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**SEX DISCRIMINATION: OBSTACLES TO A GIRL'S SCHOOLING IN BUCHI EMECHETA'S
SECOND-CLASS CITIZEN**

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ABSTRACT

This article aims at examining the obstacles to Adah's schooling in Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* which is an autobiographical novel. Adah, the protagonist of the novel, has met many obstacles as far as her schooling is concerned. In almost all the African societies, parents generally prefer having male children rather than having female ones as it is the case of Adah's parents in the novel under study. It means that she is a victim of discrimination which constitutes the first obstacle to her schooling in the novel. In the framework of the present study, discrimination, negligence, poverty, untimely marriage, and the lack of good accommodation have been identified as being the obstacles to that young girl's schooling.

Key words: obstacles, girl, schooling, discrimination, neglect.

Introduction

In this article, the obstacles to Adah's schooling in Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* constitutes a problem which calls for reflection. Girls generally find it very difficult to go to school because of a number of obstacles which hinder their schooling. The study is based on the obstacles that Adah, the protagonist of the novel, has met in the course of her schooling and which stem from her discrimination by her own parents. It aims at shedding light on the manifestations of those obstacles. To reach that goal, the study has been divided into three sections: (1) Adah's Discrimination from Birth as the First Obstacle to her Schooling in *Second-Class Citizen*, (2) Child Neglect, Poverty and Untimely Marriage as Obstacles to Adah's Schooling in the Novel and (3) The Lack of Good Accommodation as an Obstacle to Adah's Schooling in *Second-Class Citizen*.

1. Adah's Discrimination from Birth as the First Obstacle to her Schooling in *Second-Class Citizen*

Emecheta denounces the fact that the first obstacle to Adah's schooling is mainly related to the fact that her own parents discriminate against her in *Second-Class Citizen*. She portrays the protagonist of her novel as a girl who was born when everybody was expecting and predicting the birth of a baby boy: "She was a girl who had arrived when everyone was expecting and predicting a boy. So, since she was such a disappointment to her parents, to her immediate family, to her tribe, nobody thought of recording her birth. She was so insignificant" (1).

Emecheta who is nobody else but Adah deplores the fact that a child is considered as a disappointment not only to her parents but also to her whole community. The behaviour of the people of the depicted community towards female children is illegal. The illegality of their behaviour is further highlighted

through Adah's parents' decision not to have her birth recorded although to go to school, every child needs to have his/her birth recorded. This record which is known as the birth certificate indicates the child's name, surname, date and place of birth, together with his/her parents' names. Although that certificate is an important document, Adah's parents have denied her the right of having it because of the socio-cultural discrimination which prevails in the society where she was born. Through the utter discrimination which Adah is victim of from her birth, Emecheta denounces this age-long practice which sets girls apart from boys as inferior beings although they are both human beings. This practice is generally fostered by the fact that women are generally labeled as "the weaker sex," a pejorative term which puts men above women in all the walks of society. In the Igbo society which Adah or rather Emecheta belongs to, the birth of girls is seen as something awkward, as a kind of bad omen. Bringing up a girl is considered to be as pointless as watering a neighbour's plant simply because she is expected to get married one day and contribute to the growth of her husband's family at the expense of her own family. For that reason, most people prefer boys to girls. This is, of course, a kind of discrimination which is against the requirements of children's rights which stipulate that children should not be discriminated against whatever their sex. It is not understandable that in the depicted society, people usually give preference to boys' birth and education. Although they are realising fast that education saves people from poverty and diseases, they fail to acknowledge girls' importance in the community as potential agents who can save them from poverty and diseases through education. Emecheta refers to education in Igbo land in these terms:

School — the Igbos never played with that! They were realising fast that one's savior from poverty and disease was education. Every Igbo family saw to it that their children attended school. Boys were usually given preference, though. So even though Adah was about eight, there were still discussions about whether it would be wise to send her to school. (3)

The novelist is against the fact that although Adah's parents have not sent her to school, she is the one who takes her younger brother, Boy, to school. If things follow their natural course, as Boy's elder sister, her parents should send her to school first. Paradoxically, they have denied her the privilege to go to school before Boy despite her envy to do so. According to her parents, "Even if she was sent to school, it was very doubtful whether it would be wise to let her stay long. 'A year or two would do, as long as she can write her name and count. Then, she will learn how to sew'" (3). So, even if Adah has the opportunity to go to school, she cannot be educated enough to fend for herself by getting a well-paid job. She will only be able to write her name and count. Although her parents think that she will sew as soon as she leaves school, one wonders whether the very little education that she will receive can really help her much in her new profession. The envy that the fact of taking Boy to school fills her with ends up entailing a kind of frustration which she shows in many ways. Emecheta lets the reader know that Adah is filled with envy to go to school whenever she sees other children go to school. She expresses it in these terms:

