

## **Unveiling the Issue of Love in Chinua Achebe's and Buchi Emecheta's Novels**

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### **Abstract**

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*This paper deals with love issue and probes its manifestations in different spheres through characters in Chinua Achebe's and Buchi Emecheta's novels. Drawing from the sociological and psychological approaches, it aims at investigating the different love evidences as contextualized in the selected works. The exploration of these novels reveals that both authors consider love as one the important intrinsic worth values that a person should embody and share for a harmonious societal life. Indeed, they infer that the meaning of love depends on the importance one may grant according to assigned purpose and, as such varies from one character to another. Hence, the current study highlights two aspects of love: its platonic and erotic dimensions from which both writers have approached love issue.*

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**Keywords:** Love evidences, lovers, societal life, platonic love, sensuality

### **Introduction**

Human life is regulated by a number of qualities among which love, a quality that helps build a peaceful and strong nation. Indeed, love exists in any human society but it has different connotations according to the meaning people would grant. There are love for parents, love for children, partners, places, money, stories, God, sciences, literatures, and so on. As a matter of fact, love is a critical societal characteristics and stands as an ‘umbrella’ a term, and that defining it, becomes somewhat ambiguous. But for it to be real love, it must be expressed in actions as it is felt by the way somebody is treated.

Love has been a favored topic of philosophers, poets, writers, and scientists for generations, and different people and groups have often thought about its definition. While some people agree that ‘love’ implies strong feelings of affection, others however think that this concept may have different meanings depending on the context in which it is used. However, there is an increasing body of empirical research studies devoted to the categorization and the different manifestations of love in African works of fiction. Among critics who have tackled this issue, Anapol Déborah's “*Love Without Limits*”, for example, brings light and tells an inspiring and romantic story about Nick and Kanae, especially how they improbably find each other, fall in love and then fight to overcome skepticism from others about their relationship. The understanding of love made by Deborah Anapol has brought light on the issue. She argues that love has no borders and is no longer a substance to be sold:

Love is bigger than you are. You can invite love, but you cannot dictate how, when, and where love expresses itself. You can choose to surrender to love, or not, but in the end love strikes like lightning, unpredictable and irrefutable. You can even find yourself loving people you don't like at all. Love does not come with conditions, stipulations, addenda, or codes. Like the sun, love radiates independently of our fears and desires. Love is inherently free. It cannot be bought, sold, or traded. You cannot make someone love you, nor can you prevent it, for any amount of money. Love cannot be imprisoned nor can it be legislated. Love is not a substance, not a commodity, nor even a marketable power source. Love has no territory, no borders, no quantifiable mass or energy output... Whether sex should be for sale is another question entirely, but love itself cannot be sold. One can buy loyalty, companionship, attention, perhaps even compassion, but love itself cannot be bought. An orgasm can be bought, but love cannot. It comes, or not, by grace, of its own will and in its own timing, subject to no human's planning. (On line)

We can read from the foregoing that all love is a kind of passionate commitment that we nurture and develop, even though it usually arrives in our lives unbidden; it is more than just a powerful feeling. Focusing on the drawback of obsessive passion, A. D. Makosso, A. O. Matongo Nkouka (2020:2305) opine that "*when love becomes an obsessive passion, it slips into fanaticism or a blind extremism which dehumanizes the lover since he/she is no longer capable enough to discern what is salutary to him/herself and to the community.*" Indeed, Love cannot be turned on as a reward or turned off as a punishment. A position shared by M. Alkali, R. Talif, and J. Mohd Jan in their article entitled: "Violence and Sexual Harassment in Nigerian Novels: The NegoFeminist Option" wherein they analyze the seamy side of love namely in its erotic dimension. Focusing on Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price* with regard to the nubile heroine Aku-nna who becomes a limp bride because ambushed by her seemingly lover but recklessness captors, these critics contend (2013:10):

Taking advantage of women in most modern legal contexts is illegal. The unwelcome sexual advances have often been accompanied with violence of differing degrees of a female such as demonstrated in Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price* (1976) forcefully calls attention to how they should be remedied. In the village of Ibuza, harassment is so frequent and severe that it creates a hostile and offensive environment for budding girls of marriage age – and a question shoots: what is the way out for novelists in deconstructing the life of such young girls as Aku-nna, the lead female character? [...] The world cannot continue to be stupid in its injustice to womanhood. Someday, which is here in fact, would live to see a change in the order of the world.

This position tallies L. Bedana & S. Laishram's who, in "Reflection of African Marriage and Culture of Bride Price in Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*" (2014) assert that sexual love is always experienced as a plight by African women the onset of menstrual cycle. Rather than being a joyful adventure, "*it creates a psychosis in African women for they are vulnerable to unwanted suitors who can cut a lock of hair and announce the woman (the victim) as his wife without even paying the bride price.*" (p.071)

Only something else pretending to be love can be used as a lure, as a hook, for bait and switch, imitated, insinuated, but the real deal can never be delivered if it doesn't spring freely from the heart. Yet, Deborah Anapol's consideration and mainly her explanation about love do not distant from the definition provided by *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2005:878) wherein love carries connotations of "*a strong feeling of deep and tender affection for somebody such as a close relative or friend, or for something such as a place, an idea, or an animal.*"

In addition, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price* and *The Joys of Motherhood* have great significance as they are replete with instances of love be it in its 'eros', 'storge', or 'philia' dimension, but less in 'agape', the highest form of love, meaning 'charity' or the unconditional love of God for man. For both authors present more than one forms of love mattering for our analysis.

From these considerations, one surmises that love is a fundamental emotion in people's lives and as such, plays a vital role in human life. It passes to be the cement of "vivre ensemble" or the key to a harmonious societal life. Thus, referring to Chinua Achebe and Buchi Emecheta's novels under scrutiny, one asks the following question: how is love categorized and manifested? As a matter of fact, the probing of their novels reveals the existence of several forms of love from which some are considered throughout this analysis.

In order to appropriately conduct this study, we resort to sociological approach as love is shared or experienced among people living in society. This approach that Wilbur Scott (1967:124) asserts to be “*the most influential critical method of our times*” is dialectical in the sense that its practitioners consider the work of art or literature emphatically as a consequence of the social milieu or as literature finally affects that environment in which it is produced. For it is always set in a specific time and space and generally expresses the aspirations and the feelings of the people who make up that society. In this connection, Irele Abiola (1970:30), asserts that sociological approach:

Correlates the work to the social background and to see how the author’s intention and attitude issue out the outer social context and of his art... and so get an understanding of the way each writer or group of writers captures a moment in the historical consciousness of the society.

