



## Struggle for Self-identity in Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood

مجلة كلية الآداب بقنا (دورية أكاديمية علمية محكمة)

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### Abstract

America has a long history of violence towards people of other races in general and Black people in particular, with origins that go all the way back to the colonial era. The relationship between Whites and Blacks in this racist culture of America was based on two tenets: White hegemony and Black subordination. Because of this, Black people fought for freedom throughout history in all spheres. This has compelled black writers to modify their styles in order to defend black causes and preserve their ancestors' identity. Among these writers is Buchi Emecheta. The aim of this study is to shed light on how racism affected the black community, how it led to a chasm between black men and women that is known as *Sexism*, and how Buchi Emecheta, a black woman, replied through *Womanism*. Additionally, this study clarified how the ideologies of *Womanism* and feminism differ from one another. The study then used this womanist perspective to *The Joys of Motherhood*, one of Emecheta's greatest books, tracking the development of Emecheta's female protagonists toward self-recognition.

**Keywords:** Racism, Sexism, Womanism, Feminism, Colonialism, Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood*, Civil Rights Movement, Violence, self-recognition.

## **Introduction**

America has a long history of violence towards people of other races in general and Black people in particular, with origins that go back to the colonial era. The United States is “a country created out of genocide [European conquest of the Americas] and colonialism [the historical process of conquest and exploitation]” (Trask 9). Within “the colonial agenda” of this country, Floyd-Thomas and Gillman state, “power is organized and violence is exercised within a system that maintains control over Black people. But it is those more internalized forms of oppression that add further injury to the acts of violence” (536). The relationship between Whites and Blacks has been predicated on two principles: hegemony of the Whites and subordination of the Blacks, within this racist civilization of America. Because of this, Black people fought for freedom throughout history in all spheres. They gave their souls in order to achieve dignity in this racist culture that had long denied black people their rights and treated them more like animals than like people. Thousands of black ancestors sacrificed their souls to have their voices heard because freedom is so dear and can cost one's soul, and now it appears that their descendants are reaping the rewards of their sacrifice. Due to this, black authors have modified their pens to defend black issues and keep their ancestors' identity. Among these writers is Buchi Emecheta.

## **Analysis:**

This study seeks, among other things, to respond to address the paucity of critical studies on writing by Third World women. In Tillie Olsen's *Silences*, she writes about female authors, describing them as teachers. There is a vast body of literature that has to be reassessed and revalued. She recommends to read and listen to contemporary female writers, both the new and the long-established but

frequently overlooked ones. Not having an audience is similar to dying. Check out our countless varieties of female writers not just those who describe us as "the other half," but also those who describe other human worlds and dimensions in their writing. (44)

Third World writing my women tell us not only of their oppression but also about "other human dimensions" where they become healers dissecting the ills of society and telling the people where it goes wrong and continues to go wrong. In these writings, we see multiple forms of oppression, exploitation, and domination that coalesce to strangulate the Third World, especially women. Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* that this paper discusses advocate emancipation of women in the Third World and because of the peculiar problems of this area in relation to the world, a Third World feminist agenda should embrace an empowerment of the Third World from all sources of internal as well as external oppression. Thus, Emecheta articulates this position.

In all facets of life, Emecheta is concerned with societal transformation. She bemoans and denounces injustice and helplessness in her writings, as well as the numerous ways that they affect Black people, women, and the poor.

Kirsten Holst Petersen asserts that Buchi Emecheta can accurately replicate the circumstances and challenges faced by women and provide insightful information about their feelings. She is less concerned with social reform or cultural liberty. Giving women access to power in the society as it is today appears to be the goal in her eyes. (254)

On the novel *The Joy of Motherhood*, Florence Stratton writes on its two major ideological functions: "to valorize the emergence of a female literary tradition and to refute conventional

images of women. Secondary functions include challenging the construction of motherhood and prostitution in patriarchal ideology and highlighting various aspects of colonial experience” (119). Many Third World writers continue to provide answers to the questions Emecheta poses in this above quote. Ngugi wa Thiong’o addresses this issue in his *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of the Language of African Literature*. As Ngugi argues, colonization of the continent was achieved through the “physical violence of the battlefield” and the “psychological violence of the classroom” (9). The importance of language in the colonization and ongoing neo-colonization of the Philippines and the confusion it causes on a daily basis cannot be overstated.

