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The Determination to achieve one's Goals Facing Adversity in *Second Class Citizen* (1974) and *Head above Water* (1986)

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ABSTRACT

Many an African woman writer entered the literary field or has been made famous in this field through the publication of an autobiography. Thus, the 1970s and 1980s, which correspond to the early years of African women's writing, were marked by the production of a multitude of autobiographical novels by African female writers. Beyond the articulation of their life experiences, these writers not only raise African women's awareness about their condition in society but they also denounce the victimization of women due to the patriarchal system. Among these authors, one can cite Buchi Emecheta who explores in *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) and *Head Above Water* (1986) issues such as culture, gender, psychology, sociology, racism, etc. Leaning on feminism, culture, gender, psychology, sociology and racism as theories, this paper is going to deal with the determination to achieve one's objectives facing adversity in these two novels. To this end, the article will analyze the obstacles which Emecheta faced before going to the country of her dreams (the UK). Then, this study will zero in on the sacrifices she made in order to be a writer. Finally, this work will focus on the problems related to flat renting which Buchi had been confronted with and which pushed her to difficultly buy a house in London.

Keywords: Female; autobiography; adversity; feminism; patriarchal; culture.

INTRODUCTION

Many African female writers entered the literary field or were made famous in this field through the publication of an autobiography or a semi-autobiography (Busby 2019). Thus, the 1970s and 1980s which correspond to the early years of African women's writing, were marked by the production of a multitude of (semi-) autobiographical novels by African female writers (Springer 2002). In this respect, Folasade Hunsu

declares that, “*Autobiography occupies a central space in African women’s writing as the primary genre through which African women have participated in the representation of African experience and the shaping of African literature*” (Hunsu 2017, pp. 319-320). Beyond the articulation of women’s life experiences, the particularity in these literary texts by African women is the defence of the feminine cause, which Barbara Johnson illustrates when she observes that

The problem for the female autobiographer is, on the one hand, to resist masculine autobiography as the only literary genre available for her enterprise, and, on the other, to describe a difficulty in conforming to a female ideal which is largely a fantasy of the masculine, not the feminine imagination (Lerro 2018 p. 41).

Among the female (semi-) autobiographies of the 1970s and 1980s are Emecheta’s *In the Ditch* (1972), *Second-Class Citizen* (1974), *Double Yoke* (1983) and *Head Above Water* (1986). One can also cite AouaKéita’s *La vie d’Aoua Kéitaracontée par elle-même* (1975), Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), Mariama Bâ’s *So Long a Letter* (1979), Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Bélyala’s *The Sun Hath Looked Upon Me* (1988), Kesso Barry’s *Kesso, princessepeuhle* (1988), etc. What all these novels have in common is not only the recounting of a woman’s experiences in life but also the denunciation of the subordination and exploitation of the female gender due to the patriarchal system (Steemers 2021). This article is going to focus on *Second-Class Citizen* and *Head Above Water* where Buchi Emecheta stresses the obstacles she had to overcome before realizing her wishes of going to the United Kingdom, becoming a writer and owning a house in this European country. How did a girl, who lost her father when she was about eight and was obliged to go and live in the house of her mother’s elder brother where she underwent a lot of ill-treatment, manage to take her husband and herself to England? How did a woman, whose failed husband kept showing a wish to drag her down with him, succeed in becoming a writer of international renown?

How finally could a young woman immigrant, with five children to maintain alone in the United Kingdom, afford to buy a house in the capital of this country? From an African feminist perspective, this paper is going to deal with the determination to achieve one’s objectives facing adversity in *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) and *Head Above Water* (1986). Thus, based on culture, sociology, psychology and racism as theories and African feminism as literary criticism, this work will firstly deal with what the trip to England cost Emecheta; that is to say the obstacles she went through before travelling to the land of her dreams. It will then focus on the sacrifices having enabled Emecheta to meet the challenge of her being a writer. This study will finally analyze the problems related to flat renting which the Nigerian writer and her children had been confronted with and which pushed her to buy on mortgage her own house.

