



Aging and the Illusion of Maternal Fulfillment: An Analysis of Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*

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Abstract

Motherhood is often idealized as a source of joy, purpose and identity in African literature. This is largely due to the misconception that it is the ultimate reason for a woman's existence. Much of the scholarship on motherhood in African literature has focused on childbirth, nurturing and caregiving and the early years of motherhood, often overlooking the older stages of motherhood whereby the children are already grown; also referred to as the 'empty nest' stage. This study explores the later stages of a mother's life where old age, loss and loneliness often replace the purpose and identity earlier found in raising children. In most cases, the older mothers fail to find comfort in their marriages anymore while others live with unending expectations that their children will 'rescue' them from the challenges of old age. Within feminist studies, black feminism theory arose to address the specific lived experiences of black women and the intersectionality of race, gender and class in shaping the experiences of black mothers. This paper analyzes the character of Nnu Ego in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* in order to understand older mothering and also to portray a more realistic approach to the study of black motherhood in literature, away from the romanticized idea of motherhood as a source of long-term happiness, identity and fulfillment. The paper employs concepts of black feminism by Kimberle Crenshaw to analyze literary representation of black motherhood past the reproductive years. Literature on black mothers, black motherhood and the experiences of women in literature has been reviewed. A qualitative research design has been used and analysis of the novel done using close textual reading. Data was collected from the primary text, supplemented by secondary sources such as the internet, literary journals and periodicals. A literature review matrix and theoretical framework matrix were the main tools for data collection. The results of the study are that motherhood is not a lifetime guarantee of fulfillment as brought out in Nnu Ego's case where she dies alone by the roadside and that aging of mothers makes them invisible in the society because their worth is tied to their reproductive years.

Keywords: Mother, Black Motherhood, Black Feminism, intersectionality

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I. Introduction

In African literature, motherhood is often celebrated as the epitome of a woman's life, a marker of a woman's maturity and a source of societal recognition as a complete woman. Many scholars have explored motherhood in the early stages when a mother is able to bear and nurture children. For instance, scholars have established the notion of motherhood as women's sacred duty, others have explored the oppression of mothers, first by the colonizers and secondly by the male figures in their lives. Yet, other scholars have observed that mothers are tortured by societal and cultural expectations of what motherhood should be, and they have not been accorded any avenues for self-expression. While discussing about motherhood, other literary analysts have argued that a woman in Africa is defined by her ability to bear children and that for any marriage to be fulfilling, there must be children (Tanjim 2016, Bhatt 2023, Waweru 2014). This implies that in many narratives in the African context, the identity of mothers has been described through their ability to bear and take care of their children, and she is expected to find her fulfillment through this.

However, Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* challenges this assertion. The novel presents the often-unspoken truths; that motherhood can be a source of loneliness, disappointment and even lack of visibility especially in the later years. The text can be said to be a critique of motherhood in an African context as it features a mother who gives her all to educate her children who in the end abandon her.

In her criticism of Emecheta's *The Joys* (1979), Umeh (1980) argues that Emecheta defies the common African literary presentation of motherhood as honorific, illustrating that children do not always have close, loving relationships with their moms into adulthood. The scholar contends that it must have been challenging for Emecheta to create controversial drawings of African motherhood that defy the conventions of literature, particularly when dealing with such a delicate topic, and contends that: "Emecheta's ideas in the novel reflect her long exposure in British society to the detriment of her Nigerian background..." (p. 190). Umeh concludes that Emecheta exposes a different perspective of womanhood, different from the one exposed by male writers, of the mother as gold, which contributed to the use of motherhood in the oppression of women and makes significant contribution in understanding motherhood in African context. This paper examines motherhood in later years and the loneliness that comes as a result and attempts to demystify the illusion of maternal fulfillment through Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. In order to understand the literary representation of older mothers, the historical evolution of studies of women in African literature and the representation of societal expectations on motherhood is necessary.

Women in African Literature: From Marginalization to Agency

African literature has evolved with regard to its representation of women characters in literature. Historically, women have undergone many challenges in transcending patriarchal norms and societal expectations. According to Ba (2020) there are many vital insights into the transformative influence of feminist movements on the depiction of female characters and the backdrop of African literature. Just like many other parts of the world, women have often undergone discrimination and marginalization within literary circles. Patriarchy in most African societies has subordinated women within literature and the overarching social contexts. In most cases, women are commonly represented in adverse and limited manners that promote stereotypes and entrench gender roles. However, feminist movements have challenged such narratives and encouraged re-evaluation of women's perspectives and roles in literature.