The essence of Emecheta’s realism is, according to Stratton, “in her portrayal of ‘the *inseparability* of [her] protagonists’ existence from their social and historical context” (113). Emecheta is not naïve to the oppression of women under a local patriarchy although acknowledging that Igbo women had much less freedom during colonization. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, The mother of Nnu Ego, Ona, frequently suffers public humiliation as a result of her disagreements with her lover, Agbadi. She is unable to be married while being allowed to contribute males to her father's lineage due to her status as a "male daughter." Women were clearly oppressed in traditional African society, but the mechanisms they had established to support them made the persecution less severe. Susan Andrade asserts that *The Joys of Motherhood* introduces the character of Adaku serves as an excellent example of how completely it examines the idea of an Igbo women's community and highlights its failure. Due of their fight for scarce resources in the setting of urban colonialism, Nnu Ego and Adaku are in conflict. (103)

Emecheta reveals the alienation that an urban colonial economy forces on people but does not condone it. For instance, Nnu Ego and Cordelia's friendship is strained when Cordelia's spouse secures distant employment. When Nnu Ego first visits Lagos, Cordelia explains the gender and racial power dynamics there and aids her in surviving the loss of her first kid:

You want a husband who has time to ask you if you wish to eat rice, or drink corn pap with honey? Forget it. Men here are too busy being white men's servants to be men. We women mind the home. Not our *husbands*. Their manhood has been taken away from them. The shame of it is that they don't know. All they see is the money, shining white man's money . . . They are all slaves, including us. (51)

Contrasting sharply with the heavily marked women's living space, greater autonomy over their economic resources, and greater control over their sexual activity depicted in the rural setting of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is Nnaife's cramped single room where his two wives and children live in poverty. Emecheta challenges the notion that tradition is the only proper route to power through the women's cooking strike. Adaku starts a strike, and Nnu Ego joins her, all in an effort to get Nnaife to hand over all of his money to feed his starving family. Men in a village economy would have no choice than to submit or prepare their own food. In the story, Nnaife eats lunch with his coworkers, hence, the cooking incident.

Nnu Ego views Cordelia as a mentor, hence losing their friendship would be terribly felt. Because of the disparity in their economic circumstances, Nnu Ego's connection with Iyawo, a

Yoruba lady who saves her son Oshia from starvation, has never been solid.

Traditional forms of women's resistance are ineffective in this new context and Emecheta suggests in *The Joys of Motherhood* that different strategies have to be adopted. It is possible to see strategy in Adaku's separation from her husband, Nnaife, and her brief time as a prostitute. She is able to save up enough money to leave her tiny apartment and launch a business selling textiles. In the Igbo setting, which values women as skilled traders, greater economic security denotes some level of achievement.

Emecheta simply discusses her choice and the Ibuza community's subsequent anguish, skipping over the specifics of Adaku's prostitution. Most importantly, Adaku prefers to live beyond the confines of patriarchal protection rather than pursue remarriage. She says, "I want to be a dignified single woman. I shall work to educate my daughters, though I shall not do so without male companionship" (170-171). Adaku will not marry but does not shun men.

This is not meant to imply that Emecheta supports the idea that women in Africa shouldn't be allowed to marry or live without independence. She draws attention to the mistreatment of African women while also illuminating the issues that contribute to this mistreatment. In an article, "Feminism With a Small 'f!," Emecheta asserts that African women need their men and that they still have a long way to go. Her claim is supported by the fact that there is underdevelopment and a lack of resources in the continent:

I think we women of African background still have a very very long way to go before we can really rub shoulders with such women . . . So, my sisters in America, I am not shunning your



advanced help, in fact I still think women of Africa need your contribution, and at the same time we need our men. (116-117)

I contend that Emecheta is adamant that colonization imposed definitions and conditions on her, in addition to patriarchy, are to blame for the double oppression of African women. The cash economy that colonialism imposed has weakened the support networks that traditional African civilizations had for both men and women.

