"Why did you marry that man, Mum?"
"Which man?"
"The man you call our father."

- Chiedu, Buchi Emecheta's daughter, after reading the manuscript of Joys of Motherhood.
The 'city' occupies an important place in the writings of many African authors who use cityscape as a mirror that reflects tensions of modern life. The city provides the varied sources of this tension: political ambition, social competition, demands of economic considerations that always keep changing for an individual, cultural shifts that often result in erosion of traditional bastions, and finally, and as a culmination of all these transformations, the feeling of helplessness that creeps in to destabilise man-woman relationship. All these are quite evident in most of the works of Buchi Emecheta and Cyprian Ekwensi, novels that talk of events influencing personal life and public affairs in a city. But more significantly, these novels of Emecheta and Ekwensi are, in their own ways, records of African woman's predicaments that keep changing their meaning with changing times.

Cities, however, were not new to Nigerian traditional civilization. As Toyin Falola tells us:

Cities are neither post-independence nor colonial phenomena in Nigeria. There were several pre-colonial cities which emerged because of a combination of social, economic, political and administrative factors. The expansion and decline of these pre-colonial cities were affected largely by economic and political changes. In the north for instance, the growth of the trans-Saharan trade
contracts with other parts of West Africa partly sustained the grassland cities of Katsina, Yerwa (now Maiduguri), Zaria and Kano. Another major factor was the 19th century Jihad which was responsible for the decline of a few towns while favouring expansion of others, like Sokoto. In the South, the trade with the Europeans from the 15th century onwards promoted the rapid expansion of towns such as Lagos, Ijebu Ode, Benin and others which directly benefited from the contract. Wars also destroyed several towns in the north while new ones such as Ibadan, Abeokuta Ijaiye and Oke-Odan were established.\(^1\)

After 1880, there was a sudden rise in enthusiasm among European nations to occupy parts of tropical Africa: a phenomenon known as the "Scramble for Africa". Countries with powerful maritime tradition started arriving along the shores of the Continent. The European colonisation of Africa was led by Portugal and Spain, followed by England, France, Denmark, Holland, Sweden, Belgium and Germany. Later Italy also joined the fray, but its colonising efforts were limited to North and North East Africa.\(^2\)

Kenyan historian Assa Okoth observes that trading interest of these colonial powers was the reason behind establishment of many new cities and also transformation of the old ones. Nigeria thus became the largest British colony not only among the West African states but in the continent as a whole. Okoth narrates:
For British activity, Nigeria was unique in two ways. It was the area where British traders had penetrated deeply into the African hinterland, and it was also the area where they became deeply involved in local politics. Besides, Nigeria eventually emerged as Britain's largest colony in Africa in terms of size of territory as well as size of population.3

The periodic changes in the attitude of the governments in the mother countries towards their colonies also induced changes in the African cities and urban centres. Considering the fact that one of the basic intentions behind colonization being, among other things, a high degree of commercial profits in favour of European colonial powers, Rotimi Ajayi opines:

The basic role of the colonial state (in Nigeria) has been identified in terms of maintaining law and order towards ensuring the expropriation of raw materials with minimum resistance. (...) The economic structure was institutionalized through such instrumentalities as the monopolization of trading opportunities, monetization of the economy, taxation wage and forced labour.

The colonial state was a foreign creation, rather than being a direct outgrowth of the precolonial. It was accountable to no one, represented the primary interest of the metropole, used violence without censure and was undemocratic to the core.4

By the beginning of the 20th century, there were noticeable changes in the attitude of British colonists, as
they took up more and more developmental works in their African colonies. Of course, this was chiefly propelled by their own interest, as Boateng observes:

After the initial economic and social developments which enabled the inhabitants of many of the colonial territories to become effective consumers of Western goods, colonial possessions with large populations became profitable markets for the manufactured products of the ruling nations.5

Boateng further observes that by the end of the Second World War, British colonial policy in Africa openly 'accepted' that Britain fully shared the responsibility of 'promoting economic and social advance in her colonies in order to provide the essential basis for political self rule. This policy began to be vigorously pursued in West Africa'. (Boating, p.62)

So communication systems, railways, roads, schools, airlinks were given higher priority in this colonial 'developmental package'. The cities in Nigeria, as in other West African British colonies, were fast turning into not only colonial administrative centres, but - as Gerald Breese notes - also locus of power, agency and diffusion point of social change, point of contact with the outside world, receptacle of talent and manpower, and above all, into
The major difference between these cities and those of the pre-colonial times was in terms of a new economy - the colonial economy. As Wallerstein observes:

While some African culture had used sophisticated productive techniques and some were characterized by a market economy, the majority of the population everywhere was engaged in a subsistence economy. Even where African societies were complex kingdoms, the village remained the traditional centre of African life. The frame of custom was strong. Money was relatively unimportant (sometimes non-existent), as the internal economy of the village was communal.

So the new economic order introduced by the colonists was at sharp divergence with traditional rural economy. The importance of money grew more and more as the Europeans introduced their own metropolitan currency. This was further supplemented by opening of trading stores and other outlets for consumer goods which greatly influenced the transition from a self-sufficient kinship oriented, agrarian economy to a capitalist economy controlled by cash nexus.

Tovin Falola provides a contrast to this colonial phenomenon when he describes the configuration of pre-colonial cities:
The pre-colonial cities had a number of characteristics. First, unlike most modern cities, they did not exhibit an occupational specialization which ignored agricultural activities. While they were centres of crafts and commerce, they were at the same time noted for extensive farming in their peripheral and outlaying regions. The linkage between city activities and a well developed agricultural system has been established in the case of Ibadan in the nineteenth century. Consequently, food shortage did not accompany large populations in the cities. Secondly, and again unlike modern Nigerian cities, there was no segregation and zoning on the basis of wealth. The wealthy and the leadership elite did not concentrate in a section of the town. In effect, there was no discrimination in the use of public amenities, notably water from streams. Partly because of the mode of production and the system of government, there were no environmental problems. It was easy to mobilize citizens for public work and also to practice an efficient system of waste disposal. All these and other features have now given way to chaotic and confused ones. 

Some of the pre-colonial Nigerian towns were, and still are, rich in natural resources: Lagos, Calabar and Port Harcourt were known for fishing reserve, Ibadan and Kano for ancient religious and commercial settlement, Jos for tin ore, Enugu for coal mine, and towns like Kaduna and Sokoto were political capitals, Today, as a result of 'colonial development programmes' undertaken by the Britishers, many of these towns have busy sea-ports, rail terminals, airports, centres of education with universities, and more significantly, the political-financial-commercial capitals.
But the same developmental activities began during the colonial rule have also thrown life in these cities out of gear by generating sharp social divisions and inequality among the populace, environmental and ecological hazards and finally, by disturbing the rural-urban balance in Nigeria, as well as other West African colonies.

The new colonial economy that unfolded itself in the cities and urban centres after they were connected by railways and other means of modern communication, suffered from a shortage of manpower. To meet this need, it became a sort of necessity to lure villagers to leave their homes and come to the city to work in the mines or manufacturing units, apart from dockyards, railways and the manual labour sections in various government machineries. As the slave trade came to be banned, the colonial rulers devised other ways of forcing men to migrate to the townships.

The spread of education exerted a strong European influence on the minds of the young Nigerians who got used to seeking comforts and amenities that were hallmark of western civilization, for they were symbols of success and fulfilment. The cities provided opportunities to earn them, and so with little education, young men and often women would
prefer to migrate to cities for a better future.

The introduction of metropolitan currency in the native economy, along with the spread of western education and Christianity, resulted in a radical shift from communal cultural behaviour towards individual traits. This in a way also generated in the minds of Nigerians an insatiable lust for private accumulation. This became more evident among the emergent Nigerian elite and bourgeoisie who mostly resided in the cities. It became an imperative for colonial rulers to create a ruling elite in Nigeria before handing the government over to them for self-rule, as that would continue guarantee realization of the European imperialist interests even after the independence of the African states.

All the members of this emerging native bourgeoisie, whether in politics, or business or academics, operated within frameworks of western politico-cultural paradigms, where everything was shaped after the European pattern. This necessitated more frequent use of money and the importance of cash grew no bounds. Much significance was attached now to an individual's status in terms of accumulated material wealth. As the lifestyle of this bourgeoisie became the idol for the people in rural areas where there were no
amenities, modern comforts and scope to earn cash, mass migration to the cities began in a big way from adjoining as well as far-flung rural settlements.

Centres for higher studies like universities and colleges were always built in the cities. The educated youth, after passing out from these institutions, looked for suitable jobs in urban centres, and never wanted to go back to their native villages. The cities were not only developed into centres for international business, they also became the trading points for local businessmen.

Apart from being centres for trade and commerce, the cities also saw a rapid growth of industries. According to Toyin Falola, since 1955, when a policy of industrialization by import-substitution began, virtually all investments have been concentrated in the cities. And since it works to the benefit of the Nigerian bourgeoisie, the policy has remained, though with occasional modifications, since 1960 (...) More Nigerians were employed in manufacturing activities, thus complementing the few opportunities provided by government and commercial enterprises. (...) Thousands of the products of the numerous primary, modern and secondary schools established in the 1950s and 1960s saw the cities as their only hope, and streams of migrants flocked to these growing industrial centres.9
Another major reason for migration to the cities was the land squeeze enforced by European settlers who appropriated rural fertile lands to grow cash crops. The natives were either pushed to less fertile lands or they moved towards the city in search of work.

