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## ABSTRACT

Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood tells the story of Nnu Ego, a rural Igbo woman. Nnu Ego finds herself in Lagos, the urbanized capitol of Nigeria. Through the feminist lens, patriarchy is frequently considered to be a main factor at play in the oppression of women within both tribal and colonized countries. Similarly, postcolonial theory often focuses on capitalism and how a western sense of superiority wrongly affects the definition of self, particularly for people native to third world countries. Based on these findings, the majority of critics also argue about the extent to which Nnu Ego plays an integral part in her oppression and eventual downfall.

However, in regard to The Joys of Motherhood and in the case of Nnu Ego, certain factors are overlooked by such critics. Throughout the novel, Emecheta inserts evident contradictions that blur the lines between opportunity and victimization, making it difficult to judge Nnu Ego's character. These contradictions are evident in the portrayals of polygamy and economics within Lagos. There are also other criteria to consider. It is obvious that Nnu Ego at times plays a crucial role in her own oppression. Her disjointed reasoning and illogical faith in motherhood cause her to repeatedly make poor decisions. These poor decisions become evident causal factors for her demise. Yet, when her upbringing is taken into account and when other characters also show to be limited, the setting is brought into question as a key factor in her oppression.

There are also several operating forces at play within the novel that affect Nnu Ego in a way that make it difficult to critique her character. The degrading work force, World War II and the Christian concept of heaven play major roles in exacerbating her subjugation. These forces along with motherhood and the mentioned contradictions open

a window into Emecheta's intentions in writing such a limited character as Nnu Ego. When her second and somewhat autobiographical novel, Second Class Citizen, is considered, and the main character Adah is juxtaposed with Nnu Ego, a new platform to evaluate the character and Emecheta's purpose emerges. It becomes evident that Buchi Emecheta is purposely writing Nnu Ego as a limited character that plays a role in her own oppression while simultaneously relinquishing her of blame.

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Elizabeth Shannon Morgan and Richard Frank Holmes who have seen me through my education with complete financial and personal support. I also dedicate this thesis to my fiancé Lawrence Thomas Rouse for always encouraging me and for bringing me coffee in the wee hours of the night. Without these three people, I do not think this would have been possible.

## INTRODUCTION

One of Buchi Emecheta's most acclaimed novels is The Joys of Motherhood.

Published in 1979, the novel is about a traditional Igbo woman who in 1934 finds herself in colonial Lagos, Nigeria. The main character, Nnu Ego, battles with accepting the new culture, Lagos, without abandoning her native culture. Her Igbo background is a patriarchal one where marriage and having children are the most important goals for a woman. A sense of community is highly valued, and people are seen for what they can add to their compound. On the other hand, the culture of Lagos stresses money and individual success. Having many children in Lagos is not valued as it can cause financial burdens. Communities cease to exist as each person is not valued as part of a whole. Men compete for jobs and families compete for housing. Nnu Ego thus becomes trapped between two separate belief systems. Throughout her journey within these cultures she ultimately fails to cope with the changing environments. Due to her upbringing and the operating forces in Lagos, she proves to be a limited character lacking the tools needed to thrive.

Within this third person narrative, Emecheta portrays Nnu Ego's struggle through journeys within both cultures. Born of an Igbo chief, Agbadi, and his mistress, Ona, Nnu Ego has an unusual childhood. She is never forced or pressured into marriage like other girls in her village. Nonetheless, wanting desperately to be a mother, Nnu Ego fails at her first marriage with Amatokwu. After not becoming pregnant right away, she makes unwise decisions to breast feed and to contemplate stealing his second wife's baby. She is thus returned to Agbadi, who then returns the bride price to Amatokwu.

Next, Nnu Ego travels to Lagos with hopes of succeeding with her second

husband Nnaife. However, upon arrival Nnu Ego is disheartened with Nnaife and with what Lagos has to offer. Her struggle begins as she has many children and makes decisions that mold her life in the new modern world.

While in Lagos, she acquires a junior wife, Adaku, and fails at creating a bond with her. She makes poor decisions in regard to community, family, economics and most importantly, motherhood. These decisions ultimately send her down a road of loneliness and defeat. At the end of the novel and after approximately twenty years in Lagos, Nnu Ego dies alone in a ditch. She does not reap the benefits from motherhood that she hoped for over the years. Her poor decisions show to be a symptom of her displacement rather than mere personality traits.

There are many reasons Nnu Ego is denied her traditional rights as a mother while she is still alive. Critics disagree on the level of responsibility for which Nnu Ego should be held accountable and on the reasons Emecheta would write a limited character who repeatedly makes poor decisions. Critics, such as Laura Dubek, argue that Nnu Ego is simply a victim of patriarchal oppression. Dubek highlights the negative aspects of both Nnu Ego's Igbo background and the culture of capitalist Lagos. Salome Nnomorele, on the other hand, suggests that Nnu Ego is not an object of patriarchy, but plays a role in her own oppression. Yet another critic, Cynthia Ward, sees Nnu Ego as a character full of contradictory perspectives and thus doomed to fail. Therefore, Nnu Ego is triumphant or tragic depending on how one chooses to read the novel. She also is quite possibly meant to be a character full of flaws and limitations. Emecheta has reasons for creating such a woman and uses Nnu Ego's limited nature to prove a point.

Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo highlights a negative aspect of this method of character



development. Yes, Emecheta presents a character who fails to benefit from both her traditional culture and a more liberal modern society in which she finds herself. Ezeigbo suggests that in doing this Emecheta fails to portray the benefits of Nnu Ego's traditional society.

Emecheta is a committed writer who holds very strong views concerning the evils of patriarchal institutions and conventions that hold women down in Igbo society. Her justified attack on these evils can be very uncompromising, leading her to neglect to use her power as a creative artist also to highlight the positive aspects of tradition, the strengths, resilience and triumphs of women in traditional society as Nwapa. (160)

In The Joys of Motherhood Emecheta chooses not to highlight positive aspects in both cultures. She is just as uncompromising when it comes to Lagos as she is to Nnu Ego's Igbo life.

Because Nnu Ego fails in both her Igbo village and in Lagos, Emecheta implies that there is more than social and political oppression at play. It then becomes arguable that Nnu Ego's decisions play a major role in her life's outcome. In turn, her character cannot be overlooked as a determinant of her oppression. Obviously, this double sword is planted on purpose. It is Emecheta's choice to write such a character that needs to be examined along with how Nnu Ego arrives at a place where she is incapable of making wise decisions. It must be kept in mind that the decisions are made from the viewpoint of a limited character: a character lacking the tools to overcome her circumstances.

In contemplating the reasons behind Nnu Ego's limited character, it is helpful to consider other factors outside of the novel itself. Buchi Emecheta's second novel Second

Class Citizen, 1974, portrays a character almost the complete opposite of Nnu Ego, a character who overcomes various forces of oppression. Because the main character, Adah, is said to be based on Emecheta herself, the novel offers a window into how Emecheta views such issues as patriarchy, capitalism, and her native Igbo tradition. This along with other operating oppressive factors, illustrated in The Joys of Motherhood, will be examined to shed more light on exactly why and how Nnu Ego failed at life.

The first operating factor is Nnu Ego's second husband Nnaife and how a lack of an Igbo identity affects their marriage. The next factor is World War II and how it exacerbates Nnu Ego's and Nnaife's lack of education. Another factor is Christianity and the ways it fills Nnu Ego with false hope and complacency. Additionally, her chi or African life force, believed to be that of a slave woman, is an operating force that shapes her life negatively and is a bad influence on her decisions. The final force operating is the devastation of failed motherhood and how it robs Nnu Ego of the life she desired.

## NNU EGO IN IBUZA: THE BEGINNING

The main character, Nnu Ego, is no heroine. She is not the female character that Africans are meant to look up to and mold their lives after. Instead, she is limited in numerous ways causing her to make poor choices throughout the novel. At times, she appears to be completely incapable of making wise decisions, particularly when she finds herself in circumstances unheard of in her native culture. Other times she may come across as flawed and stubborn. However, these attributes are merely a symptom of what she is forced to face when both cultures become juxtaposed. To understand Nnu Ego as a weak character, it is crucial to examine her life in an Igbo village before she made her journey to Lagos and how her experiences there rob her of the tools needed to thrive in harsh urban conditions.

Ironically, the years Nnu Ego spends in her tribal home are a catalyst for her troubles in Lagos. From birth, Nnu Ego is given opportunities and choices that most Igbo women do not have. Born of Ona, a woman never allowed or wanting to marry, Nnu Ego could not have been more unlike her mother. Nnoromele illustrates Ona's unique womanhood when she writes,

Ona's idea of womanhood ran counter to the general notion that African women equate womanhood or selfhood with motherhood. [. . .] Ona wants Nnu Ego to be the master of her own fate, the subject of her actions rather than the object of other people's actions and decisions. (182)

At a time when women lived to serve their husbands and dreamed of being a senior wife, Ona exhibited individuality like that of a man picking his bride. Unfortunately, she died giving birth to Nnu Ego and never passed on those beliefs. However, she did leave

wishes behind to Agbadi to “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” (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 28). Agbadi carried out the request.