Emecheta also discusses the disastrous effects of polygamy, particularly for low-wage workers like Nnaife in metropolitan areas where “she and her husband were ill- prepared for a life like this, where only pen and not mouth could really talk” (179). The pen stands for the cash-based economy of the new colonial regime. For the illiterate like Nnaife and his women, life in the city might be tantamount to battle. Nnaife is informed that Nnu Ego exists when he returns from the war: “fought the war too here in your family” (183). She fought a war to provide for her family. Any rivalry among the women was a struggle to divide scarce resources.

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, men and children are also subjugated as a result of colonization and urbanization in addition to women. In Lagos, Nnu Ego and her husband live in the “boys’ quarters,” behind the white master’s and mistress’ house in an arrangement reminiscent of American slave plantation architecture. Nnaife actually emphasises this issue by informing her buddy Cordelia that “my father released his slaves because the white man says it is illegal. Yet these our husbands are like slaves . . . They are all slaves, including us. If their masters treat them

badly, they take it out on us” (51). The system is undoubtedly hilarious given its consequences for enslavement and immaturity. Because of her patriarchal upbringing, where males are expected to be superior and to provide for their wives and children, Nnaife holds the position that she does. He cleans his female employer's underpants because he works as a laundromat. Nnaife considers the job to be humiliating and unbearable. Nnu Ego notices her husband displaying the white woman's underwear and she “would wince as someone in pain. The feeling would cut deeper when, with sickening heart, she heard Nnaife talking effusively about his treatment of dainty clothes and silk” (47).

Thus, Emecheta tries to show the social, political, and historical causes of the oppression not only of women but of the men as well. She does not suggest that women solve the problem just by ostracizing men. She believes that collectively, both African men and women can solve the problems facing them.

Victimization of black women in the racist and sexist American society is a principal theme in Emecheta's literary works. Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* narrates the story of a black woman, Nnu Ego, who knows her identity and its completion in having many children especially the boy one. Despite being poor, she knows that she is wealthy because she has three sons. She feels that with the assistance of her sons, she would have a comfortable old life in accordance with Ibuza custom. Emecheta, in fact, emphasizes the consequences of capital politics and colonial patriarchal regimes in Third World women's marginalization and control by presenting the persecution and pain Nnu Ego faces in Lagos. As the tale of women's voicelessness, invisibility, and marginalization, Emecheta's *The Joys of*

*Motherhood*, aims at rewriting an integral part of history which has been dismissed. Emecheta aims to represent the Ibuza women who are repeatedly mistreated and ostracized by a colonial and indigenous patriarchal society. Emecheta is thus the ideal candidate to retell the pain and marginalization of Nigerian women, and her book is a crucial source of information on them. In a talk with her neighbor Cordelia, she raises the subject of women's double colonization. Nnu Ego and Cordelia's talk reiterates the double oppression that African women experience. The whites rule over their men, who in turn rule over their women. Emecheta provides examples of the tribal way of life, the degree to which women support and encourage their own subjection, and the enslavement and dominance that result from these conditions.