Apart from the new economic order that shifted the focus of development and concentration of human activities towards the urban centres, the cities also became the temples of European acculturation, emanating a new kind of lifestyle that had both western and traditional elements in it. Wallerstein comments:

The town was not merely the incubator of new values and ideas; it was also a centre for the spread of these values and ideas to the villages.¹⁰

In this respect, the British policy of indirect rule came to play a significant part in all the British West African colonies, where this policy was pursued faithfully and successfully. The indirect rule to some extent curtailed the traditional political and judicial authority of the native rulers, though preserving the traditional, native administrative institutions. But once it became apparent that the district officer was more powerful than the chiefs,

238
the line of distinction between the European and the traditional administrative machinery became almost non-existent. The superiority of colonial white man's administrative and judicial authority was thus established. Aided by educational institutions and the church putting European values at a higher pedestal while indirectly instigating the African to despise indigenous customs and lifestyles, the white man was able to establish himself as a superior being in the eyes of the Nigerians. This caused them to be inclined towards taking to the manners and customs of their colonial masters. Nowhere the culture shift was more prominently reflected than in the cities, where life was so closely wedded to technology that was essentially of western origin.

This way, the city life was always encouraging one to take to the ways of modern western culture. This posed immense problem before the indigenous Nigerian who could not totally dissociate from traditional cultural roots. As a result, the individual was pushed into the predicament of hanging between two strong cultural currents, often losing one's way and becoming a cultural schizophrenic. This still remains an overwhelming social problem not only in Nigeria, but many previous African colonies, where it manifests in damaged human relationships as well as an individual's inner
turmoil rising from conflicting value systems.

Emecheta and Ekwensi highlight this inter/intra-personal phenomenon in their depiction of Nigerian cityscape.

People of the City, considered Ekwensi's first major work, has a gallery of women characters. The central character, Amusa Sango is a journalist and a musician. The reader comes to know about the women only through their interaction with Sango. The novel does not have one major plot, but rather is a collage of several incidents of shorter duration depicting life in a city with all its elements: fast life, luxury, violence, petty crimes, politics, prostitution and above all, an overwhelming air of despair hanging all around. The gory murders, deception, cruelty in human nature and breach of faith, all appear again and again in the novel to show the decaying city life. At times Ekwensi takes his reader away from the rat-race of the nameless city to the lap of nature in the countryside, as one finds in chapter eight of the novel, or among striking mine workers for whom the city life is beyond their dream. But from the beginning, Ekwensi makes it clear that behind all the glitter and glitz, high-life and bars full of well-shaped, lipsticked women, lurks an ugly monster, which is the real
identity of the city.

The outer degeneration and the inner chaos going on inside the individual's mind combine in the "noise" metaphor that the novelist uses to portray the turmoils of city dwellers. In chapter one, for instance, a voice -- as if from the outer world -- cautions Amusa Sango:

There comes the dreaded city noise, Amusa. You live with it so you don't notice it any more.\(^1\)

That the city preys on and devours those who are too innocent for its ways or those who are too careless and make themselves vulnerable, comes as a refrain in the novel. When Beatrice (the first) meets her gory end after going through cruel physical torture, her long time boy friend Kofi breaks down in chapter fifteen:

"But she threw her life away. The city eats many an innocent life like hers every year. It is waste of our youth! It must stop." (p.146)

The vulgarity and cruelty of life in Ekwensi's nameless city are not merely products of the novelist's imagination working over time to shock his readers. If at all it startles a Nigerian, it does so because of its similarity with the real faces of Nigerian city life. What the people of
the city experience in Ekwensi's novel is not far removed from truth as far as Nigerian cities are concerned. Ekwensi's journalistic talent captures the disjointed incidents with all their crudity in typical Onitsha market literature tradition to register a shocking reminder in the minds of his Nigerian readers of what they might have experienced in Lagos, Ibadan or Port Harcourt. By keeping the city in his novel nameless, Ekwensi probably tries to attain a sort of universality of his description of urban life in Nigeria. This view is supplemented in John Povey's apt observation:

The social milieu in which Sango lives is a world far removed from traditional village life or civil service existence, those extremes of experience that more usually bracket the lives of many other characters and, one might observe, of their creators. Yet Sango's experience is a thousand times more commonplace and familiar in contemporary Africa.12

However, most of the victims of city life in People of the City, are women. With the exception of Beatrice the second who is seen embarking on a journey to unknown future with her lover and husband, Amusa Sango, for all other women the escape routes are sealed. Only death could give them freedom from their drudgery and agony, as it does to Beatrice the first.
Aina, Beatrice the first, Dupeh Martins, all are drawn to the vortex of the cruel, nameless city in the novel due to one basic reason; their survival instinct which springs from their lust for life. They all want to live their life to the fullest. Driven by poverty and joblessness, they come to seek life's opportunities in the city, always hoping for comfort. All are not equally lucky though and they meet their destinies differently. But one thing is strikingly common about them: they all utilise the first available opportunity to cash in on their greatest capital - their bodies. The easiest way they can seek their path to fortune is by utilising their bodily charm. They don't miss any opportunity coming their way in this direction, whether in a bar, or a nightclub, or on the shores of the lagoon or while walking the streets of the city. In Chapter four, Sango's reflection on Dupeh, the female companion of his close friend Bayo, is a pointer:

She smelt sweet. Sango took her soft hand gently in his, looking into the black eyes. She was a girl in that dangerous age which someone has called 'the mad age': the mid teens. Her eyes held nothing but infatuation for Bayo. This was a girl who belonged strictly to the city. Born in the city. A primary education, perhaps the first four years at secondary schools; yet she knew all about Western sophistication - make-up, cinema, jazz.... This was the kind of girl whom Sango
knew would be content to walk her shoes thin in the air-conditioned atmosphere of departmental stores, to hang about all day in the foyer of hotels with not a penny in her handbag, rather than live in the country and marry Papa's choice. (p.29)

Aina is different. She along with her mother came to this city to earn her livelihood, as the life in village became unbearable for them with its fatigue of farming and living on scanty or almost non-existent resources. Here she was working for some Lebanese cloth merchant, as her mother tells Sango in Chapter four. In a characteristic Ekwensian style that is also evident in his other novels like Jaqua Nana and Beautiful Feathers, Aina is brought before the reader in the first chapter of People of the City with all her physical attributes that titillate men. As she enters Sango's room in the early hours of dawn, Sango tries to figure her out with probing eyes:

A female voice, a female hand, elegant; a girl, ebony black with an eager smile. She smiled not only with her teeth and her eyes, but with the very soul of her youth. She wore one of this big-sleeved blouses which girls of her age were so crazy about. Really, they shouldn't, for the bubas were considered 'not good' by the prudes: loose, revealing trifles, clinging to the body curves so intimately that the nipples of the breasts showed through. Certainly not the most comfortable sight to confront a young bachelor on a morning when he had just made noble resolutions. Amusa tried to appear unmoved. Her large imitation-gold ear-
rings twinkled in the dim light. She moved across the room gracefully. Sango felt the vitality of the girl and it tantalized him. (pp.4-5)

From the very moment she is brought on to the stage, the reader gets a hint that she is going to be an evil influence for Sango and his 'noble resolutions'. In fact, she does not prove herself much otherwise, barring few sparks of 'love' she claims to have for him at times.

One is reminded of a similar way in which Jagua Nana is introduced to the reader by Ekwensi. The novel starts:

Jagua had just had a cold bath, and, in the manner of African women, she sat on a low stool with a mirror popped between her bare knees, gazing at her wet hair. Only one cloth - a flowered cotton print - concealed her nakedness; and she had wound it over her breasts and under her armpits. Her arms and shoulders were bare (...) She raised her arm and ran the comb through the wiry kinks, and her breasts swelled into a sensuous arc (...).13

Aina lives with her mother in a slum in one corner of the city, in a condition which is far below the level of minimum human dignity. In Chapter four, Sango discovers Aina's dwelling as he goes in search of her mother:

He could not see his way forward. With hands outstretched he groped towards what might be a door. His head caught against something and he ducked. He was in. He could feel that the room was large, like a low-ceiling hall. In one corner
a light flickered. (...) 

He tried to move but something caught his step and he staggered. Then he realized that the entire floor was covered with sleeping bodies. He was in a kind of bedless open dormitory. Everyone but the old woman slept on the floor. Old, young, lovers, enemies, fathers, mothers, they all shared this hall. From early childhood Aina had listened to talks about sex, seen bitter quarrels, heard and perhaps seen adults bare their passions shamelessly like animals... From early childhood she had learnt the facts of life without being taught. (pp.33-34)

So Aina had lost her innocence to the demands of the city where the greater chunk of the population had to live in dirty, stinking slums with no amenities and full of disease-causing stench, while a small number of people like Lajide lived in big mansions and owned a few more. Jagua Nana's Lagos is a similar picture. When Jagua visits the place where her companion Rosa lives, she describes it as "the slum of slums". Ekwensi describes her reactions as she enters Rosa's shanty:

Jagua looked at the degradation. Bare floor which came off in powdery puffs if you rubbed your feet too hard. The bed was in the same room, wooden, with a mattress stuffed with the kind of grass cut by prisoners at the race course. Rosa had become - like many women who came to Lagos, like Jagua herself - imprisoned, entangled in the city, unable to extricate herself from its clutches. 14

In People of the City Aina, Beatrice the first, Rose the...
prostitute, Muri the unknown girl found murdered with her child in Magamu Bush—all become 'prisoners' of Ekwensi's nameless city.