As mentioned above, the prevalent evolution of women's roles portrays changes in societal attitudes towards female empowerment and gender equality. Therefore, feminist ideologies have played a critical role in remodeling female characters into multidimensional depictions. Ba (2020) recognizes the transformational impact of feminism based on how African writers empower and portray female characters. Women are no longer portrayed in relation to men, but rather as people with their own sense of individuality and agency contrary to the past norms. By avoiding representing women as objects of male desires, or mothers and wives, feminist ideologies have inadvertently challenged the patriarchal structures.

Despite feminism-oriented developments, chauvinistic undertones are still evident in most societies and they perpetuate misrepresentation of women in literature. Jegede (2014) contends that, "Conventional societal expectations and gender norms continue to influence how female characters are portrayed by perpetuating stereotypes of mistreatment and subservience..." (p. 30). Although people in the modern-day society recognize the role of women in the society, gender expectations still limit how women characters are portrayed.

Different scholarly works highlight the sociocultural contexts that modify such representations and pinpoint women's high status and societal contributions. In specific cultures, women embody hope for growth in the society. However, very few narratives represent the positive depiction of women as they are commonly juxtaposed within the themes of marginalization and oppression, which portrays the intricacies of gender dynamics in most societies due to the fact that black motherhood has often been used by patriarchy as a way of marginalizing women and turning them into overly submissive beings. In the changing world, the influence of conventional systems is still felt even by women who by the standards of the society, seem to have evolved.

Often, political and sociocultural contexts influence women representation in literature. Gwendolyn (1995) contends that, historically, women writers have experienced challenges transcending the social expectations and patriarchal norms. However, feminist movements have been influencing the depiction of female characters to represent and recognize women's empowerment and agency within literature. The mainstream feminist movements have in their fight for equal representation of women and men, overlooked the uniqueness of the experiences of black women. Issues that are pertinent in the African context such as motherhood have also been overlooked. Due to this, scholars have sought to understand the concept of motherhood, because mothers are revered in African communities. However, scholarship has been done on the young, nurturing and reproductive mothers, and limited attention has been given to older mothers.

In the modern context, the literary representation of women by women writers has changed. Women are portrayed as heroines in narratives and given other roles that portray their agency. Female characters have been seen to assume gender roles that have been traditionally a preserve for men and all this has contributed to women's progress from marginalization to resistance.

Motherhood and Societal Expectations in *The Joys of Motherhood*

Motherhood is a socially constructed institution that is deeply influenced by aspects of tradition such as patriarchy. Black mothers are brought out in literature as revered beings and they are supposedly 'worshipped' by the society. However, this is evidently a patriarchal tactic of causing oppression to mothers through motherhood. In *The Joys*, Emecheta portrays motherhood as a key aspect of womanhood among the Igbo community where the novel is set. Through the character of Nnu Ego, the author explores the pain that mothers feel when they are deemed to be barren by the community. They view themselves as failures. According to Igbo society, womanhood is only defined through motherhood as seen in Nnu Ego's case. The intersection of gender and cultural expectations unravel through Nnu Ego when she gets a son because her identity and worth as a mother are pegged on her ability to bear sons. This is a form of oppression on black mothers that black feminists seek to address. Jorgensen (2018) observes that:

The *Joys of Motherhood* begins as a confrontation with oppression when the author introduces the protagonist, Nnu Ego, who has lost her only child and that she is faced with her co-dependence on socially constructed roles (which she has subconsciously accepted as her own) and desires to commit suicide (p. 62).

This means that the society has held mothers captive through its oppressive expectations of what motherhood should be and even gone mute on the pain that mothers go through in order to fulfill what is expected of them. The co-dependence felt by Nnu Ego is as a result of fear that she harbors to what the society will think of her now that she has lost her only child. Nnaife emphasizes the importance of having sons during the naming ceremony of his second born son Adimabua which means "now I am two." He tells the world that now he has two sons, so he is two persons in one, which means he is a very important man (p.110). The worth of women is pegged on not only being mothers, but by mothering sons as the society views them as superior to girls.

