

World, Class, Women
*Global Literature, Education,
and Feminism*

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CHAPTER 4

The Triumphant but Tragic Wealth of the Poor

*Buchi Emecheta Meets Hernando De Soto's
Informal Markets*

Utopia in the Market

The Mystery of Capital, Hernando De Soto's empirical study on the global informal economy, contends that poverty is an illusion.

[I]n Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, . . . most of the poor already possess the assets they need to make a success of capitalism . . . The value of savings among the poor is, in fact, immense—forty times all the foreign aid received throughout the world since 1945. In Egypt, for instance, the wealth that the poor have accumulated is worth fifty-five times as much as the sum of all direct foreign investment ever recorded there, including the Suez Canal and the Aswan Dam. In Haiti, the poorest nation in Latin America, the total assets of the poor are more than one hundred fifty times greater than all the foreign investment received since Haiti's independence from France in 1804. If the United States were to hike its foreign aid budget to the level recommended by the United Nations—0.7 percent of national income—it would take the richest country on earth more than 150 years to transfer to the world's poor resources equal to those they already possess (5).

From a series of interviews and case studies of unlicensed local trade and vendors, De Soto concludes that poor people already have a substantial amount of assets, more even than the values of the stock exchange and international financial institutions combined.¹ However, non-Western peoples have been unable to use their assets—mostly labor and resources—to

the fullest efficiency because of government regulations such as fees, permits, oversight, and licensing, which curtail capital investment incentives by limiting access.² Insisting that the problem of poverty is caused by too much public control, De Soto's main contention is that developing nations need an integrated property system that standardizes representations of value and minimizes the public's role in "fine-tuning" the economy, thus allowing all people equally and democratically to realize the potential of their capital.

Picking up on the thematization of privacy as freedom in prior chapters—and what this has meant for women, politics, and the public—this chapter shows how De Soto's empirical research on informal markets fails to account for the economic problems of the poor caused by neoliberal economic reforms, deregulation, privatization, private labor contracting, and power. By reading Buchi Emecheta's 1979 novel *The Joys of Motherhood*, this chapter explores how the poor are losing assets through neoliberalization, in particular, through the privatization of public interests which has strengthened imperialism. In the words of Kenyan novelist, playwright, political dissident, and cultural theorist Ngugi Wa Thiong'o:

There are other absurdities. Mobuto of Zaire, in an act of supreme African authenticity, had ceded a whole territory many times the size of New Zealand to a West German rocket company. A group of African leaders recently begged France to send troops to Chad to protect French legitimate interests, threatened by "imperialist" Libya. Moi of Kenya has given military bases to U.S.A. without a debate in parliament, with Kenyans only later learning about the "secret" deal through a debate in U.S. Congress. One could quote other even more incredible episodes, of the callous massacre of children, of the equally callous genocide of part of a population and all by native leaders on behalf of imperialism. (80)

The commodification of knowledge which De Soto invites as the solution to world poverty contributes, in Emecheta's assessment, to deepening hardships among Third World workers due to depletions in public resources and protections and is implemented only through institutionalized violence, corporate and military alliances, and the militarization of civil society. Based in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ideas of the subject as constituted through primitive desires, De Soto formulates a conception of market freedom as a naturalized sphere of production devoid of the controls that Freud attributed to maturity and civilization, while democracy is brought into play as unmediated, infantile consumer desire bubbling up beneath the authoritarian paternal prohibition instituted by public oversight. In other words, democracy appears as the Id of consumer desire held in tow by the Super-Ego of the nation-state. De Soto's solution to poverty by instituting internal property law reforms

and human labor commodification does not take into account important changes in national and international power, capital consolidation, public disinvestment, ideological manipulation, labor exploitation, and global warfare.

This chapter builds on the premise of the last two chapters that literature projects values that serve to construct, frame, and instruct people about future possibilities, identifications, affiliations, agency, action, and belief systems. Responding to the same informal economies that inform De Soto's work, and like De Soto describing the new labor conditions and relations of production in the global economy, Emecheta's literature, like De Soto's economics, is currently participating in imagining social actors, interactions, and mobilized identities within new global relations of capital and of power. Unlike in De Soto's market/utopic call for deregulation and procedural regularity, Emecheta, however, shows how new regimes of global power have incapacitated ordinary people from satisfying basic needs, let alone acquiring assets. Indicating that literature answers the call to identity heard in capital's needs for labor and resources, Emecheta demonstrates the tragic outcomes to the poor when public assets like education are reconfigured according to the rules of the market,³ that is, through the logics of privatization, contracting, decentralization, antiauthoritarianism, competition, flexibility, autonomous agency, and militarization.⁴ Emecheta shows how De Soto's plan for the privatization of labor—turning laboring people into private companies to be hired on a contract or piece basis for broader flexibility—actually limits the possibility of accumulation for the poor.

Many critics have praised *The Joys of Motherhood* as exemplary of an African woman's experience of and resistance to patriarchal power and/or of the construction of a strategic ethnic identity to counter imperialism. "Emecheta's reputation in world letters as a major voice in African women's liberation," writes, for example, Marie Umeh in the introduction to a collection of critical essays on Emecheta's work, "rests on her protest against the victimization of women in Ibuza society and, by extension, in all societies" (xxiv). "[I]n the works of Emecheta . . . and others," Florence Stratton argues, "it is frequently within the writer's adaptive integration into her text of such elements as myth, rites, and social practices that the defining features of a distinctively female literary tradition lie" (144). Critics generally place Emecheta's work within a literary tradition started by Flora Nwapa with her 1966 novel *Efuru*. A response to Chinua Achebe's 1959 classic *Things Fall Apart*, *Efuru*, like *The Joys of Motherhood*, explores women's role in traditional Igbo life still ordered around seasonal agriculture, small-time trade, and ritualized kin and community relations. Moreover, critics often trace this body of writing back to the 1929 Igbo Aba

Women's War, *Ogu Umunwanyi*, when women organized in markets and mobilized against native courts, women's taxation, and British colonial presence. Susan Andrade, for example, sees the *Efuru* tradition, like the Aba Women's War, as women's "self-inscription into history" because it "interrogates the imperialist authority that Hegel symbolizes" and thus disrupts power by dialoguing with it (97).