Adah would stand there, filled with envy. This envy later gave way to frustration, which she showed in many small ways. She would lie, just for the joy of lying; she took secret joy in disobeying her mother. Because she thought to herself: *If not for Ma, Pa would have seen to it that I started school with Boy.* (3-4)

Through the quotation above, it is clear that Adah identifies her mother as being the one who oppresses her in the home; and because of the bad relationship that exists between them, the girl finds herself not cooperating with her mother at all. Emecheta denounces the sad fact that Adah's mother, who should understand her plight more easily than her father, since she too is a woman, is the one who constantly opposes the idea of sending her to school. Her mother is so cruel that she decides to ruin her future. Mohammed (2010: 465) is therefore right when she states that "A very important area where women constantly oppress their own kind is in the relations between mothers and their daughters. Maternal oppression of the female [child] begins in the home." This observation has amply been made by feminists like Flora Nwapa who states that "The oppression of the woman starts in the home" (James 1990: 113). Adah is a young girl who dreams of visiting the United Kingdom. The title "United Kingdom" when pronounced by her father sounds so heavy, like the type of noise one associated with bombs. It is so deep and so mysterious that he always voices it as if he were speaking of "God's Holiest of Holies." The United Kingdom, then, must be like

heaven. However, she finds it very difficult to fulfil her dream because of the maternal oppression that she undergoes, since her mother is the main actor of her plight. Commenting on the novel, Raghav (2008: 75-76) writes:

Adah's dream is to go to the United Kingdom to study and to see the greatness that she thinks is there. Her troubles begin from the first moment she realizes what her dream is. First she is not allowed to go to school because she is a girl and the family does not want to spend the money for her to go. She is a girl of her own mind though and she goes to school anyway which ends up getting her mother in trouble. Her next set of problems occurs when her father dies and she is sent to live with her mother's brother. Any money that her family had went to her brother's education, and the only reason [why] she was kept in school was because it was thought that her uncle would be able to get more money for her when they finally married her off.

What Raghav points out in that quotation highlights Adah's will to go to school and further her studies in the United Kingdom later from the onset of the novel and her parents' categorical refusal to send her to school simply because she is a girl. Emecheta disapproves of that situation so much so that she makes Adah go to school by herself. Her schooling becomes hypothetical as soon as her father's dies. This is due to the fact that she has to go to live with her mother's brother who employs her as a housemaid in order to raise funds for her brother's education. Meanwhile, her seeming education is simply related to her uncle's intention to get a big bride-price for her when she gets married owing to the acceptable level of education that she would probably reach. Of course, her uncle has the unconditional support of her mother who keeps on oppressing her. To highlight maternal oppression of the female child, Mohammed (2010: 466) further writes:

One of the recurrent themes that expose mothers as oppressors of their own sex is that of male preference. Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* portrays maternal oppression of the female child in the home. That a mother deprives her girl child the same opportunities that she allows the boy child are enough oppression to the girl to cause her unhappiness, besides thwarting of her ambitions. It is because Adah's mother does not believe in the education of females that Adah does not begin school before her brother who, in fact, is younger than she is. In other words, the unhappiness which Adah experiences as a result of not being in school is caused by her mother who would want her daughter to stay at home to help out with house work rather than leave home to be educated.

Emecheta shows that Adah's plight is an abnormal situation brought about by the psychological oppression that she suffers at the hands of her mother. At her father's death, her life takes a downward turn because she is left in the hands of her mother who has to take every decision for her. Being conscious of the bad experiences that she has had with her mother, Adah knows that her education is going to come to an abrupt end. Her mother is not ready to raise money from any form of business to send her to school. Under the oppression of the society, sometimes supported by other women like her own mother or her mother-in-law, Adah has to continue her contest alone. Before she gets married to Francis, her attitude in rejecting her suitors shows that she challenges the oppressive patriarchal social order in her society: "She would never, never in her life get married to any man, rich or poor, to whom she would have to serve his food on bended knee: she would not consent to live with a husband whom she would have to treat as a master and refer to as 'Sir' even behind his back. She knew that Igbo women did this, but she wasn't going to!" (14). She decides to find a husband to pay a good bride-price on her head. However, all the suitors who come for her hand are bald-headed old men "[...] because only they could afford the high 'bride-price' Ma was asking" (14).