Due to the societal preference for male children, mothers are forced to enforce similar ideals even to their children. The author states:

Even when it came to sharing the piece of meat for the two children, one of the duties of the woman of the house, she pointed out to Dumbi that she must respect Oshia, as he was the heir and the future owner of the family. Their few possessions...the four-poster iron bed which Nnaife had bought from his journey to Fernando Po and the large wall mirrors...were things of immense value to Nnu Ego, and if her son never grew up to be a farmer, she wanted to make sure that whatever there was, was his (p. 150).

Nnu Ego takes part in dignifying male children over female children. It is ironical that she supports the same system that oppresses mothers like her for failure to be mothers to sons. The desire of a mother to protect her family is seen in Nnu Ego's decision to lecture the young Dumbi (Adaku's daughter) concerning the position of Oshia as the heir apparent of the few belongings they have. There is portrayal of social inequality based on gender even through the sharing of food, where male children are given the larger portions of meat than daughters. The importance of male children is further seen when Adaku delivers her first pair of twin girls. Nnaife does not appreciate their birth and he even questions Nnu Ego, "What are these? Could you not have done better?" (p.156) However painful this may sound, it is the reality among the Igbo people, and it makes mothers desperate to live to it. For instance, when Adaku delivers a male child who dies of convulsions a few weeks after birth, she questions God as to why He does not take one of the girls instead of her son, which reflects how society has conditioned mothers not to think about their personal value as human beings but to live up to societal sanctions that subordinates them through motherhood. Hooks (1981) critiques the way patriarchal societies, within the context of black women's experiences, have historically placed undue importance on women's reproductive roles and emphasizes that women should be valued beyond their roles as mothers. Although Hook observes the African society's gender discrimination, mothers like Nnu Ego do not resist these oppressive structures, rather they struggle to fit in to the societal definition of motherhood.

The importance of the male child is further emphasized when Adaku has a quarrel with Nnu Ego and judgement is made in favor of Nnu Ego although she was the one who had wronged Adaku. Ezigbo (1997) asserts that the relationship between Nnu Ego and Adaku illustrates the complexities of relationships between females in the novel within a male dominated society, and that, while women share common struggles, their different responses to these challenges reflect the diverse ways in which women navigate and resist oppression. Since Adaku does not have any male children, Nwakusor judges in favor of Nnu Ego:

Don't you know that according to the custom of our people, you, Adaku the daughter of who, you are committing an unforgivable sin? Our life starts from immortality and ends in immortality. If Nnaife had been married to only you, you would have ended his life on this round of his visiting earth. I know you have children but they are girls, who in few, years' time will go to build another man's immortality (p. 24).

Adaku is therefore discriminated against for having female children. In Igbo society; it is not enough for one to be just a mother, being a mother to male children accords a woman preference and sometimes favoritism in the society. The words uttered by Nwakusor are heavy and they reflect the position of the traditional Africanists towards male children and their role in building the man's lineage. The purpose for female babies is

to build another man's immortality and are therefore deemed as only useful to their husbands. Delving into the traditions of the Igbo people, one can feel Adaku's pain when she is disgraced by men who are supposed to help her and her cowife to coexist in peace. Lorde (1984) contends that practices like preference for the male gender devalues women and strips them of their agency and reinforces their oppression and advocates for equality between the sexes. Such gender dynamics affect the societal view of mothers without children and deny mothers the happy experience of just being a mother, to either a son or a daughter. The society has set a high bar for women in order to achieve complete 'womanhood.'

Emecheta portrays the Igbo society as one that expects a mother to sacrifice her time, energy and even social relationships for her children; that should be the source of her joy and fulfillment. When Nnu Ego gets married to Nnaife, she has to move to Lagos to live with her new husband. According to Mohanty & Torres (1991), social, educational, and economic institutions sustain dependence ties based on race, sex, and class, which are the connections among women in the Third World. Furthermore, according to the two academics, certain portrayals of African moms depict them as being economically and politically dependent or as having no other employment options than prostitution. In the 1979 novel, *The Joys*, the moms assist their husbands in providing for their families' everyday necessities. Even though they are raising the kids, they still have to work to pay for things like clothing for the kids.