THE COST OF THE TRIP TO ENGLAND

Wanting to make her father happy and proud of her, Adah (or Buchi Emecheta) decided that she would one day go to the United Kingdom, for she knows his respect for this European country. School which she had just started was the means by which Adah intended to realize her ambition. However, Adah was to overcome four hindrances in order to achieve her goal. The first one was the death of her father who used to pay her school fees and she was obliged to continue her schooling in “*an older and noisier school*” (1974, p. 17). Still, Adah was grateful she was allowed to stay at school. As a

matter of fact, the idea of stopping her schooling had been raised because the family had been worrying about paying the school fees of her brother. So she had to accept or go and learn sewing in accordance with her mother's wish.

The second obstacle which Adah had to overcome so that she could realize her ambition occurred when she reached the age of eleven and was to leave school at the end of the academic year. The point is there were pressures on her from her cousins and her mother to get married because her mother and her brother needed financial help. This explains why they were pushing Adah to suitors who could give a high bride price but these men "*were bald and huge, almost as big as her dead Pa*" (1974, p. 19). Adah eventually managed to discourage the suitors. Still, the fact that she was going to stop school at the end of the academic year distressed her so much that she lost weight. One can imagine Adah's pleasant surprise when she was informed that she could apply for the secondary school of her dreams, that is to say The Methodist Girls' High School. Adah showed her joy by smiling when she heard the Presence telling her "*you are going, you must go and to one of the very best of schools; not only are you going, you're going to do well there*" (1974, p. 20). But the problem was that Adah needed two shillings to take the entrance examination. So, when her cousin, sending her to the market to buy him a pound of steak, gave her two shillings, Adah buried the money on the way and came back to tell him in tears that she had lost the money. Adah acted this way because she knew that if she had asked for the money, nobody would have given it to her. Even if her cousin caned her severely and for a long time (one hundred and three strokes), Adah had secured her entrance examination fee.

The next barrier lay across Emecheta's way when she finished secondary school after five years at The Methodist Girls' High School. She wanted "*to go to Ibadan University and read Classics and she was going to teach at the end of it all*" (1974, p. 23). To do so, she needed a place where she could study in peace. If she could live by herself, this would not be a problem for her. But she was sixteen and teenagers were not allowed to live by themselves in Lagos. The alternative for Adah was to get married, which she did after meeting Francis (or Sylvester), "*Adah, from the day of her registry marriage, had seen the romantic side of her life being shattered, like broken glass, about her*" (1974, p. 28). But Emecheta's relief dwelled in the fact that she could further her studies quietly.

Engaging in this marriage, Adah really angered her family. Her mother and the other members of her family were all the more displeased as Francis (or Sylvester) could not afford the five hundred pounds they were asking as bride price. This is the reason why they wanted the young woman to marry one of the older men whom they were directing her to, for they were able to give the said amount. Consequently, the members of her family were missing on her wedding day, "*the saddest day in Adah's whole life*" (1974, p. 24). Neither did they come to see her after the birth of her first child. But Adah had an objective to achieve at all costs. At least Adah's choice to marry Francis enabled her to continue her studies and get a good job at the American Embassy in Lagos, soon after the birth of her first child. Her salary was almost six times that of her husband. When she received her first pay, she voiced to her husband her intention to save money so that they could go to the United Kingdom in order to further their studies. It is here that the fourth and last hindrance to her trip to England occurred. In effect, her father-in-law did not approve of her going abroad because Adah is a woman. But Francis was allowed to go and he promised to come back within three years. Adah understood what

her parents-in-law and her husband expected her to do: “*So she was to stay in Nigeria, finance her husband, give his parents expensive gifts occasionally, help in paying the school fees for some of the girls (her husband’s younger sisters), look after her young children and what then, rot?*” (1974, p. 28). Drawing inspiration from the Bible (Be as cunning as a serpent and as harmless as a dove), she conformed to their expectations without complaining.

