



Decolonizing African Economic Structure: A Gendered Lesson from Flora Nwakpa's *Efuru* and Buchi Emecheta's *the Joys of Motherhood*

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Abstract

*The protruding numbers of scholarly works on feminism—in all its inflections—reveal that there is a progression of conversations that center on the exploration of gender inequity in the world, and the absurdity it creates therefore. In recent time, that tide of influence has been sweeping the African intellectual space with a form of torrent that necessitates diverging views. Many of the works in this direction argue that Africans undermine their female's economic freedom by distancing from them the means of production, and by implication, their financial access. There is thus the paucity of intellectual engagements that considers necessary the decolonization of the existing economic structure of Africa, achievable through the knowledge of distributive economies that permeated their system before colonial experience. Consequently, this work concentrates on decolonizing this structure by taking a gendered lesson from two texts, namely, Flora Nwakpa's *Efuru* and Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. To achieve this, Akachi Ezeigbo's snail-sense feminism is used, as its tenets are anchors for situating the contemporary African economic structure within its colonial heritages. The culture of protest demonstrated by the protagonists of the text is an awareness and consciousness of the roles of women in primordial African setting and they appear to be unapologetic about making their voices heard, and their roles count. Role-reversal, and economic restructurings are evident of this adrenaline protest, and the works therefore exemplify economic frameworks useful in revolutionizing the polity.*

Keywords: Decolonizing Economic Structure, Adrenaline Protest, Economic Frameworks Of Africa, Financial Access, Inclusive Economy, Gendered Lessons And Economic Restructuring

Introduction

Narratives that African women are systematically disempowered by the available economic systems¹ are usually insensitive to the historical and economic foundations laid by eminent Africans, in their understanding that there was a need for a structured economic framework for the enhancement of a vibrant and virile society that included all. To the extent that such impression has penetrated the intellectual territory of the contemporary African feminists—with all their inflections—experts, scholars in other disciplines and even public opinion shapers have added their voices. For this reason, quite a number of misrepresentations have been launched and have attracted mostly uncritical remarks, reactions and evaluation.² It would be interesting to know that a comprehensive sociocultural framework for the structuration of economic, and even political system is available in the primordial African society and it was used to develop their civilizations and sustain it for ages. Conceded that literary tradition of a people, be it in its oral or written form, qualifies as a document of history that can be used to trace not only their distant past but also their proximal experiences,³ to this extent, the texts that have been produced by African writers have given perfunctory remarks about the economic structure that this work has prioritized.

One may not be invested in cultural knowledge to immediately decode for example that Chinua Achebe's reference to Ekwefi's cassava cultivation in that classical work *Things Fall Apart*, is an evidence of economic structuration that conforms to both the biological capability of these sexes and the domestic responsibility that they are each accorded. But then it would be unsavory to not note that such system existed, and it represented a carefully

¹ Ferguson Ann, *et al.*, (2019) "Feminist Perspectives on Class and Work," *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*

² Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations* Trenton, NJ: African World Press.

³ Ruth Finnegan, (1970) *Oral Literature in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

designed socioeconomic framework that is believed to have far-reaching impact on the society where each is practiced. To the Africans of the highlighted period, economic template employed among the people helps in the crystallization of their ideologies in their engagements. For this, the bystander effect of the structure was that political and social systems were reinforced by the economic framework and everyone became important in the structure (Jeyifo 1990).⁴ It was not a master-subordinate framework with mechanism to give recognition to a particular gender above the others. And the fact once again that the plot of the cited work concentrated on the protagonist, Okonkwo, does not become a valid reason to say, for example that it is discriminatory or imbalanced, on the basis of gender.