It is important to stop treating the speaking and recognizing of identity on aesthetic and cultural terms alone as a force strong enough to fend off imperialism, patriarchy, and consolidated power, and to start thinking anew the relationships between literary production, state power, and the retreat of the nation-state before the rise of global corporate visions.⁵ As Patrick Hogan emphasizes, the Women's War was a response to the ways women "were rapidly losing out in the new economic structure" (176). The focus of Nnu Ego's plight in *Joys of Motherhood* is not only on how she constructs an autonomous identity through giving representation to an oppressed gender and ethnic minority heretofore neglected, but also, and perhaps more fundamentally in global terms, on how she gradually loses an autonomous identity through colonial and then postcolonial De Soto-like market reforms. As Hogan points out, when Nigeria was integrated into the world economy, "[W]omen lost the considerable security and independence they enjoyed in traditional culture[. . . T]raditionally, women had often substantial wealth" (174). *The Joys of Motherhood* centers on how Nnu Ego loses her identity during a time of national transition into a wage economy set up to keep labor costs low and public obligations minimal in order to ensure profitability for foreign investments and war.

Understanding cultural analysis as a continual recognition of proliferating differences responds to a liberal desire to see globalization as happening through an accumulation of cultures rather than as an increasing privatization of public functions which *The Joys of Motherhood* and Emecheta's other works document. This chapter follows on prior chapters' criticism of how certain liberal constructions of identity depend on a type of privacy which—by reducing difference to culture devoid of structural economies—holds representation as the key to the global advancement of equality much in the same way as does *The Mystery of Capital*. This position assumes that everybody is equal before the aesthetic and the law just as they are assumed to be equal before the object of consumption. The waning of public power which De Soto advocates for the sake of underclass political autonomy becomes the very wedge through which such autonomy becomes an impossibility for Nnu Ego.

Under neoliberal regimes, right-wing pundits like De Soto have appropriated and frequently monopolized discourses of hope. Wendy Brown states it well:

Throughout that decade [of the 1980s], "freedom" was deployed by the Right to justify thuggish mercenaries in Central America, the expenditure of billions on cold war defense, the deregulation of toxic enterprise, the destruction of unions with "right to work" protection, the importance of saluting—and the blasphemy of burning—the flag[. . .] In the contemporary popular refrain, freedom other than free enterprise was cast as selfish, infantile, or killing [as in the "sexual emancipation" that, in such perspectives, led to the AIDS crisis], and placed in ignominious counterpoise to commitment, maturity, discipline, sacrifice, and sobriety[. . .] Contemporary disorientation about freedom also appears consequent to the Right's programmatic attack on the welfare state since the mid-1970s[. . .] Thus, as the Right promulgated an increasingly narrow and predominantly economic formulation of freedom and claimed freedom's ground as its own, liberals and leftists lined up behind an equally narrow and predominantly economic formulation of equality. (9–10)

The move of "freedom" to the right has meant the reformulation of freedom from a democratic principle to a false promise of economic mobility. As Peter McLaren elaborates, "The very meaning of freedom has come to denote the freedom to structure the distribution of wealth and to exploit workers more easily across national boundaries by driving down wages to their lowest common denominator and by eviscerating social programs designed to assist laboring humanity. Territories that were once linked to national interests have given way to networks inscribed within world markets independent of major national political constraints" (32). The economism or economic reductionism with which Marxist theory is charged dwarfs in comparison to the economic turn in such right-wing free-market prophecies. The formulation of political struggle around "the desire to participate in shaping the conditions and terms of life" (4) has been translated into a widespread belief that access to commodities should secure democratic freedom because commodities grant rights to self-determination, so that the commodity actually holds freedom within it. Emecheta's biting appraisal of liberalization provides a language of critique that could be used to reclaim, for the left, a politics based in public rather than private notions of freedom.

Patrick Hogan has recognized that this faith in ultimate freedom through the acquisition of Western commodities mobilizes sentiment about the Third World, where Western knowledge is said to offer an egalitarian escape from the oppressions of indigenous traditions and customs. If only, such logics claim, Western practices of economic autonomy and independence were adopted as counters to patriarchal tribal systems, then not only would fundamentalism disappear, but women would also at last be free. This is the kind of rationale, for example, behind the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, and the rush to "liberate" Iraq and bring "freedom" to the Iraqi people, and then the "surprise"—expressed by the military and the

press alike—that the Iraqis did not flock into the streets to cheer the advancement of the Marines as their “liberators,” and that some even resisted. As Hogan elaborates,

[C]olonized women in regions of high intensity contact are unlikely to be freed from indigenous patriarchal oppression, except in very limited ways and in very limited circumstances. Indeed, European intervention seems, on the whole, more likely to worsen this oppression than to ameliorate it, for it often leads to reactionary rigidification and in some cases blocks indigenous efforts at reform. In addition to living with the continuing and perhaps even worsened effects of indigenous patriarchy—often without the corresponding rights and institutional support of traditional women’s communities—the colonized woman in the region of contact is likely to find herself burdened by European constraints as well. (179)

Emecheta, argues Hogan, foregrounds how the usual way that market culture is organized inhibits and restricts women’s “ability to earn and to sustain themselves and their children through productive labor” (183), reducing gender to an exchange value—a mere representation without identity—often pushing women into slavery to patriarchy and imperialism, and devastating both mobility and freedom.