Nnu Ego struggles vainly to make ends meet:

Nnu Ego still sold firewood, garri and other foodstuffs. Every morning neighbors could hear her calling "Oshia, Adim, twins, wake up and let us go to the waterside! "There she would buy firewood for the day's sale and they would all carry it home. She normally left Nnamdi with Iyawo Itsekiri..." (p. 174).

Nnu Ego engages in petty trade and leaves her youngest child Nnamdi with Iyawo so she can fend for her family. The children are also involved in helping their mother to carry firewood which she later sells to pay their fees and buy food. Nnu Ego paves a path for other black mothers to get help from other women so they can provide for their children. Although Nnu Ego is not the modern educated woman, she has the wisdom to know that she should seek help when possible so she can carry out other motherhood duties so as to fulfill societal expectations.

Nnu Ego further cries. "On my life, I have to work myself to the bone to look after them, I have to give them all. And if I am lucky enough to die in peace, I have given them my soul" (p.186). Amadiume (1987) discusses the socioeconomic dimensions of the character's struggles, with the argument that Buchi Emecheta highlights the economic dependency that exacerbates women's oppression. For her, motherhood involves giving your sweat and blood for your children and even in death, she hopes to have given them all she can. According to Hooks (2000), the society exploits women's labour through the glorification of the sacrifice of mothers and this is a form of oppression for them. Such societal expectations pressure the mothers beyond their ability to ensure that their families are well provided for.

Despite the expectations that the society has on women, Emecheta brings out instances where for instance, Nnu Ego questions the extent of her sacrifice towards her children. Other times she regrets for not having formed good relationships with other women in the community as they would have helped her in her time of need. This shows that there is an attempt by Nnu Ego to resist the patriarchal society that has held her hostage as a woman and as a mother. All these expectations face Nnu Ego when she is able to provide productive labour. She is young, strong and can do any jobs to provide for her children and even to educate Oshia and Adim. The young and productive mother has been analyzed by various scholars, however, the older mother character has not been given enough attention. The question remains, what is the literary representation of older mothers who are past the stage of active childbearing and can no longer work to provide for their children?

Aging and The Illusion of Maternal Fulfillment in The Joys of Motherhood

Emecheta demystifies the irony in the title of her novel, *The Joys of Motherhood*. She builds an elaborate story to demolish the illusion, while at the same time supposing to uphold the age-old idea that 'mother is gold.' Indeed, a mother of sons should be happy; such happiness should help her to bear the grind of poverty. Underneath all this so-called contentment is the motif of the lonely and all-suffering mother. Umeh (1987) argues:

"...Nnu Ego gradually realizes that motherhood has not brought fulfillment. After years of sacrificing everything for her family, our heroine is forced to understand that the joy of being a mother was the joy of giving all to your children. Instead of drawing images of the traditional vision of children as a source of joy and wealth, who more than amply repay the trouble of their upbringing, Emecheta portrays children as the millstones around the mother's neck and as greedy parasites who suck their mother to death (p.3)."

This implies that Nnu Ego is exploited and betrayed by her children, and when they mature, they do not care for her as she had expected. According to Umeh's assertion, children are viewed as a great burden rather than as a source of fulfillment for mothers. The scholar deviates from traditional ideological perspectives of motherhood that depict children as sources of wealth for the family and the eventual fulfillment of womanhood, to a different approach that exposes the reality about motherhood.

Nnu Ego believes that children bring joy to their parents in their old age. After the birth of her son, for the first time in her life, Nnu Ego completely embraces Nnaife, and she feels satisfied. While giving her kid a bath and preparing food for her husband, she believes that she will have a nice old age and that someone will survive her to call her mother. Emecheta states:

Nnu Ego accepted Nnaife as the father of her child and the fact that this child was a son gave her a sense of fulfillment for the first time in her life. She was now sure, as she bathed her baby son and cooked for her husband, that her old age would be happy, that when she died there would be somebody left behind to refer to her as 'mother' (p.20).

Collins (1990) observes that black women, particularly mothers, are often judged by their ability to adhere to socially constructed notions that limit their identities and marginalize them as seen in Nnu Ego whose fulfillment is pegged on her role as a mother as dictated by the society. The socially constructed notions of motherhood affect black mothers like Nnu Ego who persevere because she hopes for a good old age through her children.