Therefore, when the popular American feminist, Margaret Bentson, concludes that "the 'woman question' is generally ignored in analyses of the class structure of society,"⁵ with the insinuation that the relationship maintained by the available gender to their economic and financial powers reveals who controls the means to production, she has a wide knowledge gap as to the distributive economies that characterize civilizations, perhaps, other than that of America. She argues therefore for the most part, for the enhancement of an evenly distributed access to wealth without in the first place understanding the sociocultural interpretation of wealth and the attitudes created for its sustenance. This thus means that, unlike the implied definition of Bentson as represented above, some other social issues take fundamental position in the development or making of a society because these factors when considered cumulatively would determine how ideas are formulated and how philosophical constructs are thus subsequently generated. A cursory look at Africa's approach to wealth in their pre-contact with external cultures, would reveal that they emphasized differently the idea to the accumulation of wealth from what is obtained in the Western world that defined her evaluative comments. What made Okonkwo considered borrowing tubers of yam from elderly kinsman does not stop female participants from doing the same.

Contemporary Economic Structure in Africa

Accompanying the expiration of colonial control of African economies was a downward slope of economic growth especially for the women who apparently were not integrated into the means of production and distribution during the colonial time. In no better way was it more apparent to decode the imperial ambitions for gender inequity than to interact with the choices he made during his overlordship control of colonist's resources.⁶ From the choices of interpreter, which in most cases were predominantly males, there was no need for a soothsayer to understand that the aftermath effects of colonialism for women, on economy and politics, cannot be rosy and inclusive. This is where the position of some Western critics does not always consider the factor of colonialism that re-engineered the economic opportunities available to women and men, before their conversation around gender equity in intellectual discourses. The foundation of the lopsided financial distribution was therefore laid solidly during the period in question and it became eternally counter-productive that a post-independence political class that did not embrace pre-colonial administrative system would suddenly adopt the economic structure, which in most cases would undermine their authority or deflate their overblown ego sustained by their access to political power and all the perks that are associated with it.

Suffice to say therefore that the expansion of the economic gap between the males and female is a brainchild of the attitude of subjugation and distance that neocolonial African leaders have inherited and glorified. Two possible interpretations are capable of being generated from above assumption, namely, that the contemporary economic imbalance cannot be said to represent an accurate description of how primordial African society was structured economically, and growing from this conclusion would be an assumption that its origin is traceable to their recent history; and the second interpretation is that post-independence political powers have committed themselves to an aspiration of exclusionary politics or economic distribution, without necessarily stating this in their constitution. In essence, when anyone talks about the reduced numbers of females in politics, they would have by implication raised an observation of a system that appears very discriminatory and imperialistic in character and also in practice, predominantly to females. Meanwhile the materials for which external contributors use for their conclusions about Africa's disposition to gender equity is drawn not from indigenous practices traceable through oral legacies or folkloric materials but from the activities of the very modern time that are generally unconnected to the happenings of their origin.

We should be duty-bound to understudy available oral traditions that belong to Africans critically so that we may have a better ideological grounding about the situation of the past that has been violently embattled by recent history. It was not a coincidence that Okonkwo's wife, Ojuigo in the work *Things Fall Apart*, the Iyaloja, the wife of Lejoka Brown in Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, the Iyaloja in Wole Soyinka's *Death*

⁴ Biodun Jeyifo (1990) "The Nature of Things: Arrested Decolonization and Critical Theory," *RAL*, 21 (3): 33-48.

⁵ Jansen Alix, (2015) "Feminism, Capitalism and Family: Reflections on Margaret Bentson's Political Economy," in *Robert L. Hellbroner Center for Capitalism Studies*, 6.

⁶ Nnaemeka Obioma, (2004) "Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing and Pruning Africa's Way," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 29 (2): 357-385.

and the King's Horseman (the last two examples being drama texts) are reflective of the pre-colonial African economic structure that gives power to the women folks, not as subordinates to their male counterparts but as complementary agents of financial generation and distribution. Once we understand that these are a given, the practice rather than the exemption, we can therefore begin to understand the contemporary economic structure within the context of its colonial sources, where the mechanisms of poverty were made for continued subjugation of women. As such, the female characters who is subjected to numerous harsh economic atmospheres is on the expedition of self-rediscovery. This view is echoed by Akachi Ezeigbo who argued that females are making efforts to negotiate their ways in male-dominated economic jungle (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2015).⁷ Quite a number of literary narratives have put in place the necessary mechanisms to understand that the contemporary economic framework in the African countries is a clear departure from what obtained in primordial African societies.