In Chapter four, Aina is found being jailed by the authorities for her alleged involvement in a petty theft at Molomo street. But before that she repeatedly tries to bring Sango under her control by telling him that she is in love with him. She reappears again in Chapter nine, when Sango discovers her near the Beecroft Bridge, selling cigarettes to bus passengers, taxi and truck drivers. She is quite surprised to see Sango who invites her to a posh eatery for dinner, one of the many luxuries of the city. Here Ekwensi gives the readers a bit of her mind:

It was a way of life she liked. The glamourous surroundings, the taxis, the quick drinks. This was one reason why she had come to the city from her home sixty miles away to ride in the taxis, eat in fashionable hotels, to wear the aso-ebi, that dress that was often and so ruinously prescribed like a uniform for mournings, wakings, bazaars, to have men who wore white collars to their jobs as lovers, men who could spend. (p.88)

So these are the charms of the city that lure innocent girls from the countryside to come here and immerse themselves in the sea of vice and deception. Afterwards, it be-
comes difficult to free themselves from the 'clutches' of the city, as Jagua says. Or the city 'drugs' them to perpetual slavery. In *Jagua Nana*, the protagonist's attachment with the Tropicana Club, her daily hunting 'ground for one-night lovers, and money has been described in a similar vein:

The Tropicana to her was a daily drug, a potent, habit-forming brew. Like all the other women who came here, alone or with some man, Jagua was looking the ray of hope.15

At the restaurant, Sango tries to hide her feelings for Aina, thinking that she is nothing but an attractive street-walker, the kind of girl his mother had cautioned him against. He thinks that it was his fatal attraction for this dark beauty that he was not impressed with Elina, the girl to whom he was betrothed by his mother. Ekwensi adds a lot of melodrama in the scene:

They were in and he was sitting beside her. Suddenly all the restraint he had imposed on himself broke loose and he held her in his arms and hugged her. She pushed against him like a naughty child, but he saw the tears in her eyes and he was sad. Yet the next moment she was laughing, teasing him derisively till all the pent-up desire he had for her broke over him and he knew he was still putty in her hands, this street - walker with dark, smooth face and white smile. (p.88)
But her imprisonment has taken its toll. She has changed from a quiet, subdued, tactful girl to a bitter, outspoken, blunt personality. Sango discovers this change in Aina:

He tried to find out what the prison had taught her. She was bitter against him, that he could see. But she was also bitter against everybody, against the very city that had condemned her. She had become hardened. (p.88)

After coming out from the prison, Aina is more after Sango's money than his love. She wants to have her way, whatever may be the consequence. And this determination in her makes Sango uneasy, as he remembers his mother's warning about 'city girls' in her letters that were written by 'half-literate' scribes. (p.89) Aina knows that she cannot run away from the stigma that has been attached to her otherwise charming appearance. For Sango, Aina is now difficult to handle. She is no more the dark beauty craving madly for a little attention from him. Now Sango wants to run away from her. Her stigma has made her into a changed personality:

'Well, I'm a thief! I've been to jail, and I'll still come to Twenty Molomo Street, and I shall visit you! Nobody can stop me (...)!' (p.89)
When she pleads Sango to marry her, he hesitates for their paths diverged from the very beginning'. (p.90) But Aina does not hide her bitterness for him:

'You are very wicked, Amusa.' She was smiling, and that made matters worse, because her smile always melted his heart. (p.89)

Aina's new identity as a 'jailed' woman haunts her as she moves about the city. She is frisked by the Lebanese cloth merchant Zamil in his departmental store; where she goes to steal a piece of beautiful plum velvet. It seems all the decent ways of living are gradually being shut on her face when she tries to earn for herself and her old mother. Finding no other way, she takes to the immediately available alternative for the city offers a hapless young woman: she jumps into the fire of promiscuity.

However, she keeps on coming back to Sango to make claims of her 'love' for him. But now money is equally important to her. It reminds one again of Jagua Nana's relationship with her long-time Ibo lover, Freddie, in Jagua Nana. When the latter objects to her amorous responses towards the Syrian wooing her for the night, she makes her priorities clear to him.
Jagua took it. This was her bread and butter, she told herself. The Syrian's money would buy her that new dress from Kingsway. She had already pictured herself in it. She loved Freddie well, but his whole salary could not buy that dress. He must understand that taking from the Syrian did not mean she loved him less.

And as Freddie leaves the club in rage because Jagua would not leave the Syrian, she takes it nonchalantly:

At that instant Jagua forced back a small spark of pity for her loved one. He should know by now that in the Tropicana, money always claimed the first loyalty.16

However, Sango is too willing to respond to Aina's amorous advances once she manages for him the much required permission from Alhaji to practice with his band in the school compound. Through this Ekwensi features another decaying side of city life, where 'love' also comes for a consideration. With no immediate prospects for the development of a permanent relationship with Beatrice the first, and having been relieved of his worries about the prospect his musical career, Sango now has a little time for fun, but 'just for this once':

'Don't be sad anymore', Aina said, leaning against him. 'No more, I'm happy.' 'Because of me? Sango, do you love me now?' He was silent, trying desperately to collect his
thoughts, to marshall his force against the wiles of this seductress. He looked at her face, serene, with long lashes and pouting lips. In the eyes he read admiration. Just for this once, he decided to be defeated. He held her to himself and she sighed the sign of love in triumph. (pp.97-98).

If Aina's 'love' is guided by her desire to get money from Sango, he is no less business-like in offering his 'love' to her. He condescends to answer to Aina's amorous calls only when he gets something in return, like Alhaji's permission to use the school compound. So he decides 'to be defeated just for this once'. But this lands him in further trouble. In chapter fourteen, when Sango is without a home, a job and moving absolutely directionless in the city, he is startled to find Aina at his make-shift dwelling. She has come to tell him that their last moonlight adventure by the lagoon has made her pregnant. So Sango must marry her now. She even threatens him that her mother will move judicial proceedings against him if he refuses this time. Sango's temporary escape comes when he parts with whatever little cash he had saved for his own survival. He becomes an unwilling 'victim' of Aina's blackmail.

However, Aina does not gain much from this. In chapter fifteen, she makes her final appearance in the one-room
shanty of the First Trumpet (funny, Ekwensi does not name him). Ekwensi describes the scene with Aina's lasciviousness:

She rose when he entered; tied the cloth more firmly about her hips, swelling out her breasts as she did so. She walked vainly to the table, poured herself a glass of water. There was a time when Sango would have thought the dimples at the back of her knees nice and soft, but not now. When she turned and faced him he recognized her for what she was - the dark temptress who was such a threat to his happiness (...). (p.146)

Sango knows that Aina and her scheming mother could disclose the stories of his promiscuity to his mother who is in the town for medical treatment. He could imagine the shock his mother would receive if these two women told her about his relationship with Aina, and the child she was carrying. His worries make him desperate. He hits Aina badly in his rage, almost causing her a miscarriage. But Aina manages to survive along with the child. She had to, for Ekwensi wants to prove at the end that his protagonist was not the father of Aina's child. Sango needed this proof to clear himself of guilt, and to reassure himself of his 'reputation'.

Interestingly enough, the birth of this child actually helps Sango to 'free' himself from Aina, with his relation-
ship with Beatrice the second now consolidating into a prospective marital bond. This comes out clearly in Sango's musing over his past relationship with Aina, in Chapter sixteen:

God must be praised for bringing back Aina's life. (...) That borderline between life and death: Aina had hovered on it threateningly for many a soul-searing night. If she had crossed, who would have believed that he never meant to harm her in the first place? Or that the child she had, belonged to another man? Who - in this wide city? (pp.153-154)

So Sango finally wrenches him free from the spell of this 'dark seductress', and thus survives a series of cruel humiliation caused to him as a result of 'that fleeting love affair begun under the shadows of Molomo Street'. (p.153)

Beatrice the first is different from Aina. She has tasted, unlike the latter, the cosy comforts of modern city life as a mistress of Grunnings, a well known engineer from England with wife and children at home. Grunnings has been married to Beatrice according to African law and custom (as if that elevates Beatrice in her stature, though she is just fulfilling his physical needs in exchange for her financial and material comforts). The arrangement between the English engineer and her is funny: on completion of his eighteen
months’ tour, the man goes back to his family in England leaving Beatrice alone to return to her native village.

In Ekwensi’s city, girls looking for luxury and comfort appear to have been left with no self respect. Beatrice’s marriage with the English engineer ensures a higher social status for her in the city, for she has got money to spend on costly dresses, good food and have her way at elite nightspots. She lives in Rokiya Hills, a wooded area on the outskirts of the city, so typical of the colonial mentality.

But beneath all her glitter and wealth, she carries the same sordid story of rural-urban migration caused by boredom from rural life and a lust for being independent. In chapter five, Ekwensi introduces Beatrice to the reader through Sango’s spectacular discovery of a ‘petite’ West African girl, with an ‘almost transparent dress cleverly gathered at the waist’, who seemed to ‘have come from the pages of a South Sea travel book’.

