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"Nego-Feminism: A Form of Resistance in Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen.*"

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Abstract: The present paper seeks to adumbrate and construe the concept of 'Nego-Feminism,' a term coined by Obioma Nnaemeka, as it is intricately woven into Buchi Emecheta's trailblazing novel *Second Class Citizen* (1974). The perspective, projected in the paper, is to explore how Nego-Feminism is portrayed as a form of resistance—an endeavour to pulverise the suffocating constraints imposed by societal norms and toxic traditions. Through negotiation and compromise, Nego-Feminism becomes a powerful strategy for upending patriarchal expectations and forging a path toward self-determination. While Buchi Emecheta has notably challenged prevailing notions of motherhood within society, *Second Class Citizen* offers a nuanced critique that contrasts traditional views with the author's own perspective on the maternal experience. In this regard, Emecheta subtly presents Nego-Feminism as an essential tool for 'detonating patriarchal landmines' and dismantling oppressive structures. Deemed a preponderant branch of Africana Feminism, Nego-Feminism, or No-Ego Feminism, emphasises collaboration, negotiation, and compromise in the feminist discourse, particularly in the African context. This paper aims to examine how Emecheta adroitly integrates these Nego-Feminist principles in *Second Class Citizen*, using the character of Adah to accentuate complex societal, cultural, and traditional landscapes. Her concern is all about women's struggles, placing them at core of her narrative, and Adah's experiences are the paradigm of these struggles. Through her resilience and unwavering spirit, Adah de-constructs the expectations placed on her. Her resistance is particularly evident when her husband, Francis, refuses to take responsibility for their children. Emecheta foregrounds Adah's moral and inner strength, re-locating it as the ultimatum of her worth, contrary to the superficial societal standards of female virtue. In *Second Class Citizen*, Adah's true worth is not defined by the judgmental and oppressive norms of Nigerian society but by her own self-affirmation. This reverberates the privileging of the authentic inner self over the external social persona that conforms to society's expectations. Emecheta's portrayal of Adah's journey is, therefore, a profound narrative of triumph, where the female protagonist emerges victorious not just over external obstacles, but also in reclaiming her autonomy and redefining her identity on her own terms.

Keywords:- Nego-Feminism, Negotiation and Compromise, Africana Feminism, Authentic inner self, Resistance, Motherhood.

Opines Buchi Emecheta, "What makes one human is belonging to a group. I, like a traditionalist, stress the communal sense of belonging" (qtd.in N. Sen 58). Florence Onyebuchi Emecheta (Buchi Emecheta) was one of Nigeria's preponderant African female writers. At a young age of 22, Emecheta started to work for the sake of her children and herself. 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 the Ditch* (1972*)* and

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Second- Class Citizen (1974) are Emecheta's renowned works, adumbrating her notions about feminism and womanhood. Buchi Emecheta points out

> Being a woman, and African born, I see things through an African woman ' s eyes. I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African women I know . I did not know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist then I am an African feminist with a small f. In my books I write about families because I still believe in families. (175)

The aforementioned vision of Buchi Emecheta foregrounds the foundational principles of Africana Feminism, while simultaneously drawing a sharp contrast with Western Feminism. Western feminists would always want empowerment not within the domain of the family, whereas women, pertaining to Africa, are in need of autonomy and self-determination at the center of the family and the community. Buchi Emecheta gainsays herself as feminist, plainly upending the label of feminism. She is concerned with feminism which embraces all and that's why, she is of the view-

> I am a feminist with a small 'f'. I love men and good men are the salt of the earth…Personally, I'd like to see an ideal happy marriage. But if it doesn't work for goodness sake, call it off. (Umeh 345)

At this crucial juncture, the expounding of Africana Feminism urges considerable attention. This intellectual framework provides a suitable platform with an eye to delving deep into African women's struggles and liberation, while also allowing for a detailed deliberation of Nego-Feminism. Africana Feminism offers a comprehensive approach to addressing the distinct challenges confronted by African women, while Nego-Feminism adds another perspective, focusing on necessity for a feminist perspective anchored in the African context and proposes to reclaim and redefine women's roles within it.

