



## The marital experience of Tisa in *the prodigal husband* (1991) as a response to the irony in *the joys of motherhood* (1979)

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### Abstract

In many books by African writers, bearing children, particularly male children, is of great importance for a woman. Childbearing proves womanhood, and a woman who has a son (or sons) is held in high esteem because she enables the continuation of her husband's lineage. The woman who has children also secures herself a happy old age in the sense that her offspring will assist her. However, African female writers have questioned this paramount importance granted to bearing children. Thus, Buchi Emecheta in *The Joys of Motherhood* presents a woman, Nnu Ego, who yearned for having children. She finally had them. But ironically, her sons, whom she expected would support her when they grew up, went abroad and cut off all contacts with her, which "broke her" and contributed greatly to her early death. The object of this article is to explain why Nnu Ego's example is an exception. The reference to the matrimonial experience of Tisa in Lazarus Miti's *The Prodigal Husband* enables to explain why such a misfortune has befallen Nnu Ego. Leaning on sociology, culture, psychology as theories and cultural criticism as literary criticism, the paper will consist in analyzing the two reasons which account for Nnu Ego's disillusionment, that is to say her misconception of marriage and her failure to give her children a good upbringing.

**Keywords:** misconception, marriage, failure, children, upbringing, disillusionment, motherhood, womanhood

### Introduction

One of the main characteristics of early African literature is the great importance which is attached to childbearing, particularly bearing sons. A woman is expected to procreate in many African societies where "motherhood defines womanhood."<sup>[1]</sup> If a woman has children, she is supposed to have a happy old age, for her offspring will take care of her. Also, her bearing a son will make it possible for her husband to continue his paternal lineage and, as a result, she will be respected by her in-laws. According to Juliana M. Nfah-Abbenyi (1997: 35)<sup>[19]</sup>, "motherhood has traditionally been the predominant framework of identity for women in African literature, be it from the perspective of male writers, or paradoxically, that of female writers." Therefore, the importance for a woman to give birth and more importantly to bear sons can be found in early novels by African male writers as well as in those by their female counterparts. But contrary to their men colleagues, these women writers also question this ideology. This is confirmed by Carole Boyce Davies who states that African feminism "respects African woman's status as mother but questions obligatory motherhood and the traditional favoring of sons."<sup>[2]</sup>

As a matter of fact, in Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966)<sup>[20]</sup>, the heroine is anxious that she delays in getting pregnant more than a year after her marriage. She eventually conceives and is replete with joy after delivering a baby girl. When her child falls ill, *Efuru* is also very worried: "What will I do if I lose her?" she thought. "If she dies, that will mean the end of me." (79). The child dies and yet *Efuru* continues living. She even accepts to worship Uhamiri, the goddess of the lake, knowing quite well that consequently she will not give birth any more. Uhamiri herself is childless but happy and remarkable for her beauty and wealth. Then, in *Idu* (1970)

too, Nwapa presents a woman, Idu, whose complicity with her husband, Adiewere, is so strong that when the latter dies, Idu joins him, leaving their only son behind. This explains why Joseph Asanbe (1979) says that Idu prefers love over children<sup>[3]</sup> Still, the Nigerian writer, in *One is Enough* (1981), portrays, through her heroine, Amaka, a woman who is "quite contented" (85), enjoying life with her economic independence and her acquaintances in Lagos after her divorce which is caused by six years of a childless marriage.

As for Nko, in Emecheta's *Double Yoke* (1983)<sup>[12]</sup>, when she is made pregnant by her university supervisor, Professor Ikot, she decides that the baby shall be her first and last: "I am having only this one." (159). Again in Calixthe Bélyala's *Your Name Shall Be Tanga* (1988)<sup>[6]</sup>, Tanga bluntly refuses to bear any child after having noticed the plethora of children in Iningué and their hard life. Her lover, Lame-Leg, with tears in his eyes, has not managed to convince her to give him a son. Ama Ata Aidoo, for her part, comes up with *Changes* (1991)<sup>[2]</sup> where Esi has only one child and does not want any more children, which makes her husband very bitter. She is more passionate by her employment than by children: "Esi definitely put her career well above any duty she owed as a wife." (12). The questioning, in these African female-authored novels, of the paramount importance of motherhood takes another form in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979)<sup>[12]</sup> where Emecheta shows that children, contrary to the common belief in many African communities, do not always bring happiness for a woman.