Having formed a research institute—*Instituto Libertad y Democracia*—to study Peru’s informal economy in the 1980s, De Soto wrote a book called *The Other Path* (*El otro sendero*), which claimed to have found a path to freedom for the poor different and more expedient than the solutions offered at the time by Peru’s Maoist guerrillas Sendero Luminoso or by the socialist-based APRA party (*Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana*, or the American Popular Revolutionary Party) then in power under Peruvian president Alan Garcia.⁶ De Soto sent out researchers into poor, urban communities, asking how long it would take and how much money it would require to turn a house or a business into a capital good, which could generate profits or secure investments. He collected statistics documenting that it often took generations to complete all the steps for legalization. For example, just for the initial expenses of doing business, it took ten months and \$1036.60 to complete the bureaucratic process to establish an industry, eighty-three months to get permits for building, twenty-eight months to get approvals for land development, and additional costs, too, for developing transportation, starting markets, and building stores. If the state itself were the principle owner, the proceedings took even longer, since the cost of state adjudication was estimated at \$526,019. Remaining informal cost less but at the expense of accumulating inventory, long-term planning, and infrastructural investments (*The Other Path*, 132–146). De Soto’s

suggestions for neoliberal economic reform through easing legalization, dismantling public interventions, denationalizing industries and banking, and privatization in the name of self-determination later became the platform for Mario Vargas Llosa’s campaign for presidency⁷ (Vargas Llosa wrote the introduction to *The Other Path*) and still later became the ideological lever of what Peruvians have called “Fuji-Shock,” or rather Alberto Fujimori’s lifting of price ceilings overnight, when prices escalated to the point where there was a night of national crying, as Peruvians described it. Endorsed by the likes of Margaret Thatcher, Milton Friedman, Francis Fukuyama, Javier Perez de Cuellar, Bill Bradley, William Buckley Jr., and Jeanne Kirkpatrick, *The Mystery of Capital* is meant to extend De Soto’s Peruvian researches globally, perhaps even to extend his model for the “economic miracle” which has increased destitution in much of Peru and delegitimated Fujimori’s government until the point where it collapsed in scandal in 2000.

De Soto’s premises also underlie U.S. president George W. Bush’s claims, as he rallies, with bipartisan support, for global market expansion and domestic school “choice,”⁸ that free markets and trade liberalization are the only way for the poor to lift themselves out of poverty. This domestic agenda often furnishes the rationale for foreign policy. As he was going off to meet with the G8 leaders in Genoa, Italy, in 2001, Bush said, against compelling evidence, that protestors against globalization were no friends to the poor but free trade would end poverty. Going further than even Adam Smith, who believed that the excesses of the market needed to be countered by public checks and balances,⁹ these fans of free trade are insisting that the market can cure all social ills.

In fact, however, while corporate news media heralded economic boom at the millennium’s turn, disparities in wealth under neoliberal governance have reached greater proportions than during the Great Depression,¹⁰ with the world’s richest three hundred individuals possessing more wealth than the world’s poorest forty-eight countries combined, and the richest fifteen having a greater fortune than the total product of sub-Saharan Africa (Bauman, *The Individualized Society*, 115). As well, austerity measures imposed by world trade organizations such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and the International Monetary Fund in the name of expanding free trade ensure that poor nations stay poor by imposing “fiscal discipline” and public disinvestment, while no such discipline applies to entire industries such as defense, entertainment, transportation, and corporate agriculture that are heavily subsidized by the public sector in the United States and many other advanced-industrial countries. As formerly New Right advocate and Thatcherite John Gray has pointed out,

According to the Thatcherite understanding of the role of the state, its task was to supply a framework of rules and regulations within which the free market—including, crucially, the labour market—would be self-regulating[. . .] The contemporary model that informed these changes throughout was the American labour market, with its high levels of mobility, downward flexibility of wages and low cost for employers. Partly as a result of these policies, there was an explosive increase in part-time and contract work[. . .] The innermost contradiction of the free market is that it works to weaken the traditional social institutions on which it has depended in the past[. . .] Many low-skill workers earned less than the minimum needed to support a family. (2000: 28–29)

De Soto based his model of informal markets and extralegality on a particular reading of U.S. history and property law, where, he says, the wilderness was joyfully colonized by the incorporation of extralegal social contracts into the legal framework (De Soto, of course, does not acknowledge that the settlers' contracts on the land did not often include, either legally or extralegally, its original inhabitants):

Americans had been settling—and improving—the land extralegally for decades. Their politicians gradually modified the law to integrate this reality into the official legal system and won some political points in the bargain. Having thus changed their laws to accommodate existing extralegal arrangements, U.S. officials left the assets of the American settlers and miners primed to be converted into capital[. . .] It is “experience” that gives life to the law demonstrating[. . .] that the law must be compatible with how people actually arrange their lives. The way law stays alive is by keeping in touch with social contract pieced together among real people on the ground. (2000: 108)

As Carlos Lozada has stated in a review which infers *The Mystery* is foreshadowing De Soto's bid for the presidency of Peru, De Soto “[i]gnores the likelihood that many illegally occupied lands presumably are owned by someone—publicly or privately—and that trying to meld legal and extralegal property systems likely would result in endless court challenges.”

