

MOTHERHOOD DEFIANCE: SPECULATING THE FUTURE FROM THE PRESENT IN BUCHI EMECHETA 'S *SECOND CLASS CITIZEN* AND NNEDI OKOROAFOR 'S *THE BOOK OF PHOENIX*

Chinasa Abonyi

Department of English and Literary Studies

University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Email. chinasa.abonyi@unn.edu.ng

&

Sopuluchchukwu Blessing Madubuchi

Department of English and Literary Studies

University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Email: sopulug1@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Motherhood defiance is a woman's determination to be self-reliance and her refusal to be controlled by the patriarchal society she lives in. It is when a woman rejects gender stereotype and challenges patriarchy and stands her ground for socio-economic and political improvement. In African literature, motherhood can be described as strength characterized in femininity. Motherhood defiance conceptualizes a woman unique mothering experience while maintaining her autonomy and identity. Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* has been critiqued from a standpoint of female autonomy, identity formation and resistance against women oppression and colonial legacies, while studies on Okoroafor's *The Book of Phoenix* focused on her speculative fiction as a critique to gendered violence and social inequality. From motherism, a decolonial feminist approach, this paper aims to portray motherhood as a form of defiance and empowerment in traditional and speculative African fiction. However, our interpretation of motherhood from the old and the recent texts, is a speculation of the future from the existing feminist canons.

Keywords: Motherhood, African feminism, Buchi Emecheta, Nnedi Okoroafor, and gender empowerment.

Introduction

The term "motherhood" is one that elicits feelings of warmth, care and tenderness as it reminds most people of their mothers who often is their primary and first caregivers. In general, motherhood characterizes warmth, care and nurture which signifying femininity. In *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Adrienne Rich, defines motherhood as both a lived experience and a social construct. She distinguishes between motherhood and mothering as two different concepts: "motherhood" as an institutionalized societal construct and "mothering", as a personal experience and identity. (O'Reilly,19). Motherhood is often tied to societal expectations of self-sacrifice, endurance, and silence, where a woman's worth is measured by her fertility, submissiveness, and ability to nurture others. These narratives are shaped by the intersections of patriarchy, culture and religion. Oyèrónké Oyèwùmì in *The Invention of Women: Making an African sense of Western Gender Discourses* argues that colonial influence changed African gender relations, turning motherhood into a duty rather than a choice (98). Generally, society stereotypes motherhood as being silent and self-sacrificing, even at the expense of personal growth and ambition. In *Of Woman Born...* Rich critiques institutionalized motherhood and its instinct over intelligence, selflessness over personal growth, and relationships over the growth of one's own identity. (Rich, 42).

In binary representations, Senem Ustun Kaya in "Angels or Demons: A Comparative Analysis of Motherhood in World Literature" argues that world literature often constructs mothers as dual frameworks that position women as selfless nurturers or destructive agents. The "angelic mother" represents devotion, sacrifice and care while the "demonic mother" represents neglect, control or moral deviation. These binary representations of mothers reveal the expectations, and moral standards societies impose on women for mothering capacities. Although Kaya's article explores on the binary representations of motherhood figures, the paper does not explore how motherhood might be interpreted beyond these binaries to examine motherhood as empowerment for female characters.

Shradha Gupta's "Seeing Motherhood through the Lens of Gendered Society" brings the understanding of motherhood to identity question by analyzing the cultural expectations surrounding motherhood. Gupta demonstrates how motherhood becomes a mechanism through which patriarchal systems control women and limits their autonomy. Although Gupta's work is important in revealing the ideological pressures within culture(s) and institutions such religious that determine motherhood.

In African literature, the cultural significance of motherhood has been explored extensively. And scholars believe that a woman is identified by the strength of her mothering ability. An example is Njoki N. Wane's article; "Mothering in an African Context as Portrayed in *The Joys Of Motherhood*" in which Wane maintains that

motherhood is seen as the main determinant of womanhood and social marker for women in different African societies. Although motherhood is culturally celebrated, the lived experiences of women often involve hardship, sacrifice, and emotional struggle. Wane therefore emphasizes the tension between the idealization of motherhood and the realities faced by women who are expected to embody this ideal. It is in “African Cultural Conception of Motherhood in *Efuru*” that Kouadio Germain N' Guessan equates womanhood to motherhood citing that Efuru the protagonist who as the critic maintains fails as a woman because she is unable to mother a child. In a further development, Remi Akujobi ‘s argues in “Motherhood in African Literature and Culture” that motherhood figures are often portrayed as custodians of culture and moral values within African societies. According to Akujobi, mothers are cultural educators who transmit communal knowledge, traditions, and ethical principles to future generations. Akujobi’s exploration of texts like Flora Napa's *Efuru*, Chinua Achebe ‘s *Things Fall Apart* and Buchi Emecheta 's *The Joys of Motherhood* to buttress her points substantiates her points and solidifies her feminist argument in African literature. Emecheta’s feminist representations characterize the African woman who is traditional, colonized and modernized. Her characterization has occupied gender scholarship in African literature that one can say without exaggerations that feminist characters are traditional enough when they look and sound like those of Emecheta. And this is what it means from the caption of this article: speculating the future from the present.

