. We contend that by delving into analyses of the quest for justice from a gender perspective and by looking at this quest in the context of the diaspora experience, we will be making an attempt at filling an existent gap in available critical discourse.

vii. Theoretical Framework

In this study, we propose to utilize feminist theoretical frameworks and gender analysis tools in our examination of the texts under focus. Our choice is motivated by our understanding that feminist criticism provides us with tools requisite for a comprehensive critical appraisal of society. We contend that a feminist theoretical framework provides a viable approach that can suffice in a study such as this.

Alison M. Jaggar *et al* in *Feminist Frameworks* states that “Feminist frameworks are systems of ideas, conceptual structures” that are applied to analyse “the nature and causes of women’s oppression and a correlated set of proposals for ending it” (xii). This essentially means that analysing women’s oppression without suggesting ways of ending it would not be concomitant with the desired “commitment to improving the situation of women” (xiv). In our view, analysing women’s oppression presupposes that the oppressive forces are, essentially, men. Analysis of the role men play in enhancing women’s oppression, therefore, becomes important. Our understanding here is that the practice of oppression the practice of injustice as it infringes on people’s rights.

In *Beyond the Net: Feminist Criticism as a Moral Criticism* Josephine Donovan (1988) proposes and analysis of society that is based on morality. Focusing on the use of feminist approaches to literary study, she states:

Feminist criticism is moral because it sees that one central problems of ... literature is that in much of it women are not human beings, seats of consciousness. They are objects, which are used to facilitate, to explain away, or redeem the projects of men (267).

With these words, Donovan justifies the preoccupation of feminist critics with the creation of a new moral framework in which justice for all – women and men – is a safeguarded principle. She further suggests that feminist criticism is political when “it asserts that literature, academic curricular and the

standards of critical judgement should be changed” and that in this way, “literature will no longer function as propaganda furthering sexist ideology”. Donovan also points at the importance of literature in furthering ideology when she says that it is “an important contributing element to a moral atmosphere in which women are derogated” (267).

Looking at Donovan’s postulation, we can affirm that writers, whether women or men, are more or less in search of justice in society. This search is informed by the need to create a society, which provides women and men the means to achieve their potential as human beings. After all, as Ezenwa-Ohaeto says in *‘Replacing Myth with Myth’*, the oppression women face “is also suffered by men” as we shall demonstrate in later sections of this thesis (Umeh, 165). For women writers, however, the search for justice is informed by a conscious realisation of the need to redress past or present socio-cultural and economic injustices that have been committed against women. And as we shall see in later Chapters of this study, it is a search that should be aimed at creating a more just society for women and men.

Feminist Studies have evolved to an extent that there are quite a number of strands that can be utilised in the analysis of society. In *Feminist Thought*, Rosemary Tong cites liberal feminists who insist that gender justice can only exist if the ‘rules of the game’ are made fair. This, she cites, is the first step in making “certain that none of the runners in the race for society’s goods and services is systematically disadvantaged...” (2). Indeed, the quest for gender equity can be pointed out as one single factor that led to the rise of feminist thought. This is precisely why we partly align ourselves with liberal feminists, as it is the ‘rules’ that govern human relationships that should be the focus of any endeavour that seeks to lead to gender sensitive changes in society. It is this aspect of liberal feminism that we find appropriate for our purposes.

It is apparent that, in spite of their other contentious standpoints, Liberal Feminists are in search for justice for women and men in society. Their focus was on how women could ‘reclaim’ the space that had been ‘snatched by men’. The scenario was of the ‘oppressor’ and the ‘oppressed’, with the

oppressed searching for a way of redemption. Women engaged in a liberating literary discourse attempting to counter the negative aspects of male literary domination by coming up with a new one, and as such, proposing a new form of existence in literature and otherwise, for women.

For many years, the feminist perspective sought to stake out a liberating principle for women through the analysis of the male perspective. The initial preoccupation of feminist critics was what Josephine Donovan calls the 'images of women' in literature (n.d). In an article 'Beyond the Net: Feminism Criticism as a Moral Criticism' Donovan states: "Through the 'images of women' approach the critic determines how women characters are presented. Usually, the critic discovers that the images are *other*, and, therefore, that the literature is alien" (264).

This is essentially the same perspective that Peter Barry (1995) in *Beginning Theory: Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* propagates. Tracing the origin of feminist criticism to the 'women's movement' of the 1960s, Barry says that it was "literary from the start". This is because "it realised the significance of the images of women promulgated by literature, and saw it as vital to combat them and question their authority and their coherence" (122). Barry further asserts:

In this sense the women's movement has always been crucially concerned with books and literature, so that feminist criticism should not be seen as an off-shoot or a spin-off from feminism which is remote from the ultimate aims of the movement, but as one of its most practical ways of influencing everyday conduct and attitudes (122).

However, over the years, this scenario has changed to encompass male critical discourse on the depiction of women and men characters by both male and female writers in Literature. The evolution of the gender theory, according to Elaine Showalter, therefore, sought to introduce masculinity into the process of feminist critical inquiry (Showalter, 197), thereby enabling male critics to venture into feminist studies. For our purposes, the evolution of the

gender theory provides us with an opportunity to come out strongly and focus on presentations of both women and men in female writer's works.

Elaine Showalter in an article 'Feminism and Literature' points out the danger of lack of clarity when we talk of 'gender'. She writes:

One danger is that 'gender' will read as a synonym for femininity, so that men who come into the field will continue to pontificate about the representation of women without accepting the risks and opportunities of investigating masculinity (Showalter, 198)

We are in no risk of pontificating, especially because we take advantage of the opportunities that the gender theory provides us. We realise that the use of gender analysis tools, brings us closer to realising that both women and men "writers bring alive their texts by ... narrating a story about how people relate and organise themselves to survive and to produce life supporting goods and services" (Kabira, *et al*, 9).

Gender analysis, therefore, is all about recognising that society is made of women and men, and that the socio-political, cultural and economic set up is inhabited by these sexes. In *ABC of Gender Analysis*, Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira and Masheti Masinjila state that books essentially "present a gendered picture of the world. This means they tell a story about women and girls, as well as men and boys that can be determined through a process of textual analysis" and that a text "contains within it a gendered perspective that purports to mirror the reality of that which is written about, that which is spoken about, and that which is visualised" (10). Applying the *ABC of Gender Analysis* on the study of Buchi Emecheta's works would, therefore, be appropriate, as it recognises that it would be best if the quest for justice in texts can be achieved if women and men are presented in such a way that "both can identify closely with the narration". This, according to Kabira and Masinjila would ensure that the reader does not "feel alienated" (11). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines gender analysis as "a tool to diagnose the differences between women and men regarding their specific activities, conditions,

needs, access to and control over resources, and access to development benefits and decision-making" (ILO, 2000). It goes further to state as follows:

It studies the linkages of these and other factors in the larger social, economic, political and environmental context. Gender analysis entails, first and foremost, collecting sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive information about the population concerned. Gender analysis is the first step in gender-sensitive planning for promoting gender equality (ILO,2000).

This means that gender analysis as a tool can be used to study any aspect of human life – especially how it affects women and men. Within the context of studying women writers, gender analysis becomes an indispensable tool for discourse – especially as it relates to the quest for justice.

Suffice it to say that while still focusing on the oppression of the women-folk in traditional African society, it is necessary to remember that regarding all men as oppressors is inconsistent with the realities of human life. For example, it could pose challenges for those men who support the mainstreaming of women's issues into development discourse and praxis. It could also result in an outright hostility from sections of the male population, manifesting, for instance, in increased violence against women. If the societies depicted in literary works are microcosms of our daily *real* lives, this violence is also depicted in the literature under focus.

It is necessary, as we have indicated above, to look at the applicable aspects of these feminist perspectives. This is essentially what Maximillia Muninzwa proposes in her article "Of Feminists, Macho Men and the Benders of Gender". She asserts that radical feminism, for example, is a western concept that might not have much to do with the African setting. She writes:

These radical feminists see the ideal woman as one who goes against any form of traditional stereotypes including rejecting marriage, which they equate to some form of oppression or slavery... The radical feminist promotes some

sense of self-centredness, seeing only her feelings, her rights, her needs, and rejecting any binding ties or obligations (Muninzwa, 22).

Whilst we may not entirely agree with Muninzwa on her use of 'stereotypes', it is apparent that she has a very pertinent point. This is because if the quest for gender equity has to involve both women and men, there has to be an acceptable framework within which the forces of justice can work. It is arguable that not many African women and men would be excited about the possibility of any discourse that would destroy the family systems in which marriage is central.

Muninzwa essentially proposes that it necessary, especially in Africa, to come up with an inclusive framework for undertaking a critical enquiry into the creative works of African women writers. Otherwise, there is a constant danger of attaching untenable positioning onto these works. After all – we can say - the beginning point for balancing the gender equation is not replacing the feminine qualities of women with masculine ones. Instead, it should focus on overhauling the value systems of society to start taking women seriously (Muninzwa, 22). This is one sure way of ensuring that one oppressive framework is not replaced with another.

Radical feminists, for instance, insist, "women's oppression is the most fundamental form of oppression" (Rosemary Tong, 71). Indeed, any form of oppression is despicable, especially if it stands in the way of active co-participation of human beings in making decisions about their lives and the issues that affect their status in society. Our assertion is that after agreeing on the fundamental truth - that women are an oppressed lot - focus should be on coming up with practical suggestions through which new gender acceptable relationships can be developed.

According to '*Entrepreneurial Skills for Young Women*', (n.d) appreciating patriarchy is as complicated as comprehending feminism. The publication states that the words "mean different things to different people" (22). It further goes states that looking at patriarchy as the only explanation for women's

oppression could be "misleading ...because it can be used in a way that hides the class and race differences between women. The publication further states that this "can give a false idea that all men are united against all women, and that all men benefit equally from women's oppression" (22-23). It would be interesting to establish whether Buchi Emecheta, in the way she treats male characters, demonstrates such a perspective.

The quest for justice, therefore, becomes important to feminism as "all feminists are united by a commitment to improving the situation of women" and "share certain basic assumptions about what would count as an improvement of women's situation" (Jaggar *et al*, xiv). Alison Jaggar proceeds to say the following:

All agree that it is necessary to end sexual harassment, rape, and physical abuse of women; most agree that women should have sexual and reproductive freedom ... ; and all ... agree that women should have an opportunity to participate fully in so-called public life (xiv)

The recognition that there is need for a new frame of reference based on principles of equality becomes a guiding maxim. Applying the feminist framework in our study of Buchi Emecheta's works would assist us to establish how the writer treats issues of women's oppression and the choices she proposes for the reversal of the situation. In effect, we will also have an opportunity to suggest ways in which injustice can be dissipated.

It is apparent, therefore, that the use of gender analysis tools to study the quest for justice in Buchi Emecheta's works would be a useful way of appreciating how she views the relationships between men and women in society. It also enables us to focus on the portrayal of both male and female characters and analyse situations. This would essentially be an addition to the process of literary appreciation. On one hand, it is a bold step towards focusing on the masculine individual that is allegedly favoured by society. On the other hand, it is a bold step toward recognising that gender analysis as a

framework in feminist studies allows us to focus on the treatment of both women and men in any setting.

viii. Scope and Limitations

Our primary texts in this study are *Destination Biafra*, *Gwendolen*, *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Kehinde*. We focused on these texts because they adequately capture the essence of the study and provide us with the raw material for our critical inquiry. However, we draw examples from other works by Buchi Emecheta.

The varied settings of the books also provide us with an adequate sample for the purposes of our study. For example, the setting of *The Joys of Motherhood* provided us with the ample Nigerian rural-urban setting, which is critical in our analysis of the Nigerian society. *Kehinde* and *Destination Biafra* both provide us with the Nigerian-London dichotomy, which is important for our apprehension of the diaspora context of Buchi Emecheta's works. On the other hand, *Gwendolen*, with its Caribbean-London setting, provides us with obvious advantages as we focus on the multifaceted nature of the author's presentations.

During the research and writing of this thesis, the researcher made attempts to communicate with the author. Unfortunately, this did not happen, as the agents could not reveal her contact address. Efforts to meet the author were also not fruitful. Lack of access to the latest material on the author also posed an initial challenge.

ix. Methodology

The study was conducted through library research, involving first the reading of the primary texts to get the researcher adequately acquainted with the issues raised by the author. Next, the researcher looked at the available material on the feminist theoretical framework in order to come up with an appropriate focus for purposes of the study. The researcher also looked at the

available critical works on the author in order to ascertain the nature of the studies that had been undertaken on her works and thus concretise his perception of the gaps that he set out to fill.

A look at works by other black writers in Africa and the African diaspora was undertaken as a way of drawing parallels between their works and Buchi Emecheta's thematic concerns. This enabled the researcher to have the critical mindset and analytical terminology required for the inquiry. It also enabled the researcher to have a bird's eye view of the literary landscape of Africa and the African diaspora – especially in the context of the theme of the quest for justice.

In the process, the researcher paid attention to the writer's depiction of male characters as a way of appreciating her conception of justice. The similarities and differences between the issues addressed by Buchi Emecheta and other black writers in Africa and the African diaspora was looked at in the effort to place the writer within the African and the African diaspora context.

In the final analysis, the issues in the primary texts were merged with the information got from secondary readings to come up with the interpretative whole that constitutes this thesis.

In the next chapter, we establish whether Buchi Emecheta, in her quest for justice, addresses issues similar to those addressed by other writers in Africa and the African diaspora as a way of appreciating her place within the African and the African diaspora literary landscape.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 BUCHI EMECHETA AND THE DIASPORA CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

In the previous section, we discussed the key components of our study and clearly indicated that we would utilise gender analysis tools in our inquiry. We identified the gaps that exist in the study of Buchi Emecheta, and sought to justify our focus on the writer and the specific fictional works intended for this study.

In this Chapter, we attempt to determine the place occupied by Buchi Emecheta relative to the issues addressed by other black writers in Africa and the diaspora. This is done in order to establish whether there is a thematic semblance between what she writes and what other writers, women and men, write. We essentially seek to establish a meeting point of these writings and make a statement about Buchi Emecheta's position within the black literary experience. This will provide us with a framework for further launching into an analysis of the theme of justice and the influence of writing from the diaspora.

In *The African Diaspora: Revisionist Interpretations of Ethnicity, Culture and Religion Under Scrutiny*, Paul Lovejoy defines the diaspora as requiring "the recognition of a boundary; those on one side are associated with the homeland ... and those on the other side are in the diaspora" (3). For our purposes, the diaspora refers to any geographical place outside of Africa. In our study, we use the term 'Africans in the diaspora' to refer to Africans or blacks that, for one reason or another, are living outside Africa. By 'ideological diaspora' we refer to that mental or social positioning that is a result of exposure to a different way of life that is not only different from Africa but that is found outside of Africa.

Paul Lovejoy continues to state "the diaspora ceases to have meaning if the idea of an ancestral home is lost" (3). That all Africans living outside Africa, and those blacks who have lived outside Africa due to the slave experience are *outside* of Africa – and in the African diaspora - is a standpoint we are taking both in this chapter and the subsequent ones. Of importance is the recognition of the fact that outside of Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas probably have the largest populations of black people. These people were dislocated by systematic enslavement by white people. Buchi Emecheta, who has who was born and raised up in Nigeria but lived in London for most of her life, qualifies to be a citizen of the African diaspora.

1.2 Buchi Emecheta, Justice, and the Caribbean Scenario

Bethwell A. Ogot asserts that Africa and the Caribbean "share long histories of colonialism and dependence ... and have experienced the dominance of slavery..." (*Africa and the Caribbean* 1). In essence, Ogot is drawing our attention to the need to establish critical parallels between black people in Africa and the Caribbean. Buchi Emecheta also seems to make this comparison, as one of her books, *Gwendolen* is set both in Jamaica and London, and brings together black characters of Caribbean and African origin.

Of importance to us is the understanding that Africa and the Caribbean share the same colonial experience. George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*, suffices as an apt rendition of the difficulties of the post-colonial (black) nation in the Caribbean. In this novel, the warped socio-economic and political set-up in the community is given justification when the school system propagates the belief that God is the one who has ordained injustice and race oppression. This is evident in the words of the school inspector at the beginning of the story:

The British Empire, you must remember, has always worked for the peace of the world. This is the job that was assigned to it by God and if the Empire at any time has failed to bring about that peace it was due to events and causes beyond its control ... You are with

us and we with you. And together we shall always
walk in the will of God (30)

What the British Inspector is saying here is that God has ordained the oppression that is extant in the Barbados society. He is asking the children to believe that the whites are superior and that it will serve everybody well if the black children always remembered this. Gareth Griffiths in *A Double Exile* states that the white inspector seeks to fictionalize everything around the Caribbean child leading to the loss of pride in his identity (80). As they grow up, they are made to look at themselves as inferior beings that follow even "the instructions that are not spoken" (47). The head teacher just needs to blow his whistle and the boys follow like zombies.

It is in an environment such as this that Gwendolen, Buchi Emecheta's heroine in a novel by the same name, grows up in. It is an environment in which racism and injustice have formed the very basis of human relationships. The belief in the superiority of white values creates an individualistic ideological mindset that makes individuals to satisfy their own selfish ends at the expense of simple human ideals of love, justice and peaceful co-existence. This is what Daddy Winston and Uncle Johnny do when they defile the young Gwendolen at different periods of her life both in Jamaica and in London. This is what happens when Mr. Slime in Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* finds it expedient to cheat the villagers out of their savings. After all, the school system, which has its foundation as the colonial mentality of white superiority, has made him to think that black people are to be kept in their place by all means of exploitation.

The negative self-regard that is perpetuated in Lamming's novel makes children to grow up knowing that they can only become successful outside the debilitating Barbados environment. For characters like Trumper and Boy G, journeying out of the country is the only sure way of making meaning out of life. After all, they have essentially been denied knowledge of their own country by the education system that has prioritized British events and made the reality of colonialism and the African experience and history appear like a

myth. One wonders whether this negative growth is an attribute of those blacks in the diaspora.

In the next Chapters of this study, we will focus at length on the concept of looking at the west for solutions to the personal predicaments that African characters face. Critical to our objective of putting Buchi Emecheta in context, however, is the understanding that in her novels, the concept of journeying in search of better life *out of Africa* are quite common. The search for social, political or economic justice is taken to the West where a more viable environment seems to exist. This is seen in the choices made by Buchi Emecheta's characters in *Gwendolen*, *Kehinde*, *In the Ditch*, *The Joys of Motherhood*, among others.

Our reference to George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* will be incomplete if we do not acknowledge the fact that, even from the title of the novel, it is apparent that blacks are at the receiving end of the racist justice system within both the Caribbean and the American landscape. In fact, it would be viable to regard the system as an 'injustice system' as its practices counter every rule in the book of justice. Through his depiction of the education system in Barbados, Lamming proposes the necessity for a re-orientation of socio-political and economic relationships. He proposes that a more humanistic approach that does not seek to justify injustice needs to be put in place.

Education, Lamming seemingly tells us, should allow people to have a sense of racial consciousness without having to get out of the country to gain it. It should be an education system that instills in them an intense consciousness of their situation (Freire, 58). Freire seems to assert that this is the only way that the oppressed can avoid acquiring the mannerisms and behavioural patterns of the oppressor. In essence, Lamming is suggesting that blacks do not have to travel to the west to gain their independence.

If the oppressor in terms of inter-racial relationships in Africa, the Caribbean and America is the white person, trying to establish whether black writers in

the diaspora do not necessarily become indoctrinated with beliefs of white superiority becomes a bit problematic. What is important, however, is the recognition that the slave experience apparently is the single most important experience shared by blacks in the world. As Imaya E.J asserts, a study of African American literary works cannot ignore "the effect of slavery on the psychosocial, economic and political disposition of blacks in America" (*The Quest for Identity*, 1). In reference to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Imaya states that the protagonist finds his efforts to "be accepted into mainstream of American life are continuously frustrated and his quest" for justice is curtailed (5).

As we mentioned elsewhere, the problem of the colour line, which Du Bois underlines as the problem of the twentieth century, becomes real in the African, Caribbean and American context. Indeed, Du Bois summarizes the problem of the century as "the relation of the darker to lighter races" (*The Souls of Black Folk*, 214-215). Du Bois aptly suggests, according to Imaya, that a "realistic journey back to the drawing board" for the development of a more just framework of race relations is expedient (5).

What we are establishing is that while looking at Buchi Emecheta in context, it is difficult to ignore the fact that human relationships, especially where issues of race are concerned, have always been warped. That the scenario is favourable to the white race is apparently a popular view among black Caribbean and American writers. It is difficult to ignore what the Black Radical Congress in its 'Statement on the Status of the Freedom Agenda' expounds. The preamble of the statement acknowledges that:

During the last 500 years, humanity has displayed on a colossal scale its capacity for creative genius and ruthless destruction, for brutal oppression and indomitable survival, for rigid tradition and rapid change. The Americas evolved to their present state of development at great cost to their original indigenous peoples, and at great cost to those whose labor enabled modernization under the yoke of that protracted crime against humanity, slavery (1)

The Black Radical Congress essentially acknowledges that the quest for justice within the context of the black diaspora is informed by sad realities that are unfavourable towards black people. It acknowledges that people of African descent “carry an enormously disproportionate burden” and that in the United States, “the living legacy of slavery, and the pervasiveness of institutional white supremacy” have placed black people on “all-too-familiar terms with poverty, urban and rural” (1-2).

Prepared at the twilight of the 20th Century, the above sentiments from the Black Radical Congress confirms that the injustice that was engendered by colonialism and slavery engendered the existence of injustice in society, which will apparently always inform global race relationships. A sober reflection of past injustices enables blacks to appreciate that there is not much in terms of justice that can be expected from the west. What is critical is that Buchi Emecheta not only strides, but also lives in these worlds in which racism is an entrenched legacy. How this affects her works is an issue we will look at in later chapters of the thesis.

Looking at the situation of blacks in the Caribbean and America, one is convinced that Marcus Garvey must have had a strong motivation for propagating a back-to-Africa process for black people in the diaspora. Bethwel Ogot states “Garvey argued that the blacks in diaspora also needed ... a great spiritual nationalism, which would promote political and cultural solidarity between all peoples of African descent” (*Africa and the Caribbean*, 60). This would mean that just as the quest for independence led to a rise in African nationalism, there was a necessity for the same unity in the African diaspora. Ogot further says that Garvey implied that a racial category blacks would not achieve “racial self-hood until their group becomes competent and adequate in resources for the demands of their economic, political, moral and spiritual life” (60). It would be interesting to establish whether Buchi Emecheta pays credence to this perspective.

Critical to our understanding of the quest for justice in the diaspora is the appreciation of the fact that the proponents of freedom for Africa were Caribbeans like Marcus Garvey and Edward Blyden, Walter Antony Rodney, among others. As we attempt to contextualise Buchi Emecheta, we have to acknowledge that there were certain problems faced by those blacks in the diaspora. Looking at Edward Blyden, for example, Bethwel Ogot asserts that even as the activist "propounded a positive philosophy of humanism which gave the African an honourable place in the history of mankind" (28) there were problems of attitude among black people themselves, which essentially hindered the quest for justice. The problem of the "attitude of the Africans in the diaspora to Africa and the attitude of Africans to the Africans in the diaspora" arose. Ogot continues to say:

Blyden had to admit that most of the African Americans had fallen victims to white propaganda, which presented Africans as "racially inferior", and were therefore ashamed to be linked with them. He [however]... advanced the constructive idea that Afro-Americans could not achieve equality in the United States if they ignored the interests of Africans, thus linking the struggle of the blacks in the diaspora... (47-48)

Blyden apparently recognized the warped basis of relationships between Africa and the rest of the world, not to mention the African diaspora. He blamed the West for propagating slavery that had "disastrous consequences for Africa" leading to the inability (of Africa) to "overcome ... backwardness". The slave trade, therefore, created a scenario in which oppression was institutionalized. Putting an end to slavery, to Blyden, was "the beginning of the Africans' renaissance" (34).

What is apparent is that there are a myriad perspectives arising from the Diaspora. The question is, how possible is it for a writer with a two-pronged ideological and geographical setting to avoid getting either negatively or positively influenced? How does a conscientious writer deal with the contradictions of being African, black and a resident of the diaspora? Does it mean that different perspectives that could be confusing inform the quest for

justice within the black or African diaspora? These are questions we will attempt to answer in the next Chapters of this Study.

1.3 Emecheta, Justice and the African Scenario

While appreciating that the slave history is the single most unfortunate event in the history of Africa, we have to remind ourselves that a considerable number of literary works by blacks in Africa and the African diaspora arose out of the desire for freedom and justice. It is critical, of course, that at this point, the search for justice does not necessarily have a gender responsive face. Most of the works are focused on looking at the larger issue of racism and how black people can gain their dignity within the system.