Liberalized trade policy has not led to greater equality or an alleviation of poverty but rather to a growth in the disparity between rich and poor, an undermining of labor, civil, and environmental rights, a weakening of job security and public protections for much of the world, and an intensifying exploitation of the poor as work is compensated increasingly by the piece rather than by the hour. Additionally, the world financial and commerce establishments' attack on domestic state functions, and particularly public oversight in the Third World, has further strangled these struggling economies. As Immanuel Wallerstein points out, mercantilists from the economic core countries are able to employ strong state formations to protect their interests at home while weakening the state formations in peripheral countries in order to protect the core's hegemonic controls.

De Soto's vision of a Third World exemplar of a self-regulating market is not a new cry for freedom but rather an old practice of world systems integration under global capitalist management.

Knowledge and Representation

The Joys of Motherhood tells the story of Nnu Ego when she moves from her rural, ancestral village into the capital city of Lagos at the time when the British colonialists were beginning to pull out of Nigeria in the 1940s. Having first married a local farmer chosen by her chieftan father, she does not conceive until he rejects her for not bearing children and she moves to the city to marry her father's second choice. The novel then narrates Nnu Ego's struggles to find solvency for herself and her family against a harsh new urban marketplace that prohibits her from establishing a steady trade. The trajectory from Nnu Ego's mother's rural girlhood to her own and then to her married life, her move to the city, and, finally, to motherhood thereby corresponds to Nigeria's historical movement as it was integrated into new relations of global financial management, urban industrialization, wartime culture, and economic adjustment.

One of the ways that *The Joys of Motherhood* critiques neoliberal capitalism is by, like in *The Mystery of Capital*, linking the accumulation of surplus to the acquisition of knowledge. De Soto wants to equalize property by creating a system of representation where the economy can be marked through units of universal exchangeability, expunging from these representations—as in liberal theories of governance—the differences that would not, in principle, accord. This idea of representation as an equalizer assumes knowledge as a commodity in order to turn people into capital. Whereas in *The Joys of Motherhood* Emecheta denounces the difficulties of access to schooling in a wage market, De Soto lauds the abilities of a market-based economy to provide universal access to knowledge as capital as well as universal exchangeability. In other words, Emecheta critiques the idea, so prevalent in De Soto's work, that privatizing public goods like education would be preferable to, as he puts it, allowing governments to compete with private interests (2000: 86–87).

De Soto claims that capital, like knowledge and consciousness, contains a latent content; like knowledge, capital needs to be represented in its most natural form in order to be accessed and in order for its virtual value to be realized:

For thousands of years our wisest men [*sic*] have been telling us that life has different degrees of reality, many of them invisible, and that it is only by constructing representational devices that we will be able to access them[. . .] [C]ivilization has worked hard to fashion representational systems to access

and grasp the part of our reality that is virtual and to represent it in terms we can understand[. . .] Unlike tigers and wolves, who bare their teeth to protect their territory, man [sic], physically a much weaker animal, has used his mind to create a legal environment—property—to protect his territory. Without anyone fully realizing it, the representational system the West created to settle territorial claims took on a life of its own, providing the knowledge base and rules necessary to fix and realize capital. (220–221)

In other words, knowledge is property, and property is metaphysical, like God. Knowledge operates like property because it gives returns, expansive returns whose growth is reliant on uniform procedures of description specifying uniform rules for extracting potential values. The quest for profit here appears as the search for the invisible truth—value—in representation, and a successful search for truth requires true and unfettered experience just as wild animals have. In order for knowledge to become transparent as profits on property, it depends on the ability of individuals to operate freely within a field governed by a set of rules or regular laws of nature. These laws of nature guarantee that the returns on human activity are contradictorily both predictable and unrestricted. The idea that free, natural experience leads to progress comes out of the nineteenth-century sciences of recapitulation, where, as Gail Bederman has shown, children were supposed to be encouraged to play freely in the wilderness like their primitive ancestors in order to develop properly into civilized adulthood.¹¹ In De Soto's view, the proper market would resemble the free play of children, primitive people, naive emotions, and wild beasts. Representing children, primitive people, naive emotions, and wild beasts as prelinguistic, prerepresentational, and therefore free (as did Freud, among others) feeds imperialist ideologies where Third World nations are seen as needing Western forms of knowledge and organization in the absence of their own political systems and sovereignty. Legalized markets co-opt the freedom of free desire, organize it, and run with it.

The Mystery

De Soto's ideas about the benefits of neoliberalism to the world's poor are based in his conviction that everything can be turned into capital. In other words, all possessions can and should be converted into equatable representations of market value which can circulate through exchange. Though he never specifies what counts as an asset, he continually asserts that what poor people have can be turned into one by a reformulation of property law. Uniform and standard categories to describe the productive elements of an object would promise that those elements could be made "fungible," or rather productive of "surplus value," "able to be fashioned to suit practically any transaction" (56): "One of the most important things a formal

property system does is transform assets from a less accessible condition to a more accessible condition, so that they can do additional work" (56). This theory relies on the collapse between labor and capital where De Soto assumes capital itself catalyzes the production process, performs the "work," and becomes the force behind its own growth in value: "Clearly much of today's surplus value in the West has originated not in scandalously expropriated labor time but in the way that property has given minds the mechanisms with which to extract additional work from commodities" (217). In other words, focusing purely on speculation, De Soto takes the human element out of Marx's theory of labor.