Moreover, since this study investigates on the ‘love’ which is a mindset expressed through emotions, passions or excitements, the Psychoanalytic Criticism proves then helpful since it informs on characters’ nature thanks to observations, habits and experiences. Theorizing on the critical approach based on the tradition of psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud, the Ghanaian critic Kofi Agyekum (2013:217-218) accordingly asserts:

Psychoanalytic critics analyze a work of literature from the point of the author’s mind, personality, mental and emotional characteristics. [...] They Employ symbolism to identify, explain and interpret the meaning of some psychological state of minds of writers and characters they create. [...] They use basic and ordinary objects [...] to explain emotions, desires, love, hatred, repressed desires, oppression and suppression, etc. [...] These objects and other literary devices reveal the psychological motivations of the characters, their settings, and the psychological mindset of the author.

Since defining, the concept ‘love’ can be ambiguous as it is a multifaceted feeling, with several expressions in different life context. Nevertheless, its denotative meaning is an intense feeling of affection towards somebody or something. Of course, this notion has many parameters, but in the framework of this study, we unroll the different manifestations of love as contextualized in the selected novels, and specifically in two aspects, underlying its platonic and erotic dimensions.

### **1- Portrayal of Storge Love in Achebe’s and Emecheta’s Novels**

Before embarking on ‘Storge’, it is worth noticing that this term is close similar to ‘Agape’, the pure or highest expression of love. Indeed, coined in the mid-seventeenth century by the Greeks from the adverb, ‘*agapē*’ meaning ‘*with mouth or hands wide-open, usually in surprise or wonder*’, ‘Agape’ initially referred to a ‘brotherly love’, a love that is wholly selfless and spiritual. It is the horizontal love that God has given to humanity and that people should vertically share among them, since ‘Agape’ in its religious connotation, implies selfless love felt by Christians for their fellow human beings. More generally, in our daily experiences, ‘Agape’ carries similar connotations as ‘platonic love’, that *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English* (2005:203) defines as a love “*involving friendship and affection, but not involving sexual relations between people who might be expected to be sexually attracted to each other.*” It is at the level love encompasses two types of manifestations somehow confusable but clearly distinct from their Greek etymology: ‘Storge’ and ‘Philia’, both characterized by family love and brotherly love.

Coined from Ancient Greek στοργή (storgé), meaning ‘love, affection’, ‘Storge’ or familial love, refers to natural or instinctual affection. In *Understanding the Triarchic Theory of Intelligence* (1999), Robert J. Sternberg, a well-known psychologist whose research often focuses on human intelligence and creativity, opines that in the daily life, storge love is experienced as Love of a parent towards offspring and vice versa. He accordingly defines ‘storge’ as love:

shared between family members (typically immediate family), and sometimes close family friends or friends from childhood. It differs from philia in the way that it's reinforced by blood, early memories, and familiarity. [...] Familiar Love, Storge is a naturally occurring love rooted in parents and children, as well as best friends. It's an infinite love built upon acceptance and deep emotional connection. (pp. 299, 301)

The African context considers a family as a group of one or two parents, including their children as well as their relatives. This is quite different from the European context where a family is made of parents and children only. The truth is that people from the outset are governed by different kinds of relationships linking different members of the same community or family. They have their way to express feelings and love to each other. This is part of civilization which is also concerned with literature. For love is a literary sensitive issue as writers fictionalized it between characters, parents and progenies, or husbands and wives as well. As a matter of fact, the literary production of Achebe and Emecheta are not an exception.

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* for instance reveals a vivid show of love through the protagonist's wives. In fact, Okonkwo's wives lead a cohesive life that could not silence critics. In this connection, Ode Ogede (2000: 60), presenting Okonkwo's wives writes:

Okonkwo's wives for example are far from bickering, quarrelsome or self-centered lot. Not only do they act in ways that the ideas that a successful man's wives should participate in establishing his social status through self-display, but forming a cohesive community of their own devoid of any form of cut-throat competitiveness.

From this excerpt, one surmises the accordance and peace that govern and singularize Okonkwo's home in Umuofia is made possible thanks to his wives' capacity to control their inner feelings and to express love to one another. They show their love toward children in teaching them the basic societal values, a way of helping them grow up with full ancestral ethics. This corroborates Basile Marius Ngassaki's postulation that in the African 'vivre-ensemble', mothers are expected to play an active role in the upbringing of children, giving them the basic morals and traditional values of the community, as he (2009:98) notes:

Both male and female children take their first lessons from their loving mothers who show great tenderness to them. Women participate actively and positively in the transmission of tradition and customs, and this may account for the fact that most of the gods are female. They hold together the traditional values of the community. For instance, on the Week of Peace that is observed in honor of the goddess Ani, no harm must be done during it. Harmony and friendship are highly recommended because any misdemeanor can ruin the whole clan.

As it can be seen, love in its 'storgic' demission is noticeable between mothers and children. The case here is about Ezinma who is as bound to her mother as she is the only child and the center of her mother's world. This love is also proved through the privilege given to her to choose or decide which food the mother should cook. She is so cherished by her parents that she becomes the pride of the couple and mainly of her mother who would have been laughed at by any one if she did not procreate her.

Another case of platonic love in this household is shared between Okonkwo and his two wives in *Things Fall Apart*. The author, in effect, shows how these women prove their deep affection for their husband through a total submission to meet all their husband's demands. Since making a husband happy is the first and foremost concern of a traditional woman, whatever Okonkwo wishes or needs, is completed by his wives who eagerly take it as a married woman's duty.

Woman's love for her husband transcends all life vicissitudes. The case of Ozoemana's death is convenient. People often believe that it is in such occasions (of misfortune, hardship, and suffering) that one can realize affection or sincere love which existed between a man and a woman. Thus, Ozoemana's wife was present at the washing of her husband's body, although dead, a way to show her attachment to the man. That is why, commenting on such a case, Basile Marius Ngassaki (2009: 99) writes:

This woman cannot imagine life without her husband. The only solution is to follow him in the world of the ancestors. In general, women in this book take a great pleasure and enjoyment in self-abnegation for their husbands. Sharing is part of their being which justifies their very existence. This explains why Okonkwo's wives first interest is to protect his public image through total dedication.

The sentence: "This woman cannot imagine life without her husband. The only solution is to follow him in the world of the ancestors" evidences here that love sometimes carries connotations of 'fatuous love' that psychologists such as Frank L. Schmidt and John E. Hunter (1993:8), typify as "a whirlwind courtship in which passion motivates a commitment without the stabilizing influence of intimacy. Often, witnessing this leaves others confused about how the couple could be so impulsive."

However, the sentence: “*Sharing is part of their being which justifies their very existence*” unveils the dimension of ‘phileo love’ described by the same psychologists as “*an emotional connection that goes beyond acquaintances or casual friendships.*” (p.9) For, as they assert, “*In social psychology, another term for love between good friends is philia.*” (Ibid.) Indeed, when one experiences ‘phileo’, one shows a deeper level of connection. This connection is not as deep as the love within a family, perhaps, nor does it carry the intensity of romantic passion or erotic love.