Sango was conscious of that strange excitement which had possessed him that night when he first saw Aina. The symptoms were the same: an insistent restlessness, a desire to be near this creature, to bask in the radiance of her beauty. (p.37) (emphasis added)
At the All Language Club she introduces herself to Sango:

You are very kind, Mr. Sango. When I live on my own, I'll be happy. I came here to live and enjoy life. For a short while I enjoyed my life, went to big functions, night clubs... I always wanted to be free. (p.41)

But now that her cup of enjoyment is filled to the brim, she wants to run away to seek new men, new adventures. She is no more happy with Grunnings and is tired of living in Rokiya Hill.

She sighed, 'Grunnings has changed. Whenever he comes back from leave it is always like that. But this time, I shall do something about it.' (p.40)

Whatever she was looking forward to enjoying in the city came to her through her marriage with Grunnings. However, she is too tired to be tied up with one particular man for such a long time. What she is probably missing is the thrill of her earlier adventures with various men from the city, before she finally settled down with the English engineer. At least that is what is suggested when Beatrice talks to Sango about her husband:

'He is a nice fellow; he loves me very much. But lots of men also love me and I'm going to leave Grunnings... (...) I want to move from Rokiya Hill. (...) 'The place is grave; too quiet and lonely. I like noise, it is not so boring as
silence. And I like high life and drinks and music.' (p.40)

A little later Beatrice makes her intentions to leave Grun-
nings clear:

'But now, I have given him three children and I
know he can never be a real husband to me, so I'm
quitting. I have thought over it a long time!' (p.41)

When she collapses in the Club after making herself
drunk, the waiter comes to reveal some private sides of the
woman to Sango:

'That woman, one day she will die - like this!' (

'(...) 'She get some bad sick inside her. When
them tell her, go home, she no go. One day she go
die for this city.' (p.41)

One hears the similar stories from her transporter
boyfriend from Gold Coast, Kofi, when he laments her tragic
death while sitting with Sango in the barber's shop on
Molomo Street. He tells Sango:

'You did not understand what was underneath. How
could you? The girl was finished, man.' (...

'Finished, I say. I was trying to help her back.
She was finished, I tell you; and I was the last
man, and too late. (...)’ (p.145)
So Beatrice dies of some disease, probably some venereal disease which she contracts during her promiscuous adventures. Her living with Zamil, the Lebanese merchant, as his mistress does not give her any comfort. Her encounters with Lajide also do not take her anywhere. Anyway, she possibly could not carry on with Lajide who would not have offered anything other than his wealth and his bed. Lajide’s offer of marriage and comfort is turned down by her, though she appears to enjoy the rivalry between him and Zamil over her company.

However, her attraction for Sango is more than mere infatuation. She, therefore, goes out of her way to request Lajide to provide accommodation for Sango in exchange of the small favours the rich landlord would demand of her. But she fails. In her admiration for Sango, Beatrice takes revenge on Lajide. But her trick ends up in an abortive attempt and she suffers one of the cruellest possible physical humiliations. Lajide’s wives pin her down and shower blows on her till she is floored. Then Kekere, the youngest wife of Lajide, rubs caynne pepper all over her body, into her eyes, nostrils, mouth and her private parts. Shortly afterwards, she dies a tragic death with nobody to claim her deadbody.
Elina, the girl betrothed to Sango, remains an incomplete character in the novel. Ekwensi creates her as an antithetical entity to his city seductresses, like Aina or Beatrice. Her surroundings induce a sense of purity and piety in her. She is being taught to lead an austere life in a convent, situated in a little village in the Eastern Greens. Sango visits her on his way back to the city after covering the miners' strike. The protagonist is startled at the contrast between this peaceful place and the city where he lives:

Less than a hundred miles from the scene of death, desolation and the shattering of amities, yet this place stubbornly refused to see the evil in the world, talked only of the good and pure. The sadness came when the girls graduated as Elina would. Then rude shocks were theirs in the words, thoughts and deeds of the outside world. (p.78)

What the novelist probably wants to suggest here is that even spirituality and purity of thought are no insulation for human soul against the corrupting influence of the city.

While waiting for Elina in the convent, Sango's city-bred notions about girls suffer a jolt as he is struck with the purity of atmosphere prevailing inside the convent. But the final shock comes when Elina appears before him:
Elina was a tall girl, quick-smiling, but somewhat gawky in appearance. Looking at her as she hung timidly on the arm of the head-girl who led her in, Sango felt his heart contract with pain and disillusionment. Pure she must be, innocent, a virgin no doubt; but one whom Sango could never see himself desiring (…). He cursed himself for his city background which had taught him to appreciate the voluptuous, the sensual, the sophisticated in woman. Elina was none of these. What did he want for a wife, anyway? A whore? Perhaps not; but he knew what he did not want. (p.79)

Here Ekwensi hints at the protagonist’s later rejection of Elina when she comes to the city accompanying Sango’s ailing mother. If People of the City decries the corrupting influence of city life that finds shape in the novelist’s characterization of Aina or Beatrice, the ‘good’ and ‘virtuous’ woman is not accepted either, because she lacks in “feminine” sensuality.

Beatrice the second is the only woman who exists as a contrast to all other city women in this novel. She has a noble lineage and comes of a well-to-do family with past glory. She is in no way similar to Beatrice the first. Sango discovers her during De Pereira’s funeral procession, when he saves her from a stampede. And Sango is attracted towards her instantaneously the moment she reveals her future plans for marriage with her fiancé, and then opening
a hospital in the remote interior to serve the people and not to make money. Sango’s usual restlessness to ‘possess’ a girl is back again:

There is the girl for you Sango. If you could win her, you would find a foothold in this city and all your desires will focus on a new inspiration. How different she is from them all: Aina, Elina, Beatrice the First. Have you ever felt anything like this beautiful feeling before? (p.116)

So Beatrice the second helps Sango to discover real love, amidst all his adversities: no home, no job and no money. Ironically, while he himself feels so helpless and desperate, his attractions for Beatrice the second is much enhanced due to the air of helplessness she carries about her. She appears so dependent, so fragile in her emotions and so soft and innocent in her feelings and attitudes, that Sango appears to develop a kind of protective attitude towards her, which he enjoys. This also generates in him a feeling of responsibility for her. This is symbolically suggested at the beginning of their relationship, when she faints in the funeral procession immediately making Sango move on his feet and struggle through the surging crowd to ‘save’ her. All through their relationship, she is seen to be largely dependent on him for her emotional security, a
fact she hides at first. Unlike Aina, she is somebody with
whom Sango does not have to 'compete'. In the typical
Victorian sense, she surrenders herself completely to Sango
for her love. Among the two lovers, Sango is the dominant
one. So he receives her undivided attention eventhough he
does not have a place to stay, has no job and no money.
Then again, following the patriarchal tradition of a girl
being completely vulnerable to her lover's charms, Beatrice
the second comes to meet Sango telling lies to her father
about where she was going. She very dutifully reaches the
hospital where Sango's mother is admitted, without telling
him anything about it. When Sango goes there to discover
that his mother is dead, he has Beatrice the second's shoul-
ders to cry on and seek solace in his despair.

Each and every move of hers makes Sango doubly sure of
his 'masculine charm' and he is able to retain his future
hopes and self-confidence only through Beatrice's unstinted
moral support. When she repeats to Sango what Aina had told
him lying on her hospital bed, his heart dances with joy:

'You know something: what this girl said is true.
The girls go for you. I am very worried myself.
Recently, I have been feeling very lonely when you
are not with me. I can't concentrate. I do
things I have never done before - like telling
lies to my father so that they don't know I've
come to see you.... Sango was beside himself with joy. There was hope for him then! He did not want to dwell on it because he did not see how Beatrice could ever be his - with all that family match-making her father had talked about. (p.149)

Following this part, there seems to be a sudden - and unexplained - urgency in the novelist to solve the case of Sango-Beatrice affair, so that everything falls in its own place for them to look forward to a happy future together. Soon the reader is told about a case of suicide far away in England, which takes the life of Beatrice's fiance'. So Sango and Beatrice are now "morally" free to tie the nuptial knot. In the face of weak resistance from a shocked father and, approval from a too willing mother hastening the marriage process, the novel ends with Sango and Beatrice enjoying a free ride in Kofi's transport to Gold Coast where they would look forward to starting life afresh.

Sango's rejection of Aina, Beatrice, Elina and his marriage with Beatrice the second reflect the author's didactic portrayal of city women in People of the City. Elina - with all her saint-like qualities - could be an ideal foil to Aina, who herself becomes a prey to her fatal physical charms and her promiscuous nature. Elina grows up in a convent, far away from the corrupting influence of the
city, but still she does not find favour with Ekwensi's protagonist. On the other hand, Beatrice the second is shown as an ideal combination of 'womanly' virtues and sensuality. She represents the stereotype of 'ideal woman' in Ekwensian vision as opposed to his 'fallen' women whom the novelist so enthusiastically portrays in all his works. Therefore, Sango's acceptance of Beatrice is symbolic of what Ekwensi would look forward to in a modern African woman to make herself 'acceptable': total surrender to male ego, lack of an independent will, fear of asserting her individuality under critical circumstances, and finally, abundance of physical beauty to be attractive to a man.