That every group of people deserves a level of fair hearing in the generalizations constructed on them is one of the critical positions that this study has been committed to make. This being so because it is discovered that no amount of evolutionary behavior cannot be linked to a particular beginning, no matter how rapid or distant. In fact, the realization that progress generally leaves a trace behind accounts for the possibility that Charles Darwin would unlock the key to the understanding of human evolution⁸ in the previous two centuries in his insightful work, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, is evidence that a people's progression cannot be divorced from the circumstances of the time when it is inscribed into their culture. This is the same thing for the economic practices that have left the African people into the hands of postcolonial agents of economic exploitation that see no good in the distribution of access to the means of production in their different areas. The corrosive consequences of this destructive economic model are felt not only in the areas of sociological relationships between men and women, but more expansively, the structure has in practice exposed women to the harsh economic conditions that lead them among other things to the commodification of their virtues, for sustenance. Meanwhile this had been carefully tied to different appealing but nonetheless exploitative mantra of "taking care of women," "spoiling them with material things," among other inflections that are accessible in the world today.

Sociological Consequences of Post-independence Economic Structure

It would be a desirable repetition to mention that the numbers of African women in African politics or social class where the means of production is accessed more apparently is considerably low, and we should not belabor the factors responsible for this condition. However, the sociological consequences of the condition are necessary for re-examination. Let us consider for example that in no African country other than Liberia (with Ellen Johnson Sirleaf serving as the President between 2006 and 2018) has the female sex produced an African president from in post-independence period in spite of having more than 50 countries in the continent. To argue that the abysmally low figures of their representation is caused by the slow evolutionary process of the political system in the continent is to undermine the intellectual versatility of Africans, and that alone would challenge the integrity of their intellection. More than 60 years of independence should not be considered insignificant if we intend to drive changes of generational significance. However, one can allude the said snail-pace progress to the ambition of their male counterparts to continue with the very structure of segregation that gave ground for the cultivation of strictures when colonization was ubiquitous in Africa.

When women are systematically taken out of political participation, the most primary consequence would be that they are excluded from making or contributing to decisions that would affect their economic and financial well-being. The foregoing suggests that they are taken out from strictly important engagement that can affect their whole existence. It was evident for example that the Iyaloja in the cited work of Wole Soyinka above represents the indigenous economic structure in place, for example, in the Yorùbá political landscape where the ministry of finance was eternally dedicated to the women folks. Iyaloja, which literally means "the woman in charge of market" is an evidence of inclusive economic framework constructed alongside the Yorùbá political system in the pre-colonial time. Before the incursion of the West, the political system and power were sacrosanct and not diluted by external frameworks working as an inescapable alternative as we have in the toga of democracy in the colonial and pos-independence African countries. Iyaloja's position meant that issues that bother on economic growth of the community, which included the two sexes, must be under her control and executed by her discretionary powers. In essence, she was involved.

But democracy, even when it gives room for participatory culture of politics does not factor in that the participation of people can be manipulated. So, unlike the existing systems that has roles exclusively assigned to sexes in their society, democracy has been used to expand the influence of the post-independence African men while simultaneously keeping the women folks under a very suppressive confinement. The implication of this is that an unprecedented level of political apathy has been inscribed into the heart of the women, and they either underpay their need for increased participation or they would be discouraged by a number of factors from the

⁷ Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo (2015) *Snail-Sense Feminism: Building on an Indigenous Model*, Lagos: Wealthsmith Books

⁸ Charles Darwin (1859) *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* London: J. Murray

indulgence of politics. Meanwhile an inseparable connection exists between political participation and economic or financial access, and the disallowance of that participation means disqualification to partake in the other. This has created a form of distance that exists between the males and their female counterparts in recent history, and it appears inevitable that there is a body of lessons to learn from the African economic structure that was prevalent in the primordial setting. Buchi Emecheta's protagonist, Nnuego and the eponymous character, Efurū have something interesting to teach us about this said structure, and we must interrogate their protest within the context of reclaiming the economic modality employed by the pre-colonial generations of Africans.