In an article, *'Problems of Nationhood in Grace Ogot's Fiction'* Ify Achufusi (n.d) states: "Questions of social morality and the quest for nationhood have preoccupied African writers dealing with post-colonial society" (179). He gives the examples of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Ayi Kweyi Armah, Wole Soyinka, Grace Ogot and Meja Mwangi, among others, as some of the writers who have focused on the quest for a moral equilibrium within society. The purpose was to come up with a new vision that would serve Africa and Africans better. That no serious reflection was spared for women and the possibilities that were open to them is not a matter of conjecture.

We hesitate to say that one of the positive aspects of colonialism was its creation of opportunities for both women and men, especially in regard to formal education and its consequent perquisites. The formal education system that replaced the informal one downplayed the division of labour and resources along gender lines and arguably propagated, albeit indirectly, a liberating principle for both women and men. With more women gaining access to education and formal employment, attention began to be drawn to the fact that a greater percentage of Africa's women population was suffering, getting only a fraction of the fruits of their labour. Here lies, in our view, the artistic and political motivations behind women's writings, in which category

Buchi Emecheta's fictional works fall. That women's literary effort began to gain recognition was inevitable.

Buchi Emecheta's own experience inevitably comes in handy here. In the introduction to *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*, Marie Umeh (1996) states that in her autobiographical works, the author "records her own dissatisfaction with marriage, which primarily brought about her permanent separation from her spouse" (xxvii). This essentially means that it would not be feasible to look at Buchi Emecheta's works outside the context of her experiences. Her autobiographical works *In the Ditch*, *The Bride Price*, *Head Above Water* and *Second Class Citizen* essentially chronicle her experiences as a divorced mother in London. In the previous Chapter, we averred that it is necessary to determine just how Buchi Emecheta's own experiences affect her.

To women writers, the replication of patriarchal structures in literature by men was an attempt to incessantly promote the culture of domination over women. Rose Ure Mezu in 'Women in Achebe's World', states: "By creating a masculine-based society, Achebe was merely putting literature to mimetic use, reflecting existing traditional mores" (1). Indeed, Mezu's words make us to reiterate that it may be necessary to establish whether women writers do not also end up mimicking the society in their works, especially if they present caricatures of suffering women to make their point.

In our view, patriarchy could be regarded as one of the most serious forms of injustices directed towards women. As Marilyn French says, patriarchy is humanity's demonstration of 'self-hatred' (536). She goes further to say: "By defining man as something man can never be, patriarchists betray a powerful impulse towards suicide, a drive to kill the real human in order to manufacture a 'better'" (536). The author is essentially stating that that human relationships could do better than benefit from the dictates of patriarchy. What is necessary is for the principle of justice to govern human relationships.

The quest for justice, especially by women, was motivated by the realisation that it was not possible to live dignified lives in the context of existing oppression and injustice. In her works, Buchi Emecheta continues the fight for justice. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, she gives us a glimpse of the life of Nnu Ego, the struggles she goes through in her attempts to gain acceptance in society. All her life, she has based her actions on society's definition of what it is to be a woman. She engages in an effort to live a meaningful life. Towards the end of her life, Nnu Ego realises that her life's happiness had everything to do with bringing up her children and little to do with her personal life, her personal happiness. She thinks:

Her joy was to know that she had brought up her children when they had started out with nothing, and that those same children might rub shoulders one day with the great men of Nigeria. That was the reward she expected (JOM, 202).

The demands of motherhood have made Nnu Ego to prioritise the aspirations of her family to the detriment of her own happiness. She becomes important only because of the services she renders to the bringing up of her children and being the un-acknowledged head of the family. In this novel, just like in the rest of Buchi Emecheta's works, motherhood as an institution has debilitating effects on black women, be it in Africa or in the diaspora. We can see this in *Destination Biafra*, *Kehinde*, and *Gwendolen*, among others. Motherhood is given undue emphasis by society to the detriment of women's lives. The seriousness of this scenario is emphasised by the sad scenario of Nnu Ego's death in *The Joys of Motherhood*:

She used to go to the sandy square called Otinkpu, near where she lived, and tell people there that her son was in "Emelika", and that she had another one also in the land of the white men - ... After such wanderings on one night, Nnu Ego lay down by the roadside, thinking she had arrived home. She died quietly there, with no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to her. She had never really made many friends, so busy had she been building up her joys as a mother (JOM, 224).

It would suffice to say that the Nnu Ego we met running on the road to commit suicide has actually finally got her escape from the mean circumstances of life. Dying by the roadside signifies that the quest for justice within the Ibuza society is far from over, and the long road lies ahead for Africa's women. The lack of dignity in the way she dies also shows she is neglected and that there is no one to attend to her during her time of need. Her roadside 'home' becomes a vindication of a society, which ruins the lives of its women citizens by making impossible demands on them. The explanation of society that "she did not answer prayers for children" when barren women appealed to her, indicates the utter moral decay of society under scrutiny (JOM, 224). It also shows that she is dissatisfied with the state of motherhood in her society.

In *Kehinde* and *Gwendolen* Buchi Emecheta informs us that the status of black women in Africa and the diaspora has no fundamental dissimilarities. The Caribbean context of Gwendolen's family shows that black women face serious obstacles to their achievement of self-affirmation. Even as she moves to London, Gwendolen and her mother Sonia face the same problems from their male counterparts. It is only the setting that changes. The relationships maintain a highly patriarchal context, however mutely it manifests itself.

We could surmise that Buchi Emecheta is actually stating that some force necessarily intricately joins black men in one thing: injustice to the women in their lives. Otherwise, why would most of the men in her works be so oppressive to women?

In *Black Women Writing and Identity*, Carole Boyce Davies states "Motherhood and/or mothering thus become central and defining tropes in Black female reconstruction" (135). What Davies is suggesting that tackling women's oppression has to start with combating the insistence that society puts on motherhood. She goes ahead to draw a comparison between racism and women's oppression. She says "One correlative of racial marking, then, for people in racially stratified societies, is childbearing for women in male-dominated societies" (138). Davies is suggesting that childbearing in Africa, for example, is a key signpost of male domination. Whether this is true or not

is debatable. What is important is that Buchi Emecheta lives both within a male dominated and racist environment, the influences of which we will determine in the next Chapters of this study.

It is recognised that the social, political and economic changes that have taken place in society have not been augmented by a requisite gender-sensitive transformation of the society, as women continue to be marginalized from key sectors of development. Patriarchal perspectives still hold sway. This is especially because, as Rosemary Tong asserts, gender justice can only exist if the “rules of the game” are made fair. Fairness will ensure that “none of the runners in the race for society’s goods and services is systematically disadvantaged...” (2).

Indeed the disparity in access to social, political and economic amenities between women and men has made a majority of them have little or no education. Issues of male domination and patriarchy that Buchi Emecheta tackles still hold sway, and are a debilitating obstacle to the achievement of justice and its attendant virtues. Essentially, the negative male principle hangs over the lives of the members of society, both women and men like a dark monstrous cloud.

Patriarchy obscures the gains that have been made to increase opportunities for women. As such, it is only the educated, hence, enlightened women, who have sought a mode of expression that would enable them to draw the attention of society to the necessity to address gender inequalities that negatively impact on the social, economic and political status of women. This is the socio-cultural context in which Buchi Emecheta wrote. She was born and brought up in a society that made it clear that a woman’s position was always significantly lower than that of a man.

The issues that Buchi Emecheta and other African writers deal with are those of socially entrenched oppression. It is an oppression that can only be counteracted by a commitment by women and male writers to eradicate it. By constantly engaging in the quest for self-fulfilment, Buchi Emecheta engages

her characters in an attempt to affirm their right to happiness and full enjoyment of life. In this way, they apparently espouse the sort of humanistic principles that Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* outlines (1972). Freire asserts that the quest for humanity should be 'a vocation for mankind' (Freire, 20). We agree with him, as long as 'mankind' refers to women and men.

That Emecheta espouses the principles of women's empowerment is apparent. She is cited asserting, "Black women all over the world should reunite and re-examine the way history has portrayed us" (Emeagwali, 5). This is a statement that could be regarded as significant to endeavours that have the objective of seeking for gender justice in society. There is, however, an apparent allusion to some lack of unity in the way black women have regarded the issue of history and how it has portrayed them. We could surmise that at this point, Buchi Emecheta has probably acknowledged that a majority of black women in Africa and the diaspora face almost similar challenges as a result of the patriarchal leaning of their societies. This implies the existence of a serious relationship between what black women generally tackle in their works.

It is critical that we recognise the quest for identity as an apparently defining feature of women's literature. Bessie Head in her writings constantly presents female characters trying to find solutions to the problems affecting them. In one of her novels, *A Question of Power*, Elizabeth who is a principal character finds herself confronted by situations that leave her mentally wounded and scattered. She is in search of a redemptive medium in her life but constantly fails in her attempts. In his analysis of *A Question of Power*, Oladele Taiwo asserts that although Elizabeth fails to find redemptive meaning in her life, it is noteworthy that her "enormous capacity for suffering and her ability to overcome evil in the long run are put in the context of the struggle for equality by the oppressed people of South Africa and other parts of the world" (Taiwo, 197).

Here, women's suffering is looked at against the quest for freedom from apartheid oppression and its attendant effects. Elizabeth's efforts are constantly frustrated by the presence of the male principle in her life. This situation is a threat to her existence, and it becomes necessary for her to come to terms with the difficult issues that confront her. Born into a racially defined world, Elizabeth's mixed blood further complicates her situation. Apart from the discrimination she faces, there comes an additional racism. Gaining acceptance is difficult, and establishing a viable identity, in itself, becomes a momentous task. Gaining redemption from the threatening injustice becomes more or less overwhelming.

This could be said of Buchi Emecheta herself. In *Head Above Water*, she recalls her experience of London: "We arrived at a time when it was classy to advertise for tenants and print in bold red letters "SORRY NO COLOUREDS". My husband could only get a small room" (28). At this moment, the author is socially and geographically dislocated from her familiar environment into one in which she suddenly finds herself looked down upon.

In *Bessie Head: Restless in a Distant Land*, Charlotte Bruner asserts that the author's *A Question of Power* presents a "thin hope of survival" which "mirrors Bessie Head's own un-rewarded struggle for acceptance in her new community" (Parker, 263). Bruner further draws our attention to the autobiographical linkages to the upheavals faced by Bessie Head's characters. She says of Bessie Head: "Her color, her sex, her projected solutions complicate [the situation] Her literary work demonstrates some unique aspects of her exile and rules out for her some solutions others have found" (Parker, *et al*, 261).

Indeed, when issues of racism come into consideration, the situation of women becomes doubly worrying. Culture and racism hinder the quest for self-affirmation for both Buchi Emecheta and Bessie Head. Although the reasons differ, the basic point is that both women have to step out of their countries in search of socio-political and economic redemption. Consequently, they become refugees to London and Botswana respectively.

We have to acknowledge that the challenges that Buchi Emecheta and Bessie Head face are borne out of a conviction by the rest of society that some human beings are essentially more important than others. In Bessie Head's South Africa, being the illegitimate daughter of a white woman and a black man is sufficient condemnation to a lifetime of drudgery. For Buchi Emecheta, being an African woman married to an African man in London meant that she had to bend low and not disrupt the patriarchal pattern in the lopsided relationship in which masculinity was supreme. It also meant dealing with a racially divided society. In this regard, both Bessie Head and Buchi Emecheta deals with issues of womanhood within a racist and politically unstable environment, which is also a highly male dominated one.

It is, therefore, not shocking that In *The Slave Girl*, the practice of slavery – based on a conviction of superiority of some people over others - is rampant. This is enhanced by the extant belief that whites are superior to blacks – which indirectly fuels the sort of inter-black oppression practiced by people like Ma Palagada and her lot. When Ojebeta and her fellow slave girls come into the Palagada household, their identity and their sense of dignity are shattered. For example, the opportunity to laugh becomes worthy of celebration. The cultural and familial roots are forever wrecked, and the young girls face a distressing future with no possibility of ever finding their roots. That it is a woman who is at the helm of the oppressive forces gives injustice a feminine face. This means that both women and men can practice injustice. This perspective seems to contradict Buchi Emecheta's emerging perspective – that men are the ultimate oppressors.

The slave woman definitely faces a double problem, for she is first a woman in a gender-insensitive setting, and then a slave. This double discrimination enhances the hopelessness in the lives of women and further complicates the process of emancipation and the search for self-affirmation. Indeed, this is the scenario that confronts us when we talk of the diaspora, for the question of slavery and racism cannot be dispensed with. In fact, the issue of dislocation

of blacks to the West, and the reality of colonialism provide a fertile ground for contemplating the issue of the diaspora and its influences on the psyche.

Essentially, therefore, the process of tackling oppression has to be contextualised within the larger picture of the quest for justice within the larger African society and the world at large. The compartmentalization of justice within gender lines, or its quest for that matter, can only lead to increased confusion in the society. This is what Marie Umeh (1996) calls "gender politics" which, she suggests, should be replaced by "a collective struggle against the real enemies – social injustice and human degradation..." (xxxiii).

In her analysis of Buchi Emecheta, Marie Umeh goes ahead to say that the author "raises the consciousness of her readers to move towards genuine power sharing between males and females, so that living and loving together may be fun and empowering rather than cruel and crippling" (xxxiii). In Chapter Two and Three of this thesis, we explore whether this is indeed what Buchi Emecheta does. The issue of justice that Marie Umeh mentions is a core concern in our discussion and analyses.

1.4 Race, Identity and the Diaspora

Those blacks in Africa and the diaspora cannot gainsay the issue of race and identity. Black people who live outside Africa because of the historical event of slavery or as social, political or economic refugees – or those who have made a conscious decision to live there - recognise the serious problem of racism. That their initial preoccupation has been with the establishment of ways and means of living meaningful lives within their new environments is not contestable. This is particularly when we look at the thematic focus of writings by black people in Africa and the diaspora.

In Africa, colonialism had serious negative effects on the economic front, with resources from Africa going to the West to build the economies of the 'mother' countries. The quest for independence by Africans had been painful, as the colonial forces were not ready to relinquish power. This meant that any

processes of handing over power to black people were informed by a lack of sincerity by colonialists to the process of institutionalising lasting democracy, peace and justice in Africa. Instead, colonialists saw an opportunity for entrenching systems that would ensure the existence of a new economic framework that would still protect the political and economic interests of the former colonisers for decades to come. This is what has evolved to become 'neo-colonialism' a concept which has pre-occupied writers like Ngugi wa Thiongo for years.

Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* demonstrates this negative legacy of British colonialism in Nigeria. The process that Governor MacDonald and Allan Grey put in place eventually leads to the existence of an autocratic system of leadership. As proponents of good leadership, justice and democracy, some African writers like Micere Mugo, Alex La Guma, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o among others started being viewed as enemies by the new post-independence states.

Eventually, writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka, Saro Wiwa, Micere Mugo, among others found themselves in trouble for calling for a 'second liberation'. Due to the real danger that they found themselves in, the writers had to escape from Africa, mostly to the West. On the other hand, unlike the other writers, Buchi Emecheta was a social and economic refugee. In the first instance, she went to join her husband in London. When the marriage failed, she had to find solutions to her economic problems within London. She left her husband and decided to take the bold step of bringing up children on her own in a foreign country.

In America, the Caribbean and other countries in the world, writings by black people specifically became deeply rooted in the quest for justice for the oppressed black race. James Baldwin's statement in *The Fire Next Time* (1963) captures the reality of blacks in the diaspora:

You were born and faced the future you faced
because you were black and for no other reason.

You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible that you were a worthless being. You were not expected to aspire to excellence: you were expected to make peace with mediocrity (15-16)

Different black writers in Africa and the African diaspora have echoed this statement, albeit in different words. It articulates the fact that black people in the world are generally looked down upon by white people who regard them as inferior beings. The fight by such individuals as Martin Luther King focused on creating a level ground for blacks and whites so that both could benefit from the opportunities available in the American nation.

No wonder that Marcus Garvey led the back-to-Africa campaign, while Malcom X called for the re-orientation of Black Nationalism. For black writers who had a firm understanding of their slave history, there was no way a white person could be trusted. The search for justice was, therefore, clear: the white man was the oppressor, and the black man was the one who had to fight for freedom. Indeed, it is this historical suspicion that has been behind the calls for an African renaissance. To say that the calls for an African feminist perspective are part of this re-orientation would not be distant from reality.

As late as 1963, just a year after Buchi Emecheta went to England, Martin Luther King Jr. made the famous *I have a Dream* speech, in which he stated categorically that a century after the emancipation proclamation, racism was still rampant in America. He states that the lives of blacks in America were 'still crippled in manacles of segregation' (616). That Dr. King was calling for peaceful co-existence is not in doubt. What is important is that he realised that black people still faced discrimination.

For purposes of this presentation, the recognition of the inhuman treatment faced by African people through out the world necessitated a response from Blacks in Africa and the diaspora. Indeed, it is this realisation that produced people like Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, Maya Angelou, Bessie Head, and Buchi Emecheta, among others. It would, therefore, be impractical and

inaccurate to ignore issues of race in Buchi Emecheta's fictional works. After all, one can even say that racism constitutes the very basis of international relationships, the seed of which was sown by historical racist events of which slavery and colonisation are apt examples. Of critical importance to us is the similarity in subject matter between writings by blacks from Africa and the diaspora.

Buchi Emecheta concedes that there are a number of similarities between the writings of African women and African-American women. In a discussion with Joseph Ogundele (Umeh, 1996), she says that African women "deal with the Pan-African situation" while the African-American women deal with "the interpretations over generations" (451). The interpretations that Buchi Emecheta is talking about here have everything to do with the slave experience of some Africans in the diaspora. She goes ahead to state that African and African-American women "are all talking about the same thing in order for people to hear our voices" (451). We contend that when all is said and done, they all deal with issues of women's oppression and quest for justice, which apparently defy cultural boundaries.

It would also appear that by drawing the above parallel with African-American women, Emecheta admits that women writers do not only deal with issues of women's oppression facing the African nation. The larger issues of justice and oppression we tackled earlier in this Chapter are also of concern. It is not surprising then, that the author includes other wider issues in her works and does not just limit herself to the rendition of women's issues. She is quoted as saying: "I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of African women I know. I did not know that being so, I was going to be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist, then I am an African feminist with a small 'f'" (Umeh, xxxi).

While talking about *The Rape of Shavi* (one of her novels), Buchi Emecheta implicitly acknowledges that writing from the diaspora has posed certain problems to her. She says: "*The Rape of Shavi* is an allegory about how our area became raped by Europe. And after raping it, they put nothing there. The book is not very popular because of its stringent nature. It is very much

against the West "(449) [sic]. Buchi Emecheta acknowledges the issue of the rape of Africa by the West during the processes of slavery and colonisation. This links up with the perspectives by other writers who call for a reorientation of Africa's perspectives if the future has to be effectively dealt with. It would be interesting to establish whether the author could say the same of her other novels, or whether she considerably tones down and toes the determined line.

In *Talking With African Writers*, Jane Wilkinson (1992) quotes Kofi Awoonor saying that African writers should 'pay attention to that specific place' that shaped their worldview (31). He goes on to say that if an African writer does not do this, he or she 'will be coming from nowhere or belong to no place. We the writers of Africa must insist that we come from a place' (31) [sic]. Kofi Awoonor lends his voice to the debate about the authenticity of the African experience that has continued to take place in literary circles since Leopold Sedar Senghor's negritudist movement.

For our purposes, we can say that indeed, women writers, and Buchi Emecheta to be more specific, did exactly this: they paid attention to the socio-political and economic reality of the woman's life, realised its injustice, and started a process of perpetuating a liberating principle. Together with other women artists, they savoured what in the words of Ben Okri is "the joy of being able to write" and depict the realities and "the tension, the internal tension, to show the life, the place, the environment" of the women and men in society and the effect of this on them. (qtd in Wilkinson, 79) [sic].

Ben Okri proposes the necessity for presenting "a different conception of history because the facts of history alone are not enough to give an account of our consciousness and what we need to do" (Wilkinson, 80). It is worthy to note that the philosophy that Ben Okri, who lives in London, proposes is practical as it places the context of women's writing, and specifically Buchi Emecheta's into what we can regard as a clear perspective. Clearly, Ben Okri looks at African writing as a liberating literature that dissipates misconceptions and sets a new framework of democratic reference for Africa. Appreciably, this is what Buchi Emecheta is supposed to do in her works.

Caught in the crossfire of the Biafran war, Debbie Ogedemgbe – in *Destination Biafra* - rises to the occasion and handles the situation the best way she can. In the face of frustration and conniving inconsistency from the fighting male folk, she asserts herself as a level-headed patriot of humanity's cause. She has analysed the problem with Nigeria to be that of tribal-minded, murderous, selfish and greedy leaders who lack the dignity to admit their mistakes and be credited for the restoration of sanity to the disintegrating socio-political and economic morass. Indeed, this is what Chinua Achebe says of the leaders of the Nigerian nation in *The Trouble With Nigeria*. He states that: "The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmark of true leadership" (4).

In *Destination Biafra*, Buchi Emecheta attempts to rewrite the history of the Biafran war. In the process, she gives women the attributes of 'personal example' that Chinua Achebe mentions above. In essence, Buchi Emecheta pays credence to the Nigerian experience. Foregrounding women characters in the search for self-affirmation is, essentially, a call for a new frame of definition of what justice means to the community. It is a process of foregrounding the role of women, which has apparently hitherto been downplayed. This process enables both Debbie Ogedemgbe and her mother Stella to have their own minds, "after all" (115). So that even as society wishes that Debbie "hadn't gone to England to learn all this talk of women behaving like men" she feels that it is her responsibility to respond to the needs of her country (117).

In *Sarafina! The Sound of Freedom* (Miramax, 1990) the struggles for emancipation from the shackles of apartheid are at an advanced stage. Sarafina, her school teacher, her mother and the other girls who work in unity in the quest for freedom and justice, provide an ample example of women characters involved in charting out the course of their own lives and the society's destiny (Dir. Anant Singh, 1990). However, the deliberate undermining of women's labour, and the exaltation of the heroic endeavours

of the male fighters is brought to the fore during a discussion between Sarafina and her mother (played by Miriam Makeba) towards the end of the film.

While her daughter is busy praising her absent father for his 'invisible' heroic deeds, Sarafina's mother is busy handling the practical issues of the day. She toils to feed the children, dress them and take them to school. She responds to Sarafina quite appropriately when she seems to foreground her father's heroism: "He went away to be a hero", she says, "and I stayed at home to work". The irony here underlies the basic dilemma that informs the lives of women. They have multiple roles that are apparently unrecognised by society.

What is notable is that in a few sentences, Sarafina's distraught mother makes it clear to her frustrated daughter that bringing up children alone is a gargantuan task in South Africa's racist environment. It is revealed to the young aspirant that the complimentary roles that husband and wife play in the liberation process, regardless of the consequences, should be recognised. And even if some women and men ignore them either intentionally or otherwise, it will remain in the hearts of enlightened women and men to put the record straight. The scenario confronting Sarafina's mother is not so dissimilar to that facing Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood*.

In essence, we are seeing very clearly that the participation of women in the liberation process can bring a two-pronged change: it creates a just society; as well as a women-friendly environment. In *Sarafina!* there is greater hope for oppressed groups to achieve a society in which justice is not anathema. This clearly shows that as a high humanistic ideal, the pursuit of justice and equality in the society should be a basis for the establishment of democratic and equity principles. These would eventually lead to gender-sensitive governance. These principles will ensure that all members of the community, women and men, fully enjoy their rights and freedoms.

Sarafina!'s success lies in the centrality of the women characters to the story's movement. This scenario is important in our attempts to contextualise Buchi

Emecheta. In *Sarafina*, the men play disagreeable roles of absentee husbands and traitors but also appear in the agreeable garb of freedom fighters and community mobilizers in the quest for freedom, democracy and good governance that upholds the rights of women and men regardless of colour or religion. The women only appear as strong agreeable and fearless proponents of justice. In the final analysis, there is a recognition of the role both women and men play in the liberation process. There is no deliberate attempt to de-emphasise the contribution of men.

In Buchi Emecheta's works, women who are in search of a defining principle for their lives essentially lead the quest for justice. The men become the culprits and are, therefore, relegated to the backyard of life. However, the emerging differences in the two writers notwithstanding, it is the uniting principle of the quest for justice among them that is of critical importance to us.