Even Nnu Ego learns to accept Nnaife as the father of her child, and the fact that her baby was the first son in her life to give her a sense of fulfilment. She was now confident that her old age would be happy and that when she passed away, there would be someone to remember her as she bathed her infant son and prepared meals for her husband; she will always be remembered as a “mother”. (54)

In the novel, Nnu Ego is multiply victimized by oppressive forces of race, gender and class. Emecheta presents three ladies with various identities. For example, Ona is a strong, independent woman with male authority. Adaku, a symbol of a free woman, fights for her freedom and independence. Traditional woman Nnu Ego acknowledges the primacy of men and makes an effort to be a good daughter for her father, a good wife for her husband, and a good mother for her kids. Emecheta thoroughly demonstrates in

the book how colonial rhetoric affects institutions, such as the religious ones in Lagos, to bring about reforms: “the workers are determined to be off only half a day in the week and that is on Sundays in order to attend the church. If the marriage is not performed in a church, it is considered to be a forbidden union. Nnaif becomes concerned that he might lose his job because they didn't get married in a church when Nnu Ego became pregnant for the first time. Moreover, Nnu Ego, in the court, is told to swear by the holy Bible not by her chi”. (Emecheta, 2011, p. 217) Hence, Emecheta highlights how carefully West develops its culture and rules through the institutions. She does, in fact, reaffirm how oppressive forces of race, gender, and class combine to oppress women in many ways. In this sense, Emecheta makes an effort to speak for the oppressed African women who are subject to colonial patriarchal society. Due to their own contradictory sex, race, class and cast positioning, Third World women and women of color are subject to domination and exploitation (Mohanty, 2003, p. 64).

Moreover, the title is highly significant. Emecheta's novel's title is an ironic attempt to make a point. She emphasizes that for a woman who chooses to lead a secluded, antiquated life in a world that is changing, there is no joy in life or parenthood. Even unemployment contributes to national poverty, which results in people begging for food and shelter and travelling aimlessly but still managing to survive as a vagabond. The title of the novel *The Joys of Motherhood* is taken from Flora Nwapa's pioneering novel *Efuru* (1966). The closing sentences of Nwapa's book raise a paradox about the much-consulted childless river goddess, Uhamiri: “She had never experienced the joy of motherhood. Why then did the women worship her?” (Efuru, 221). *The Joys of*

*Motherhood* is Emecheta's melancholy satirical expansion on such venerated, so-called joys.

Emecheta is indeed concerned about the spiritual survival of her entire people, but her main focus is on studying the struggles and accomplishments of black women. Black women's solidarity and unity are therefore essential components to achieving such victories.

Emecheta's serious fight for Black women's rights is actually related to her awareness of the peril of sexism as one of the abhorrent consequences of racism. In fact, sexism appears to be more dangerous than any other issue because it has strained the relationship between the two pillars of the Black community, Black men and women. Women are perceived as "other" to men rather than as similar to them based on this idea of sexism, which refers to the superiority of one sex over the other. This is done by giving each sex opposite characteristics and then ranking them so that those understood as male are superior to those understood as female. Similar to racism, sexism left black women with an intolerable sense of inferiority and self-split. By 1970, this sense of self-split has been intensified due to the call raised by "some people who called themselves black nationalists or black militants... [for] black women, who had struggled for their freedom along with black men in the Civil Rights Movement, to subordinate themselves to black men, to make themselves less, for the good of their people" (Hendrickson 112).

Black women made the decision to fight for independence alongside black men after being astonished by their desire to dominate and control them like white men do. She endured prejudice and slavery, but her misery was doubled as a result of

being raped in order to boost her slave owner's wealth. Under this depraved system of slavery “an enslaved woman's refusal to work or her complaints about enforced sex with beatings and decisions to sell her children. [However,] black women denied compliance with a worldview that asserted their bestiality as workers, as mothers, and as women” (Palmer 123).

A movement with a long history in the struggle for women's rights, feminism has played an important role in the issues related to women's liberty not only within the United States but all over the World. This goal drives Barrow and Millburn to define feminism as “a label for a commitment or movement to achieve equality for women”; J.A. Cuddon perceives it as “an attempt to describe and interpret (or reinterpret) women's experiences as depicted in various kinds of literature”, and sociologically “the word feminism can stand for a belief in sexual equality combined with a commitment to transform society” (Ebunoluwa 227). It is evident from these diverse feminism-related viewpoints that the movement's fundamental goal is the liberation of women from sexism. Feminism was a magnet that drew in Black women writers because of its concern in women's independence and gender equality. Later on, though, Black women felt the need to create a movement to convey how their experiences differed from those of their White counterparts. This difference is in fact clear in the lack of White feminists' interest in such important issue as racism because “sexism, not racism, is the principle issue for the average, middle class, White feminist” (Beckmann 406). Indeed the black woman and her White counterpart have the same goal of defying male's power, the relationship between a black woman and a white feminist is controlled by this notion of power and therefore “white woman's invocation of power destroys [this]