Efurū: A Synopsis

The story is built around a strong-willed Igbo woman, Efurū, who doubles as the protagonist of the work. The woman exudes the confidence of an economically buoyant Igbo character making substantial efforts for the advancement of her aspirations under a helpful family background with impressive financial structure. However, she meets Adizua, her youthful husband who has a less chance of economic success because of the twin factors of his laziness and poor background. With their union, there is a clash between love and tradition as the female character Efurū remains entwined in the love net of Adizua, who, as a result of his impecunious conditions, could not afford the customary regulations that mandate dowry payment before they can be legally joined as husband and wife. The most realistic option for them was an elopement and they take it without second thoughts. Since there is love between them, the wife supports the husband with much loyalty and affection. Their marriage yields a fruit, Ogonim, and series of events unfurl after that development.

Efurū is properly trained and has no problem demystifying the assumption that mothers-in-law are antagonistic of their daughter-in-law as she wins her over, and that companionship means that a number of the husband family members embrace her as their part. As such, the mother-in-law, Ossai, and Ossai's outspoken sister, Ajanupu, become go-to acquaintances that extend beyond hands of friendship to Efurū. On many occasions, they become genuinely concerned about the barren condition of the protagonist, and make measurable efforts to make her conceive a child. During the conception of their daughter, after series of native efforts, Efurū became less energetic to continue with their trading business and her husband, Adizua takes over. However, he lacks the economic intelligence and energy to generate results consistently. He expresses his inability to continue, and to replace him, a maid, Ogea, is hired, to assist in taking care of the little girl, so that Efurū would continue with her proven expertise in trading. The resumption of Efurū to her trading translates to their resumption to economic and financial surplus almost immediately. Their finances become restored when he resumes office.

However, the story takes a different turn when the husband begins extramarital affairs with another woman. Worried, the protagonist seeks the advice and guidance of the mother-in-law Ossai, who advises that she should remain committed to the marital adventure, and she accedes to request after her protest that "to suffer for a truant husband, an irresponsible husband like Adizua, is to debase suffering. My own suffering will be noble" (Efurū, p. 73). It gets worse, their pretty daughter, Ogonim, dies after a brief illness. Over a period of endurance and tolerance, she leaves Adizua and the mother-in-law reluctantly accepts her decision. She recoils to her father's house, Igbo culture being intimately patrilineal, and in that experience, meet Eneberi, now Gilbert, and love is immediately incubated by their coming together. Immediately, they get married. Their marriage suffers childbearing and being someone attuned with their custom, they make consultation with the dibia (diviners) who reveal the message of the gods to them. Chosen by the goddess, Uhamiri, Efurū is instructed to carry out some spiritual arrangements the outcome of which would be a manifold of financial and material wealth for her. She does as requested and the eventual outcome is glamorous for her materially, even when she bears no child for Gilbert.

Flexible Economic Structure in *Efurū*

Since the work portrays the Igbo's sociocultural and socioeconomic conditions, it draws much from their indigenous economic system to allocate roles to the characters, and Efurū is considered a classical example. In this indigenous setting, the ability for sustained economic transformation is not determined by the human sex. Prosperity is derived based on the ability of an individual's capacity to turn their conditions around. This flexibility of social roles is reflected even in the governance system embraced by the people from their beginning to the time of European emergence where a central government was not preferred. This republicanism did not allow for such administrative system where a king of central government is installed. For this, everyone matters as long as they are ready to turn their history around through the available means and the popular economy. It is this structure that makes the Igbo people to be recognized as one of the most economically successful people in Africa, and this success is not tied to their gender. It is reinforced in the work, *Efurū*, in which the protagonist, Efurū herself chose trading and she excels because of her economic and financial intelligence.