By first taking Francis to Britain, Adah was paving the way for herself at the same time. Actually, as a woman with two babies, it was impossible for her to go to this country on her own; *That was the time when English immigration was becoming difficult. A woman could not go there on her own with two babies, even if she could afford it, but she could go to join her student husband...*. So, Adah incurred all Francis’s travelling expenses, which cost her a lot. For example, at the passport office, one had to bribe not only the man at the top but also all his subordinates who happened to be policemen and therefore civil servants, paid by the State to do the job. Adah had to give twenty pounds to the chief and five pounds to each of his subordinates. Adah’s determination to go to England is manifest when a few months after Francis’s arrival, he gave up his promise to come back after staying three years in the UK. Adah went to plead with her mother-in-law. She told the older woman that joining her husband would enable her not only to earn more than double what she was earning but also to ride a car. Besides, she would send the older woman money and attend to all her wants. As for her father-in-law who was still doubtful on account of the classy job she was about to abandon, his doubts faded when Adah declared, “*My going to England would be regarded as leave without pay*” (1974, p. 33). But Adah had still not administered the finishing stroke, for Francis’s mother did not want her daughter-in-law to take her two kids with her insofar as the protagonist might not send money if she went abroad with her children.

To win over her mother-in-law definitively, Francis’s wife gave her all her gold jewels. Knowing how much women like gold jewellery, it goes without saying that the older woman was very happy. If Adah was smiling while parting with the necklaces of her little girl and with her own ones, it was just a masquerade. In truth, she wished her mother-in-law death. She took advantage of the older woman’s joyful surprise and “*had had her kids immunised and paid for a first-class passage by boat for the three of them*” (1974, p. 33). She was warned that it would cost her over two hundred pounds more than was necessary for their trip to England and was advised to wait another six months in order to get a cheaper passage. But she did not give a damn. Besides, it was out of the question for her to give her mother-in-law the time to change her mind. The fear that the achievement of her dream could still be compromised did not leave her immediately after she won over Francis’s mother: “*She was still not completely sure that her dream was coming true until she was on the deck of the Oriel, Vicky in her arms and Titi holding onto her skirt*” (1974, p. 33).

If Buchi Emecheta dreamed of going to the United Kingdom, it was because she also wanted to realize another dream: to become a writer, telling stories like her big mother, Nwakwaluzo Ogbueyin. However, some people did not believe she would be able to achieve this goal.

THE SACRIFICES FOR BECOMING A WRITER

When Miss Humble asked her what she was going to do after leaving the Methodist Girls' High School, Emecheta did not say "*Moi, je veux faire Maman*" (Diome, 2003, p. 186) [*Me, I want to do Mummy*] like the girl, in *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*, who was asked the same question by her teacher. Instead, Buchi showed how much ambitious she was by answering that she wanted to be a writer. Her answer deeply frustrated her English literature teacher who ordered her out and asked her to go to the chapel in order to pray for God's forgiveness. According to Emecheta, Miss Humble believed that she must not aspire to become a writer, writing in English because that was out of her reach: "... *I came to the conclusion that Miss Humble probably felt that her language was too good for the likes of me to want to use as a means of expression*" (1986, p. 24).

Yet, a few months after arriving in Britain, Emecheta wrote *The Bride Price* and, with great exuberance, came to show the manuscript to her husband. The writing of a book by his wife should arouse happiness and pride in a man but this was not the case with Sylvester. At first, he refused to have a look, arguing: "*You don't know much, so how can you write a story?*" (1986, p. 34). Nevertheless, Emecheta pleaded with him to read it, which he finally did in secret before burning it. The last pages were being consumed by the fire when Buchi came back home from Queen's Crescent market where she had been shopping, "*I knew then that my dream of being an ideal wife and mother was buried*" (1986, p. 34). Sylvester was actually trying to discourage his wife whom he did not want to succeed in England while he was not doing well in his studies, while he was not making it in England. This is the reason why Emecheta left her husband and went to rent a flat with her children from a Yoruba man. From this flat to the one in Rothay (Albany Street) in addition to her flat in Pussy Cat Mansions, Emecheta did not have good living conditions.