In weighing the sadness of Nnu Ego’s eventual reality, perhaps most disheartening is that she had a chance most women in her society did not. Being the daughter of Ona and the apple of Agbadi’s eye, she was given the choice of marrying or living a life similar to her mother’s. Not many fathers in Ibuza would tell their daughters, “Don’t worry, daughter. If you find life unbearable, you can always come here to live” (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 33). This opportunity, however, runs counter to what Nnu Ego so desperately wants. She does not want to be like her mother and this is precisely the problem. Emecheta’s portrayal of Ona helps to shape Nnu Ego’s negative view of her mother.

Though Ona is a revered woman in the Igbo community by men, Emecheta attempts to paint Ona’s life as miserable having been robbed of the right to marry. Because of her “freedom” to remain unwed, other women in the village view her as wild and choose not to befriend her. In her book Lessons of Solidarity: Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Ba on Female Victimizers, Laura Dubek agrees with Emecheta’s portrayal when she writes, “In The Joys of Motherhood Emecheta’s portrait of Ona highlights the negative aspects of traditional Igbo culture for women, suggesting that the principle of ‘male daughter’ denies women independence and personal happiness by alienating them from other women” (207). It is this viewpoint that limits Nnu Ego. Because of her mother’s role as a male daughter, Nnu Ego finds it even more important to marry. From the time she was a young girl, Nnu Ego expresses the strong desire to wed and begin

having children. She does not realize the positive aspects that could be associated with being a “male” daughter.

Little does Nnu Ego know that marriage is ultimately what oppresses her. While Dubek and Emecheta suggest that being denied marriage robs a woman of happiness, in Nnu Ego’s case marriage never grants her independence, happiness, or the friendship of other women. In contrast, marriage causes Nnu Ego to become further bound to male dominance. Emecheta, through the character of Ona, thus places Nnu Ego in a precarious situation from birth. Nnu Ego is raised believing that without marriage, she will not fit in with her fellow community, as Ona did not fit in. Her mother is presented as a victim and therefore a background to Nnu Ego’s oppression while simultaneously presented as an exception to the harsh expectations put upon women. Nnu Ego quickly learns that marriage is a no win situation.

To make matters worse, because her mother died at her birth, Nnu Ego lacks a female role model to teach her how to cope with the demands of marriage. Even more unfortunate, had Ona lived she would have been incapable of this since she never was a wife. Having never been shown a functioning example of marriage, Nnu Ego enters the adult world disillusioned and accepts the belief that a husband and child will fix everything. When things go awry, she is lacking the tool that an example of a positive marriage could have given her. She has no mother to turn to and no memory of a marriage between her parents. Her influences are strictly derived from her desires.

Another factor that presents itself early on and limits Nnu Ego is her chi. Many critics of The Joys of Motherhood put prevalence on Nnu Ego’s chi as a condition of her struggle. In Igbo culture a person’s chi is essentially his or her life force, more

specifically the life force of the Igbo people. In Nnu Ego's case her chi is believed by herself and others to be that of a slave woman who dies at her father's hands. When the slave woman is forced to be buried alive as a sacrifice, she resists. She is then violently struck on the head and falls into the grave where she perishes. Nnu Ego can never escape her chi's curse which she believes causes her first failure at marriage and procreation. She feels this interconnectedness with the dead slave perhaps because both find themselves in similar predicaments. The slave woman is bound to her master in the same way Nnu Ego is bound to her belief in motherhood. Both of their metaphorical prisons lead to death in the end.

There are two ways to view the concept of chi in this novel. Nnu Ego is far from a slave yet she personally relates to one. Some would argue the parallel Emecheta draws between Nnu Ego and a slave illustrates that regardless of class the female subject must deal with oppression. "Chi is a central point in the psychology, thought and belief of the Igbo. People recognize it as being responsible for their wealth and prosperity, life and health, success, failure, and for all their fortunes and misfortunes. In general, the Igbo consider Chi as the sole controller of their life affairs" (Qnukawa 108). It appears in the novel that Nnu Ego does in fact consider her chi to be in control of her life. The belief that Nnu Ego's chi is cursed limits her character even more. Due to this belief, Nnu Ego becomes trapped into thinking she will never escape her plight and at times relinquishes any attempts. "'O my chi, why do you have to bring me so low? Why must I be punished? I am sorry for what my father did and I am sure he is sorry too. But try to forgive us.' Many a night she cried tears of frustration and hopelessness" (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 32). This portrayal places her chi as a valid reason for her troubles.

On the other hand, Afam Ebeogu intimates that Emecheta uses the concept of chi in order to create a scapegoat for Nnu Ego. In Enter the Iconoclast: Buchi Emecheta and the Igbo Culture, Ebeogu illustrates what Qnukawa fails to mention:

This exercise at hypothetical make-belief then enables the author to attribute the 'catalogue' of disasters that confronts Nnu Ego in life to the misfortunes of her so-called chi who was once human. Despite this obvious ignorance concerning the cosmological import of chi in Igbo thought, Buchi Emecheta depicts Nnu Ego quite well as a character. As a matter of fact, this ignorance or deliberate misinterpretation by the author enables her to bestow her heroine with immense tragic dimension for her chi bears responsibility for the sense of fatality which pervades the novel.

(92)

Accepting that Nnu Ego's chi has cursed her only stands to add to the tragedy facing Nnu Ego. It fails to place Nnu Ego in a position to thrive if she is after all not the sole controller of her life. Is the lack of historical accuracy a mishap or does Emecheta desire for the reader to see Nnu Ego not as a full character? Full characters map their lives by making their own decisions. In this way, one can view Nnu Ego both as a tragic heroine who merely copes with her victimization and as a stubborn woman contributing to her demise.

However, because Buchi Emecheta is herself an Igbo woman, it is highly doubtful that she would choose to embellish the concept of chi in order to further victimize her character. The importance lies in the extent to which her chi detrimentally affects Nnu Ego. Whether the curse of the chi is accurate or not, the character nonetheless suffers

because of it. In this way, Emecheta succeeds in demonstrating how Nnu Ego's traditional beliefs stifle her. Beginning her existence with the spirit of a murdered slave is a precursor to a miserable life. It only matters that Nnu Ego invests in this belief.

An additional circumstance that further limits Nnu Ego is her first marriage to Amatokwu. He is paramount in shaping her mindset before she leaves for Lagos. His mistreatment of her increases her desire to please others by having a male son. It appears that the relationship Nnu Ego has with Amatokwu contributes to her later downfall by crushing what little identity she has while still in her Igbo home.

First she is unable to produce a child for her first husband, so he takes a second wife and places Nnu Ego on the farm. Amatokwu tells her,

I am a busy man. I have no time to waste my precious seed on a woman who is infertile. I have to raise children for my line. If you really want to know, you don't appeal to me anymore. You are so dry and jumpy. When a man comes to a woman-he wants to be cooled, not scratched by a nervy female who is all bones. [. . .] But now if you can't produce sons, at least you can help harvest yams. (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 32)

Here, Emecheta sets the stage for Nnu Ego's first devastating decision in the novel. The decision involves Amatokwu's second wife. Nnu Ego decides to secretly breast feed the second wife's baby. So lost without one for herself, she even contemplates stealing the baby, all the while blaming her spirit chi. "She ran to the effigy of her chi and cried once more: 'Why don't you let me have my own children? Look, I am full of milk. [. . .] Why are you so wicked to me?'" (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 34). Eventually she faces the consequences of her actions when Amatokwu catches her and beats her. This



forces her to return to her father's compound where Agbadi must return the bride price. "And they all agreed that a woman without a child for her husband was a failed woman" (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 62). This is a critical point in the novel where Nnu Ego first sees the harsh reality of her identity: she is nothing without a child for her husband. This crippling belief follows her to Lagos and eventually leads to her death. Like her chi, this incident could be viewed more than one way.

Technically, the occurrence of Nnu Ego being made to work on the farm is not out of the norm within the Igbo culture. Without knowledge of the Igbo culture, a reader of The Joys of Motherhood would not be aware of the choices and freedoms Nnu Ego could have had but was denied. "Women were allowed self expression and this was very crucial in determining their position," states Theodora Ezeigbo, "for they could voice out their grievances and even take action when necessary to safeguard their rights when infringement on the part of the men" (151). Nevertheless, Nnu Ego does not possess self expression or have a relationship with the second wife or other women within the compound that would enable her to speak out. This set up might work well for a senior wife who possesses a strong relationship with the other wives. Nnu Ego does not have this status as senior wife, a mother to give her advice, or women friends from childhood. Having been a child born out of wedlock, Nnu Ego never had friends growing up. She is already at a disadvantage when entering into her first marriage.

Ultimately, it shouldn't matter whether patriarchal oppression or Nnu Ego's character is to blame for her unstable outlook going into Lagos. While many of her poor decisions stem from character traits like stubbornness and low self esteem, it is her traditional background that forms those traits. Her lack of a relationship with her mother,

the belief in her condemned chi, and her marriage to Amatokwu set the stage for her life in Lagos. Each experience chips away at her identity until there is nothing left for her to rely on but motherhood. Therefore, she enters Lagos fragmented and lacking the strong sense of self needed to survive in a new environment within a different culture.

Unfortunately, once she is in Lagos she finds herself emerged in many contradictions that exacerbate the problems and cause her illogical faith in motherhood to grow.