The fact that a woman's sense of helplessness makes her more 'acceptable' to male ego is highlighted in the story of Nnu-Ego, the woman protagonist in Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood*. The novel narrates Nnu-Ego's journey of life, wherein she gets very little shelter from social and emotional hazards, and very little comfort from her personal endeavours. All through this journey, elements constituting the reality around her - her desires, her social duties, her maternal/family responsibilities, her physical pain and inner turmoils - are set against each other in a series of recurring conflicts from which she finds no escape till she
breathes her last. The conflict is both internal as well as
external, a clash between the real Nnu Ego that hides inside
her physical frame, and the woman she should have been
to according demands that are generated from outside. In fact,
she is a prisoner of this lifelong war. The novel stands
apart from most other feminist novels written by black
African writers, in its beauty of characterization.

Katherine Frank, in her essay on the genre of feminist
novel in Africa, observes that the female protagonists of
such novels belong to a particular class: westernized,
educated and mostly of urban origin. For once, Buchi Eme-
cheta proves her wrong in *Joys of Motherhood*. According to
Ms. Frank:

> When we look at African feminist novels, however, it is striking to note that all of them have educated, highly Westernized heroines, and all are set in urban environments. 18

Nnu Ego's birth and the formative years of her child-
hood take place in Ibuza, an Ibo settlement in rural Nige-
ría, where people do not know the ways of the city. She
does not receive any formal education - in western sense of
the term - throughout her life. She is never seen adopting
any European custom, or emulating western fashions. On the
contrary, her efforts are most of the time channelised to fulfil certain traditional duties according to Ibo customs, something that leads her to her most harrowing physical and emotional agonies.

Buchi Emecheta has created a unique interior design for *Joys of Motherhood*. Nnu-Ego's experience at first as a girl, then as a wife and finally, as a mother is divided into a number of "rural-urban shifts". Such shifts taking place in the outer, physical reality around the protagonist almost coincide with shifts in her inner experience. Her priorities change along with these shifts. At the beginning of her womanhood her priorities appear to be nothing more important than filling her father's pipe and, behave as a dutiful daughter to an illustrious father. With her becoming a 'wife', her sole concern is for attainment of motherhood. Finally, when she is tired of her recurring pregnancies, all her energy is channelised towards her children's welfare. And if through the shifts in physical reality around Nnu-Ego the tribulations of city-life come to the fore, through her inner experience, changing along with the transformations in outer reality, comes the message that Emecheta conveys in *Joys of Motherhood* - the one about the
real social status of an ordinary African woman of today. Through the obvious gaps between Nnu-Ego's aspirations and achievements, intentions and actions, desire and compromises, and her illusions and the reality, Emecheta drives home her message: that the modern African woman continues to suffer under the twin pressure of tradition as well as of modernity. Though changing times have provided her with opportunities to improve her lot, she still stands as a victim of the cross-cultural milieu and its sacrificial demands that a woman must meet in order to fulfil her traditional role and, also to fit into the expectations of the modern times. Through Nnu-Ego, Emecheta tries to address to the question of woman's predicament in modern African city-life.

In a marked difference from Ekwensi who seems to be too much pre-occupied with the bizarre - murder, rape, blackmail, robbery and corruption - Emecheta urges her readers to see the world in a mirror that reflects the travails of an African woman's mental universe. So one finds that instead of rape, murder or blackmail, *Joys of Motherhood* raises questions about universally accepted "feminine" spheres: motherhood, marriage, women's associations and the intricacies of man-woman relationship. What strikes a reader is
the author's obsessive urge to highlight the issue of education, especially the sordid state of women's education and, the negative approach of the patriarchal society to this issue.

In chapter three of the novel, Nnu-Ego's father Agbadi, and his closest friend Idayi, are seen conversing about finding her a bridegroom. Their conversation originates from the fact that Nnu-Ego's father and his friend are aware of the girl's popularity among the local young bachelors. Here Emecheta's protagonist is shown against a traditional, rural backdrop, with all its customs and rituals. According to Ibo custom, young boys pay their visits to a girl's compound after she attains her puberty, to compete among themselves for a possible marriage. She is finally married off to Amatokwu in a grand ceremony never before seen in Ibuza. Nnu-Ego doesn't disappoint her father as people from her in-laws' village, Umu-Iso come to inform Agbadi later that his daughter had been a 'complete' girl.

So in this first phase of her development, Emecheta's heroine is set against a rural background. Everything about Nnu-Ego is a part of traditional African culture: her upbringing in Agbadi's household, her dresses, her marriage
ceremony and finally, her 'chi' or personal god, which every African person is supposed to have. This 'chi', however, proves to be a difficult one for the protagonist. Emecheta describes how Nnu-Ego's 'chi' is a slave woman who was buried alive against her wishes along with the deadbody of Agunwa, Nwokocha Agbadi's chief wife. In chapter two, the slave woman, one from the land of the water people with fair skin, tells Agbadi before being pushed to death that she would come to his household as his legitimate daughter. Later the 'dibia' or the native medicine man from Ogboli who comes to cure Nnu-Ego, tells her parents in a mysterious voice as if coming from a far-off land:

This child is the slave woman who died with your senior wife Agunwa. She promised to come back as a daughter. Now here she is. This is why this child has the fair skin of the water people, and the painful hump on her head is from the beating your men gave her before she fell into the grave. She will always have trouble with that head. If she has a fortunate life, the head will not play up. But if she is unhappy, it will trouble her both physically and emotionally. (p.27)

Emecheta completes her rural setting by portraying the element of the supernatural in traditional African life through dibia's prophecy.
At first, Nnu-Ego's marriage with Amatokwu works out fine, the latter being a loving and caring husband. But as the days pass by and she still remains without a child, her husband gives in to the advice of his relatives to marry again. The tension between the couple and Nnu-Ego's emotional suffering reflect the issue of polygamy in Africa and its effect on women. The stigma of childlessness is too heavy for an African woman to bear. David G. Maillu writes why childlessness is taken so seriously in Africa:

The first natural acceptance to the African, in so far as woman-to-man sexual relation in marriage is concerned, is that their coming together is primarily to procreate. This is seen as a divine call. He knows that life can continue on earth only when the old give way to the birth of the young, and that the tree that does not bear brings an end to its own kind. (...) And a recognition that life appears to have only two major shifts: one in which the old nurse the young because the young are too young and helpless; the second shift when the young have to nurse the old because the old are too weak to help themselves. That is, the two generations are purely complementary. Or metaphorically speaking, the two ages are the two hands of the same person so that what the right hand has taken is passed over to the left hand, and in any performance, the two hands desperately need each other. ¹⁹

Nnu-Ego's inability to bear a child for Amatokwu compels her to make room for another wife. The new wife soon gives birth to a son, reducing Nnu-Ego further in her
stature. The new wife's pregnancy makes her more and more conscious of her barrenness. Her inability to achieve motherhood makes her feel incomplete as a woman.

The protagonist's sufferings due to her failed motherhood suggests that longing to be a mother means much more than to be able to procreate and then, continue the lineage. Patricia Hill Collins makes a sociological analysis of motherhood in West African tradition:

While the archetypal White, middle-class nuclear family conceptualizes family life as being divided into two oppositional spheres -- the "male" sphere of economic providing and the "female" sphere of effective nurturing -- this type of rigid sex role segregation was not part of the West African tradition. Mothering was not a privatised nurturing "occupation" reserved for biological mothers, and the economic support of children was not the exclusive responsibility of men. Instead, for African women, emotional care for children and providing for their physical survival were interwoven as interdependent, complementary dimensions of motherhood.  

Emecheta provides ample proof in support of this analysis in Joys of Motherhood. In chapter three, one comes to know:

Nnu Ego's relationship with the other women in the Amatokwu compound was amicable. The younger wife did not keep her new son to herself but allowed Nnu Ego as the senior wife to share in looking after him. Many an evening neighbours would hear Nnu-Ego calling the younger woman to come for her crying baby. (p.33)
In a similar vein, later in the novel when Nnu Ego becomes a mother in Lagos city, often her children are taken care of by her neighbours.

The phenomenon of motherhood is an expression of a woman's fullness, her completeness as a 'female' being. But Emecheta shows how in traditional African culture a woman's barrenness is synonymous to the loss of her rightful status in her husband's household. Nnu-Ego's husband, who a few months back had all the care and appreciation for her, now orders her to do various odd jobs and manual work in his farm. He also does not come to her bed, a right she had earned as the senior wife. Instead he spends the whole night with the younger woman. Nnu Ego tries to keep quiet and ignore Amatokwu's deliberate negligence. Even when he seems to forget that at least the child needs its mother, Nnu Ego does not want to caution Amatokwu:

The younger wife often stayed in Amatokwu's hut till very late (...). On one such evening the baby began to cry for its mother, and Nnu Ego wondered what she should do. "If I go to Amatokwu's hut, they will say I am jealous because he prefers the young nursing mother to me. All the same it is wrong for him to do so, not giving the new wife a chance to wean her child before calling her into his hut. But I haven't even the
courage to enforce our rules since my position as senior wife is now being eroded." (pp.33-34)

With her growing attachment for the child, she is finally able to breast-feed and nurture him. But in spite of all her motherly qualities she still remains barren. When the younger wife conceives for the second time, it becomes too difficult for Nnu Ego to hide her feelings. Her elusive motherhood makes her desperate to the extent that she makes a very selfish prayer holding the child in front of her 'chi': that either the child should be hers or it should send some of its friends from the other world. She appears to have forgotten in her emotional agony the implications of such a prayer. While praying so, she is caught by her husband who beats her up.