It is clear that there are quite a number of works by male writers that give prominence to the women's experience. Chinua Achebe's treatment of Beatrice in *Anthills of the Savannah*, for instance, is a case in point. In depicting her positively, Achebe, in the words of Margaret Hander 'seeks to link ... the question of African women's roles to the larger problems of the post-colonial nation' (Hander, 1).

In looking at Buchi Emecheta's writings as a constituent of artistic works that espouse liberating principles for women and the greater society, we may, therefore, argue that it is the joint efforts of women and men that are bound to enhance the socio-economic situation of the community. This would be to the benefit of all, women and men. This, essentially, is why we tend to agree with Margaret Hander when she says:

Achebe goes beyond the notion of conflict to propose that hope lies not in separating women's issues from society's issues, but in integrating them, and in looking to women continually in the process of social change (Hander, 2).

What Achebe is suggesting may not be “looking to women” as Hander suggests above, but involving them as partners in sorting out the predicaments that Nigeria and Africa are confronted with. It is critical that as a male writer, Achebe attempts to bring out strong female characters. This is in spite of the fact that these characters rapidly lose their strength under close scrutiny. Perhaps this is because in his fictional writings, Achebe borrows heavily from the patriarchal ideology that seemingly guides the society in which he lives.

In effect, Achebe, like Sembene Ousmane in *God's Bits of Wood* “questions traditional male chauvinism and succeeds in enlarging the political and social base of women” (Taiwo, 12). This affirms that the women's agenda could either encompass or be encompassed by the wider liberation agenda of the oppressed community. This is precisely because we cannot look at the sort of slavery that Ma Palagada practices in *The Slave Girl* outside the context of the influences of colonialism and western experience and capitalism.

Indeed, even the sort of predicament facing, for example, First Corinthians Dead in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, cannot be looked at regardless of the context of the slave history of African Americans, which informs current relationships. Ma Palagada's behaviour in *The Slave Girl* is essentially influenced by the desire for the trappings of capitalism. The intelligent woman entrepreneur has discovered the secret of affluence. When opportunities arise for her to buy slaves, she not only buys them, but she also gives them the 'appropriate' inhuman treatment that is expected.

For Toni Morrison's First Corinthians Dead, her slave ancestors left her a legacy that forever made it clear that her place was very well defined. College education is no panacea to the issues she has to deal with in society. The white 'master' still holds the reins and the socio-economic 'slave' is supposed to dance to the tune. It soon becomes clear that the young woman is coping with issues of alienation and identity, and it becomes difficult for her to assert herself in the debilitating racist environment.

It is clear that both Buchi Emecheta and Toni Morrison draw inspiration from the slave experience and its effects. In *The Slave Girl*, it is manifested in the Palagada household. In *Song of Solomon*, it is manifested in Macon Dead who is so engrossed in looking for money that the sober realities of the moment completely evade him. Trappings of capitalist prominence have made him to acquiesce to the demands of White-owned Banks, and he becomes too cautious to even entertain the needs of his immediate family. The result is deterioration in family relationships, and it is only the conscious effort of his son to discover his roots that appear to be saving the day.

While writing about Buchi Emecheta, Oladele Taiwo conceded that the "slave trade, slavery and colonisation may appear remote influences, but they are strong enough to provide an inspiration" (Taiwo, 15). We assert that slavery is an inspiration that African writers in the diaspora cannot possibly do away with. In the same way, we can assert that the diaspora may appear to have no influences at all on Buchi Emecheta's fictional renditions but it is possible that it has quite strong effects, as we shall discuss in the next chapters.

It is apparent that after looking around her and after getting certain nuances from her experience in Lagos and London, Buchi Emecheta must have felt herself a visionary who would lead Africa's women to a new level of enlightenment. She rose out of the ashes of patriarchal dominance to become a dominating force in women's writing, and as Charlotte Bruner asserts, one can describe Buchi Emecheta as one of "today's women in Africa and the diaspora (who) have found voice and are writing not just one poem or one book but steadily, professionally, extensively" (217) [sic]. Indeed, this is authenticated by Emecheta's literary resume. As to whether she has a clear vision for the women of Africa, or for Africa for that matter, is an issue we will address in the next Chapters.

1.5 Concluding Remarks

To say that we have exhaustively contextualised Buchi Emecheta within Africa and the African diaspora would be an overstatement. We have attempted to cite a few writers in Africa and the African diaspora who are preoccupied with the search for justice. We also refer to some of the major writers and proponents of justice within the black diaspora as way of appreciating the unjust basis of inter-racial relationships in the world.

We affirm that works by black male and female writers in Africa and the diaspora, are essentially about the quest for justice and self-affirmation. In our discussion, we have taken care to look at these works in the context of what they propose for women and men. We have drawn our inspiration from the understanding that a gender sensitive framework should inform the quest for justice at all levels, requiring that both women and men join hands in fighting the forces of injustice in society.

In fact, any effort to contextualise Buchi Emecheta raises several issues that may perhaps be clarified in the next Chapter. The fact that she has lived in London for a very long time makes us to suspect that her geographical estrangement from Nigeria and Africa is also ideological. This poses issues of identity for the author herself, which are difficult to ignore. We can conclude that the search for justice within the diaspora has to be predicated within an all-inclusive framework. After all, as stated in the 'Principles of Unity' of the Black Radical Congress (2000), "Gender and Sexuality can no longer be viewed solely as personal issues but must be a basic part of our analyses" (1). This essentially means that it would be impractical to regard the search for justice in the society as a search that would benefit only a section of the population, or only women for that matter. What is necessary is a process that recognises what Ali Mazrui (1999) calls "cultural reform", which requires "persuasion, education and example" (1).

Suffice it to say that there are critical parallels between Buchi Emecheta as a writer, and other writers in Africa and the diaspora. We have established that paying credence to the African or black experience is critical to propelling a positive image of Africa. This is what Buchi Emecheta attempts to do. In the next Chapter, we establish how the author treats the theme of motherhood and how motherhood impacts on the quest for justice in society. In our analysis, we look at how characters and society in general in *The Joys of Motherhood* react to the institution of motherhood and how these perceptions essentially combine to influence the course of justice for both women and men.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 MOTHERHOOD AND THE QUESTION OF GENDER JUSTICE

2.1 Introduction

In the previous Chapter, we noted that Buchi Emecheta's works tackle the issues that other black writers in Africa and the African diaspora addressed. We asserted that the quest for justice undoubtedly informed most of the endeavours by these writers. We highlighted some of the issues arising from writings by black women and men in Africa and the African diaspora and made a statement about the possible motivation behind this.

In our efforts to contextualise Buchi Emecheta's writings, we found that she deals with the plight of the underprivileged women and men in their effort to live meaningful and satisfying lives. We noted that in her works, she dealt with themes that embraced humanity as a constitution of women and men, and the way they relate. Looked at in the context of the African literary landscape, Buchi Emecheta deals with what Eustace Palmer in *The Growth of the African Novel*, refers to as the current reality "in order to relate the struggles of today to a vision of tomorrow" (27).

Essentially, we demonstrated that Buchi Emecheta occupies a viable place within the literary landscape of Africa and the African diaspora. We have not only looked at women writers but also men writers as a way of appreciating that the issues the writers tackle are essentially the same.

In this Chapter, we look at how the writer treats motherhood in her works as a way of appreciating how this aspect of women's lives influences the relationships in society and the quest for justice. We proceed from an understanding that one of the key considerations when discussing gender relationships in Africa is recognising that motherhood is central in women's lives. Carole Boyce Davies states that the woman's "role as mother and the

centrality of this role as a whole" is "the most important factor in regard to the woman in traditional society". The writer goes on to state that:

The importance of motherhood and the evaluation of the childbearing capacity by African women is probably the most important fundamental difference between the African woman and her western counterpart (3)

Buchi Emecheta apparently recognises this. This is because motherhood plays a central role in her character's lives. This essentially justifies our choice of motherhood as a topic of analysis.

Ensuring that motherhood does not limit the socio-economic and political horizons of women becomes critical. At this point, the appreciation of the rights of women to achieve self-affirmation becomes critical. This can only happen if society comprehends that justice must serve both women and men in equal measure. It is this appreciation - that society needs to ensure "that none of the runners in the race for society's goods and services is systematically disadvantaged" - that becomes what we are referring to as 'gender justice' (Tong, 2).

2.2 Motherhood Reversed

Motherhood is a critical factor in Buchi Emecheta's works, especially in *The Joys of Motherhood*. It is propelled into centrality because it is upheld by the patriarchal society. In the prologue, we meet Nnu Ego determined to commit suicide. This, in our view, is hardly a prelude to a novel whose title promises beaming images of joy. We learn that Nnu Ego's child, got after many years of practised patience and endured scorn, has died in its sleep.

It is important that we note Nnu Ego's state of mind at this stage. Immediately after realising that her son is dead, she "backed out of the room, her eyes unfocused and glazed, looking into vacancy" (7). These words probably set the pace for our understanding of Nnu Ego's overall state of mind. Her vision

at this point is befogged. We wonder whether this is the state of the protagonist's mind throughout the novel.

After years of marriage to her first husband Amatokwu, she cannot give birth. Problems in her marriage arise because her husband and the community consider the fact that she does not have a child to be deplorable. The protagonist cannot, therefore, lay claim to full membership in the community from which her husband comes from. She undergoes immense humiliation from her husband who calls her "all bones". She is further dislocated from her house to "a nearby hut kept for older wives because his people had found him a new wife" (JOM, 32)

After undergoing these and more embarrassing episodes, Nnu Ego decides to go back to her parent's home. It is while here that she gets married to another man, Nnaife. That she does not marry this man because of love is instructive. She gets a son with Nnaife, and it is this child who has died. As she runs towards the bridge to commit suicide, Nnu Ego is full of pain:

As she walked, pain and anger fought inside her; sometimes anger came to the fore, but the emotional pain always won. And that is what she wanted to end very, very quickly...It would all soon be over, right there under the deep water that ran under Carter bridge. Then she would be able to meet her *chi*, her personal god, and she would ask her why she had punished her so (JOM, 9)

Nnu Ego's anger and frustration is fuelled by society's perceptions of womanhood and motherhood. These, to the protagonist, will make it difficult for her to live in peace, now that her only child, a boy, is dead. She, in the words of the woman who castigates her for wanting to commit suicide, "has only just lost the child that told the world that she is not barren". As the woman says this, the crowd around the bridge seem to agree that indeed, "a woman without a child for her husband is a failed woman" (JOM, 62). Through this statement, society casts its judgement onto Nnu Ego and the feeling that is

fore-grounded is that of condemnation. It is as if the passers by regret that they saved such a 'useless' woman.

It is possible that the mere thought of childlessness, and the scorn that she would have to endure from society, combine to make Nnu Ego decide that it is better to die. This is not a sensible decision, for Nnu Ego has demonstrated that she has an enduring spirit. The introduction to motherhood, therefore, becomes a terrible anti-climax, and the future, it would appear, has no promise for Nnu Ego.

The assertion here is that Nnu Ego's decision to commit suicide is motivated by the realisation that the acceptance she had received from the patriarchal society will disappear once the community realises that she no longer holds the certification to respect in the community: a child. The patriarchal society establishes a framework that creates a way of life for women that is debilitating to individual endeavour. This is essentially because motherhood is put at a revered position and is essentially over-emphasised.

While focusing on the issue of motherhood and how it impacts on the quest for justice, it is worthy to note several issues. In the first instance, we need to appreciate that as a product of patriarchal process, the warped view of motherhood arises out of the socialisation process that emphasises the division of roles along gender lines. Men and women have different roles that are determined through social and cultural conditioning. In the *Oxfam Gender Training Manual* a statement attributed to Ian Douglas points at the sort of conditioning the author went through as a young man. He says:

I learnt fairly early in life that one of my first accomplishments was to be superior to that other little creature that inhabited the earth, 'girl'. My parents guided me through this difficult period well. They gave me some helpful pointers. If I cried, they told me not to, as only little girls cried ... If my parents wanted to intimidate me because my hair was getting too long or untidy all they had to say was 'we will have to put a ribbon in your hair, won't we' (123)

This sort of conditioning becomes deterministic in terms of giving both women and men an opportunity to influence their lives. According to *Entrepreneurial Skills for Young Women*, “patriarchy as a social system is one way of trying to understand and explain women’s oppression”(22). Comprehending patriarchy means taking into consideration what Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira calls “cultural politics” which influence “the social arrangements between men and women, wives and husbands” (105)

Understanding patriarchy, it could be said, is one way of understanding motherhood and the forces at play around the issue. This could presuppose that motherhood is essentially oppressive and, therefore, unjust. Indeed, this what seems apparent in *The Joys of Motherhood*. It appears as if the injustice that is practised is so rooted in society that even Nnu Ego accepts it as a matter of course. For instance, while in Lagos with her second husband Nnaife, she seems to accept that her husband is not behaving like a man – the traditional conception of a man – we may add. This is because her husband washes clothes for a white man, Dr Meers and his wife, something that a man should never do. She accepts Nnaife’s disposition as “one of the inevitabilities of fate” but still continues to wonder, “why he could not find a more respectable job”(47).

It is, of course, instructive that Buchi Emecheta decides to create a Nnaife who *chooses* to undertake the apparently dehumanising task of washing even the underpants of a white man, one of the remaining vestiges of Nigeria’s colonial past. This is a task that even Nnu Ego, Nnaife’s wife, finds unmanly, and, therefore, despicable and dehumanising. And it is apparent that this is what is destined for Nnaife, as he continues to deteriorate into a vegetable life.

In Nnaife, Nnu Ego sees a man who does not meet her conception of manhood. He is so unlike Agbadi Nwokocho, her machosistic father. Nnaife is a modest man, a man of small things who can even get into arguments that

could be considered frivolous with his wife. Unfortunately, any qualities he has are diminished by the fact that he works like a robot.

He would sit on a kitchen stool by the first bath and wash all manner of articles, towels, women's nightdresses and what-have-you. Then, in mid-morning, he would move to the second bath and start rinsing. ... So regularly timed was his daily progression that one would tell the hour of the day by what he was doing. (JOM, 47)

So lost is Nnaife in his apparently 'demeaning' duties that he remains largely oblivious of the pregnancy-related changes taking place in Nnu Ego. It is important to note, however, that Nnu Ego does not let her husband's behaviour stop her from enjoying the prospect of motherhood. In her conception of what justice means in her society, Nnu Ego understands that the achievement of justice would be incomplete without a child for her father and her husband. That is why she is grateful to her *chi* when she sees all her children around her. "Thank you my chi, that they are healthy and strong". She says. "One day, they will become people" (174).

At this point, Nnu Ego has analysed her situation and decided that to be 'people' her children must gain certain life skills. She decides to take all of them to school at first, but later decides that her daughters, Taiwo and Kehinde, have to leave school "and help me in running the house and in my trade. If they are lucky, they too will go to school when your father returns. They don't need to stay long in school, only a year or two" (174). By deciding to limit the horizons for her daughters, Nnu Ego essentially becomes unjust and has seemingly learnt nothing substantial from her own experiences.

Nnu Ego's understanding of justice is limited to the patriarchal confines of her experience. Her socialisation makes her to give her female children what society has set aside for women: education that would enable them to be good wives and mothers. In effect, it appears that Nnu Ego does not learn any lessons from her own life. Her vision is grossly befogged and she is incapable of affirming the quest for self-affirmation and freedom as a quest her

daughters should be engaged in. She constantly reminds them that they are girls. Kehinde and Taiwo, her daughters, recognise this and they protest. "You remind us all the time", they tell their mother who, shortly thereafter refers to them as "good hawkers" (175).

As she encourages her daughters to blossom into good hawkers, Nnu Ego ensures that her male children are socialised to know that they are different from the girls and that they have to satisfy the demands of society. When Kehinde complains that the boys are "let off from going to fetch firewood", Nnu Ego responds by telling them: "But you are girls! They are boys. You have to sell to put them in a good position in life, so that they will be able to look after the family. When your husbands are nasty to you, they will defend you"(176). In this way, Nnu Ego assists in entrenching injustice – as it relates to the denial of the right to education and self-assertion – to women in her Lagos society.

Nnu Ego is depicted as the life giving, nurturing force from which humanity (and for this case, her children, the men in her life and the wider society) derive happiness and fulfilment. In this respect, therefore, it would be erroneous to say that the mere thought of motherhood bespeaks of injustice for women. Unfortunately, this is what Buchi Emecheta seems to be saying in her depiction of motherhood. The patriarchal community reveres the state of motherhood to an extent that it makes it a status issue for every woman. Those without children are no different from outcasts.

A deeper insight into the phenomenon reveals that it is not motherhood *per se* that is the source of injustice for Nnu Ego, but the socio-cultural baggage that goes with it. We cannot ignore the fact that motherhood is an important thing that even Nnu Ego enjoys. Her pride in being able to bring up her children almost single-handedly is illuminating. It is inconceivable that she could be happy in the academic success of her sons if marriage and motherhood were inherently unjust institutions. In our view, it is the subjugation of peace, justice and integrity as a result of motherhood or lack of it that becomes the issue.

It is society, and the patriarchs like Ijayi, her father's friend, who entrench these unjust systems. This is precisely why it does not make sense for the victim to seek to destroy her own life. Instead, it would have made sense for Nnu Ego to team up with other oppressed individuals in her society to bring an end to the practices that subjugate their individualities. In the next Chapter, we question why Buchi Emecheta creates such a character as Nnu Ego. Okeng'o Matiang'i (1999) says of Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*: '(It) brings out the tribulations of the Igbo woman. In fact, the life of the central character reads like a catalogue of tragedy' (184)

The tragedy is indeed demonstrated because Nnu Ego's life lacks the qualities of independence and freedom of choice that would, for instance, that would enable her to enjoy life. Even as Matiang'i continues to posit that Nnu Ego utilises the absence of Nnaife, her second husband to "re-evaluate the prescribed status she occupies", (184) we go a little further to say that this step is meaningless, as it has no positive influence on her life. These, it would appear, are the wasted attempts of an individual doomed to fail.

A wretched society where men can tell women to their face that they "have not time to waste" their precious "male seed" on them because they cannot have children (32) and where men approach sex like slithering snakes or like some wild animals ready to 'jump' and 'claw' at their women with 'vengeful' intentions asserts itself as a truly adamant obstacle to justice. It is the same wretched society that does not provide possibilities for Nnu Ego so that she can make viable choices.

It is, therefore, not surprising that Nnu Ego contemplates death after the demise of her only son. At this point, death is not just an end to life; it becomes an escape from the jeering and humiliation that is bound to come to her once the funeral is past. That the male-dominant forces would guide the jeering society is almost a foregone conclusion. It is apparent that society has not prepared Nnu Ego for the possibility that there is any happiness beyond the responsibility of motherhood and wife-hood.

The only sort of justice that life can give to a woman like her is to allow her the pleasure of motherhood. Even after this has been granted, the forces of justice had better ensure that the child lives. This appreciation of her circumstances befogs Nnu Ego's vision. She does not, therefore, realise that as a human being, she could still have future opportunities to enjoy life to the fullest. The decision to commit suicide is made by an individual who has given in to despair. She says:

Who was going to give her the energy to tell the world that she had once been a mother, but had failed? How would people understand that she had wanted so desperately to be a woman like everybody else, but had now failed...? (JOM, 61).

The Ibuza society we are dealing with has individuals who delight in the exploits that oppression brings their way. In this society, "Domination, aggression and violence form an intrinsic part of social life" (Gadotti, 1). Whether both women and men practise this injustice is an issue we continue to address in this thesis.

Nnu Ego essentially symbolises the failed aspirations of a majority of African women who are bogged down by the responsibilities of motherhood and, therefore, have no time to focus on their personal lives. Like Nnu Ego, the only tools they have are patience, endurance and hard work. It is apparent that these are not enough to counter the oppressive forces within the patriarchal society, which puts too much emphasis on their mothering abilities. As motherhood is revered, it does not instil a sense of dignity in women as would be expected. Instead, it distorts their horizons and leads them to live thankless lives. However, it is ironical that the women, at the same time, feel fulfilled by motherhood, though conditioned.

2.3 Motherhood As Identity

It is not, for that reason, surprising that the patriarchal society, (in its wretched belief in its own superiority), accords respect only to those women who are not only capable of bearing children, but also able to do it at the 'appropriate

time' - not too long after the marriage. The fact that Nnu Ego fails the test of motherhood makes society drive its young citizen into frenzy. Essentially, the patriarchal society places motherhood on a pedestal. The death of Nnu Ego's only son cancels the only identity she had, the only joy she had, the only source of respect from society. This is precisely why, at the relatively young age of twenty-five, the woman is ready to die and get it over with.

As society treats Nnu Ego with derision, her husband Amatokwu, well bolstered by the warm blanket of patriarchal tradition, marries another woman whose ability to produce children astounds the community. At this point, the other woman's motherhood is used to spite Nnu Ego and humiliate her. That the co-wife apparently embraces motherhood with great abandon is quite clear. The co-wife realises that in the quest for self-fulfilment, motherhood is a key defining factor. She consequently ensures that she performs her wifely roles beyond conventional stretches of time to the applause of Amatokwu's family but to the denigration and mortification of her fellow woman, Nnu Ego. At this point, the quest for justice becomes an individual endeavour and the two women are left to fight it out by satisfying societal conventions. The situation becomes a serious source of additional torment for Nnu Ego – and can be viewed as a setback to the quest for justice by women in Africa.

Here, Buchi Emecheta reveals to us the effects of motherhood on different women characters. To one woman, motherhood is a source of joy, while to Nnu Ego, it is a source of constant pain. These contradictions are as realistic as they enable us to appreciate that motherhood has different effects on different women. What is common in all the scenarios is that it is highly regarded by the patriarchal society.

It is, therefore, appropriate for us to appreciate that before she returns to her father's home, after the failure of her first marriage. After years of childlessness, Nnu Ego has faced the ultimate embarrassment in her Ibuza community: she is found engaged in the 'illicit' act of breastfeeding a child that is not her own. This is an abomination. She is given a thorough beating by her husband and has to go back to her father's home. In this context, we see

gender violence becoming a serious threat to Nnu Ego's quest for justice. This is a journey not just to her family, but a symbolic one that enables her to re-discover her self-esteem and thus reclaim her equilibrium. The humiliation she undergoes emphasises the seriousness with which society regards motherhood. When Agbadi Nwokocha, her father, talks to Nnu Ego's husband, he says:

Amatokwu, I don't blame you for beating her so badly. We will not quarrel, for we are in-laws, but let me take her to my house so that she can rest a while and I can look after her. Who knows, maybe after the calming effect of her family she will be cool enough inside to be fertile. At the moment, whatever the juice is that forms children in a woman has been dried out of my daughter by anxiety (35).

The words ascribed to Nwokocha Agbadi are contradictory because he is demonstrating neither support nor disdain for Nnu Ego. He is apparently standing the middle ground, intent on not annoying his in-laws, as this would be construed as exonerating his daughter from blame. This sort of ambiguity, in our view, is not acceptable as it counters the course of justice. Agbadi is an arrogant man who sees into too much detail about the daughter's fertility.

One would expect that going back to her parents is necessarily a panacea to Nnu Ego's predicament. Unfortunately, the revered status of motherhood also reveals itself in the events that attend her life after she goes back to her parents. It is still the same society guided by the same myth of male domination. Having gone through the tutelage of patriarchal experience and instruction, Nnu Ego accepts to marry a man chosen for her by her father. The debilitating and dis-empowering nature of this process is apparent, but the protagonist has no choice but to satisfy society's definition of a 'complete woman'. It is our view that the morally warped values stifle individual morale and hamper personal initiative and, ultimately, the achievement or non-achievement of justice.

Furthermore, the insistence on motherhood eventually makes women and men to accept second rate alternatives. Nnu Ego is a dignified character who understands her situation. However, even as she acknowledges the intense ugliness of her new crass grass-cutter husband, she cannot effectively act and say 'no'. The fact that she is scandalised notwithstanding, she seemingly has no option but to accept the ignoble choice that has been made for her. She has to submerge her humanity and accept a second rate alternative.

She does not know that this can be attributed to her socialisation within a patriarchal context. When she meets Nnaife for the first time, she contemplates the grim possibility of living with such an 'ugly' man. Her initial gut feeling is to take off, but it is the thought of disappointing her authoritative father that makes her change her mind. She thinks:

It could not be! This could not be the man she was to live with.... She felt like bursting into tears...but she knew that even though her father was the best of fathers, there was such a thing as overstaying one's welcome... (JOM, 43)

It is our assertion that the society depicted in *The Joys of Motherhood* has no sense of humanity. If it did, Nnu Ego would have been socialised to refuse the outrageous possibility of marrying a person she obviously detests. When she becomes the mother of several children, Nnu Ego apparently fails to comprehend the falsity of her expectations of the joys of motherhood. She consistently fails to realise that she has probably been chasing mirages all her life. Her father, who is portrayed as a kindly family man is not able to assist her. After all, he is a senior student of the patriarchal society. He perpetuates the practice of male domination even if it is to the detriment of his daughter's best interest. He makes it a must for Nnu Ego to leave home, if only to appease his egotistical spirit. The bottom line is that his training gave him the tools to behave the way he does. He too, has no option but to behave the best way he knows.