## CONTRADICTIONS THAT LIMIT NNU EGO

Nnu Ego dwells within a paradox. Just when something appears to be of benefit, such as the opportunity for personal financial gain, the consequences become all too clear. To assimilate would mean losing her sacred placement as the traditional Igbo woman Emecheta portrays. There are several contradictions in culture and beliefs that cage Nnu Ego while she is in Lagos. For example, the differences in polygamy in Iboza versus Lagos are startling and stifle any benefit Nnu Ego could reap from the tradition. Also, money and the rules of economics take on a new meaning: one that Nnu Ego struggles to understand and master. Within these two realms of contradiction, Nnu Ego makes devastating decisions that hurt her life. While having to make journeys through two varying cultures limits Nnu Ego enough, their contradictions within these limit her even further.

Some would argue that since Nnu Ego makes poor decisions in both cultures the setting becomes less relevant than her character. It could be interpreted that she is given the liberty to pick and choose which values to honor, and she continually chooses the wrong ones. However, it is undeniable that these contradictions place Nnu Ego at a disadvantage and further limit her abilities to cope with her changing environment. This emphasis on character unfairly puts Nnu Ego further under the microscope.

Why would Emecheta choose to include such contradictions in the novel? By her interjecting these contradictory view points, the reader gets the impression that life in Iboza and Lagos was malleable. It then becomes difficult to discern what is realistic and what is meant to be ironic. Consequently, a character convoluted with twisted perspectives is more difficult to judge. Cynthia Ward sheds more light on this notion

when she writes,

Most of Emecheta's critics agree that the novel is highly ironic, yet they disagree how to interpret the irony. Most of her critics also agree that 'The Mother,' Nnu Ego, is caught between the 'traditional' world and the 'modern' world, yet they disagree about what constitutes the values and the imperatives of each world. (92)

Perhaps Emecheta purposefully creates ambiguity.

One constant in both *Ibuza* and *Lagos* is the presence of polygamy; women and men favor it. Unluckily, the presence of polygamy in *Lagos* tends to strip Nnu Ego of its intended benefits. Within the western mentality, polygamy is seen as an oppressive institution. "While polygamy was not a perfect marital agreement," Teresa Derrickson illustrates, "it was well suited to the agrarian lifestyle of the Igbo people and contained several built-in mechanisms that allowed women to better cope with the burdens of that type of lifestyle" (44). Polygamy allowed for a system of checks and balances. Women could form a conglomerate to exercise power over the husband by ensuring equality in workloads and sufficient food supplies. Unfortunately, Nnu Ego does not experience the sense of camaraderie among women that comes with polygamy because she views the other women in *Lagos* as competition. This view of other women is not necessarily her fault since she was a bastard child who lacked friendships and as a young woman lacked kinship with other women in her tribe.

Within the first few years of Nnu Ego's stay in *Lagos*, she is expected to provide financially for the family where Nnaife cannot. "She had to work. She provided the food from her husband's meager housekeeping money, but finding money for clothes, for any

kind of comforts, in some cases the children's school fees, was on her shoulders” (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 53). Because of the hard work and pain, it would seem that Nnu Ego would welcome a second wife for Nnaife. Instead, her responsibility in Lagos strengthens her stubbornness and self worth. This is not her fault. Having never been successful in her life, especially in her village home, Nnu Ego is bestowed a sense of accomplishment that most men experience when providing for the family. Suddenly, with the introduction of a second wife, she stands to lose this nobility.

Even though the status of senior wife is something to be revered within her Igbo culture, she views polygamy in Lagos as something that will take away from her status in the Owulum family. Here lies a contradictory view of polygamy. Teresa Derrickson shows that polygamy stood to offer nothing to Nnu Ego in Lagos.

This shift does not go unnoticed for Nnu Ego, who on more than one occasion questions the motives of patriarchy that insists on using such a title despite its irrelevance outside the tribal sphere. [. . .] In urban Nigeria, however, where financial hardship places a space at a premium and where the newly imported capitalist ideology of the nuclear family enforces cohabitation of spouses, Nnu Ego is left without these rewards. Her predicament as a woman is exacerbated therefore, by the fact that the capitalist system she now lives under still requires her to play the role of responsible senior wife without offering her the small privileges and benefits that once accompanied that role under the former tribal sphere.

(47)

Nnu Ego is also well aware of this paradox.

Nnu Ego stared at her [Adaku]. She had so lost contact with her people that the voice of this person addressing her as ‘senior wife’ made her feel not only old but completely out of touch, as if she was an outcast. She resented it. It was one thing to be thus addressed in Ibuza, where people gained a great deal by seniority; here in Lagos, though the same belief still held, it was to a different degree. (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 118)

Once again possible differing viewpoints lie. Regardless of the harsh reality of financial hardship and the nontraditional cohabitating of spouses, there are many ways in which Nnu Ego could have improved her lot by accepting the second wife, Adaku. Adaku attempted to offer solace and friendship. She also possessed a knack for trading and brought money into the household. Derrickson does not address the possible power of female solidarity present in polygamy within the urban setting of Lagos. This facet of polygamy is relevant outside the tribal sphere. It is illogical to think that Nnu Ego rejected Adaku simply because she thought she would not reap the benefits of being a senior wife while in Lagos.

Where two women find themselves away from home and within a new culture, what could offer more solace than power in numbers? Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo states in her article titled, “Traditional Women’s Institutions in Igbo Society: Implications for the Igbo Female Writer,” “It is striking to note that Igbo men did not have the same kind of network of associations and sex solidarity which enabled the women to mobilize across boundaries into a united body” (150). It was the men who had to worry about one another as they were competition for money and jobs. A more probable reason for Nnu Ego’s

disharmony with Adaku is jealousy. Nnu Ego discriminated against Nnaife because he lacked physical prowess and good looks, and she discriminated against Adaku for just the opposite, her beauty.

To Nnu Ego's eyes, she [Adaku] was enviably attractive, young looking, and comfortably plump with the kind of roundness that really suited a woman. This woman radiated peace and satisfaction. [. . .] Nnu Ego felt that she could be bowing to this perfect creature--she who had once been acclaimed the most beautiful woman ever seen. [. . .] Jealously, fear and anger seized Nnu Ego in turns. She hated this type of woman, who would flatter a man, depend on him. [. . .] Now there was this new threat.

(Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 118)

Nnu Ego's view of Adaku shatters any collective empowerment the two women could have had. Adaku never stood a chance. Nnu Ego never realizes that by competing with Adaku, she places more power into the hands of Nnaife thereby facilitating her own misery. "For critics who insist on seeing African women solely as victims of patriarchal agencies," argues Salome Nnoromele, "it is possible to dismiss the role of African women as agents for communal support and female survival in their communities and to see them as agents for promoting and advancing female oppression" (184). In the end, Nnu Ego advances both Adaku's and her oppression.

The question is why and how this takes place. What is the point of creating a jealous character that fails rather than a strong heroine? For one, jealousy is a very human quality present in people regardless of background and culture. The extenuating factor of Nnu Ego's jealous nature is that it stems from her fears of rejection: rejection she has

experienced while in her native home. She apparently feels threatened and is desperately attempting to preserve her placement in the Owulum family.

Emecheta presents a character that disconnects from the very things that lend support and simultaneously attaches to what is oppressing her. Someone with this nature is obviously lost. Nnu Ego is so determined to be a successful wife and mother that anything standing in her way must be destroyed. Emecheta insinuates that just because a woman is raised in Igbo tradition does not mean that she will grasp and be able to use what little tools that background may provide. Here is a character not even capable of accepting help because everyone is viewed as a threat. This limits Nnu Ego by denying her the benefit of a potential friend in her junior wife.

Though polygamy, however varying, is a constant in both cultures, economics is not. The differences in economics between Igbo village life and life in Lagos pose many confusions for Nnu Ego. Traditionally, Igbo women make their money through farming and selling their product in the open market. This method is easy for Igbo women because the land is abundant and the community is supportive. In Lagos, women are forced to become more independent entrepreneurs who lack the support of their community and are faced with selling products they know nothing about, such as cigarettes and paraffin.

In this arena, Nnu Ego makes many poor decisions. Even though she is new to the concepts of finance and making money, Nnu Ego's failure cannot be strictly attributed to her new setting. Her problem is that she shapes her idea of money on circumstantial events. One example relates to her first born son, Ngozi. After realizing the harsh life of poverty that she and Nnaife are headed for, she begins a life of petty trading in the city



market. When she becomes pregnant and even once Ngozi is born, she continues to make her way down to the market to trade. When Ngozi is a few months old, Nnu Ego finds him “stone dead” on his mat. (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 55). She blames herself for his death thinking her pursuit of money is what killed him. Basing her view of money on this one incident, Nnu Ego continues, throughout the novel, to see money as an enemy of motherhood.

With motherhood being her largest goal in life, money takes the backseat to everything else. “She had reminded herself of the old saying that money and children don’t go together: if you spend all your time making money and getting rich, the gods wouldn’t give you any children; if you wanted children, you had to forget money and be content to be poor” (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 80). It is these kinds of generalizations that keep Nnu Ego in a life of poverty. She believes motherhood is her only ticket out of misery.

When it comes to the belief that children and money do not go together, she refuses to see that this is illogical in Lagos and not conducive to survival. She rejects tradition with regard to polygamy while simultaneously embracing it with regard to motherhood. While capitalism and her faith in motherhood may be a catalyst to her unwise decisions regarding money, it is her lack of willingness to change that causes her to descend further into poverty.