Filomena Steady characterizes African Feminism as a "humanistic feminism" (qtd. in Badejo 94), emphasizing its deep roots in values of female empowerment, autonomy, and solidarity. Going deep into this discourse further, it ought to be averred that African Feminism endorses the moral and inner resilience, construing their deserved domain in socio-cultural milieu, while catching the linchpin of femininity. It is not only the call and/or demand for right but it adumbrates and accentuates fundamental principles of African cultural legacy which summons synergy, peaceful and harmonious balance between men and women for the sake of the amelioration of the nation. Alice Walker's "Womanism" was not something very akin to feminism which is more or less concerned with "…bourgeois perspectives about only the white female" (Kolawole 92-98). As bell hooks astutely observes, "In Feminism—it's a Black thang,' emphasizing the urgent need for a feminist movement within the Black community that addresses the collective needs of Black women, men, and children" (qtd.in K.Sen 58). Hudson-Weems constructed the concept of *Africana Womanism* as a distinct and Afrocentric framework that encompasses all women belonging to Africa. For Hudson-Weems, Western feminism, with its often Eurocentric focus, fails to adequately capture the specific concerns of African women. As she asserts, Black feminism does not fully capture the complexities and realities of African

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women's lives (Al-Harbi 119). Africana Womanism, on the other hand, is endowed women with their cultural legacy and tradition, foregrounding the togetherness and the unity of identity, family, and community within the African context. Hudson-Weems' doctrine of Africana Womanism is quite different from other theoretical perspectives of feminisms, since

> Africana Womanism is an ideology created and de-signed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women. It critically addresses the dynamics of the conflict between the mainstream feminist, the Black feminist, the African feminist, and the Africana womanist. The conclusion is that Africana Womanism and its agenda are unique and separate from both White feminism and Black feminism, and moreover, to the ex-tent of naming in particular, Africana Womanism differs from African feminism. (25)

Africana Feminism also serves as a launch pad for delving deep into the concept of "Motherism", excavating core perspectives grounded in African culture and feminist discourse. The term *Motherism* was introduced by Catherine Obianuju Acholonu, who deems it as Africa's unique alternative to Western feminism. As Acholonu states, "Africa's alternative to Western feminism is Motherism, and Motherism denotes motherhood, nature, and nurture" (110). Basically, *Motherism* unearths the basic assumptions of organic order and harmonious balance-harmony with Mother Nature and African Masculinity. For the Motherist, according to Acholonu, the prime task is to heal, protect, and preserve the organic unity and cohesive essence of the family. The term Motherism bristles with a significant implication since it encompasses all men and women and upholds solidarity. Postulating that 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. If a nation discards and fails to comprehend the vital contributions of women in terms of the amelioration of the country, it has to be taken into account that the nation is a *motherless* nation. This absence of female influence and guidance stifles the full growth and development of society. Consequently, democracy remains a distant dream in many African nations, as leaderships dominated solely by men (and devoid of *Motherist* principles) have repeatedly faltered, leaving behind a legacy of unfulfilled potential and historical failure. The preponderant contributions of women in leadership are worth-mentioning not only for progress but for the very survival and thriving for democracy.

The mention of Nego-Feminism now holds significant importance over here.

> But what is *nego-feminism*? First, *nego-feminism* is the feminism of negotiation; second, *nego-feminism* stands for "no ego" feminism. In the foundation of shared values in many African cultures are the principles of negotiation, give and take, compromise, and balance. Here, negotiation has the double meaning of 'give and take/exchange' and 'cope with successfully/ go around.' African feminism (or feminism as I have seen it practiced) challenges through negotiations and compromise. It knows when, where, and how to *detonate patriarchal land mines;* it also knows when, where, and how to go around

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patriarchal land mines. *In other words, it knows when, where, and how to negotiate with or negotiate around patriarchy in different contexts.* (Nnaemeka 377-378 ; my emphasis).

Nnaemeka postulates that nego-feminism is shaped by cultural imperatives and influenced by ever-shifting local and global exigencies. The theology of nearness, rooted in indigenous traditions, adumbrates feminism in Africa as both a performance and an altruistic act. It is the intricate interplay between resistance and realization, where struggle meets awakening, and defiance transforms into empowerment. The language of feminist engagement in Africa—embedded in collaboration, negotiation, and compromise—contrary to the confrontational tone of Western feminist scholarship, which often emphasizes concepts such as challenge, disruption, deconstruction, and rupture. Western feminism focuses on upending structures. In contrast, African feminism seeks to challenge and transform through negotiation, accommodation, and reconciliation. To add to it, the language of resistance is the language of negotiation, accommodation, and compromise. As an offshoot of Africana Feminism, Nego-Feminism champions the creation of a more balanced society, one that transcends the conflict with masculinity and nurtures a spirit of unity and collaboration. Much like the principles of Motherism, its core values revolve around healing and safeguarding the community, all while contemplating paths toward improvement through negotiation and compromise. At its heart, it seeks to operate within the community, fostering growth and unity from the foundation of the home.