The novelist denounces Adah's untimely marriage due to her parents' poverty. Because of her financial difficulties, Adah's mother finds no alternative left apart from getting a big bride-price for her although she is still a mere teenager. This poses the problem of untimely marriage (or even forced marriage) which constitutes one of the major obstacles to girls' schooling in most African communities. The writer opts to make Adah realise what her mother is driving at as far as her schooling is concerned. For instance, she makes her discover that her mother is asking for a big bride-price so that the money could be used to train her son, Boy, at school. Even at this stage, Adah feels that her mother is oppressing her by not allowing her to choose her own husband among the young people of her age. What her mother intends to do is to make her marry any bald-headed old man, provided that he accepts to pay the high bride-price that she is asking. This is a kind of

untimely or forced marriage since she is still a mere teenager. This kind of upbringing is awkward insofar as it may mislead Adah in the future when she becomes a mother. That is what Mohammed (2010: 467) means by writing: "This being the somewhat disagreeable up bringing that is meted to Adah by her own mother; it is surprising that later as an adult, she in turn, would consider preferring her sons to her daughters." Emecheta further denounces girls' discrimination in the depicted society which haunts Adah and becomes a stigma for her even in Europe. For instance, when her son, Vicky, is ill and taken to hospital in London, she cannot help acting exactly like her mother because the utter discrimination which she has undergone as a girl is still anchored in her mind. This sad fact can be seen in her conversation with the nurse in charge of treating her son:

'Is Victor your only child?'

Adah shook her head, Vicky was not, there was another, but she was only a girl.

'Only a girl? What do you mean by "only a girl"? She is a person, too, you know, just like your son.'

Adah knew all that. But how was she to tell this beautiful creature that in her society she could only be sure of the love of her husband and the loyalty of her parents-in-law by having and keeping alive as many children as possible, and that though a girl may be counted as one child, to her people a boy was like four children put together? And if the family could give the boy a good university education, his mother would be given the status of a man in the tribe. (62)

Through what is said in the quotation above, it is clear that Emecheta denounces the fact that a boy is considered as being equal to four children put together because of an awkward social practice. She does not approve of the fact that Adah cannot help being scandalised and confused when her son, Vicky, falls sick and is taken to hospital because she cannot explain to the nurse how dear the boy is to her and how her happiness depends so much on her son's staying alive. This attitude brings one to wonder, constantly, why women, especially mothers, continue to despise their own kind even when they, themselves, have been victims of such a social injustice. The reason may lie in the fact that "...maternal roles must continue to protect the smug position of the male as the head of the family" (Nkere-uwem, 1997: 68). The practice is so unbelievable that Adah does not know how to tell the nurse, who is from a different culture, about it since she cannot understand such a thing. For the white nurse, however, a girl is a person like a boy, which means that they are both human beings and that they are equal. The novelist's intention while making Adah reveal what girls endure in the African society in general, and in the Igbo community to which she belongs in particular, is to show the extent to which they are oppressed. Child neglect, poverty and untimely marriage are other obstacles to Adah's schooling in the novel.

2. Child Neglect, Poverty and Untimely Marriage as Obstacles to Adah's Schooling in the Novel

Child neglect and poverty hinder Adah's schooling in the novel. Emecheta uses child neglect to denounce parents' lack of interest in their female children's schooling. For instance, because Adah's mother neglects her, she has failed to send her to school. As a result, Adah has slipped from the house to go to the Methodist School by herself, holding a piece of slate. She has not even bothered to look for a school-bag. Her lust for education has led her to bypass her parents and to take upon her the responsibility to go to school. Through Adah's action, the novelist clearly shows the extent to which girls can disobey their parents at times because the latter create discrimination among their male and female children which causes them to neglect the female ones. Child neglect is a breach of one of children's rights which stipulates that parents should not neglect their children. That is why the police has to call upon Adah's mother to answer for her child neglect:

In fact there was a big hullabaloo going on. Pa had been called from work, Ma was with the police being charged with child neglect, and the child that had caused all the fuss was little Adah, staring at all of them, afraid and yet triumphant. They took Ma to the police station and forced her to drink a big bowl of *gari* with water. (6)

Adah's act cannot even be equated to disobedience, insofar as she has rendered justice to herself by taking her future in her own hands although she is only eight years old. Her parents' failure to fulfil their duty as her biological parents has caused her to make such a decision by herself. She is forced to start school without letting them know about it. As a consequence, she is thought to be lost, and her mother runs into trouble with the police who accuse her of child neglect. Adah's mother is keen on preventing her from going to

school. She is therefore the sole responsible for her own trouble. So, there is no wonder when the policemen ask her to drink up a big bowl of *gari*, although they inwardly know that it is quite impossible for her to do so. This implies that any mother who neglects her children deserves hard or cruel punishments: “Ma told them with tears in her eyes that she could swallow the *gari* no more. She must drink the whole lot, she was told[...] in such language that Adah hid behind Mr Cole. If Ma did not finish the *gari*, the policemen went on, they would take her to court” (7).