Except, can she be liable? While this stubbornness appears to be a character trait rather than a condition of her surroundings, it is her environment that has unfairly molded her into this different woman. In her Igbo home she would never have to choose between poverty or children. Children, particularly male, are seen as great assets, almost equal to

money. It only makes sense that losing her first son would greatly alter her view of capitalism. Her wavering positions appear to mimic the very setting she finds herself in. Emecheta uses this wavering to stress the presence of motherhood and Nnu Ego's unfaltering faith in it. Motherhood is perhaps the only constant in the novel.

Because Emecheta presents Nnu Ego as a round character, her unwise decisions and her character traits are engaging. Round characters by definition are often capable of change. In "Enter the Iconoclast: Buchi Emecheta and the Igbo Culture," Afam Ebeogu maintains that Emecheta makes clear choices in how she manipulates the main character Nnu Ego.

Characters are no longer thrust on the reader ready-made. Most characters are individuated people who have found themselves in a world of uncertainty and who must make choices at every change of their lives in the society. Characters become agents of their fate rather than just the victims (90).

In The Joys of Motherhood, Emecheta creates a character that can either be viewed as a victim or as flawed, but not as heroic. As Ebeogu suggests, Nnu Ego must make important choices. The problem is that she makes the wrong ones. Emecheta, therefore, creates a character who is not an admirable agent of her own fate.

In addition, Nnu Ego lacks the desire to change. Throughout the novel, her frustrations with life in Lagos do not seem to solicit anything more than complaints and grievance. Additionally, it is not that Nnu Ego is unaware of the changing demands. She willingly chooses to resist in order to receive the future benefits of her motherhood. The following excerpt lends an example of Nnu Ego's clarity on the matter while she is

speaking with Adaku.

This woman knows a thing or two, she thought. So independent in her way of thinking. Was it because Adaku came from a low family where people were not tied to pleasing the rest of their members, as she Nnu Ego had to please her titled father Agbadi all the time? She sighed and remarked aloud, 'You are right. The trouble with me is that I find it difficult to change.' (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 127)

This self proclamation proves that Nnu Ego is aware of her naiveté and is actually choosing her behaviors. It becomes clear that her patriarchal upbringing, the strains of capitalism, and her tie to tradition are not the sole factors in her plight. However, her character is also not completely to blame. Instead, the combination of her troubled background and the strains put upon her by living in two contrasting cultures create a limited character incapable of thriving.

It is unfair to simply blame Nnu Ego as if she were in complete control of her fate. She is not. The journey through both cultures present her with unfair contradictions: contradictions that blur what is real and what is expected of her. Even more so, her past struggles in Ibuza left her fragmented and doubting her culture upon arrival in Lagos. Both polygamy and money now mean nothing to her.

When it comes to economics, motherhood is seen as a type of currency for Nnu Ego. She has been ingrained since birth to believe that providing a male child for one's husband is the ultimate female accomplishment. She fails at this in her home village and then loses a male son within her first year in Lagos. This affects her ability to make clear decisions when it comes to money in Lagos. She loses her ability to make practical

decisions as everything becomes connected to motherhood. With everything riding on being a mother, she cannot afford to think in revolutionary terms. Tragically, her character is damaged to the extent that she is incapable of coping productively in her new environment. Additionally, there are several operating forces at play that prove to greatly affect and change Nnu Ego's personality and her ability to cope with her changing environments. She soon finds herself in a web of circumstances beyond the issues of polygamy and economics. These circumstances will prove to further limit her as a character and will continue to rob her of the tools she needs in order to deal with her changing world.

## OPERATING FORCES AND ISSUES OF MOTHERHOOD

While Nnu Ego makes many bad choices, many forces operate around her that determine her fate. One force is the type of work that Nnaife, her second husband, finds he must do: washing the clothes of a white family. Another force is the Second World War and how it distances her from Nnaife and causes her oldest son, Oshia, to resent her. The last force is Christianity and the ways in which it causes Nnu Ego to become complacent through false hope. In addition to these, Nnu Ego's unwavering commitment to motherhood poses many problems. As her social environment stifles her, she becomes further fixated on her desire to become a mother and this shows to haunt her throughout her life.

The transfer from a tribal model to a capitalist system is another cause of the character's collapse. Unfortunately for Nnu Ego, this means a double injustice. Not only does she deal with the patriarchal oppressive nature of her Igbo tradition but once in Lagos she must also cope with the problems that stem from the capitalist environment. The first trouble she encounters is in regard to her husband's form of work. The lack of physical labor has left him out of shape and disconnected from the quintessential Igbo man.

Nnu Ego was just falling asleep when in walked a man with a belly like a pregnant cow. His hair, unlike that of men at home in Ibuza, was not closely shaved; he left a lot of it on his head, like that of a woman. His skin was pale, the skin of someone who had for along time worked in the shade and not in the open air. If her husband-to-be was like this, she thought, she would go back to her father. (Emecheta, The Joys of

### Motherhood 42)

This immediately makes Nnu Ego reluctant to love Nnaife or trust him. She is repulsed by the knowledge of his job and does not consider him to be a real man. In reality, Nnaife does what is expected of him in order to support his new bride, and in Lagos jobs like his are coveted.

This rift between the couple greatly breaks down any solidarity the two could have had. Nnu Ego carries with her the belief that Nnaife is not good enough and she never grows to truly respect him. The two never operate as a team. While Nnaife's perspective changes, Nnu Ego's does not. The two become isolated as their fate is out of their control. In the capitalist society a person works to provide a service or to sell someone's product. Rather than gaining concrete benefits as in farming, Nnaife has nothing to show for his work and at any time could lose his job. It is only natural that Nnu Ego should be turned off by him. However, she fails to realize the dangers this poses for her family.

A second detrimental force is the Second World War. It enters into Nnu Ego's life in a way that is unforgiving and difficult for her to understand. After losing his job working for the white man, Nnaife begins to get closer to his Igbo roots doing physical work on the railroad; his body becoming toned, there appears to be a glimmer of hope that love will occur between the two. This temporary good time is cut short when Nnaife is kidnapped and forced to participate as a soldier in the Second World War supporting the British. This circumstance affects Nnu Ego for years to come.

Nnaife is naïve about what he thinks are benefits of being a soldier. He tells Nnu Ego that the army would pay him more money than his job on the railroad.

He was told that the large sum of twenty pounds would be paid to her, and that she would be sent similar amounts from time to time. More importantly, they [Owulum family] were told, when they returned they would all be promoted in their places of work. Nnaife, for example, would move into the workshop and be apprenticed to a trade, on a higher income. This was a chance to pull their families out of the kind of life they had been living. (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 146)

Nnaife does not consider that he may be killed, leaving Nnu Ego with nothing. He seems to have a blind faith in the very culture that subjugates his people. In reality, the money does not arrive at regular intervals. In fact, Nnu Ego goes without money for so long that her children almost die of malnutrition. As will be shown, this negatively affects her relationship with Oshia, her eldest son.

The war also brings out the dangers of having no education. Nnu Ego is illiterate. When she receives word from the army about getting her money, she only knows to pick it up because her friend, Abbey, reads the letter for her and accompanies her to the army barracks. The war simultaneously highlights Nnaife's illiteracy which also causes problems for Nnu Ego. Because he can barely write, there is no communication between the husband and wife. While other men in the army wrote home, Nnaife does not because this would mean asking for help from other soldiers. This inability for the couple to communicate makes their rift even larger:

He had signed the form for part of his income to go to Nnu Ego, and when he had come back on leave that time he had made sure the money would not go to Adaku in Lagos. Little did he know that the whole thing had

become confused from that time. Nnu Ego was now in Lagos with the children but with no money. [. . .] Nnu Ego was left with dying hopes and demanding children. (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 172)

Nnaife's being away at war also began the wedge between Oshia, the first son, and his mother. Oshia resents his mother for his father's absence and admires his father. The first time Oshia sees the money Nnaife sends home, he comes to think that only Nnaife provides for him or cares about his well-being. After all, until that point, he is told he has to stop going to school and at times goes hungry. When his father sends money, he returns to school and is fed. A few years later when Oshia demands to go to a grammar school called Hussey College, Nnu Ego says that he would need a scholarship. Nnaife encourages the belief that his mother did not look out for his best interests:

'Why did you not win a scholarship like other boys?' Nnu Ego demanded.

'Only a few people win scholarships, and they have to be very clever.'

'Then why aren't you clever?' retorted Nnaife. 'Maybe if I had a peaceful childhood, and not had to spend my young days selling paraffin and carrying firewood--'. [. . .] Nnaife laughed and said, 'You answer your father back, eh, son? Well, maybe if your mother was not so keen on getting money, maybe you would have won a scholarship. I had to go and fight. I did not choose to go.' (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 185)

In actuality, Nnu Ego spends almost all her money on Oshia's education. Sometimes she even does so privately and lets others believe that it was Nnaife's money to save his pride. It is because of the war that the Owulum family struggles and Oshia is made to work. Nnaife's absence and his discrediting Nnu Ego leads to Oshia's decision to not



support his mother in her old age.