The fact that Nwapa created a character like this is to reinforce the economic system of Igbo people in way that would reveal how it is entrenched in the people's cultural genes. No wonder that despite being a postcolonial work, the work portrays the character of Efurū as one that is focused on the financial improvement, and like the

character of the pre-colonial woman that has now been submerged in the bloodstream of colonial and neocolonial politics, she defies anti-woman economic structure to raise her identity. She was not blessed with surplus fertility while she is with Adizua, but this inability is not socially induced and neither is it politically motivated in any way. However, the matter of economic success is dependent on humans, and their ability to attain this success depends to a large extent on how they are consistent about their aspirations. Efuru becomes successful to the extent that she contributes essentially to the payment of her bride price when she elopes with Adizua, with whom she pledges her emotional attachment. She knows what she wants as a woman and how to get it. The following conversations reveal this position:

Why does she remain in town and not come to the farm with her husband?”

“She refused to go to the farm. She is trading instead... And I don't blame her. She is beautiful. You would think the woman of the lake is her mother” (12).

“If you like... go to the farm. I am not cut out for farm work. I am going to trade” (10).

“There is a woman behind this indifference. A woman whose personality is greater than mine.... I must face facts.... Perhaps she is very beautiful and has long hair like mine.... Is she as stately as I am” (54)?

Efuru states, “the individual hamiri freedom of choice fostered by the Igbo culture allows innovation. There is opportunity for experimentation as well as tolerance for failure and admiration for success” (19). The above textual references are an indication that the economic structure that are in place in the pre-colonial African economic framework, as practiced in Igbo society is one that is flexible. Despite the fact that Adizua decides to become a farmer, the wife does not allow that spousal ambition to impede her blueprint for economic success. The democratic culture is therefore reflected in that even when she is a wife, she is not conditioned by cultural ideologies to restrict her chances of transformation to household participation. She pointedly tells Adizua that her own roadmap to success is trading and no amount of emotional attachment to him will derail her from that trajectory. Again, this is a validation of the inclusive economy available with majority of the African people before the incursion of the Europeans on their space. She would have considered other important angles where she can considerably achieve her ambition and become the business tycoon she desires to be, if there are other promising dreams, but she has resolved to trade because it is efficient to bring her dream to reality.

Inclusive Economic Framework

The primordial Igbo society, like many pre-colonial African society, has an economic framework that is developed around farming and trading. Only these two means of production was popular and everyone embraced what they have the biological and intellectual capacity to sustain. There is a general assumption that since males have more biological muscle, they naturally tended to farming, more usually than their female counterparts, but nonetheless, that means of production or business model is an eternally evolving practice among the Igbo people. No wonder that Igbo males of the contemporary time prefer trading (business) than their parents. Economic subjugation, as usually assumed by Eurocentric scholars, does not exist in an economic environment where the means of production are principally polarized. It would be noticed that the economic system of the village was not the one that reflected the colonial ones where state owns the means of production and therefore it is (in)directly involved in its distribution. Stripped off of any colonial arrangement, the economy that produces Efuru shows a greater level of inclusiveness, and this explains why she succeeds exceedingly. Nwapa contrast this with the colonial exclusionary economic structure thus:

“Why the government does not allow us to drink our homemade gin, I do not know.... If they must stop us from cooking gin, then the white man's gin and his schnapps should be sold cheap” (Nwapa, Efuru, p. 104).

One can see the frustration of the protagonist here where she decries the economic framework that was introduced and imposed by the colonialists. It is very obvious that the system that the colonizers brought does not follow the existing systems and structures that the Igbo society is familiar with, and for that, the change of political inclinations necessitated the remolding of their economic distribution. Now, indigenous gin is contrasted with the European one, and because the latter is brought by the ones with the political authority, the former becomes systematically dismembered. Meanwhile the attainment of one's life objectives and aspirations promote one's social and political relevance, and titles are accorded to individuals who have achieved excellent success. Efuru's late mother was a successful businesswoman that she took several titles before her departure to the great beyond, and this also means that that recognition was something very common for anyone with outstanding contributions to their society, and interestingly, Efuru has achieved this feat through her outstanding contributions and wide-ranging efforts demonstrated in the work.