Review of Related Literature

A lot has been done in Emecheta’s novels that raise more questions about womanhood and the mother in African perspective, but this paper objectifies the struggles of mothering and the resistance to patriarchy in both old and contemporary African society. Thus, Okoroafor’ s *The Book of Phoenix* is a modernist leap from the tradition of Emecheta’s *Second Class Citizen*. In “Healing with African Literature: Emecheta’s Second-Class Citizen as Auto-Scriptotherapy Text”, Adewale Adejumo, Sanni Mayowa, and Adebayo Damilare, explore the therapeutic dimensions of African literature using Emecheta’s novel which they referred to as “auto-scriptotherapy” (18, 19). These scholars employ Carl Jung’s psychoanalytic theory and conclude that *Second-Class Citizen* for example is a healing narrative for both author and readers. While “Internalised Oppression as Vehicle for Womenpressionism in Buchi Emecheta’s *Second-Class Citizen*,” by Rantimi Jays Julius-Adeoye and Elizabeth Amarukhor Omoruyi introduces the concept of “womenpressionism” to describe women’s oppression of other women in the novel (12). Their analysis which is grounded in psychodynamic theory again, reveals how Adah’s mother’s gender unconscious and her perpetuation of patriarchal values by favouring the male child and relegating Adah to the margins (12). While the Afrofuturist feminist representations in Okoroafor 's *The Book of Phoenix* draw fresh critical attention as the redefinition of black womanhood, its decolonial imagination of African identity is in the climax to the definition of the contemporary African woman. The characterization of Phoenix as both a creation and destroyer has sparked debates about the female body, agency, and resistance in speculative fiction. Although, with motherhood excluded. So, that, despite the range of existing criticism, attention is shifted from motherhood defiance and the intersection of mothering power, identity, and rebellion embodied in Phoenix’s story.

“The Black Female Messiah in Nnedi Okorafor’s *The Book of Phoenix*: Decolonizing Speculative Fiction,” by Bernice Borain situates the protagonist as a paradoxical messianic figure who represents both creation and destruction in African futurist literature (2–5). Borain’s womanist and Afrofuturist reading of the text show how Phoenix’s apocalyptic transformation challenges Western epistemic frameworks. She argues that Phoenix’s body becomes a sacred text, re-writing patriarchal systems of knowledge. While Borain’s analysis offers a rich interpretation of Phoenix’s symbolic divinity, it primarily treats her as an allegory of cultural redemption and not as a mother figure who channels her power through generative defiance. The failure recognize Phoenix’s emotional and physical sacrifices characterize motherhood opens the text for further inquiries as this paper engages.

The Book of Phoenix from the ongoing is a Afrofuturist text, speculative in perspective and this justifies the objectives of this article which traces a futuristic pattern from the existing. It is decolonial to retrace as Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, Catherine in *On Decoloniality: Concept, Analytics, Praxis* would put. *The Book of Phoenix* represents the future of Afro-feminism and its attempt to reposition black identity in a modernist digitalized world where patriarchal capitalism meets with the new beings and this the digital being. Gender therefore shift from the two binary oppositions to include the robot which is the human-machine. But in their study of the text, “Afrofuturism and Quest for Black Redemption in Nnedi Okorafor’s *The Book of Phoenix*,” Robert Kipkoech Sum, Justus Kizito Siboe Makokha, and Speranza Ndege believe in the novel’s Afrofuturist engagement and its attempt to redeem black history through speculative imagination (330–335). Their analysis demonstrates how Okorafor reconstructs black identity and agency within a futuristic framework that draws strength from ancestral memory. They perceive Phoenix’s powers and rebellion as metaphors for racial redemption and collective resistance as decolonization engenders. Thus, a linking to the earlier narrative of Emecheta.

In “Feminist Imaginings of African Futures: Counterfactual Mythmaking in Nnedi Okorafor’s *The Book of Phoenix* and *Who Fears Death*,” Joseph Kwanya analyses Okorafor’s narrative technique as a form of mythmaking that challenges patriarchal and colonial histories (14–18). He argues that Okorafor uses speculative fiction to create alternative realities that foreground African women’s subjectivity and resistance. This is evident in many readings of Emecheta’s *Second Class Citizen* even though there may be no one research that investigates the two novels based on motherhood defiance. It is interesting that the gentle nurturing disposition of the mother figure is however, investigated as quite resistant to patriarchy and socio-economic disempowerments. Research like Shiloh Jeya Jeevan’s “Patriarchal Subjugation and Female Liberation in Buchi Emecheta’s *Second-Class Citizen*” dwells on women subjugation but recent developments show that the African woman might be escaping the margin.