The last and perhaps strongest force operating against Nnu Ego is Christianity. In the novel, Christianity is shown as yet another form of oppression. Nnu Ego uses it to refer to her willingness to live meagerly and to her faith in the future. She adopts an attitude of being saved by her children much the same way a Christian is saved by Christ. Perhaps it is also an out from the cinching hold her chi has on her. Sadly, Nnu Ego is not educated with regard to the religion and subscribes more to the fanciful hopes. She is not herself a Christian nor does she practice Christianity. However, she does share in the faith of heaven, along with other women in her community. Understanding the values of Christianity did not matter to her as much as believing in the redeeming qualities of heaven. This faith allows her to become dangerously content in her life:

Nnu Ego was like those not-so-well-informed Christians who, promised the Kingdom of Heaven, believed that it was literally just around the corner and that Jesus Christ was coming on the very morrow. Many of them would hardly contribute anything to this world, reasoning, 'What's the use? Christ will come soon.' (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 162)

In this way Christianity is yet another way the colonial government controls the thinking of its inhabitants. This way, Nnu Ego becomes more likely to accept her lot and merely hold strong in her faith. Christianity gives her yet another false hope for her future. She now answers to her illogical faith in motherhood, her chi, and to a religion that she will never fully understand.

Christianity is also used as a means to keep people like Nnaife in horrible jobs.

Nnaife is aware of his boss, Dr. Meers', religious faith and knows that he has to exhibit the same beliefs in order to keep his job. "If I do not marry you in a church they will remove our names from the church register and Madam here will not like it. I may even lose my job" (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 50). With the majority of the British population at that time being Christian, what is a man like Nnaife to do? He has no option but to convert. All of this disconnects the family from any tribal customs and thereby thrusts them into an unknown world where they are completely removed from everything they once relied on.

These three tragic operating forces that may appear to bring monetary or religious comfort in truth are just as destructive, if not more harmful than the patriarchal society Nnu Ego is trying to flee. Demeaning jobs and alienation resulting from WWII along with a superficial sense of God leave her husband in no condition to care for his family in the accepted Igbo fashion. Combined with Nnu Ego's limitless faith in motherhood, these forces gain strength and are the final straws that cause a life of failure for both Nnu Ego and Nnaife. However, her faith in motherhood will possibly show to be an even greater factor in her demise. Nnu Ego's lack of coping skills are most evident in her suicide attempt and in her treatment of and faith in Oshia.

First, it is important to assess the meaning of motherhood to an Igbo woman. Nnu Ego believes that a woman's glory is in direct correlation to how she contributes to her husband's name. She believes that a woman who is fertile is seen as a commodity because she is a means for her husband to express his virility and role in the community. For her, all a woman stands to gain from motherhood is the comfort of knowing she will be cared for by her children and community in her old age. Nnu Ego also succumbs to a

belief that only sons are assets to the Igbo society. The author Ogbaa, however, describes a different perspective when he writes:

In spite of their society being patriarchal, the Igbo believe in complementary dualism. [. . .] In the same manner, a woman can give birth to a child because she is made pregnant by a man; and the man cannot have children unless the woman is able and willing to bear them. [. . .] Women also play most of the roles that men play in all aspects of Igbo life. Whereas men serve as priests of Igbo goddesses, women serve as priestesses of Igbo gods. [. . .] Women also play the roles of diviners and healers. In those roles, they frequently serve as midwives and pediatricians. (14-28)

Because Nnu Ego so readily accepts a belief different from Ogbaa's description, she loses all self-identity outside of what she accepts to be her role as a woman. As will be seen, Nnu Ego never assumes the role of midwife or pediatrician. She never dares to dream of those standards for herself. Instead, she becomes complacent within a stifling self image. In this way, motherhood becomes her prison. Emecheta's portrayal of motherhood is one that doesn't provide prestige or comfort but rather one that continues to rob Nnu Ego of tools to cope with her new colonial surroundings.

A critical point that demonstrates Nnu Ego's self worth being dependent upon motherhood is her suicide attempt while living in Lagos. With the suicide attempt Nnu Ego makes herself vulnerable to ridicule and furthers her own lack of self worth. Even though the suicide attempt does not happen until later in Nnu Ego's life, Emecheta places it in the beginning scene of the first chapter. By opening with Nnu Ego's attempt at

suicide caused by the death of her infant boy, the reader is immediately placed inside the mind of a woman so obviously subjected to the patriarchal system of motherhood that she defines herself by it.

It is necessary to consider Nnu Ego's motives behind the attempt. It never appears in the novel that she tries to kill herself because of the love for her baby and the pain of his death. Rather it seems her attempted suicide is the result of fear that her baby's death will cause her life to be a complete failure. What does this say about the society in which Nnu Ego lives? Motherhood is no longer about the love of a baby and the desire to nurture but is about status. This offers a window into how life is for Nnu Ego. Her personal desires are continually brushed aside in an effort to remain the traditional Igbo woman she thinks everyone wants her to be.

Nnu Ego's suicide attempt also goes against Igbo tradition and is therefore indicative of her feeling that she is not a worthy component of her community. While Nnu Ego is preparing to jump from the bridge to her death, Nwakusor, a friend, is trying desperately to save her. Close to giving up he contemplates, "However a thing like that is not permitted in Nigeria; you are simply not allowed to commit suicide in peace, because everyone is responsible for the other person. Foreigners may call us a nation of busy bodies, but to us, an individual's life belongs to the community and not just to him or her" (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 60). She has lost her sense of identity. She feels that if she cannot provide for her community by producing a male child, then she must no longer be a viable part of that community.

After her attempted suicide, she falls into a deep depression. It is not until she receives a visit from an old Igbo friend, Ato, that she is able to snap out of her obsessive

bereavement. Ato takes one look at Nnu Ego and says to her,

Please take that lost look from your face. If you wear a look like that for long, do you realize what people are going to say? They are going to say, 'You know the beautiful daughter of Agbadi, the one his mistress had for him, the one who had a woman slave as her chi, the one who tried to steal her mate's child, the one who tried to kill herself and failed on purpose so as to get sympathy--well she is now completely mad.' You know our people, you would never live it down. All your many sisters would find no husbands, because it would be said that madness runs in the blood. Do you want all that to befall your people? (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 74)

In this message, Ato outlines Nnu Ego's bad decisions and reveals Nnu Ego was driven to suicide in the first place by the fear of a tarnished reputation. By reinforcing the designated responsibilities of a woman, she is able to regain her focus on her reason for living: to ultimately further Nnaife's lineage. If she can succeed at this, Nnu Ego believes she will be well taken care of in her future. The very thing that rejuvenates her causes her despair: gaining status within the patriarchal society. The one tool that could grant her this is a male son, subsequently, the very thing she loses in Lagos.

It is with this mindset that Oshia enters her life. After the loss of Ngozi, it only makes sense that once Nnu Ego has Oshia, she chooses to invest herself completely in him. Unfortunately, she is unable to raise him in modern, capitalist Lagos and still implement the Igbo family structure. She raises her children, mainly Oshia, in an environment that advocates personal achievement rather than family priority and

responsibility. She does this because she sees no other way.

She is aware that her lack of education and personal achievement cause her to fail in Lagos and promises to not let that happen to her children. “With tears of relief in her eyes, she promised herself that all her children, girls and boys, would have a good education. [. . .] She and her husband were ill-prepared for a life like this, where only pen and not mouth could really talk. Her children must learn” (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 179). Unfortunately, this attitude does not work to her advantage when it comes to Oshia. He witnesses his sisters staying behind to help Nnu Ego trade, so they barely learn how to read and write. As his view of himself grows into the typical patriarchal view of man being ruler, the women in his life do not intercede. His mother tends to cater to him due to her hope for reaping his generosity in her old age. For example, when Oshia is asked to perform certain chores, his response is, “I am a boy. Why should I help with cooking? That’s a woman’s job” (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 129). Nnu Ego dismisses this attitude by saying, “Just like a boy” (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 129). Oshia separates himself from the women in the household. He gradually becomes disrespectful towards his mother, always taking the side of his father. Even though Nnu Ego sacrifices in order to provide for his education, he still blames her for not getting a scholarship. Hearing Oshia’s view of his mother for the first time is a devastating blow to Nnu Ego:

It was all so hopeless that Nnu Ego simply broke down and gave in to self pity. Oshia, her son, blaming her as well. Of course to him his father was a hero. He was a soldier. He was a fighter. He brought money into the family. All the poor boy had ever seen of her was a nagging and worrying

woman. Oh, God, please kill her with these babies she was carrying, rather than let the children she had hoped for so much pour sand into her eyes.

(Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 185)

Nnu Ego makes a mistake by not taking credit for paying his school fees.

Throughout the novel, Oshia has no idea that his mother is the real provider in his life.

Had he known the sacrifices she made, the outcome may have been different. Can Nnu

Ego be faulted for taking the back seat? Her giving credit to Nnaife demonstrates her

commitment to the Igbo tradition. A woman must never trump her husband or embarrass

him to his friends and peers.

Instead Nnu Ego does the best she can. She raises Oshia in the community of the

Yorubas, a group that sets themselves apart from the Igbo. He begins to covet the

Yoruba's style of dress and education slowly putting a wedge between himself and his

indigenous culture. It is not surprising that in the end Oshia chooses to go to America to a

university rather than stay and take care of his family. Sadly, he makes light of the

expectations put upon him:

'They told us that you were going to be a great man, that you would help

us in our old age, just like sons in Ibuza used to help their parents.' Oshia

started to smile, stifling the urge to laugh out loud. 'Mother, do you mean

the type of medicine man you used to take me to? The one that said that

the ghosts were in Father's old guitar?' Nnu nodded. 'Such *dibias* helped

us look after you.' There was no point in telling her that most of those

*dibias* only told her what she wanted to hear. 'Me a great man indeed!'

