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Mothering Performativity in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*

In the novel The Joys of Motherhood, *author Buchi Emecheta demonstrates how motherhood emerges from a patriarchal society characterized by a homogeneous system of oppression. Motherhood is closely intertwined with gender, where women's roles are often determined by traditional hierarchical norms. In Nigeria's Igbo culture, a woman is not only restricted to male dominance and domestic space but also to coercive mechanisms, such as polygamy, son preference, and widow inheritance. Although all are subjected to the same cultural and gendered background, the novel introduces the reader to Ona, Nnu Ego, and Adaku, women who develop their identities differently. Sometimes, these fictional characters follow the traditional Igbo views on womanhood, and other times, they subvert them by providing a new performative model. Applying Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to Nigeria's Igbo culture, this article argues that mothering performativity is a way of (de)constructing traditional Igbo views of womanhood. Using the method of a critical textual analysis of* The Joys of Motherhood, *I examine how the characters Nnu Ego, Ona, and Adaku internalize or subvert cultural tradition by liberating themselves from gender expectation. Butler's framework explains the possibilities of subversion and displacement within the dominant structure. Moreover, the power of performativity is articulated with the ideology of mothering in which mothers exercise agency by determining their routes through life. In contrast to the apolitical and oppressive institution of motherhood, mothering performativity transforms women's daily practices into a source of power.*

Society attempts to define women by their power to give birth. Women internalize the role of family, marriage, and motherhood from early childhood. Motherhood is closely intertwined with the notion of gender, a tool for the construction of women's roles and the hierarchy between men and women. However, in the novel *The Joys of Motherhood*, first published in 1979, Buchi

Emecheta subverts this paradigm by demonstrating how motherhood emerges from a patriarchal society characterized by a homogeneous system of oppression.

In Igbo society in Nigeria, for instance, a woman is subjected not only to male dominance and restricted to domestic spaces, but also to coercive mechanisms, such as "polygamy, son preference, and widow inheritance" (Ezeigbo 26). By drawing attention to this inegalitarian system, Emecheta's novel critiques patriarchy by directly challenging the oppressive relationships that have limited the power and freedom of women and mothers.

Emecheta questions the societal stereotypes of womanhood. Struggling with the multiple identities of a so-called "woman", "wife" and "mother", Igbo women internalize the idea that without a child, they are failures, as when giving birth to children, they "ensure their people's continuity" (Mbiti 144). The dominant discourse regulates and constrains women's acts, gestures, and bodies. Nevertheless, womanhood cannot be defined by motherhood, as a woman may choose not to have children.

By incorporating Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, I argue that mothering performativity subverts traditional gender roles. *The Joys of Motherhood* introduces the reader to Ona, Nnu Ego, and Adaku, women characters who develop their women and mother identities differently and subversively. Although restricted to the same cultural and gendered background, Ona, Nnu Ego, and Adaku internalize but also rebel against gender norms, even subverting them by providing a new performative model.

In this article, I examine how the Igbo cultural traditions are internalized or questioned in Emecheta's novel. The chosen critical framework can explain the possibilities of subversion and displacement within the dominant structure. Becoming a mother does not rely on a reified position of something static; rather, it is a constant negotiation process. The power of performativity is articulated with the ideology of mothering in which mothers exercise agency by determining their practices as subjects of their choices. Unlike the male-centered, apolitical, private, and oppressive institution of motherhood, the political setup of mothering focusses on women's daily practices as a power source. For this reason, the interaction between mother and children must be considered from a relational and ever-changing perspective when examining the relationship between the chosen female characters and their children.

Ona's Performative Model of Sex

Ona is a mistress of Nwokocha Agbadi, "a very wealthy local chief" and "a great wrestler" (Emecheta 9) who is married to many women but not to Ona. The relationship between this African couple disrupts the conventional patterns established for men and women in Igbo society. This "heartless

woman" (18) is "so stubborn" that "she refused to live with Agbadi" (11). The power, then, lies in the hands of this "beautiful young woman" (11) who refused "his wealth, his name or his handsomeness" (11). Ona makes a choice when not accepting Agbadi as her husband. Strong and independent, she deviates from tradition when refusing submission to marriage and motherhood. The character's words and actions contest the significance of womanhood in this traditional society. At first, her body is not reduced to an object of procreation.

