

The Representation of African Traditional Women in African Literature: A Feminist Study of Buchi Emecheta'S *The Joys of Motherhood*

Makgwale Hassel Monthabeng¹
edward.montle@ul.ac.za

Malesela Edward Montle²
eddiemontle@yahoo.com

Mphoto Johannes Mogoboya³

^{1,2,3}University of Limpopo Department of Languages (English Studies)

Abstract

African women writers had not been allowed a stage to air their views about the traditional African set-up. However, with feminist winds of change sweeping from Europe to Africa in the 18th century, the social climate in most parts of the globe began to change. Minority groups challenged the Western canon and protested against their status as the second-class citizens. The groups included Afro-Americans, formerly colonized black people, women, gays, lesbians, etc. This paper focuses on one such group: black women. Being marginalised as both black and female, the African women writers started to interrogate not only the mainstream society, but also challenges faced by women in traditional African societies. The paper adopts feminism as a theory through which issues impacting African women's lives in their respective traditional set-ups are crystallised. Feminism has various branches, of which, black womanism is one of them. As such, this paper adopts Alice Walker's black feminism to unearth the emotions and perceptions about their daily challenges.

Keywords: patriarchy, polygamous marriage, childbearing, women as objects

INTRODUCTION

Like other African women authors, such as Mariama Bâ, Tsitsi Dangaremba and others, Emecheta attempts to portray the precarious status of women in a peculiar African society. Her literary works expose dissatisfaction with the situation of women in her Ibo culture, which she criticises in her works. Furthermore, *The Joys of Motherhood* is an interesting novel that centres on motherhood, and how its issues impact women's lives in the traditional patriarchal Igbo society in Nigeria. As such, motherhood will be the critical theme to be analysed – alongside with others namely patriarchy, (a polygamous) marriage, marriage and childbearing, and women as objects. Based on these impediments, the article will also consider the possibilities of women's self-empowerment in the selected text.

Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* uncovers various incidents of Nigeria during the British rule. During this period, Nigerians found themselves in the transitional era, that is, they had to change from traditional to modern life. It was at this time that the British government, and other European imperialist countries, started to offer goods and work for the development of their religion in Africa. The argument above implies that it was the Europeans colonialists who brought drastic changes to their colonies. Through colonialism, Africans have acquired a new identity, religion, and or civilization. For example, marriage should be done in the church lest it be regarded as illegal one. When Nnu Ego falls pregnant for the first time, Naife becomes worried that he might lose his job because they have no married in the church. Through this aspect of 'marriage,' Emecheta describes how the West has

developed cultures and rules through various institutions. Cynthia Ward (2018) states that the Emecheta's novels apply feminist views because they represent the experience of the African woman struggling to assert herself against historically determined insignificance and try to speak for the disenfranchised African women who are oppressed by the colonial, patriarchal societies. Balavatbhai (2020) argues that Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* attempts to expose the marginalisation and suffering of women in patriarchal African societies. The novel tells the story of Nnu Ego, an Ibuza traditional woman, who is proud of herself as the mother of three sons. In patriarchal societies, women who do not bear children are often scorned by their in-laws.

According to the Ibuza society, the birth of successful sons offers the mother a comfortable old age. When the novel's story ends, however, Nnu Ego dies lonely death in Lagos, with 'no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to her (Emecheta p.11). The author depicts the impact of colonial patriarchy and economic politics that marginalize Ibuza women in the third world. A feminist observer, Alice Walker, submits that because of "their double identity, black women are the victims of both sexual and racial discrimination" (Kohzadi et al, 2011). Lewis and Mills (2003) maintain that the novel 'accommodates the aspect of western feminism which brings in the light gender inequality, sexual difference, and gender oppression within the Igbo society, and highlights how women are oppressed and silenced by patriarchy (Ibid, 2003). In other words, Buchi Emecheta criticizes how patriarchal African institutions define 'motherhood.'

Emecheta challenges the use of powers endowed to men by culture. The powers, according to the author, turn women into the victims of cultural subjugation. Without the assistance of her husband, Nnu Ego does everything possible to feed her children: she does petty works and sells wood so that she can save money to pay for her children's school fees. She cries:

On my life, I have to work myself to the bone to look after them; I have to give them

all. And if I'm lucky enough to die in peace, I have given them my soul (p. 186).