Emecheta makes Adah’s father intervene and make his stand clear to the police by deploring his wife’s behaviour in these terms: “She was a great talker, very careless, otherwise Adah would not have been able to slip away as she had. Women were like that. They sat in the house, ate, gossiped and slept. They would not even look after their children properly” (7). It is evident that Adah’s father cannot help accusing his wife of being a great talker and a careless woman in front of the policemen during his plea for her release. She does not want Adah to go to school probably because she herself has not been to school. The simple fact that she is unable to say ‘prison’ but ‘pilizon’ (7) is a token that she is illiterate. Despite her illiteracy, however, she is aware of the fact that going to court is not good because of the consequences that it entails. Contrary to Adah’s mother, the policemen acknowledge that she looks like a child who is keen to learn. For that reason, they have not hesitated to give her advice so that she should send her to school at last. To foster the decision of the police, Emecheta makes them threaten to send Adah’s mother to court if she fails in her duty to send her to school: “She knew that court meant two things: a heavy fine which she would never be able to afford, or prison, which she called ‘pilizon’. They advised her to sell one of her colourful *lappas* and send Adah to school, because she looked like a child who was keen to learn” (7). The novelist goes further to make the police suggest a solution to Adah’s mother so that she can afford her daughter’s schooling on purpose to show that she has no alternative left. Husain (2013: 3) refers to the child neglect which prevails in the novel in these terms:

[...] Adah somewhat unwittingly learns quickly how crucial semi-autonomy will be to her future agency; in order to circumvent the patriarchal social code that forces her brother Boy to attend school grudgingly while a willing student such as herself must stay at home to help with domestic chores, Adah manipulates the state’s partial regulation of child-rearing. Her being reported missing when she slips away to school one day precipitates the police first charging her mother with child neglect and subsequently force-feeding her until she promises to permit Adah to go to school regularly. Although Adah wonders where the Nigerian police “got all their unwritten laws from,” she ultimately benefits from her mother’s extreme punishment by the police—whose mandate to enforce mandatory schooling at all, much less in this manner, remains unclear—and attends classes without parental protest.

Husain’s viewpoint on the situation clearly shows that he corroborates what Emecheta denounces in the novel as far as child neglect is concerned. The novelist ironically makes Adah come out of the situation triumphantly. The only loser in the game that her schooling has become is her mother who ends up throwing herself into a sheer shame. Adah’s struggle for her schooling is used by the novelist as a means to show that girls like Adah can go to school if they have the will. Although Adah’s father has caned her for the trouble that she has rightly caused, he is wise enough to send her to the school where her younger brother goes. This may be due to the fact that he has no alternative left lest he should provoke the wrath of the police once more. “Evidently, when attained via state auspices, agency is highly provisional; where in one situation the Nigerian state proves malleable enough to challenge the custom prohibiting Adah’s schooling, in another she finds that the apparent flexibility of its instruments can equally well tend towards the reconsolidation of patriarchal authority”(Husain, 2013: 3-4). Her father’s death shortly after she has started school causes both her and her brother to be transferred to a cheap school because their mother cannot afford the school fees of the expensive school:

So that was how Adah started school. Pa would not hear of her going to the Methodist Primary; she was to go to the posh one, Ladi-Lak. Success in life would surely have come earlier to her if Pa had lived. But he died soon after, and Adah and her brother Boy were transferred to an inferior school. Despite this, Adah’s dream never left her. (9)

The quotation above reveals that despite Adah's father's death, she is determined to keep her dream of going to school at all costs. That dream is strengthened by the arrival of Lawyer Nwebe who has come back from the United Kingdom where he has studied Law: "Second-Class Citizen begins by describing an encounter with bureaucratic officialdom that inaugurates Adah's earliest memory: her knowledge of her age stems from remembering that she was eight years old at the time of the return of the first man from her village to receive schooling as a lawyer in the United Kingdom" (Husain, 2013: 3). The following quotation reveals the revival of her ambition after the lawyer's arrival:

But she made a secret vow to herself that she would go to this United Kingdom one day. Her arrival there would be the pinnacle of her ambition. She dared not tell anyone; they might decide to have her head examined or something. [...].