Nnu Ego further cries. "On my life, I have to work myself to the bone to look after them, I have to give them all. And if I am lucky enough to die in peace, I have given them my soul" (p.186). One would expect that all this sacrifice would give Nnu Ego happiness, peace and fulfillment in her old age, however, she is left alone to suffer and eventually loses her sanity out of neglect by her children. Amadiume (1987) discusses the socioeconomic dimensions of the character's struggles, with the argument that Buchi Emecheta highlights the economic dependency that exacerbates women's oppression. For her, motherhood involves giving your sweat and blood for your children and even in death, she hopes to have given them all she can. According to Davis (2014), the society exploits women's labour through the glorification of the sacrifice of mothers and this is a form of oppression for them. In the modern-day Lagos, mothers are expected to work hard to help their husbands as evident in the case of Nnu Ego, Adaku and other mothers in Lagos who labour to provide for their families.

After the arrival of the colonialists who introduce formal education, Nnu Ego works hard in her petty trade to educate her sons. She feels that by educating them, they will have a better life than hers. Oshia gets admission to a college in Warri and Nnu Ego proudly accompanies him to his new school and advises him not to go the way of the rich boys in his school, so he can succeed. She hopes that by educating her children, they will in turn care for her in her old age. Nnu Ego fends for her children in the absence of her husband. According to Stratton (1994), Nnu Ego's character is a clear representation of the sacrifices and struggles of women are confined to their roles as mothers and wives and further argues that Emecheta uses Nnu Ego's story to criticize the idealization of motherhood and the societal pressures that dictate a woman's worth based on her ability to bear children. When Nnaife is forcefully conscripted into the army, she assumes the sole responsibility of feeding the children and taking them to school through her petty trade. Initially, she worries as to whether she will manage the task ahead of her:

Nnu Ego gave in to all the suppressed emotion that was inside her. Nnu Ego's desperate situation makes her confide to her son Ubani as she rhetorically discloses; "How are we going to manage? what are we going to do with all these children? I can't afford to feed us all as well as paying the rent (p. 165).

Emecheta exposes the mental torture that Nnu Ego goes through when she realizes that she has to care for all her children on her own. However, she is able to shoulder all the responsibilities and to educate her children. The resilience of Nnu Ego as a mother is unbeaten by the hard conditions that she faces, sometimes even extreme hunger that almost kills her son. Nnu Ego is a wise mother, who knows how to deal with tough situations well in order to succeed according to her plans. After the burial of her father Agbadi, Nnu Ego goes back to Lagos through Adankwo's insistence. She is shocked to realize that a lot had changed in the few months she had been away at Ibuza "...there were four other kiosks where hers had been alone" (p. 201). She realizes that she cannot compete with her neighbors, who already have established their businesses and further realizes that getting a market stall would be very costly. She makes a decision to sell firewood as it does not require much starting capital and since other women find it tiring, she would have many clients. Therefore, Nnu Ego goes through a difficult period since her business is new and as she struggles to bring up her children, she realizes that she no longer fits in with Adaku and the rest of her friends in Lagos. Out of wisdom, she decides to keep her distance from them, and lives in solace that: "one day her boys would be men" (p. 202). This shows that her comfort is encompassed in the growth of her children, specifically her sons. The preference of the male gender stems from the traditions of the Igbo community which appreciates the male children over female children. It is evident that black mothers also perpetuate gender discrimination on their children and this is a

concern for black feminists, as they fight against sexism. Nnu's hope is that Oshia and Adim will be her source of help as she ages, although sadly, they neglect her until she dies alone.

Nnu Ego advises her son Oshiagently regarding her lack of money to pay for his school fees and that of Adim, his brother because their father had gone to war and the money she had is finished. She tells him: "you remember what I have been telling you, that you are handsome? Now I know that you are clever as well...you did well on the farm and when you came here, you caught up with your education as if you had not missed a day. I know you will make it" (p. 219). She employs a nice and motherly approach to convince her son to start private lessons as they are cheaper than going to a real school. Although Oshia agrees unwillingly, he obeys his mother as there is nothing, he can do about it.