Emecheta demonstrates that by being completely devoted to her children, Nnu Ego grows faint, and does not make friends either – she is always lonely. The author highlights the burden of African womanhood. For example, in Lagos women are multi-tasked: they have to work to provide food to and create some comfort in their families. They do so to supplement their husbands' meagre wages. Therefore, *The Joys of Motherhood* is an irony in which the novelist presents oppression, suffering, and loneliness that African mothers experience in patriarchal societies (Balatavbhai, 2020).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The word 'theory' has various definitions. In Concise Oxford English Dictionary, Stevenson & Waite (2011) define 'theory' as a "supposition or a system of ideas intended to explain something, especially on general principles independent of the thing to be explained." Hadi (2017) defines a theory as "a set of ideas that is intended to explain something about life or world, especially an idea that has not been proved to be true." This paper focuses on thematic issues explored in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. The paper employs a feminist theory which argues for equality between men and women, and the elimination of all social forces that instigate discrimination, oppression, and exploitation (Pasque & Wimmer, 2011), and draws attention to patterns of thought, behaviour, values and power in the relationships (Vine, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

The paper has used a qualitative approach and is library-based. Crang and Kook (2007) in Cropley (2019) argue that the central aim of qualitative research is to detail the daily lives of people under inquiry. It has collected its primary data from Buchi Emecheta's purposively sampled literary text: *The Joys of the Motherhood* and supplementary data from internet sources. Emecheta's *The Joys of the Motherhood* is chosen by virtue of its brilliant delineation of theme of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from Emecheta's *The Joys of the Motherhood* has been presented through a qualitative thematic analysis technique, which qualifies the researcher to generate relevant themes to present and discuss the findings:

Patriarchy

Some literature writers around the world have found that African societies tend to be patriarchal. They argue that in some African societies, role-playing is usually determined by patriarchal ideology, which prescribes who to do what, and when. Cheris Kramarae (1992) argues that the term 'patriarchy' has been around even around even before the contemporary women's activist movements, and feminist studies. The author explains that the term was re-invented over the last two decades to trace the 'origins and reasons for men's oppression of women.' It was in the first instance used to refer to the powers of the man as the head of the household. Thenceforth, the term was defined as "a system of male authority which oppresses women through its social, political, and economic institutions" (Ibid, 1992).

Rawat (2014) defines patriarchy as 'a socially and ideologically constructed mechanism that regards men as superior to women, in which the former holds authority over the latter, children, and property' (Walby, 1990); it encourages male leadership, male domination and male power. Reardon (1996) defines patriarchy as 'a system in which women are subject to economic dependence, violence, domestication, and women are in peripherals of decision-making; it imposes structures that categorise some types of work as men's, and others as women's, and gender inequality (Smith, 1990). Furthermore, the term 'patriarchy' refers to the arrangement of a set of relations based on material ability that capacitates men to dominate women (Stacey, 1993). This system of a social hierarchy and differentiation based on sex enables men to get some advantages, while at the same time putting some constraints on women's freedom to advance their interests and creativity. Based on this understanding, men characteristically have the strength and courage to face the outside world, and their sexuality is forced on women through rape, prostitution, pornography, and other cultural practices and their creativity impeded. "Women labour is

confiscated in marriage, their fertility is controlled and creativity is impeded with persecution and knowledge is withheld from them" (Stanworth, 1987). The argument is supported by the narrator in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) remarks about Okonkwo's obsession with his patriarchal rule in his household as the father:

"Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the Youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his children. Perhaps down in his heart Okonkwo was not a cruel man. But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. Okonkwo's fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep within himself."

The connotation in the above quote is that men, as the heads of families, parade their muscular supremacy through injecting fear in their families to salvage their manhood. This tendency often results in family members being afraid to express their ideas. In his autobiographical novel, *Down 2nd Avenue* (2004), Es'kia tells about his father's patriarchal behaviour. His father, Moses, does not take care of his family. Es'kia's mother, Eva, does a dressmaking job for a tailor just outside Pretoria (now the City of Tshwane). To supplement her meagre income, Eva sells skokiaana (a home-brewed beer). Little does she know that each time her husband comes back home from work demands more of it (beer). When asked to at least care of his children, Moses falls into tantrums, and always threatens to beat Eva up. Instead of acknowledging his weak points, Moses says: "Don't talk to me like that. Didn't your mother teach you never answer back to your husband and lord?" (p. 16).