That she would go to the United Kingdom one day was a dream she kept to herself, but dreams soon assumed substance. It lived with her, just like a Presence. (11)

Emecheta portrays Adah as a very ambitious girl. However, she has to face another obstacle to her schooling just after her father's death. That obstacle is related to poverty or rather to the lack of financial means owing to the fact that her mother continues discriminating against her. The writer uses poverty as an obstacle to Adah's schooling to show that money is important in the whole process. In Adah's case, her mother is keen on preventing her from going to school; only the future of her son, Boy, is her concern. She decides that the money that their father has left to them as an inheritance should be spent on Boy's education to the detriment of Adah's education. The quotation below reveals Adah's plight after her father's death:

Adah, like most girl orphans, was to live with her mother's elder brother as a servant. Ma was inherited by Pa's brother, and Boy was to live with one of Pa's cousins. It was decided that the money in the family, a hundred pound or two, would be spent on Boy's education. So Boy was cut for a bright future, with a grammar school education and all that. Adah's schooling would have been stopped but somebody pointed out that the longer she stayed at school, the bigger the dowry her future husband would pay for her. After all, she was too young for marriage at the age of nine or so, and moreover the extra money she would fetch would tide Boy over. So, for the time being, Adah stayed at school. (12)

Although Emecheta opts to make Adah an ambitious girl, she has no financial means to carry on her studies. Her schooling is thus threatened to be stopped whereas her younger brother is going to receive a grammar school education. She is allowed to continue going to school simply because her education is looked upon as an incentive to help her mother and her relatives amass a big dowry from her future husband later on. She is hastily dispatched to her uncle's house and starts working as a servant. She has to face other difficulties by enduring some atrocities there as recorded in this quotation:

The day's work! Jesus! Her day started at four-thirty in the morning. On the veranda of her new home in Pike Street, there was a mighty drum used as a water container and Adah had to fill this with water before going to school. This usually meant making ten to twelve trips to the public 'pump', as those public monstrosities were called in those days. (13)

As it can be seen in that quotation, Adah is submitted to a kind of sheer exploitation after her father's death. This can prevent her from working well at school because she goes there very tired after filling a huge water container with water. Such a hard work is against children's rights which stipulate that children should be protected against overwork. Among the Igbo, children, especially female ones, are taught to be useful very early in life so as to allow them to learn to be responsible for themselves. To some extent therefore, Adah learns to be responsible for herself through the hardships which she is daily subjected to. However, as a school-girl, this constitutes an obstacle to her schooling.

Emecheta uses untimely marriage as another obstacle which impedes Adah's schooling. She denounces that phenomenon in her novel. For instance, as soon as Adah reaches the age of eleven, people start asking her when she is going to leave school so that she can get married simply because the fund for Boy's education is running low. Although Adah is a school-girl and too young to get married, her people see nothing wrong with her getting married at that tender age. They think that it is time for her to start making a financial contribution to her family. Her mother even wants her to get married to an old man on the grounds

that old men take better care of their wives than the young and overeducated ones. However, Adah strongly objects to her mother's wish to see her get married to an old man and wants to be an emancipated woman rather being the slave of her husband when she gets married. The quotation below shows this very clearly:

Ma had told her that older men took better care of their wives than the young and overeducated ones, but Adah didn't like them. She would never, never in her life get married to any man, rich or poor, to whom she would have to serve his food on bended knee: she would not consent to live with a husband whom she would have to treat as a master and refer to as 'Sir' even behind his back. She knew that all Igbo women did this, but she wasn't going to! (14)

Adah's determination to get education at all costs is justified through the quotation above. She wants to break the chains which have prevented Igbo women from being emancipated so far. She does not feel like being blindly submitted to her husband; on the contrary, she wants to live with him like an equal partner. The simple fact of telling Adah that she will leave school after a year or two constitutes a handicap for her. She cannot learn well because she is haunted by that idea. If she were left alone, she could do well at school and fulfil her dream. The narrator therefore seems to be right when he says: "The thought of her having to leave school at the end of the year worried her so much that she lost weight. She acquired a pathological anxious look; the type some insane people have, with eyes as blank as contact lenses" (15). This quotation clearly shows that Adah has a troubled mind because of the pressures that she regularly undergoes. Another proof of the fact that she has a troubled mind is given when the headmaster of the school which she attends announces the lists of available secondary schools which the school-children can apply for:

At about this time, something happened that showed her that her dream was just suffering a tiny dent, just a small one, nothing deep enough to destroy the basic structure. The dream had by now assumed an image in her mind, it seemed to take life, to breathe and to smile kindly at her. The smile of the Presence became wide as the headmaster of Adah's school announced the lists of available secondary schools which the children could apply for. '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,' Adah heard the Presence telling her. She heard it so much that she started to smile. The headmaster's voice jostled her back to reality. (15)

That dream in which Adah smiles without being aware of it causes the headmaster to cane her on her posterior when she tells him that she is not smiling. She is keen on going to secondary school, but she has no money to pay for the entrance examination to the school. This poses the problem of poverty which generally prevents most girls from going far in their schooling in African societies. Adah's determination to go to secondary school leads her to try to raise the necessary funds for the entrance examination. To reach her goal, she devises a stratagem which is revealed in the quotation below:

Adah was given two shillings to buy a pound of steak from a market called Sand Ground. She looked at the two-shilling piece for a very, very long time. All she needed to take the entrance examination to the school of her dreams was two shillings. [...] Adah buried the money and went back home in tears, without the meat. (16)

The quotation above clearly shows that although Adah is a fervent Christian and knows that the Bible forbids people in general and Christians in particular to steal, she is forced to steal by circumstances. In fact, one of the Ten Commandments of God says that "You shall not steal." However, Emecheta makes her think that anybody can twist what is said in the Bible as far as theft is concerned to suit his own interpretation. The only chance that Adah has to pay for the entrance examination fee is to steal the money or to lose her chance of furthering her education for ever. Despite the biblical implication of the act of stealing, she has no alternative left but steal the money and bury it. She hopes to be able to sit for the entrance examination by being able to afford its fee. For her, the end justifies the means. Her decision to steal the money is simply due to her awareness of the fact that although her cousin can afford it, he will not do so if she asks him in a proper way because of negligence. She buries the money and goes back home, weeping to deceive her cousin and his wife. Unfortunately, her trick is discovered by her cousin's wife since she is not used to stealing:

She was really no good at lying. The wildness in her eyes had a way of betraying her. [...].

'You're lying, Adah,' her cousin's wife said, pointedly.

[...]. She knew what was going to happen to her: the cane. She did not mind this caning because she knew that anybody who sinned must be punished. What she did not bargain for was the extent of the punishment. Her cousin sent her out with a three-penny piece to buy the type of cane called *koboko*. It was one the Hausas used for their horses. There was nothing Adah could do but buy it. Her cousin warned her that he would not stop administering the cane until she'd told him the truth. (16-17)

Although Adah is a mere girl, she devises a stratagem in order to afford her entrance examination fee. The fact that her trick is discovered does not prevented her from keeping the two shillings that she is has stolen. By beating her with a cane used by the Hausas to beat their horses, her cousin thought that she would confess that she has stolen the money. However, because of her ambition and her determination to sit for the entrance examination and to attend the Methodist Girls' High School or die, she chooses not to confess her theft even though she has received one hundred and three strokes with the cane. The following quotation is a proof of that fact:

She had to go the Methodist Girls' High School or die. She concentrated her mind on something else. After the burning of the first few strokes, her skin became hardened, and so did her heart. She started to count. When Cousin Vincent had counted to fifteen, he appealed to Adah to cry a little. If only she would cry and beg for mercy, he would let her go. But Adah would not take the bait. She began to see herself as another martyr; she was being punished for what she believed in. Meanwhile Cousin Vincent's anger increased; he caned her wildly, all over her body. After a hundred and three strokes, he told Adah that he would never talk to her again: not in this world nor in the world to come. Adah did not mind that. She was, in fact, very happy. She had earned the two shillings. And he was a nasty, nasty man. (17)

Emecheta's intention while making Adah refrain from giving the stolen money back although she is wildly caned by her cousin is to show the extent to which she is determined to sit for the entrance examination at all costs and have a chance to attend the Methodist Girls' High School like other girls whose parents are wealthy. Adah is obsessed by the idea of furthering her studies. Her obsession is apparent in the following quotation:

Sometimes the thought that she might not be able to pay the fees crossed her mind. But she did not let that worry her. She had read somewhere that there was some sort of scholarship for the five or so children who did best in the exam. She was going to compete for one of those places. She was so determined that not even the fact that her number was nine hundred and forty-seven frightened her. She was going to that school, and that was that! (17-18)