Joys of Motherhood: A Synopsis

The protagonist, Nnu Ego, is at the center of the story. She is married to Nnaife Owulum, a Lagos-based worker who has been in Lagos for the preceding five years of their marriage. She is compelled by her new status as a wife to relocate from Ibuza, where she had grown up, to Lagos where her husband resides. Meanwhile her husband works as a washerman for the Meers, a British couple, since opportunities for a more dignifying job are not forthcoming. Nnaife and Nnu Ego live in the boy's quarter as an evidence of their penury. Nnu Ego's life in Lagos is completely different from what it used to be in the village because the city life refuses to offer her access to financial opportunities. Unlike the life in Ibuza, where women cultivated and had enough to feed their families, especially their own children, there is a limited economic opportunity and more humans struggling for them.

Nnu Ego belongs to a group of wives from Ibuza from whom she receives a loan to start her business in order to survive in this new economic system. The Meers are forced to return to their home-country along the line, which put them back to square one as survival proved difficult. Nnaife, the family's breadwinner, becomes helpless and distraught. The unfolding condition leaves Nnu Ego embrace the responsibility to care for the family because the husband is temporarily unemployed as a result of the callous fate. Nnaife eventually finds a petty job as a grass-cutter by the railway, sustaining his family on a wage that hardly can cater for a full-grown individual. In spite of the heartrending economic condition of the family, Nnaife still manages to marry another lady, Adaku, one of his elder brother's wives who had recently died, more out of cultural indulgence than actual necessity.. Nnu Ego becomes envious of Adaku when he moved into the new house, but she soon has to accept the new reality. Complicated by the increase in the numbers of mouth to feed, their family experienced trials that almost overwhelm them, and as a coping mechanism, Nnaife resorts to being an absentee husband who drinks away his accumulated sorrow, becoming an addict. As a result, the wives go on a hunger strike and refused to give him food, but they eventually halt this punishment for the sake of the children. Following that, Nnaife is forced to join the army to fight in a current war. They could not help but accept their fate. Nnaife has to go fight in India.

Nnu Ego later returns to Ibuza to bury her dying father. When she arrived, she discovers that her father had passed away. She lives in Ibuza for seven months as a result, and many people wondered when she would return to Lagos; however, she prefers to stay in Ibuza because living in Lagos is more stressful. She begins trading firewood after she returned to Lagos. Even more than Nnu Ego, Adaku, the second wife, is able to start her own business and becomes a prosperous trader. Nnu Ego has been the one in charge of finances, such as school fees, and they have not heard from Nnaife. She puts the kids' schooling on hold and makes ends meet by selling firewood, garri, and some food. After that, she receives news from Nnaife, who sent them money with which she was able to send her sons back to school and build her business by selling abada outfits. Nnaife eventually returns home. Surprisingly, he gets into an altercation with some people and was sentenced to five years in prison, but he was eventually pardoned and only stayed there for a brief time. Nnu Ego returned to Ibuza and resided with her own family rather than her husband's. The husband returned to Ibuza with Okpo, his new wife, to live with her. Nnu Ego dies without the presence of her children at the end of her life. She was buried flamboyantly, and her children made a monument in her name so she could hear the pleas of barren women but that never happened. It seems as if she did not live a fulfilled life in the aspect of motherhood.