De Soto assumes that everyone can own and run his or her own business, so his theory cannot account for conflicts between proprietors and the ones who work for them, or rather, any theory of labor or unequal power. Since everyone is equal before the act of speculation, there is no sense that, in capitalism, owning the means of production gives one advantages, clout, and authority to decide and shape the social field. It is not likely, for example, that an upstart hamburger vender operating out of a cart would be able to assemble a community of public interests to open highway stops to small-time competitors. Notes Samir Amin,

The active army of labour exists here and may continue its progression. But it will never, as far into the future as we can see, be able to absorb the reserve from the rural and informal economies—both because global competitiveness now requires techniques of production that make such absorption impossible, and because the safety-valve of mass emigration is not available. As for the non-industrial and/or non-competitive peripheral countries of Africa and the Arab world, the situation is still more dramatic: the active army barely exists at all, virtually the whole nation being a reserve in world terms. (1997: ix)

De Soto chooses not to understand that productive businesses presently require technology and management systems that are not cheap or simple and that therefore put in place barriers to entry. As well, the restriction of public protections which De Soto advocates would benefit large corporations more than small proprietors, because it removes obstacles to unlimited corporate growth, obstacles like taxes, community provisions, or the cost of applying labor and environmental laws, even as it does not take into account how most large corporations have developed through public subsidies or contracts of some sort or another. De Soto's call to informalize labor markets turns labor into buyable contracts, each one exchangeable on an open market. In other words, the reforms that De Soto deems necessary to alleviate poverty would aid more in turning sidewalk vendors into cheap, exploitable, and unprotected labor for large industry and manufacturing enterprises than in turning them into business owners.

De Soto's ideas about standardizing representation of informal markets imply that freedom results from more capitalism divided up into exchangeable property units: independent contractors and small business enterprises serving as outsourced production sites that take on a piece of a larger corporate process. This way of thinking, however, is not restricted to right-wing justifications for fiscally conservative policy and labor deregulation. It has, additionally, seeped into left-leaning liberal analysis. In *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy*, J. K. Gibson-Graham,¹² for example, argues that the reason that it is so difficult to think alternatives to capitalism is that capitalism, like the Phallus under patriarchy, has become a universal, hegemonic, and dominating signifier unquestionably at the ideological center of all social relations. This type of representation has become performative rather than descriptive, actually producing a capitalism that seeps into the very margins of social existence. What is needed instead, she says, is a more fluid and deconstructable concept of capitalism—like the de-essentialized concepts of sexual and gender identity promoted by post-structural feminist theorizing—where the question might be asked “what a hybridized and nomadic ‘economic identity’ might be” (12). Gibson-Graham believes that there are plenty of instances of noncapitalist relations within the current social organization, and that these examples of economic difference can demonstrate the limits to capitalist hegemony as well as its complexities, rifts, multiple references, overdeterminizations, and contradictions.

So far, so good; but in order to situate capitalism as a certain instance of a much broader tableau of social experience, Gibson-Graham has to narrow what she means by capitalism to an adjectival form, where it appears most of the time as a certain act or as a singularized exploitative relationship between a manager and a laborer. Rejecting any important differences in representations of the economy between the right and the left, Gibson-Graham understands capitalism as “the image of two classes locked in struggle” (9ff) defined through exploitation and domination and degrees of ownership and possession, “from managing director to production supervisor to laborer” (50), as seen in the labor process. Noncapitalism, then, is constituted in spaces which are free of direct managerial control or the extraction of surplus value for the profit and accumulation of owners of the particular means of production where this extraction happens: “Noncapitalism is found in the household, the place of woman, related to capitalism through service and complementarity. Noncapitalism is the before or the after of capitalism: it appears as a precapitalist mode of production (identified by its fate of inevitable supersession); it appears as socialism, for which capitalism is both the negative and the positive precondition” (7). What is missing from this formulation is the way that capitalist outsourcing to private household industries and sweatshops has not produced

greater freedom from exploitation, as both Gibson-Graham and De Soto contend, but rather a cheapening of labor and an intensification of exploitation between different levels of capitalist production systems, and particularly of Third World and female labor. “[C]apitalism,” as Immanuel Wallerstein indicates in “The Rise and Demise of the Capitalist System,” “involves not only appropriation of surplus-value by an owner from a laborer, but an appropriation of surplus of the whole world-economy by core areas” (86). Household industry is not outside of capitalism, but rather, as I argue in the next chapter, the central component of its advanced, global stage.

The examples given show that Gibson-Graham, like De Soto, can only think of capitalism as the direct extraction of surplus from hired labor in conventional industrial situations, so much of what passes as labor under capitalism now—temporary or contract labor, piecelabor, outsourced labor—falls outside of capitalist relations in her descriptions. Like De Soto again, she seems to disregard the fact that these newly proliferating forms of labor create an intensified polarization between those who own the means of production on a world scale and those without assets, between First World economic dominance and Third World poverty:

Recent developments in the international semiconductor industry indicate that the penetration of Asia by foreign MNCs [multinational corporations] has borne unexpected fruit. Both upstream suppliers and downstream users of semiconductors have sprung up in a regional complex of indigenous firms in south-east Asia, including technical training facilities, centered in Thailand. This development counters the image of the sterile branch plant in poor countries, which repatriates profits and contributes only to underdevelopment rather than industrial growth. (130–131)

In this view, multinational corporations are “unwittingly generative” because they create satellite enterprises on the margins of industrial production which decrease the costs of production by lessening the costs of in-house labor for those corporations—including the costs of benefits and labor negotiations of any sort—as do all informalizations of labor markets. Furthermore, the situation described by Gibson-Graham could have given rise to the liquidity crisis that caused the collapse of Thailand's bubble economy in 1997, the year after the book was published, alongside the vast unemployment that followed and the closing of many of the small businesses that Gibson-Graham lauds. Again:

Perhaps we might see the proliferation of credit and deregulation of financial markets as creating opportunities for the growth of noncapitalist class relations as well as capitalist ones. The huge expansion of consumer credit (including credit-card financing with large maximum limits, home equity loans, and a

variety of other instruments almost forced upon “consumers”) is often assumed to promote personal indebtedness associated with a culture of consumption. Yet, given the growth in self-employment and of home-based industries—some of which is associated with the downsizing and streamlining of capitalist firms—it is clear that much of what is seen as consumer credit is actually (or also) producer credit, in other words it is used to buy means of production (including computers and other equipment) and other inputs into the production process of self-employed workers. (138)

