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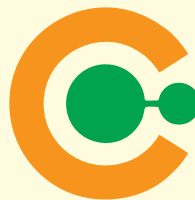
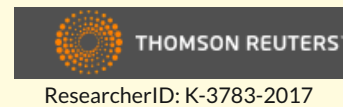
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Ecological Violence: A Critical Perusal on Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* and *The Joys of Motherhood*

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an endeavor to adumbrate a comprehensive view of African Environmentalism embedded in Buchi Emecheta's two trailblazing novels- *Second-Class Citizen* (1975) and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). The two novels, if minutely construed, would enable the readers to comprehend the linchpin of the ecological violence. Albeit Emecheta foregrounds the motherhood in the novels, she deliberately presents the violence of the ecology of Nigeria, providing the readers with a broader perspective of kincentric connection, impact of colonialism/neo-colonialism and colonial demands of modernization. Within the rubric of Africana Feminism and Motherism, Emecheta has been adroit in postulating the Environment of the poor, subverting the concept of pristine nature and concentrating on Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) pulverized by the wheels of globalization, colonialism and/or neo-colonialism. Two protagonists of both the novels are faced with wave of obligations coercing them to be tormented not only by racial, class and gender differences but by the impact of the ecological violence. The focus of the paper is to re-present these two novels within the purview of African environmental literature by demonstrating the characters and their social, cultural and economic milieu.

Keywords: *Ecological violence, Africana Feminism, Kincentric attachment, Indigenous Knowledge System*

FULL PAPER

Florence Onyebuchi Emecheta, popularly known as Buchi Emecheta, was born on 21st July 1944 in Lagos, a city in Nigeria, of Igbo parentage. Her father was a railway worker in the 1940s. Being an orphan at a tender age, she was brought up by her extended family. She was devoid of education during her initial years, albeit her brother attended school. However, she joined an all-girls missionary school finally by earning a full scholarship. Following her education in Methodist Girls' School, she got married and her husband moved to London for education and she followed him in 1962. At young age of 22, Emecheta started to work to support herself and her children as a single parent. She initially joined as a librarian in the British Museum and at that time she brought out a few books, mostly autobiographical and semi-autobiographical, in the true sense of the term. In 1972 and 1975, she published her first and second novels, *In the Ditch* and *Second-Class Citizen*. Since then she has published a few novels along with five children's books—*The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977), *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *The Moonlight Bride* (1981), *Destination Biafra* (1982), *Naira Power* (1982), *Adah's Story* (an amalgamation of her first two works *In the Ditch* and *Second-Class Citizen*), *The Rape of Shavi* (1983), *Double Yoke* (1982), *Gwendolen* (published in the US as *The Family*, 1989), *Kehinde* (1994), *The New Tribe* (2000). The two novels, *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Second-Class Citizen* (1975) shall be construed over here with an eye to foregrounding Buchi Emecheta's environmental consciousness by adumbrating ecological violence, often relegated to background. However, an unfortunate oversight happens when it comes to Emecheta's inclination towards African environmentalism.

African Environmental Literature and Ecological Violence

What is African Environmental Literature? To delve deep into the question, the issue of 'African Environment' becomes preponderant over here. Chengyi Coral Wu (2016) highlighted that environmental issues in African literature lies in the fact that they may not look like environmental issues as addressed or represented in Anglo-American environmental literature. In *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, he implies, "environment refers to the Igbo land as a *whole*—composed of the inhabitants, the gods and ancestral spirits they worship, village compounds, and the forests surrounding the community" (Wu 2).

He mainly talked about Igbo attachment to the land their ancestors had settled for centuries. In his famous essay, "From Cultural Hybridization to Ecological Degradation: The Forest in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*," he posits, "Achebe represents the indigenous Igbo relationship with the land and the earth goddess (Ani)-a relationship between ancestral spirits, gods, use of the land, harvest, and community sustainability—in order to critique how the advent of British colonialism undermines that relationship" (Wu 95). What Wu explicates here is that we need to fathom the Igbo people's relationship with the environment via spiritual and social practices.