The heroine of *The Joys of Motherhood* went through an ordeal and made a lot of efforts to get children and she finally had them. But ironically, these children whom she made many sacrifices to bring up, specifically her sons Oshia and Adim, disregarded putting an end to the hardships

their mother was facing when they could. One may wonder why these sons, whom Nnu Ego hoped would attend to her when they grew up and give her a happy old age, let her down. Why did Isaki and Yosefe, in Lazarus Miti's *The Prodigal Husband*, adopt the opposite attitude towards their mother, Tisa, who has also been long-suffering in her conjugal home? A reference to the marital experience of Tisa enables to give answers to these questions.

From a cultural criticism perspective, this article is going to refer to the marital experience of Tisa in *The Prodigal Husband* to analyze the reasons that account for the disillusionment of Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood*. "Cultural criticism is another critical lens through which any text can be viewed. This form of criticism examines how different religions, ethnicities, class identifications, political beliefs, and views affect the ways in which texts are created and interpreted."<sup>[4]</sup> Therefore, being based on religion and political ideology to interpret a text is part of cultural criticism. A political ideology can be defined as "a certain set of ethical ideals, principles, doctrines, myths or symbols of a social movement, institution, class or large group that explains how society should work and offers some political and cultural blueprint for a certain social order."<sup>[5]</sup>

Leaning on sociology, culture, psychology as theories and cultural criticism as literary criticism, this work will consist in analyzing the two reasons which account for Nnu Ego's disillusionment, that is to say her misconception of marriage and her failure to give her children a good upbringing.

### Nnu Ego's Misconception of Marriage

In Nnu Ego's community, a woman who cannot have a child is denied her womanhood: "*Motherhood defines womanhood.*" (Boyce, 1986:243) <sup>[10]</sup>. A childless wife is likely to lose the respect of her husband and in-laws. Thus, one can understand why Nnu Ego is under pressure when she delays in getting pregnant after marrying Amatokwu. What she feared eventually happened: Amatokwu's people find for him a second wife who delivers a baby boy in less than a year. Though she is very saddened by her present situation, she does not despair. This explains why she gave her breast to her co-wife's baby. She hoped that this act might make her fertile. Unfortunately, she caused Amatokwu this way to beat her savagely, which led to the end of the marriage.

Later, Nnu Ego is given in marriage to Nnaife but when she sees her new husband for the first time, she is disappointed about his physical appearance and the job he is doing. The man is short, far from handsome and is a washerman of women's clothes. She wants to leave Nnaife and go back home but she stays with him because she does not feel like "overstaying" her father's welcome. She also remains in her marriage because she dreams of conceiving and ultimately bearing children: suppose this man made her pregnant, would that not be an untold joy to her people? O my chi... 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. (44-45)

Therefore, Nnu Ego subordinates her respect for her husband to her being pregnant by him, which is contrary to the conception which her people have of marriage and to the attitude that they expect a wife to adopt. A wife is expected to submit to all the obligations that marriage imposes on her. And one of these obligations is to respect and obey her husband, whether he makes her pregnant or not. According

to the societal ideology, if a wife fulfils this expectation placed upon her, she will be rewarded: « *Le mariage est sacré. Qui accomplit la totalité des obligations que le mariage lui impose et espère n'attend jamais en vain.* » (Kourouma, 1998: 43) <sup>[15]</sup> [*Marriage is sacred. Whoever accomplishes all the obligations that marriage imposes on her and hopes never waits in vain.*]