In controlling her life, Ona has acquired individual autonomy in the face of male domination. Her father had promised that his daughter was "never going to stoop any man" and that "she was free to have men" (Emecheta 12). The "rude, egocentric woman" exercises power over her male partner Agbadi, who begs for her company by saying, "Come and stay with me…. Don't let us waste our lives longing for each other" (27). By bringing into the story the unconventional relationship between Ona and Agbadi, the writer paves a different way for women who give meaning to their sexual experiences. The couple's intimacy could have been omitted in this novel, however, the sexual act, which "woke the very dead" (22), is the joy of both characters, male and female, as pleasure is not only given to the male partner. Borrowing the words of the scholar Marie Umeh, the couple makes "one another sexually and emotionally happy" (192). This healthy, erotic relationship is maintained because of Ona's expression of sexual desire. Although respected as "the only woman who could make Agbadi really happy," "people did not much like her" (15). Ona's community disapproval is linked to her refusal to marry and to her sexual proclivities.

In the Igbo context, four codes govern female sexuality, as Umeh points out in "Procreation Not Recreation in Decoding Mama in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*." The first code says that "the glory of a woman is a man," and the second emphasizes the importance of a woman conceiving children, as "a woman without a son is a failure" (192). The third code is that "marriage is for the production of male heirs to continue the husband's lineage," and the fourth is that "a complete woman is a mother of healthy sons" (192). Listed in order of importance, these roles reduce women to good wives and mothers of sons. Nevertheless, what is performed differently is excluded from this patriarchal context. A transgressive female character like Ona resists her oppression and enjoys her fulfillment as a free woman. As her name represents in the Igbo society, she becomes a "priceless jewel."[1] Ona's gender performative model contradicts the social norms.

In "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," Butler argues that gender is "an act one does" (277). However, this act is not something "passively scripted on the body, and neither is determined by nature and language" (282). An act is "socially shared and

historically constituted" (281). Importantly, gender means the sedimented construction through specific corporeal acts. In other words, throughout these acts, the possibilities for cultural transformation of gender can be enhanced. Butler adds that "in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking" (271), the subversion of gender identity is constructed. Gender performativity does not mean a mechanical repetition of acts. These acts are not fixed or remain self-identical throughout time. In Butler's argument, it is through the variation on the repetition of acts, behaviours, and the "reiterative and citational practice" (2) that a new approach to doing gender emerges. Ona's denial of a crystallized discursive practice and the way her body responds to social norms enhance the fabrication of gender performativity—the subversive identity of a nonmother. Ona's performative model of sexual liberation is opposed to the traditional social norm paradigm.

Ironically, when Ona gives birth to her daughter Nnu Ego, she dies. Becoming a mother was not something idealized by this character. Death is used by the writer to protest against the repetition of a fixed identity. Ona cannot cope with an oppressive system that reduces women to the mother identity and sees boys as more valuable. Thus, her death may be seen as her desire to live in another spiritual existence as she does not fit the conventional ways anymore. On her deathbed, Ona asks her beloved Agbadi to "allow" her daughter "to have a life of her own, a husband if she wants one. Allow her to be a woman" (Emecheta 27). Ona's words reinforce the power her daughter may have to make her decisions. Left motherless, Nnu Ego will not have a specific female pattern to connect. Ona's experience with her mother has been neglected. Her father will be responsible for raising her. Will Nnu Ego be a powerful woman like her mother was? Will she follow and repeat the past or will she break with her community's social conventions? As she receives no knowledge from her mother, Nnu Ego naturally accepts the traditional view of womanhood: "All I want to be [is] a woman and a mother" (53). In the context of this novel, Adrienne Rich's words ring true: "A woman as a child bearer [is] the test of her womanhood … motherhood [is] the enforced identity for woman (26). Unlike her mother, Ona, who does not define her womanhood through motherhood, Nnu Ego wants a "child to cuddle and love" (34).

Nnu Ego's Performative Model: Nonreproduction

Married to Amatokwu, a man chosen by her father in the rural community, Nnu Ego initially seems to have a happy life. She marries to have children so that "her old age would be happy" (Emecheta 54). Being a mother in this context guarantees immortality. The parents will be remembered by their descendants. This idea is spread throughout the narrative by proverbs, such as "When one grows old, one needs children to look after one. If you have no

children and parents have gone, who can you call your own?" (38). By introducing this proverb,[2] the writer shows how it shapes the characters' beliefs and thoughts. Reinforcing this viewpoint, African anthropologist John Mbti adds, "Without descendants, an African spiritual existence is nullified" (33). Moreover, childbearing is a way of belonging to her local community.