The demands that the patriarchal society makes of women hamper their access to happiness and self-affirmation. In this way, its positive aspects are wrecked, so that what we are looking at is motherhood subverted. Its prominence makes it a key player in the subversion of justice. It can be stated that Nnu Ego is a woman imbued with the sort of character that should contribute to her enjoyment of the opportunities available in her Ibuza and Lagos communities.

However, from the time we open the first page of the book, to the time we see her dead by the roadside, we realise that we are reading a rendition of situational ambiguity. This is essentially because the patriarchal society has made many demands requiring her to be "mother, housewife, nurse, cook" among others (*Head Above Water*, 216). The course of justice is subverted, as the protagonist lies abandoned by family, friends, and society.

Even as we contemplate Nnu Ego's fate, we recognise that as an oppressed member of society, Nnu Ego demonstrates a sense of moral superiority as she affirms all the values of justice. She sacrifices everything - money, energy and time - for the children who come out of her marriage to Nnaife. On the other hand, the absentee husband, who, like Amatokwu, is apparently well sustained by the male dominated society, cannot play an effective role in the upbringing of children.

Unfortunately, society has made demands on men like Nnaife but, apparently, does not give them the necessary tools to address the demands of fatherhood. In essence, the role of fatherhood in the family set-up is completely subjugated. This is the same scenario we see in other works by the author. For example, in *Gwendolen*, papa Winston, the father of the protagonist fails to take care of his children and ends up raping his own daughter. This is essentially a man with no moral values. He has a warped sense of justice and family solidarity.

As we read *The Joys of Motherhood*, we realise that enormous obstacles befog the quest for justice in this society. The communities we are dealing

with have individuals who delight in the exploits that oppression brings their way. In this society, 'Domination, aggression and violence form an intrinsic part of social life' (Gadotti, 1). In the case of *The Joys of Motherhood*, the blame is squarely on the patriarchal principle in society.

The centrality of motherhood in the life of Nnu Ego and her female compatriots both in *The Joys of Motherhood* and other works cannot, apparently, be under-stated. This is also true of women through out the world, as Diane Richardson (1993) in *Women, Motherhood and Childbearing*, tells us:

Motherhood is a central fact of many women's lives. It shapes their relationship with other people ... their leisure activities. They may also feel a sense of security and belonging through proving to themselves and others that they are like 'other women'. They may also feel a sense of importance and maturity in becoming a 'real woman' at last (Richardson, ix-1)

These words provide us with insights that would help us to understand Nnu Ego's predicament even better. Even as she thinks that her identity is linked to that of her children, it is apparent that Nnu Ego has, all her life, been running towards the wrong direction. She has sacrificed everything for her children with the hope that they would assist her when she is older and in need of attention. Her joy has been in getting children for her father and for her husband, and sacrificing every conceivable ounce of energy to feed and educate them, with the help of her absentee husband, Nnaife. These are the efforts of an individual who is committed to her beliefs, however wrong or misguided they may be.

In fact, a critical look at the life of Nnu Ego's mother who appears earlier in the story also reveals to us that indeed, motherhood is a serious debilitating factor to the achievement of justice. As the only child of her father Obi Umunna, Ona's freedoms are effectively curtailed. Since her father has no sons, she is fated not to marry and have a house of her own. Her personality is subjugated

to her ability to get children, and preferably, a boy child for her father. In other words, she is supposed to satisfy her father's fantasies or cool his disappointment at having no boy-child in his own house. On the other hand, it is this same society that splits her personality and expects her to pay homage to Nwokocha Agbadi, her admirer.

Ona is expected to be Agbadi Nwokocha's consort and, like the other women in his household, be subservient to him. Above all, she is expected to bear children for her designated man. This scenario creates a clash of identities for Ona. Even her moral integrity is sacrificed at the altar of male egoism, when Nwokocha Agbadi literally has sex with her in public. It is noteworthy that this sexual act, described so graphically by Buchi Emecheta, seals their future together. It is remarkable that Ona has a genuine attraction to this man. It is also notable that Ona dies while giving birth to her second child.

Several issues arise in the manner in which Buchi Emecheta depicts Ona. She is apparently a woman of remarkable dignity who has the ability to ward off self-centred men like Nwokocha Agbadi. She has a strong will, which is contrary to the existent spirit among the womenfolk. She discovers that she is caught within a situation in which she has to satisfy two men, and she plays the role with a remarkable astuteness. But it would appear that the world couldn't possibly accommodate such people as she. She is the pure one in the midst of a morally decrepit world. This has created a scenario that does not allow her to positively assert herself.

In order to safeguard Ona's dignity, Buchi Emecheta decides that the best way to protect her is to take her out of the scene before she becomes a mother of a bunch of children who will weigh her down for the rest of her life, like Nnu Ego, her daughter. The author decides to eliminate Ona from the scene. However, even as we contemplate her death, the split character of Ona is apparent when she says to Agbadi Nwokocha: "my father wants a son and you have many sons. But you do not have a girl yet". She adds: "Since my father will not accept any bride price from you, if I have a son, he will

belong to my father, but if a girl, she will be yours. That is the best I can do for you both” (25).

Ona's words are words of resignation as she is torn apart by the demands of the patriarchal society represented by her father and her lover. The realm of justice within which Ona exists is justice defined in patriarchal terms. This is precisely why Agbadi fails to realise the apparent pain in Ona's voice as she contemplated satisfying her admirer and her father. The failure by people like Agbadi Nwokocha to appreciate her dilemma cancels any respite she would have got from being able to make her own decisions. For example, she spends time with Agbadi and even engages in a sexual relationship with him outside a marriage context. It is, of course, curious that such a thing should happen within a traditional setting such as Ibuza.

It is our view that by getting Ona out of the scene, Buchi Emecheta emphasises the view that motherhood need not be the defining determinant of success in women's lives, especially if it kills them spiritually and physically. It is illuminating that the second child Ona gives birth to is described as “weak” while Ona herself was sickly through out the pregnancy. This, in our view, illustrates the debilitating nature of motherhood on the quest for fulfilment by women like Ona. For all their lives, personal endeavour has been subjugated to satisfying societal demands. In regard to Ona's life, the quest for justice can be considered as stillborn.

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, there is a call for the re-orientation of human relationships to a more acceptable and realistic framework in which women and men are accorded respect for what they are, but not for what the community expects them to be. It would appear that Emecheta, in her creation of Ona, actually ends up subverting the female principle, which she is supposed to be upholding. The depiction of Nnu Ego does not give a different picture either. The male principle still holds sway in the society, and is in control of the lives of both women and men. One would expect that as an artist, Buchi Emecheta could do better to give more positive images of women

in her works – especially if she really wanted to contribute to the improvement of their lives in society through literature.

It is important, therefore, that Ona makes a definite request to Nwokocho Agbadi, her husband shortly before she dies: “see that 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” (JOM, 28). In this statement, we see an element of authorial intrusion. This is a direct rendition by an individual who is aware of the fact that women like Ona deserved an opportunity to live meaningful lives. In our view, the words attributed to Ona have too deep a significance for her disposition. Otherwise, we would wonder why she did not refuse to be pushed around by her father and lover, if she had such a deep understanding of the injustice done to her and that could be suffered by her daughter.

That Ona’s words are a direct indictment of her father and her husband is not questionable. She has been denied the freedom she has yearned for, and which she is wishing for her daughter. She has experienced the bitter taste of womanhood and motherhood, and her wish is that her daughter, the symbol of the future generation, be given space to prosper. It is a statement that is a signifier of hope for community; of better opportunities for women and men. She hopes that Agbadi Nwokocho’s tolerance will give way to a better appreciation of the enjoyment women are supposed to experience in society.

However, we realise that, if anything, Ona’s daughter Nnu Ego faces an even grimmer fate. Her sons seemingly abandon her at a time of greatest need. They are successful but are apparently too busy to consider the status of their mother from their vantage American and Canadian settings. They only go back to Nigeria when they hear that she is dead. If there is any joy in being buried well, then this is the only accolade that the mother of *The Joys of Motherhood* receives from her hypocritical children. In effect, all her sacrifices have been meaningless. A critical apprehension of the ironical difference between Ona’s dream for her daughter, and the reality of Nnu Ego’s life, point at the fact that the enlightenment of one individual in society is unlikely to

bring any major changes in the lives of other individuals. The persistence of the patriarchal principle is constantly being enhanced by the society's institutions. Justice, it is apparent, can only show its face when the enlightened individuals join together to push for change.

Buchi Emecheta presents motherhood with its raw challenges, exposing the invisible joys and pains that motherhood brings to women. There is no sentimentalism. It would appear that motherhood is a sort of social suicide where the woman is doomed to suffer alone without paying recognising the possibility of achieving personal satisfaction. Nnu Ego has essentially had one hope: that her joys would eventually be manifest in the help she will receive from her prosperous sons. Unfortunately, she dies like a common beggar in the street. However, this is before Adim shows that he has appreciated the difficulties faced by the mother. He tells her:

You have worked too hard all your life. You have to join your age group at home, dress up on Eke days and go and dance in the markets. It is going to be a good life for you. Don't saddle yourself with so many children (JOM, 222)

To the mother, these words have come too late, for she "does not know how to be anything else but a mother" (JOM, 222). However, they are words are those of an individual whose feelings are, seemingly, motivated by love for his mother. It is, however, ironical that such an incisive thinker like Adim does not realise that years of hard work have had a debilitating effect on his mother and that dancing may not necessarily be a top priority for her.

When Adim and Oshia, mature young men in America and Canada ignore her, Nnu Ego's world crumbles, and she dies poor and neglected. This essentially means that the patriarchal tradition controls the lives of the young men who have joined the diaspora. It is as if the diaspora is unable to negate the deep-rooted patriarchal philosophy in their lives. Nnu Ego's sons are not any different from Albert Onwordi in *Kehinde*, who, after living in London for more that fifteen years, the patriarchal philosophy still holds sway in his life.

As she takes her last lorry ride, Nnu Ego listens to the driver who, after listening to the mother's talk of her children, says: "life is very unfair to us men. We do all the work, you women take all the glory. You even live longer to reap the rewards" (JOM, 223). These are the words of an individual with a serious problem of ignorance about social and economic relationships in society. He is encased in his patriarchal cocoon in which the belief that women are automatically satisfied with the successes of the men in their lives is current. It is a belief that the lives of women are full of joy just for having sons – even when the sons play only nominal roles in their lives. It is also the author's depiction of an individual who has a warped understanding of what work entails. To him, driving a lorry is work, but breaking one's back in the struggle to bring up children is not.

If Nnu Ego's life is full of joy, then it is a very paradoxical sort of joy, for her sons only come for her funeral. This is the height of irony, for one would expect the mother to benefit a great deal from whatever successes come to her children. We become exasperated, especially because Nnu Ego educated her sons at the expense of her daughters, Kehinde and Taiwo. Educated in the patriarchal school of thought, Nnu Ego finds it necessary that her daughters be prepared for the domestic roles that have been destined for them.

We could surmise that Buchi Emecheta is telling us that it is necessary to give both girls and boys an equal go at the society's opportunities. It would appear that a balancing act is necessary as an insurance against the sort of irresponsibility that is displayed by individuals such as Oshia and Adim. Yet, our view is that we cannot say that the sons' lack of care for their mother arises out of their manhood. Instead, they are just irresponsible individuals who should be indicted for desecrating the more or less 'hallowed' responsibility of appreciating the sacrifices their mother made for them. We can also suppose that Nnu Ego's failure to apprehend the defects in the society becomes a serious impediment to her ability to make choices.

At the end of the novel, therefore, Nnu Ego's life has gone full circle. She has done everything, and stops short of literally sweating out her blood to satisfy society's expectations. She has been engaged in an effort to make the lives of her children, her husband and her father meaningful. She has managed to bring up her children in the best way she can.

Towards the end of her life, she discovers it is too late for her to prepare her daughters for an easier life, an easier fate. Her efforts are those of a morally superior character whose attempts to achieve self-affirmation have been continually suppressed by society that has created too many stumbling blocks that make it impossible for justice to prosper. Her efforts are further hampered by her own ignorance of the available opportunities. This makes her to follow the only path that society has designed for her.

In *Head Above Water*, Buchi Emecheta states that in Nnu Ego, she "created a woman ... who gave all her money and everything she had to raise her kids." (224). She goes on to say, "She chopped wood for sale, she dealt on the black market, she did everything except whore herself to raise money" (225). She gave everything indeed, and gained nothing in return. Buchi Emecheta only succeeds to shock the reader into realising the horrific situation of the life of a typical African woman. One is left wondering what the depiction achieves – especially because there is no suggestion of hope.

2.4 Concluding Remarks

Our investigation of motherhood has essentially revealed that it is a very serious impediment to the achievement of self-determination among women in the novel *The Joys of Motherhood*. The demands of motherhood turn women into frantic individuals who are engaged in a furious struggle to get children. The men keep hoping that the women will give birth to not just children, but male children. The women, on the other hand, are caught in the receiving end of having to satisfy the male expectation.

The women especially lack the element of choice in their lives and since justice for the society means justice for both women and men, it is necessary to say that the environment both in Ibadan and Lagos is not conducive for the promotion of true justice. If justice is the "maintenance or administration of what is just", (Gove, 1961), then it is worthy to conclude that there is a failure to uphold the values of humanity in *The Joys of Motherhood*. The fact that there is no man who apprehends the necessity of creating a conducive environment for women to aspire to be something greater than *just* mothers makes the situation a hopeless one in terms of nurturing a viable environment for the achievement of gender justice.

We posit that the society under scrutiny in *The Joys of Motherhood* does not uphold the values of justice for both women and men. Even as it appears that the men are enjoying their status in society, it is apparent that they are torn apart by the demands of society and end up under-performing in their roles. Because of society's over-insistence on motherhood, the aspirations of women are curtailed. They are made to focus more on being mothers and carers for their families than on achieving personal goals. This scenario creates a community of women whose focus on their mothering role stops them from being alive to their need for love, security and happiness and even if they arrive at this realisation, they have no capacity to influence their lives in any remarkable way. They engage in life-long sacrifices, which go unrecognised most of the time. In the final analysis, they are forgotten; even by the very children they spent so much energy nurturing.

We need not overstate the fact that due to the immense focus that is being given to motherhood, women become the unknowing players in the promotion of injustice. The underlying fact here is that there is no clarity of vision in regard to motherhood or the methodology to be used to dissipate injustice in society. Buchi Emecheta apparently calls on the society to focus its attention on re-defining its understanding of motherhood and its role in society. There is a call for the appreciation of the role of women and men in the development of the community. There is, otherwise, a real danger of the continued practice of injustice.

In the next Chapter, we focus on the influences of patriarchy and masculinity on the quest for justice in *Destination Biafra*, *Kehinde*, and *Gwendolen*. By focusing on leadership and how it is influenced by patriarchy both at personal and public level, we make a statement about the way the writer presents issues of leadership and the quest for justice for women and men in Africa and the African diaspora.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 LEADERSHIP, MANHOOD AND THE SUBVERSION OF JUSTICE

3.1 Introduction

In the previous Chapter, we looked at how Buchi Emecheta treats the issue of motherhood and the quest for justice in *The Joys of Motherhood*. We analysed the presentation of two key women characters in this novel, Nnu Ego and her mother Ona. We concluded that the quest of the two characters is incomplete, as they do not achieve anything substantial in their lives.

In this Chapter, we investigate how leadership and the way it is handled by men leads to the subversion of the course of justice. We look at *Destination Biafra*, *Gwendolen*, and *Kehinde* as our primary texts. In our analysis, we establish the role women and men play in the quest for justice and make a statement about the nature of justice.

In our discussion of leadership, we will look at it in broad terms to encompass both the private and public domain. We will look at leadership in terms of political leadership, respect and the upholding of the human rights of women and men in society. We will attempt to demonstrate that leadership in Buchi Emecheta's fictional works is principally a male preoccupation and is, in practice, a subversion of justice.

3.2 Leadership as a Masculine Domain

The issue of political leadership is exemplified in *Destination Biafra*. In this novel, Buchi Emecheta re-tells the story of the Biafran Civil War, which saw the Igbo community declaring secession from the larger Nigerian society because of political frustration. The conflict context is set by the decision of the white Governor Macdonald to appoint an unpopular leader to be Prime Minister, while ignoring the role of other more deserving leaders.

Buchi Emecheta, at the beginning of the novel, is dealing with a moment in history when Britain, the former colonial power, is putting in place political structures to ensure transition to independence for the new Nigerian nation. However, underlying this process is the attempt that these structures that will protect British interests in the country and thus ensure the existence of post-independence neo-colonialism. Allan Grey and Macdonald represent the colonial factor that hangs over Nigeria's head. Governor Macdonald is aware of his responsibility as the architect of neo-colonialism in:

He had to make sure that the right man was elected. A leader acceptable to Britain and one who would offer the least resistance to British trade yet would be accepted by the majority of the natives and ensure stability. He had been given enough loud hints as to the choice of his employers in London (DB, 1-2)

The colonial factor apparently designs the emerging scenario such that the Africans are only involved in voting for handpicked leaders, when the country's leader has already been earmarked and helped to get power. In the words of Sir Fergus, Macdonald has to "nominate officers to represent these people" and the populace will "vote for whichever party they like" (9). Sir Macdonald is also told that he will "nominate the first president, who will sign the treaties binding the country after independence" (9).

When, shortly thereafter, the white men's plan fails, it is the Africans who are depicted as unable to handle their independence. The fact that it is the whites that cause all the confusion notwithstanding, the quest for justice and independence is superseded by greed and corruption. The quest for wealth befogs the vision of the political leaders, who are all men, from comprehending the designs of Britain through its white representatives. This appreciation of the colonial factor is important for our apprehension of the reality of the African diaspora, as we shall note in the next chapter of this thesis.

The selection of Mallam Nguru Kano, even before the counting of votes is concluded provides the necessary ignition to the conflict in the Nigerian nation. The seeds of discord are sown and, rapidly, the contemplation of forming a new Biafran state starts. The opposition, led by Dr. Ozimba, is embarrassed by the short-changing they have experienced in the hands of the white men. Chief Durosaro says: "To think those people made us believe we were contesting an election, when they knew the result in advance because they planned it" (24). This is shortly before they decide that there is possibly no way they can agree to be led by Hausas. It is Chief Oluremi Odumosu who says the definitive words:

As I see it, the great battle is still ahead. Then we will have the Nigeria we dream of, where we will really be free, where we will be ruled by our own people, not by these ... wanderers from the North. We must get to work forthwith. We must change our image... (24).

The new Nigerian State attempts to ensure that the political opponents are not involved in organising a civil uprising. The opposition discovers the folly of actually doing this and does not take any step. At this point, Durosaro's words have not inspired any affirmative steps to deal with the unpopular government imposed by the British leaders on Nigeria. The situation is not helped by the apologetic appointment of Dr. Ozimba to the relatively 'weak' position of President shortly thereafter.

The Igbo supporters are not assuaged, and it is apparent that the most important seat that Dr. Ozimba should have been appointed to was that of Prime Minister held by Sir. Nguru Kano. During Dr. Ozimba's inauguration, the crowd does not hide the fact that it likes him better than the Prime Minister, who "sensed that his appointment was not liked" (38). The fact that most of the population does not like the appointments of Prime Minister and President, and the opulence of the new political leadership class, combine to make the situation unbearable for those who had better expectations of the post-independence Nigerian nation.

For instance, Samuel Ogedemgbe, the Minister holding the finance portfolio in the new government, thinks that his riches are some sort of payment for the work he did "preparing, campaigning and winning the election" (27). He thinks that what he needs at this moment is "some peace" to enjoy his wealth and sigh, saying to himself "It was worth it". Ogedemgbe is essentially a corrupt leader who has no idea what his role as a leader is supposed to be. He becomes an obstacle to the enjoyment of justice by other members of society. He has gorged himself to an extent that he has to be assisted to dress.

The failure of leadership is, therefore, epitomised, in Samuel Ogedemgbe. His ill-acquired wealth emphasises the large gap between the rich and the poor in post-independence Nigeria. The greedy opulence, which he so markedly exudes, does not do justice to the larger society. In any case, he is one of the few rich individuals in the Nigerian State. To the soldiers in the army, therefore, the type of corruption exemplified by the warped electoral and leadership process cannot be condoned.

Like the majority of disappointed members of society, the soldiers are first scandalised by the elections and secondly, the subsequent appointment of Prime Minister and President. Their sense of justice and independence is greatly falsified. It is Nwokolo who summarises the feeling of the soldiers when he says of the election:

It is not an election but a time bomb. It will explode soon, you mark my words. How many of us are going to sit on our backsides and let this happen? Mallam Nguru Kano the first Nigerian Prime Minister! ... Can you imagine a Nigerian Government without Dr. Ozimba? (DB, 25)

From Nwokolo's words, one gets the impression that the stupefaction experienced by the soldiers is unimaginable. It is hence no surprise when they later turn rebellious and start the process of setting up a Biafran state. They have the determination to bring sense to a scenario they regard as unwarranted. Corruption as an ideological by-product of patriarchy is thus entrenched, and the soldiers see themselves as saviours.

It is the disposition of such people as Samuel Ogedemgbe that inspire the soldiers to take up arms intent on replacing the old corrupt order with a new one, where justice rules the day. Any semblance of amusement in them is dissipated by the way the politicians parade their ill-gotten wealth. For instance, when they attend Chijioke Abosi's wedding, the display of wealth scandalises them, as they are apparently poorly paid. They find it unacceptable that the political leaders should 'eat' with such blatant abandon. In their conception of justice at this particular time, the politicians have to be killed if the problem has to be solved. Yet, it is apparent that it is the desire for the sort of wealth enjoyed by politicians that attracts them. We read:

If those millionaires suspected that they could be awakening the spirit of jealousy instead of admirationthey were not letting it worry them. But the ill-paid soldiers and their officers were also watching all this wealth display, and they had what the ordinary people did not have: they had guns (44).

As the conflict is brewing in Nigeria, corruption takes a curiously non-tribal turn. It is the conflict between the two Yoruba Chiefs Odumosu and Durosaro that incites the whole conflict. Chief Odumosu had wanted to get a Minister's position in the federal government but had failed. He was making an attempt to return to the seat he had previously occupied in the Western House but which he had 'given' to Chief Durosaro.

But after considering what he would be giving up if he let the seat go, Chief Durosaro changes his mind. However, like Chief Odumosu's, supporters, his people "were used to his squandering money to impress and also to help some of the underprivileged in his extended family" (48). The two Chiefs are corrupt leaders whose interest in leadership stems out of the desire for self-aggrandisement. Chief Odumosu thinks that his junior in the party will give way so that he can resume his position in the Western House. He thinks that the popularity he enjoys is unquestionable, and that his opponent should recognise this.

In the meantime, the leader “had forgotten that Durosaro, his ... enemy, had been schooled in his own ‘Bribery Academy’ and had spies who paid Odumosu’s ‘seers’ to acquaint him with all his plans. Durosaro was prepared to deal with the matter in another way” (48-49). The ‘way’ Durosaro has in mind is intimidation of his opponent’s supporters. Before Chief Odumosu can speak and call for a democratic election, Durosaro’s hired thugs shoot into the air and scare away the eligible voters. Consequently, we read that members of the Western House “could not vote at all, to say nothing of voting against Chief Durosaro” (49).

It is the confrontation between the supporters of the two Yoruba Chiefs that makes the soldiers get involved in the effort to restore peace. At first, it appears that the soldiers are pro-justice forces. The politicians have failed and “the military was gradually taking over. It was the first confrontation”(49). One gets the impression that the soldiers have looked at the society, noted the socio-political and economic dis-integration, and decided to become the saviour factor that would rid it of corruption and irresponsible leadership. They recognise that the bulging tummies of the politicians are a testimony to the rigorous rape of the economy that has taken place.