The prejudices which she and her family were undergoing in Rothay and in her previous flats pushed Buchi to resolve that her next move would be into a house of her own. As she needed to confide in someone, she addressed her social worker, Carol, "*I am going to buy a house – I don't know when, but when I move from this place it is going to be into a house which I would be buying*" (1986, p. 49). Not believing her ears, Carol asked, "*And where are you going to get enough money to buy a house? May I ask?*" (p. 49). To this question, the Nigerian woman answered, "*I don't know yet, but I think I am going to be a writer. Yes, I will write*" (p. 49). The social worker troubled Buchi's confidence with "*I don't know how many would-be writers I have come across,*" she said, adding, "*Writing does not necessarily make you rich enough to buy a house.*" (p. 49). Thus, Emecheta was determined to prove Miss Humble, Sylvester and Carol wrong, which was a challenge for her because, "... *one way to set my mind on achieving something was for another person to tell me that I could not do it*" (p. 49). Despite the fact that she had to take care alone of five children, Buchi decided to study Sociology through evening classes. She believed that this subject would help her be a writer. Thus, she registered at the Polytechnic of Central London. But months after she started the course, she did not understand what she was learning. In effect, Emecheta spent the greater part of each class sleeping because she was always tired after a full day's housework and was trying "*to squeeze five lectures into one as a part-time evening student*" (p. 54). The solution to her problem came from her classmate, Meriel, who suggested that she change her course from part-time evening to full-time day. Thus, on the days when she did not have lectures, Buchi could go to the Senate House Library and "*worked steadily from ten in the morning to three in the afternoon*" (p. 56).

Another sacrifice which Emecheta made is stressed in the fact that she had to find a job while respecting the fact that, as someone living on the dole, she was not allowed by the Social Security to work for more than four pounds a week. The point was the dole money which she was receiving from the Security was not enough for her and her five children to live on, and yet she took from this money to pay her university fees. When she confessed to one of the Social Security men that she was working (for 2.75 pounds a week), she gained his respect, "*Now I really respect you. You mean after the university lectures you go and clean in the evenings?*" (p. 57). If her studies in sociology enabled her to write her "diary" about "life in London for a single female raising five children," this is not the case with the typing. That is why she asked a friend, Gloria, to do the job for her. After weeks of typing the manuscript, Gloria not only handed it back with so many gaps for words she did not understand but she also charged Buchi eight pounds for the job. Though Emecheta complained about the expensiveness of the bill, she paid it and struck her off the list of her friends. Owing to Gloria's act, Buchi took her machine again and was determined to be independent as far as typing is concerned: "... *I started picking the letters out one by one using only two fingers. I screamed with joy when after four hours of banging and rubbing off, I had a full typed page*" (p. 63). Having solved the problem of typing, Emecheta's next worry was to get her work published. From 1970 to late 1971, she tried to persuade publishers to read the pieces which she kept sending them. Besides, in both years, she even chose to work at the post office during Christmas and some of the money she earned "from working those endless nights" she spent on buying typing papers and postage stamps. Then in late 1971, her friend and fellow countryman, Chidi, suggested that she send her 'Observations' to Richard Crossman of the *New Statesman*, which she did three times before the man told her that he was interested by her 'Observation of the London Poor':. "*I screamed with joy until I lost my voice*" (p. 70). After Richard promised to write to her in due course, Emecheta waited for six weeks without hearing from him. As a result, she went resolutely to find him in his office.

A few weeks later, "Life in the Ditch" started to appear in the well-respected Socialist paper, the *New Statement*. Consequently, the literary agency, Curtis Brown, wanted to make her a writer while the publishing house, Barrie and Jenkins, proposed that she should compile "Life in the Ditch" into a book. Despite the excitement which these happenings aroused in her, Buchi did not rest on her laurels by forgetting her studies. She was not discouraged by her failure in the Social Statistics evaluation which she was repeating. With this subject which was a pet hate for her, she had to multiply her efforts in order to overcome her difficulties in it: "*I suspected that my struggle at being a sociologist was being watched with curiosity by my friends and with amusement by my lecturers. But I worked hard, and for the first time started getting my Statistics right*" (72). After she sat for her Part One exam, this time with more confidence, Barrie and Jenkins published her first novel *In the Ditch*, to her great joy and relief, "*I had come a long way, and only people who have set their hearts on achieving something and eventually getting it will realize how one feels at a time like this*" (p. 74).