In Pedi custom of Limpopo region, South Africa, for example, a man is the initiator. He proposes love to a woman, sends his clan members to negotiate the bride price with his future wife's family, pays the bride price, marries, builds a home, and provides for the family; on the

one hand while on the other the woman remaining inactive participant in the whole process.

Researchers have found that in some African cultures women are responsible for domestic chores such cooking, laundry, child-bearing and child-raising – regardless of their status and professions. It is against this gender-based classification of responsibilities that some men dominate women in many respects. Taboos, idioms, and proverbs also help entrench patriarchal mindset. For example, in Sepedi, then proverb 'tša etwa ke ya tshadi pele, di wela ka leopeng,' which literally means 'led by a cow, the whole herd will fall into the donga.' The implication in this proverb is that women do not have leadership qualities; they usually mislead people. Montle (2021) avers that this cultural proverb declares that a woman cannot lead and hence, should not be given a position as a leader. However, some women leaders have demonstrated good leader qualities. For example, Mrs Margaret Thatcher was once the prime minister in Britain. Mrs Graca Machel has founded the world child welfare organisation and many more occupy prominent government positions in the world.

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Buchi Emecheta explores a patriarchal view of women. Nokwocha Agbadi's sexual advances to Ona are indicative of patriarchy. The writer tells a sad incident in which Agbadi uses his physical masculinity to force himself onto an unsuspecting Ona – a girl given to him by his friend, Agbadi, as one of his mistresses. Some of Nigeria's Ibuza traditional men's view of women as sex objects is demonstrative of Agbadi's deliberate intent to show that some men do not need women's consent to satisfy their sexual urge. The states that:

"He did not let her mouth free for a long time. She struggled fiercely like a trapped animal, but Agbadi was becoming himself again. He was still weak, but not weak enough to ignore his desire. He worked on her, breaking down all her resistance. He stroked and explored with his perfect hand, banking heavily on the fact that Ona was a woman, who had hurt him many a time. And he was right. Her struggling and kicking

lessened. She started to moan and groan instead, like a woman in labour. He kept on, and would not let go, so masterful was he in his art. He knew he had had won. He wanted her completely humiliated in her burning desire" (p.20).

Therefore, Emecheta challenges the abuse of powers endowed to men by culture, which often unnecessarily turns women into victims of cultural subjugation. Instead of having sex with their partners out of mutual consent, the author shows how some traditional Ibuza men employ their strong physicality to manipulate women's physical feebleness to quench their lust, be it sexual or otherwise. Moreover, the author shows that men in some traditional African societies tend to decide the fate of their daughters. The author of the novel sounds to know the truth about this cultural propensity. The essence underlying this submission is that what matters most in traditional Ibuza society is family building, and not love between partners-to-be. This practice still exists today.

In her book, *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta mentions that Nokwocha Agbadi and his friend, Obi Umunna, agree on Ona's fate. Umunna tells Agbadi that should bear a boy, the child would be his (Umunna), but should it be a girl, she would be Agbadi's.

"Did Ona tell you of compromise? She agreed that if she bore a baby girl, she would be mine, if a boy, he would be yours," Agbadi said coolly (p. 26).

Emecheta laments the fact that the fate of traditional Ibuza women, either as wives or daughters, is often decided by men. Given these circumstances, Ibuza men turn women into objects even matters that directly impact them. For example, in a particular traditional African society, fathers have absolute right to determine the fate of their daughters; they can decide to marry them to their family friends or instruct them to bear them children if their parents do not have them (children). This is the case with Ona, who has to bear her father children.

The author challenges fathers to give a lease to their daughters to decide the type life they

cherish to lead, and not chastise or enslave them in any form they, fathers, fathom possible. Two friends, Obi Idayi and Nwokocha Agbadi, go on to determine Nnu Ego's life. It is by their agreement that Nnu Ego is married first to Amatukwu. Idayi tells Agbadi:

"Your daughter's mind is not here. She dreams of her man and her own home. Don't let her dream in vain. After all, her age-mates are already having their first and second babies. Stop rejecting young men, Agbadi, let of them marry her" (p. 27).