Renowned critics like Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, Renee K. Gosson and George B. Handley are concerned with the perspective of universalism prevalent in Anglo-American nature writing, upending the stereotypical belief that environment is a universal concept. According to their view, “modernity and industrialism go hand in hand with European colonial expansions into non-European regions, and that colonialism has led to environmental degradation in these places” (DeLoughrey and Handley 6). However, it ought to be taken into consideration that modernity, capitalism and industrialism fail to discern the subtleties of environmental issues caused by colonialism, neocolonialism and inequalities owing to racial, class and gender differences. African Environmental Literature castigates the impact of colonialism/neocolonialism and globalization on African environments. Wu rightly says, “It (African Environmental Literature) traces the weakening of indigenous inhabitants’ attachment to the land and dispossession from the land to the more specific political context” (Wu 17). In this respect, we would like to take a closer look at ‘kincentricity’ since it highlights the indigenous attachment to the land. In “Landscapes, Visual Arts ,And Ecocriticism : A Reflection on The Scenic Apertures of Mount Fako in Cameroon,” Taku Victor Jong (2010), relating ‘kincentric’ connection to Bakweri origins in Cameroon , mentioned that the history of Cameroon would be worthless sans Mount Fako ,the highest and most active volcano in West Africa and its eruptions are loaded with implication. Mount Fako, more often than not, is related to the creation of the world, offering a link to the creation of land and a ‘kincentric’ connection to Bakweri origins. Regarding ‘kincentricity,’ he construes, “*Kincentricity or traditional ecological knowledge* is relevant to Cameroon culture because much of what obtains in Cameroon passes through such knowledge” (Jong 793). (Italics Mine)

It is a communal consciousness explicated through oral traditions, dialogues and dialects. Apart from ‘kincentricity,’ Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKSs) must not be relegated to the background. Often considered as being unsystematic coupled with its danger of extinction, Indigenous Knowledge Systems are significant in preserving African culture and tradition. Dominics Dan Ayaa and Fuchaka Waswa (2016) in “Role of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the Conservation of the Bio-Physical Environment among the Teso community in Busia County-Kenya” mentioned that the Teso community members used numerous indigenous environmental norms in managing different elements of the bio-physical environment .They argued that IKSs would refer to “Indigenous ways of knowing, local/traditional/folk knowledge /ethno science and is thus a dynamic archive of the sum total of knowledge, skills and attitudes belonging to and practiced by a community over generations...” (Ayaa and Wasawa 468).

African Environmental Literature subverts the concepts of pristine nature and of wilderness propounded by Anglo-American Environmental Literature, thwarting the proclivity of Anglo-American Environmental Literature to recapitulate ideas and values, rather providing critical perspectives in reading environmental literature. Beset with the issues of urban slums and urban environmental degradations executed by the

colonial demands of modernization, African environmental literature underscores the crisis of famine and food shortage caused by the shift from subsistence farming to global, market-oriented farming under globalization, deploring Anglo-American Environmental Literature's wistful longing for pastoral and agrarian life. At this crucial juncture, Anthony Vital's concept of 'African Ecocriticism' could be useful for us to analyze ecological violence. He states:

Ecocriticism, if it is to pose African questions and find African answers, will need to be rooted in local (regional, national) concern for social life and its natural environment. It will need too, to work from an understanding of the complexity of African pasts, taking into account the variety in African responses to currents of modernity that reached Africa from Europe initially...(Vital 88).