While household debt has been increasing steadily since the 1950s, there has been, since the 1970s, an increase in the proportion of household income to household debt from under 12 percent to over 14 percent (Campbell) along with an increase in the amount of personal bankruptcies by five times (until the time when bankruptcy attainability itself was made legally bankrupt) (Ellis) and an increase in the number of indebted low-income families from 45 percent in 1983 to 54 percent in 1992 and rising. In 1999, the Federal Reserve reported an average of \$4,000 in consumer debt for every adult and child in the U.S., leading to higher interest rates, and more people filed for bankruptcy in the U.S. than graduated from college (Mann). As for the idea that consumer debt helps to make people more lucrative by giving them the means of starting their own small businesses, one would need only to look at the monumental increase in debt for the poor instituted by small, short-term payday loans, often reissued in a series of rollovers to as much as 2000 percent interest: “Critics counter that poor working people, disproportionately people of color, are the primary users of payday loans. The Woodstock study found that 19 percent of payday loan customers make less than \$15,000 a year, and another 38 percent make between \$15,000 and \$25,000. The Woodstock study also says that borrowers in predominantly minority neighborhoods had an average of 13.8 rollovers, 37 percent higher than in predominantly white neighborhoods” (Lyderon). It is difficult to elevate this debt system to the principle behind a noncapitalist resolution to the problem of capitalist oppression, or to an escape from the capitalist system of profit accumulation through exploitation.

Fungibility and the Marketing of Genius

De Soto's notion of fungibility draws from the principles behind the creation of Wall Street felon Michael Milken's junk-bond empire.¹³ Michael Milken built his fortune by popularizing the buying and selling of junk bonds, or rather, the practice of issuing high-yield public bonds on failing companies that were below investment grade. This meant that dead capital and unproductive businesses, and later failing schools—or “junk”—could be turned into speculative profit. Though Milken was convicted on charges

of insider trading and fraud—as William Adler shows, “the bidding process was about as genuine as Milken's hairpiece” (243)—De Soto still upholds him as the hero of the poor and of the Third World: “the great practitioners of capitalism, from the creators of integrated title systems and corporate stock to Michael Milken, were able to reveal and extract capital where others saw only junk by devising new ways to represent the invisible potential that is locked up in the assets we accumulate” (7). In other words, the poor would be saved if they could turn their garbage into assets and thus into investment opportunities: there should be no limit to marketability; anything can be capital. The idea behind De Soto's model is that Third World vendors are the same as devastated businesses: mere junk.

For De Soto as for Milken, market experience converts, through representation, into assets: the market itself becomes the basis for producing knowledge as profit potential for everyone. “Formal property,” he writes, “is more than just ownership . . . [I]t has to be viewed as the indispensable process that provides people with the tools to focus their thinking on those aspects of their resources from which they can extract capital . . . [I]t is an instrument of thought” (218). In other words, thought itself needs to be structured according to expanded property law, so that all thought which cannot be, for instance, patented needs to be represented in ways to make it patentable, or rather, worthy of investment and speculative profit. This would mean representing natural or customary experience, in other words, what people in the informal market already practice. There is, however, no explanation here of how thought can be turned into an asset, of how that might change the very nature of thought, or of what the difference might be between thought that can be converted into an exchangeable asset and thought that cannot, or what might become of thought that would thereby be excluded from representation because it does not function only as a tool for extracting capital. De Soto makes it clear that the mind itself is most useful when its products are made fungible—extracting the latent meaning—that is, when it can generate stock profits, as when Bill Gates's “personal genius” translates into “deals and long-term projects” based on “enforceable contracts,” “liability systems and insurance policies” (224) (De Soto somehow neglects to mention here that Bill Gates's “personal genius” perhaps turned a profit precisely because Microsoft *violated* property rights law). For Emecheta on the other hand, the informal market substitutes for formal schooling: the informal market works in ways that make knowledge inaccessible and advancement into a formal market system impossible. This is especially the case for women, and in particular for Third World women, who, despite De Soto's idealism about the market's pledge of equality, are not equal within the present wage-labor system.

Nnu Ego works her whole life to provide for her children and give them an education. She hopes they will earn enough to support her in her old

age. Yet, even nearing the end of her life, "[s]he could not afford the rent and she had no courage to start struggling all over again" (220). Nnu Ego is not "rich" (223), as the lorry driver teases her during her final return to Ibuza. The driver teases her as rich because he learns she has lots of children and one son studying in America. Emecheta here ironically foreshadows, within the lorry driver's false impressions, the destitution that leads to her character's demise: "one night, Nnu Ego lay down by the roadside, thinking that she had arrived home. She died quietly there, with no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to her. She had never really made many friends, so busy had she been building up her joys as a mother" (224). Nnu Ego's wish to give her children profitable knowledge collapses. "What help can one give with only twelve pounds a month?" Oshia inquires begrudgingly. "That is what they pay now, even with a good Cambridge school-leaving certificate" (191). The market does not turn her experience of struggle or her children's education into assets to be converted, through representation, into profit, speculative potential, or secure investments. Though some of her children—notably, the boys—do get sporadic schooling, the novel ends with Nnu Ego's death, before the children come back offering either earnings or development projects, and so the economic promise is left indefinitely unfulfilled. As John Gray concludes, "The natural counterpart of a free market economy is a politics of insecurity. If 'capitalism' means 'the free market,' then no view is more deluded than the belief that the future lies with 'democratic capitalism'" (17). De Soto's faith in the possibilities of capitalizing fruitfully on market access contrasts sharply with Emecheta's ideas about how people are impoverished when capitalism reduces their experience to the market, offering the insufficient assurance of turning an eventual profit on it or using it as an asset. Not blaming Nigerian depravity simply on a deficient legal structure, Emecheta makes clear, rather, that such trade liberalization policies as allowing for unrestricted market extensions only invite foreign investments to replace public supports, thereby ensuring the continuation of poverty.