This is the reason for which Nnaife's elder brother told Nnu Ego to learn to respect her husband, which may not be easy but if she does so, her hopes will be fulfilled. However, it seems that Nnu Ego has not heeded his advice. She talks back to her husband, denies him his complete manhood by labelling him "some man." She pushes Nnaife this way to tell her that she must accept his work, his way of life from the moment she has accepted to be his wife. The man's reasoning angers more Nnu Ego who goes as far as to voice to Nnaife her regrets for having broken with her former husband but also her preference for the latter: "*If things had worked out the way they should have done, I wouldn't have left the house of Amatokwu to come and live with a man who washes women's underwear.*" (49)

When Nnu Ego delivers a baby boy, the reader thinks that her resentful feelings towards her husband are going to disappear forever. That is what she had promised anyway and she confirms it through these words which she addresses to her friend, Cordelia: "*But, you see, only now with this son am I going to start loving this man. He has made me into a real woman – all I want to be, a woman and a mother. So why should I hate him now?*" (53). Unfortunately, baby Ngozi dies four weeks later and the heroine of the novel starts all over again with her disrespect and hatred towards her husband. The loss of her first child makes her very bitter. She compares Amatokwu to Nnaife, rating the former higher than the latter. To Nnaife who reasons with her, telling her that three months is a long time to mourn for a child who was not more than one month old, she replies: "*What do you know about babies?... If I had had him at home in Ibuza, I would never have come to this town.*" (73). Actually, she has stayed three months after the death of her son without sleeping with Nnaife. Had it not been her big mother's claim that her arms were itching for a baby to rock and the advice of her friend, Ato, she might have prolonged that duration.

If Nnu Ego starts sleeping with Nnaife again, it is because she wants to have children and not because she feels that it is a duty for her to do so. Soon she bears another son, Oshia, and this child's coming into the world has helped her fill the gap left by Ngozi's death. Oshia is followed by other children, boys and girls. As could be expected, she once again becomes happy with and grateful to Nnaife for having enabled her to get what she had come to him for at the beginning: "*What had sobered her opinion of him is the children she started having in quick succession. Was that not why she had come to him in the first place, to use him as a tool to produce the children she could not have with her first husband?*" (1979: 205). Now Nnu Ego devotes her attention, time and energy more to her children, selling things in order to feed, clothe them and also spend on the schooling of her sons, Oshia and Adim.

Unlike Nnu Ego, Tisa has stayed in her marriage basically because she knows that, being a Christian, she must not divorce her husband:

Tisa would not contemplate divorce. That would be sin. She recalled the scripture in one Corinthians seven, verses ten

and eleven: 'To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.' (Miti, 1999: 35) <sup>[16]</sup>.

Tisa postulates through this quotation that she understands the main reason why a wife has to persevere in marriage. A woman must be patient in her marital home fundamentally because it is a command of the Lord and not for her children's sake only or any other reason. This command of the Lord justifies the sacred aspect of marriage mentioned above.

As a matter of fact, Tisa's husband, Musa, has decided to take a second wife, which Tisa objects to, arguing that they are Christians and Christianity forbids polygamy. She refers to the Bible (the first Book of Timothy, chapter three, verse two) to confirm her position:

*Now the overseer must be above reproach, the Husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, Respectable, hospitable, able to teach ...* (28)

Not dissuaded by this verse, Musa is determined to have his way. Though Tisa is annoyed by her man, she remains a respectful, devoted and submissive wife. Despite her annoyance, she satisfies her husband's every wish without any sign of unwillingness. To her father who cannot understand her objection to Musa's decision to marry another woman, she says: "*Baba, I have always been polite to my husband and I want to continue to be.*" (50) However, she will not agree to her husband's taking another wife for, she argues, polygamy is a sin according to the Bible.