Nnu Ego and Amatokwu have children. Nnu Ego's body responds to the cultural expectation of sexual reproduction. Motherhood reduces the female body object to the bodies of the children who need protection, care, and love. Suffering from not being able to conceive a child, Nnu Ego regards herself as a nonwoman. According to Mbiti, a barren woman is an "outcast" in her community (44). Such a social value structure, as Susan Arndt realizes, is hard on barren women because it denies them the right to be women. Childless women in her words "will never enjoy social acknowledgment" (39). Enza Gandolfo discusses the idea of a double lack, first as a woman and then as a nonmother. By not being able to have children, they are believed to be "damaged" and "abnormal," therefore constituting "the other of the other" (Gandolfo 113).

Tormented by the difficulty of conceiving a baby, Nnu Ego asks her chi,[3] "O my chi, why do you have to bring me so low: Why I must be so punished: I am sorry for what my father did and I am sure he is sorry too" (Emecheta 32). In this prayer, Nnu Ego links her loss of fertility to a past event in which her father "pushed into the shallow grave" (23) a slave girl who was destined by tradition to be buried alive with his dead first wife. Struggling and fighting against this ritual, the slave girl dies, and a curse is assigned to Nnu Ego. To this extent, Nnu Ego's disgraceful life is justified by the girl's or the chi's premature death.

As a rotten piece of property, Nnu Ego is returned from her husband to her father who arranges a second marriage in Lagos, Nigeria. Her first husband cannot "waste [his] precious male seed on a woman who is infertile" (Emecheta 32). She is sent to a strange place to marry an unattractive man, Nnaife Owulum, whom she has never seen before. Living in between two places, the rural community and urban Lagos, Nnu Ego tries to negotiate the values of her new home. Women suffer from the "burden of double oppressive structures" (Ezeigbo 15) in the village as well as in the city. Whether a rural or an urban setting, women have a low status. Inhabiting the domestic space of a home, women do not "contribute" (Emecheta 81) as in their original home. Hence, the male figure is reduced to "a state of impotence and powerlessness by the colonial master" (Ezeigbo 15). Life in Lagos demands new social practices. Nnaife, for instance, works for a white master washing his family's clothes or the "white woman's smalls" (Emecheta 61), as his wife Nnu Ego says disappointedly. Nnaife does not exhibit the masculine energy or strength of the farmers and hunters of rural Ibuza. He does not "smell healthy" unlike

men in Ibuza who have the "healthy smell of burning wood and tobacco." Instead, his body "smelt all soapy, as if he was overwashed" (44). He loses his dignity by living through the "shining white man's money" (51) when providing for his family.

Although she does not approve of her husband, Nnu Ego accepts him. This is a strategy to accomplish the mother's identity. She is obsessed with the motherhood ideal. Unlike Ona, Nnu Ego does not desire her male partner. Like a business transaction to procreate, Nnu Ego submits herself to a loveless, passionless relationship. The sexual encounter does not provide joy. She pretends she is there, letting "the hungry man" do his business, waiting for the fulfillment of his "insatiable appetite" (Emecheta 44). She conceives a baby boy, and her life becomes meaningful. Importantly, Nnu Ego engages with the mother identity by reproducing fixed cultural values. From now on, Nnu Ego is "going to start loving this man. He [Nnaife] has made me into a real woman" (53). Being a mother defines her, as she is grounded in an essentialized past. The way Nnu Ego does gender is "not an individual matter" in Butler's sense as she follows "certain sanctions and proscriptions" (276). Gender performativity is reinforced by her body movements, gestures, and enactments restricted by this specific male-centered context. Nnu Ego reenacts and reexperiences a set of meanings already established for motherhood by dramatizing and reproducing a historical situation of the female body.

After a few weeks of happiness, her son dies. She cannot consider herself a real woman anymore. Her community realizes her failure, as the omniscient narrator questions, "Who was going to give her the energy to tell the world that she had once been a mother, but had failed? (Emecheta 71) The child has proved to the community that she is not a barren woman. Completely devastated, she starts running through the streets of Lagos in an attempt to commit an unsuccessful suicide. At the beginning of the novel, the reader, introduced to Nnu Ego in a distressed state with "unfocused and glazed" eyes "looking into vacancy" (7), does not understand why that woman chose her death. However, her story is gradually unveiled, and the reader becomes aware of Nnu Ego's reason for considering her life meaningless.