Actually, characters in Chinua Achebe’s works show love among them. Obi Okonkwo experiences instances of love with members of his community since he could not live lonely. This is remarkable through the welcome he is reserved by his mother’s kinsmen in Mbanta. It is reported that Okonkwo is sympathetically welcomed by Uchendu, his mother’s younger brother who is now the eldest surviving member of the family. This warm welcome shows that Okonkwo is loved not only by his uncle but also by the entire village looking at him as the savior of the entire African community. This emblematical love is the full expression of ‘Nneka’, meaning “mother is supreme”. For, in Africa, children are given great affection by their fathers as well as their mother’s lines. So, whenever a child misbehaves, and is punished by his father, he can look upon his mother for sympathy. Even though, and no matter the distance, there are still some Umuofians who do not forget their champion. As an illustration, Obierika who is Umuofians’ representative pays him a friendly visit twice: the first was to bring him some bags full of cowries; the second to tell him about the advent of missionaries in their land.

In *No Longer at Ease*, platonic is also manifested through the bond between Obi and Hannah Okonkwo, his mother. Indeed, Hannah has got many children but there exists a special tie between Obi and her as of all her eight children. People notice Hannah’s proclivity for Obi proved to some extent by the pseudonym she accepted when called by Obi. Because he is so loved by his mother, she accepts to be called ‘Obi’s mother’, a name she doesn’t deserve until Obi was born. However, the bitter remembrance Obi had for his mother was when the razorblade he had forgotten in his pocket, hurt her as we can read from the following passage: “*For some reason or other, whenever Obi thought affectionately of his mother, his mind went back to that shedding of her blood. It bound him very firmly to her.*” (NLE: 76)

The laundering service she carries out for her Obi denotes the affection she shows toward her son. The laws of the clan forbids people of Umuofia to get married with an ‘Osu’. Obi is aware of that, but decides to break the law regarding the degree of love he has toward Clara though he knows better than everyone else that his family would violently oppose the idea of marrying an Osu. But for him it is either Clara or nobody. Family ties are all very well as long as they don’t interfere with Clara. Thus, attached to his mother, Obi trusts only his mother according to his own wordings: “*if I could convince my mother*”, he thinks, “*all would be well.*” (NLE: 76). This evidences how well Obi shows a deep affection to his mother.

Another kind of love which can be associated is friendship between characters. In *No Longer at Ease*, for instance, such love is experienced between Joseph and Obi when the latter loses his mother. It is a kind of solidarity he shows toward his fellow beloved. Gathered at the mourning seat, people are coming one after another. The President of the Umuofia progressive Union asks whether it is permissible to sing hymns in Ikoyi, a European reservation. Obi says he would rather they don’t sing, but he is touched most deeply that so many of his people had come, in spite of everything, to condole with him. In this connection, the conversation between the two friends is tinged with compassion and conviviality. For, Joseph calls Obi aside and tells him in a whisper that he has brought the beer to help him entertain those who would come:

“Thank you,” Obi said, fighting back the mist which threatened to cover his eyes.

“Give them about eight bottles, and keep the rest for those who will come tomorrow.” (NLE: 152)

It appears that Obi is such an altruistic man that many people condole with him. Everybody on arrival is warmly welcomed with a share of drink, as Obi orders: “*Give them about eight bottles, and keep the rest for those who will come tomorrow*”. This unveils the ‘legendary’ African solidarity for which the black continent is still appreciated over the World.

All things considered, love, be it platonic, storge or phileo always involves deep affection, but no romantic or sexual attraction. Yet, as African writers, Achebe and Emecheta contend that it is absolutely possible for people of any gender to maintain a friendship without sexual tension or attraction. For, when you love someone platonically, you might notice some basic signs of love.

As we said earlier, the issue of platonic or sacrificial love is recurrent in Buchi Emecheta's literary production. This is the case of *The Joys of Motherhood* which tells the moving story of Nnu Ego, the archetype of African woman devoted to her children, given them all her life with the result that she finds herself friendless and alone in middle age, as Elleke Boehmer (2008, p.i) better puts it:

With its doggedly downbeat portrait of Nnu Ego, the worn-out West African Every-woman and ironic icon of maternal self-sacrifice, [...] At every turn in her beleaguered life, Nnu Ego discovers that the promised joys of wifehood and motherhood-both the material rewards and the emotional fulfilments-in fact bring little more than disappointment and bitterness.

From this excerpt, one easily infers the heroine's platonic love for her offspring since she works herself to the "bones" to look after her children and even shies away from friendship telling herself that she does not need any friend; she has enough in her family, as she comforts herself:

After all, I was born alone, I shall die alone. Yes, I have many children but what do I have to feed them on? On my life, I have to work myself to the bones to after them. I have to give them my all. And if my luck enough to die in peace, I even have to give them my soul. They will worship my dead spirit to provide for them.... (*The Joys of Motherhood*, p. 210)

This passage epitomizes Nnu Ego's life and duty for her children which resemble a 'chain of slavery'. For she has to scrape and save (selling of paraffin and carrying of firewood) just to pay for her son's fees and for the twins they have to stay at home for the boys' education to go ahead. She is left with dying hopes and demanding children when money stops coming from her husband after the war; out of hopelessness and self-pity she breaks down, as the narrator dramatizes her plight:

All she prayed for was Nnaife's release. Everything was costing her money, money she did not have. Adim's schoolwork began to suffer and the boy was losing weight. It was true what they said, she thought, that if you don't have children the longing for them will kill you and if you do, the worry over them will kill you. One day she called the boy and talked to him seriously. "Look, Adim, it seems I am alone with you in this game of living. Your father blames me and you, my children. Ibuza people blame me: they say I did not bring you all up well because I spent most of my time selling things in the market." (*The Joys of Motherhood*, p.239)

Phrases such as "...it seems I am alone with you in this game of living" or "Your father blames me and you, my children. Ibuza people blame me" unfortunately evidence the seamy side of an excessive love of a 'canonized mother' for her descendants. Indeed, Nnu Ego's deep affection for her progenies remains intact throughout lifetime, and even when life vicissitudes would command to moderate such a platonic love. As a matter of fact, when everybody, and even her own children think that she could willingly accept going back to Ibuza alone for a little rest, peacefully waiting for her ancestors' call, Nnu Ego contends as she still conceives life impossible away from her dear children:

'Look, Mother', Magnus said to her [Nnu Ego] then. [...] What's more, you need a little rest, Mother. You have too hard all your life. You have to join your age-group at home, dress up on Eke days and go dance in the markets. It's going to be a good life for you. Don't saddle yourself with so many children.'

'But that's it,' Nnu Ego replied with tears in her eyes. 'I don't know how to be anything else but mother. [...] Taking the children from me is like taking away the life I have always known, the life I am used to.' (pp. 250-51)

However, it is interesting to notice that it is because mothers love their children in a 'sacrificial' way that they bring them up, teaching and educating them according to ancestral principles. In this connection, Nnu Ego appears to be the archetype of these women who impart some moral values to children enabling them to be self-confident and keep hoping in life, and make them sociable citizens. The following conversation between Nnu Ego and her son Oshia helps buttress this view:

Nnu ego knew that someone had annoyed her son. She could only watch him work out his emotion in this way. [...]