Nnu Ego addresses Adim's poor performance. She tells him:

Look Adim, it seems I am alone with you in this game of living...Ibuz 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...so far you and your sister Taiwo are my only hope...wipe the tears of shame from my eyes. Face your schoolwork, it is your salvation (p. 272).

Nnu Ego's words, filled with love touch Adim's heart, especially when he looks at her and realizes how old she looked because of her constant worries about her children. The society blames black mothers for every failure that happens to one's children despite their efforts to nurture them. Mothers can only hope that their children will work hard to protect their mothers from shame and humiliation. On realizing this, Adim thanks his mother and is determined to do well in his forthcoming examination. Nnu Ego's actions point at the wisdom of black mothers in handling tough situations that require a mother's gentility. This trait reveals the agency of black women, which black feminists champion for in overcoming the challenges that their children face and it is centered on the need to foster resilience and perseverance in them. In her old age, Nnu Ego suffers alone.

Emecheta states:

Nnu Ego in old age was going downhill very fast. It was not that she was physically poor, her daughters sent help once in a while. However, what actually broke her was, month after month, expecting to hear from her son in America, and from Adim too, who went to Canada, and failing to do so. It was from rumors that she heard that Oshia had married(p.200).

This alludes to the pain and loneliness that Nnu Ego goes through in her old age. The fact that her son Oshia marries without informing her and does not show any interest in her wellbeing causes her a lot of pain as a mother who had given her all for her children.

Nnu Ego regrets not having meaningful friendships with other women when she realizes that her husband Nnaife, who was now in jail, resented her for all the challenges they had gone through in life. Emecheta posits:

Nnu Ego told herself that she would have been better off had she had time to cultivate those women who had offered her hands of friendship, but she had never had the time. What with worrying over this child, this pregnancy, and the lack of money couples with the fact that she never had adequate outfits to wear to visit her friends, she had shied away from friendship, telling herself that she did not need any friends, she had enough in her family. But had she been right? Nnaife had looked at her with so much venom...(p.282).

Nnu Ego laments her lack of meaningful relationships with fellow women. However, she attributes this to her commitment to her children and her husband and lack of good clothes to wear during such occasions. This exposes the pressures that mothers go through, both self-inflicted and also from the society in order to be good, responsible and present mothers to their children. Nnu observes that Nnaife's family blames her for bringing up her children badly because Oshia who was in America did not care at all about her. She still had three young children with her, and with the first flush of youthful age gone, she knew she would be better off in Ibuz because there would be no rent to pay, and she could plant food at the back of her hut. These thoughts break Nnu's hut, as her hopes in being taken care of by her children are dashed. Unfortunately, even this behavior is blamed on her by the community.

In conclusion, Nnu Ego dies alone by the roadside despite having given her all to her children. Her sacrifices as a mother bear no fruit for none cares about her. Emecheta states:

When her children heard of her certain death, they all, even Oshia, came home. They were all sorry that she had died before they were in a position to give their mother a good life. She had the noisiest and most costly second burial Ibuz had ever seen, and a shrine was made in her name, so that her grandchildren could appeal to her should they be barren. Nnu Ego had it all, yet still did not answer prayers for children(p. 224).

The question remains as to whether all the sacrifices that Nnu Ego did for her children were worth it. Through a close examination of Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, it is evident that Nnu Ego's sons and daughters knew the right thing was to give their mother a good life but they failed in this. Hypocritically, they

prepare a big funeral for her and hope to appease her through it. Despite her sacrifice, Nnu Ego is labelled as a bad mother for failing to answer her children's prayers in death.

II. Conclusion

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta uses Nnu Ego to expose the illusion that motherhood guarantees joy and fulfillment. When she grows old, the fallacy that children bring stability and care for their aging mothers is exposed through the lack of reciprocity from her children when she needs them most. This predicament facing the aged mothers shows a crack in the system whereby mothers are celebrated and revered in their reproductive years and neglected during their vulnerable years. By demystifying the illusion of maternal fulfillment, this paper is a call for a reexamination of the cultural and economic systems that create definitions of ideal motherhood while neglecting them once they are deemed no longer productive. The results of the study are that motherhood is not a lifetime guarantee of fulfillment as brought out in Nnu Ego's case where she dies alone by the roadside and that aging of mothers makes them invisible in the society because their worth is tied to their reproductive years.

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