Not only does Musa take a second wife, Rhoda, but he also abandons Tisa and her children in Northern Rhodesia and goes back to Southern Rhodesia where he lives with Rhoda and works as a farm foreman. It is the beginning of Tisa's financial problems. Musa promised Tisa that he would send her and the children transport money so that they can join him in Southern Rhodesia but he does not keep his promise. Nor does he even send them food. Besides, Musa's younger brother, Shuzi, makes life more difficult for his sister-in-law. First of all, he objects to Tisa's sending her sons, Isaki and Adim, to school before being compelled by headman Nkhanza to let Isaki go to school. Second, when Isaki asks him to sell a bull from the family cattle so that the student can pay his school fees, he refuses and tells him to stop school, whereas the cattle belong to both Shuzi and Isaki's father. Third, he refuses to lend Tisa and her two sons an ox-cart to take a bag of groundnuts to the co-operative union market. The woman and her children want to raise nine pounds and fifteen shillings which is the required amount for Yosefe's boarding-school fees. In reality, Shuzi is not interested in the boys' schooling because he wants them to look after the cattle.

For seventeen years, Tisa persevered in her marital home despite her husband's desertion, her impoverishment, her problems with her brother-in-law and neighbour who poisons her life. Tisa's mother, Mwazona, who wonders why her daughter should still be married to Musa, ends up saying in vain that she must ask for a divorce. Mother of Isaki simply refuses to comply because she is not the type of woman who can be charged with marital home desertion: "*No matter what they do to me, I will be in that village until father of Isaki decides to divorce me. I will never contemplate divorcing him.*" (107) As Mwazona has difficulty in seeing the reason that accounts for Tisa's

resolution, the latter adds: "*Mother, I am a Christian. I cannot divorce my husband. If he does not want this marriage, it is he who must initiate divorce proceedings.*" (107)

Contrary to his wife, Tisa's father, Lwando, agrees with his daughter and advises her to remain dignified in her household even if he is aware that Tisa is facing difficult living conditions. He promises her that if she follows his advice, she will overcome her plight one day: "*But do not despair. If you keep the dignity that your husband found you with when he married you, then one day, he will come back to you, pleading.*" (107)

Lwando is proved right by the end of the novel. To start with, Musa loses his job and decides to return to Zambia where he hopes he will find an employment. Then, Rhoda refuses to follow him, arguing that she and her two daughters will be bewitched by his people. Also, in Kitwe, Musa halfheartedly accepts a work at a mine market where he is sometimes obliged to clean the communal toilets. Though he sends a letter to each of his wives, it is his first wife who reacts. Rhoda seems to have let him down now that he is in difficulty. Thus, Tisa comes to his rescue by requesting Isaki to go and bring his father back home. Filled with remorse, Musa accepts to follow his son. He is aware now of the worth of Tisa whom he wishes Rhoda could copy (with respect to the reading of the Bible) and whose approval he needs in order to return to Rhodesia for the sake of his second wife and daughters. The heroine of the novel has not broken her vow of staying in her marital village despite her difficult living conditions caused by the unfair attitude of her husband and her brother-in-law. Tisa's Christian faith, which guides her conception of marriage, has not only brought Musa back to her but it has also earned her the respect of the headman of her marital village who sees in her a model wife:

Could it be said with all sincerity that she had not behaved in a manner expected of a well brought up Ngoni woman? A woman who had not been properly trained by her parents would not have remained in her husband's village for so many years despite her husband's manifest negligence of his responsibilities. [...] It would not be easy to apportion blame against her. (189)

As far as the heroine's motherly duties are concerned, she has given her children, particularly Isaki, a good basic education, an education which is thoroughly influenced by her Christian faith. This is not the case with Nnu Ego who has failed in bringing her children up well, which also explains the ungratefulness of Oshia and Adim.

### **Nnu Ego's failure to give her children a good upbringing**

Nnu Ego has always worked in order to feed and clothe her offspring and pay the school fees of her sons, selling firewood, cigarettes, soap, paraffin, roasted groundnuts, oranges... However, to provide one's youngsters with a good upbringing, one also needs to instil into them values such as moral or religious ones. Contrary to Tisa, Nnu Ego has not succeeded in inculcating these values on her children. There dwells the explanation of the gratefulness of Tisa's sons and the ungratefulness of Nnu Ego's ones towards their respective mothers. Tisa, a Christian and thorough reader of the Bible, teaches her children to always refer to the Word of God and to go by faith. This can be noticed in Isaki. For instance, even though he does not have the fees for Angoni Upper Primary Boarding School where

he is newly admitted to do Standard Three, Isaki decides to go there all the same because he has *“recalled his mother’s words of faith. She had told him that nothing was impossible for the Lord.”* (66)