Oshia said to himself. (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 193)

Nnu Ego lived in and accepted poverty because she believed it would pay off in the end. She believed that Oshia would be successful and she could return to her village home as a victorious woman and live her life as a retired mother.

Ironically, the very thing that she sacrificed so much for in turn gave her nothing. M.J. Daymond suggests, “In raising her children in the belief that her sons must be educated in Western fashion if they are to rise in the new urban world, Nnu Ego does not see that the education she struggles to provide will in fact alienate her sons from her” (278). This paradox ultimately is the reason why Nnu Ego dies alone in a ditch. To provide Oshia with the tools he will need to support her in old age means handing him over to another world. She realizes too late that Oshia lacks the Igbo connection and therefore obligation to care for his mother and family once he succeeds at life. Also, Oshia cannot be completely blamed. He is merely trying to escape the same oppressive environment where he saw his parents fail to thrive. It is with his family that the cycle will stop.

It is obvious that the title, “The Joys of Motherhood,” is sarcastic. Nnu Ego never experiences joy in her dealings with motherhood. Instead, she spends most of her life trying desperately to attain it at the cost of her independence and at times her sanity. In life, motherhood offers her no solace and in death it offers her absolutely nothing. This is precisely why, at the end of the novel, Nnu Ego becomes, in a sense, her own chi for future generations.

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 she had been building up her joys as a mother. [. . .] Stories afterwards, however, said



that Nnu Ego was a wicked woman even in death because, however many people appealed to her to make women fertile, she never did. (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 224)

Nnu Ego's refusal to answer prayers for children is indicative of her struggle with her own motherhood. It is ironic and sad that after many years of pleading to her own chi for children, she in death denies others the same wish.

## OTHER CHARACTERS AS LIMITED

Nnu Ego is not alone in her limited ability to cope with the ever changing environment. While she may be the character with the fewest tools, others share similar plights and also suffer. Besides Nnu Ego, two other main characters emerge in the novel: Nnaife and Adaku, the second wife. While Nnaife is at times portrayed as a bully and male chauvinist, he too is faced with challenges he is not able to deal with. Adaku, on the other hand, is perhaps the one character that makes it out of the vicious cycle. However, she does not bask in her redemption as her freedom comes at the price of prostitution. It is her daughters that will reap the benefits.

It is important to highlight that the main male character, the man supposedly in charge of Nnu Ego and her life, is himself limited and plagued. Here is an Igbo man who left his tribal home in hopes of making a better life in the city. When he takes a job as a washer and housekeeper for the Meers, a wealthy white family, he becomes undermined and ridiculed by traditional standards. Immanuel Wallerstein comments on the general disintegration Nnaife and others experience due to displacement:

Thus, the sentiment of communal solidarity of the village, under the pressure of the colonial situation, led to the exporting of its men [and women] into a new and often alien world, a process which in its turn would usually lead to a breakdown of this very sentiment of communal solidarity, and they began to want the things money could buy: material comforts, contacts with a wider world, modern education, and improved transport and communication. Each of these was to play a major role in changing the perspectives of the African. (34)

Nnaife's perspective does indeed change. He begins to think of his status in terms of occupation and money. Sadly, he fails to realize that the system he is working for never allows him to get ahead. He only makes enough to keep his head above water. Somehow, this is good enough for him as he believes his work is something to be proud of. "Nnaife had scoffed and told her [Nnu Ego] that in a town people never minded what they did to get money, as long as it was honest. The man was actually proud of his work, she realized" (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 47). He does not understand why Nnu Ego is displeased with his job, as he is so far removed from being a traditional Igbo man. He is not aware that he is being exploited. Just to have a job in a colonial city is satisfactory for him.

While it is obvious that in order to survive, within the setting of this book, one must abandon all tradition and assimilate to the colonial system, Nnaife seems to acquire all the negative aspects of what he believes is his new freedom. He begins to want those material things that don't serve to help him or his family. An Igbo man in the village life would never dream of spending money on such things as toys and alcohol. However, for Nnaife there are many instances where he spends a whole paycheck on palm wine. His drinking progressively gets worse and is indicative of his effort to escape. Additionally, his addiction to alcohol becomes symbolic of how capitalism corrupts the traditional Igbo man.

World War II also places Nnaife at an extreme disadvantage to be any kind of support for Nnu Ego and his children. Even though his job as a soldier over time provides some money for his family, it is never adequate and does not replace his absence. As in any society, a father being away will have adverse effects on a family. Even though

Nnaife is forced to fight in the war, he is close to joining on his own accord. Again, money is the driving force for him because he is too naïve to perceive the dangers of war. Nnaife's acceptance of the war highlights his naiveté and the hypocrisy the war thrust upon African soldiers. It goes against Igbo morals to serve the British Army, yet Nnaife willingly supports the capitalist system that oppresses Igbo men like himself.

Throughout much of the second half of the novel, Nnaife is limited as he becomes a character operating from a distance. Sadly, his presence doesn't offer much help for Nnu Ego either. His being in the war is a double-edged sword. While in some aspects, the household is more at peace without his drinking fits, there lacks the sounding board for the family when he is gone. Nnu Ego and Adaku have no one to intervene in their fights, there is no regular pay coming in, and the children are without a father figure.

Nnaife, like Nnu Ego, is displaced. What sets the two apart is that Nnaife does not seem to be aware of his dire situation. He is the epitome of what capitalist and colonial societies depend on men being in order for their systems to run smoothly. He adheres to the rules by never wanting more than what he is given, he puts his money right back into their economy, and he fights in their war. The worst part, and what makes him flawed as a character, is that he does this without the smallest complaint.

When Adaku enters the novel as Nnaife's second wife, a new platform on which to examine Nnu Ego emerges. The two women's personalities exist on opposite poles. Though they are submerged in the same environment, the ways in which they handle it differ greatly. Adaku appears to be the image of strength and change, but while she accomplishes many feats, she too is very restricted in her outcome.

While Nnu Ego abides strictly by her traditional customs and Igbo law, Adaku is

more aware of the necessity for change. She is willing to change regardless of whether it goes against her cultural beliefs. She is also willing to face any consequences that may arise when abandoning her native tradition. Younger than Nnu Ego and having come straight from the tribal homeland, Adaku has a fresher outlook on Lagos and what it might offer a woman. Her acute sense of self and her willingness to accept change greatly set her apart from Nnu Ego.

First, there are many times when Adaku shines as a character. Initially, she is portrayed as the one character that just might make it. Three circumstances in the novel set Adaku apart from Nnu Ego. They are how she conducts the cooking strike, how she handles the time Nnaife is away at war, and how she chooses to educate her daughters. These instances will prove to show Adaku as a strong character and will also further highlight Nnu Ego's weak points. Her life's outcome, however, will reveal that Adaku is just as inadequate and doomed as her senior wife.

Adaku and Nnu Ego differ in the level of tolerance each has for Nnaife's behavior. Adaku's empowered nature illuminates Nnu Ego's lack of power and esteem. The incident of the cooking strike exemplifies this difference. Both women become discouraged with the amount of money Nnaife provides for housekeeping and food. Adaku takes the initiative and proposes a cooking strike. "She [Nnu Ego] had undertaken to talk to Nnaife about all of Adaku's grievances, the guitar apart, but Adaku insisted that the only way to bring home to him the fact that they needed more housekeeping money was to stop cooking for their husband" (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 133). Adaku's proactive nature frightens Nnu Ego and illustrates her own passivity. She is reluctant to accept Adaku's idea but eventually gives in. Nonetheless, she does not allow

the cooking strike to run its course, thereby sabotaging its success. Nnu Ego says it is her children that withhold her from carrying through with the strike. She has mouths to feed and cannot afford to play what she thinks is a childish game on Adaku's part. After only a few days, she gives in to Nnaife and pleads for money. She does this without consulting Adaku.

Two conflicting views are held by critics regarding the cooking strike. Some argue that it is bound to fail regardless of Nnu Ego's reluctance to go along with it. Because Nnaife is not a husband in the Igbo village, he does not have to rely solely on his wives' cooking for food. He is able to eat while at work on the railways by asking friends or simply buying his own food in the market. This view is that the traditional right for women to rally is denied Adaku and Nnu Ego in Lagos. "The resounding failure of the novel's cooking strike," according to Teresa Derrickson, "demonstrates that her new role as trapped housewife divests her of virtually all political power within the home [and] neither she nor Adaku are in any position to make demands as to how their home will be run" (48). Nnu Ego knows that Adaku does not believe that her own survival is contingent upon Nnaife, and she views this as dangerous. Adaku's response to the news is:

He wouldn't let us starve. He would have given in in the end. Anyway, it's not your right for you two to make up somewhere in secret and leave me in the dark. When a man starts showing preference to one wife then he's asking for trouble. I'm going to wait for him here and have it out with him this evening. (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 138)

It is obvious that Adaku has more faith in her decisions and a strong sense of self,

separate from any man. She understands that she has a say in things and is not afraid to voice her rights. Nnu Ego's responsibility to her children does not excuse her lack of faith in the collective power two wives should have. Had Nnu Ego continued with the cooking strike and the women won, she and Adaku would no longer suffer from Nnaife's lack of responsibility with money.