Emecheta's skepticism about defining labor as free enterprise needs to be looked at in relation to De Soto's market idealism. De Soto's vision of Western capitalism's success story reduces the role of the state to the background and then erases any public presence besides state repression (but only economic repression). In other words, the ideal Western state appears as a set of rules before which everyone is equal and autonomous, "a view of society as a fair system of cooperation between free and equal persons" (Mouffe, 44), whereas the corrupt Third World State—a site of contention between various interests, corruption, arbitrary authority, bureaucracies, and unequal application of the law—operates as an obstacle to development¹⁴ and to knowledge. This view denies the very important play of pol-

itics, other roles that the state performs besides creating obstacles for business (e.g., redistributive functions, functions of justice, etc.), the ways that international market integration redefines the extensions and potentials of state power, and mitigating social inequalities produced by the market. De Soto does not take into account political theorist Chantal Mouffe's criticisms of this model of liberal government where "there could never be, in a modern democracy, a final agreement on a single set of principles of justice" (52). Instead, because his idea of politics fits within the singular functioning of an economically repressive state, De Soto assumes that a consensus could be reached about the rules of representing capital as property, forgetting the kinds of differences that must be washed out if everything is given value only through interchangeable representational structure. He does not, therefore, consider antagonisms and power struggles within the democratic political process or "the bargaining advantages that could affect the process of decision and distort the result" (Mouffe, 44), in other words, as Orwell might say, that some ways of representing property are more equal than others. Nor does he indicate that representation itself is subject to interpretive frameworks that exist as the result of struggles over power. As educational theorist Henry Giroux contends, "Representations are always produced within cultural limits and theoretical borders, and as such are necessarily implicated in particular economies of truth, value, and power" (1992: 219). De Soto's theory could only be logical and workable either if power were absolute or *if there were no such thing as power*, in other words, if power could be routed out.

De Soto's idea that decentralized representation removes power and thereby produces freedom conforms to the many right-wing ideologues who use the same justification to consider the "triumph" of the global market. *New York Times* foreign correspondent Thomas Friedman here quotes a Merrill Lynch advertisement to portray the golden promise of interconnectiveness and access under neoliberalism: "Many world markets are only recently freed, governed for the first time by the emotions of the people rather than the fists of the state[. . .] The spread of free markets and democracy around the world is permitting more people everywhere to turn their aspirations into achievements. And technology, properly harnessed and liberally distributed, has the power to erase not just geographical borders but also human ones" (xiii–xiv). Full of peace, love, harmony, fast food, easy travel, intense commodification, and ultimately skyrocketing productivity, the world that Friedman describes provides enough for everybody, as long as all anybody wants is American products or Japanese robotics, and fulfills everyone's desires, even when it has to kill a few people along the way because they are too slow or maybe too uncivil to be grateful for all that Taco Bell has done for them. Like De Soto, Friedman sees current globalization

schemes as a utopia formed through the removal of power, as power only can operate through authoritarian repression, and particularly in this case, the repression of the natural, primitive, vital energy and consumer desire of the people, or what Friedman calls democracy.

As with Structural Adjustment Programs demanded by the IMF, the World Trade Organization, and the World Bank in much of the Third World, De Soto envisions the public sector as a tyrannical cap on individual creativity, innovative experience, and economic maximization, but a cap that can be removed to release choice freedom and prosperity. De Soto can only imagine power as public, public power as State power, and public power as therefore repressive, like Freud's dominating Ego Ideal: it is only public power that needs to be legally circumscribed and set within limits. Describing the success of capitalist development in post-Renaissance Europe, De Soto talks about a historical conflict between the market and the state where the market, in the end, was triumphant, establishing freedom:

European governments were gradually forced to retreat in the face of growing extralegality—as governments in developing and former communists (*sic*) countries are doing today[. . .] In England, the state was forced to recognize that new industries were developing primarily in places where there were no guilds or legal restrictions[. . .] Moreover, the extralegal industries were more efficient and successful[. . .] The extralegals' numbers, persistence, and success began to undermine the very foundations of the mercantilist order. Whatever success they had, it was won in spite of the state, and they were bound to view the authorities as their enemies. In those countries where the state outlawed and prosecuted extralegal entrepreneurs instead of adjusting the system to absorb their enterprise, not only was economic progress delayed, but unrest increased, spilling into violence. The best-known manifestations were the French and Russian revolutions. (2000: 99)

In other words, the market works best and guarantees freedom only when devoid of politics, as though markets themselves are not constantly constituted through struggles in political arenas as these very examples demonstrate. As John Gray has elaborated, "In reality a *laissez-faire* economy—that is to say, an economy in which markets are deregulated and put beyond the possibility of political or social control—cannot be reinvented. Even in its heyday it was a misnomer. It was created by state coercion, and depended at every point in its workings on the power of government[. . . W]ithout diminishing the size of the state or reinstating the social institutions that supported the free market in its Victorian heyday, free market policies have encouraged new inequalities in income, wealth, access to work and quality of life that rival those found in the vastly poorer world of the mid-nineteenth century" (5).