Emecheta adroitly integrates these Nego-Feminist principles in *Second Class Citizen*, using the character of Adah to accentuate complex societal, cultural, and traditional landscapes. She focuses on women's struggles, placing them at the heart of her narrative, and Adah's experiences serve as a reflection of these struggles. Through her resilience and unwavering spirit, Adah de-constructs the expectations placed on her. Endowed with rich autobiographical elements, *Second-Class Citizen* pulsates with the struggle of Adah, its resilient protagonist, since she is engulfed by the complexities of survival—not only of herself but also of her dreams. In her journey from a privileged position in her native Nigeria to a life of poverty in a predominantly white European society, Adah's transformation into womanhood unfolds amidst the stark contrasts of identity and belonging. She struggles with motherhood and a part of her struggle emanates and deals with the issues of racism in the U.K. 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. Emecheta's debut novel, *In the Ditch* is concerned with her arduous voyage, as she embarks on a life of independence, raising her children alone. Working at the British Museum library, she finds herself confronting the harsh realities of life as a single mother. The novel's protagonist, Adah, is reluctantly forced to live in a housing estate, where her dignity is deeply wounded by the charity she is compelled to accept. This struggle for self-worth and survival is further explored in *Second-Class Citizen*, where Adah's resilience in the face of adversity remains a central theme. In *Second-Class Citizen* Adah's life is torn between Ibuza, Lagos and the 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. Adah is considered a disappointment to her parents, her birth unrecorded

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simply because she was a girl. Yet, her indomitable spirit and unwavering sense of presence became the driving forces that propelled her forward, enabling her to overcome the odds and pursue an education against all expectations. Adah's impulsive marriage to Francis initially appears to be a blessing in disguise, as she believes that marriage is her only way to securing a good job and saving money for her studies in the United Kingdom. However, Francis soon becomes a heavy burden and his presence in her life is more of a weight than a support. In England, he remains unemployed, yet his vitality is unmistakably evidenced by the rapid succession of four children he fathers, a paradox of energy and irresponsibility. But, Adah refused to crumble under pressure, and her resilience shone through when she made the bold decision to enter the workforce, determined to forge her own path despite the overwhelming odds stacked against her. 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 here negated and denigrated her motherhood. Adah deceived the doctor by concealing her pregnancy and by dint of it; she herself valued her motherhood, overhauling the expectations of the society.

> 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. (ch.9)

Within this lies the delicate interplay of realization and resistance, where awakening meets defiance in a powerful dance of transformation. Apart from it, Mother Nature smiles upon Adah once more as she finds herself pregnant again, but this time, it is not a child of flesh and blood—rather, it is her 'brainchild,' *The Bride Price*, which begins to take form. "The more she wrote, the more she knew she could write, and the more she enjoyed writing. She felt this urgent call: Write; go on and do it, you can write" (Emecheta ch.13). Adah's 'brainchild' could be construed as the determined defiance against the worn- out tradition aggravated by excoriating impositions of hetero-patriarchal domain. In addition to it, her creation becomes the only way through which she would accentuate her voice, epitomizing her identity formation being a mother and a woman as well.

After being informed by Adah about her creation, Francis refutes it and postulates that women are devoid of any literary accomplishment, and Adah's caliber is not worth-mentioning. Relegating her role to the background, merely as a good mother, he simply, without fathoming Adah's latent qualities as a writer, doesn't even acknowledge her 'brainchild'. Francis goes on to burn Adah's manuscript and this act of Francis is tantamount to thwarting her dream and her baby. Motherhood, here, is apostrophized as a process of renewal, which enables women to undertake an arduous journey from silence to resistance, from the fringe to the core, from the margin to the meaning and from the suppression of the soul to the assertion of the self. Positing them through the subtle art of compromise and highlighting the resilience and self-determination, this defining point has become an act of 'detonating the patriarchal landmines'. And hence, her selfhood, autonomy and subversion of her so-called hetero-patriarchal imposed identity come to the fore,

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when husband, Francis, doesn't even bother to take responsibility of their kids, demonstrating her dogged defiance against cruel irresponsibility. Asked by the Magistrate for the responsibility of the children, he was not ashamed of asserting that "I do not mind their being sent for adoption" (Emecheta ch.13). But Adah directly discards Francis and firmly avers "Do not worry Sir, The children are mine and that is enough. I shall never let them down as long as I am alive" (Emecheta ch.13.). Adah realizes and knows very well that she has to negotiate and confront the obstacles brought by the patriarchy coupled with so-called and worn-out tradition. To delve deep, it is to be postulated that Adah's belief lies in compromise and coordination, not in confrontation and destruction. Her inner and moral resistance is anchored in negotiation, thereby carving out her own identity and valuing her family and community.

In conclusion, Emecheta's portrayal of Adah's fictitious voyage has been an anecdote of acute pain mingled with excoriating pressure of the society, deep-seated desire for academic excellence, an endeavor of the mother who always takes care of the well-being of her kids, family and a silent warrior who always wants negotiation under the garb of resistance. As the very paradigm of Nego-Feminism, Adah symbolizes the harmonious balance within the community and the family, fostering the sense of resistance, reconciliation and self-determination.

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