‘What is the matter?’ she asked at last when she saw that Oshia’s temper was so violent. “Come on, son, and tell your mother. Tell ...”[...]

“They asked me to go away,” he blurted out.

“Who asked you to go away?”

“Them!” he pointed towards the door. “They wouldn’t let me eat of their sarah.” [...]

“Well, Oshia, you can’t force people to invite you to their sarah” [...] Don’t worry, son. When we have money you’ll go to school like the other children. All Ibuza people in this town send their boys to school. Why should you be the exception? Do you know that you’re the most handsome of them all? You have the look of an Arab or Fulani, and those horrid people can’t take that away from you. When we get enough money and dress you up nicely, you’ll see what I am saying. Remember, son, that you are a very handsome boy. (*The Joys of Motherhood*, pp.109-110)

Nnu Ego’s lovely and reassuring words “*When we get enough money and dress you up nicely, you’ll see what I am saying. Remember, son, that you are a very handsome boy*” leave a great impression on the young boy since they help him have his mind made up and lead a life of self-contentment. This excerpt unquestionably unveils a family love between a mother and her child, a maternal affection which has the merit of shaping if not boosting latter’s wining spirit. Accordingly, in Ibuza community all parents send their children to school for a prospective future but this is not the case for Oshia’s parents. That is why Nnu Ego, instead of lamenting, moralizes her son by providing promises, one way to say that sooner or later he will go to school, and for that Oshia should hope a marvelous future as he will attend class as the other children of his age.

Unfortunately, Nnu Ego does not achieve an expected result and has been brought up to believe that motherhood makes womanhood. She hoped that her old age would be happy and could even be remembered and referred to long after death as mother. Dashed hope! For, as Florence Stratton (1994: 115, 118, 225) rightly points out:

Nnu Ego’s final years in Ibuza are characterized by poverty, loneliness and mental deterioration. [...] Her sons, now university-educated men repudiate the values she has sacrificed herself for, in favour of the Western-style individualism they have imbibed in Lagos. [...] For instance, Oshia, Nnu Ego and Nnaife’s eldest son, is so detached to Igbo values that he does not feel he has any family responsibilities to meet, to his parents’ disappointment.

Indeed, Nnu Ego’s disappointment is total as she fails to hear from her two sons that travelled abroad. Instead, it is from rumors that she hears Oshia has gotten married to a white woman. A very sad news that actually breaks her down.

This kind of platonic love where mothers have towards their children by teaching them through stories has also been approached by Basile Marius Ngassaki (2000: 98) when he writes:

Love in this section has a twofold dimension because women have to share their love with their children and their husbands. In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo’s wives play an active role in the upbringing of their children in teaching them the basic societal characteristics. And tales are one of the mediums to achieve this ... That was the kind of stories Nwoye loved. Nwoye himself confesses that this was the kind of stories he really enjoys, as they have didactic interest.

Naturally, mothers have to love their children as well as their husbands from which they can procreate. This is at the same time a requirement and a law given by God the Almighty as we can read from the Holy Scriptures: “*Beloved ones, let us continue loving one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born from God and gains the knowledge of God.*” (1 john4: 7-8). In this way, mothers play a critical role in the transmission of education (ancestral values) and love to their children on one hand and specifically to their husbands.

The attachment of Obi Ummuna vis -à -vis Ona, his daughter, shows the purest degree of love. In this respect, Obi, though having several wives, had few children but they died all. Hence, Ona grew to fill her father’s expectation to the point that Obi was not ready to let her go for marriage without solid proven guaranties, as the narrator explains:

When it came to his own daughter (Ona), she must have a man who would cherish her. [...] time he wanted a man who could be patient with her, who would value his daughter enough to understand her. A man who would take the trouble to make her happy. Feeling this way, he refused all very handsome-looking men, for he knew that though they might be able to make love well, handsome men often felt it unnecessary to be loving. The art of loving, he knew, required deeper men. [...] as usual with such serious family matters, Agbadi conferred with his old friend Idayi about the problem of the right suitor. "I wish Nnu Ego had been born in our time. When we were young, men valued the type of beauty she has," he mused. (*The Joys of Motherhood*, pp.35-36)

The father's love for her daughter is strong so that at a deepest level of consciousness, it could be interpreted as an incest for how can a father prevent her daughter getting married in order to keep on making her father's ornament. As Obi Ummuna keeps on inflicting humiliation upon Ona's suitors, Agbadi, one of them, suspecting's excessive love for his daughter, ridicules and jokingly says to Obi: "*why don't you wear her round your neck, like an Ona, a priceless jewel?*" (p.11)

As it can be seen, Obi Ummuna's love toward Ona could be interpreted as a natural affection that parents show to their offspring. Indeed, when someone grows, he needs children to look after him. If you have no children, and your parents have gone, who can you call your own? However, the case of Obi was different since he had a litany of children, many daughters with no son. Whenever Obi returned from his many wanderings he would go and stay with his Ona. In this connection, the narrator puts:

A year after the birth of Nnu Ego, Obi Ummuna died, and Ona cried for days for him, especially as he had gone without her producing the wanted son. Agbadi relented when he heard of it, for he knew how close Ona was to her father. (*The Joys of Motherhood*, p.27)

The second reason for Obi Ummuna to love her daughter is as sensational as we may think. In fact, Obi doesn't have a son of all his many children. In African culture a male child is always valuable than a female one for many reasons. As such, Obi's name will no longer exist after his death. That is why he expects his beloved daughter not to get married, but to give birth to a male child who would inevitably have his name; a way to preserve his own name. This can be understood in Ona's first weeks of motherhood when she chew the fat with Agbadi, her suitor. Thus, sending word to her father to come for her the next day, Ona reports the agreement she made with her father. Because her father had no son, she had been dedicated to the gods to produce children in his name, not that of any husband. This is evidenced by the narrator in the following terms:

On that last night, she tried to reason with Agbadi, but he gave her his stiff back. "All right," she said in compromise, "my father wants a son and you have many sons. But you do not have a girl yet. Since my father will not accept any bride price from you, if I have a son he will belong to my father, but if a girl, she will be yours. That is the best I can do for you both. (p.25)

From the foregoing, the reader easily infers that Obi's though excessive love for his daughter is not the only thing that prevents Ona from marrying Agbadi. For, even after her father passes away, Ona remains reluctant and, described as "*a beautiful young woman and arrogant, more abusive and aggressive who had been spoiled by her father*" (p.27), remained reluctant to marriage what prevents her from moving to Agbadi's house. She kept on rejecting Agbadi's insistent offer though the latter for over two years persisted in trying to persuade her to come and live in his compound. For she thought that marriage kills love. Therefore, maybe the best way to keep his father's love was not to get married and remain in her father's house.