In response, Agbadi says, "I have already promised Amatukwu that I think about his son. He is one those out there," (p.27). Hoping to see a handsome man, Nnu Ego expresses some disappointment at the man chosen for her by her father. Her disappointment with Nnaife as her new husband indicates just how fathers in traditional African societies force their choices on the daughters. The narrator in the story describes Nnaife's physical appearance:

Nnu Ego was grateful for it, and was just falling asleep with a full stomach when in walked a man with a belly like a pregnant cow, wobbling first to the side, and then to that. The belly, coupled with the fact that he was short, made him look like a barrel. 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 mourning for her husband. His skin was pale. The skin of someone who had for a long time worked in the shade and not in the open air. his cheeks were puffy and looked as if he had pieces of hot yam inside them, and they seemed to have pushed his mouth into a smaller size above his weak jaw. And his clothes – Nnu Ego had never seen men dressed like that: khakhi shorts with holes and an old loose, white singlet if her husband-to-be was like this, she thought, should go back to her father. Why, marrying such a jelly of a man would be like living with a middle-aged woman! (p. 42).

The cultural practice to choose marital partners still exists in some African villages today. Certain traditional African communities believe that by right all members should have marital

partners to continue men's lineage (Stanworth, 1987). It is therefore not surprising to see Nnu Ego being married to a man unknown to her. An Ibuza culture allows men to get a marital partner through negotiations and an agreement reached between the respective families. But in cases where the potential partners are educated, the agreement might flop. In this book, however, Buchi Emecheta denounces this culture as something that belongs to the past; modern women have every right to chose what to do, and who to marry as the time might dictate. The author the fact that any man thought right by the parents is thrown unto the daughters without bothering to inform them. As such, she expresses the agony of seeing women treated objects of exchange, something which should be stopped.

A polygamous Marriage

The narrative gives details of African woman's oppression in the marriage system of patriarchal society. Women are treated as properties of men, commodities that can appeal to the owner whilst still new (Nyanhongo, 2011). Furthermore, the author argues that they (women) are merely dominated by men, and their principal role is to attend to the needs of their men and produce children, especially the male ones. This incident is buttressed by Nnu Ego's case: she seems to be infertile when she first married Amatukwu. Because of her infertility, she is to move to the nearby hut kept for older wives, especially after her husband has found him a new wife (p. 32).

In most of the author's books, marriage is a central theme along which others are aligned. Marriage is the institution in which both partners are equal in procreation: a woman needs a man in the bearing of kids, and vice versa. The writer's focus on marriage tends to expose hardships or challenges which some African women face. The writer's novel has an African country, Nigeria, as its setting. This African milieu gives the novel's story a sense of absolute Africanness or Africanity. Therefore, her respective characters represent some black Africans and almost everything done and said in their countries. In other words, these characters are a reflection of African life. As for Emecheta's novel, the story takes place in Ibuza, Nigeria.

The word 'marriage' has acquired various definitions. In this context, marriage can be defined as "a formal union of a man and a woman by which they become a husband and a wife," (Soans & Walker, 2003). This definition implies that both a man and a woman are equal in marriage. However, in certain African cultures men marry women, that is, men pay dowries to the women's families before they become husbands and wives. From the African perspective, marriage fulfils the completeness of a woman (Baloyi, 2010). In her book, *The Joys of Motherhood*, Buchi Emecheta sees marriage, especially a polygamous one, as a means by which men objectify women. Being men and egocentric, some polygamous African husbands tend to ignore the needs of their wives, regardless of how faithful the latter might be to the former. The writer shows how African are: they enjoy the comfort of their concubines' company at the expense of their true, rightful wives. Emecheta says this about Nwokocha Agbadi's austere behaviour:

The story gained credence particularly when Agbadi's wives showed signs of neglect. He would be reminded to do his duty by them, then when they became pregnant he would not be not seen in their huts until the time to mate them again. But whenever he returned from his many wanderings, he would go and stay with his Ona (pp. 12-13).

Emecheta uses the phrase 'to mate them' to demonstrate the state in which some women in polygamous marriages tend to find themselves. The writer refutes the type of marriage in which wives are neglected. The gist of the writer's contention is that the Nigerian Ibuza community sees women as baby makers. To avoid experiencing these hardships, women should stay unmarried if they want to remain dignified human beings lest they be treated as the 'other' – people without emotions. This standpoint has symbolic violence. That is, in some African cultures an unmarried man or woman tends to be regarded as incomplete, on the one hand. On the other, some people had been married but experienced the agonies of a married life and want to emancipate themselves from the marriage shackles.

Emecheta challenges men who neglect their wives because of concubines. The writer further intends to imply that men are egocentric and selfish – they do not mind cheating on their wives. She, again, illustrates the atrocity of a polygamous marriage: Agbadi's senior wife, Agunwa, dies on the very night he makes loves to Ona in the same courtyard; he ignores his wives' emotions and does not mind the consequences of his action(s).