Following this, she is taken back to her father's house where she gets what she needed - care and sympathy. As her condition improves, her father starts thinking of remarrying Nnu-Ego. Without showing much intention to take Nnu Ego's opinion on the choice of a second husband for her, he packs her off to Lagos with the senior brother from the Owulum family, for she was to be the 'wife' of the junior brother, Nnaife. Nnu-Ego's reality, thus, changes abruptly.
The city phase in Nnu Ego's life starts with a series of shocking realisations. The journey from Ibuza to Lagos, covered in four days, puts her to the limit of her physical endurance. When Nnu Ego gets her first chance to look at Nnaife, her husband to be, she almost shudders with disbelief at the unlikeness between the two brothers from the same Owulum family:

It could not be! This could not be the man she was to live with. How could two brothers be so unlike? They had similar foreheads, and the same kind of gestures, but there the similarities ended, for otherwise the two men were as different as water and oil. She felt like bursting into tears, like begging the senior Owulum to please take her home; (...). (p.43)

Earlier in the same chapter, Emecheta describes Nnaife:

Nnu Ego (...) was just falling asleep with a full stomach when in walked a man with a belly like a pregnant cow, wobbling first to this side and then to that. The belly, coupled with the fact that he was short, made him look like a barrel. His hair, unlike that of men at home in Ibuza, was not closely shaved; he left a lot of it on his head, like that of a woman mourning for her husband. His skin was pale, the skin of someone who had for a long time worked in the shade and not in the open air. His cheeks were puffy and looked as if he had pieces of hot yam inside them, and they seemed to have pushed his mouth into a smaller size above his weak jaw. And his clothes - Nnu Ego had never seen men dressed like that: (...). If her husband-to-be was like this, she thought, she would go back to her father. (p.42)
Little did she know that it was with this man she so much disliked at the first sight that she would have to spend the rest of her life as his 'wife'.

The turmoil of a rural-urban shift is reflected in the protagonist's emotional as well as physical plights. In Ibuza, Nnu Ego was surrounded by handsome, well built young men who would come to Agbadi's compound as her suitors. Her own father was a symbol of male beauty. When she finds her pushed into a far-away place called Lagos, and forced to accept a man like Nnaife as her husband, Nnu Ego is hardly able to hold back her indignation and makes her dislike for Nnife obvious:

Nnu Ego held herself tight, trying bravely to accept the greetings and not to imagine what her father would say had this man come in person to ask for his daughter. She fought back tears of frustration. She was used to tall, wiry farmers, with rough, blackened hands from farming, long, lean legs and very dark skin. This one was short, the flesh of his upper arm danced as he moved about jubilantly among his friends, and that protruding belly! Why did he not cover it? She despised him on that first night (...). (pp.43-44)

But this is certainly not the end of her disillusionment with her new husband who came to Lagos five years before Nnu Ego became his 'wife'. On the first night
of her arrival she discovers that her husband is not only ugly in his outward appearance, he is also devoid of human emotions. As Nnaife is smart enough to sense his new wife’s disapproval of himself as a perfect husband, he does not waste time in asserting his conjugal right in his marital bed:

He demanded his marital right as if determined not to give her a chance to change her mind. She had thought she would be allowed to rest at least on the first night after her arrival before being pounced upon by this hungry man, her new husband. (...) This one worked himself into an animal passion. She was sure he had never seen a woman before. She bore it, and relaxed as he had been told, pretending that the person lying on her was Amatokwu, her first sweetheart of a husband. This man’s appetite was insatiable (...). She felt humiliated, but what was she to do? She knew she must have cried all night long and that the older Owulum had been there listening (...). She was used to her long wiry Amatokwu who would glide inside her when she was ready, not this short, fat, stocky man, whose body almost crushed hers. What was more, he did not smell healthy either, unlike men in Ibuza who had the healthy smell of burning wood and tobacco. This one smelt all soapy, as if he was over-washed. (p.44)

In a symbolic way through the most intimate of human actions Emecheta shows a clash between Nnu Ego’s sensitivity shaped by her rural upbringing, and the ways of a city-dweller that Nnaife is. In a village, under traditional customs, the newly-wed would have been welcomed in the
husband's hut by smiling relatives, and then the couple would be all by themselves for the night.

But in a city the things are different. Acute shortage of housing facilities push commoners like Nnaife into such one-room tenements in far flung areas of the city that are without any basic amenity like water supply and electricity. The problem of housing as an integral part of city life has been one of the major points in Emecheta's other novels like The Second Class Citizen, and The Bride Price. In fact, Nnu Ego spends her whole life in Lagos city in such one-room flats with common kitchen and lavatories for the tenants. She even has to share the same sleeping space with Nnaife's other wives. She can claim her privacy only by separating her bed by a thin curtain, an almost imaginary personal space where she suffers her humiliations and makes her resolves. Lack of physical space for her in the city, in her husband's house, comes as a sharp contrast to the life in Ibuza where each wife would have her own hut in a husband's sprawling compound.

However, it is significant to note how Emecheta skillfully uses this lack of physical space as a metaphor for the ever shrinking psychic space around Nnu Ego that
prevents her from asserting her individuality. Thus, any encroachment into her private psychic space comes as a torture to her. At the end of chapter ten, when the second wife from Ibuza arrives in Nnaife's house to stay, Nnaife again violates Nnu-Ego's private space to inflict injury in her mind. The situation here can be well compared with Nnu Ego's thoughts when her former husband, Amatokwu, would keep his junior wife longer in his own hut, leaving Nnu Ego and the child alone and neglected in her own compound. (Chapter three). The city creates a different reality. Here Nnu Ego is forced to sleep on the floor in the same room where Nnaife is enjoying the company of his new wife on the only bed they have got:

"Try to sleep, too, senior wife," he said to her, and now Nnu Ego was sure he was laughing at her. He could hardly wait for her to settle down before he pulled Adaku into their only bed.

It was a good thing she had prepared herself, because Adaku turned out to be one of those shameless modern women whom Nnu Ego did not like. (...) She tried to block her ears, yet could still hear Adaku's exaggerated carrying on. Nnu Ego tossed in agony and anger all night, going through in her imagination what was taking place behind the curtained bed. Not that she had to do much imagining, because even when she tried to ignore what was going on, Adaku would not let her. She giggled, she squeaked, she cried and she laughed in turn, until Nnu Ego was quite convinced that it was all for her benefit. (p.124)
Nnu Ego's tryst with city life in the novel is full of disbelief and disappointment. Everything around her is so different from what she had been taught and told all these years in Ibuza. After her painful experience of spending the first night in the city with Nnaife, next morning she is utterly shocked to discover her husband's calling—washing clothes for Dr. Meers and Mrs. Meers. How odd it appeared when she compared him with the strong men working in their farms in Ibuza.

She had at first rejected his way of earning a living and had asked him why he could not find a more respectable job.

Nnaife had scoffed and told her that in a town people never minded what they did to get money, as long as it was honest. Did she not think the work easier and much more predictable than farming? But every time she saw her husband hanging out the white woman's smalls, Nnu Ego would wince as some one in pain. (p.47)

Her apprehensions about the city take shape in her comparison of both the Owulum brothers, as she is being amused by her brother-in-law, Nnaife's elder brother:

This type of man, thought Nnu Ego as she watched him, did not belong to a soft place like this. He belonged to the clear sun, bright moon, to his farm and his rest hut, where he could sense a nestling cobra, a scuttling scorpion, hear a
howling hyena. Not here. Not in this place, this square room painted completely white like a place of sacrifice, this place where men’s flesh hung loose on their bones, where men had bellies like pregnant women, where men covered their bodies all day long. (p.46)

However, Nnu-Ego still hopes to attain completeness in her motherhood, with the help of this man she hates so much.

Another thought ran through her mind: suppose this man made her pregnant, would that not be an untold joy to her people?

"O my Chi", she prayed as she rolled painfully to her other side on the raffia bed, "O my dead mother, please make this dream come true, then I will respect this man, I will be his faithful wife and put up with his crude ways and ugly appearance. (...) (pp.44-45)

Nnaife finally makes Nnu-Ego a mother. Though her first child, Ngozi, does not survive, she gives birth to three sons and three daughters subsequently. Her dream of motherhood which proved so elusive to her is finally materialized in a series of pregnancies. The arrival of the first child, however, is received with cold gestures from Nnaife. Had it been Ibuza, her whole household would be bursting with joy and celebrations. Her age-group would come and surround her with happiness, they would sing and dance to her honour. Coming of a child is the most important event in traditional African life. But in the city, Nnu Ego’s husband only basks
in the glory of his manhood, as the following conversation between Nnu Ego and Nnaife reveals:

"You are not even happy to see me pregnant - the greatest joy of any life!"
"Of course I am happy to know that I am a man, yes, that I can make a woman pregnant. But any man can do that. What do you want me to do? How many babies are born in this town everyday? You are just looking for an excuse to pick a quarrel. (...) Remember, though, without me you could not be carrying that child." (pp.50-51)

Thus, in spite of her becoming a mother, Nnu Ego never comes to respect Nnaife. All along he remains a difficult husband for her. He never shows any regard for her comfort, never appreciates her efforts at keeping the house fire burning, her working against all odds to give education to their children. In fact, Nnaife shares none of Nnu-Ego's sorrows or happiness. The only thing he understands is his comfort. He is very lazy and wicked, but has a big ego. He always asserts his superiority as a man, as a husband, who must lord it over his woman because he paid the bride price. He even does not show any regard for the children, and whenever he can manage a little money, he spends it on drinking and self-enjoyment. For him everything else, like providing wholesome meal to his family or pay for the children's education, is meaningless. He remains and dies a
selfish man. At the end of the novel, he is seen to be blaming Nnu Ego for his jail sentence and on his return to Ibuza after lawyer Nweze makes an under hand deal for his release, he no more wants to live with Nnu Ego. He finally dies in his own house.