When Isaki arrives, the headmaster requests him to go back home and tell his mother to write to his father and ask him to send the fees or a letter in which he promises to do so. His place will be kept for three weeks. Neither has Musa provided the fees nor has he written to the headmaster. When Isaki asks his mother what they should do, the latter answers: *“We must pray,” she told him. “Our Lord Jesus Christ told us that whatever we asked in his name, God would provide.”* (73). And God does provide, for the Angoni Native Authority grants him a bursary from which he benefits up to Standard Six. By deciding not to attend the marriages of his daughters (Maria and Malita), Musa disappoints once again his first wife and his children, arguing that his boss cannot do without him at the farm. But Tisa’s thoughts are focused on how she can bring her children up well so that when they grow up, they put an end to the ordeals she is going through. Thus, she intends to achieve her goal by urging them to study hard and by leading them on the way indicated by the Bible:

I only want to bring you all up well so that in future you may look after me. Work hard at school in order to get a good job. God knows why all this is happening to us. As His Word teaches us, let us not fix our eyes on those things that are seen but rather on those that are not visible, for what is seen is temporary whilst what is unseen is eternal. That is what we read in two Corinthians chapter four, verse eighteen. That Word is a great source of encouragement to me. I urge you to study it too. (76)

Unlike Tisa, Nnu Ego has not insisted on her children’s moral education, let alone their religious one. What she first does instead is to repeatedly raise Oshia’s awareness about his physical charm: *“Well, haven’t I been telling you that you’re going to grow up to be really tall?” she said lightly. “A tall, handsome man like an Arab...”* (107). This future of her son cannot but make the heroine happy in the sense that he will not look like his father whose shortness, ugliness, huge belly... frustrate Nnu Ego. Second, as early as his childhood, Oshia rates as a prince because of his mother and his aunt, Adaku. For example, while the family were having their evening meal just after the arrival of Nnaife’s new wife Adaku and her daughter Dumbi, Nnu Ego *“pointed out to Dumbi that she must respect Oshia, as he was the heir and the future owner of the family.”* (122)

Consequently, it should not be surprising that Oshia refuses arrogantly to comply when Adaku asks him to go with Dumbi to fetch water for the evening meal: *“I’m not going! I am a boy. Why should I help in the cooking? That’s a woman’s job.”* (128). Although Nnu Ego has hit her eight-year-old son for his arrogance, asking him if he does not know that Adaku is like a mother to him, the heroine should also have told the boy to go to fetch water and seen to it that Oshia does as he was told. Worse, she believes the child who asserts that he saw Adaku in his dream the day before and that the latter was trying to push him into a ditch, whereas he is lying. Instead, Nnu Ego takes her son to a native medicine man to seek protection and she even

*“bought him a big roasted plantain on their way back.”* (129)

Oshia also manifests his impoliteness, this time towards his parents, by openly accusing them of being an obstacle to his performances at school. To his father who asks him why he did not win a scholarship for the grammar school called Hussey College in Warri like other boys, he replies: *“Maybe if I had a peaceful childhood, and not had to spend my young days selling paraffin and carrying firewood – ”* (185). He is abruptly stopped by Nnu Ego who cannot bear such ungratefulness, after all her efforts to enable him to continue school in the absence of his father, conscripted for the Second World War: *“Shut up!” shouted Nnu Ego. “So it’s all my fault, is it?”* (185). Oshia’s father is offended as well: *“You answer your father back, eh, son?”* (185). However, Nnaife accepts to pay the student’s education at Hussey College. When Oshia arrives in Warri, accompanied by Nnu Ego, he expresses to her his relief to have left his family by accusing his parents once more: *“If I had stayed in Lagos, I don’t think our home would have been conducive to my studies. There are so many quarrels over money, and me having to help in selling this and that.”* (190). The woman cannot believe her eyes, she feels that her son is letting his family down: *“You are not running away from your people, Oshia, are you?”* (190)