Some Ibuza men tend to append their unscrupulous behaviour to both culture and tradition. They treat their wives as insensible beings. It is men, as the writer shows, who are insensible to sensitive acts such as having sex with concubines or mistresses in the same homesteads where their wives stay. Moreover, instead of taking care of and respecting their wives as they respect them, Ibuza men tend to do more favours to those women with whom they are in extra-marital affairs. Ibuza women usually try to satisfy their husbands and their clans by remaining silent on their husbands' misconduct to their own (women's) disadvantage. The writer comments:

Agbadi's senior wife, Agunwa, became ill that very night. Some said later that she sacrificed herself for her husband; but a few had noticed that it was bad for her morale to hear her husband giving pleasure to another woman in the same courtyard where she slept, and to such a woman who openly treated the man they all worshiped so badly. A woman who was troublesome and impetuous, who had the audacity to fight with man before letting have her: a bad woman (p. 21).

Through this quote, Emecheta portrays a man who is a culture outcast. Agbadi, the old man who is respected by all and sundry in his village, fails to match the honour bestowed to him by his wives: he makes love to Ona in the same courtyard. In other words, he disregards the morale and status of his wives. Consequently, Agunwa, being the first time in her life to experience this debauchery, dies of heart attack. Her death, however, surprises Agbadi, and now shows some recognition of Agunwa's importance in life. He says:

You are wrong, Idayi, to suggest she might be or bitter just because last night with Ona amused myself a little. Agunwa is too mature to mind that. Why, if she behaved like that what kind of example would that be to the younger wives? (p. 22).

Later, Agbadi talks to his grown sons about their mother: Your mother is a good woman. So unobtrusive, so quite. I don't know who else will help me keep an eye on those young wives of mine, and see to the smooth running of my household (p.22).

With these two quotes, Emecheta shows that while they are culturally heads of their families, men fail in their responsibilities to protect their wives against senseless acts such as cheating. She further shows that Ibuza men do not regard their as true human beings. For example, Agbadi is surprised by his wife's death because he thinks that having sex with Ona in the same courtyard is the unlikely cause of death, on the one hand. On the other, the writer portrays Agbadi as a man who, though unintentionally has contributed to his wife's, is agonised. He fully acknowledges the superiority and importance of his life, the overseer of his other wives and their households. The implication of Agbadi's reaction to his wife's death is that some African men lose honest and faithful wives because of their unscrupulous behaviour.

In addition to this point, Buchi Emecheta defies the dynamics of the polygamous marriage. In the Igbo culture, just like most of African cultures, a man can, upon the death of his sibling, inherit his family. This usually creates unprecedented rivalry between or amongst the wives. The writer argues that this culture/tradition disadvantages wives to such an extent that the chief wife usually gets relegated, or if possible, even replaced. The storyteller says:

"A husband was meant to share of the wife whose turn it was to cook, unless she was indisposed, pregnant or nursing a child" (p. 138).

According to some African customs/traditions, a daughter-in-law should demonstrate her accomplished womanhood either upon arrival at her husband's homestead or

at her house. In Sepedi for example, there is a proverb that says 'mosadi ke tšhwene o lewa mabogo,' which literarily means 'a true woman demonstrates her complete womanhood through hard work.' The connotation under this idiomatic expression is that a real woman does not tire up; she is always industrious. Another example is the Mozambiquan custom. It is rumoured that in Mozambique, women married from foreign countries are given strenuous fieldwork to test their woman. Failure to perform the prescribed work indicates physical weakness.

Marriage and childbearing

In some African customs, the fundamental role of a woman is to become the mother. In this context, motherhood comprises childbearing and bringing up the children, looking after them and their father, washing clothes and cleaning the family house, fetching firewood in the mountain or bush, and ploughing the fields to produce food. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta criticises the traditional view of the ideal Ibuza motherhood. To her, traditional motherhood enslaves women as wives while it emancipates men from this gender-based enslavement. A dialogue between Nnu Ego and her husband, Nnaife, demarcates the gender-based line of responsibilities between wives and husbands:

"You are to give her children and food, she is to cook and bear the children and look after you and them," (p. 71).

"But now you have to make Nnu Ego pregnant very soon," (p. 70).