Finally, Nnu Ego's second marriage is "legalized" (50) by the gods when she gives birth to her second son, Oshia. "The greatest joy of my [her] life" (51) not only asserts womanhood but also reinforces something providential. However, Nnaife's words, "Of course, I am happy to know that I am a man, yes that I can make a woman pregnant" (51) engenders the problematic invisibility of the female body. Motherhood, under the male authority, mainly asserts manhood.

Facing poverty when her husband, Nnaife, loses his job, Nnu Ego must reconcile the old and new systems. Having neither money nor family resources, she faces this chaotic scenario by disrupting the conventional pattern of

motherhood. Her engagement for the survival of her two sons, Oshia and the baby boy, Adim, can be assigned to the ideology of mothering according to Rich or intensive mothering (O'Reilly). Several characteristics define intensive mothering: children can only be properly cared for by the biological mother; mothering must be provided twenty-four hours a day; mothers must always put children's needs before their own; mothers must turn to experts for instructions; mothers feel fully satisfied, fulfilled, and completed in motherhood; and mothers must lavish excessive amounts of time, energy, and money in the rearing of their children (O'Reilly 11). Although Nnu Ego does not rely on the instruction of experts, her mothering performativity falls under intensive mothering. The woman character is the one who defines the daycare of her children by exercising power over the traditional ways and making a different choice. She resituates herself by articulating a new mother-identity dimension and a working woman. Her act of subversion in this cultural scenario is expressed by her words when she says: "I can use part of the money we have left to buy some stocks of cigarettes and matches and start my little business again? … We can't lose, and it will give me something to do" (Emecheta 86). Nnu Ego's body represents the material ground of received meanings; sometimes, her body dares to innovate a new meaning to ensure her children's survival. Some acts may deviate from the norm, but most will reiterate the old and well-known structure.

Although Igbo women may face constraints, "they are still able to challenge social prejudices" (Ezeigbo 2) through such activities as trading, teaching, nursing, or acting as spiritual advisors. Nnu Ego learns how to trade and makes a "display outside the house, with cans of cigarettes, boxes of matches, and bottles of kerosene" (Emecheta 103). The protagonist explores an option that can liberate herself from the "oppressive set-up" (Ezeigbo 2). She deconstructs the gendered dichotomy of public and private spheres by showing that work and family cannot be seen in isolation as separate institutions. When examining racial and ethnic women's experiences in the United States, Patricia Hill Collins remembers that these two spheres are interwoven, and the experiences of mothering are linked to social concerns (47). As Collins explains, "Black women, through motherhood, can express and learn the power of self-definition, the importance of valuing themselves" (118). This notion is also found in *The Joys of Motherhood,* in which the mother's experience cannot be separated from the historical and cultural context.

In Nnu Ego's culture, she is expected to devote herself exclusively to her children as she remains primarily responsible for them. According to her husband, she has "to look after your child. That at least is a woman's job…. Who is going to take care of him when you go out to sell your stuff" (Emecheta 86). In defiance of this oppressive culture, Nnu Ego tries to create the best conditions for herself and her family; her choice defines her maternal power.

She relies on her strength to face the difficulties of providing for her children's housing, food, clothes, and education. Intensive mothering comes from the double responsibility for herself and the other as she believes that "everything would be just fine when the children grew up" (162). The established symbiotic relationship between mother and children benefits both parties involved, not only in the present but also in the afterlife scenario.

The important responsibility of the children's development relies on the female hands who keep alive the cultural significance. For O'Reilly, the daily struggle is "an act of resistance; essential and integral to the black people" (125). Children are empowered by living in a space nurtured by love and care. When Nnaife fights in World War Two, Nnu Ego becomes the main financial provider for years and fights "the war with her children" (Emecheta 183). From this perspective, Nnu Ego's power is exercised over her children throughout the daily act of mothering. However, the reader may question the protagonist's power of subverting when looking carefully at the way she raises her children. Motherhood is a site of power, but in this male context, it can be a site of oppression.