By the time he finishes with Hussey, he gets a good job at the Technical Institute in Lagos. Aware that if Oshia has got this employment, it is greatly thanks to his father who made it possible for him to study in Hussey, Nnu Ego asks her son when he is going to buy Nnaife a bottle of whisky to toast the young man’s *chi* for helping him succeed in his exams. But Oshia displays again his rudeness: *“What’s wrong with the sixpenny bottles of local ogogoro he has been drinking all these years? I can’t afford a whisky party.”* (200). Besides, he puts off helping in his family because he considers that his monthly salary amounting to twelve pounds is not sufficient to enable him to do so. Yet, Musa in *The Prodigal Husband* maintains his wife Tisa and their seven children with a wage of ten pounds a month. When Nnaife is fed up with waiting for his oldest son to do his duty towards the family, he requests that the young man be called for him. The way Isaki answers his father is not respectful: *“What is it, Father?”* (200)

To Nnaife who wants to know when Oshia is going to take on his family responsibilities (more specifically to help financially in the schooling of his younger brothers), Oshia says he cannot and he is going to the United States to continue his studies. Worse, he even expected his parents to help him in raising his board money. That was the last straw for Nnaife who got very angry with Oshia. Thus, to calm his father down, Adim declares that he will soon finish his education and help his younger brother Nnamdio. The latter also reveals his rudeness: *“I don’t want to go to a silly school.”* (201). Adim himself is no exception. For instance, when Nnu Ego hears her husband wishing that Oshia had died in the place of his first son and she asks Adim why Nnaife says such dreadful things to his sons, Adim reacts: *“Not to me,” Adim protested. “Nobody thinks at all about me. It’s only Oshia. Oshia every time.”* (201). Heartbroken, Nnaife tells his oldest son that he does not wish to see him any more. Before leaving the room, Oshia shocks the reader by his reply: *“I can do without seeing your face, old man!”* (201)

If Oshia and Adim left respectively for the United States and for Canada to further their studies and they let their mother down, disappointing her hope, Isaki and Yosefe stay with their mummy and take care of her thanks to the good upbringing Tisa has equipped them with. Isaki has become a medical doctor and Yosefe is about to become a lawyer. These two sons only confirm their constant attachment to the woman who has given them birth. In fact, as a child, Yosefe worries about his mother when he and Isaki are pushed by Shuzi to leave her for their maternal grandparents'. In fact, they join their grandparents because, according to Isaki, it is better for their mother:

*'Shall we leave our mother alone?'*

*'She will be alright. If we sit idle, her situation will never change. If anything, her problems will worsen. Let's try this plan. It might help her.'* (102)

Besides, Isaki is brought up by Tisa in such a way that he *"did not want to let his mother and his teachers down. [...] His mother had told him that as a child of God, he had to bear in mind that whatever he did, he should do it for the Lord."* (78) Therefore, he helps his mother shell groundnuts for sale in order to pay three pounds and five shillings as a deposit on his younger brother's boarding school fees amounting to nine pounds and fifteen shillings. He shells peanuts until he gets blisters on his fingers. Isaki also applies for and gets a vacation job at the Fort Jameson Township Board so as to help Yosefe complete his school fees. While Oshia is not bothered at all by the fact that his ageing father still works to support the family, Isaki takes full responsibility and tells his father to take a rest: *"At your age, you need to rest."* (185)

### Conclusion

Buchi Emecheta, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, has re-examined critically the paramount importance granted to bearing children, particularly males ones, and to a woman's perseverance in her marital home. Nnu Ego underwent psychological pressures and was very anxious because she delayed in conceiving. She even nearly committed suicide after she finally gave birth to a baby boy and it died four weeks later. The point is, in her society, bearing children is not only synonymous with proving one's womanhood but it is also equivalent to having people who will take care of you in old age. Furthermore, a woman enables the continuation of her husband's lineage if she has a son. Nnu Ego is ultimately blessed with children, to her great relief and happiness and those of her family, above all her father. She also persevered in her household, working and depriving herself of many things in order to provide for her offspring, hoping that everything would be well when they grew up.