So far, love is also experienced among wives belonging to a single man. It is obvious that the African society tolerates polygamy and many are husbands who engage themselves on the issue. However, in such household the relationship between wives is often worsened, stemming from some attitudes such as jealousy. This thought finds credence in words of Basile Marius Ngassaki (2009: 129) when he says:

The fact that an individual can have more than one ego leads to internal and external conflicts which are well expressed through the different pressures coming from the 'social me', the 'maternal me' and the 'individual me'. This means that what is considered as 'Me' is not always easy to define. 'Me' seems to be just a container in which many things can be put.

Fortunately, for Nwokocha Agbadi, his many wives live in good terms despite the fact that he neglects them. He was not different from many men and might take wives and then neglect them for years. The conflictual atmosphere arousing from Agbadi's wives was implied but not made explicit.

In *The Bride Price* also, love is experienced by some characters under different forms. Indeed, the relationship between Odia Ezekiel and Aku-nna was of true love. The protagonist's name stems from the expectation the father had for his daughter since she is the real image of her father. In a word, Odia Ezekiel has named her Aku-nna, meaning literally 'father's wealth', knowing that the only consolation he could count on from her would be her bride price. Actually, for him, this was something to look forward to, and Aku-nna on her part was determined not to let her father down. Their relationship had been cemented by the services Odia received from his daughter. However, Odia faced troubles in his life, with his ailing foot considered as side effects of the war he took part. Then, the conversation between them shows how affected Aku-nna was by his father's plight. In this connection, the narrator asserts:

She laid her small hand on one of his and said, "I'm going to make you Nsala soup, very hot, with lot of pepper, and the pounded yam I shall prepare to go with it will be lumpless. So, Nna, hurry back home to eat your evening meal hot, I know you don't like it cold."

Nna smiled. His reddened eyes focused on his daughter, the corners of the eyes formed small wrinkles and his white teeth gleamed. For a while the woebegone expression on his sick and bloated face disappeared.

Thank you my little daughter, but don't boil more yams than you can pound. That odo handle is too heavy for you. Don't do too much pounding... the key to the big cupboard is in my grey trousers — you know, the ones hanging on the hook on the wall. If you want any money, you can take it from the big cupboard, but be very careful how you spend it, because you have to make it go a very long way. (*The Bride Price*, pp.11-12)

Admittedly, the above conversation is full of lessons. One can firstly label the affection an individual shows towards another. The case of a daughter whose father experiences a sorry situation. Secondly, the importance of visiting a sick person. An unhealthy person can be healed by the presence of visitors who comfort and appease the pain. Thirdly, the trustfulness Odia has for his daughter in revealing his secrets and finally a piece of advice he gives to her daughter in extensively spending money. Above all, though fictitious, this is the kind of love God, the Almighty wishes humans to share among them. Truly, as any loved father, Odia didn't want his daughter to suffer or worry unduly and Aku-nna knew that there was a kind of bond between her and her father which didn't exist between her and her mother as the narrator (*The Bride Price*, p.17) says: "*Despite all that, Aku-nna knew she hold a special place in her father's heart.*" Thus, as a virtue, all people would manifest love not only toward his or her parents, children, relatives or friends, but also toward any living being for a harmonious life in society.

## **2- Eros as a Gauge of Harmony among the Lovers**

Originally coined by ancient Greeks who used the concept 'eros' in reference to the son born to Aphrodite, the love goddess. Yet, theorizing on the love issue, Plato, an ancient philosopher of social ethics, distinguishes two types of 'eros': the 'vulgar eros', descending from the 'vulgar Aphrodite', who drives people to sexual frivolity and libertinage, and 'heavenly eros', descendant of 'heavenly Aphrodite', who in contrary, embodies the virtuous way for people to pass from the lower world up to the higher one, from the material sphere onto the world of ideas.

In social psychology, the term 'eros' commonly carries connotations of the first category, the vulgar one. In effect, 'eros' is generally referred to as erotic or sexual or passionate love. It is often all about need and it is more about the person who is feeling sexually attractive than it is about the person who is the focus of that love or thing that is the focus of that love. It is addicting, and may as such, enhance joy or be a source of great distress among the lovers. In the framework of this section, let us focus on the constructive effects of 'Eros'.

In the African context, apart from love within a family, friendly love, sexual love is as considered as the social gauge of a harmonious household since it cements spouses among them. An exploration of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* for instance helps buttress this view. For, one notices that Okonkwo and his wives love mutually since he endeavors to satisfy them sexually, and in an equitable way. This equity brings about peace in Okonkwo's home, pictured as a harmonious Ibo traditional household.

Eros also pervades Achebe's second novel with regard to the sexual attractiveness between Obi and Clara. Both loves are even so affected one another that Obi ignores the clan's laws. Important to know *No Longer at Ease* centers on the issue of love since Obi burs up for Clara. It tells the story of an Igbo man, Obi Okonkwo, who leaves his village for an education in Britain and then a job in the Nigerian colonial civil service. As a young man, the Umuofia Progressive Union awarded him a scholarship to study in England. They hoped he would be a lawyer but he chose to study English instead. Before he left everyone gave him a party and the village pastor warned him to keep to his studies and stay out of trouble. Unfortunately, on the ship back from England to Nigeria after his studies were completed, Obi is conflicted between his African culture and Western lifestyle and ends up taking a bribe. For he meets a bewitching girl named Clara, who is at first cold to him, but they eventually kiss. The narrator evidences that Obi and Clara's eyes meets for a second, and without another word Obi takes her in his arms. To show her full adhesion to her lover's sexual solicitousness, Clara can help trembling in joy, as Obi kisses her over and over again.

"Leave me", she whispered.

"I love you."

She was silent for a while, seeming to melt in his arms. "You don't", she said suddenly. "We are only being silly. You'll forget it in the morning." She looked at him and then kissed violently. "I know I will hate myself in the morning. You don't — Leave me, there's someone coming." (*No Longer at Ease*, p.34)

Narrations such as "I love you" and "She looked at him and then kissed violently" show the intensity of romantic attractiveness between the two 'lovebirds'. Indeed, this is the starting point of erotic adventure between Obi and Clara on a ship during voyage. Actually, Clara expresses affection to Obi when the latter suffers all along the journey and as nurse, she brings him some tablets to heal his pain.

Moreover, erotic love is also a vivid issue in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* with regard to Chris and his girlfriend Beatrice. Obviously, Chris' behaviour is so strange for not helping Beatrice when she is taken away. Staring at one another for minute, if not hours, Chris is completely at a loss and he has never coped with her in such a mood. This strange atmosphere that traces a grief in their friendship can be seen through the conversation the hold when Chris walks a few steps and stops in front of her:

-'Will you be good enough BB, to tell me in what I have now offended you.?"

-'Offended me? Who said you offended me'

-'Then, why are you behaving so strange?"