As it could be expected, she passed her Part One exam and soon set about preparing her Part Two. She formed a group work with Brenda, Roberta, Sue and Meriel. These students overcame the impossibility of reading all the books and articles

recommended for each project by entrusting each branch of project to one girl. Buchi Emecheta really put too much into the preparation of her exam:

I was determined not to repeat, as I would not wish even my worst enemy to go through Sociology revision twice! There were seven subjects for Part Two, some of which had two papers, each of three hours. I completely forgot how to sleep. Only God knows how I coped with my family (p. 10).

Furthermore, instead of having a rest during her free hours, she would work on another book, *Second-Class Citizen*. Consequently, she not only fell ill after the exams but she also had to take drugs in order to sleep. If the taking of these drugs did her some good, it had a negative impact on her as well, *“the side effect was that when walking down the street, my feet would suddenly fold themselves under and I would fall flat on my stomach”* (p. 103).

Her success in the Part Two exam, followed by the graduation ceremony, did not arouse happiness only in Emecheta. It also meant leaving college with a heavy heart on account of the tidiness and predictability of the life over there. Her immediate worry was how to find a job. In the meantime, she carried on with the writing of *Second-Class Citizen*. Writing this novel enabled her to know that she had reached the objective which was behind her decision to study Sociology, that is to say reading Sociology in order to be better equipped to write, *“I realized after writing the early part of the book that I must have got something out of those long hours at Senate House. Without my being aware of it, my writing was being shaped sociologically,”* (p. 109). The publication of this novel, however, proved itself difficult. The problem was that Buchi let down the publishing house, Barrie and Jenkins, after realizing that the editor, John Bunting, was in love with her and too “patronizing for” her “sense of freedom.” As a result, all other editors, sympathizing with their colleague, refused to take the manuscript of *Second-Class Citizen*.

Another consequence of her disagreement with Mr. Bunting was that *In the Ditch* was on the point of being pulped. Curiously, she was told that the novel was not selling any more whereas Pan had just called it a best-seller. By buying about three hundred copies in order to save them from being pulped, Emecheta made a dent in her finances. Worse, she could not yet earn money from her second novel which had not found a publisher. Therefore, she was obliged to look for a job and she found one in a youth centre called The Seventies. There are two other reasons that pushed her to accept to work in this centre which was composed of Blacks only. On the one hand, it helped her in her sociological studies, particularly in her research on “The Plight of the Black Youth in London.” On the other hand, it gave her an opportunity to help her fellow blacks. Unfortunately, she left The Seventies following her physical aggression by one of the young men, Peter. Her feeling of failure is softened by Vince Hines, the director of the youth centre, Dashiki, who insisted that she go and work at this centre where the boys were much younger.

No matter how difficult her financial situation was, she was reluctant to accept Vince’s proposal after her experience at The Seventies. Her recruitment as a teacher at the ILEA could not change her situation immediately insofar as, before starting, she would be checked medically and her papers sorted out, which would take three months, *“I had to sell my car in order to buy enough time to finish writing The Bride Price”* (p.167). She finished it in June 1974, joined Dashiki and then the ILEA. With the publication of her *Second-Class Citizen* in March 1975 by Allison and Busby, Buchi

Emecheta experienced a resounding success: "... *London and everybody started telling me that I had written a good book. London did. The press did. Everybody started phoning me for an interview*" (p. 185). As a result, she was invited on June 28th, 1975 by the International Women's League to give a speech on the occasion of International Woman's Year. This speech not only enabled her to make much money by selling many copies of *Second-Class Citizen* but more importantly to be known as a writer beyond Britain, "... *I autographed so many copies, and sold all the books, that a Dutch woman who wanted 86 copies had to be sent to Allison and Busby. I think that talk really put me on the map as an international author*" (p. 190). Having realized the dreams of going to the United Kingdom and being a writer, Emecheta had another objective to achieve; buying a house in her host country.