To draw the line closer, Diana Adesola Mafe’s investigation of characters in *The Book of Phoenix* in her article called: “Phoenix Rising: *The Book of Phoenix* and Black Feminist Resistance”, foregrounds the novel’s protagonist as a metaphor for radical twenty-first-century black feminist politics (47). Mafe’s analysis connects Phoenix’s struggle with contemporary decolonial movements and portraying her as an embodiment of the black woman’s resilience in a Eurocentric world. The study’s strength lies in its articulation of Phoenix’s multiple identities as a Black, a female who is equally characterized as a digital being. Emecheta’s protagonist Ada depicts postcoloniality and Black consciousness as well as motherhood at home and in diaspora.

Although, Vincent Jevisha and Douglas Jaisy’s article title: “Africans Quest for Identity in Nnedi Okorafor’s *The Book of Phoenix*,” explores how the novel portrays the search for African identity in a dystopian and postcolonial context (46, 47), Their argument is that while Phoenix’s transformation represents the broader struggle of Africans grappling with identity and heritage in a globalized, oppressive world, their article highlights the enduring influence of colonialism and the resilience of African culture within futuristic narratives. The present research repositions Phoenix’s quest as both existential traditional in gender struggles by tracing her characteristic pattern through an earlier motif, quite recurrent feminist literature of the colonized. It is from the perspective of Said’s Orientalism that Elçin Ayakan’s “Defining the Orient: Edward Said and Buchi Emecheta’s *Second-Class Citizen*” arrives at the conclusion that the novel’s is a counter-discourse to Western hegemony (9). Ayakan perceives Adah as a representative of the Eastern voice reclaiming identity and dignity within a Western-dominated context. This is typical of the Okoroafor’s digital Phoenix. Ayakan’s approach rightly positions Emecheta characters within the postcolonial discourse that raises the viability of her text for future investigation. Thus, Jency Prathesha and Margaret Joy Priscilla’s “Live to Win: A Study on Women’s Voice in *Second-Class Citizen* by Buchi Emecheta” examines Emecheta Adah as feminist determination to be educated and empowered. In the age of digitality, we try to look the same pattern is the character of Okoroafor’s protagonist to draw the recurrency of motherhood defiance.

Motherism and the Feminist Approach: A Theoretical Framework

Feminism is derived from the Latin word “femina”, which means woman. Feminist theory emerged as a critical framework in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries to challenge gender inequality and patriarchal structures in society. The theory interrogates the cultural ideologies that define gender roles and seeks to empower women through social, political, and intellectual transformation. Feminism can be said to be about gender representation rather than equality. As bell hooks explains, feminism is “movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression”. (1) The theory interrogates the cultural ideologies that define gender roles and seeks to empower women through social, political, and intellectual transformation. The tenets of feminist theory rest on the principles of equality, justice, and the deconstruction of patriarchy. It holds that gender is socially constructed rather than biologically determined, and that power operates through social institutions such as the family, religion, education, and media (Showalter 15). In literature, feminist theory is used to examine how texts represent women, challenge patriarchal norms, and reveal the gendered dynamics of language and power.

The theory has evolved through distinct waves, from first-wave suffrage movements to contemporary fourth-wave activism leveraging social media. Feminist theory encompasses various strands, including liberal feminism, which seeks equality through legal reform; radical feminism, which identifies patriarchy as the root of oppression; Marxist/socialist feminism, linking women's oppression to capitalist exploitation; and postmodern feminism, critiquing universal womanhood and emphasizing gender performativity. Further strands include black feminism and womanism, which centre the experiences of black women excluded from mainstream feminism. Writers such as Alice Walker and Audre Lorde argue that racial and gender oppression are intertwined (Walker 19; Lorde 27). Postcolonial feminism examines how colonialism and patriarchy intersect, calling attention to the unique struggles of women in formerly colonised societies (Mohanty 64). Each strand enriches feminist theory by highlighting different dimensions of oppression and liberation.