The pressure of city life thus claims one of its major casualties: the strained relationship between the husband and the wife. Emecheta tells her readers that:

Like other husbands and wives in Lagos, Nnu Ego and Nnaife started growing slightly apart, not that they were that close at the start. Now each was in a different world. There was no time for petting or talking to each other about love. That type of family awareness which the illiterate farmer was able to show his wives, his household, his compound, had been lost in Lagos, for the job of the white man, for the joy of buying expensive lappas, and for the feel of shiny trinkets. Few men in Lagos would have time to sit and admire their wives' tattoos, let alone tell them tales of animals nestling in the forests, like the village husband who might lure a favourite wife into the farm to make love to her with only the sky as their shelter, or bathe in the same stream with her, scrubbing one another's backs. (p.52)

With these words, Emecheta poignantly sums up how even the best of relationship weathers under the pressure of the city. The economic demands that the city makes on the lives of its inhabitants take their toll on many married couples,
like Nnaife and Nnu Ego, who probably get almost everything they want, except for a little love.

According to Toyin Falola, the capitalist economy in the cities are behind the creation of a major class - one that has people like Nnu-Ego and Nnaife - who sell their labour to earn. Thus, the cities show urban inequalities and a resultant social stratification and underdevelopment.

The cities provide the most concrete evidence of the intensification of property, inequity and social stratification in the country. Underdevelopment, inequality and stratification are integral components of any capitalist system such as we have in the country. The power monopolist in any capitalist society have a stake in the preservation of poverty and inequality.21

As Nnaife never earns enough to meet the family expenses adequately, Nnu Ego decides to start trading. Compelled by the demands of urban economy many rural women start their petty trade after migrating to the city. Apart from trading, often they take to prostitution to maintain a certain economic standard in the city. Aidan Southall writes:

Illicit brewing and various forms of prostitution may provide the only economic opportunities readily available to the ordinary town woman to fill the vacuum left by the loss of her rural tasks. (....)
(...) But it is remarkable that in the West (Africa) petty trading is recognized as a reputable and predominant feminine activity at almost every level of status.22

Emecheta touches the issue of prostitution by rural migrant women in the novel when Adaku, the youngest wife of senior Owulum whom Knife inherits after his elder brother's death, openly declares before Nnu Ego that she is going to be a prostitute, as one finds in chapter fourteen.

Nnu Ego's intention of trading is of course to supplement her effort to provide two square meals and bare minimum clothes to her family, especially when she has a lazy husband, without work and whiling away his time at home. Emecheta tells us how she makes her efforts at starting a small business:

The monthly meetings on the island with her fellow Ibuza wives did Nnu Ego a great deal of good. The other women taught her how to start her own business so that she would not have only one outfit to wear. They let her borrow five shillings from the women's fund and advised her to buy tins of cigarettes and packets of matches. A tin of cigarettes cost two shillings and she then sold the cigarettes singly for a penny each; as there were thirty-six in each tin, she made a profit of a shilling on each tin. The same thing applied to boxes of matches. (p.52)
Though at first Nnu Ego starts her petty trade to keep herself occupied so that she does not have to bother about a husband she does not like, or her ensuing delivery, her trading becomes the only means of survival very soon. When Nnaife goes out of Lagos for a long time, she manages to survive through her trade. But later in the novel, Nnu Ego's trading attains another significant dimension: she looks forward to supporting her children's education by earning from her business.

The indomitable urge to provide education to her children does not weather away with periodic slump in her business. She thinks more about her sons' schooling than she cares about her health and other comforts. In the face of a lot of financial crisis recurring at short intervals in the novel, accompanied by her failing health due to malnutrition and repeated pregnancy, Nnu Ego manages to send her sons to school and her daughters, to evening private lessons. She is, for once, at the peak of her happiness in Chapter fifteen, when she receives a hefty sum of sixty pounds from the military headquarters, and the thought uppermost on her mind after the initial shock of disbelief subsides is about her children's education:
With tears of relief in her eyes, she promised herself that all her children, girls and boys, would have a good education. If she herself had had one, she would have been able to call at this office to check about the money. She would at least have been able to contact Nnaife, and he could have done the same. She and her husband were ill-prepared for a life like this, where only pen and not mouth could really talk. Her children must learn. (P.179)

One may observe that in the novel, the only woman who matches the strength of Nnu-Ego's will power, is her mother, Ona. This mistress of Nwokocha Agbadi, daughter of a well-known chief and a paragon of beauty, remains controlled and unmoved before the overwhelming charms of Agbadi, her long time lover. She becomes his most prized 'possession', even when he has a number of wives in his compound. But all this love and intimacy from a famed hero like Agbadi cannot change Ona's resolution to stay with her father, Obi Umunna. Because Obi Umunna does not have a son who could carry forward his lineage,

Ona grew to fill her father's expectations. He had maintained that she must never marry; his daughter was never going to stoop to any man. She was free to have men, however, and if she bore a son, he would take her father's name, thereby rectifying the omission nature had made. (pp.11-12)
It is only after the love child of Agabadi and Ona is born, that she is shifted temporarily to Agbadi household. But she promises to come back to her father after the child would grow up. However, this never happens, as Ona dies during her second delivery, giving birth to a son who shortly follows his mother's footsteps in her journey to the other world.

Through Ona's characterisation, Emecheta has drawn the flexible social structure of traditional Ibo society, when things like Christianity and one-man-one-wife system were unheard of. A reputed chief's daughter, Ona is allowed to live with men though she is to remain 'unmarried' forever. Such a thing could never be dreamt of in modern Nigeria.

The character of Nnu Ego is also built on a mixture of traditional and modern values - a phenomenon found everywhere in colonial Africa. There are strong traditional traits in her. She is an obedient daughter, and, after her marriage, her sole ambition is to become a mother of several children - something that is expected of every woman in traditional Africa where childlessness is tantamount to sin. She has deep faith in the art of medicine men, the traditional doctors, and not in any modern medicine, that will
make her pregnant. The mysterious dream sequence she goes through preceding her pregnancies is a picture of spiritual communication that was so much a part of African traditional religion and oral culture.

Nnu Ego is also mostly traditional in her outlook. She strongly believes in social institutions like seniority among wives, importance of giving birth to sons, and so on. In chapter fourteen, Nwakusor and Ubani, the fellow Ibo men from Ibuza living in Lagos, caution Adaku as her actions are annoying Nnaife's senior wife, Nnu Ego. Adaku, who does not have a son, must not show disrespect for Nnu Ego - the only woman in the family who brought glory to their husband by bearing him more than one son. Later in the same chapter Nnu Ego is alarmed as Adaku says:

"My 'chi' be damned! I am going to be a prostitute. Damn my chi!" She added again fiercely. Nnu Ego could not believe her ears. "Do you know what you are saying. Adaku! The chi, your personal god, that gave you life -" (p.168)

Nnu-Ego also warns Adaku that no Ibuza man will ever marry the latter's daughters as they will be known to have a prostitute mother.
Emecheta's female protagonist also believes in the hierarchy of boys over the girls. In chapter fifteen, her daughters complain about why their brothers should be allowed an evening off for their lessons while the girls would have to fetch wood and sell them. Nnu Ego shouts:

"But you are girls! They are boys. You have to sell to put them in a good position in life, so that they will be able to look after the family. When your husbands are nasty to you, they will defend you." (p.176)

But on certain counts, she is absolutely modern in her approach. Her desire for economic independence and her efforts to continue with her children's education are cases in point. She shows remarkable reflections of modern understanding of man-woman relationship in some of her insights into her failing marriage with Nnaife. In chapter seven, while rocking her second baby Oshia, she reflects:

She might not have any money to supplement her husband's income, but were they not in a white man's world where it was the duty of the father to provide for his family? In Ibuza, women made a contribution but in urban Lagos, men had to be the sole providers; this new setting robbed the woman of her usual role. Nnu Ego told herself that the life she had indulged in with the baby Ngozi had been very risky; she had been trying to be traditional in a modern urban setting. (p.81)
In chapter ten, when Adaku comes to Nnu Ego's compound uninvited, after her husband's death, the latter is struck by the young woman's fashionable appearance and her obvious ambition to win over Nanife:

Jealousy, fear and anger seized Nnu Ego in turns. She hated this type of women, who would flatter a man, depend on him, need him. Yes, Nnaife would like that. He had instinctively disliked her own independence, though he was gradually being forced to accept her. (p.118)

Nnu Ego seems to understand the designs of patriarchy bit too well.

Emecheta also provides her readers with glimpses of community life so typical of traditional rural Africa while describing the lives of Ibo migrant population in Lagos. The weekly meeting of Ibuza men and that of Ibo wives on the island in Lagos are examples of such communal associations. Even Nnu Ego's neighbours like Cordelia, Iyawo Itsekiri who almost brings Nnu Ego and Oshia back from the mouth of death, the ever helpful Mama Abby and other Ibo women mentioned in the novel prove through their actions that they were not completely uprooted from their rural culture even while adopting a city-life in Lagos.