The novelist deplores the fact that although Adah has succeeded in getting the two shillings that she needs to afford the entrance examination fee, she is confronted with another problem which is how to get the fees proper after her success in the examination. To solve that problem by herself, Adah looks forward to working hard so as to win a scholarship which can allow her to attend the school. Contrary to other African girls who may surrender and leave school because they have no financial support, Adah decides to take her destiny in her own hands and to seek for ways and means to attend the school of her dreams. Because of the negligence which she is subjected to by her new family, she does not know how to tell them that she is going to sit for the entrance examination. She is afraid that her theft of the two shilling should be discovered and hence prevent her from sitting for the examination. Fortunately, when she eventually lets them know about her intention to sit for it, none of them bothers to ask her whether she has paid the fee. In the end, she has not only passed the examination, but she has also got the scholarship she has been longing for with full board as it is mentioned in the quotation below:

She was aware that nobody was interested in her since Pa died. Even if she had failed, she would have accepted it as one of the hurdles of life. But she did not fail. She not only passed the entrance examination, but she got a scholarship with full board. She never knew whether she came first or second or even third, but she was one of the best children that year. (18)

The quotation above clearly shows that Adah has managed to win a scholarship in order to further her studies apart from passing the entrance examination. Through Adah's success despite her poor living

conditions, Emecheta intends to show that where there is a will, there is a way. Because Adah has the will to succeed at all costs, she manages to get the necessary means in order to reach her goal by dint of hard work although she is confronted with financial difficulties. However, she is confronted with the lack of good accommodation which is another obstacle to her schooling in the novel.

3. The Lack of Good Accommodation as an Obstacle to Adah's Schooling in *Second-Class Citizen*

The lack of good accommodation is an obstacle to Adah's schooling in the novel. For instance, as her education at the Methodist Girls' High School comes to an end after the five years which the scholarship covers, she has to leave the boarding house of the school. Emecheta is concerned about the new obstacle that Adah has to face as she does not know where to live at the end of the fifth year although she wants to further her education at Ibadan University. The narrator reveals this fact in these terms:

She was very happy at the Methodist Girls' School especially during the first four years. However, a cloud of indecision started to loom when her school days were coming to an end. It was incredible how quickly five years could pass! She would have liked to linger there, in the boarding house, to stretch each day into a year and each year into a century. But that was impossible. The final day came and she was quite unprepared for life outside. She had some vague plans about what she was going to do; she was going to continue her education, he was going to go [sic] to Ibadan University to read Classics and she was going to teach at the end of it all. (19)

As it can be seen through the quotation above, despite Adah's success, she does not feel like leaving the boarding house of the school because she has nowhere to live in order to attend Ibadan University for her higher education. Like any other student, to attend a university for a degree and to read for the entrance examination or for more 'A' levels, she needs a good home, a good and quiet atmosphere where she can study in peace. Unfortunately, that is what she now lacks. She does not have the opportunity of getting a decent home where she can make her dreams come true:

Well, there was one thing she had not bargained for. To read for a degree, to read for the entrance examination, or even for more 'A' levels, one needed a home. Not just any home where there would be trouble today and fights tomorrow, but a good, quiet atmosphere where she could study in peace.

Adah could not find a home like that. In Lagos, at that time, teenagers were not allowed to live by themselves, and if the teenagers happened to be a girl as well, living alone would be asking for trouble. In short, Adah had to marry. (19)

The fact that Adah has to face the problem of accommodation upon seeking entrance to university after enjoying success in secondary school is used by the novelist to show that it is difficult for girls of Adah's age to live on their own in their community. So, "Continuing to exercise semi-autonomy in one realm, however, also means risking constraint in another" (Husain, 2013: 3). Gil-Naveira (2013: 12-13) corroborates the idea when he writes:

As a girl child, Adah is inherited by her uncle after her father's death, and he considers her a 'slave' and an 'object' to 'sell' in exchange for the bride price. At this time, despite being very young, Adah shows a strong identity when she fights to go on with her studies and when she despises the idea of getting married to a rich old man. However, she is unable to escape the society she lives in; and though Adah tries to escape her difficult situation by marrying Francis, a young student who would allow her to go on studying, her community is not prepared to give her the freedom she needs. In consequence, she stops being the property of her family to become the property of her husband and his family.