As we read the novel, we expect that perhaps Buchi Emecheta has decided to give us a glimpse of positive male characters. This is especially because the soldiers’ struggle to bring order to the confused nation makes them, at first, an embodiment of hope for the nation. Their dissatisfaction with the politicians is understandable. Onyemere, one of the army men, confesses that he has had enough of what he regards as “political nonsense”. This is especially when it becomes apparent that the political leaders are not ready and capable of dealing with the chaotic situation that is unfolding. Onyemere goes further to summarise the feeling among the army men by saying:

If they can’t govern then they should say so and let us try our hand at it. At least under us there would be peace. I wouldn’t have minded if Durosaro and Odumosu had ended up killing each other, but

Indeed, it is not only the soldiers who are worried about the inability of the Prime Minister to deal with the situation. Even members of the public are concerned with the escalating violence. While the Prime Minister is still bogged down by consultations, the soldiers begin to “enjoy their new found power” (54) and have put in place their own plans for taking over from the politicians. Shortly thereafter, the Prime Minister decides to put the warring Chiefs Durosaro and Odumosu under house arrest but by this time, his ineptness has become apparent. The soldiers have already decided that the only way to deal with the escalating violence is first to use the gun to quell the riots, and then somehow get rid of the corrupt politicians.

We expect that after the seemingly unjust order is toppled, a new framework of justice will be established. However, our expectations are checked with a jolt: the soldiers decide that the best way to create a new nation is to kill all the politicians. They decide that the best way to deal with the injustice perpetuated by the politicians is to summarily execute them “instantly – including Dr. Ozimba himself and Nguru Kano, ... – instantly, and without pain, if possible” (58). At this point, the hitherto forces of justice acquire a murderous hue. When the soldiers go ahead to implement their intentions, we feel cheated as we recognise the soldiers for what they truly are: as corrupt and murderous as the politicians. They have a warped understanding of the needs of society.

At this point, it is clear that the very existence of the soldiers in the leadership framework engenders a dangerous sort of corruption. All the participants in the political process are men, and this can explain why corruption as an ideology is apparently intricately tied to the behavioural patterns of the leaders in society. When the soldiers decide to kill the politicians, they essentially forget that corruption is not something that can be changed by the death of ideological opponents.

They have grown up in a setting that promotes and idealises a male machismo, a society in which conflicts can only be eliminated through flexing of muscles. Once more, the masculine principle is responsible for the entrenchment of corruption. Buchi Emecheta, through the depiction of the soldiers and politicians, affirms the failure of the male-dominated State. The soldiers cannot even agree on how to eliminate the politician problem.

This perspective is supported by the apparent lack of unity of purpose among the soldiers. It is, curiously so, apparent that the Igbo politicians had been forewarned of impending death by one of the officers. During the meeting held to review the unexpected anomaly, we read that Oladapo, the leader of the squad in charge of eliminating the Igbo politicians, recounts an anomaly. He reports that "when he arrived in the East he had been surprised to learn casually ... that the President, Dr. Ozimba who topped their list of those to be killed had gone to the United Kingdom for health reasons" (DB, 64). This means that the soldiers do not even trust themselves to undertake agreed-upon tasks. Even their own conception of justice is befogged with serious inconsistencies.

Buchi Emecheta affirms the perspective that the failure of the African State is because of the murderous disposition of the leaders of the reform process in *Destination Biafra* is the failure of justice. It becomes apparent that there is no hope for justice in this society. The soldiers have the mistaken belief that democracy and justice can be achieved by the death of the politicians. Consequently, their action goes against what Paulo Freire (1972) posits as a "concern for humanisation"(20). By deciding to kill the politicians, the soldiers become an embodiment of the very unjust practices that they have struggled to replace. In essence, their actions make them practitioners of oppression. In Freire's words, they "are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness" they have acquired (24). At this point, the men's actions are contradictory to the quest for justice and, therefore, hamper the enjoyment of the rights by members of society.

Eventually, the semblance of unity among the soldiers breaks up. As the news of the elimination of the politicians is announced, the army also takes full control of the situation, with Brigadier Onyemere as the new president. It is when the brigadier is murdered and his government toppled that the rapid deterioration of the peace occurs. Buchi Emecheta writes: "With the death of the brigadier, Nigeria was plunged into the bloodiest carnage even [sic] seen in the whole of Africa. And the greater part of the blood that flowed was Igbo blood"(74).

At this point, it is apparent that the folly of the male dominated State has gone full circle. The result is chaos. The members of society who suffer most are women and children. Some of them have witnessed the death of their husbands, parents and children. Debbie Ogedemgbe more or less witnesses the death of her father. She herself undergoes the humiliation of being sexually harassed. She is "a woman of strength who can make a meaningful contribution to the building of a new nation" and stands out as the epitome of the struggle by women during the unnecessary war perpetuated by men (Commonwealth: Essays and Studies, n.p). Debbie is the new African woman who takes clear steps to bring justice to her community.

As the daughter of Samuel Ogedemgbe, Debbie is born into privilege and wealth. She has been educated in the best schools, and has gone to Oxford University. Confronted by the prospect of playing the father's good daughter, she rebels and decides to join the army. This is contradictory, as one would have expected her to get some white-collar job and be content. Recognising the grim possibilities facing her country, she makes the unconventional step of becoming one of the first two women to join the army. It is instructive that Buchi Emecheta depicts Debbie Ogedemgbe in such light as it demonstrates a deliberate effort to foreground the role of women.

Debbie Ogedemgbe's defiant step serves to illustrate her commitment to making a contribution to the development of her society. Even as she makes this decision, the situation deteriorates when Abosi and other Igbo's decide to secede from the rest of Nigeria and form a new state. Just after joining the

army, Debbie finds herself participating in the wanton arrest of Igbo soldiers. The arrests lead to the subsequent deaths of these soldiers.

At this point, we have to pause once more to discuss the role of the male factor in the ensuing chaos in *Destination Biafra*. We have to understand the character of Chijioke Abosi. To do this, we have to trace his growth, or his deterioration to the moment after his wedding is disrupted by soldiers reacting to disturbances in parts of the country. When riots break out, he decides that it is time to use guns:

Last time we dispersed the crowds with tear-gas, now we have to use guns ... The politicians can't govern with this chaos ... We are kept just to do their dirty work for them, and still no word of thanks. If the army were in control, at least we'd know we had a military government (57)

This statement, given to a group of senior officers of the Nigerian Army, essentially establishes a foundation for the dissipation of justice and establishes a framework for the enactment of chaos. Chijioke Abosi can thus be credited as the architect of the civil war that engulfs the Nigerian nation immediately thereafter. His fellow army officers embrace the idea of a military government wholesale, and when Abosi declares: "I think this country needs a military respite, and so to Biafra we will go..." (57), we realise that the stage has been set for forces of destruction to be unleashed. It is not too long when the decision to kill all the politicians and create a new nation called Biafra is made: "The conversation grew increasingly serious and they all became more determined to make a decisive plan ... The only sure solution must be for all the politicians, the ministers, including Dr. Ozimba himself and Nguru Kano, to be killed (DB, 58).

The male soldiers engage in premeditated murderous endeavours, which they actually effect. Oxford obviously did not influence Chijioke Abosi to be very humane in his actions and perspectives. The soldiers go into rampage, killing all the politicians, well, almost all, as it is discovered later that some of the Igbo politicians escaped the fiasco after being forewarned.

It is the heartlessness of the male soldiers that is disconcerting and alienating, as they seem to enjoy inflicting pain and killing in cold blood. That they kill the men is not surprising. After all, all the politicians are men. However, Buchi Emecheta ensures that before the corrupt politicians like Samuel Ogedemgbe are killed, they beg for their lives in the most undignified manner possible. Their hitherto pompous personalities are reduced to empty shells in the face of the threat of impending death. Samuel Ogedemgbe faces the dehumanizing task of digging his own grave. Nguru Kano, described as “a man of dignity whose approach to everything in life was through calmness” (62) dies of a heart attack and faces perhaps the ultimate humiliation, being buried in the same shallow grave with his former finance minister, Samuel Ogedemgbe.

As the architect of the whole coup, Chijioke Abosi is presented as a person who is terribly lacking in foresight. When the decision to kill the politicians is reached, for example, he does not stop to think of the eventual ramifications of the actions of the soldiers. In this, the soldiers are with him as they “did not count on the ripples created by their behaviour” (66).

In the final analysis, Chijioke Abosi sinks deeper and deeper into moral ignominy and becomes a key figure in the birth and failure of the Biafran dream. As the war escalates, Abosi escapes the country, but on the other hand, Debbie Ogedemgbe decides to stay behind. Her decision is guided by the realisation that the tremendous mess that has been created by men needs cleaning. And it is only women like her who can do it best.

Buchi Emecheta presents to us a typical scenario in which the incisive woman survives through the chaos while the man gets lost in his misguided machismo. It is Debbie Ogedemgbe who asserts that it is unrealistic for Abosi to expect “a quarter of a nation to fight the other three quarters and win...” (DB, 109). And true to Debbie's words, the “men make all the mess” and have to call “on us women to clear it” (110). But when the same men with whom she is supposed to be in the same regiment rape her, the war between

two armies becomes the war between women and men. The ultimate heroine smarts from the pain of the struggle, but she is still able to tower above the destruction caused by the male factor in the Nigerian society.

Debbie Ogedemgbe's actions are critical to our understanding of the effect of the male factor in the creating an unjust state of affairs. The soldiers commit extreme atrocities to the Igbo people, as observed at the train station:

The passengers on the platform were still alive – just – but the killers had made sure that those Igbos who went back home would always remember their stay in the North. Nearly all women were without one breast. The very old ones had only one eye each. Some of the men had been castrated, some had only one arm, others had one foot amputated. All were in a shocked daze, their eyes staring as if from skulls of the long dead and buried (84).

Indeed, it is this focus on killing the Igbo fuels the decision by Chijioke Abosi to declare the secession of the Igbo people to form a new state. As Ugoji, one of the Igbo's fleeing from Northern Nigeria says, it is time for "Abosi to forget about the talk of "one Nigeria"... Why should we sit and let our people be killed this way without raising a finger to defend ourselves ... ? (85).

When Debbie realises the atrocities that have been committed against the Igbo soldiers, she feels remorseful that she participated in arresting them. At this time, she is tainted as she has worked hand in hand with the patriarchal society to subvert the course of justice through murder. Debbie Ogedemgbe also walks on the treacherous path that the male State finds itself on. However, as the political leaders continue to engage in mutual duplicity, it becomes apparent that there is a chance for the young woman to redeem herself from her momentary participation the debauchery that is going on.

An opportunity provides itself when Debbie finds herself with the obligation to tell Abosi that he cannot possibly win against a more powerful Nigerian nation. Why Abosi does not realise this is probably a result of his male ego, or his

anger at being duped by Sakah Momoh, the Nigerian head of state. Debbie is charged with the responsibility of bringing sense to the unreasonable situation that is being engendered by the selfish motivations of both the Igbo proponents of the Biafran State and the defenders of the Nigerian Nation - the government soldiers. She, like Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, becomes an emissary of war. She faithfully pursues the attainment of the responsibility that has been bestowed upon her.

By ensuring that Debbie becomes the only active female voice in the army, Buchi Emecheta is making a statement about the bright horizons that confront the ambitious woman aspirant. It is a very bold statement at placing an industrious woman amidst conflicting male egos. It should be remembered that there is an underlying appreciation of the desperation of the Biafran community due to a genuine feeling of betrayal. There is no justification for the war. The lack of vision in the Biafran soldiers makes them ignore the fact that the Nigerian army is well equipped, and that it is just a matter of time before the Biafran nation is over-run.

Obviously, it is a suicidal male ego that makes the leader of the Biafran Army secede. It is the same masochistic egoism that makes Saka Momoh of the Nigerian Army decide to pursue a hard-line stance when dealing with the proponents of the Biafran State. Therefore, because of the male factor in Nigerian politics, Debbie Ogedemgbe's conflict resolution efforts are doomed to fail. It takes too long for her to reach Abosi. At this time, she has undergone numerous torments, which is a learning process even for her. Initially, she believes that it is Abosi who needs pacification. As she continues with her journey, she appreciates the fact that the problem lies right at the doorsteps of the army men from both sides.

The process of 'clearing up the mess' is costly to Debbie. She is exposed to a lot of hazards and some of the soldiers who grossly violate her are from her own Nigerian army. It would appear as if anarchy causes men to throw out of the window the values of respect and solidarity. What is crucial is that when Debbie is sexually molested, she stops being an emissary of the Nigerian

nation sent to drive sense into the heads of the proponents of the Biafran nation. Instead, her allegiance goes to humanity. She becomes a proponent of peace for a new Nigerian nation whose creation is hampered by bloodthirsty men. She supports neither the Biafran State nor the Nigerian army: she stands for the principle of justice for both women and men.

In essence, the war in *Destination Biafra* is guided by corrupt, selfish intentions. While the men are engaged in flexing their muscles and killing each other, the women focus on the consequences of the war. For example, they are exposed to the physical and sexual brutality of the soldiers. They know who is to blame, and apart from this, they begin to look at the consequences of the war as an opportunity for them to re-kindle the sense of justice that has long been submerged by the dominant presence of men.

Mrs. Madako, for example, is a previously docile woman. Yet, when her husband dies, she shows a new life-preserving aggressiveness. When one of the battered women bewails her tattered fortunes and states "I can't look after my children by myself. I want to die", (DB, 203) Mrs. Madako reproaches her and wonders, "which bush community", the woman was brought up in. She encourages other women not to engage in self-pity, but instead look for practical solutions to the predicaments facing them now and in the future. Essentially, Buchi Emecheta portrays men fighting each other and destroying the socio-political and economic life of the society while women assert themselves as peacemakers and entrepreneurs who suffer as a result of the censurable behaviour of the leaders.

Through following the character of Debbie Ogedemgbe, we come to the understanding that tribalism is a serious example of corruption that endangers the survival of the whole society. It hampers the existence of good leadership in the Nigerian nation and essentially subverts the course of justice. The failure of leadership is essentially the failure of the quest for justice. In our view, justice can only be achieved if individuals rise above tribalism to espouse universal principles that promote the respect for life and above all, forgiveness and reconciliation. The failure of the political and army leaders to

recognise this becomes a sort of social corruption that stands in the way of justice for women and men in society.

In appreciating the situation in *Destination Biafra*, it is clear that what we are dealing with is a hopelessly corrupt male world in which ineptitude is the key word. What needs to be introduced is what Rose Ure Mezu in *Women in Achebe's World* (1995) calls "the female principle", and Buchi Emecheta attempts this (2). However, we can say that creating a character that is pummelled by the unjust forces to utter stupefaction like Debbie Ogedemgbe, does not do much justice to the 'female principle'. Instead, it weakens and subverts it and makes us wonder whether there is any hope especially for women in the community under focus.

Buchi Emecheta provides us with a two-pronged suggestion. First, she implies that the introduction of the female principle is necessary for true democracy to exist. Secondly, she cancels this by making the female principle ineffectual. We would like to assume that the principle would make women like Mrs. Ogedemgbe play more effective roles in the politics of the nation. This would make political leadership a domain of both men and women. Women should not just be called in 'to clear the mess' after the men have gorged themselves and desecrated 'hallowed' ground. However, Buchi Emecheta gives a befogged vision that shows blatant disregard for obvious necessities of a true gender responsive nation. This is confusing, especially when we remember that Buchi Emecheta is supposed to be giving us un-equivocal images of women and men keenly engaged in the quest for justice.

In Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra*, the personal failures of men are intricately linked to community failures. We have seen how the individual ineptness and lack of vision and perception leads to civil chaos and increased injustice at both individual and community level. The latent energies that lie in pro-justice individuals like Debbie Ogedemgbe are not exploited to the full, as the patriarchal ideology and the opposing male egos become serious obstacles.

3.3 Patriarchy as Social Corruption

The failures that are apparent in *Destination Biafra* are also apparent in other novels by Buchi Emecheta. These failures, however, do not occur at the political level. They mostly occur at personal level like in *Kehinde* where we see one of the male characters, Albert, grossly subverting his role as husband, father and member of the community. For example, one would expect that Albert Onwordi, Kehinde's husband, would fully embrace the principles of justice when it comes to the wife's feelings and priorities. Having been dislocated from the Nigerian environment where women are not supposed to be heard, it would not be entirely unexpected that Albert should change and start looking at his wife as an equal partner.

As it turns out, the diaspora setting in London has not made any difference to Albert's Nigerian masculine character. When his wife tells him that she is pregnant, he insists on abortion. By doing this, Albert automatically falls short of the patriarchal determinant of fatherhood, where a man is supposed to rejoice in having many children. In the same vein, he falsifies any influence of the diaspora context when it becomes apparent that he falls short of the expected influences of western ideology. This western ideology essentially calls for equality among the sexes thereby requiring that Albert listen to his wife, Kehinde. It is clear that Albert Onwordi is basically an adherent of the patriarchal school that believes in the superiority of men – and the feeling that they should have their way. Unfortunately Albert Onwordi occupies the no man's land between being an adherent of the quest for justice and being an opponent, as we shall shortly demonstrate.

That he listens to his sister's requests asking him to go back home is part of that contradiction in Albert Onwordi's character. He decides to follow his sister's advice and ignores his wife's protestations. What is astounding, however, is not this acceptance. It is the fact that he misses the patriarchal environment and needs to have a sort of homecoming that leaves a bad taste in our mouths. During his final party in London, he nostalgically states:

But I want to go back to the way of life that my father had, a life of comparative ease for men, where men were men and women were women, and one was respected as somebody.... I am fed up with just listening to my wife and indulging her. (Kehinde, 35)

With this statement, Albert affirms the belief in the superiority of the male over the female. He has stayed in London and has become nostalgic of the unequal power relations in Africa, where women were supposed to play the role of caretaker for their husbands. In London, the economic context is such that a woman can earn more than her husband, as Kehinde does. The London society with its apparent democratic and equality-oriented systems has not had any impact on him.

In effect, then, it becomes clear that the sort of conditioning that Albert has undergone in Nigeria is deterministic in terms of imbuing him with a strong sense of patriarchy that upholds male dominance. This mindset blinds him from seeing Kehinde's position as a source of sustenance for their family as it improves their standard of life. What comes through, in Albert's behaviour, is that patriarchy is not just a socio-cultural construct. It is as ideological as it defies education and setting.

At the end of the day, Albert Onwordi is no more responsive to the gender realities of his new setting than Nnaife is of his surroundings in *The Joys of Motherhood*. He is completely oblivious of the influences of environment on his beliefs and practices. When he chooses to marry a second wife, he chooses a highly educated one, as if to show Kehinde, his (first) wife that her success was not sufficient to change her from being a woman like any other.

In this rendition, Buchi Emecheta implies that education alone is not sufficient to effectively liberate an oppressed woman. Yet, the choices that Kehinde makes – to abandon her family and go back to London – are curious ones. She does not fight to reclaim her family. Her decision to get into a sexual relationship with a younger man cannot be said to be very viable, as it

bespeaks a certain level of moral degeneration and thus poses a challenge to the achievement of true justice and freedom. It is debatable, at this level, whether she is any different from Albert.

It is interesting that Rike, a highly educated woman, accepts to be a second wife to Albert Onwordi. This decision subverts the view that education automatically opens pathways to self-affirmation for women. What is apparent is that it opens only certain doors and leaves others firmly locked. What Emecheta is telling us is that there should be an ideological transformation in both women and men, to enable them to see justice as a principle that must be upheld and perhaps put on the pedestal. In essence, Rike participates in actively subverting the course of justice for herself, other women and the society as a whole.

The propensity of men to cause chaos in society is further emphasised in *The Joys of Motherhood*, where men are engaged in affirming values that are contrary to the quest for justice. For example, when Nwokocho Agbadi is almost killed by a wild animal, Ona, the woman he admires, volunteers to assist him. Ona probably does this under the influence of true human kindness and love. Her intention is to nurse him back to health. However, tradition stops Agbadi from taking her sacrifice seriously. He does not show gratitude for her efforts. In the Ibuza society, it is not manly to show gratitude, and Ijayi, a respectable octogenarian, sums it up when he says to Ona: 'If Agbadi had to lower himself to thank you, I am sure that you would stop caring for him. You need a man, not a snail' (JOM, 17). Nwokocho Agbadi and Ijayi are presented as unreasonable individuals who are not responsive to any virtues outside their patriarchal fiefdom.

If this is the sort of wisdom that is promoted by society, then one can only but express indignation at the apparent blatant nature of oppression. The possibility of justice existing in the Ibuza society is thwarted (not that there was any). What is left is a belief in the superiority of men. This is a stultifying philosophy that promotes a selfish cronyism among men. It promotes an archaic male machismo and does not promote humanistic values.

By denying Ona the possibility of marriage, Obi Umunna, her father, violates her rights. It is illuminating that it is only after he dies that Ona is able to get married. The death of Obi Umunna gives release to the imprisoned spirit within Ona. The death symbolises the elimination of the masculine principle, which has been controlling her life. Buchi Emecheta seems to be telling us that the elimination of the patriarchal ideology of male dominance is a prerequisite to the existence of justice.

Yet, it could be said that for Ona, her father Obi Umunna is as loving as any father could get in the Ibuza context. The man, who eventually marries her, Nwokocha Agbadi, is as loving as any lover can be, perhaps even by contemporary standards. For Ona, her father's love canopies her through out her life. She is undoubtedly the centre of his life. Obi Umunna's sickening attachment to his daughter drives him to make unreasonable demands of her. This notwithstanding, he is a good man with genuine kindness. These men can only experience love and affection the best way they know.

This notwithstanding, it would appear that the fates that Ona and Nnu Ego suffer are due to a deliberate vindictiveness in the men they encounter in their lives. One wonders whether it is possible to look at the glimpses of true human kindness in Amatokwu, Agbadi Nwokocha and Obi Umunna as a hesitant glimmer of hope for women in the African context. This would necessarily mean that this hope lies in the African socio-cultural context that, according to Buchi Emecheta, is apparently conditioned by the masculine principle. The society has a pre-determined way of life, and decisions are not left to individuals.

Nwokocha Agbadi reveals that he represents just the sort of masculine figure that society encourages. He is the village *macho* man, who cannot understand why Ona does not accept him. His masculine egoism makes him to go to all ends to ensure that she does not escape him. That he 'gets' her when she is taking care of him after the accident with the wild animal is a matter of mere coincidence. The important thing is that when he has sexual

intercourse with Ona, his behaviour is uncouth. Yet, it would appear that for a man to violently and publicly engage in sex with a woman is not unheard of in the community under focus. Yet, the fact that Ona seems to accept the sexual act is instructive. As they engage in foreplay, we are told:

her struggling and kicking lessened. She started moaning and groaning ... like a woman in labour... He knew that he had reduced her to longing and craving for him. And Ona knew. So she tried to counteract her feelings in the only way she guessed would not give her away (20).

Ona's role in the sexual episode notwithstanding, Agbadi's arrogant disposition is a subversion of justice as it relates to the affinities between women and men in society. For a short critical moment, we learn that the sort of brutal force, which Agbadi apparently uses against women, cannot match that of nature. It is nature that provides a wild animal to remind him of his vulnerability by hurting him. However, because this is before his act with Ona, one can conclude that nature's lesson was not very effective in infusing Agbadi with a sense of humanity, a sense of justice. However, it does not escape the reader that Agbadi is so obsessed with sex that even his illness no longer bothers him. He has his way with Ona even when he is too sick to turn on his own. It would appear that the thought of sex makes him forget the pain he has as a result of injury.

Agbadi's vulgar behaviour as he relates with Ona, therefore, cancels any generosity and kindness he demonstrates to his daughter Nnu Ego later in the story. This generosity is actually out of place and out of character, and cannot, therefore, be accepted as genuine. The polygamous conqueror of the womenfolk has to be looked at as a practitioner of the sort of "false generosity" that Paulo Freire (1972) so ably talks about. To Freire, true generosity has to be informed by a genuine concern for the oppressed. He says: "The oppressor shows solidarity with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt, deprived of their voice...." (Freire, 26)

Indeed, we agree with Freire, and highly doubt whether Nwokocha Agbadi's effort to bring his daughter home after the breastfeeding episode at the Amatokwu residence is informed by a sense of justice or respect for Nnu Ego as a woman. He is more interested in preserving his own public image as a respectable man. We aver that it would be contrary to true manhood if Agbadi allowed himself to endure the embarrassment of seeing himself and his daughter further humiliated by the Amatokwus. Adding a goat to the bride price he returns to the Amatokwu household is supposed to be an insult to Amatokwu for mistreating his daughter.

However, Amatokwu greedily accepts the goat and keeps his peace. The significance of the goat, of course, makes Amatokwu a man of small things. After all, having the wealth to marry another wife should, surely, make one to live above such things as goats. Agbadi's thoughts at this moment are basically sexist. He thinks it could be time for Amatokwu to marry another wife, and leave his daughter alone. He, therefore, uses his wealth to release his daughter from one bond of marriage and places her into another. It is, of course, needless to mention that this is not before he has received his share of the bride price from a new suitor, Nnaife.