What Anthony has implied here is that 'African Ecocriticism' is concerned with regional and/or national perspectives, indicating African responses to the modernity and/or capitalism introduced to or imposed on African land and culture. Keeping this in mind, it must be noted that the resistance towards the modernity, colonialism, neocolonialism, industrialization and globalization on the part of the native Africans can be deemed as 'Environmentalism of the poor.' It is "a set of social movements that arise from environmental conflicts when impoverished people struggle against powerful state or private interests that threaten their livelihood, health, sovereignty, and culture" (Wikipedia). However, African Environmental Literature combats a fight –the fight against the ecological violence, modernity /development and its impact on human living conditions and psychology, impacts of war. Overall, it resists and shields Indigenous 'kincentric' attachment to land and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKSs) from the oppressive forces of modernity, colonialism, neocolonialism, industrialization and globalization.

Second-Class Citizen

Bestowed with autobiographical elements, *Second-Class Citizen* published in 1975, is concerned with the struggle of Adah, the protagonist and her survival, not only of herself but also of her dream(s), while growing into a woman, moving from a high class position in her native Nigeria to a very poor class in a predominantly white European society. She struggles with motherhood and a part of her struggle emanates and deals with the issues of race and being black in the face of English racism. The forte of this novel lies in its ability to deal with a few preponderant issues like determination of women, struggle for self-respect in general and Adah's motherhood and her womanhood in particular. As an autobiographical novel, *The Second-Class Citizen* reflects upon Emecheta's own life in England as an émigré through a constructed alternative self. The text engages with the question of individual self-assertion in cultural, ideological and historical contexts. Emecheta's first novel, *In the Ditch*, (1972) is concerned with her life after leaving her husband and living at her own along with her children. She worked in a library at the British Museum. The protagonist of the novel, Adah is coerced to live in a housing estate. Her dignity is wounded here because of the charity she is compelled to accept. And Adah's struggle

is depicted in *Second-Class Citizen* as well. However, Buchi Emecheta is adroit enough to explore the ecological violence or her African environmental consciousness through the struggle of Adah.

Emecheta critically explores the extraordinarily idealized view of the United Kingdom, experienced from the distance of colonial West Africa. The UK is mused to be a sort of heaven, a refuge of prosperity, manners and education, and racism is something that cannot be relegated to the background. In *Second-Class Citizen* Adah's life is torn between Ibuza, Lagos and UK. Her dream is to study. And its Presence constantly haunts her. But her dream and its presence are pitted against the forces of an egotistical and unemotional husband and largely indifferent white society. Her dauntless spirit, however, and her vigilant 'Presence' helped her lot to go to school albeit "boys were usually given preference. So even though Adah was about eight, there were still discussions about whether it would be wise to let her stay long" (*Second-Class Citizen* ch.1 n.p.). She, so to speak, pulverizes the so-called image of fragile women explicated by Peter Okoro Nwankwo & Patrick Ikehukwu Ibe with the help of her constant urge of being a writer and to study in United Kingdom. "Traditionally, women are considered sacred and fragile, and are respected mostly on the grounds of their gender and housekeeping duties" (Nwankwo & Ibe 1). Adah's hasty marriage with Francis acts like a blessing in disguise since she muses that marriage is the only way for her to get a good job and to save money for her study in United Kingdom. But Francis becomes a large part of her onus and in England he remains unemployed only to father four children in rapid succession as a proof of his vim and vitality. Leaving Nigeria to England for her dream and discarding her kincentric attachment to her land coupled with Indigenous Knowledge Systems, she actually felt harsh reality in U.K. She, being treated as 'second class citizen' in England, was imbued with the sad realization that U.K. is not a 'heaven'(which she used to muse); the sense of nostalgic return to Nigeria pervaded her throughout the novel.