Similarly, the other view of the cooking strike is one that questions Nnu Ego's motives. Nfah-Abbenyi disagrees with Derrickson when she states:

Adaku's ability to combine traditional and urban values is no match for Nnu Ego. For example, when Adaku astutely convinces Nnu Ego, the senior wife that they boycott serving their husband food as a measure to force him to increase their food allowance, Nnu Ego agrees, but defeat is snatched from the jaws of victory when Nnu Ego gives in at the last minute, under the pretext that unlike her co-wife, she has children to feed. This battle for more rights for themselves as women, wives, and mothers is used by Nnu Ego as a weapon against Adaku. Her 'crime,' in Nnu Ego's eyes is her personal ambition and her independence, a free spirit that Nnu Ego both dreads and secretly covets. (44)

Additionally, besides keeping the surrender a secret, Nnu Ego prepares Nnaife's favorite meal on the night he is to come home after having just ended the cooking strike. This is how Adaku discovers the strike is over. It is clear that Nnu Ego is trying to win favoritism while at the same time condemning Adaku. It is not that in Lagos a cooking strike would not have worked. Nnu Ego does not decide to end it because she is concerned for her children. She does so out of jealousy. All this does is hinder both

women by denying them their collective power as co-wives, thereby giving Nnaife more power over them. Emecheta prompts the reader to admire Adaku in comparison to Nnu Ego by providing several incidences where she thrives. This sets the stage for an eventual disappointment when Adaku becomes a prostitute.

Another visible discrepancy in Adaku and Nnu Ego's characters is the way in which they handle Nnaife's absences while he is away at war. Nnaife being absent allows both women an opportunity to express their individuality without the presence of a man. During this period, Adaku uses the small amount of money she makes through trading and any dividends from Nnaife to invest in a booth for herself at the market. Adaku sees that by investing in a booth, she will eventually gain more financial independence.

In contrast, Nnu Ego still remains bound to the struggle of obeying her rural tradition within the urban setting. Rather than investing in herself and ultimately her children, she continues to engage in petty trading of firewood. She feels to get a booth would mean neglecting her children. Nnu Ego cannot see herself as a separate entity from them. Even more so, she chooses this view of herself because it further divides her from Adaku. While Adaku is the entrepreneur, Nnu Ego is the nurturing mother.

Also during Nnaife's absence, Nnu Ego decides to go home to her Igbo village. She leaves Adaku in Lagos along with Adaku's daughters. Back home, Nnu Ego enjoys the attention she gets from other women. She is revered as a mother of several sons. Because of this, she overstays her welcome. She is reprimanded by the elder women for allowing her junior wife to head the household and get ahead in Lagos without her.

As expected when Nnu Ego returns to Lagos, things have changed. Adaku is now an independent woman. Nnu Ego accuses Adaku of using her cut of Nnaife's money to



further herself, and says,

‘Yes, I can see you have been busy making money. Look at all your wares, look at your stalls. I’m sure Nnaife’s money went into building your trade.’ ‘That is not true, senior wife. I didn’t ask you to go home in the first place. You insisted on it, so don’t blame me if you’ve lost your foothold in Lagos. Here is your five pounds. I didn’t use it for my business, as you seem to think.’ (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 160)

Nnu Ego begins to resent Adaku. She feels inferior as a senior wife when she realizes Adaku no longer relies on her or Nnaife for food or anything else.

Rather than learning from Adaku’s actions and what she has been able to accomplish in such a short period of time, Nnu Ego reverts back into her faith in motherhood. After all, this is what she believes sets her apart from and makes her better than Adaku. “This was a life Nnu Ego did not know how to cope with. [. . .] Nnu Ego accepted her lot, taking comfort in the fact that one day her boys would be men. But to be so reduced in status as to be almost a maid to a junior wife, and an inherited wife at that, dampened her spirits” (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 161). Again, Nnu Ego’s weak points are shown and Adaku is portrayed as the admirable one. Emecheta conveys the two different ways an African woman deals with this type of predicament. It is not until later that Adaku is proven to be just as stymied by circumstance.

Finally, the contrast in how each woman treats her daughters greatly illustrates Nnu Ego’s lack of responsibility and backward thinking. Again, Nnu Ego’s bad decisions are highlighted up against Adaku’s pioneering attitude. Nfah-Abbenyi describes this: “Adaku thinks in revolutionary and positive terms about herself as a woman; about

herself as a wife; and about herself as a mother of daughters whose future she is determined to change, instead of letting that future be mapped out by a blatantly discriminating cultural script” (45). On the contrary, Nnu Ego does not see the need to educate her daughters. She accepts the standard that a daughter and a woman are only worth as much as her bride price and the number of male children she can produce.

Ironically, Nnu Ego’s awareness of what befalls her daughters is clearly present. She contemplates, “But who made the law that we should not hope in our daughters? We women subscribe to that law more than anyone. Until we change all this, it is still a man’s world, which women will always help to build” (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 187). Nonetheless, Nnu Ego subscribes to that law more than any other female character in the novel. In the end she leaves her daughters in Lagos, uneducated and set to marry. There is no doubt that her daughters will continue the cycle that trapped their mother.

Conversely, Adaku chooses to educate her daughters and stop the vicious cycle. She never thinks of denying her daughters an education where one is available. She plans to enroll them in private school and in the meantime gives her daughters lessons while they are still very young. In fact, Adaku’s ultimate decision to leave the household and the Owulum family is so that her daughters can have a better future and life. She declares to Nnu Ego that she will not be held prisoner:

Everybody accuses me of making money all the time. What else is there for me to do? I will spend the money I have in giving my girls a good start in life. They shall stop going to the market with me. I shall see that they get enrolled in a good school. I think that will benefit them in the future. Many rich Yoruba families send their daughters to school these days; I

shall do the same with mine. Nnaife is not going to send them away to any husband before they are ready. I will see to that! I'm leaving this stuffy room tomorrow, senior wife. (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 168)

In contrast to Nnu Ego, Adaku sees the opportunities in a capitalist society. After observing other cultures in Lagos, she chooses to change her traditional Igbo perspective and emerge with what capitalism has to offer. Adaku's coping mechanism is to initiate change rather than simply cope. Nnu Ego relies on future rewards as a means to deal with her lot in life, and copes in silence. Still, it is worth noting that Adaku did not have any sons. Perhaps her focus would have been similar to Nnu Ego's if she did.

Ironically, it would seem that Adaku is the real heroine of the novel. However, Emecheta provides a clincher that perhaps portrays Adaku as an equally tragic character. The tragedy is that it is only through the occupation of prostitution that she is able to leave the Owulum family and set out on her own. While Adaku does provide a better life's start for her daughters, it comes at the expense of her own life. For all the times she appears to surpass Nnu Ego in character and strength, it is this horrific ending that levels the playing field once more. Emecheta shows that there is no real escape for women. Nnu Ego lives her life for her children and Adaku sacrifices her body for hers. This outcome suggests that through all Nnu Ego's poor decisions, she still cannot be blamed for her life's outcome. The presentation of Adaku at first highlights Nnu Ego's faults but in the end shows that all women are thwarted in this situation. If a character as strong as Adaku cannot make it, then a woman like Nnu Ego does not stand a chance.

After examining Nnaife and Adaku, it becomes clear that all the participants of the novel are left grasping for straws. The controlling and chauvinistic Nnaife is really

just an uneducated and culturally displaced man struggling for a foothold in a society that doesn't understand his kind. In his battle to move ahead, he turns to alcohol and is also abandoned by his sons Oshia and Adim. The impressive and revolutionary Adaku is in the end an exploited woman trying desperately to save her daughters from a life like her own. Conceivably the saddest situation is that Nnu Ego is left in their shadows and dies alone never witnessing the fruits that came from all she forfeited.

## ADAH AND THE REASONS WHY

It is interesting to note that Nnu Ego's life is starkly different from Emecheta's. She most often writes of other women more similar to her: women who are able to conquer the perils of patriarchy and lead a fulfilling life. Her second novel, Second Class Citizen, 1974, is considered to be autobiographical and therefore offers insight into Emecheta. The main character Adah also gives insight as to why The Joys of Motherhood was an important novel to write. Adah offers yet another platform on which Nnu Ego can be examined. She illuminates all the materials and tools Nnu Ego is lacking, and while like Adaku, she at times makes Nnu Ego appear flawed, she ultimately demonstrates why Nnu Ego is excused of accountability for her life's outcome. The two women differ greatly in regard to their education, aspirations, traditional beliefs, their views on polygamy, and their responses to abusive relationships with their husbands. These differences are what lessen Nnu Ego's flaws.

Buchi Emecheta was born in Lagos, Nigeria in 1944. Like Nnu Ego she was raised in an Igbo village and had a traditional Igbo upbringing. She was orphaned as a young child and raised by her extended family. Emecheta received an education that was unlikely for a girl in her village. She was able to attend a missionary school where she learned English and other languages. At sixteen she left school and was forced to marry a man to whom she had been engaged since she was eleven. Luckily for Emecheta, her husband needed to relocate to London in order to complete his studies. She was granted permission to leave with him. Once in London and by twenty-two, she was mother to five children.

Emecheta was employed at the British Museum library and at a youth center. As a

busy working mother, she gave up her mornings to devote herself to writing. In 1966, she managed to leave her abusive husband, who burned her first manuscript. She published her first novel In the Ditch in 1972. Also during these years, Emecheta attended the University of London and graduated with a bachelor's degree in Sociology.