In *The Slave Girl*, we get a curious portrayal of a woman actively engaged in subverting justice. However, we are reminded shortly thereafter that it is the male society that has made her corrupt. Ma Palagada is portrayed as the architect and symbol of oppression in the novel, denying several girls, including Ogbanje Ojebeta, the main character, the opportunity to enjoy their rights and freedoms. She is portrayed as a capitalist who has no qualms about stepping on the rights of others with impunity. Her business practices contradict the morality that is required in a decent society governed by humanistic, justice-oriented values. She has been socialised in the capitalist school, where money and prosperity govern human relationships. All that interests her is the extra shilling. The uprightness or lack of it, of the process of getting that shilling into her purse does not arise. The principles guiding the process are, after all, not just.

In Ma Palagada, we see a person imbued with the aggression not too dissimilar to the one demonstrated by the overzealous soldiers in *Destination Biafra*. She becomes a ruthless capitalist and espouses the value of corruption that essentially debases her and all the women and men around her. This precisely explains why she is not able to 'see' when her husband has sexual liaisons with one of the slave girls. Blindness is seemingly a defining characteristic of all those who engage in unjust practices.

Even though her parents are dead, the community set-up in *The Slave Girl* would have provided the necessary sustenance to Ojebeta's growing up process. She would have had a whole village of aunts and uncles to bring her up. But Okolie, her brother, driven by selfish motives, decides to sell his sister to the only available bidder. As an older brother and leader, he feels a sense of guilt about the injustice he is about to commit. Nevertheless, he decides to still go ahead with it: "He begged their dead parents to forgive him, but what else was there for a young bachelor like himself to do with a small sister of merely seven years of age?" (29). These are the thoughts of a hypocrite who has miserably failed to provide proper leadership and example to his younger sibling.

We hesitate to mention that the faithless oppressor does not even know what the price for his sister would be. He eats like a glutton and sneaks away from the accusing eyes of the morally superior Ojebeta. It becomes rather ironical that the community does not take Okolie to task over the disappearance of his sister. This is a contradiction of the values governing traditional Africa. It would be inconceivable to imagine a situation in which a young girl would 'disappear' from a community without the closely-knit society raising eyebrows in a significant way.

The critical fact here is that both women and men characters become the culprits in the process of enhancing inhuman processes. Ma Palagada, Okolie and her husband become partners in the process of enhancing unjust practices in society by ensuring that members do not enjoy their rights. Those from the slave class have no rights and are only there to embellish the position

of rich property owners. We see a subversion of the female principle when Ma Palagada's greedy countenance takes centre stage, and benefiting from the labour of the innocent slave girls she has acquired. Yet, it is apparent that Okolie is portrayed as the culprit and, compared to Palagada, is seen as a despicable individual.

In *Gwendolen*, we see another case of social corruption perpetuated by the patriarchal principle. When Gwendolen, the main character, gains the courage to confide in Granny Naomi about her rape ordeal at the hands of Uncle Johnny, it marks the beginning of public humiliation and embarrassment for the little girl. The men in the vicinity are depicted as heartless brutes that do not take too long to find the scenario amusing. Uncle Johnny, on the other hand, does not deny. He looks askance "as if all the noises people were making had little to do with him" (G 23). He typifies the heartless man devoid of any moral standing. As he later laughs off the idea, the other men in society join him to form a category we can only regard as despicable perverts who find the rape of a little girl a laughable affair. A man by the name Jeffrey even goes ahead to say "May be the lill marm love the job" (24).

It can be affirmed that in these male characters, Buchi Emecheta manages to create the perfect perverts possible. There can possibly be no character worse than a grandfather figure that rapes a little girl instead of taking care of her and protecting her. The message here is clear: the men are the 'defilers' of women and children. They are the liars. After all, Johnny who had been a friend to Granny Naomi for years has betrayed her. It, therefore, becomes outrageous to see fellow women trying to influence Granny Naomi:

She must remember that it was Gwendolen's word against that of Johnny. Granny must not forget Johnny's status in the society. All Naomi had to do now was to try to forget it and keep her eyes open that a thing like that would never happen again. Very few people, would believe Gwendolen, she must never forget that (25).

Granny Naomi's conviction begins to waver. As society begins to look at Gwendolen differently, she too, albeit unknowingly, joins them. The adult world, to Gwendolen, is full of lies. And in such a scenario where these "respected members of the community" could just "tell lies and wriggle out" (25), there was no hope for a little harassed girl like her. This is why she eventually decides to shut up and withdraw into her inner self. In fact, her grandmother and mother start looking at her strangely – as if to tell her that they suspected it to be her fault. One wonders, however, what 'status' Uncle Johnny can have in society when it is so apparent that the community he comes from is in dire poverty. The man is simply a criminal, and it would be sufficient to have been arrested and charged for rape. Unfortunately, such a system of formal justice is absent in this society.

That the women, who are supposed to side with her, literally desert her at her time of greatest need presents a contradiction to the expected unity among any oppressed people. This presentation is as stereotypical as it affirms the oft-trumpeted standpoint that 'women are their own enemies'. They have joined up with the male oppressor class. Once more, Buchi Emecheta demonstrates her ability to present men in the worst light possible.

What we also see is that Buchi Emecheta's depiction of characters and situations is affected even as she handles the Caribbean setting. In Uncle Johnny and Daddy Winston, Buchi Emecheta creates two ideal characters in whom sexual evil is solidified. This is emphasised by the behavioural patterns of the two men once they have both raped the unfortunate Gwendolen. Uncle Johnny assumes a 'jaunty' walking style, while Daddy Winston has the audacity to complain that she is not a virgin. Uncle Johnny's jauntiness is misplaced, while Daddy Winston's thoughts are outrageous.

And as we read the novel, our anger is not assuaged. The extreme discomfort is heightened by a remembrance of the images in the other novels we have looked at, which essentially portray men as mentally disturbed individuals in need of psychiatric care. Suffice it to say that in *Gwendolen*, the depiction of Uncle Johnny and Daddy Winston disqualifies the long held respect that older

people are supposed to elicit from the younger members of the community. Older people are no longer the depositories of wisdom in whom young people can seek support and guidance. Instead, they become immoral individuals lacking in self-respect and human dignity.

3.4 Concluding Remarks

It is apparent then, that while looking at the works under focus, exhausting the discussion of leadership and its effects on the quest for justice would not be possible. This is because *Destination Biafra*, *Kehinde*, and *The Slave Girl* are heavily influenced by patriarchal ideology.

From our discussions on leadership and the quest for justice, it is apparent that men are the wretched perpetrators of the social, political and economic despondency in society. The search for justice is, therefore, thwarted by their evil and selfish intentions. Buchi Emecheta subverts manhood and makes it look like corruption and despondency personified. The failures experienced are as a result of the unrelenting presence of male leaders who are not able to see beyond their own selfish interests. Therefore, even as Dr. Ozimba's followers in *Destination Biafra* are disillusioned, we realise that even the man himself may not necessarily be above censure. He is part of the 'eating' leadership class. It would not, therefore, be preposterous to assert that the main reason for disappointment is the contemplation of the fact that another community will be doing the 'eating' instead.

As seen in the activities of some female characters, it is apparent that the practice of oppression is not just a male domain. Women too, are culprits. Underlying this assertion is the fact the patriarchal ideology influences the behavioural tendencies of both women and men. It gives men control over society's resources but determines the philosophical direction that seemingly dictates the social, economic and political relationships. It teaches women to also acquire the bad 'eating habits' to the detriment of society's survival.

There is a call for women and men to share leadership responsibilities equally and, therefore, participate effectively in the development process. Through this process, women like Debbie Ogedemgbe will not just be called to rectify the situation once things go awry, but will be given an opportunity to determine whether war is the only way to sort out the mess, or create it for that matter.

We realise that masculinity as a patriarchal construct engenders a process through which manhood becomes a serious obstacle to self-affirmation by men, women and society. Patriarchy subverts the positive aspects of manhood by placing unrealistic and unjust expectations on the path of both men and women. This process dehumanises both the male and female members of society, engenders ineptitude and leads to the failure of leadership at private and public level. Corruption is also engendered by patriarchy, which gives certain members of society immense powers. Buchi Emecheta apparently calls on society to focus its attention on re-defining its understanding of manhood and its understanding of good leadership.

In the next Chapter, we investigate the possible effects of the diaspora experience on Buchi Emecheta's vision as perceived in her works. We focus on how the characters deal with the diaspora experience and thus determine how this affects the quest for justice.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 ALIENATION AND THE DIASPORA EXPERIENCE

4.1 Introduction

In the previous two Chapters, we identified motherhood and patriarchy as the obstacles to the quest for justice and self-affirmation in society depicted in *The Joys of Motherhood*, *Kehinde* and *Destination Biafra*. We established that society's perception of motherhood, and its upholding of patriarchy engenders a process of political and social ineptitude that essentially subverts the course of justice.

In this Chapter, we investigate the possible effects of the diaspora experience on Buchi Emecheta's vision as perceived in her works. We focus on how the characters deal with the diaspora experience and thus determine how the author is influenced by the diaspora experience. We further investigate the instances of alienation in the portrayal of characters and situations. We pay special attention to *Kehinde*, *The Joys of Motherhood*, *Destination Biafra* and *Gwendolen*, but also illustrate our arguments from other works by the same author. This is essentially because the novels provide us with excellent material through which we can explore the diaspora experience and its effects on the characters and situations.

In the first instance, we have to reiterate that Buchi Emecheta has written most of her works from London, where she lives. *The Joys of Motherhood*, *The Bride Price*, *Destination Biafra*, *Second Class Citizen*, and *The Slave Girl* are examples of works that have been written from London. It could be said that social dislocation from Nigeria means an estrangement from a familiar way of life to an alien one. As a consequence, it also means getting used to a very different way of life and the more glaring issue of race and identity for an African woman living in London. This scenario creates an existence of the London-Nigeria dichotomy, which gives rise to a two-pronged perspective in

her writings, which we will look at later in this Chapter. This is confirmed by her own words during an interview with Julie Holmes, when she says: "I keep my two worlds, my two cultures". Julie Holmes goes ahead to say the following about Buchi Emecheta:

Added to her commitments, she helps her extended family in Nigeria. She keeps in touch with her ancestral roots by returning home three to six months every year.... Going back on these visits gives her the opportunity to confront the changing traditional culture in her native land (6).

The Nigeria-London dichotomy in her works cannot, therefore, be gainsaid. In our view, she maintains a philanthropic relationship with her Nigerian family. She considers the visits she makes to her home as critical in informing her of the changes taking place in her native Nigeria. Our view is that visits alone are not sufficient to provide a firm grasp of the realities of a people's *current* reality. Still, it is our view that going back to Nigeria, for Buchi Emecheta, is a spiritual sojourn through which the alienated artist wants to declare that the relationship with Nigeria is as strong as ever. Whether these visits are sufficient to enable her to come up with a composite view of the Nigerian experience is another issue altogether.

In his book *Writers in Politics*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981) mentions that a writer is a product of a particular class, race and nation, and hence a creation of a real social process (6). This means that the bare realities of the lives of the people in the society from which the writer comes from must be reflected in his or her works, and that the writer becomes a kaleidoscope through which society can be looked at and appreciated. Looked at in this context, Buchi Emecheta's fiction presents us with certain problems. As a writer who has apparently escaped the disabling reality of Nigerian life, we wonder how effective she is in her depiction of the life of the Nigerian State. We wonder whether, there are any contradictions in her works and whether she is sufficiently in touch with the situation on the ground. Critical to us is an appreciation of whether the solutions she provides for her characters are worthwhile within the different settings.

The setting of the novels provides us with useful insights into our discussion of characters and situations in Emecheta's books. *Kehinde* is set in London and Lagos, while *Gwendolen* is set in Jamaica and London. On the other hand, *The Joys of Motherhood* is set in the rural-urban context of Nigeria, with some of the characters, notably the main character's family, travelling out of the country in search of opportunity. *Destination Biafra*, as we mentioned in Chapter three, is basically about the failure of leadership in the African State.

That the settings are hundreds of miles apart reveals that Buchi Emecheta is writing from a multiplicity of worlds. It would be difficult to say what her perspective of social relationships and justice in Africa is. However, the settings apparently provide us with the first glimpse of the sort of contradictions that we experience in the writer's works.

4.2 *Kehinde* and the Clash of Identities

At the beginning of *Kehinde*, the main character is pregnant and her husband, Albert Onwordi, seemingly spurred by the economic realities of their London setting, sees his wife's pregnancy as unacceptable. He finds it inconceivable that his wife should get another child at such an inauspicious time. He therefore, suggests the procurement of an abortion. He has no qualms about the fact that his wife violently resists it, or that he is literally sanctioning the death of the child, though unborn.

As an African man, Albert Onwordi is supposed to pride himself in fatherhood, for in Nigeria, having many children is a key attribute of a successful man. It is supposed to be an indication of the high social standing a man enjoys. It would be inconceivable for an African man not to be proud at the prospect of fatherhood. He refuses to listen to Kehinde's assertion that in Nigeria, it was believed "that people are more valuable than money" (7), and that he should stop focusing on the economic difficulties that the presence of an additional child would bring.

An analysis of *Kehinde* reveals that the setting is, initially, London. At the time when we first encounter Albert and Kehinde's family, Albert has received a letter from his sister in Nigeria, requesting him to go back home. When his son Joshua asks where it is from, Albert answers: "It's ... from Aunt Selina and Aunt Mary. They want me to return home". Kehinde, concerned about the exclusion of the children and herself from the letter, asks:

They want you to return home? What of us? ...
They have been hinting at it for a very long time,
now they've got the courage to spell it out. Return
home, return home indeed! They keep forgetting
that you left Nigeria a young bachelor and that now
you have a wife and kids (1).

This first altercation sets the stage for the conflict we are exposed to throughout the novel. It is perceptible that the diaspora experience sets a conflict context between the African nuances that are basically patriarchal, and the London ones that provide some sense of freedom to the characters. The nuances of both London and Nigeria pervade the novel, and the characters' own understanding and appreciation of the influences of either of the two settings essentially influence all the events in the novel.

In *Kehinde*, Buchi Emecheta assists us to get the first glimpse of the unadaptability of her male characters, like Albert Onwordi to their relatively new London environment. The different dichotomies of place are emphasised in the way the author treats women and male characters. For instance, while Albert is described as "a thin wiry man of forty", his wife, Kehinde, is described as "thirty-five and ... comfortably plump" (6). Albert's wife is typical of the exposed, forward-looking woman who quickly appreciates the London environment and the opportunities available there, while the man is apparently immune to any influence beyond his patriarchal background.

For Kehinde and Albert, the diaspora offers no room for them to behave 'normally'. As citizens of London, the couple is apparently living an unreal, pretentious life that is rocked, for example, by the mere suggestion by Albert's sister that he goes home. Kehinde is averse to the idea of going back to

Nigeria because she knows what 'home' means. Her response is typical of a woman who understands the type of life awaiting her in Nigeria. The couple is not in a position to amicably discuss the issue of the letter from Nigeria and reach a solution without much ado. At this point, London life is unreal to both of them. They eventually have to confront the realities of the moment by coming to terms with their African personalities.

It is our view that as citizens of London, Albert and Kehinde are supposed to accept the realities of their new lives and, necessarily, the roles that accrue to them. Albert, for example, should have discovered long ago, the impracticability of his patriarchal experience and his behaviour in London. Kehinde should have also learnt to accept the reality of London life and live her life without paying too much attention to the past. In this way, the couple would be in a position to influence each other to settle harmoniously within the London setting.

Unfortunately, each of them seemingly realises that the life they are living in the diaspora is as unrealistic as it is temporary. Both of them apparently have an unclear vision of the sort of life they would like to live. Kehinde and Albert are, therefore, two individuals with split, alienated identities, trying to live together when it is clear that the *status quo* is not satisfactory to either of them.

Buchi Emecheta seems to be telling the world about the realities of African life. We aver that the message she is giving to the readership is "look, the reason why this is happening is that in Africa, manhood is considered supreme". This is what Kehinde and Albert seem to have at the back of their minds through out their relationship. Kehinde avoids getting into altercations with her husband because "The Igbo in her knew how far to go" (22) and is, therefore, ready to get back into her "submissive role" when she visits Nigeria (66).

Through her portrayal of these characters, the author seems to admit that writing from the diaspora presents certain problems. In an interview with

Oladipo Ogundele (Umeh, 1996), she states that she is “being read by few Africans and mostly by people from other parts of the world” (446). This obviously poses several challenges. People can only read what they like. This means that the writer then has to be careful lest the sensitivities of the dominant reading ‘public’ are injured.

The diaspora experience essentially then affects Buchi Emecheta considerably. She admits that writing from the West has its own effects on her. Fitting within a white world as an African poses certain difficulties, as the author herself admits:

It means sometimes you feel a sense of inferiority, especially some of us African Artists living abroad. Sometimes you want to identify yourself as an African writer, then you see Africans being humble and you ask ‘Am I not cheating myself wanting to identify myself as an African writer?’ You find all the time you are faced with this dilemma (Adeola James, 35)

One wonders whether the dilemma Buchi Emecheta faces is not both racial as well as ideological. It could be said that the dilemma she faces as a writer is the dilemma of being African, and living within a white London. It could be the dilemma of writing for a principally white audience and, therefore, attempting to explain a lot of the things that happen in the novels so that the white audience can understand the contexts of her character’s lives. It could also be the dilemma of pleasing two worlds – the white and the black – without forgetting where the bread and butter comes from.

No wonder then, that a critical insight into *Kehinde* reveals that some of the things the writer says in the novel, even as the conflict deepens, are seemingly meant for people whose understanding of the socio-cultural and economic situation of Africa is wanting. She delves into constant explanations, which are, we suppose, meant to enable such a reader to appreciate the underlying socio-cultural issues resulting in the situation the characters find

themselves in. At the beginning of the story, and while explaining to us the economic position of Albert and Kehinde's family, Buchi Emecheta writes:

(Albert) was not unaware of the legal status of a wife here in Britain. In Nigeria, the home belonged to the man, even if the woman spent her entire life keeping it in order. She could never ask her husband to leave the house, as was done here...(for) a good wife was not supposed to remind her husband of such things. When Kehinde said 'your house', she was playing the role of the 'good' Nigerian woman. Conversely, when he said 'our house', he was being careful not to upset her. After almost sixteen years of marriage, they played this game without thinking (*Kehinde*, 4).

In a few sentences, Buchi Emecheta is able to throw light into the socio-cultural background of Kehinde and Albert's family. For a person not informed of the reality of African life, this information is important as it sets the context for appreciating the type of relationship to be expected between the couple. One understands that the two come from an unequal socio-political and economic background in which men are more valued than women.

This does not, of course, mean that we do not necessarily appreciate the sustained explanations. After all, they help us appreciate more deeply the social dynamics of life both in Nigeria and London as they directly affect the characters. It is, consequently, important for us to acknowledge that Buchi Emecheta's positioning in the African diaspora enables her to enter into discourse about the patriarchal nature of relationships in Africa. This is, essentially, for the benefit of a non-African audience in the diaspora. At the same time, she provides us with contrasts from the London context.

When talking about *The Rape of Shavi*, Buchi Emecheta says that the book "is very much against the West" because of its harsh nature (449) [sic]. If Buchi Emecheta is dissatisfied with the harsh reception of *The Rape of Shavi* in the West, she makes a serious turn-around in her later works: she adopts a more conciliatory tone. This is essentially because she, in *Kehinde* and other novels, presents the West very positively.

Albert apparently yearns for Nigeria, where men do not have to stay in houses bought by their wives. Staying in London is not only a negation of his manhood but of the masculine principle. His sense of justice has before this, depended on the patriarchal construction of the world. The demands of the London scenario essentially alienate him. Albert's going to London demonstrates that he is dislocated from a familiar way of life. He must resolve this in order to stop pretending and be his true self. Albert's alienation is a result of the grip the patriarchal ideology has on him. Living in the diaspora has not changed his thinking about women and gender justice.

Compared to the matrimonial tribulations of Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Kehinde's contemplation of and eventual execution of abortion runs counter to the pro-life attributes that she is supposed to muster and defend at all cost. It does not make logical sense that a woman of her standing should bend too easily to her husband's demands for the termination of the pregnancy. The plot is worsened when it is continuously exposed to us that it is the man (Albert) who is insisting on the abortion. He denies his wife the element of choice as it relates to her reproductive choices. The situation is inconsistent with the supposedly pro-life socio-cultural realities and beliefs about life in the African society. There is an obvious conflict between the insistence on African ideals and the social and economic realities of life in the diaspora.

As Nnu Ego struggles to satisfy society's desire for children and destroys herself in the process, another woman is contemplating abortion. This is a contradiction in the quest for justice and for a humane equilibrium. It is a negation of the life-preserving principles and practices that should guide human relationships. It would be a negation of what would be regarded as the African scenario. Unfortunately, they are caught somewhere between Africa and London and have essentially lost their identity. They cannot, therefore, act in a clear unequivocal manner.

By the standards set by Obi Umunna, Agbadi Nwokocha and Amatokwu in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Albert Onwordi could qualify as anything but an African man. Buchi Emecheta presents him as a caricature of what manhood in the African context could stand for. He strides two continents and with this, carries serious contradictions that pose a serious challenge to his self-actualisation. We can say that Albert is a highly alienated individual with a torn identity. His attempt to maintain a few vestiges of his Nigerian male mentality within the London context makes him an 'incomplete' human being. His remarkable alienation makes him to betray his family just to get back what, to him, is the ideal manhood in Nigeria. He marries another woman but even before the confusion he has created in his nuclear family is dissipated, he is in yet another hunt: for another woman.

This is the same man, who, in long before leaving Nigeria, reacts to polygamy in strong terms. His sense of justice seems to be very high for he has the view that "polygamy was degrading for women" (84). Albert's perspective is based "on his own experience with his father's two wives". It is apparent that Albert has this worldview before, and shortly after he meets Kehinde, when both are in High School. However, this same man, after living in London seems to have been re-educated to appreciate the value of polygamy. By marrying another wife like his father, Albert essentially decides that polygamy, regardless of his earlier beliefs, is good. Only that it is good for men.

At the end of the novel, there appears to be no redemption for Albert's scattered sense of self. He is painted as becoming morally decrepit and totally lacking in family values. Essentially, he is even worse than he was in London. This is one contradiction of the diaspora that gives an opportunity for change only to women. Whilst it is a winning situation for patriarchy, it is a debilitating scenario to the quest for justice. In Lagos, Albert regains his concept of manhood, and ironically, loses every sense of direction, a semblance of which he seemingly had in London. As Kehinde visits him in Lagos, we read that "He looked more imposing than the London Albert ... and he exuded a new confidence" (66). This essentially means that London was, for Albert, not a

viable environment for self-fulfilment, justice, and freedom. He has discovered himself.

In *Albert and Kehinde*, Buchi Emecheta reconstructs the concept of fatherhood and tells us that some of the perceptions held in Africa are based on shaky ground. We constantly get exposed to the outrageous excesses of manhood. Men are intricately tied to the failure in the quest for justice both in Africa and the diaspora. Indeed, Albert Onwordi, as a man seems to be fated to fall even deeper into an abyss from which he cannot be redeemed. It is as if the author wants to exorcise the world of such evil men as Albert.

The fact that he cannot fit within a purely patriarchal context means that Albert is a social misfit who may not necessarily live a meaningful life. In any case, he cannot measure up to the patriarchal firmness similar to Agbadi Nwokocha's for instance. In any case, Agbadi Nwokocha never left his village and conducts his personal and public business the best way he knows. He never had to abdicate his responsibility as a husband and a father. The same scenario more or less applies to Nnu Ego's grandfather, Obi Umunna, who loves his daughter Ona and loves her in within his socio-cultural, political and psychological circumstances.

Yet, Albert's character has to be looked at in the context of his patriarchal background. It would, in this context, not be possible to look at Albert's desires to go back to Nigeria, to marry another woman and to be a man as selfish from the onset. As it is, Albert wants to enjoy the glitter and freedom of Lagos life. This is a life that is not fettered by undue attention and concern directed towards women either as equal partners. It is also a life that is not fettered by the incessant recognition of his uniqueness or difference from the world around him on the basis of his skin colour. His apparent sensitivity to Kehinde in London gives way to an overbearing attitude in Lagos. Women, to him, become mere objects to satisfy his maniacal desires. As Kehinde enters her Lagos home, she is confounded:

She was dumbfounded by the sight in front of her. A very beautiful, sophisticated, young, pregnant woman, with a baby on her left hip, stood in the doorway, wearing the same white lace material as Albert ... She scrutinised Kehinde insolently, smiling in a mild and insolent way. She did not attempt to come and help with the unpacking (K.68)

At this point, Albert's dishonesty is brought to the fore, especially as he did not make a point to inform Kehinde of his decision to marry another woman. In the same vein, he apparently ignores the fact together with Kehinde, they had a family with teenage children, and that he had made her to undergo an abortion in London. When Kehinde is told that she is "the senior wife of a successful Nigerian man", there is no consolation for her (73). She knows exactly whom she is married to: a faithless pervert. Buchi Emecheta also creates a scenario in which conflict is created between Kehinde and her more educated co-wife, Rike who is portrayed as being "sophisticated" but "bowing down to tradition" (89). This scenario is stereotypical as it portrays women as incapable of supporting each other to combat injustice. It also portrays educated women as unable to influence their lives to counter the injustice that is perpetuated by patriarchal tradition. One wonders what exactly Buchi Emecheta sought to achieve by this.