Rapid urbanization coupled with urban environments in U.K. altered Francis, the husband of Adah, leading him to desert his wife and children. "In hospital Adah thought and thought again. Why Francis had never given her present. After all, she had given him this Mohammed Ali of a son. After all, the son was going to carry his name, not hers, even though she was to carry the ugly Caesarean scars all her life. And what of the pain she was still going through? Yes. She deserved a present from Francis" (*Second-Class Citizen* ch.9 n.p.). To add salt to the wound, when Francis was asked by the Magistrate for the maintenance of the children, he said, "I do not mind their being sent for adoption" (*Second-Class Citizen* ch.13 n.p.). Mother Nature smiles with Adah who is pregnant again but this time it is her 'brainchild'- *The Bride Price* which now comes into being. "The more she wrote, the more she knew she could write and the more she enjoyed writing. She was feeling this urge: Write; go on and do it, you can write" (*Second-Class Citizen* ch.13 n.p.). Her brainchild is a sort of resistance against the patriarchal society; it's the only refuge though which Adah can raise her voice and justify her position as a mother and as a woman. However, she told Francis about her 'brainchild'. But he was not interested.

And he humiliates her by saying that she cannot write because she is a woman. To Francis, women are brainless and Adah's endeavor is 'rubbish.' Furthermore, Francis burnt Adah's manuscript containing *The Bride Price*. The burning of her manuscript is tantamount to killing her baby. When Adah was expecting her third one, she had to undergo a medical examination for her job as no pregnant woman could come by this job. However, the so-called society negated and denigrated her motherhood here. Adah deceived the doctor by concealing her pregnancy and by dint of it, she herself valued her motherhood, overhauling the norms of the society. Even though Adah hid her pregnancy only to secure her job in U.K. (the job itself demanded that no pregnant woman would be employed), she was found triumphant by resisting the colonial birth control and giving birth to her offspring.

The Joys of Motherhood

The Joys of Motherhood (1979) bristles with the story of Nnu Ego and her struggle. Nnu Ego's 'chi' (Personal God) is said to be the slave woman who was forced to die with Agunwa, Agabadi's (father of Nnu Ego) eldest wife. The young and pretty girl had decided to jump into the grave of her mistress as all good slaves are supposed to do. She received a blow on her head and blood splattered out and she finally fell into the grave. This horrific description of female enslavement becomes the reality of Nnu Ego's life. She lives and dies like a slave, chained to old traditional values and love for her children and, in a way, enslaved by her husband. Nnu Ego is Agbadi and Ona's love child and on her death bed, Ona made one request to Agbadi, "allow her to be a woman" (*The Joys of Motherhood* 23) but Nnu Ego becomes exactly the kind of woman her mother did not want her to be. She inherits her mother's beauty but she hardly inherits her mother's spirit. She, through the course of her maturity, is taught how to be a good wife and mother. Soon a groom is found for her and a bride price is fixed. Most importantly, she makes her father proud by proving to be an 'unspoiled virgin' and this is followed by a great celebration in her father's house. She is deemed barren since she doesn't bear a child in the first twelve months of her married life, disappointing everybody including her husband, father and her own self.

Agbadi decides to celebrate Nnu Ego's marriage again. This time he wants a man who would be patient with her, a man who would take the trouble to make his daughter happy. She marries a second time with a view to saving her honor and the honor of her family by proving that she is not barren. Her second husband, Nnaife is an ugly urban resident from her village, making an undignified living as a wash man in a white colonial's house in Lagos. He is disgusting in his looks and in the menial work he does - washing even woman's underwear with such loving care. It has created a huge impact on Nnu Ego's psyche. Moreover, her husband Nnaife works as a servant in the white master's (Dr.Meers) house and Nnu Ego, more often than not, questions the status of her husband's work. It can be averred that the urban milieu has played a major role in undermining the Nigerian people. Nnu Ego, having no other alternative, starts living with her husband again and experiences the hopes, pains and joys of motherhood when Nnaife is compelled into service while the Second World War begins. Once dependent on her husband, Nnu Ego has to keep the wolf from the door

for herself and especially for her children. She is now coerced to cope single-handedly with the problem of feeding her growing children in times of a raging inflation while living in crowded quarter. It has to be stated that Nnaife's participation in army in the 'white man's war' has created a huge fissure in Ego's life. Nnu Ego seems to wage a fight –the fight against urban environments, modernity/development, impacts of war and colonialism and as a working-class slum she appears to be victorious.