-'I am not behaving strange. You are! Chris you are behaving very strange indeed. Listen, let me ask you a simple question, Chris. I am the girl you say you want to marry. Right? Ok, I am taken away in strange, very strange circumstances last night. I call you beforehand and tell you. You come over here and all you say to me is: don't worry, it's all right.'

'I never said anything of the sort to you' (*Anthills of the Savannah*, p.112)

This lovely exchange, though made of grief, is in effect the expression of Beatrice's attractiveness for her beloved Christ. The truth is that she cannot help living far from her beloved. In effect, when she contends: "I call you beforehand and tell you. You come over here and all you say to me is: don't worry, it's all right", Beatrice is burning and soliciting a sexual moment with Christ since they have been kept distant for a while.

Buchi Emecheta's *Joys of the Motherhood* too, tackles the issue of sexual love with regard to Agbadi and Ona, depicting erotic sequences which consecrates sexual intercourse as the regulator by excellence of the 'vivre ensemble' between partners in a couple. The authoress provides the readers with one of those 'sweet moments' Agbadi has with his beloved Ona:

Ona was there lying beside him. He (Agbadi) watched her bare breasts rising and falling as she breathed, and noted with amusement how she was sure to stay as far away from him as possible, [...] He felt like jumping on her, clawing at her, hurting her. [...] He found rolling towards her, giving nipples gentle lover's bites, letting his tongue glide down the hollow in the centre of her breasts and then back again. He caressed her thigh with his good hand, moving to her small night lappa and fingering her coral waist-beads. [...] She started to moan and groan instead, like a woman in labour. He kept on, and would not let go, so masterful was he in this art. [...]

"I know you are too ill to take me," she murmured.

“No, my Ona, I am waiting for you to be ready”. [...]

“Please, Ona, don’t wake the whole household.”

Either she did not hear, or he wanted her to do just that, for he gave her two painful bites in between her breasts, and she in desperation clawed at him, and was grateful when at last she felt him inside her. (*The Joys of Motherhood*, pp.15-17)

This love sequence, full of glamour, helps us figure out the intensity of love between both ‘lovebirds’. Through Ona’s murmured hesitation: “*I know you are too ill to take me,*” and Agbadi’s sensual insistence “*No, my Ona, I am waiting for you to be ready*”, the authoress wants to show a change of paradigm in sexual intercourses where women were abruptly approached by their husbands just to unleash themselves. Instead, men need then to show how masterful they are in the negotiating a successful romantic sexual service, through intensive preliminaries in order to gain their partners’ adhesion.

Let it be reminded that the novel is set in a traditional society where the community is viewed as the bearer of rights, and the roles assigned women are designed to ensure that they conform to the needs of the community, rather than the needs of individual women. Women are often socialized into accepting the roles mapped out for them by the community, and attempts to challenge them often lead only to ostracization by the community.

In Buchi Emecheta’s love paradigm shift, women are no longer viewed as custodians but partners in love since they too can appreciate the opportunity and the moment of this sacred sexual exchange. Since they are now valorized in love matters, women enjoy a certain freedom to express their sexual potentials. As a matter of fact, the reader learns that “*she[Ona] in desperation clawed at him[Agbadi], and was grateful when at last she felt him inside her.*” However, Agbadi’s plea: “*Please, Ona, don’t wake the whole household*” indicates his will not to hurt the morale of the crowd, especially that of his other wives who could be humiliated hearing their husband giving pleasure to one of them in the same courtyard. Dashes hope! For, when, the ‘lovebirds’ reach the ‘seventh cloud’, the novel reads that in a passionate thrust, Ona could help screaming, unintentionally alerting the whole household coming out and hurrying in recourse. This brings about scandal, as the narrator dramatizes:

He (Agbadi) came deceptively gently, and so unprepared was she for the thrust which followed that she screamed, so piercingly she was even surprised at her own voice: “Agbadi, you are splitting me into two!”

Suddenly the whole courtyard seemed to be filled with moving people. A voice, a male voice, with later she recognized to be that of Agbadi’s friend Obi Idayi, shouted from the corner of the open courtyard: “Agbadi! Agbadi! Are you all right?”

Again came that low laughter Ona loved and yet loathed so much.

“I am fine, my friend. You go to sleep. I am only giving my woman her pleasures”.

Having hurt her on purpose for the benefit of his people sleeping in the courtyard, he had had his satisfaction. [...] then he was sorry for her. He moved her closer to him and, letting her curl up to him, encouraged her to get the bitterness off her chest. He felt her hot tears flowing, but he said nothing, just went on tracing the contours of those offending nipples. (*The Joys of Motherhood*, pp.17-18)

In effect, Agbadi’s reply: “*I am fine, my friend. You go to sleep. I am only giving my woman her pleasures*”, shows how endeavored the husband is to fulfil his marital duty, that of making his beloved happy. This means that sexual intercourse is very sacred a moment that must be protected and exempts of any disturbance, from anyone and under any pretext. Sexual love seems to be the royal way chosen by Agbadi to express his sincere love to Ona who, at the end, positively appreciates her lover’s performance. It is clear that spouses often express their love through sexual contacts leading to procreation which is the ultimate goal of the union. For, the expected result of sexual love, is descendants or offspring. That is why a union without such fruits is often source of worries and is later, doomed to divorce. But Agbadi’s couple is blessed, they got one daughter Nnu Ego as a fruit of their love. It is the latest gift partners could prove for their mutual love.

In *The Bride Price*, Emecheta shows how Dogo and Uzo love one another. A sincere love which doesn’t exist as an abstract but as a reality punctuated by tangible proofs of love. Indeed, Dogo is deeply affected by his wife’s love that, in return, he doesn’t hesitate to pay the bride price for her to become his legitimate wife, as evidenced in the following passage:

Dogo liked Uzo and Dogo paid for Uzo, and Nna helped them to get a room in Akinwunmi Street and now they had this fat, greedy baby who was eating Auntie Uzo up, making her look too old for her age, making her dry, giving her the appearance of a female giant. "Tonight I am going to tell you a story which I've just heard from a friend who arrived from home yesterday," said Uzo. Actually, I knew the story before but I had forgotten it, and I don't think I have told it to you and Nna-nndo before. This particular one is very long and has two lovely songs in it-the kind of songs you like. (*The Bride Price*, p.22)

This quotation shows how Dogo manifests his love toward Uzo by honoring her in front of her parents, relatives and friends and without mutual love such a fact is hardly completed. In return, when Uzo promises to tell Dogo a story that she had never told to anyone, the bride is preparing him for an erotic night, a very long and romantic sequence, as she insinuates: "*This particular one is very long and has two lovely songs in it-the kind of songs you like.*"

All things considered, sexual love is actually a source of blossoming of the lovers, and can without any doubt, be considered as the gauge the peaceful and harmonious life in society. As such, one can be tempted to say that in everyday life, a dignified man would fulfill this act, a way to secure one's family. This is almost true when each of the lovers strives for peace with everyone, and for the harmony of the homestead. However, love may turn to deviances, mainly when one of the partners slips into a 'root of bitterness' which springs up and causes trouble.