THE END OF EMECHETA'S FLAT-RENTING SORROWS

Emecheta first faced flat-renting problems, alone with her children, when she left Sylvester after he burnt the manuscript of *The Bride Price*. She went and settled in the house of a Yoruba landlord. But soon the civil war broke out in Nigeria and with the tension between Yorubas and Ibos, the man no longer wanted her in his house. Owing to the harassments from her landlord, Buchi was hurriedly moved with her off spring into Pussy Cat Mansions where they were to live provisionally because the Mansions needed renovating. Though she was looking forward to leaving this area because of the poor living conditions, she would not move just for the sake of moving; "*I refused to consider any inferior flats and consequently was given one of the best, in Rothay, Albany Street*" (p. 43). However, this move did not mark the end of her flat-renting sorrows. She was pressurized by her white neighbours who argued that she did not deserve the flat because she had not waited as long as them. The family living close to Emecheta and her offspring was worse. For example, the children of this family left rotten tomatoes on her doorstep, stole her milk bottles deposited by the milkman, they sprayed her doors and wrote rude things on them. When Emecheta had enough of it, she decided that the next time she moved house, it would be into one of her own. She intended to become a writer and hoped that it would enable her to buy a house. Thus, in 1975, while teaching at the ILEA and after Clive Allison and Margaret Busby published *Second-Class Citizen* (1974), she saw in *Contact*, the magazine for teachers, an insurance advertisement. As a teacher, she could get a mortgage. However, she was supposed first to take up an insurance by depositing about 4,000 pounds, an amount which she did not have but which she was keen on collecting. That was why she delayed in parting with her agent, Elisabeth Stevens. In fact, she needed Elisabeth to pressurize Clive Allison into paying her royalties.

True to her decision, Buchi asked Mr. Olufunwa, in the summer of the same year, to look for a house for her. She had long been seduced by the home of the Olufunwa's but dared not tell them that she wanted to buy one like theirs. Actually, she thought that they would ask her the same question as Carol had put to her, "*But where are you going to get the money from?*" (p. 194). She was making a mistake in fact, for when she told them, they believed her. Emecheta did not delay in realizing that buying a house was not as simple as she had thought, "*Every weekend I went with the Olufunwas, peering into agents' windows, getting brochures and visiting house.*" (1986, p. 199). They eventually found a house which she really wanted in Coniston Road, Muswell Hill. But the owner would not sell it for less than 16,500 pounds whereas the writer could not afford more

than 15,000 pounds. It was with a heavy heart that she gave up, particularly when her son, Ik, declared tearfully his appreciation, "*Oh Mum, it's such a posh area, the son of the lady has a boat and a sports car*" (p. 200).

The writer sensed that this episode marred a bit the motivation of the Olufunwa's. As for her, she was far from being demotivated. In effect, she previously saw what became of two Nigerian brothers who had lost their parents in a car accident. The boys were evicted only weeks after the funeral, for the "*parents did not take out a mortgage protection scheme*" (p. 193). The youngsters were taken to Dashiki and when this youth centre closed down, the younger brother was sent to a Borstal. Buchi therefore went to see a house in Cecil Park, Crouch End. The house belonged to a black Trinidadian who was selling it because he was going back to his country. Once again, she had to renounce for two reasons. On the one hand, the man had too many birds in the house even though she knew that he would take them away. On the other hand, the residence was too big for her liking and there was no way she could maintain that "mansion." The next villa which Buchi fell for was in Nelson Road. The fact that she immediately paid an advance of 500 pounds to the estate agent for the house to be taken out of the notice board shows how much she needed it. While making this deposit, she had already raised enough money to take up an insurance, "*I would then get the building society and Mr. O'Hagan (the insurance man) to work to get the remaining £3,000 I had so far managed to save*" (p. 201). She and her children were replete with joy. They were all the happier as they could spend the next Christmas in their own house. As buying a house was a feat at the time, her neighbours started to respect her. At this stage, one can see the racism of some of her women neighbours who began to talk to her for the first time after six years of community life. Having paid the insurance, she had the payments of the mortgage to worry about, "*My heart kept missing beats each time the bill for the solicitor came in and then the bill for the surveyor*" (p. 202).