The author remarks: 'Nnu Ego realised that part of that pride of motherhood was to look a little unfashionable and so can drawl with joy.' Nnu Ego says, "I can't afford another outfit, because I am nursing him, so you can't go anywhere to sell anything," (p.80). On the one hand, the author shows that children are precious to traditional African women, and that parenthood is a huge challenge that should be handled by both partners. On the other, the author implies that the onus to bear children and raise them rests on the shoulders of the mothers. In other words, the writer shows that in most cases it is only the mothers who experience family challenges as fathers are usually away. The quote

below indicates the hardships through which mothers go in bringing up children alone:

“Oshia, do you want to die and leave me? Stop this sickness.

I have nothing else to give you. Please stay and be my joy, be my father, and my brother, and my husband – no, I have a husband I don’t whether he alive or dead” (p. 104).

Adaku tells Nnu Ego:

“In Ibuza sons help their father than they ever help their mother. A mother’s joys is only in the name. She worries over them, looks after them when they are small; but in the actual help on the farm, the upholding of the family name, all belong to the father ...” (p.122).

The narrator says:

“On her way to her room, it occurred to Nnu Ego that she was a prisoner, imprisoned by her love for her children, imprisoned in her role as the senior wife. She was not even expected to demand more money for her family; that was considered below the standard expected of a woman in her position. It was not fair, she felt, the way men cleverly used a woman’s sense of responsibility to actually enslave her” (p. 137).

Emecheta cautions women who believe that true motherhood is accomplished by sacrificing their lives. She highlights the pain of challenging work to bring up children who might not take of their mothers when it matters most. In other words, the author is concerned about the quality time Ibuza women spend on perfect motherhood when there is no guarantee of their taking care of them in turn.

Nnu Ego’s death accentuates this view. The remarks about Nnu Ego’s last days in the following quotes:

“However, what actually broke her was, month after month, expecting to hear from son in America, and from Adim too who later went to Canada, and failing to do so, (p. 224) after such wandering on one night, Nnu Ego

lay down by roadside, thinking that she had arrived home. She died quietly there, with no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to her. She had never really made many friends, so busy had she been building up her joys as a mother” (p. 224).

Women as objects

This section deals with the objectification of women. As I alluded to marriage as the central theme along which others are aligned, then the act of objectifying women follows as one of the accompanying themes in the author’s narrative. In this context, objectification of women includes, among others, women as inheritable property, women as commercial commodities and or women as sex objects either outside or inside marriage.

In Xala (a Muslim Senegal) Ousmane tells the story of El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye, formerly a teacher who had been dismissed from the profession because of sexual misconduct. El Hadji has become one of the wealthiest personalities in the new Senegalese government under the black Senegalese. He has already married two wives, namely Adja Anwa (six children), and Oumi N’Doye (five children). N’Gone is yet to be married as the third wife.

In this book, the writer shows that polygamy, as permitted by the Muslim religion in fact objectifies women. Adja Anwa’s response to her daughter’s persistence that she stays home instead of attending El Hadji’s third wife marriage demonstrates that traditional Senegalese marriage imprisons women. Her daughter, Rama, encourages her mother to divorce instead of tolerating the humiliating polygamous marriage between her husband and the third youngest wife, N’Gone. Adja Anwa quips:

“It’s easy to talk about, Rama, her mother began slowly. What she is about to say was the product of much careful reflection.” You think I should get a divorce. Where would I go at my age? Where would I find another husband. A man of my own age and still a bachelor? If I left your father and with luck and Yalla’s help found a husband, I would be

his third wife or his fourth wife. And what would become of you?" (p. 12).

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Buchi Emecheta shows that sometimes daughters are names that determine their commercial value. In her other novel, *The Bride Price*, Ezekiel Odia names his daughter 'Aku-nna,' which means 'father's wealth' (p. 3). In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Agbadi names his daughter 'Nnu Ego,' which literally means 'twenty cowries.' The author shows that from their birth daughters do not occupy the same social status as boys – they are commercial items from which their parents, especially their fathers, make economic gains or profit just like any other commodity in the commercial market. This total objectification and authoritarian ownership of daughters by their paternal parents deny them their sense of complete humanity- their fate is decided by someone else, and must comply with whatever contemplations and wishes their parents might develop about them. In this text for example, chief Obi Umunna has a daughter named Ona, meaning 'a priceless jewel.' The writer says that the chief would remorselessly pull the daughter along wherever he went. When asked about that, he still showed no sign of resentment in treating his girl child as an object. The writer says: 'but her father told people that his little was his ornament,' (p. 11). Therefore, the chief sees his girl child not as a human being, but as something with which to decorate himself. In the same book, the writer shows that an Igbo woman is usually owned by someone. The author challenges the Nigerian Igbo custom which belittles women. The Igbo woman does not only have to satisfy her husband's wishes, but also her father's. Connotatively, typical Igbo women should devise a means to emancipate themselves from this traditional view of a woman. Ona's fate, Ubi Umunna's only mentioned daughter in the text, is tossed between her father and his friend, Agbadi:

"... she had been dedicated to the gods to produce children in his name not of any husband. Oh, how torn she was between two Men: she had to be loyal to her father, as well as to her husband. (p. 18).

...my father wants a son and you have many sons. But you do not have a girl yet. Since my father will not accept any bride price from

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

Balavatbhai (2020) argues that Emecheta demonstrates that in *Ibuza* are dehumanized by their husbands. The author gives an example of Agbadi who confesses that *Ibuza* men want women 'who could claim to be helpless without them (men). The only honour women in *Ibuza* can get is when they produce sons, which means failure to carry out this 'males-producing' mandate will render a particular wife redundant or useless. Emecheta says "s(till) many agreed that she has given all to her children. The joy of being a mother is the joy of giving all to your children," they said and reward?" "Did she not get the greatest funeral *Ibuza* had ever seen?" it took Oshia three years to pay off the money he had borrowed to show the world what a good son he was. That was why people failed to understand why she didn't answer their prayers, for what could a woman want but to have sons who could give her a decent burial?"

The above quote discloses Emecheta's awareness to suffering, loneliness, and oppression which some African women experience in the patriarchal society. Coetzee (2010) shows that some men are promiscuous, that is, they see women as sex toys. In his book, *Disgrace*, the author tells the story of a European man named David. David is a Communication lecturer at the Cape Technical University, formerly Cape Town University College. He is fifty-two years old. He has divorced thrice in his life. The author says about him:

"He existed in an anxious flurry of promiscuity. He had affairs with the wives of colleagues, he picked up tourists in bars on the waterfront or at the Club Italia; he slept with whores (p. 7). He does what he feels like. He doesn't care if it's good or bad. He does it. he doesn't act on principle but on impulse, and the source of his dark to him" (p. 33).

His love life profile includes Soroya (Indian), Dam (employee at the institution), and Melanie Isaacs (student at the same institution). In the

character of David, Coetzee depicts a person who is remorseless in his sexual behaviour. A girl, Melanie Isaacs, who David brings home, is not only thirty years his junior, but also a student under his tutelage. "No matter what happens between them now, they will have to meet again as teachers and pupils," (p. 89). David remorselessly tells his daughter, Lucy, about his rape case (a university professor charged him with sexual misconduct after sleeping with Melanie Isaacs):

"My case rests on the right of desire", he says, "on the god who makes even the small birds quiver," (p.89). "No animal will accept the justice of being punished for following its instincts," (p. 90).

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta shows that in the traditional Igbo society, childbearing determines the failure or success of the marriage. If the marriage does not produce children, the society usually suspects the woman, and the man, as infertile. A wife accused of barrenness might be subjected to hard labour to force her to run away or be replaced by the junior one. The author reprimands this traditional tendency by projecting 'an infertile bride' in Nnu Ego's character. Amatukwu tells Nnu Ego after no signs of pregnancy:

"I will do my job by you. I will to your hut when my wife starts nursing her child. But now, if you can't produce sons, at least you can help harvest yams" (p. 33).

Emecheta exposes that some Igbo men wives tend to neglect their families. But it comes to their daughters being ill-treated by their husbands, it hurts them. As unfaithful men, such fathers or husbands pretend as if nothing wrong happens in their families, and they think of wives as people who need material maintenance, but not their daughters. The author remarks:

"Agbadi was no different from many men. He himself might take wives and then neglect them for years, apart from seeing that they each received one yam a day; he could bring his mistress to sleep with him right in his courtyard while his pinned and bit their nails for a word from him. But when it came

to his own daughter, she must have a man who cherish her" (p. 36).