Among the numerous strands, African Feminism emerges as a significant theoretical response to Western feminist dominance. African feminism focuses on the cultural, social, and historical realities of African women, integrating race, class, tradition, and colonial history into its analysis. It rejects the universalist tendencies of Western feminism by grounding its discourse in African experiences and values (Nkealah 64). The tenets and principles of African feminism revolve around equality, social justice, and cultural relevance. Central to the theory is the recognition that women's liberation must consider historical, social, and economic contexts specific to Africa (Ogundipe-Leslie 8). African feminists argue that gender oppression is intertwined with colonial legacies, cultural practices, and socioeconomic inequality. They advocate for women's active participation in political, economic, and social spheres while promoting cooperative relationships between men and women. Another principle is that African feminism is inclusive, seeking to transform communities rather than solely prioritising individual advancement. The proponents and key scholars of African feminism include Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, who introduced Stiwanim (Social Transformation Including Women in Africa), highlighting the importance of incorporating women's perspectives into societal development (Ogundipe-Leslie 5). Obioma Nnaemeka developed Nego-feminism, advocating negotiation and collaboration between genders rather than confrontational approaches (359). Catherine Acholonu's Motherism emphasises women's nurturing and spiritual roles, recognising their contributions to community and cultural continuity (22).

African feminism encompasses various strands, each addressing distinct aspects of women's experiences. Stiwanim focuses on social transformation that includes women in decision-making processes (Ogundipe-Leslie 9). Motherism is another Afrocentric type of feminism, of which Catherine Obianuju Acholonu is the main proponent. Motherism is a multidimensional theory that involves the "dynamics of ordering, reordering, creating structures, building and rebuilding in cooperation with mother nature at all levels of human endeavor" (Acholonu, 1995, p. 110).

The tenets of motherism include: love, tolerance, service and mutual cooperation. Acholonu (1995, p.110) argues that the "weapon of motherism is love, tolerance, service, and mutual cooperation of the sexes, not antagonism, aggression, militancy or violent confrontation, as has been the case with radical feminism". Motherism is gender neutral. This means that a woman or a man can be a motherist. A motherist is anyone who observes the tenets/principles of motherism aforementioned. Motherism has motherhood in its centre. It builds on the tenets of motherhood and promotes complementarity of sexes. Other tenets of motherism include cooperation with nature, peaceful management of the environment by women, partnership and complementarity of sexes and motherhood is seen as a source of power and agency for women.

Thus, motherism provides a robust theoretical framework for this study, offering tools to explore how literature portrays motherhood as not a site of oppression but as a source of power and defiance. By centering African women's experiences, the theory illuminates the social, cultural, and historical forces shaping motherhood identity and resistance, making it particularly suited for analysing Emecheta and Okorafor's narratives. The framework will guide a deeper understanding of how motherhood defiance challenges normative gender expectations and asserts women's agency in African literary contexts. This research adopts a qualitative approach suited to examining the complex portrayals and experiences of defiant motherhood in literature. It focuses on Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* and Nnedi Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix*, analyzing how their heroines confront and negotiate cultural, social, and patriarchal restrictions. The study gathers data through close reading and thematic interpretation, paying particular attention to moments where motherhood emerges as a space of struggle, defiance, and self-assertion. Attention is also given to the authors' use of characterization, narrative form, and the cultural settings that shape motherhood. Scholarly commentaries and theoretical sources complement this analysis, providing depth and critical support.

Motherhood Defiance: A Sociocultural Acceptance and Resistance in Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* and Nnedi Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix*

Motherhood is often seen as a traditional and conservative institution, one that reinforces patriarchal norms and values. However, in Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* and Nnedi Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix*, motherhood is portrayed as a form of defiance and resistance. According to bell hooks, "motherhood as experienced by black women has been a site of resistance and rebellion" (hooks, 1990). From the onset of Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*, Adah resists the patriarchal structures set in place to limit her. As a little girl, when other girls of her age were kept from going to school, she started schooling. Thereby, resisting patriarchal ideology that schooling was for the boys. "...Adah went to school and ran as fast as she could before anyone could stop her. "Anyone" is given inference here to mean "patriarchal structures/ideology" set in place to limit her. In the course of her marriage to Francis, who is entrenched in patriarchal values, she resists his suggestion to start

working in a shirt factory with other house wives. She gets a job as a senior library assistant at North Finchley Library. Adah also continues her education when she arrives in the United Kingdom to Francis' displeasure. Francis queries her asking her who will "take care of your children for you". Her fellow Nigerian tenants posed too as systemic obstacles which she surmounts. They prod her through Francis to give out her children to a white foster mother. However, Adah insists, looking after them herself. This goes against societal expectations in a racist setting.

In Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*, Francis poses as a symbol of patriarchy. Adah's initial plans of coming to the United Kingdom is to further her education in librarianship but her soon pregnancy with Bubu deters this plan. After the birth of Bubu, she determines to stop giving birth and take control of her reproductive system. However, Francis, who believes that marriage is for sex and lots of it, refuses to allow her to get birth control that will come in between the sex. Due to the patriarchal society Adah lives in, she requires his signature, but Francis refuses to give her permission to equip herself with the birth control gear. In defiance, she goes right ahead to get the birth control cap, forging his signature in the process. Rich argues that "patriarchy transforms women's reproductive abilities into mechanisms of control." Adah takes back autonomy when she goes to the clinic. It is good to note that she tells the motherly-looking nurse that she "originally came here to study and bring up the two babies I brought from home." (Buchi Emecheta 155) Adah adds her "babies", the children she has foremost on her mind. Thus, she gives credence to African feminists' postulations that motherhood is seen as "strength."

Furthermore, Adah goes against Francis' deep rooted patriarchal ideologies on what a wife and mother should be and do. She does this by first furthering her education. Jeevan, et al in their article titled "Patriarchal Subjugation and Female Liberation in Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*", note that "Adah had to deal with cultural expectations that prioritise her marriage and motherly responsibilities ahead of her personal ambitions." However, when Adah gets married to her Nigerian student husband, Francis Obi, she finds a means to further her education. Thereby, defying not only patriarchal ideologies but societal constructs. Adah also goes against systemic oppressions. She fights for better treatment for her children, Titi and Vicky. Miss Stirling, the children's officer tells her that there is no nursery place for her children this is because she is black-"... there was no place for the children" (Emecheta 59) However when Vicky contracts virus meningitis from Trudy's filthy backyard, she rises to fight against systemic oppression reflected by black mothers having no nursery place for their children because they are black. Her fierce challenge and attack against Trudy, leads Miss Stirling to find a nursery for Titi and Vicky. She defies not only societal limiting structures but systemic oppressions by becoming a black mother who has her children in a nursery and not in the care of a foster mother. Adah also challenges Francis' notion of a wife and mother. Although Francis' notion of a wife and mother is true to Rich's critique that "patriarchal systems diminish a woman's ability to create life as a source of power, framing their reproductive abilities as a mere duty to serve their husbands." (Of Woman Born, 120) Francis portrays this through his perspective on who a wife and mother is. For him,

"a woman was a second class human, to be slept with at any time, even during the day, and if she refused, to have sense beaten into her until she gave in, to be ordered out of bed after he had done with her... get his meals ready at the right time. There was no need to have an intelligent conversation with his wife...she might start getting ideas" (Emecheta 181)

In *Of Woman Born*,(42) Rich argues that institutionalized motherhood demands "mother's instinct over intelligence, selflessness over personal growth..." Rich's postulation is mostly cited by Western feminists as they believe that motherhood is a burden and a site for oppression. However, African feminism, specifically Acholonu's motherism sees motherhood as strength and source of power. Adah challenges Francis' notion about wifhood and motherhood by going ahead to write. She writes a manuscript which she shows her friends and Francis. Francis burns the manuscript later on. And this leads to Adah's final act of patriarchal resistance - she leaves Francis. Conversely, Okoroafor's *The Book of Phoenix*, though not embedded in realism, portrays motherhood as a form of defiance in the text. Phoenix rebels against the Big Eye, who represents patriarchy in the text. The Big Eye creates Phoenix to be a dangerous weapon, a self-regenerating bomb. However, she rebels against them when she finds out how cruel they are. Saeed's discovery in the secluded lab leads to his "death". This opens her eyes to the harsh realities of Tower 7. She defies them by refusing to stay in the Tower and be a weapon. Instead, she uses her light to help nature- "But one thing I had learned was that, despite my origins and the sinister reasons for creating me, my light brought life. Though I burned I was a positive force. It had been my light that had brought this jungle that grew in the debris. It was my light that had given The Backbone the strength to shake Tower 7 from its great body" (Okoroafor 40) Thus, she uses her light to help nature and liberate The Backbone, an alien plant. She refuses to bend to the Big Eyes caprices when she is hunted down to be recaptured. She defies them by flying off to freedom, aware that they also seek for the alien seed which she has in her possession. In addition, her refusal to be a submissive "speciMen" with no autonomy is an act of defiance against colonial structures.

Similarly, Phoenix's refusal to board the ship when she is recaptured in Wulugu village does not only show patriarchal resistance but colonial resistance. According to Bernice Borain, her refusal to board the ship shows how she asserts her independence and to ensure "that she is not sent to America on a ship the way her transatlantic slave ancestors once were." Furthermore, the act of Phoenix fighting a white Big Eye man as she sees him raping Sarah is an act against both patriarchal and colonial structures. This is because Sarah represents the African soil that is being exploited by the white (colonizers). So, Phoenix's pushing off the white Big Eye shows how she shrugs off colonial influence, asserting herself. In addition, she releases HELA, a six-year-old accelerated biological organism. HELA is given relief when she dies through Phoenix's burning. As "when she died, she was allowed to leave" (Okoroafor 190). Ultimately, Phoenix's final burning when their (Saeed, Mmuo, Phoenix) revolutionary plan is deterred by the Big Eye is the ultimate resistance and defiance against the Big Eye. This is because she was created to be a weapon not a purifying fire. Phoenix goes against the Big Eye's original intent for creating her to be a weapon without any independence or autonomy.