As usual, whenever Emecheta was helpless, a saving grace would finally come her way. Hence, the request from Innes Lloyd of the BBC asking her to write a play for television. Though Emecheta had studied and acted Gwendoline in *The Importance of Being Earnest* and had read many works of Shakespeare, she had never written a play before. Nevertheless, she accepted because not only did she need money to make her moving easier, "*I needed every penny I could lay my hands on to make my moving easier*" (p. 202), but she had also learned from reading the early life of Jackie Kennedy "*never to say No to an assignment you want and you know you could do well if given the opportunity*" (p. 205). Buchi was right by accepting to write the play, for a few weeks later, Granada also requested her to write an episode for their *Crown Court* series. She could not believe her ears. Her publisher, Margaret Busby, whom she regarded as the sister she did not have, was jubilant, "*Buchi, you've made it. Many people want to get into television because that's where the money is, not in books*" (p. 205). The payment she was promised for writing the episode was bigger than what she had earned altogether from *In the Ditch* and *Second-Class Citizen*. Besides, Granada did not break its promise. Neither did the BBC.

The author's difficulty in finding a house of her own is stressed once again when, in October, the owner of the house in Nelson Road said he was no longer selling, which was all the more painful for the narrator as her children had already told the neighbours that they would move into their new home before Christmas. In spite of Buchi and

Mr. Olufunwa's pleadings with the man, he would not come back to his decision. Worse, he threatened to force them out:

This incident made me deeply unhappy, not so much because I worried about the money, but because I now knew that it could take a while to find the right house. To cap it all, if all went well with the television people, I was going to be too busy to look for another one" (p. 207).

As for Mr. Olufunwa, he is also disappointed because he hoped that both he and Buchi would buy a house located in Crouch End in order to make a business with it after the woman had settled in Nelson Road. This explains why he did not tell Emecheta about the house when she was looking for one and yet, he had known of the residence for the past three months. As soon as Mr. Olufunwa informed her about the domicile, Buchi wanted to know then how he was going to buy it. It became clear that Mr. Olufunwa would no longer be able to afford the home. Furthermore, co-owning a house or coping with tenants did not appeal to Emecheta at all. So, she asked him to show it to her:

He did. The house was not only suitable, but because it needed slight redecoration it was £2,500 cheaper than Coniston Road and had all the features of that house plus a bit more. The only difference was that one was in Crouch End and the other in Muswell Hill (p. 207).

Through the act of Buchi who gives a deposit for the house behind Mr. Olufunwa's back, the narrator shows that her difficulty in finding a house was becoming too much for her. Besides, she was in that situation because she is a woman, a black and a single parent. For example, because she is a woman, the estate agent, Dennel, refused to take her £50 deposit whereas this is the same amount which he accepted from Mr. Olufunwa. She had to give £500, which Dennel reluctantly accepted. The requests of Innes Lloyd and Granada were a saving grace for Emecheta but they were also a challenge which she had to meet. And she met it thanks to her sense of self-sacrifice. The reader admires the narrator who once again illustrates her conviction that "*...whatever you want to do in this world, if you set your heart on it, you will always get it*" (p. 81). In effect, two weeks before Christmas, Emecheta received a financial advance from Granada which made her feel so rich. However, she was expected to submit the first draft of the play "Juju Landlord" by the first week of January. She was obliged to work on this play even on Christmas Day and typed for six hours at a stretch on New Year's Day. The script editor of the *Crown Court* series, Alex Marshall, told her that she had written too many words. She had to diminish it, despite her tiredness, with the assistance of Alex. They reduced it to the third after working on it for days. No sooner had she finished with "Juju Landlord" than the BBC called to tell her that they needed their play *A Kind of Marriage* at the latest on January 25th. The BBC also requested her to recommend her artists whereas she knew of only one, Taiwo Ajayi. She eventually managed to find others, including her son Jake, Jumoke Debayo, Loui Mahoney and Mr. Baptiste.