relationship” (Reames 3). This urged Black women to “define their realities, reflect upon their experiences, and find their place in the world” (Jue 451).

To enable the Black women to have such place in the world and represent the uniqueness of her experience, Emecheta has chosen the term “Womanism” to give a special character to Black women's struggle against racism and sexism. Black women experience male violence in a way that is particularly bitter, and one of the authors, Traci C. West, has sympathetically stated that “there is no more compelling societal problem in need of redress than black women's experience of male violence. ... in the United States white supremacy, patriarchy, and intimate violence often represent simultaneous, heinous violations of the personal and communal becoming of African-American women” (1).

The goal of the current paper is to examine *Womenism*, which is important due to its alternative value system. Women become a necessary component of society since they live their lives dependent on others, creating imaginary universes that male authors are forced to enter.

He restores his diminished power at home in the meanwhile. Nnaif acts like a lord and master at home when he returns from Fernando Po, where he worked for white guys. He even does not always respond to Nue Ego. Nnaif is also pleased to reestablish his influence at home, which he had lost as a result of colonial dominance, by working as a grass cutter for the railway. Now, he can beat his wife: One thing was sure: he gained the respect and even the fear of his wife Nue Ego. He could even now offer to beat her up if she went beyond the limits he could stand. He gave her a little house keeping money which bought a bag of

garri (cassava flour) for the month and some yams; she would have to make up the rest from her trading profits. (p. 117) “They are all slaves, including us. If their masters treat them badly, they [will] take it out on us”. (p. 51) When Nnu Ego gives birth to a twin, two baby girls, Nnaif even doesn’t choose their names. Nnu Ego says disappointedly: “they don’t deserve a suitable name” (p. 14). As a result of the interplay of racial, gendered, and socioeconomic repressive forces, female characters are seen as being the targets of double oppression. They were made specifically to help guys

Nnu Ego lives in a culture where a woman's identity is determined by her relationship with a man and her status as a multi-child mother. As Emecheta notices, “gender inequality” in the colonial and indigenous patriarchal society, determines the value of human being: male child is attached excess importance while female child is considered as “other”. We are informed of Nwakusor's contempt for Adaku because she is not the biological mother of the male child. When she was informed, she was viewed as someone without a historical identity, “you Adaku, the daughter of whoever you are” (Emecheta, 2011, p. 166).

Therefore, a woman's relationship with a patriarchal culture shapes who she is. Women are therefore determined to suppress their sense of independence. A male-dominated society is what makes up their identity, sense of self, and essence. When talking to her second pair of girl twins, Nue Ego makes one of her emotive claims: “God, when will you create a woman, child who would be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody’s appendage?” (p. 186). In her novel, Emecheta partially assumes the voices of the female characters who have been silenced by



patriarchal ideas. Her actions serve as a representation of their suffering under the native patriarchy, which was then reinforced by the racial colonial patriarchal government

Yes, I have many children, but what do I have to feed them on? On my life, I have to work myself to the bone to look after them I have to give them my all. And if I am lucky enough to die in peace, I even have to give them my soul. They will worship my dead spirit to provide for them: it will be hailed as a good spirit so long as there are plenty of yams and children in the family, but if anything should go wrong, if a young wife doesn't conceive or there is a famine, my dead spirit will be blamed. When will I be free? (Emecheta, 2011, P: 186-87)

In the novel, *Nnu Ego*, an Ibuza lady from a traditional culture, experiences persecution and hardship after moving to Lagos, a colonized city with capitalist economic principles. A specific sexual division of labor was established in Ibuza. Men were defined as breadwinner who work in the farm, do hunting, etc., while the primary functions of women are to care for their husbands' needs and bear offspring, making them mere chattels (Killam, 2004, p. 44). These are the definitions of work for both male and female in this traditional patriarchal society.