Engaging the Future from the Present: Motherhood in Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* and Nnedi Okoroafor's *The Book of Phoenix*

For Western feminism, motherhood is viewed as a burden and a site of oppression. For African feminism, specifically motherism, motherhood is a source of power. Acholonu argues that motherism is "central to African metaphysics and has been the basis of survival and unity of the Black race through the ages", (Acholonu 1995) This places motherism which places motherhood at its centre as a source of power. This aligns with Ogunidipe's argument that motherhood is "...claimed as a strength by African women..." This section examines how motherhood becomes a source of strength, independence, and assertion in Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* and Okoroafor's *The Book of Phoenix*. Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*, Adah is the breadwinner of the family. She is the one that feeds herself and the children, pays the rent and also the school fees of Francis' seven sisters. She did all this as a young wife. However, when she relocates to the United Kingdom to be with Francis, she realizes that the money she receives as her superannuation fee, would not be enough to feed her and the children. So, she tells Francis that he must work and fend for himself. As a wife, Adah seemed content with doling out money for everyone's needs including her extended family. However, in the context of motherhood she determines that her children came first and so do their needs.

In addition, Adah asserts her independence through her relocation to the United Kingdom. For one critic, Adah had "to deal with cultural expectations that prioritize her marriage and motherly responsibilities ahead of her personal ambitions..." (Jeevan 4967). However, she makes decisions that challenge both Nigerian traditions and British systemic oppressions. She goes against her mother-in-law and father-in-law who believe that a woman should not be so ambitious (to go abroad). On her arrival to England, she challenges Francis and her fellow Nigerian tenants' belief that as second-class citizens they do not get to keep their children. First, she pays for the services of a baby minder, Trudy, to take care of her children, preferring to raise them herself than give them away to a foster white mother. This shows how she identifies with her mothering duty, that is caring for her children herself. She challenges Trudy's improper and dirty care of her children. She does this as a fierce protector of her children's health and life. This leads the white children's officer to get a nursery for them. Thus, Adah uses motherhood to gain liberation for herself and her children too. This leads to her assertion of independence in that context.

For Garuba, "African feminism involves redefining feminist discourse to reflect the unique experiences of African women, moving away from Western universalist frameworks" (2021). This means that Adah's unique experiences which she feels as being "... forced into a situation dictated by society in which, as an individual, she had little choice..." (Emecheta 29) This helplessness over her situation was rebelled against when she realizes that she owes it to herself and especially her children to make the best of life. "From now on her children will come first". It was this new consciousness which she gained from motherhood that makes her assert herself daring Francis to do his worst when she decides to stop catering to his financial needs. Instead of giving him her salary as usual, "she would buy everything the doctors and midwives told her to eat. Francis raised many rows, but Adah had a more important thing to worry about- her unborn child". (Emecheta 175) As an expectant mother, she stands up for herself, liberating herself from patriarchal subjugation. Thus, motherhood becomes a site makes her regain agency. Again, Adah takes control of her reproductive health. She realizes that it would not be easy to train her children if she continues to get pregnant. So, she goes against Francis by equipping herself with the birth control cap. She relates to the motherly-looking nurse that her initial plan of furthering her education in England and bringing up her two babies was not materializing. Thus, Adah balances her personal growth in care giving and mothering abilities.

Furthermore, Adah gains agency as a mother. She refuses to bend to Francis' harsh patriarchal values. Although she asserts herself, she does it diplomatically. This gives credence to Acholonu's ideals of motherism which include "tolerance, service and mutual cooperation of the sexes, not antagonism, aggression, militancy or violent confrontation, as has been with radical feminism." First, she negotiates with Francis, telling him to start work to be able to fend for himself as her superannuation money would not be enough for herself and her children, coupled with Francis. Francis raised many rows, but she maintained her stand peacefully- "Adah said nothing but carried out her plans", (Emecheta 176) This becomes one of the few times in her young marriage she defies Francis. In addition, she shrugs off the heavy financial burden Francis placed on her from the onset of their marriage - breadwinner. Adah retorts that "she would not pay the rent, because it was a man's job to do that, she would not contribute to the food budget...She would only be responsible for her children, their clothes...and anything else the children needed..." (Emecheta 177) By reminding Francis of his duty as the man, Adah reaffirms a critic that motherism places importance on family and family values. (Acholonu 1995)