Because Emecheta knew that getting the house in Crouch End was a race and that her acquisition of the house depended on her respect of the deadlines given by Lloyd and Granada, she decided painfully not to go with her daughter, Chiedu, to Highbury Hill Girls' open day on February 12th, 1976. If the writer was pained by her not being by her daughter's side on the open day, Chiedu was more so. Even if she was accompanied by her youngest sister, Alice, Chiedu moped for days. Her anger with her mother would probably have gone beyond February 23rd if the family had not won "*the contractual race for the house in Crouch End*" (p. 219), on that day. The children, including Chiedu,

could not contain their happiness and wanted to move into their new and own house the very day. Their mother reasoned with them, telling them it was not possible because she had to get the deeds and the house lacked gas, water and electricity but they would not give up. It was at that moment that Mr. Olufunwa brought them the keys of the house and then took all of them in his car to visit it. Four days later, some students who had a van moved them into Briston Groove, Crouch End,

The thought that it could take up to twenty years to make it really mine made my stomach rumble, and it made my legs go weak when I calculated how much I would be paying for the £10,000 mortgage I was shouldering. But then without the mortgage I could never buy a house. [...].

So on the evening of 27 February 1976, an evening that was very cold and damp, we moved from Rothay into Briston Groove. There was no light in the house, nor was there water or gas, but there was a happiness that was unfathomable (p. 222).

Thanks to her determination and her faith, Buchi Emecheta realized thus her other wish, a wish which her former social worker, Carol, took as a folly.

CONCLUSION

In her autobiography, Buchi Emecheta has shown how much determination is important if one wants to achieve one's objectives. At a certain moment, each of her goals mentioned above seemed almost impossible to reach. First of all, she had vowed to go to Britain one day and she relied on school to realize this vow. But after the death of her father, it was suggested that her schooling should be stopped to enable financially her younger brother to continue his studies. The money left by her father was running out and priority was given to the schooling of boys. Therefore, she was withdrawn from Lady-Lak school and had to be content with an older and noisier school. Then, came the moment when her last academic year in college was coming to an end. Luckily, she was informed by her headmaster that she had the possibility to take the entrance exam to the secondary school of her dreams. She had to undergo one hundred and three cane strokes from her cousin Vincent in order to sit for the exam and pass it. She also had to take her husband to England first, provide for and please his parents before they eventually allowed her to the land of her dreams.

Secondly, she wished to become a writer. However, after writing *In the Ditch*, Emecheta really had difficulty in finding a publisher who was willing to publish it, "*I spent almost every week of 1970 and 1971 trying to persuade publishers to read my work. I did not care whether I was paid for its publication or not – my only wish was that it should be published*" (1986, p. 67). Buchi continued all the same and she tries to explain why she did not stop making efforts for her novel to be published:

Maybe I was young and naïve, or perhaps there is something in what those who believe in horoscopes say – that people like me, born under Cancer, are crabby and tenacious – or maybe just being twenty-two I was stubborn in my own quiet, determined way, still hopeful, and thought that nothing was impossible. Or simply a combination of all this. Anyway, I slogged on (1986, p. 68).

As a result, in 1972, *In the Ditch* was published and in 1974, it was her *Second-Class Citizen*. After the publication and success of this novel, she "*stopped scratching the front of my nose each time people referred to me as a writer*" (1986, p. 191). Thirdly and

lastly, Emecheta told Carol that if she left her council flat in Rothay, she would be moving into her own house. The social worker found this declaration funny and thought that the immigrant was dreaming. When Carol left, Buchi was not as hopeful about the achievement of her goal as before, “*She left, having made the hollow in my stomach bigger than ever*” (1986, p. 49). All the same, Emecheta kept on writing and sending little typed pieces to editors, as she relied on this profession to earn enough money to realize her wish. After the publication of her first two books and while teaching at Quintin Kynaston (ILEA), she was informed that she could get a mortgage after having collected about 4,000 pounds and taken up an insurance. But she did not have this amount and soon would not earn money any more at Quintin Kynaston, as she had decided to stop working there because of the bad teaching conditions. Therefore, “*how was I to make the money?*” (1986, p. 193).

All these uncertainties did not make Buchi Emecheta balk at her determination to reach her three goals mentioned above and she eventually got satisfaction. In this regard, the Nigerian woman should be set as an example from which to draw inspiration.

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