While these accomplishments are out of Nnu Ego's realm, there are many similarities between Emecheta and the main character of Second Class Citizen, Adah. In the novel, Adah lives a life parallel to Buchi Emecheta's. Orphaned when her father dies, she is forced to live with her extended family. This initially poses a problem for Adah who up to that point had attended school: "It was decided that the money in the family, a hundred pounds or two, would be spent on Boy's education. [. . .] Adah's schooling would have been stopped, but somebody pointed out that the longer she stayed at school, the bigger dowry her future husband would pay for her" (Emecheta, Second Class Citizen 17). Her education only continues because she would eventually be profitable for the men in her family. Like Emecheta, Adah's character greatly desires to continue her education through the college level. She knows that in order to do this, she will have to leave her Igbo village.

Different from Emecheta, an educated husband also desiring to leave does not just fall into Adah's lap. Instead, she strategically alienates possible older suitors in order to secure the one, Francis, whom she knows will lead her to her freedom.

She would never, never in her life get married to any man, rich or poor, to whom she would have to serve his food on bended knee: she would not consent to live with a husband whom she would have to treat as a master and refer to as 'Sir' even behind his back. She knew that all Ibo women

did this, but she wasn't going to! (Emecheta, Second Class Citizen 19)

Unfortunately, once in London with Francis, Adah begins to be abused. It is here the title of the novel takes precedence. In her Igbo land, Adah is a first class citizen. She is educated and makes a good living: more than most men in her community. Once in the United Kingdom, she realizes that she is a second class citizen. She and Francis are discriminated against by the elites of the area and even by other Africans for having darker skin. Because she makes the living for the household, Francis becomes lazy and starts to neglect his studies. Like Emecheta, Adah works at a library. This is where the character's desire to write begins. Despite poverty, domestic abuse, racism and the frustrations of being a mother, Adah succeeds in leaving her husband after an intense court battle. It is implied that Adah lives alone as sole provider of her children and continues her success as a writer and contributor to society.

In these ways, Emecheta and Adah are very much alike. Each values education and has an opportunity to be educated in her village home. Both women find a way to the United Kingdom. Both face extreme adversity and are able to overcome it. In Second Class Citizen, Emecheta portrays a woman overcoming patriarchy. It is important for her to write this version of the Igbo woman's story because it gives hope and teaches others that there is a way out.

On the other hand, Adah and Nnu Ego differ in many ways. These differences stand to make Nnu Ego look weak. Both women come from similar backgrounds. Each loses a parent early on, for Nnu Ego at birth. The only real difference in their early ages lies in education. There is not much mention of Nnu Ego's early education beyond basic reading and writing skills. Adah is lucky to attend a missionary school which ultimately

sets the stage for her success.

The two women have very disparate aspirations that guide their lives. Adah puts her dreams into education and bettering herself, whereas Nnu Ego puts all her aspirations into becoming a mother. Nnu Ego sees children as equal to status and as a form of currency. At times within Second Class Citizen, Adah sees children as an obstacle to her goals and desperately tries to attain birth control: “Could not the woman be given the opportunity of exercising her own will? Whatever happened, she was not going to have any more children. She did not care which way she achieved this, but she was having no more children” (Emecheta, Second Class Citizen 142). This is such a strong contrast to Nnu Ego’s undying wish to mother as many children as possible. Initially, Adah’s dream appears more realistic and admirable as it goes against the grain of patriarchy. In the shadow of Adah, Nnu Ego appears to be promoting the oppression of patriarchy by viewing herself in terms of men.

An experience each woman shares is an abusive relationship with her husband. However, each handles it differently. Adah puts up with Francis’ abuse only to the extent that she must until she is able to leave. Often she fights back: “Even his beatings and slappings did not move her any more. She did not know where she got her courage from, but she was beginning to hit back, even biting him when need be. If that was the language he wanted, well, she would use it” (Emecheta, Second Class Citizen 154). She is brave in the face of his tyranny and doesn’t succumb or let it change her behavior and goals.

Conversely, Nnu Ego never contemplates leaving and instead at times attempts to appease Nnaife in order to avoid mistreatment. An example of this is in the cooking strike and in her allowing Nnaife to take credit for the payment of Oshia’s school fees. This



difference is even more alarming in that Adah faces stronger physical abuse than Nnu Ego. “The wife of the Indian doctor, who was a doctor herself, and who had treated her, had said: ‘Next time you might not be so lucky with a man who can beat you like this’” (Emecheta, Second Class Citizen 73). Until the end, Adah is steadfast with her resistance and knows that her larger plan will come through eventually. For Nnu Ego, her larger plan of reaping the benefits of motherhood leaves her no room to negotiate with Nnaife. While her resolve is equally as strong as Adah’s, her faith is misguided. Adah’s ability to enact change when things become unbearable make Nnu Ego’s stubborn reluctance to change course appear sad, irresponsible, and foolish.

Another difference between the two is their thoughts on multiple wives for their husbands. Nnu Ego resents Nnaife’s taking a second wife with Adaku and lets it hinder her foothold within the family. On the contrary, Adah welcomes the idea of Francis taking another wife as she believes it will take pressure off of her. This exemplifies the difference in each woman’s self image. Adah does not see herself as an extension of Francis. Rather, he is a vehicle she can use to reach her goals. Therefore, another wife does not threaten her position. Since Nnu Ego’s goal is contingent upon placement within the Owulum family, a new wife is very threatening. Again, and perhaps unknowingly, Nnu Ego appears to be placing herself deeper into oppression. Her dream is not only unfulfilling but also alienates her from others along the way.

The meaning and influence of the Igbo tradition also differ for each woman. Adah wants to shed her Igbo identity once in Britain and at times tries to keep it a secret from her other black neighbors: “Thinking about her first year in Britain, Adah could not help wondering whether the real discrimination, if one could call it that, that she experienced

was not more the work of her fellow-countrymen than of the whites” (Emecheta, Second Class Citizen 70). She continually steps out of the bounds of her tradition with every aspect of her life in education, birth control, career, and in her role as wife. In contrast, Nnu Ego’s trouble lies in her stubbornness to stick to her Igbo tradition.

After considering certain factors, it becomes unfair to juxtapose Nnu Ego with Adah. The scales are not balanced as it becomes obvious that Adah holds all the tools Nnu Ego lacks. The difference is in each woman’s early experience in her Igbo village. Nnu Ego is not educated and lacks an extended family to nurture her. After the death of Ona, most of Nnu Ego’s influence comes from her overbearing father, Agbadi. She does not regularly attend school and gains her outlook by watching other women attain status through motherhood. It was only natural that her dream is to be a mother herself.

For Adah, the experience is much different. From an early age she attends school and is able to win a scholarship to attend the Methodist Girl’s School. This experience gives her a foothold on life and a jumpstart to independence. Due to her education, she does not rely on a man. In fact, her future husband relies on her. This alone gives her many freedoms and ultimately allows her to eventually leave Francis. In Nnu Ego’s case, she knows from the beginning that her existence depends on a man and this fact robs her of freedom and choices. Her lack of education does not give her the liberty to seek a career much less leave an abusive husband.

Another mitigating factor for Nnu Ego is the difference in time between the two novels. The character, Adah is in her early twenties, eight years after World War II. It is a time when students in Lagos and Ibadan were given the opportunity to travel to Europe to study. Even though she has to do so under the wing of a husband, this is something Nnu

Ego can never do because Nnaife lacks the opportunity to travel to Europe for any reason. Additionally, World War II occurs in the middle of Nnu Ego's life in Lagos, and this poses major problems for her and her family.

The contrast in setting also allows for Adah's growth and reduces Nnu Ego's accountability for her failures. London provides Adah with a mixture of cultures and opportunities. She is able to get a job, create friendships with women who are liberated and who are academically and professionally successful. She is also provided with methods to control her life. For example, having the option to acquire birth control is something that is out of the question for Nnu Ego, who does not even have a doctor. Lagos, Nigeria during World War II stands to offer Nnu Ego nothing more than poverty and discontent. She has no real opportunity to better herself financially without abandoning her children at home and compromising her morals, much the way Adaku does. She does not have the counsel of other women; rather, other women are a threat. She cannot easily get a job. The setting only makes her more reliant on what she hopes her sons will one day provide for her.

All of these factors show that while Nnu Ego appears flawed when compared with Adah, she is merely coping the best she can. Through these two novels, Buchi Emecheta portrays two strikingly different characters. There must be a reason behind choosing to write two novels both about Igbo women but with opposite outcomes. Second Class Citizen is obviously a portrayal of Emecheta's own life fictionalized. She shows how the Igbo culture oppresses Adah but then redeems her. While this mirrors her own experience, it is also a stab at patriarchy. It shows the strength of women in the face of adversity and what they are capable of. It is the quintessential empowering novel of the

woman who beats all odds. The Joys of Motherhood, on the other hand, shows the dangers of patriarchy without the redeemable characteristics. Here, Emecheta chooses to portray a more realistic view of an Igbo woman. She is making a statement that her experience along with Adah's is rare. Unfortunately, Nnu Ego is tragic and much more typical. By incorporating into the novels the contradictions and negative operating forces mentioned, Emecheta presents Nnu Ego as a character not to be judged harshly. Instead, she purposely portrays a limited heroine and thereby critiques patriarchal societies. These novels represent two different strategies for critiquing the oppression of women by men.

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