As a result, *Nnu Ego*, in this colonial society, has to do a "petty business" (Nyanhongo, 2011, p. 88) in order to feed her children and even her husband. She knows, according to the tradition of Ibuza, she is responsible for her children. When she demands her husband more money to feed her children, *Nnaif*

asserts cruelly: “it’s your responsibility to feed your children as best you can” (Emecheta, 2011, p. 136), “sell your lappas. You are the chief wife: use your head” (p. 137). Hearing this statement, Nnu Ego perceives that she was a prisoner who was held captive by her love for her children and her position as the older wife. Even asking for more money for her family was not expected of her; doing so was viewed as being beneath the standard required of a man in her position. The way men deftly exploited a woman's sense of obligation to effectively enslave her was unfair. They were aware that she was a traditional wife who would never consider abandoning her children.

At the end, Nnu Ego achieves self-realization and individual empowerment (Nyanhongo, 2011, p. 137). Emecheta echoes the sign of African women’s solidarity based on “the common interests, historical location, and social identity” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 12).

According to Mohanty, the struggle against hierarchical ideologies of racism, nationalism, imperialism, capitalism, and patriarchy, which constitute a political oppositional alliance among them, forms the foundation of black women's solidarity or unity. In describing the term “women of color”, Mohanty (2003) concludes that “this term designates a political consistency, not a biological or even sociological one” (p. 49). So, for her “unity of action” and “blackness” explore the common context of struggle among people of color and Third World women. In Emecheta's work, Ibuza women gather once a month in Lagos, which symbolizes their artificial camaraderie. They support one another so that they can both live independent lives and make their own lives simpler. The passage that follows provides evidence for this claim. Even though Nnu Ego lives in poverty, other Ibuza women

taught her how to launch her own business so she wouldn't have to limit herself to one outfit. They urged her to purchase tins of smokes and packets of matches after letting her borrow five shillings from the women's fund (Emecheta, 2011, p. 52). Furthermore, this remark reveals the shared backdrop of struggle experienced by black women who have been colonised and recolonized by power structures. This common context of struggle, as depicted, determines their “political oppositional alliance” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 49) and constitutes their commonality. When Nnu Ego and her friend Cordelia argue, they quickly determine it was not worth excluding one another from their community. The benefits of communication were far greater because they must remain in the same head, the tongue and the mouth always make up after a disagreement.

Emecheta makes an effort to examine how, despite their differences, women of color recognize that their one point of solidarity inside the power systems: “There was far more to be gained by communication” (p. 63). By description, unity of action and blackness, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, demystify the common context of struggle among women of color in Igbo society. The constructed solidarity, in this regard, unifies them against the power structures. He is gradually diagnosed to be ill. In this situation, we are told that everyone did his best to aid Nnu Ego, but the biggest favor was when the landlord advised her not to pay rent for that month. In fact, this portrayal establishes the presence of black people as a whole, not just among women. The concept examines the idea that black men and black women should fight racism together. Maybe, this extract justifies Emecheta as a black feminist and a womanist because [...] forerunners of Black Feminism...stimulate black women to love themselves, their race,

and their culture and not to trap in white superiority or white beauty standards (Kohzadi et al., 2011: 1307)

Parekh and Jagne (1988) believe that Emecheta is regarded as “feminist rather than womanist” (p. 155). Emecheta never refers to herself as a Western feminist, nevertheless. Instead, she refers to herself as a feminist with a tiny "f" since she sees things through the perspective of an African woman. She keeps a diary of the events that occur in the lives of the African women she knows. She had no idea that by doing this, she would be labeled a feminist. She is an African feminist, with a tiny f, if she is now a feminist. (Katrak, 2006, p. 17)