Ultimately, Adah started to write disregarding patriarchal and racist ideologies that it is not possible to be a black female writer in England. Francis portrays this- "A woman writer in his own house, in a white man's country" (Emecheta 184) Rich in her book, *Of Woman Born*, says that when she writes, she writes not as a mother but in spite of being a mother. She says: "For me, poetry was where I lived as no one's mother, where I existed as myself." (1986) The meaning inferred from this is that motherhood restricted her from expressing her full creative powers. She could not write as a mother but writes as herself. However, in Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*, motherhood becomes the context in which Adah embraces her interest in writing. In the context of motherhood, Adah started to pursue a path in writing- "...Adah's money was running short, and the children needed new clothes." (Emecheta 178) Motherhood provides her the liberation to make something of her life despite patriarchal structures that are set to limit her. Francis burns her manuscript and this becomes the final straw that breaks the camel's back. She leaves Francis. She leaves also in order to protect her children from that type of destruction and mindset. Thus, motherhood provides her a source of liberation and will to fight. Adah regains hope, clarity and purpose when she stands in the courtroom facing Francis. When her children's maintenance is mentioned "something happened to Adah...It was like a big hope and a kind of energy charging into her, giving her so much strength..." (Emecheta 191) Adah declared that as long as she lives she will never let her children down. This becomes the highlight of Adah's liberation and empowerment.

Conversely, Okoroafor's *The Book of Phoenix* follows Phoenix Okore, an accelerated biological organism (ABO) built in Tower 7, located at New York. She is a cyborg, a genetically mutated superhuman. Phoenix is a mother figure as she has a role as a "creator-destroyer". She embodies the mother who is loving, caring and warm in reception. She uses her abilities that the Big Eye's original intent was to be destructive, a "weapon", to give light even life" despite my origins and the sinister reasons for creating me, my light brought life. Though I burned, I was a positive force." (Okoroafor 40) She gives life to The Backbone, a genetically modified alien plant- "...It was my light that had given The Backbone the strength to shake Tower 7 from its great body. (Okoroafor 40).

Furthermore, the Big Eye created Phoenix with superhuman abilities which include the ability to read 700,000 books in a year and free access to any information she desires to read. They do this for their own capitalist, selfish interests. However, Phoenix gets to read World histories. This opens her up to the cruelty her roots, Africa, experiences at the hands of the white especially the Big Eye. This opens her consciousness and motherhood instincts of fierce protection that she becomes more human than the destructive "weapon" she was created to be. She uses this information to gain insight for their (Phoenix, Saeed and Mmuo) break in, in Tower 4. Phoenix releases HELa and the "children" with the immortal body cells. She uses her creator-destroyer ability to not only be liberated but get empowered to fight colonization of her body. In addition, Phoenix's destruction of Tower 7 is one of the highlights of her liberation. The original intent of the Big Eye was to create a weapon. Bumi, a Big Eye tells her "You're a weapon...If you wanted to know, now you do." (Okoroafor 27) Phoenix uses her creator-destroyer abilities to not only burn down the Tower but give The Big Eye the strength to shake the Tower off its great body. She gains her liberation and asserts herself.

Ultimately, her final burning to purge the world of evil and give it a new beginning, reflects her liberated and empowered psyche. She is also represented as the mother, as a transformer, a being that stands for communal redemption. According to Nkealah, Afrofuturist feminism in African fiction transfers the traditional nurturing role of women to the political as ecological spheres, reimagining motherhood as a restorative activism." And this is what Phoenix does, she becomes a beacon, messianic mother figure that fiercely protects those she loves (Sarah, Wulugu villagers, Saeed).

Conclusion

The study set out to examine how motherhood serves as a source of empowerment in Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* and Okoroafor's *The Book of Phoenix*, using feminist literary theory, specific African feminism as its theoretical framework. Scholarly works and critical essays were also used. The analysis portrays that while both authors portray motherhood within patriarchal restraints, they also redefine it to be a site of female agency and self-realization. For Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*, motherhood is situated in self-sacrifice, duty and self-realization while Okoroafor's *The Book of Phoenix* in speculative fiction, transformation and creative agency. By applying feminist literary theory, study reveals that motherhood is not a site of oppression like western feminist claim, rather it becomes a site whereby the woman gains empowerment and self-realization. Furthermore, the study contributes to feminist literary discourse as it redefines motherhood as a source of female agency and growth in contrast to western feminists' claim that it is a site of oppression. It illustrates how both authors also portray motherhood as a form of colonial and scientific resistance in the respective texts- Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* and Okoroafor's *The Book of Phoenix*.