Adah has been bound to get married simply because she has no alternative left. Emecheta has chosen to make her resort to marriage because since teenagers are not allowed to live by themselves, the only way for her to have a decent home is to get married. She thinks that it is the only way she can keep on studying. In her community, girls' bride-price is highly regarded, and parents hope to derive a colossal fund from the bargain. So, the higher the girl's level of education is, the higher her bride-price is. For instance, because she is a college trained girl, her mother and her relatives look upon her bride-price as an opportunity to amass as much money as they can as it can be seen in this quotation:

To Adah the greatest advantage was that she could go on studying at her own pace. She got great satisfaction, too, from the fact that Francis [her husband] was too poor to pay the five hundred pounds bride-price Ma and the other members of her family were asking. She was such an expensive bride because she was 'college trained', even though none of them had contributed to her education. The anger of her people was so intense that none of them came to her wedding. (19)

That quotation clearly reveals that Adah's mother and the other members of her family are so keen on making money out of her bride-price that they disapprove of the fact that she wants to get married to Francis who is poor and under age like herself. The writer sees their frustration as the reason why they decide not to attend her wedding. Untimely marriage is sometimes caused by situations similar to the one in which Adah finds herself. Because she wants to further her studies at all costs, she cannot help getting married to Francis although they are both under age. Fortunately, after giving birth to her first daughter, she gets a job as a librarian. Adah's desire to survive through perseverance in her society is what leads her in her struggle. As Raghav (2008: 76) puts it:

This is also the part of the novel where Buchi Emecheta shows her protagonist as an extremely rebellious child. This rebellious attitude is also the driving force behind her desire to never give up all her dreams. She avoids marriage over and over until she realises that marriage might be her only way to hold on to her dreams. She then manipulates her marriage to fulfil her goals.

Raghav's viewpoint backs Emecheta's insinuation that although Adah is eager to further her studies, she is confronted with the problem of lack of support as far as where she is going to live is concerned. So, the situation in which she finds herself is dictated to her by the very society from which she stems. The novelist capitalises on this to make her manipulate the circumstances by getting married because she has no alternative left:

They said Adah should have continued her education and become a doctor, since she had managed to struggle through secondary school. But nobody talked of who was going to support her, nobody talked of where she was going to live. So she found herself alone once more, forced into a situation dictated by society in which, as an individual, she had little choice but she is not above manipulating the circumstances. (23)

Emecheta deplores the fact that Adah is told in no uncertain terms that only her husband will be allowed to leave for London. Her husband's father's seeming disapproval of women's going to England is due to his intention to keep her in Lagos and derive as much profit as he can from her. At first, Adah is filled with rage because of her father-in-law's behaviour, but she controls her anger and comes up with another plan. She opts to be as cunning as a serpent but as harmless as a dove in order to succeed in her plan. Raghav (2008: 77) refers to her in these terms:

Once again she asserts her individuality to get what she wants. She sends Francis to England to study and in the meantime she works and sends him money. Adah does not give up here, she keeps her hopes up and when her husband writes to her a few months later that he is going to be in England for at least four or five more years she decides that it is time to make her move. (Raghav, 2008: 77)

The novelist gives an impetus to Adah's action as a weak character when she makes her convince her in-laws that it is necessary for her to be in England with her husband and that Francis wants her there. The rapidity with which she books herself and her two children first class tickets on a ship to England shows that she is determined to go to England, thus making her dream come true. However, the peacefulness of sojourn in England where she intends to further her studies and the success of her marital life as foreshadowed by the cold wind that welcomes her in London become hypothetical. Raghav (2008: 86) corroborate the idea in these terms:

If Western education is the key that unlocks the door to modernity, then Adah emerges definitely as a modern woman but there is always a lingering feeling of helplessness. Emecheta also shows her protagonist not just as a black mother but also as someone who links writing to mothering which has multiple significations of not only being a woman but also a humanist.

The obstacles which African girls face in their schooling as shown through the case study of Adah in Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* call for reflection. Although the protagonist of the novel has succeeded in breaking those obstacles and in going forward, her schooling has not been an easy task.

Conclusion

This article titled "Sex discrimination: Obstacles to a Girl's Schooling in Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*" has dealt with three sections. The first section, Adah's Discrimination from Birth as the First Obstacle to her Schooling in *Second-Class Citizen*, has endeavoured to show that the first obstacle to Adah's schooling stems from her discrimination from birth as her parents always wish to have boys only. The second section, Child Neglect, Poverty and Untimely Marriage as Obstacles to Adah's Schooling in the Novel has tried to examine how Adah's mother's child neglect has prevented Adah from going to school at the beginning and how poverty has led her to indulge in untimely marriage by getting married at a tender age. The third section, The Lack of Good Accommodation as an Obstacle to Adah's Schooling in *Second-Class Citizen*, has tried to show that Adah's untimely marriage is closely related to her lack of accommodation to further her studies.

Emecheta has mainly used irony to convey her message. She has succeeded in impacting her readership by making Adah's schooling successful despite the many obstacles she has met. Through the novel, she has succeeded in breaking the obstacles to Adah's schooling in a purely traditional African society where the weight of customs and traditions is great.

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