Is a woman fulfilled without a man? It is a question that illustrates how a woman, in this case Adankwo, internalizes patriarchal power. She didn't believe it. A woman's identity and existence are always dependent on a male. Without a guy, she is not a whole human being. This is the viewpoint that the patriarchal rhetoric propagates within these institutions. A woman is further oppressed by the patriarchal society by receiving this label. The duties and expectations that come with this status are higher. In fact, it appears that traditional patriarchy has enslaved the lady in this title. This is evident in Nnu Ego's case whilst she is unable to complain: She too was close to tears. She was frightened as well but her culture did not permit her to give in to her fears. She was supposed to be strong, being senior wife, to behave more like a man than a woman. As men were not permitted open grief, she had to learn to hide hers as well. She heard Adaku crying, and she envied her freedom. (p. 140)

Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* emphasizes how little attention is paid to women's sexual pleasure. Agbadi allegedly neglects his wives for a long time. Apart from making sure they each received their one yam a day, he might take wives and then abandon them for years. He could even bring his mistress to sleep with him in his courtyard as his women waited impatiently for a word from him. This documents the extent of women's sexual oppression and devaluation within the Igbo patriarchal society.

Above all, Agbadi brings his mistress to bed with her and to offer her pleasure while his wives want to talk to him. Indeed, the woman's frustration has come to an end. This truth is supported by the book's many portrayals. It is said that Nnaif treats Adaku, his brother's widow, like a child receiving a new toy by showing her around the yard when she moves in with him as his new wife. Nnu Ego fought back tears as she made her own bed for Nnaif and Adaku at night after being ignored. She wouldn't cause herself any pain when the time came for Adaku to lie in that bed, therefore it was a good thing she was committed to play the part of the mature elder wife. When they all went to bed, she had to cover her ears with a rag and place her nipple in the mouth of her small son Adim.

African women who are oppressed in many ways and prevented from realizing their potential are portrayed by Emecheta in this book. This proves Emecheta's intention to help African women understand themselves through her works. In other words, she tries to improve the standard of living for African women. Therefore, Emecheta's works mark the beginning of a new age in Nigerian literature. She tries to speak for Igbo women and calls for "political consciousness of all women, couples with questioning and challenging the marginalization of women in all

social systems” (Parekh & Jagne, 1988, p. 150). However, with political independence and social changes, women’s position began to be changed. For instance, and according to Lafraniere (2009), women currently hold a sizable portion of prominent ministerial positions in South Africa and other nations on this continent. The constitution protects women's rights in South Africa and throughout Africa. The 2006 amendment to Swaziland's constitution makes women the same as males in terms of their legal rights, including the ability to sign contracts and borrow money without a man's sponsorship (p. 11).

This particularity distinguishes *The Joy of Motherhood* as a remarkable book. While Western feminists single out gender as the foundation for sexual rights and black feminists and postcolonial feminists speak against the interplay of oppressive forces of race, gender, and/or class, *The Joys of Motherhood* emphasizes both foundations. According to Palmer (1972), *The Joys of Motherhood* is “the first work in African literature to present the female point of view in registering its disgust at male chauvinism and patriarchy’s satisfaction with an oppressive system toward women” (qtd. in Parekh & Jagne, 1988, p. 156). Thus, having children is a highly valued social position in Africa, to the point where women who choose not to have children or are barren are stigmatized as being anti-social and anti-community. In other words, women have organized to find solutions to issues that affect them as women, members of economically underprivileged groups, mothers, and Africans in a global economy.

An important difference between Feminism and Womanism is that “feminism as a movement ... is exclusively for women and, at worst, dedicated to attacking or eliminating men... in contrast

to feminism, womanist inquiry... assumes that it can talk both effectively and productively about men" (Collins, "What's in a name?" 11). At the time that feminism is based on such principles as "refusal to deal with the world of men altogether, and advocate sexual relations (lesbianism) among women, and overcome cultural and language for the sake of the unity of women everywhere" which make it exposed to harsh criticism for being "an exaggeration in a bias for women" (Enani 30).