Nnu Ego attains her Motherhood but the fact that she has to avail herself of tasting the joys of motherhood is gainsaid. The real pain of motherhood now begins when her daunting spirit ought to come out of her emotional self which is only concerned with the so-called traditional view of 'Mother' (capital 'M' means the societal ideal with its impossible standards) .In this particular situation, what she wants is that she has to be 'mother' (small 'm' means real flesh and blood mother) who will make both ends meet. However, she fulfills her traditional role by becoming a mother but soon she comes to know that motherhood is something beyond the role of self-sacrifice or giving birth to children. But, the role of motherhood would project a woman who has to confront the obstacle, combat the odds and exhibit herself as a challenging figure who would do anything for her children, if needed. At the end of the novel, Nnu Ego, crazed with grief and forsaken by her husband, has become a broken woman. Her life deteriorates; until by the end of the novel she ends her life alone, expecting to hear from her sons in America and Canada. Since her family is dispersed, she goes back to her village, Ibuza where "she died quietly there with no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to her" (*The Joys of Motherhood* 224) and thus she clings to indigenous attachment to her own land. Having heard of the demise of their mother, all her children has come and given her a very expensive second burial and bedight a shrine in her name. In reality, her children during the fag end of her life have paid no heed to her; the influence of colonial and /or modern education has estranged her from her children. Nnu Ego, who lives for her children and dies for them, is the epitome of self-sacrificing mother and the symbol of living tradition of suffering and humiliation in her life-time. However, Nnu Ego has retained the indigenous attachment to her own land. She has not left her motherland, notwithstanding she is disowned by her children. But, according to the people, her shrine, erected by her children for their deceased mother during her funeral, curses those who come to take blessings for their children and this sort of oracle engulfs the land, exhibiting that by not leaving her motherland, Nnu Ego has still maintained her attachment to the tradition and custom. She also becomes a part of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKSs) which would preserve Nigerian culture and tradition and she resists and her resistance against ecological violence has been depicted sublimely by Buchi Emecheta.

Conclusion

The present paper tried to construe Buchi Emecheta's environmental consciousness imbedded in two novels *Second-Class Citizen* and *The Joys of Motherhood*. By dint of these novels, she seems to underscore ecological violence of Igbo land. Her protagonists Adah and Nnu Ego are Emecheta's spokespersons who

advocate 'Environmentalism of the poor.' They show resistance against modernity/development, urbanization and hold on to Indigenous 'kincentric' attachment to the land. According to Acholonu (1995), Motherism is concerned with the dynamics of ordering, reordering, creating structures, building and rebuilding in co-operation with Mother Nature. The affinity with Nature is crucial in Motherism. The purpose of the Motherist is to heal and/or protect the organic unity and cohesive essence of the family, the child, the society, and the environment. The term 'Motherism' bristles with a significant implication since it encompasses all men and women and upholds the solidarity. Postulating the female leadership in Africa is one of its tasks. The term here speaks volume of the togetherness of men and women as far as the female leadership and nation-building are concerned. Both Adah and Nnu Ego are the epitome of Motherism, holding the family and the Nation together in dire need. They are instrumental in preserving Nigerian culture and tradition; Adah's resistance against modernity/development coupled with her horrid period in U.K. and Nnu Ego's 'kincentric' attachment to the land must not be sidetracked. To end with, Nnu Ego and Adah can be termed as the symbol of Africana Feminism. Their self-defining entities coupled with their ambitious nature speak volume of Africana Feminism. For the sake of the amelioration of the Nation and the preservation of holistic worldview, religion, local practices/customs, Nnu Ego and Adah play the pivotal role, giving Buchi Emecheta the launch pad to demonstrate her environmental consciousness.

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