Ekwensi's *People of the City* lacks such a range and
depth of characterization as one finds in *Joys of Motherood*.

In Ekwensi's novel, there is an overhanging air that speaks of the evil intentions of city women. While describing Sango's occupation, Ekwensi tends to generalise the picture of city women:

(...) Sango in his spare time led a dance band that played the calypsos and the Konkomas in the only way that delighted the hearts of the city women. Husbands who lived near the All Language Club knew with deep irritation how their wives would, on hearing Sango's music, drop their knitting or sewing and wiggle their hips, shoulders and breasts, sighing with the nostalgia of misty nights years ago (...). While those who as yet had found no man would twist their heaps alluringly before admiring eyes, tempting, tantalizing... promising much but giving little, basking in the vanity of being desired. (p.3)

Throughout the novel the tone of description of women remains almost the same, with an only exception to Beatrice the second. The protagonist Sango's attitude towards his women is best described thus:

To him the past was dead. A man made a promise to a girl yesterday because he was selfish and wanted her yesterday. Today was a new day. (...)

But Sango was the city man - fast with women, slick with his fairy-tales, dexterous with eyes and fingers. (p.6)
If the pleasure-seeking middle or upper class dominate Ekwensi's novel, Emecheta shifts the locale of her story to the lives of the lower middle class, migrants and wage-earners. By doing this she brings the greater part of the population into focus. She sets the grim tone of her narrative, as the second World War breaks out, to show how the war affected the lives of the commoners in the colonial cities:

For the common man in the street, things were not so grim apart from the fact that they could not find cheap fish like stockfish to buy, and the majority of imported foodstuffs became something of the past. But many people were caught in the middle: people like Nnaife and his family, families who had left their farming communities to make a life from the cities. (....) Money was short and so were jobs. (p.126)

Emecheta's portrayal of reality describes mostly the down-trodden, and not the lascivious atmosphere inside Lagos night clubs where the elite pursued carnal pleasures.

In an interview taken by Adeola James, Buchi Emecheta was asked whether she saw any difference between the ways in which African male and female writers handled theme, character and situation. Her answer was:

The difference is not only in the language, but also in the fact that female writers handle female
characters more sympathetically than men. The good woman, in Achebe's portrayal, is the one who kneels down and drinks the dregs after her husband. (...)²³

A comparison between Ekwensi's *People of the City* and Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood* more than proves the point. In the former, Beatrice the second is the only good woman as she makes a complete surrender to Sango. But in *Joys of Motherhood*, even Adaku, who turns into a prostitute in Lagos, is also redeemed when she is found to utilize her earnings for sending her two daughters to good schools and colleges. She does it so that they will not have to suffer as their mother did with a husband like Nnaife. She further excels herself by showering her love and affection on Oshia, Nnu Ego's eldest son, when he leaves for America. She buys him all his necessary articles and gives him a warm send-off.

The problem of rural-urban migration has been one of the major focus in both the novels. However, the varying approaches of Emecheta and Ekwensi in delineating the phenomenon of migration with all its related aspects confirm the presence of gender politics, that differentiates the 'official' and the 'popular' in contemporary African experience. The city seductress of Ekwensi is more of a product
of African popular imagination. The novelist takes enough trouble to describe with all vividness the city woman's bodily charms and her sexual adventures. But he hardly cares to throw light on the economic aspect behind women's preference for a city life. Christine Obbo's study based on the experience of women from East Africa highlights the issue:

(...) the general attitude that still prevails in East Africa is that urban migration is bad for women because it corrupts their virtue, leads to marital instability and erodes traditional norms. This leads to the weakening of the family structure, an increase in juvenile delinquency and violent crimes. But the worst perceived influence of the towns is the idea that prostitution is encouraged among women. (...) Branding female rural-urban migrants as prostitutes has been a strong weapon repeatedly used to discourage female migration.24

She goes on to analyse how with the improvement in transportation, communication systems including mass media, and education the women in Africa have now a much wider field in which they can choose their profession and marriage partners. However, with these opportunities, there also comes an upsurge of prejudices, where independent, single women who rented rooms in rural centres, and in towns, are indiscriminately referred to as 'prostitutes'.

294
So one never knows what exactly made Beatrice in *People of the City* to live her village and come to the city. Same is the case with Aina, as nothing has been said about her reasons for migrating to the city.

The other major defect in Ekwensi's characterization of women of the city is that he homogenises their experience either as victims or as seductresses. In fact, this is a deliberate act on the part of the novelist as his strong male bias and didactic approach to women's assertion of individuality come to play a role in his characterization. In *People of the City*, Aina and Beatrice are far apart in respect of the social classes they belong to. Thus, their exploitation by the city manifests in different levels. As Robert Fatten, Jr. observes:

Male domination should not, however, obscure the profound inequalities and class contradictions dividing women. If women are repressed and exploited, they certainly do not experience repression and exploitation equally. The lives of women are decisively determined by their social class. 25

But in his didactic vision where women should be discouraged to live their village homes and come to city, Ekwensi clubs Aina and Beatrice under one category of
'fallen women' who stalk the Nigerian cities and become agents of moral depravity. Beatrice and Aina, thus, represent the case of stereotyping of women by African male writers.

As a refreshing departure from the above gender bias, Emecheta's characterization of women in *Joys of Motherhood* is equipped with the realistic approach in order to capture their varied experience as migrant women in Lagos city. Nnu-Ego and Adaku are examples, who experience patriarchal oppression in different ways. Their responses to the oppressive machinery also vary. Adaku, a mother of two girls, takes to prostitution in her attempt to escape damnation of not being able to produce a male child. Her ambition to 'quickly' establish her financial independence so that she is able to live as she likes, and not under anybody else's control, makes her opt for the fast way of earning cash in a city - prostitution. Adaku's characterization is also a blow to the romantic idea of African 'motherhood' that is so often found in the works of male African writers. She attains her motherhood by giving birth to two girls, but never enjoys the status of being a mother. Because, traditional African culture recognises a woman as 'mother' only when she is able to produce male
children.

On the other hand, Nnu-Ego's economic necessities are created by her desire for providing food, clothing and education to her family. Nnaife's turning a blind eye to the urgency of earning for the family and blaming Nnu-Ego for producing so many children is symbolic of patriarchal domination in the society that seeks to stop women from attaining economic independence. As Obbo observes:

The central issue is economic autonomy. The men viewed this as a zero sum situation in which the women acquired economic autonomy while men lost control over the women. If a man cannot control a woman's money directly, he can at least devise all sorts of ways to spend the money that women earn, pretending to be short of money all the time or making a wife feel that any money earned is indirectly due to the husband who brought her to town and allowed her to work in the first place.26

The 'motherhood' stereotype finds its place in People of the City in Aina's pregnancy, Beatrice the first, and also, to some extent, in Aina's mother. Aina's mother and Aina are generally shown as characters with evil traits in them. Aina's mother plans trouble for the protagonist and influences her daughter to carry out those plans. Aina's motherhood, again, proves to be troublesome for Sango, as she tries to blackmail him with her pregnancy. However, she
never becomes successful in her designs. Beatrice is married to Grunnings, the English engineer and bears him two children. But her life remains a far cry from that of a contented mother, as she becomes tired of her comfortable living.

What Ekwenss suggests is that the ideal motherhood only comes through leading a virtuous life where a woman makes herself 'acceptable' in every respect to a man by following the code of ethics prescribed by the patriarchal tradition. Aina and Beatrice go against tradition, and therefore, suffer a 'failed' motherhood.

Nnu Ego in Joys of Motherhood, however, attains her motherhood through much suffering and humiliations. Still, she also goes against the forces of patriarchy and asserts her independent will. Nevertheless, she achieves all the attributes of an ideal African mother: she becomes a mother of nine children, eight of whom survive to grow up as successful individuals. Despite her poverty-stricken life, she successfully provides for her sons' education and marries her daughters off with able young men. But she finally achieves nothing through this much sought after "motherhood" as during her last days her children hardly take care of
her. The romantic image of "African mother", created in the writings of male authors from Africa, thus gets destroyed in Emecheta's portrayal of motherhood.

In her autobiography, Emecheta writes about her protagonist in *Joys of Motherhood*:

In *Joys of Motherhood* I created a woman, Nnuego, who gave all her energy, all her money and everything she had to raise her kids. She chopped wood for sale, she dealt on the black market, she did everything except whore herself to raise money. (...)

In that book I said 'the joy of motherhood' was a beautiful funeral. Nnuego's sons did not give their mother a dignified death (...), but a horrible one. It was only after her death that they all borrowed money from the bank to give her a huge funeral celebration. 27

However, Emecheta does not allow her women to be devoured completely by social circumstances, nor does she project them as great victors. They do suffer under patriarchal traditions of the Ibo society, but are able to hold on their own in moments of crisis. And unlike Ekwensi's women, they are not mere victims of city life. They know how to fight back.

299
Notes and References


3. Assa Okoth, op. cit., p.89.


5. E.A. Boateng, op. cit., p.75.


9. Ibid., pp.220-221.


15. Ibid., p.13.

16. Ibid., p.15.

17. Buchi Emecheta, Joys of Motherhood (London: Allison and Busby, 1979). All quotes from this novel used in this chapter, with page number mentioned against them in brackets, are taken from this edition.