Violence against black women has become an undeniable phenomenon within the American society. This phenomenon "is widely believed to be motivated by [males'] needs to dominate women," as Crowell and Burges state (59). Within this patriarchal society, "womanhood, like blackness, is Other [...] and the dilemma of woman in [this] patriarchal society [becomes] parallel to that of the blacks in a racist one" (Davis 12). Black women suffered violence under slavery and racism the same as African-American men. They "struggle[d] together with black men to fight [such] racism" but now they "struggle with black men over sexism" (Tate 123). After experiencing their own oppression and brutality at the hands of white people, black men have begun to misdirect their rage and project their sense of failure due to racism onto black women. In other words, black men use violence to ensure their survival and sense of superiority.

Thus, black women experience double oppression. According to *The Joys of Motherhood*, if they experience the brutality and oppression of white oppressors, they will also experience oppression and abuse from black men, whether they are their husbands or fathers. Some black women have failed in their search for self-determination as a result of the violence used

by white and black oppressors. As a result, they have been prevented from fulfilling their allotted responsibilities as spouses, mothers, and daughters, as perfectly illustrated in *The Joys of Motherhood*. However, some black women have been successful in overcoming their repressive circumstances, and as a result, they have led successful lives of self-determination.

The reader of *The Joys of Motherhood* notices such womanist approach represented by multiple female characters who strive for self-determination economically, intellectually, and socially defying all types of violence directed by men, whether white or black men.

## **Conclusion**

Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* depicts the identity crisis and dual consciousness of Africans through plains of uniformity and diversity. Emecheta raises a voice against racism and discrimination in society in an effort to humanize Africans. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to shed light on how racism affected the black community, how it led to a chasm between black men and women that is known as *Sexism*, and how the black woman, represented by Buchi Emecheta, replied via *Womanism*. She chooses topics and concepts that most accurately reflect her viewpoint on significant occurrences in Africans' lives. Additionally, she is a symbol of the devastated state of black people and her primary focus is on the life of the Africans in the context of evolving social, cultural, and political events in the United States.



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## النضال من أجل الهوية الذاتية في رواية بوتشي إميثشا مباهج الأمومة

### الملخص:

للعنف ضد الأعراق الأخرى بشكل عام والسود بشكل خاص تاريخ طويل في أمريكا وتعود جذوره إلى الحقبة الاستعمارية. وفي هذا المجتمع العنصري الأمريكي، كانت العلاقة بين البيض والسود تقوم على مبدئين: هيمنة البيض وإخضاع السود. ولهذا السبب، كافح السود عبر العصور من أجل الحصول على حريتهم في جميع المجالات. وقد دفع هذا الكتاب السود إلى تكييف أرقامهم للدفاع عن قضايا السود والحفاظ على هوية أسلافهم. من بين هؤلاء الكتاب بوتشي إميثشا. والهدف من هذه الدراسة هو إلقاء الضوء على تأثير العنصرية على المجتمع الأسود وكيف تسببت في حدوث شرخ بين الذكور والإناث السود مما أدى إلى ما يعرف بالتمييز على أساس الجنس وكيف استجابت المرأة السوداء، ممثلة في بوتشي إميثشا، من خلال ما يسمى النسوية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، ومن خلال هذه الدراسة، تم توضيح الفرق بين مبادئ النسوية والمرأة. ثم طبقت الدراسة هذا النهج النسوي على إحدى روايات إميثشا الرائعة، مباهج الأمومة، متتبعة رحلة الشخصيات النسائية في إميثشا إلى التعرف على الذات. الكلمات المفتاحية: العنصرية، التمييز على أساس الجنس، النسوية، الاستعمار، بوتشي إميثشا، مباهج الأمومة، حركة الحقوق المدنية، العنف، الاعتراف بالذات.