Before Nnaife's departure to fight the Germans, he inherits his second wife from his dead brother. The arrival of Adaku makes room for the discussion of Nnu Ego's identities as a mother and a woman when facing the tradition of polygamy. Although bothered by this situation, Nnu Ego accepts her new position as the mature senior wife and follows the convention. Not surprisingly, this new situation provokes tension between the two characters, who need to learn to share the physical space of the only tiny room and the attention of the male figure. Shaped by the same common values, the performative processes developed by Nnu Ego and Adaku disrupt the "coherence and unity of the category of women" so well criticized by Butler (14), who argues for the examination of the myriad ways "woman" is constructed. From the novel's beginning, Nnu Ego's portrayal has focussed on her obedience and patience. Adaku, in contrast, represents the threat and menace of the "shameless modern woman" (Emecheta 118) to traditional ways. She rebels against the pattern of the ideal woman by exhibiting her joy for sex and material things yet is attracted to the Igbo centre of power, as she tries to become a mother of boys. The rivalry among the cowives and the social pressure they feel to achieve status and social dignity permeate the private home space. Nevertheless, the point here is Adaku's jealousy of Nnu Ego being a mother of boys.

As a mother of two daughters, Adaku faces prejudice from her local community for not having a baby boy. Relegated to the margins, she is not respected as a woman who could help her husband preserve his legacy. Her daughters "will marry and go" (Emecheta 119). The cultural conventions impose on mothers a strict role. Nnu Ego perpetuates this cultural norm by prioritizing the education of her male sons, as she believes in the importance

of putting them in "a good position in life" (176). The boys "were encouraged to put more time into their school work" (180). The girls, however, were often bound to household tasks and rarely enrolled in school. Nnu Ego, the good mother, has dedicated her entire life on behalf of her children. She does not find a purpose outside her relationship with her children and husband. Her performative acts are tied to the children's upbringing and family. In contrast to Nnu Ego's performative process, Adaku does not succumb to the harsh social pressures placed upon her:

> I see that you're laughing at me. Yes, Adaku, you can afford to make fun of me. You may think you're right, but I'm telling you that you are wrong, whereas you chose money and nice clothes, I have chosen my children but you must remember that wealth has always been in my family. I am only poor in Lagos. Go to Ibuza and see how rich I am in people- friends, relatives, in-laws. (Emecheta 160)

Performing Authority: Adaku

The women's lifestyles differ from each other. Nnu Ego does not leave the past behind. The cultural and gendered context she was born into is not something easily erased. For Nnu Ego, Adaku is not a good mother. She has made the wrong choice by giving too much value to material things and appearances. The problem here concerns not choosing children as the only goal or joy in life.

The importance of a mother meeting her needs is crucial to the potential mother-child relationship. Adaku's joy is not only fulfilled by interacting with her daughters. By implication, Adaku's performative model relies on exercising mothering from a position of authority. According to O'Reilly, "Empowered mothers do not always put their children's needs before their own nor do they look to motherhood to define and realize their identity" (14). Being able to live her life, Adaku becomes aware of what keeps her a prisoner of the oppressive system by exhibiting a multiplicity of identities through various relationships and activities: "Everybody accuses me of making money all the time. What else is there for me to do: I will spend the money I have on giving my girls a good start in life. I shall see that they get enrolled in a good school. I think that will benefit them in the future…. I'm leaving this stuffy room tomorrow, senior wife" (Emecheta 168).

Adaku gives up the highly regarded institution of marriage. Her words demonstrate her authority in making choices for herself and her daughters. If motherhood within a patriarchal framework restricts and limits her approach to gender roles, she will adopt a mothering practice that actively resists and refuses male dominance. Nevertheless, she realizes the importance of sending her daughters to school to support their development and growth as critical

children. Through education, her girls will be empowered and may have the chance to change the oppressive system. By leaving Nnaife's home, Adaku asserts her independence and writes a new narrative for herself and her daughters as she chooses to break away from the standards set by the senior wife. In charge of her life and body, she refuses to be regulated by societal institutions. Through her specific bodily actions, Adaku challenges the limited perceptions imposed on her body by enacting a new gender identity. This "performative accomplishment" (Butler 271) is constituted in time, and the woman character is part of this ongoing construction process. Despite the impact of social norms on her body, Adaku can redefine its meaning. The body here is no longer "a kind of slate or surface on which cultural meanings are imposed" (Butler 271). Performativity, here, through bodily reenactment, makes room for individual subversion. In an interview with Vasu Reddy, Butler asserts the following: "Norms cannot be embodied without an action of a specific kind, and they cannot continue to enforce themselves without continual action. It is in the thinking through of this action that change can happen, since we are acting all the time in the ways that we enact, repeat, appropriate, and refuse the norms that decide our social ontology" (Butler and Reddy 118).