Works Cited

- Acholonu, Catherine Obianuju. *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism*. Afa Publications, 1995.
- Adejumo, Adewale, Mayowa Oluwafemi Sanni, and Damilare Oluwanikinfela Adebayo. "Healing with African Literature: Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* as Auto-Scriptotherapy Text." *International Journal of Publication and Social Studies*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2025, pp. 1–19. <https://gphjournal.org/index.php/ssh/article/view/1884>
- Akujobi, Remi. "Motherhood in African Literature and Culture." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1706>
- Ayakan, Elçin. "Defining the Orient: Edward Said and Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*". vol. 2, no. 1, 2021, pp. 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.47333/modernizm.2021171856>
- Balasubramanian, Gayathri. "Eradication of Racial and Gender Discrimination through Education in Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*." *Journal of Feminist Literatur*. Vol. 2, No. 2, 2024, pp. 7–19. . <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353902089>
- Borain, Bernice. "The Black Female Messiah in Nnedi Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix*: Decolonizing Speculative Fiction." *Image & Text*, No. 37, 2023, pp. 1–15. https://scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1021-14972023000100032
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 43, No. 6, 1991, pp. 1241–1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Emecheta, Buchi. "Feminism with a Small f." In *Criticism and Ideology: Second African Writers Conference*, Edited by Kirsten Holst Petersen, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1988, pp. 173–181.
- Emecheta, Buchi. *Second-Class Citizen*. Allison and Busby, 1974.
- Garuba, Harry. "African Feminism and the Politics of Representation." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 52, no. 4, 2021, pp. 105–118.
- Gilbert, Sandra, and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Yale University Press, 1979.
- Gupta, Shradha. "Seeing Motherhood through the Lenses of Gendered Society in Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*." *The Creative Launcher*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2020, pp. 73–82. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/366863392>
- hooks, bell. *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. South End Press, 2000.
- Jeevan, R. Shihb Jeya. "Patriarchal Subjugation and Female Liberation in Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*." *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, Vol. 5, no. 3, 2021, pp. 20–30. <https://kuey.net/index.php/kuey/article/view/3733>
- Jevisha, Vincent, and Jaisy Douglas L. "Africans' Quest for Identity in Nnedi Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix*." *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, Vol. 5, No. 5, 2024, pp. 45–54. <https://www.granthaalayahpublication.org/>
- Kwanya, Joseph Michael. "Feminist Imaginings of African Futures: Counterfactual Mythmaking in Nnedi Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix* and *Who Fears Death*." *Literary Geographies*, Vol.8, No.2, Oct.2022, Oct.2022. <https://www.literarygeographies.net/index.php/LitGeogs/article/view/262>
- Mafe, Diana Adesola. "Phoenix Rising: *The Book of Phoenix* and Black Feminist Resistance." *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 2021, pp. 43–63. <https://doi.org/10.1093/melus/mlab021>

- Mekgwe, Pearl. "Theorising African Feminism(s): The 'Colonial' Question." *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 31, 2024, pp. 15–28.
http://www.quest-journal.net/volXX/Quest_XX_Megwe.pdf
- Mignolo, Walter & Walsh, Catherine. *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Duke University press, 2018.
- Mikell, Gwendolyn. "African Feminism: Toward a New Politics of Representation." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1995, pp. 405–424. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178274>
- N'Guessan, Kouadio Germain. "African Cultural Conception of Motherhood in Efurū." *BLAC Foundation*, 2010. <https://www.blacfoundation.org/pdf/motherhood>
- Nkealah, Naomi. "(West) African Feminisms and Their Challenges." *Journal of Literary Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2016, pp. 61–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02564718.2016.1198156>
- Nnaemeka, Obioma. "Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2004, pp. 357–385.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/378553>
- Okorafor, Nnedi. *The Book of Phoenix*. DAW Books, 2015.
- O'Reilly, Andrea. *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice*. Demeter Press, 2019.
- Oyèwùmí, Oyèrónkẹ́. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. University of Minnesota Press, 1997
- Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. W. W. Norton, 1976.
- Silva, Elizabeth Bortolaia. *Feminist Theory and the Concept of Motherhood*. Routledge, 2013.
- Sum, Robert Kipkoech, Makokha Justus Kizito Siboe, and Speranza Ndege. "Afrofuturism and Black Redemption in Nnedi Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix*." *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2022, pp. 328–338.
<https://journals.eanso.org/index.php/eajass/article/view/752>
- Üstün Kaya, Senem. "Angels or Demons: A Comparative Analysis of Motherhood Concept in Literature." *Journal of Academic Language and Literature*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2020, pp. 872–887.
<https://doi.org/10.34083/akaded.755543>
- Wane, Njoki N. "Mothering in an African Context as Portrayed in *Joys of Motherhood* (Buchi Emecheta, 1979)." *Asian Women*, vol. 18, 2004, pp. 33–48.