### **3- Eros as a Fatuous Love**

As said earlier, 'Fatuous love' is typified by a whirlwind courtship in which passion motivates a commitment without the stabilizing influence of intimacy. Often, witnessing this leaves others confused about how the couple could be so impulsive. Here, love carries connotations of 'passion' or 'obsession' that the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2007: 1065) respectively defines as "*a very strong feeling of love*" or "*a state of in which a person's mind is completely filled with thoughts of a particular thing or person in a way that is not normal.*" (p.1007) Hence, a passionate is someone, burnt the fire of love, and who has or shows excessive feelings of love. As an obsessed of love, such a person is no more normal since he/she may commit a crime of passion whenever his/her love interests are frustrated. Since everything must always be regulated, nonconformities in love may bring about dramatic way-outs ranging from sexual abuse or sexual assault into forced marriages and to mild transgressions that include simple teasing, offhand comments, or minor isolated incidents in the life cycle, to crimes of passion.

This love psychological whirlwind reminds of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* where Okonkwo's extremist passion to embody societal standards, turns to a mere moral alienation and breaks him down. His exaggerated fear of effeminacy makes him conflicting with himself, his family and his clan. He is no longer a human being since his "ontological" fear to be treated as a coward or an effeminate like his late father Unoka, finally makes Okonkwo impelled by some uncontrollable inner forces, and become a merciless man and gets angry with everybody and about everything, as Thomas Melone's (1973:212) asserts: According to Donald Weinstock and Cathy Ramadan (1978:128): "*À force de cultiver cet état anxieux, il en arrive à un comportement de nervosité.*" A fiery temper that A. D. Makosso, A. O. Matongo Nkouka (2020:2303) conclude "*paves the way to his tragic downfall which is unavoidably to hang himself up. Consequently, Okonkwo commits "nsoani" after another and becomes rapidly a pariah or "a man whose Chi said no despite his affection".*" Yet, the reader shocked at Okonkwo's repulsive attitude to his family, and the degree of his inhumanity to others under the pretext of traditional zealousness.

Similarly, in Buchi's *Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego's social idealization of motherhood and womanhood can be considered as kind of 'factual love' since it finally conditions her to endure all kinds of hardships and humiliations not only from her co-wives, but also her husbands and children, just in the sake of winning societal recognition. This excessive longing for wifehood turns into an entrapment as, the narrator epitomizes:

[...] it occurred to Nnu Ego that she was a prisoner imprisoned by her love for her children. It was not fair, she felt, the way men cleverly used a woman's sense of responsibility to enslave her. They [Nnaife and his new wife, Adaku] knew that a traditional woman like herself [willingly accept her yoke since she] would never dream of leaving her children. (Comments ours. p.153)

From this quotation, one easily infers that in most African traditional patriarchal societies, and verily in Igboland, the discourse on wifehood has traditionally been formulated by men because women rarely have discursive authority and hence have remained voiceless. Yet, to better endorse her position as senior wife, Nnu Ego is expected show a never-failing maturity, even to calmly accept the sounds of Nnaife and Adaku (one of the three wives Nnu Ego's husband inherits from his dead brother) having sexual relations in the room where Nnu Ego herself also sleeps. A very humiliating scene, since Nnaife conditions everybody in the room and even visitors not to disturb this very first love sequence, as the narrator dramatizes:

Nnu Ego fought back tears as she prepared her own bed for Nnaife and Adaku. It was a good thing she was determined to play the role of the mature senior wife; she was not going to give herself any headache when the time came for Adaku to sleep on that bed. She must stuff her ears with cloth and make sure she also stuffed her nipple into the mouth of her young son Adim, when they all lay down to sleep. Far before the last guest left, Nnaife was already telling Oshia to go to bed because it was getting late. [...]

'... Go and spread your mat and sleep; you too, our new daughter Dumbi.'

The neighbours who had come to welcome the new wife took the hint and left.

'Try to sleep, too, senior wife' he said to her, and now Nnu Ego was sure he was laughing at her. (p.138)

Though she had prepared herself for such exaggerating and scandalous scenes, Nnu Ego loses her temper and finally breaks the two 'lovebirds':

[Nnu Ego] tried to block her ears, yet could still hear Adaku's exaggerated carrying on [...] She giggled, she squeaked, she cried and she laughed in turn [...] When Nnu Ego could stand it no longer, she shouted at [her son] Oshia who surprisingly was sleeping through it all: 'Oshia, stop snoring'.

There was a silence from the bed, and then a burst of laughter. Nnu Ego could have bitten her tongue off; what hurt her most was hearing Nnaife remark:

'My senior wife cannot go to sleep. You must learn to accept your pleasures quietly, my new wife Adaku. Your senior wife is like a white lady: she does not want noise.'

Nnu Ego bit her teeth into her baby's night clothes to prevent herself from screaming. (p.139)

As it can be seen, with the idealization of wifehood as women's only option for achieving personal fulfillment and social recognition, loving a husband becomes nothing but an entrapment for women in patriarchal hegemonic societies.

Moreover, since "motherhood defines womanhood" (O. Oyewùmi, 2000: 1096), Nnu Ego likely turns mad and attempts to commit a suicide, jumping over Carter Bridge into a lagoon when her only son passes away. For, she thinks "*she is not a mother anymore [...] she is not a woman anymore [for] she has [...] just lost the child that told the world that she is not barren.*" (*The Joys of Motherhood*, p.65) This kind of attitude obviously makes us realize the blindness with which Nnu Ego's clings to the new faith. In fact, she is no longer herself because the longing for having successful sons like Mama Aby's makes her lose her humanity, Nwakusor who rushes to prevent Nnu Ego to kill herself, notices:

'After all, it's her life' however a thing like that is not permitted in Nigeria; you are simply not allowed to commit suicide in peace, because everyone is responsible for the other person. [...] 'Nnu Ego! Nnu Ego, the child of Agbadi's love, Nnu Ego! What are you doing? What are you trying to do? [...]

They both fell on the cemented ground. Nwakusor's grazed knee started to bleed immediately. Nnu Ego got up quickly, trying to tear herself away like a lunatic, but now there were more people willing to help Nwakusor. [...] Nwakusor, breathing heavily, gasped in Ibo, 'What are trying to do to your husband, your father, your people and your son who is only a few weeks old? You are shaming your womanhood, shaming your motherhood. (pp.63-64)

Undeniably, a close reading of this text ultimately leads to the conclusion that Nnu Ego's poorly digested traditional ethos. Indeed, Nnu Ego's boldness evidences how much she is moulded and nurtured by a traditional narrow mindedness about motherhood. Narrations such as "...things like that is not permitted in Nigeria; you are simply not allowed to commit suicide in peace..." or "*What are trying to do to your husband, your father, your people and your son who is only a few weeks old? You are shaming your womanhood, shaming your motherhood*" show that Nnu Ego's becomes the bane of her immediate environment comprising her children all of whom are subjected to, and suffer, severe emotional as well as psychological abuse.