Unfortunately, things have not turned out as Nnu Ego expected; her two oldest sons went to the United States and Canada to continue their studies and cut off any contact with her, her daughter Kehinde, an Ibo and Christian, preferred to marry a Yoruba and Muslim, contrary to her parents' will. Kehinde's mother dies alone by a roadside not far from her house without any of her children to attend to her. The fate of Nnu Ego contrasts with the destiny which Africans expect of a woman like Nnu Ego who has children and who has been long-suffering in her matrimonial home. Actually, a woman who perseveres in her marriage is expected to be rewarded one day, as is illustrated through Tisa in *The Prodigal Husband*. That is the reason why one may wonder why such a tragic fate has befallen Nnu Ego. A reference to

Tisa's matrimonial experience has shown two reasons that justify the disappointment of Emecheta's heroine.

First, Nnu Ego does not respect her husband. She feels and is convinced that she has condescended to accept to live with Nnaife as his wife. She has been obliged to stay with him because she desperately needed to bear children after the failure of her first marriage whose root cause is her childlessness. She hardly puts up with Nnaife's shortness, *"his crude ways and his ugly appearance."* (45). Thus, the woman repeatedly compares her new husband to Amatokuwu, her first one and rating Nnaife lower than Amatokuwu. She subordinates her respect for Nnaife to her being pregnant by him but when she conceives, gives birth and the baby dies before it is five weeks, Nnu Ego resumes being arrogant towards her spouse, even abstaining from sleeping with him for three weeks, to the annoyance of the latter. Even if she is later blessed with another son who lives this time and she is pregnant for the third time, Nnu Ego still looks down on her husband. This is confirmed when, in the course of a dispute, Nnaife bangs a guitar against her head. She abuses him: *"Who is your father that you can come here and beat me, just because we are far away from anywhere?"* (91). It is important to note here that Nnu Ego's father is a very wealthy traditional chief, a great wrestler and hunter.

Contrary to Nnu Ego, Tisa has always been respectful towards her husband. Although she is completely against Musa's decision to take a second wife, she goes about it with politeness; she does not hurt her husband with offensive words. Whereas Nnu Ego was obliged to stay with Nnaife because she did not want to overstay her father's welcome and she was yearning for children, Tisa remains in her matrimonial home for God's sake, despite the fact that Musa carries out his decision and deserts her in favour of the new wife for seventeen years: *"Mother, I am a Christian. I cannot divorce my husband. If he does not want this marriage, it is he who must initiate divorce proceedings."* (107)

Second, Nnu Ego has failed in bringing up her children well. Nnaife's *"... people, and many of the Ibuza people in general, blamed her for bringing up her children badly."* (220). No doubt, she has made many efforts to provide for her children, particularly to school her sons. But she has not instilled into them the values which would make them wise children. That is why Oshia and Adim have never given her news from them ever since they went abroad. This also accounts for the fact that her daughter Kehinde sneaks out late in the night to go and join a lover who is Yoruba and Muslim, knowing quite well that this will hurt her parents.

As for Tisa, she understood early that two things would enable her to reach her objective of bringing up her children well so that they take care of her in future: on the one hand, to urge them to work hard at school so as to get a good job later and, on the other hand, to transmit them her Christian faith in order that they grow up to be conscientious children. Thus, as early as in college, Isaki did not want to let his mother down because he remembered the biblical words which she quoted to him. As soon as he starts working, he maintains his family and contrary to Oshia, asks his father to

rest. Even when he was still a student at secondary school, he brought his financial contribution to his family. Yosefe, for his part, is following his elder brother's example. He is on the point of becoming a lawyer without having left or abandoned his mother. He showed his attachment to Tisa earlier by worrying about leaving her alone while he and Isaki were pushed by Shuzi to go and stay with their maternal grandparents.

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