The hitherto London-based Albert, now based in Nigeria, is depicted as a sexual loony who has finally found his grazing ground in the fertile African land. He utilises his masculinity to play havoc on the lives of women. Even Rike, who had earlier been happy that she had Albert to herself, finds herself in the same situation as Kehinde, having to deal with an errant husband to whom the London experience, or her own attachment to him, has not been useful. At this point, formal education as a form of liberation for African women, and London as a an escape from a stifling social environment for women, are both dissipated as insufficient remedies for addressing issues of justice.

It is our view that Albert's degeneration into immoral, careless living is not worthy of a man who has a wide experience of both Nigeria and the African diaspora. One wonders whether it is because he is a black African man or whether it is because of his utterly irredeemable inhuman nature. We wonder whether he is symbolic of the dilemma that confronts all those African men who live in the diaspora. Unlike Kehinde who is more informed by her London experience, Albert deals a debilitating blow to the diaspora principle by declaring, through his actions, that he finds the London context unworkable for him. Consequently, he reverses any gains that his wife has made in the idealised London environment and essentially curtails the quest for justice.

Looking at Albert's wife Kehinde, it is apparent that from the onset, she, too, is a torn character. When she follows Albert to Africa, she is outraged to find that the father of her children has actually decided to marry another wife, "a very beautiful, sophisticated ... young woman" (K, 68). She quickly learns that the same Albert who made her terminate her pregnancy in London has already married, has one child, and is expecting another. This is a shocking scenario for Kehinde, and one could say that she demonstrates a high level of maturity and resolve when she decides to go back to London.

Albert's 'negative' growth is highly inappropriate for a man to whom the diaspora should have been an eye-opener to the need for justice in the society, where women and men are equal partners in the social, political and economic sphere of life. His degeneration mirrors the degeneration of the society into a lower level of moral perversion, where individuals who are supposed to have 'seen the light' are engulfed by the pitch darkness of moral inferiority. Buchi Emecheta does not find it problematic to depict Africa as the archetype of imaginable and unimaginable darkness and immoral depravity. After all, unlike London, it allows apparently *depraved* men like Albert Onwordi to exist freely.

It is noteworthy that London is portrayed as critical to Kehinde's self-affirmation. She decides to hit back at Albert and his new bride, Rike, by going back to university and thus reclaiming her way in life. Getting a university

degree (like her rival Rike) is Kehinde's way of gaining self-affirmation and trying to deal with her alienation from the Lagos reality she has so recently re-encountered. It is also a way of entrenching herself further in the London society. She decides to belong to the diaspora, and expects that Albert would be the one to join her in London, if he wants to. The London experience has alienated her and forced her to start looking at the social practices of the Nigerian society differently. Her view of family, propriety, morality and convention is also radically altered.

Kehinde, in essence, realises that she has probably gone to Albert too many times and for too long, and it is time for him to go to her. However, she demonstrates a serious short-sightedness as she seemingly fails to remember that the diaspora means different to the two of them. To her, it is symbolic financial and social security and thus an affirmation of her humanity. It is symbolic of the life that would be a wild dream back in Nigeria, especially because the rights of women are upheld. For Albert, it is a negation of his sense of self, his manhood, his sense of justice. Without reconciling the two 'senses', Kehinde's expectations - that Albert can follow her to London - are not realistic.

By symbolically denouncing her African identity and way of life, Kehinde assumes a British one; in order to live a meaningful life. At this point, she has probably discovered that it is not possible to live within the concrete city of London and still have the nuances of Ifeyinwa, her Nigerian sister. As Ifeyinwa focuses on revenging on Rike, Kehinde decides to take off. Ifeyinwa acts within the bounds of her experience when she taunts Rike about Albert's exploits with young women. This could as well be a rumour, but Buchi Emecheta creates a scenario in which Rike is thrown into utter confusion by the prospect of a co-wife.

Rike's reaction is dissimilar to the happy one she had when she meets her London-based co-wife, Kehinde earlier in the story. Rike acts selfishly by taking justice too personally and selfishly. Ifeyinwa simply acts as a catalyst and derides her for taking Kehinde's husband. It is intriguing that a rural

woman like Ifeyinwa who has no diaspora experience can have such an apt understanding of justice. This can mean two things: One is that even within her own social setting, Ifeyinwa's concept of justice is alive and only awaits an outlet. Second, it could point at a contradiction in the portrayal of the character. The critical thing is that as Ifeyinwa implements her plan to make life uncomfortable for Rike, Kehinde leaves for London. This is perhaps because her war is being fought at global level, where Nigeria is part of the globe, where her realisation of women's oppression has been heightened, and where people like Rike become victims of an unjust societal order. She has acquired a new ideological frame of reference.

This is precisely why the views Kehinde earlier had about marriage, morality and duty have been altered considerably. She decides to get into a sexual relationship with a man younger than her, and is able to successfully stand her ground during an altercation with her son, after the latter saw them in bed. Her explanation to the son is off-handed: "Your dad has taken two other wives in Nigeria and I am not complaining" (*Kehinde* 138). The son is astounded, as he notes the change in his mother.

What is important to us, however, is that Kehinde has gained an earnest liberal attitude towards marriage and sex that could be regarded as contrary to convention in the African sense of the word. We become frustrated when we discover that in the final analysis, she joins Albert as a perpetrator of sexual perversion – if faithfulness to one's partner is a principle that is necessary for the maintenance of a true marriage and family, if not human dignity itself. Her sexuality, therefore, provides her with the tools she needs to start out on her own. She reciprocates Albert's debauchery by engaging in a sexual relationship. This is even while she is well aware that even within the London context, the sensitivities of her children, their rights, need to be protected.

It is our view that the justification notwithstanding, this sort of reciprocal debauchery demonstrated by Albert and Kehinde does not do any justice to the quest for self-affirmation by women and men in society. This is, perhaps,

allegorised by the very nature of life in London and the opportunities that are available to our protagonist. What is noteworthy is that Kehinde, apparently, rejects Africa and its way of life.

However, it is quite clear that the loser is the man Albert. He loses his job and slowly delves into a process of becoming a vegetable: an unnecessary economic burden who has to be taken care of by his women. A situation where the women do the work and the men sit and eat is created. This is not so dissimilar to the depiction of Nnaife who, in *The Joys of Motherhood* does not participate effectively in bringing up his own children.

4.3 Alienation and Idealisation in *Destination Biafra*

Perhaps one of the most impressive cases of alienation and idealisation occurs in *Destination Biafra*, in which women defy all obstacles to play a role as peacemakers in the resolution of the Biafran conflict. Debbie Ogedemgbe stands at the centre of this quest for peace and justice and defies everything to demonstrate that she is a force to reckon with. That she is educated in London makes us establish a linkage between her and Kehinde and, to a certain degree, Buchi Emecheta herself. The unifying factor among them is, as it should be expected, London. Debbie Ogedemgbe gets education in London, Kehinde is able to escape from Nigeria and settle in London, while Buchi Emecheta lives in London.

London, for Debbie Ogedemgbe, means getting the sort of independence that the likes of her mother Stella cannot muster. It is the sort of education that enables her to recognise the critical place occupied by white men like Allan Grey in post-colonial Nigerian politics. Even Army men recognise that post-independence Nigeria is essentially deeply influenced by Britain, as shown by the words of their leader, Chijioke Abosi: "We sent away one set of masters, without realising that they had left their stooges behind. Even the matches we use in our kitchen come from abroad" (57). Abosi's words come out of the realisation that the white man plays an important role in ensuring the destabilisation of Nigeria.

Buchi Emecheta creates a scenario where London detribalises Debbie, but makes her Oxford University trained counterpart, Chijioke Abosi, an impeccable tribalist whose short-sightedness defies comprehension. As Debbie Ogedemgbe gains a useful role in the peacemaking process, Abosi still holds onto the Biafran dream, even when it is clear that the idea cannot be fully achieved. She idealises the West in general and London in particular by making it both an epitome of love and the source of justice and freedom.

Buchi Emecheta chooses to position Debbie Ogedemgbe as a girlfriend to one of the destructive forces within the new Nigerian nation. Allan Grey and his ilk are interested in maintaining the presence - and protection of - British interests in Nigeria, and to place a proponent of justice like Debbie Ogedemgbe in his hands, in our view, contradicts the very principles of justice themselves. In our view, this is a betrayal of the reader who would have expected a more un-equivocal position for women as proponents of independence, justice and democracy.

Nonetheless, Buchi Emecheta presents Debbie Ogedemgbe as a highly educated Oxford University graduate who has a heightened appreciation of the realities of the lives of African women. As she struggles to escape from the soldiers with Baby Biafra on her back, we read:

Debbie made light of it. But as she walked down that dry road in that heat, with the weight of the child almost breaking her back, it struck her that African women of her age carried babies like this all day and still farmed and cooked; all she had to do was walk, yet she was in such pain (DB, 181).

As Debbie analyses these thoughts, she obviously forgets that African women are not necessarily escaping from soldiers all their lives and cannot, therefore, feel the way she is feeling at this point. At least not every day of their lives. In the same vein, not all African women are trained in prestigious institutions like Oxford University. The comparison she makes with African women is, therefore, out of context, as it ignores the fact that African women carried

babies and did a lot of other work as part of their contribution to the development of the community.

In our view, it would be rational if Debbie called for the recognition of women's contribution to society instead of just noting her perception of suffering and giving her own condescending standpoint. It is apparent that the London-based character is alienated from the realities of African life. Her touristic perspectives as she tries to influence the Biafran scenario cannot, therefore, be acknowledged as the perspectives of a person aware of the depth of the issues she is handling. She is apparently unaware of the fact that, notwithstanding the perceptible injustice in the system, the African woman's tenacity for doing this work was developed from a systematic informal education that was in place in society. Buchi Emecheta essentially makes Debbie to elevate a small individual event to a highly exaggerated public affair apparently meant to involve all women. It is our view that personal discomforts like the one Debbie faces are not necessarily reflective of stable communities and should not, therefore, be blown out of proportion.

It would appear that in her depiction of Debbie Ogedemgbe, Buchi Emecheta seeks to state that African culture was necessarily unkind towards women as it denied them opportunities of self-assertion. In the same vein, the author tells us in *Destination Biafra*: "In the distant past in that part of Africa women were treated almost as men's equals, but with the arrival of colonialism, their frail claim to equality had been taken away" (DB, 113). Here is a glaring contradiction. The author implies that discrimination and subversion of women's rights in Africa only began after colonialism. In the same breath, she is pummeling traditional male characters onto the wall, accusing them of maintaining traditional practices that negate women's efforts to assert themselves.

We wonder, of course, how it is possible for women to be *almost* equal and at the same time have a *frail* equality with men. One presupposes that with a near equality between women and men existing in the particular society before colonialism set in, what existed thereafter may have been a shake-up

of the scenario and not a total obliteration of the African way of life. Debbie Ogedemgbe's perspectives of the African culture are infeasible and, therefore, unacceptable. Yet, in her portrayal, we see the same sustained explanations about Africa that inform her works.

4.4 *The Joys of Motherhood* and the Image of the Alienated Character

When we look at *The Joys of Motherhood*, we realise that unlike *Kehinde*, it is set purely in Nigeria, although the effect of the diaspora is still evident. Important to us is the realisation that some of the situations and images depicted are quite problematic and reflective of the effects of the diaspora experience on the author. For example, the sex scene between Ona and Agbadi Nwokocha (in the novel) is idealised to fit the western context, for it is inconceivable that the two can make love in such an outrageous fashion. In the first instance, it is inconceivable that Agbadi is so versed in kissing, as depicted in the scene below:

He found himself rolling towards her, giving her nipples gentle lover's bites, letting his tongue glide down the hollow in the centre of her breasts and then back again. He caressed her thigh with his good hand, moving to her small night *lappa* and fingering her coral waistbeads. Ona gasped and opened her eyes. (JOM, 19)

One could say that this scene could be straight from a Hollywood movie, as it is inconceivable that these two individuals should be so systematic in the art of lovemaking as to go to all the graphic details that Buchi Emecheta describes. Clearly, the diaspora has its effect here. The western readers see at once a scenario that is not so different from theirs, and the animal disposition of Nwokocha Agbadi as he semi-rapes Ona, further worsens the image of Africa in the novel. It creates the *necessary* distinction between 'civilisation' and 'barbarism', between Africa and the West and between Africa and the African diaspora. The sexual act becomes a semi-pleasure, a virtual rape of the epitome of independent-mindedness in the Ibuza society, Ona.

The consummation of a sexual act in public hearing, to say the least, is repulsive. It depicts members of this traditional African community as immoral

perverts. Nonetheless, as if the sexual encounter is of utmost importance, the sounds wake up the whole community. It is, in our view, an outrageous rendition. When Agbadi Nwokocha confidently says that he is simply undertaking the task of giving Ona 'her pleasures', one is left wondering what the scene is meant to portray.

The same applies to the first encounter between Nnaife and his new wife Nnu Ego later in the novel. The beastly nature in which the man 'attacks' his wife is quite untenable. It is in the same vein that Emecheta portrays Nnu Ego's son-in-law Magnus, telling her "your daughter was a virgin" (221). It can be arguably stated that issues about virginity (or the lack of it) are not the most relevant or likely for a son-in-law to discuss with his prospective mother-in-law. It would also be inconceivable for a mother within an African context to blatantly ask her daughter's boyfriend whether he has the intention of marrying her daughter.

The African male is an aggressive and selfish maniac who lacks any regard for individual or community interests. Agbadi Nwokocha is in extreme pain, but cannot let this come between him and public sex. This elevates a private sexual activity into a blatantly forceful community one. The fact that Agbadi Nwokocha's wife dies immediately after witnessing the sexual act between her husband and another woman gives undue emphasis to the importance of a sexual act. This is yet another mythical and alienating picture of Africans as sensual beings. This only adds to our conviction that indeed, the images are idealised to give a warped view of, for instance, Nwokocha Agbadi's identity. This affects the overall image of Africa in the novel.

In a world that is struggling to deal with the demeaning phenomenon of violence against women, scenes of sexual violence masked and idealised as love-making - as in the case of Nnaife and Nnu Ego or Agbadi Nwokocha and Ona - promote no justice for women and men. Both become dehumanised and become partners in hindering the quest and attainment of justice. What comes through is that senseless violence against women is a tolerable

practice and that women are ready to bear the brunt of the unruly and uncouth behaviour of the men in their lives. This is absurd.

As we read *The Joys of Motherhood*, we realise that images of ignorant Africans, and the depiction of African men as literally hopeless idiots, are rampant. Nnaife, Nnu Ego's last husband, is portrayed as an impossibly abject person. He is a caricature of a true African man, definitely no match for Chinua Achebe's Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*. Albert Onwordi in *Kehinde*, and Nnaife in *The Joys of Motherhood* are not dissimilar individuals. They are brothers joined together by the unkempt reputation of being unreal and lacking in the ways of civilised living. They are brothers as they are a disgrace to manhood, humanity and justice.

Although it would be preposterous to expect Buchi Emecheta to create an Okonkwo in Nnaife, it is our view that the character is exaggerated to a high degree. Nnaife is depicted as a man who is crude and un-imaginative. His desire to consummate his marriage to Nnu Ego is apparently so strong that he demands "his marital rights as if determined not to give her a chance to change her mind" (JOM, 44). Nnaife is so insensitive that he jumps onto his new wife in a 'hungry' way – undoubtedly comparable to the ways of a famished Hyena. Buchi Emecheta further goes ahead to write:

After such an experience, Nnu Ego knew why horrible looking men raped women, because they were aware of their inadequacy. This one worked himself to an animal passion. She was sure he had never seen a woman before (JOM, 44)

It would appear that in her effort to project the image of women, Buchi Emecheta misses the point altogether. She presents African men as dehumanised characters replicated in Nnaife and his ilk. Worse still, even women like Nnu Ego are dehumanised and they cannot enjoy respect from society. The above thoughts attributed to Nnu Ego are not the thoughts of a semi-literate woman. They are the thoughts of an individual whose consciousness has been heightened. That Buchi Emecheta makes her to

think of such complex concepts such as marital rape, among others, is instructive. What is intriguing, however, is the fact that the author does not make Nnu Ego to use this apparently high level of consciousness to influence her life positively.

Suspicion of the genuineness of Nnaife is further heightened when he goes to fight in a war that he does not understand. At this point, we wonder just how *real* a character he is. Yet, perhaps, we recognise the realities of the moment, when colonialism perpetuated ignorance by Africans as a tool of control. We cannot, also, forget the mitigating fact of forced conscription. Still, the enormity of Nnaife's stupidity and ignorance is significant. His wife, Nnu Ego, is no better, and as Shivaji Sengupta says, "Nnu Ego and Nnaife have no idea why Nnaife has to go to India to fight the British against the "germanis", or even where India is in the first place" (Sengupta, 239).

Nnaife as a character deteriorates rapidly and, driven by tribal anger, tries to kill the Butcher's son for befriending his daughter Kehinde. The matter is that Nnaife does not approve of Kehinde's choice of husband. After a quarrel with the daughter regarding the issue, Kehinde disappears from home and when Nnaife is told this, his anger makes him decide that it is time to teach the Yoruba butcher and his son a lesson. He shouts: "My daughter with a Yoruba husband? She is better dead – and with the father of her man" (209). At this point, Nnaife, in addition to his retinue of weaknesses, gets the tag of tribalist, which stops him from respecting the choices his daughter makes. When he is arrested and sentenced to a five-year jail term, he is a pitiable character. He becomes spiteful towards Nnu Ego. At the end of the novel, we leave him as desolate as when we first meet him when Nnu Ego makes her debut appearance in Lagos. He is a subversion of the patriarchal principle he is supposed to be upholding.

Yet, we can say that the court case that is enacted at the end of the novel, and the sentence thereof, are not justifiable. In the first instance, the mitigating circumstances are not taken into consideration by the judge. It is apparent that Nnaife was serious about defending his own honour and that of

his family. Society gave him the tools he could use in this instance: sheer brutal force. He has to get a cutlass because being an ignorant man, his understanding of British law, at this time is at loggerheads with his Ibusa mentality.

In our view, Nnaife gets the jail term not because of his violence and intended harm of the Yoruba family, but because he left the upbringing of the family to his wife only. He is jailed for being a pretender, for being the only things that society allowed him to be: a sorry character. He is a highly alienated character to whom participation in the Second World War did not help. This was essentially a diaspora experience but Nnaife, instead of coming back a more informed individual, comes back and marries another wife but only after making Nnu Ego's "senior wife" in Lagos (the widow of his dead brother) pregnant (217). It is not surprising that the man ends up in trouble.

As we reach the last pages of the book, we recognise that *Joys of Motherhood* is an apt illustration of irony. It is apparent that Buchi Emecheta presents marriage in a very negative way. The marriage institution is obsolete, as there is no single successful marriage in any of the works under focus. In the portrayal of Nnu Ego and Nnaife, Emecheta creates typical images of Africans who are as ignorant of the more global issues affecting their lives as they are of those surrounding them. It would suffice to say that Buchi Emecheta creates images that are meant to satisfy the western reader, the principal target of her writings.

At this point, we are convinced that Buchi Emecheta's handling of the quest for justice is fraught with serious contradictions. This is precisely why we agree with Evan Mwangi when he states that unlike Chinua Achebe, "Emecheta is not so much interested in the nationalistic projects which would be ready to disagree with grand tales of African greatness in favour of narratives that show tradition's complicity in women's oppression" (13). Yet, even if we agreed for a moment that tradition is responsible for women's oppression, we would expect that the quest for justice should not be fraught

with glaring ambiguities. It is not preposterous to imagine that people with grim racist perspectives of Africa can read such presentations gleefully.

However, as Okeng'o Matiang'i states, Buchi Emecheta definitely succeeds in "carefully detailing the experiences of motherhood and wifehood". This, he says, contributes to her success in debunking "the myriad theories of motherhood" and "the traditional euphoric perception of... wifehood" (200). This is true, but we insist that it would need a master decoder to translate Nnu Ego's tribulations into some positive affirmation of dignified and independent living. Our standpoint is that as long as literature gives such ambivalent messages that could simply be echoing life's sad stories, no justice can be achieved and entrenched in society.

In our theoretical framework in the introduction to this study, we mention that Josephine Donovan indicates that the earlier preoccupation of feminist studies of Literature was with the 'images of women' approach. In the same vein, Donovan goes on to say that "the aesthetic dimension of literature ... cannot be divorced from a moral dimension" (265). She goes on to say that "it is not sufficient to simply frame a scene of great suffering" like the one Buchi Emecheta frames in her creation of Nnu Ego, Kehinde, Debbie Ogedemgbe or Gwendolen but that: "it has to be placed within a moral order"(265).

In effect, what Josephine Donovan is calling for is a creation of characters within a moralist framework fraught with justice and freedom. In this framework, it would be possible for Nnu Ego to enjoy some respite from her hard life, and achieve some sense of meaning for herself, instead of living for other people and paying so dearly for it. If indeed, *The Joys of Motherhood* is meant to elicit our sympathy for the plight of women, it succeeds, but if its intention is to spur some affirmative action towards the 'emancipation' of Nnu Ego, the message is not too clear. In our view, Buchi Emecheta simply succeeds in creating a "scene of grotesque suffering" as Josephine Donovan (1988) asserts.

That women within the Nigerian framework are economically and politically unsuccessful is quite obvious, if our analysis of *Kehinde* and *The Joys of Motherhood* is anything to go by. The caged life of the traditional woman has no glories. When we look at the example of Ojebeta in *The Slave Girl*, the level of contradictions there-in are confounding to us. It is as if Ogbanje Ojebeta hops from one straitjacket into another straitjacket that is well developed and serviced by the patriarchal society. Even as she is apparently 'released' from the slave life that she has lived all her life, there apparently is no point, as she is not given the tools with which to reclaim her sense of identity.

In *Head Above Water*, Buchi Emecheta states very clearly that in Nnu Ego, she "created a woman ... who gave all her money and everything she had to raise her kids." (224). She goes on to say, "She chopped wood for sale, she dealt on the black market, she did everything except whore herself to raise money" (225). She gave everything indeed, and gained nothing in return. Buchi Emecheta only succeeds to shock the reader into realising the horrific situation of a typical African woman. On the other hand, one is continuously left wondering what the portrayal achieves. Nnu Ego does not have the education or the money with which to purchase her way to London and freedom.

Essentially, Buchi Emecheta creates a scenario whereby a handful of African women make it into the glimmer and glitter of London. Even Nnu Ego's sons, Oshia and Adim have to go to America and Canada for education and eventual material success. But like the other men, who are the desecrators of hallowed ground, they ignore their mother with outrageous impunity. They have been dislocated from Nigeria to America and Canada, and it would appear that the diaspora experience is an alienating experience, as they apparently forget the sacrifices of their mother.

They fail to remember that the main reason she sent them to school was so that, in the words of Nnu Ego, they could "feed me in my old age but also ... wipe the tears of shame from my eyes" (212). Contrary to her expectations,

the two men are just as irresponsible as Albert Onwordi of *Kehinde*, Uncle Johnny and Daddy Winston of *Gwendolen*, and Okolie of *The Slave Girl*. They are an obstinate obstacle to the quest for justice.

In the final analysis, Nnu Ego's story is simply a sad rendition of a woman bogged down by children and a weakling of a husband. The author simply outlines the sadness of Nnu Ego's life for probably a white audience that could be dying to confirm its gloomy view of Africa. *The Joys of Motherhood* goes beyond just focusing on the liberation of women. It tells the tale of a society, a community of women and men at a certain level of socio-political development. It is a society that is yearning for justice, a liberating ideology. It would appear that to Buchi Emecheta, this hope emanates from the West. But from what we have seen so far, this hope is not practical because it is befogged with inconsistencies.