As it can be seen, when love becomes an obsessive passion, it slips into fanaticism or a blind extremism which dehumanizes the lover since he/she is no longer capable enough to discern what is salutary to him/herself and to the community.

It is interesting to notice that from at a deep level of the paratextual dimension, Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price* helps buttress such a view since the narrative is nothing but an evocation of love in its erotic stances and deviances as the novel revolves around it. Indeed, the title itself stands for a fee that is traditionally paid by the prospective husband's family for the prospective wife, a theme that weaves its way throughout the novel.

One of the striking cases here is that of Aku-nna, the **heroine** who finds herself a dilemma: whether Chike or Obokoshi? In fact, Chike is a man who, for the first time in his life has fallen uncontrollably in love, is plain to see. He really loves Aku-nna. However, over and over again, his father has warned him that he was sticking his neck out dangerously, but Chike wants it **understand** that he is not about to leave for any university without Aku-nna. Indeed, the reading of the novel let us understand that it is with Chike that Aku-nna feels the most comfortable in asking those questions that have haunted her. She identifies with Chike's role, which is both part of the Ibo culture and yet strangely removed from it at the same time. Chike is her teacher in more ways than just at the missionary school that Aku-nna attends, and she falls in love with him. But to say that her relationship with Chike is her final undoing may be too simple. There are more complex factors involved.

Though Chike is backed up by Aku-nna's mother and brother, they are helpless in front of tradition. As a matter of fact, the law forbids a free born to marry a slave. Put differently, for a girl from a good family to marry the descendent of a slave would be an abomination and this is what Aku-nna attempts to do, as Chike is a descendent of a slave. Thus, friendship is one thing whereas marriage is another. From then, Chike sees his love about Aku-nna waning, stealing since Okoboshi and his group unexpectedly appear to contest their relationship. Okoboshi claims his rights on Aku-nna as a free born son and all together begin to laugh, their merriment increases in volume when Okoboshi says: "*Imagine the son of a free man not being able to sit where he wants, just because the Europeans have come to pollute our land.*" (p.120) A kind of fight opposing the two groups is observed. Hence, love which intends to be the gauge of societal harmony dramatically turns into crimes of passion as evidenced through the 'pugilat' that ensues between the three love actors and their rival supporters. A real 'love' battlefield, as the authoress helps the readers figure out:

She (Aku-nna) made her way for him on the mat where she was sitting but before he had a chance to sit down, Okoboshi came forward.

‘I would like you to sit there,’ he said to Aku-nna.

She opened her mouth and closed it again. She saw Chike clenching and unclenching his fists, and her unthinking reaction was rush up to him and hold him tight, begging him not to fight. She dreaded what the outcome might be, with all five of others against him.

“Please, let them alone, please!” she cried loudly, as if her heart would burst open.

[...] Chigboe’s son rose and pulled Aku-nna away from Chike saying as he did so: “stop crying. You can die from crying like that, you know.” Then he added, to her, “Sit where you like, Okoboshi was only joking. Chike refused to sit but stood by front door, still troubled by the anger he was being forced to suppress. Okoboshi wanted him completely out of the hut, he knew what he was going to do. Without warning, Okoboshi walked up to Aku-nna and seized her roughly at the back of her shoulder; he grabbed at both her breasts and starred to squeeze and hurt her. All at once, the self-control that Chike had been taught in years of staying with missionaries left him. He struck Okoboshi a full frontal blow. He added another, and another, waiting for the other rivals to come and fight him in defense of their friend, but he was surprised to see that nobody came forward.” (*The Bride Price*, pp. 119-120)

Analyzing this ‘love dilemma’, and with regard to the unfortunate Aku-nna, a Bride who “*very likely to be sexually exploited not only by the unwanted groom but also would be helped by the groom’s male friends*”, L. Bedana & S. Laishram (2014:072) assert:

There is a stiff competition among the African men when it comes to marriage. They compete for the youngest woman who can be very productive. The fight between Chike and Okoboshi is a clear evidence of the competition. The only difference is that Chike fights for his love of Aku-nna while Okoboshi more for his sexual satisfaction.

Yet, gradually, Aku-nna's heart aches and tears begin to well up in her eyes because it looks as if she is going to be trapped into a marriage that she is helpless to prevent. "*This is the end of all my dreams*", she thought. '*They are kidnapping me*'. [...] 'God, please kill me instead, she prayed, rather than let this be happening to me.' (*The Bride Price*, pp.56, 118). From these wordings, one comes to understand that Aku-nna aches for Chike but paradoxically and unhappily she is forced to marry Okoboshi; a doom that the bride could help escape since only trapped in claws of a patriarchal society where "women have been represented as the 'weaker sex' or the 'second sex' and stereotyped with negative qualities such as sensitive, emotional, fragile, indecisive, submissive etc." (L. Bedana & S. Laishram: 2014, p.070)

### Conclusion

This paper has explored the evolving representation of love issue in contemporary African writing in the context of social modernization. Based on four literary works by Nigerian Igbo writers belonging to different generations (Chinua Achebe and Buchi Emecheta), this study reveals that their idea of love which remained unquestioned in the mainstream of African feminist discourses for long, may no longer be applied to the literary representation of this issue by African authors nowadays. While all the novels clearly subvert the patriarchal discourse on erotic love, for instance, a certain evolution can be observed in how love has been conceptualized. It has ensured that both writers possess a rich literary production ranging from traditional life up to the modern one based on Africa with a slight difference for Emecheta who centers her writings on the gender question and tradition. While Chinua Achebe aims at exalting the African traditional values which were disregarded by Westerners, Emecheta on her side claims for African women's rights with her major themes include the quest for equal treatment, self-confidence and dignity as a woman, among the others. Her novels reflect the sorrow, anguish and strength with which women confront the burdens of traditional African life in a changing society. For the most essential part, it has been admitted that love is a societal bond that people show to one another, manifested through two dimensions, especially love within a family or friendly love and romantic love. It has been demonstrated throughout this paper that characters of the selected novels affectionately express love the ones toward the others. While 'eros' is celebrated as a gauge of harmonious, unfortunately, some relationships instead of merriment have a fatal ending. For it has also been shown that due to love, some characters bunt by the fire of erotic love, turn 'mad', and attempt to break societal standards. They find themselves in a dead-lock as they finally, no longer know which way to follow. Consequently, not only do they feel completely dehumanized and uprooted, but lose their dignity as a worthy people. Haunted by the burden of love self-fulfillment, these characters likely experience a psychological disorder illustrated by a kind of 'blind' extremism if not a sadism.

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