The financial struggles of Nnu Ego and Adaku

Just like we have established above, during the pre-colonial age in Africa, women wielded economic power in the society and their roles were never at the back burner and this can be exemplified through the novel *Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta. During Africa's pre-colonial period, capitalism was not practiced as crudely as colonial time was. Women had financial power at the time since they were no longer tied to the house. They were farmers who farmed crops and had a viable means of subsistence, but things changed with the arrival of colonization, and capitalism became the dominant economic structure. Derekson emphasizes that "Nnu Ego is a victim of this newly imported capitalist society, a society in which African women are required to continue performing traditional duties and responsibilities in an economic setting where that labor is no longer of any market value" (Derekson). More men were at the forefront of active work life and were prioritized over women. This affected the earning power of the women. Derekson suggests that "Nnu Ego moving to Lagos where capitalism is in practice is badly affected and Nnu Ego's barred access from reliable modes of production confines her to levels of poverty that make it nearly impossible for her to feed, clothe, and educate her eight children" (Derekson). This would not have been the situation in her tribal village of Ibuza, where Nnu Ego's crop yield would have sustained her large family, and where Nnu Ego and the other women of the community would have controlled key sectors of the local economy through the production and exchange of household goods and services". This is a vivid contrast of the life she lived in the village where she had economic power and the capitalist system she had to live with by migrating to another system. She explains that "she knew she would be better off in Ibuza, where at least there would be no rent to pay and if it came to the worst, she could always plant her food at the back of her hut" (Emecheta, 2011, p. 219). In Lagos, Men are viewed as breadwinners, whilst women are primarily responsible for

the home and childcare. In short, women are well-known for performing unpaid labor, yet we can see how this unpaid labor disadvantages women under this system. Most of the time, their lives revolve around unpaid labor, and as a result, they lack earning power and are left at the mercy of their husbands. As a result, men hold the key to the home's financial security, which is sometimes exploited to exert control over the women. As a result, the woman is frequently left to do her husband's bidding because her entire financial security is dependent on him. This gender divide under this capitalist system promotes societal inequity, putting women at a disadvantage. Housework is a sort of unpaid labor that is imposed on women. Women are placed at the center of the private sphere or home front in this expression of gendered labor, which limits their financial power. Nnu Ego is burdened with the responsibility of caring for her eight children in this capitalist system, and she is completely reliant on her husband. She bears the brunt of domestic stress because she is in charge of the house's care and day-to-day operations. Nnu Ego lives for her children and has had them in the forefront of her mind throughout her life; this unrecognized and underappreciated household work, if extended to industrial effort, would yield a significant economic advantage. Nnu Ego also suffers greatly when her husband is called to fight in World War II and she is unable to work for three years. For her, this is a source of financial deprivation and economic difficulty because it is her only source of income. She has to go through a form of identity crisis in Lagos as she has been stripped of her economic power.

In the pre-colonial era, women were very influential in the economic landscape of the community as it has been established above through the *iyaloja* concept which upholds the commercial aspect in the market. Derekson avers that women “exerted exclusive control over the operation and management of the village market, the site where all local commerce took place” (Derekson). In this text, one can notably see women in the active live selling their wares in the market and at the centrality of commerce in *Ibuza*. This can be seen through Nwakusor’s gaze who saw a crowd remarks “remounted when he saw a crowd on the other side of the bridge. It was a group of early workers, market women and laborers on their way to the *Ebute Ero* market”. (Emecheta, 2011, p. 59). One can see the emphasis on market women but on getting to Lagos, there was no adequate provision for women in this new capitalist system.