The transformation of gender inequality starts with women's commitment to challenging male dominance. In Emecheta's novel, a woman has to be "courageous, independent, self-determined, ambitious and assertive" (Ezeigbo 22) to survive this oppressive environment. Adaku will be responsible for her own life. The reenactment of the mother's experience means she voiced protest against the patriarchal society. The performative accomplishment was achieved through questioning the reified identities of women and mothers. By implication, Butler remembers that there are "strict punishments for contesting the script" (Butler 282). "The unwarranted improvisations" (Butler 282) of both bodies found no place in the fictional scenario. Ona dies, and Adaku is marginalized by her community when trying to chart a new path.

Conclusion

In this novel, Emecheta has problematized the rigidity of cultural norms by exploring gender performativity through the lenses of Ona, Nnu Ego, and Adaku. If gender is performative and if these women do gender differently, their experiences, voices, and emotions towards the act of mothering will not follow the same pattern. The performativity framework has invoked a constant resignification of gender, destabilizing gender expectations. In Butler's words, "What is called gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction. In its very character as performative resides the possibility of contesting its reified status" (271). Women's bodies are sources of received and

innovated meanings. In this sense, the possibility of transformation is awakened by the instabilities that question the hegemonic forces of regulatory laws.

At the beginning of the novel, Nnu Ego's practices are potentially determined by the patriarchal institution of motherhood. Her performative model consists of a repetitive core of values and tradition without critical thinking. However, this experience is not only limited to the domestic sphere. The difficulties for survival in a male-centered community have opened an avenue for mothering performativity. Transformation is enhanced through Nnu Ego's subversive act of becoming the financial provider of her family while facing poverty. Although responsible for her experience of mothering, in the end, she realizes the impossibility of creating a life outside and beyond it. Before her premature death at the age of forty-five, she becomes aware of the conditions of women's imprisonment and how she has contributed to it by saying:

> God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage? … What have I gained from all this? 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 up my soul. They will worship my dead spirit to provide for them…. Never, not even in death. I am a prisoner of my flesh and blood. (Emecheta 187).

This liberating speech brings into question the responsibility of women to make the transformation possible. She realizes that the ironic joy of being a mother is not enough to promote happiness. The deconstruction of the inherited identities depends on women's first move when they start speaking for themselves rather than being silenced as human beings.

The performative model of mothering applied to Nnu Ego differs from Ona and Adaku. Ona and Adaku renew their body act unconventionally. They have denaturalized what has been naturalized by the norms of their society. Importantly, the centrality of these characters demonstrates their subversive power. A woman may have authority by making her own social and sexual choices. A woman may also choose not to have children. Womanhood through motherhood cannot function as a regulatory norm. Women's liberation demands the right to bodily autonomy and self-determination.

Endnotes

1. Arndt states that the figures in Emecheta's novel carry figurative Igbo names. Ona means "priceless jewela", Nnu Ego, "twenty bags of cowries," and Oshiaju, "the bush that just refused" (51). Moreover, according to Emecheta, the names of her characters are always carefully chosen. The

names have to identify with something. When a child is beautiful, we say "Nnu Ego." Adaku, for instance, means "the child of wealth" (qtd. In Ogundele 449).

2. Sayings, folktales, and proverbs pave the way for teaching moral lessons. Another example of male domination is thus shown in the novel: "When the children were good, they belonged to the father; when they were bad, they belonged to the mother" (Emecheta 206). Despite all the efforts women make to nourish children, they are always pushed into the background. Her visibility is only noticed when things go wrong. Gender's structure frames motherhood.
3. In the book *The Supreme God as a Stranger in Igbo Religious Thought*, Donatus Ibe Nwoga states that the "chi concept is central to Igbo religious thought" (Nwoga 64–65). According to the African professor, "The individual depends on his *chi*. He prays for his *chi* for his achievements and successes" (Nwoga 65). Donatus remembers that the chi concept as "the person who has reincarnated in the individual" (Nwoga 65) is still prevalent among West Niger. A man's chi is "the alter ego of the person concerned, whose present life must be supervised, ruled and guided by the circumstances of the age's or *chi*'s life in her previous world existence" (Nwoga 65). In the novel, Nnu Ego is born with a "painful lump on her head" (Emecheta 27). This physical sign can be linked to the way the slave girl was beaten on the head to keep her in the grave.

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