Objectification of traditional Igbo women happens also in the form of marriage. Once a bride price is paid to the bride's parents, the woman, now as a wife, is completely owned by her husband. If this happens, the wife has no control whatsoever of anything that directly affects her. In other words, the traditional Igbo marriage subjugates wives to patriarchal whiffs. Accordingly, the author, while not utterly objecting to the institution of marriage, is not happy with the advantages accrued to men. Nnaife converses with Nnu Ego in their room. Nnaife says:

"What did you say? Did I pay your bride price? Am I not your owner? You know, the airs you put on are boring. I know you are the daughter of Agbadi. Pity he didn't marry himself and keep you by his side forever. If you are going to be my wife, you must accept my work, my way of life" (p. 48).

CONCLUSION

Patriarchy is a system of male authority which oppresses women through its social, political, and economic institutions, and is perceived as superior. Marriage is the formal union between a man and woman/women or woman and woman or man and a man. In traditional African societies marriage and childbearing are inseparable: a marriage that does not produce children, especially the male ones, is doomed a failure. Some authors argue is the mechanism through which men dominate women. The phrase 'women as objects' means treat women as inheritable properties, commercial commodities or sex objects either inside or outside marriage.

REFERENCES

- Bâ, M. (2008). *So Long a Letter*. Britain. Heinemann.
- Balavatbhai, V.H. 2020. Tale of African Women: Buchi Emecheta's *Joy of Motherhood*. *International Journal of Advance Academic Studies*, 2(2), 11-14

- Baloyi, E. (2010). *An African View of Women as Sexual Objects as a Concern for Gender Equality: A Critical Study*. University of South Africa.
- Chinua, A. (1969). *Things Fall Apart: African Writers Series*. Harlow. Pearson Education Limited.
- Coetzee, J. M. (2010). *Disgrace: reading Guide Edition*. London. Vintage Books.
- Crang, M & Cook, I. (2007). *Doing Ethnographies*. California. SAGE Publications.
- Dangarembga, T. (2004). *Nervous Conditions*. UK. Ayeibia Clarke Publishing Ltd.
- Emecheta, B. (1979). *The Joys of Motherhood*. New York. Allison & Bushy Ltd.
- Hadi, A. (2017). Patriarchy and Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan. *European Journal of Social Sciences, Education and Research*. Harran University. 4(4).
- Kramarae, C. (1992). The Conclusion of Patriarchy in Kramarae Cheris and Spencer Dale (eds.). *The knowledge Explosion of Feminist Scholarship*. Athen Suus. London. Teachers College Press.
- Kohzad, et al. 2011. A Study Black Feminism and Womanism in Toni Morrison's the Bluest Eye from the Viewpoint of Alice Walker. *International Journal of Academic Research*.
- Lewis, M, et al. 2003. *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. New York. Routledge.
- Montle, M.E. 2012. Denouncing cultural stereotypes against black women in the contemporary South African society the prism of Northern Sotho proverbs, *eBangi*: 18(1), 2322-242.
- Mphahlele, E. 2004. *Down 2nd Avenue*. Northlands. Picador Africa.
- Nyanhongo, M.M. (2011). Gender Oppression and Possibilities of Empowerment; Images of Women in African Literature with Specific Reference to Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* and Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. University of Fort Hare.
- Smith, M.D. (1990). Patriarchal Ideology and Wife Beating: A Test of a Feminist Hypothesis, *Violence and Victims*, 5(4). 257-274.
- Ousmane, S. 1974. Xala.. digitalized by RevSocialist for Social Stories.
- Pasque, A..P. & Wimmer, B. (2011). *An Introduction: Feminist Perspectives*. University of Oklahoma, 9(1)21-47
- Rawat, G. (2014). *The Impact of Culture on Traditional African Women: A Case of India*. New Dehli. Ajanta Publications.
- Soanes, C & Walker, S. (2003). *Compact Oxford English Dictionary of Current English*. Oxford New York. Oxford University Press.
- Stacey, J. (1993). *Untangling Feminist Theory*. In Richardson D. and Robinson V. (eds.). *Introducing Women's Studies: Feminist Theory and Practice*. London. Macmillan.
- Stanworth, M. (ed.). (1987). *Reproductive Technologies: Gender, motherhood and medicine*. Cambridge. Polity Press.
- Stevenson, A & Waite, M. (eds.). (2011). *Concise Oxford English Dictionary. 12th Edition*. Oxford New York. Oxford University Press.
- Vine, K. (2017). *Understanding Indian Patriarchal Practices*. Dehli. Anta Publications.
- Ward, V.C. (2018). *Restoring Fairness to Campus Sex Tribunals*. 85 TENN.LREV.1075.1136.