Nnu Ego who moved to a clime whereby she was made to solely depend on her husband was not comfortable with her economic power and as such, she sought every means to empower herself even when she was just meant to be a housewife with unpaid labour. She strived to make ends for herself which was a practice in the pre-colonial era. The new capitalist system she found herself was a blow on her economic dependence. The new system she finds herself in is indeed disempowering and she had to live with the realities and had to struggle. In an effort to make a living for herself, she sets up a kiosk beside her house as she could no longer wait on her husband for a means of sustenance. Her quest for survival pushed her into being innovative. In the precolonial system, women mainly produced the same type of crops and leaned on each other, Nnu Ego is able to get similar support in Lagos which reinforces the sense of sisterhood and communalism through a group of wives of men from *Ibuza* from whom she had to lend money so as to set up her business. The women “let her borrow five shillings from the women’s fund and advised her to buy tins of cigarettes and packets of matches (Emecheta, 2011, p. 52). With this, she is able to kickstart her small-scale business. She traded in a lot of things just to make ends meet and her sons helped out as “she would make a display stand outside the house, with cans of cigarettes, boxes of matches and bottles of kerosene, and ask Oshia to sit beside them. If there were any customers, he would shout for an adult to sort out the intricacies of change and money”. (Emecheta, 2011, p. 103). His sons were, therefore, able to help as after school, “they would sit by his mother's stand in front of the house, selling cigarettes, paraffin, chopped wood, and clothes blue” (Emecheta, 2011, p. 113). Beyond the regular display she had to do, her sons also went out hawking in order for them to survive. She had to devise her initiative to make provisions for herself as her son “Oshia would go and hawk soap, cigarettes, matches and candles, while his brother Adim would sell the roasted groundnuts she was preparing” (Emecheta, 2011, p. 162). Afterward, when her cigarette business was not booming, she, therefore, switched to “selling firewood, this did not require much capital, simply a great deal of energy. One had to carry the wood from the waterside, break it into pieces with an axe, then tie the pieces together into bundles for sale. Many other women found it too tiring.” This clearly shows her quest for survival and how stressful and demanding the work is but she still had to strive for economic and financial dependence. She did this alongside the sale of “firewood, garri, and other foodstuffs. Every morning neighbours could hear her calling: “Oshia, Adim, twins, wake up and us go to the waterside!” There she would buy the firewood for the day's sale, and they would all carry it home”. (Emecheta, 2011, p. 174). We could see notably when she had to point out that the proceeds from her sale of firewood were what she uses to pay the children’s school fees. In Nnu Ego’s assertion, ““I do, I pay his fees with the profits I make from selling firewood and other things.” (Emecheta, 2011, p. 216).

In this text, Nnu Ego and her co-wife, Adaku, go on a hunger strike since their husband does not provide them with adequate money. Hunger strike is their strategy for obtaining a means of survival because he has the earning capacity. Nnu Ego “went on pleading till morning, and when Nnaife was setting out for work she ran after him and begged him again.... ‘Please help, Nnaife, please!’ (Emecheta, 2011, p. 317). Nnaife Owulum does not succumb eventually. The strike they had to embark on is a way of deviance against the system they found themselves that made them heavily reliant on the man and a means of reclaiming their position which they are used to during the pre-colonial era. Derekson’s affirms that “Van Allen’s historical review of precolonial indigenous

power structures affirms that African women, as a unit of solidarity, exercised considerable influence over village affairs and were notoriously effective at using boycotts, strikes, and a process called "sitting on a man" to legislate the politics of both their private lives and their communities" (Derekson). This reinforces and reaffirms the power of sisterhood and solidarity among African women. This shows defiance and their silent revolt against the capitalist system they had to contend with. Although wives to a man and we can see jealousy but for a common goal, one can see how they had to put their differences aside and come together to achieve a common goal.

Adaku, on the other hand just like Nnu Ego had to also come up with a coping mechanism under this capitalist system by starting up her business. She set up a market for herself "Adaku had used her share of Nnaife's money to establish herself at the Zabo market" (Emecheta, 2011, p. 150) which made her very rich. "Adaku was now very rich..... Adaku's stall in Zabo market was stacked high with beans, pepper, dried fish, egusi and spicy foodstuffs." (Emecheta 161). Eventually, she expanded her business into the sale of other things, "She told Nnu Ego that she was giving up selling beans and peppers, she was buying a larger stall on which she would have abada material for lappas" (Emecheta 170).

Finally, there is a way when there is a will. We can see how women create new ways to provide for themselves financially when they are thrust into a new situation that threatens their financial security. We can clearly see how they had to change things for themselves by being innovative.

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