It is our view that the failure of *The Joys of Motherhood* as a story of a society engaged in the quest for justice could lie in its negative positioning of both women and men characters fighting for freedom from the debilitating aspects of the environment in which they live. *The Joys of Motherhood* does not have a heroic, un-equivocal statement about the quest for justice. Its construction is contradictory to the ideals of justice. *The Joys of Motherhood* does not contain what Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Writers in Politics* (1994) calls 'literary guerillas'. Ngugi says that the desire for 'total liberation' (24) has to be led by writers. To say that Nnaife or Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood* are 'literary guerrillas' in the efforts to influence their lives positively would be a gross overstatement. On the other hand, to say that Sarafina is a literary guerrilla and participates actively in designing the future of her community (in *Sarafina!*) would be an understatement.

4.5 *Gwendolen* and the London-Caribbean Dichotomy

The rape of the protagonist by her father in *Gwendolen* is one of the most ludicrous and sickening scenes in the novel. It throws out of the window any hope of redemption for the traumatised child. The situation is further aggravated by the fact that this scene does not take place in third world

Caribbean. It takes place in the centre of London, which could be regarded as the epitome of western democracy and respect for human rights. One expects that Gwendolen's travel to sophisticated London is essentially an exit from the land of sexual perversion, Jamaica. But then, this is an idyllic expectation as the reality is different: her own father rapes her.

In *Gwendolen*, Buchi Emecheta succeeds in creating a perfect brotherhood among African men. It is a brotherhood rooted in extreme perversion and which defies comprehension. That Daddy Winston is the ultimate culprit, the desecrator of hallowed ground, is not debatable. We become even more disappointed when he complains that the child he rapes - his own daughter - is not a virgin. That he is a black man from the Caribbean does not escape us. It is apparent that the black sexual pervert has gone to London, and Africa and the African diaspora are in the dock once more. This is a repulsive scenario that only a non-African reader may find more exciting.

Daddy Winston is not any different from Trueblood, a character in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* who is accused of having an incestuous relationship with his own daughter and impregnating her. As a section of the black community suffers under the embarrassment of Trueblood's behaviour, the white members of the community are apparently excited by the story. This is because it confirms their own grim opinion of black people in the American nation. After all, as Donald Miles (1978) states, "Trueblood stands for all the white society expects of the Negro: the committer of incest, the passer on of tainted blood, the animal" (49).

Unlike Buchi Emecheta, however, Ralph Ellison's handling of the themes of justice and identity are quite clear, so that it is possible for us to trace an increasing consciousness in our invisible character. The Invisible Man is able to utilise his knowledge to affirm his sense of self and make decisions about his life, however misguided or incomplete the decision is. What is important is that he makes a bold step towards affirming the values of justice and freedom. Buchi Emecheta, in the creation of Uncle Johnny and Daddy Winston affirms what Angela Davies refers to as "the myth of the black rapist" which, in her

view, "continues to carry out the insidious work of racist ideology" (Angela Davies, 430). The affirmation of the principle of justice and freedom is either missing or incomplete in most of Buchi Emecheta's key characters including Nnu Ego and Ona in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Ojebeta in *The Slave Girl*, Albert in *Kehinde*, Gwendolen in *Gwendolen*, among others.

For Gwendolen, the slave history stands as a backdrop for illustrating her situation in the Jamaican world. Having been dislocated from ancestral Africa by slavery, Gwendolen's forebearers must have found themselves alienated from their different cultural traits. The community of the shantytown in which Gwendolen finds herself is loosely held together. The only people Gwendolen knows are her parents and her grandmother, and her father's relatives in Kingston. Beyond these, she only knows her friends and an older man whom she calls Uncle Johnny.

Gwendolen essentially lives a deprived childhood, especially when her parents go to London and leave her behind. Her nightmare starts when an adult repeatedly rapes her. Gwendolen becomes 'stunted' in some aspects, and her sense of self-esteem is greatly hampered. Her fears of being shunned by the shanty town community when they discover her shame increases with every rape ordeal. She becomes alienated from herself, as well as her Jamaican world. She contemplates her grey fate, thus:

All she knew was that as she grew older, she began to entertain the irrational fear that everybody would blame her if they knew her secret. She was beginning to learn by daily indoctrination that there was little a man like Uncle Johnny could do wrong (G.15)

What is happening to Gwendolen is very serious, but it is astounding that she treats it with such resignation. We can say that perhaps it is because she is a child whose parents are as far away as London can be from Jamaica. The resentment she feels, and the desire to get out of the depressing environment is demonstrated by her escape to Kingston, where she hopes to find help from Daddy Winston's relatives. When she reaches there, Granny Elinor does not

make it a secret that Gwendolen is not welcome. She has no option but to go 'home' to Granny Naomi and endure the punishment of having run away and stolen Granny Naomi's money.

Therefore, even as we agree with Shivanji Sengupta who, in 'Desire and the Politics of Control' says that the rape by the father "caused a total reversal of her life" (Sengupta, 244), we see Buchi Emecheta still depicting London as a source of hope for black women. Gwendolen does not get her salvation out of the education she has. Her hopes of going through formal school have been maimed for life by the continuous violence that she has been subjected to. Her hopes have been shattered resoundingly when she makes the consequent discovery "that she was separate from her Mammy and Daddy. Her mother had twice left her to danger. Her father had raped her" (Sengupta, 244). That she eventually gets pregnant from this incestuous relationship makes the situation even worse.

The London factor comes in when the relationship with Emmanuel, a white man in London, opens a window of hope into Gwendolen's life. It is the young woman's cleanest entry into a sexual relationship with a man yet. The racist connotations of this scenario cannot be ignored. This scenario can, of course, be looked at from several angles. For instance, we can decide to look at Emmanuel as a man who simply loves Gwendolen, but then we realise that he is acutely aware of his 'whiteness' and we start wondering whether it is mere coincidence that both Uncle Johnny and Daddy Winston are rapists and above all, black, while this truly positive male character is white.

We also wonder whether Buchi Emecheta is suggesting that cross-cultural relationships should be embraced as a way of dealing with oppression. If this be the case, the only impracticality is that oppressed people cannot migrate *en masse* to the West in search of cross-cultural justice. It should, of course, not matter whether a man is white or black. After all, justice has no hue. What matters is that Emmanuel is a male character. But when he becomes the only well-rounded positive male character, our curiosity is heightened. We start

realising the lopsided nature of the author's positioning of black people, race, and race relationships in her works.

The diaspora experience is seen in the implication that it has to take a white Londoner to introduce a little humanity into Gwendolen's life. The implication that black women or women of colour have to go to England to escape from their barbaric black men is disturbing. Essentially, Emmanuel, though seemingly alienated from the demands of his family, is the ideal saviour figure who has to rescue the poor damsel from the evil forces. White becomes a symbol of justice and fairness. London, as we have asserted elsewhere, becomes the very embodiment of hope and salvation.

Emmanuel becomes a source of salvation for Gwendolen and the dark abyss into which she has been thrown suddenly gives way to a new vibrant life, which instils in her a new sense of purpose, regardless of her limitations. Sadness is dissipated and when she talks to Emmanuel during their initial encounter, her feelings are quite clear: "Gwendolen could not answer because for the first time in her life, she had found somebody who could put into words some of the things she was feeling. She was laughing so much that tears came into her eyes" (G 127). The rapport has been established and suddenly, the hitherto oppressed young woman finds understanding, love, hope and rejuvenation all in one white man.

It has taken so many years for Gwendolen to cry happy tears. It is apparent that Emmanuel's entry into her life is as significant as it enables her to find a new equilibrium for relating with men. Emmanuel is able to do what all other men, black men for that matter, have failed to do. The relationship between Emmanuel and Gwendolen brings to the fore several issues. In the first instance, it emphasises that in the final analysis, Gwendolen has to find solutions to her predicaments in her London setting. Black Jamaica and its evil men is no longer significant and must be forgotten. Unlike Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Gwendolen is offered a lifeboat, which enables her to escape inevitable destruction. Her sense of direction is regained when she realises that she has the ability to make her life meaningful.

Julie Holmes, citing an interview she had with Buchi Emecheta, says that the author "challenges and triumphs over the social and political restrictions of race and gender which many black people face. She writes to educate White and Black society about the realities of Black experience" (Just an Igbo Woman, 6). At this point, we cannot say that we absolutely agree with Julie Holmes, for we establish in her works something not so clear-cut. She indeed makes a challenge for the dissipation of barriers to women's access to self-affirmation, but does not come so strongly as to go unchallenged as demonstrated in this thesis. Her handling of the black experience is also contestable, as it leans more towards an educative exercise for whites and not necessarily for blacks as Julie Holmes asserts. Our view is that any right thinking African might find Buchi Emecheta's handling of issues regarding Africa, Africans, Blacks and the Black experience, quite disagreeable.

Julie Holmes goes a step further to record a statement by Buchi Emecheta to the effect that as much as she works for the liberation of women, she is not a feminist. She says: "I am just a woman" (Just an Igbo Woman, 6). We may not want to delve into the polemics of trying to find out why Buchi Emecheta says this. Perhaps it is because of feminism's (confusing?) vastness. Whatever the case is, our concern at the moment is that the writer treats Africa and blackness with derision and, therefore, contradicts the very principles she is supposed to uphold.

4.6 Concluding Remarks

In concluding our discussion on alienation and the diaspora experience, we can note that Buchi Emecheta bestrides several continents including the Caribbean, Africa and Europe in her works. This provides her with a lot of experience with which she has been able to construct her characters and situations. This probably explains the serious contradictions that arise from the works under focus. We have cited, for example, a series of contradictions and apparent exaggerations in *The Joys of Motherhood* and cited the failure

of the main character, Nnu Ego, to get any fulfilment out of life as a distinguishing feature of the author's rendition of the situations in her works.

We assert that the author's depiction of Nnu Ego, for instance, is as stereotypical as it simply mimics the problems that women in Africa may face – with no solutions offered to them. It would appear that by doing this, Buchi Emecheta concedes to the fact that patriarchy as an ideology, cannot be easily dispensed with. What is necessary, it would appear, is a massive re-education of society to embrace a new way of life. Even this, unfortunately, is not clear. Eventually, she leaves us wondering what proposals she has for the achievement of gender-sensitive justice for black women and men in Africa and the African diaspora.

It is apparent then, that as a result of writing from the diaspora, Buchi Emecheta essentially creates alienating characters and situations in her works. As a result of her own personal dislocation from Nigeria and the African continent, the author creates characters caught in social and mental dilemmas. Some of these characters are rendered incapable of living self-fulfilling lives as a result of the confusion in their lives.

It is also apparent that Buchi Emecheta regards London as the epitome of hope for black women. Kehinde in *Kehinde* does not find fulfilment in Africa when she follows her husband from London. It is only when she goes back to London that she regains her sanity and drive to live a meaningful life. Her Lagos compatriot, Rike, even with her education, is depicted as an unhappy Nigerian, a victim in the hands of a scheming Albert Onwordi. London has the same effect to Debbie Ogedemgbe who, in *Destination Biafra*, is depicted as a London-educated visionary who apparently dwarfs all the men in her incisive role in the Biafran conflict.

That the characters are alienated from themselves, their families or their countries is also apparent. We have mentioned issues of split personalities and talked of individuals who are so confused to be seemingly unable to find a viable equilibrium by which to measure their choices. It is clear, then, that

writing from the diaspora has serious negative effects on the writings of Buchi Emecheta. The ideal is raised to the point of reality. It alienates the reader to realise that the world he or she delves into when reading Buchi Emecheta's works is interspersed with images that are as stereotypical as they are confusing. The author's successful women characters are those ones who have crossed over, both physically and ideologically, the cultural, community, and political boundaries that have created them.

The male and female characters are both typified and demonised. There is no equivocal message as to the author's vision of society. Education is portrayed as being insufficient for women in Africa as it does not enable them to influence their lives positively. What we see is men and women incessantly contradicting themselves and, therefore, becoming obstacles to the quest for justice.

Once more, it is apparent that patriarchy as an ideology is intractable and has to be blamed for limiting the socio-political and economic horizons for women in Africa and the African diaspora. We have also pointed at the racist connotations in regard to *Gwendolen*, when a white man turns up and gives her a new sense of self worth after she has a child by her father.

It is adequate to say that we have attempted to demonstrate that alienation arises as a result of the author striding several settings and attempting to capture the socio-cultural and political nuances from all of them. The works are, therefore, fraught with serious contradictions that make it difficult for justice to prosper.

In the next section, we highlight the major outcomes of our study and make overall conclusions about the quest for justice and the diaspora experience in Buchi Emecheta's fictional works. We also make a statement about the nature of Buchi Emecheta's quest and suggest areas of further study.

CONCLUSION

In our analysis of the quest for justice and the diaspora experience in Buchi Emecheta's fictional works, we have established that like other black writers in Africa and the African diaspora, she addresses the quest for justice as a key concern. The affirmation of justice is critical as a way of black people reclaiming the position in history in the face of colonisation and slavery. We have averred that the historical events of slavery and colonisation set a basis for the contemporary tilting of global relationships in favour of the West. It, therefore, became necessary for black writers in Africa and the diaspora to pay attention to the black experience. We have essentially found that at the global level, Buchi Emecheta handles issues affecting post-colonial Africa and the blacks in the diaspora. Poverty, neo-colonialism and the failure of leadership pre-occupy her in the fictional works set both in Nigeria, the Caribbean, and London.

In our study, we have established that the author constructs motherhood to be a very grave obstacle to the quest for justice. In her works, it is society's perception of motherhood that makes women like Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood* struggle to have children in order to be accepted. The quest for motherhood essentially blurs the vision of women characters so that they are unable to focus on the quest for justice and self-affirmation. They essentially end up submerging their individualities and discover only too late, like Nnu Ego, that the joys of motherhood are essentially not sufficient without the attendant joys of economic and political empowerment.

It is also clear that it is the patriarchal society that places too much emphasis on motherhood, to the detriment of women's attainment of their individual and communal potential. The undue emphasis placed on women's ability to give birth - and be mothers - limits their socio-economic and political horizons. Tradition makes men to treat the women in their lives in a condescending manner, thereby denying them the opportunity to make reproductive or productive choices. They are, therefore, only made to sustain unjust attitudes and practices towards women in their own lives as reflected in Nnu Ego's

decision to educate only her sons and teach the daughters to be small time traders and good wives. We assert that this contradicts the quest for justice.

In our discussion of motherhood and leadership we have determined that the failures in society are attributed to the men who are in control of the social, economic and political spheres of life. Guided by an apparently intractable patriarchal ideology, male characters are incessant obstacles to the quest for justice in all novels under review. In one case, men are either weak or ignominious individuals who are fated either to die or be relegated into the background of societal affairs. In another case, like in *Destination Biafra*, men are either aggressive and corrupt individuals whose selfishness leads to chaos in society, or greedy individuals who amass public wealth and thus impoverish the African State and engage in senseless war.

In effect, men are portrayed as individuals whose moral and spiritual shallowness causes them to obscure the attainment of justice by women, at personal and community level. This is seen in the example of Albert in *Kehinde*, Nnaife in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Uncle Johnny and Daddy Winston in *Gwendolen* and almost every male character in *Destination Biafra*. Manhood and masculinity become synonymous with all sorts of imaginable evil ranging from raping small children and women, plundering national economies, and engaging in a senselessly bloody war to boot.

We can thus affirm that Buchi Emecheta portrays all male characters negatively and some female characters positively. Therefore, to a large extent, she typifies male and female characters as either the epitome of oppression or the archetype of suffering. This, in our view, subverts the quest for justice. We become lost as to the nature of the author's quest. Portraying women as oppressed mothers, defiled children, enslaved girls, raped women, among others in such a consistent manner further alienates them from the reader and, in a way, subverts the course of justice, as it does not necessarily say anything about what should be done to enhance their position in society. We have essentially affirmed that the creation of stereotypes perpetuates the belief that blatant unkindness and lack of humane appreciation among women

and men is the order of the day in Africa or among black people anywhere in the world. This is essentially because this perspective hopelessly alienates women and men from each other.

In our study, we have established the influences of writing from the diaspora on Buchi Emecheta's fictional works. We have looked at the diaspora as both ideological and geographical. The geographical diaspora affects her ideological standpoint as it influences her choice of characters and situations. We have tried to link the author's own experiences as a black person in Europe, her experiences as a woman in the Nigerian context, and the larger issue of pro-Africanism and established that the quest for justice by Buchi Emecheta's characters is both positively and negatively influenced.

Writing from London enables the author to have a kaleidoscopic view of Africa and the African diaspora. She has the same view of women's issues and the principle of justice in society and is, therefore, able to enact situations in which these issues are handled. Writing from the diaspora enables Buchi Emecheta to provide us with an insight into the tribulations of black women in Africa and the African diaspora. From Nnu Ego and Ifeyinwa in *Ibusa*, Kehinde in London, Ojebeta in *The Slave Girl* and Gwendolen in a novel by the same name, it can be concluded that Buchi Emecheta enables us to see, in kaleidoscopic perspective, the way patriarchy affects women's lives.

The author is able to criss-cross different settings including London, the Caribbean and Africa. Her own experiences as a Londoner for most of her life strongly influence her perspectives. As an African who goes to London in her early 20s, she has imbibed the nuances of the West and added them to her childhood and teenage experiences in Nigeria. She is transported to a geographical setting where the ideology of masculinity or patriarchy apparently holds no remarkable sway. Women are as assertive as men and have a fair share of society's resources. She has apparently embraced a new liberating philosophy that is a direct result of her life in the diaspora. This enables her to create the same scenario for her characters.

In Buchi Emecheta's fictional works, the quest for justice is not achieved because the obstacles are apparently too enormous to override. The writer essentially uses both male and female stereotypes to communicate the message of women's liberation and the creation of a new society where opportunities for both women and men abound. We have questioned the efficacy of this stylistic rendition and contended that the author intentionally proposes that justice is only for women while men are left in the backyard, weak and dispensable. We assert that this sort of portrayal essentially contradicts and confuses the quest for justice and makes it an illusory endeavour.

We have established intense contradictions in the author's portrayal of characters and situations. In the first instance, it is only those characters that go to London who achieve some sort of self-affirmation and justice. The only successful women characters are those who step out of their environments and go to London. In our discussion, we illustrated our argument with the example of Kehinde, who decides to settle in London because she cannot achieve her potential, freedom and justice in Nigeria. She, like Gwendolen and Debbie Ogedemgbe, has to go to London in the quest for education, happiness, and justice. Those who come back to Nigeria, like Debbie Ogedemgbe, have to adjust considerably and apparently give up a little bit of their humanity in order to fit.

Those women characters remaining in Africa and the Caribbean are constantly struggling to survive and cannot seem to find meaning in their lives. They are portrayed as suffering immensely and, in essence, incapable of achieving anything substantial from life. Even education, as in the case of Rike in *Kehinde* is insufficient for the character to achieve personal satisfaction. Yet, Gwendolen, an illiterate girl in London is capable of enjoying life in the suburbs.

We have stated that Buchi Emecheta's works form an artistic continuum, which, unfortunately, reveal a consistency in the negative treatment of male characters, and a positive treatment of some women characters. This reflects

an inconsistency in the way issues of justice are treated by the author. We can also state that portrayal of characters with split identities does not grant them a clear vision. This essentially makes them to achieve no sense of self-fulfilment in life. The conflict in their identities arises because when they are in London, their black identities seem to be expressing themselves. Instead of the characters striving to fit within the London environment, for example, the influences of the patriarchal way of life in Africa and Jamaica seems to blur any such possibilities.

In our discussion, we looked at the example of Albert whose shifting identities incapacitate him from being a positive promoter of either justice or its quest. London seems to instil in him a new faith in the superiority of men while it reveals to his wife the possibilities of achieving personal potential, success and justice. This is contradictory as there are no clear landmarks to show us progress in the quest. We are constantly lost as there are too many blind corners and too many dead-ends.

We aver that as a result of her diaspora experience, Buchi Emecheta gives her characters attributes that can be described as untenable and unrealistic. We posit that there are serious issues of race, identity and the reality of African culture and experience, which the author surprisingly treats casually and thus, trivialises. By further portraying London as the epitome of hope, the author confirms that she has no clear vision of justice. The London solutions she proposes are impractical, as they cannot be of benefit to women like Nnu Ego, Ifeyinwa or Gwendolen's Grandma Naomi.

By further portraying men as the key perpetrators of injustice, Buchi Emecheta denies them the opportunity to be keen participants in the quest for justice. This presupposes that the quest for justice can only be left to women. The men are dispensed with as they engage in self-destructive behaviour as seen in the characters of Okolie (*The Slave Girl*), Nnaife (*The Joys of Motherhood*), Albert (*Kehinde*), Daddy Winston (*Gwendolen*) and Chijioke Abosi in *Destination Biafra*.

Suffice it to say that we have attempted to look at Buchi Emecheta's quest in the context of the diaspora experience and concluded that her portrayal of both women and men is infeasible. We can say that the diaspora experience, as seen in the choices made by characters, has more negative influences than positive ones. For a majority of women and men, the diaspora experience is depleting as it denies them the possibility of living meaningful lives. For Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood*, the fact that her sons go to America and Canada denies her the support and care she needs in her old age. For Albert, the diaspora is dis-empowering as it dislocates him from the familiar way of life in Nigeria and thereafter, makes him incapable of living a full life when he returns. For Kehinde, the diaspora is an eye-opener to the possibilities that are available to her. For Gwendolen, the diaspora is first a source of torment and then a leeway to freedom and happiness. The contradictions in the portrayals of characters are obvious.

It is our view that both women and men characters must come out and unequivocally foreground situations that push for the refusal of injustice at all levels. After all, it is apparent in Buchi Emecheta's works, masculinity as a patriarchal construct is not necessarily only a socio-cultural issue. It is an ideological construct. Otherwise, the exposure to an environment in which women play a more active role in family and public affairs, for instance, should have opened the male character's social and cultural eyes to the new socio-cultural realities that demand justice for both women and men.

We have basically established that in Buchi Emecheta's works, patriarchy as an ideology is intractable, at least in the character of the African man. Whether the men are dislocated from their traditionalist society or not, their perceptions as far as the women in their lives are concerned do not undergo change. Instead, the patriarchal ideology seems to go through some docile stagnation, awaiting the right environment to recur. In essence we aver that to Buchi Emecheta, justice is an unachievable ideal, as long as the male principle of patriarchy still holds sway.

Buchi Emecheta's works are thus befogged by too many ambiguities for us to declare that there is a composite view of justice for women and men in her works. The experiences of black people in Nigeria and Jamaica, and the way they live, are consistently depicted in negative light. By depicting these experiences in negative light, Buchi Emecheta succeeds in affirming racist perspectives against Africa and black people in the diaspora. This perspective ignores historical realities of inter-racial relationships both in Africa and the diaspora. Essentially then, we assert that Buchi Emecheta is not writing for an African audience, for the works have a condescending view of Africa. The writer also seems to regard all men as united in oppressing women, a view that could be regarded as highly contestable.

It is clear that Buchi Emecheta does not appreciate the socio-political and economic changes taking place in Africa, and that there is a considerable weakening of patriarchal structures in the African society. On the other hand, it is possible that she just ignores them. She seems to present the view that Africa is in some static socio-cultural limbo that is not responsive to the global changes taking place. Looking at the African society as hopelessly patriarchal, without recognizing the gains that have been made over the years, is, in our view, hopelessly myopic.

In our discussion of the contradictions we see in the author's presentations, we have insisted that the quest for justice and freedom cannot be propagated only for and by women. As a unit, the society requires a unifying principle that enables both women and men to enjoy the joys available there-in, so that it becomes possible for both the joys of motherhood and fatherhood to be real. We have further affirmed that the creation of both male and female stereotypes only creates unnecessary ambiguities. The quest for justice, we aver, cannot be predicated upon the presentation of negative characters and situations. We propose that the creation of positive characters, women and men, is more in tandem with the principle of justice.

To say that our study of *Kehinde*, *The Joys of Motherhood*, *Gwendolen* and *Destination Biafra* is entirely comprehensive would be an overstatement.

Indeed, there is much more that can be said about the quest for justice in Buchi Emecheta's works, and even about the diaspora and its influences. It would, for instance, be viable to have an in-depth study of how the language use reflects the influences of the diaspora on the author's works. It may also be necessary to determine whether there is any stage in Buchi Emecheta's fiction where she has a clearer vision of justice for women and men in Africa, and at what point this changes. One would also be interested in looking at the concept of rebuilding the shattered continent through women's eyes. One could even go further to identify the key aspects that women writers handle as an effort to further mainstream the study of women writers, comparing their concerns with those of male writers. In the final analysis, we can only say that Buchi Emecheta is a serious writer who deserves more scholarly attention by literary scholars in Africa and beyond.

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