An example of the same economic, utopian logic of freedom as consumer desire that is found in Friedman's and De Soto's work appears as

well in a recent MSN article about reactions against Coca-Cola in the Middle East. The article laments the good old days of imperialist expansion when Russians welcomed McDonald's into their midst and says that now, during the war with Iraq, Arabs are rejecting U.S. products, choosing European Colas instead with names like Zamzam Cola (after a holy spring in Mecca) and Mecca-Cola, with some of the profits going to local charities. The article goes on to claim that the political motivation behind alternative colas is actually detrimental to local economies: "In the Middle East, however, a successful boycott [of Coke and Pepsi] could be harmful to the boycotters, not the targeted companies. Western fast-food restaurants are locally owned franchises; their employees, naturally, are also local[. . .] In Palestine, Coke, which is the region's second-largest investor, and their Palestinian bottling company offer steady work, loans, and business training. In Egypt, Procter & Gamble, the company that supposedly named its products after Ariel Sharon, has spent \$97 million on factories and community projects; it has built schools and paid for pilgrims to go to Mecca" (Fasman). What is missing here is any kind of questions about why Palestine needs Coke and Pepsi to build its schools in the first place (could it be because U.S.-sponsored and U.S.-armed Israeli incursions have closed down most Palestinian schools?) or why they would resist contract labor or why there are not local industries to employ local labor (could it have anything to do with the way the tax base in some of these countries is depleted through corporate incentive schemes?) or why people might not see Coca-Cola as the best employer. Also, the article assumes that people should want this unhealthy product, which tastes like soap, and that buying it rather than not buying it constitutes their freedom, so that the only alternative to corporate imperialist dominance is expanded corporate imperialist dominance. Like MSN and Friedman, De Soto idealistically assumes that removing politics, state interventions, and political barriers to trade will assure the democratization of capital guided by consumer desire and insists that "choice," "taste," and "desire" will be the agents unfolding the global future. He suggests that the role of the state and therefore the public should be reduced to regularizing bureaucratic procedures for commerce and equalizing capital's potential for expansion by instituting a uniform property system that treats everyone the same.

De Soto fails to consider here the insights of the dependency theorists who were able to demonstrate how Third World markets arise in a disadvantaged position within integrated world systems. Nor does De Soto take into account how advanced nations developed through state-subsidized industry rather than by "*laissez-faire*" (Chomsky). Uruguayan political theorist Eduardo Galeano analyzed succinctly the historical recurrence of imperial relations within capitalism. According to Galeano in *The Open Veins of Latin America*, the modern nation developed as part of an ongoing

class struggle where some nations provided raw materials and labor for other countries' enrichment, and some nations' economies were formed to exist "at the service of others' needs": "The division of labor among nations," he states, "is that some specialize in winning and others in losing" (1973: 11). What is missing from De Soto's argument are the relational aspects of underdevelopment. De Soto fails to recognize, for example, how not only custom, but predominantly power influences the formation of laws, so that, for example, tax laws in many of these countries favor foreign corporate investment over local industries in the name of creating jobs, even when these jobs do not provide adequate subsistence, fair treatment, labor organizing, environmental equity, or optimal satisfaction for the local populations and even when these jobs do not ever materialize. Attempts to change structural economic imbalances legally have led to various reprisals, from economic squeezing, loan disqualification, economic sanctions, and capital flight to, for example, the outright military invasion and presidential coup in Guatemala in 1954 by the combined forces of United Fruit and the CIA.¹⁵

The Joys

In contrast to *The Mystery*, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta includes ideas about how power works not only as repression, but also to support the interests of the powerful, through force if necessary, and to produce a market that distributes freedoms unequally for imperialist profit. "If they allowed us to develop the production of our own gin, who would buy theirs?" asks Nnu Ego's second husband Naife when Nnu Ego questions why the British outlawed local whisky production (111). Unlike De Soto's contentions, Emecheta's work suggests that the waning of state and public involvement does not produce freedom, since the power of the state only wanes—as De Soto's recommendations suggest—when it comes to support for the poor.

When Nnu Ego first arrives in Lagos, her husband-to-be Nnaife works as a clothes launderer for the British master Dr. Meers. Though steady, his salary is not enough to provide for a growing family, so Nnu Ego learns from her Igbo women neighbors how to acquire tins of cigarettes and matches and sell them for a slight profit. Within six months, Nnu Ego is able to complete a purchase of an entire new outfit complete with matching head tie, while her remaining meager surplus is exhausted in paying for the naming ceremony of her first child (who dies not long afterward). Throughout the novel, Nnu Ego is engaged in various small commercial enterprises from selling cigarettes, to collecting fallen timber to sell as firewood, to selling the nearly rotten vegetables she grows in her yard—precisely, her "junk"—but without ever being able to acquire, set aside, or

accumulate savings or assets, even in the complete absence of any kind of repressive public action.

When the public sector did intervene, the vicissitudes of income stabilized, wages regularized, and futures became more secure. "Nnaife was among the lucky few who found work with the government," Emecheta narrates when Nnu Ego's husband finds work as a grass cutter with the national Railroad. "Thus employed, one could hardly be sacked and could rest assured the morning would never come when one was told that there was no more work to be done. On top of that, if one stayed in government service long enough, one was sure of a small pension, something still quite new to most Ibos" (141). This pension, however, is eventually taken away not because, as De Soto would have it, public power acts arbitrarily to limit the economic potential of free citizens, but rather because private financial power is able to gain control over public institutions. This happened after Nnaife attacked a private Yoruba business with a cutlass¹⁶ for violating Igbo customary law (the butcher's son was going to marry his daughter Kehinde without paying the bride-price) during a time when the Yoruba were rising politically because of their economic ties with Britain. The promise of Nnaife's pension founders. "He [the lawyer] told her [Nnu Ego] that there was some likelihood of Nnaife being released from prison after serving only three months, because some "important" people had decided that he had not been responsible for his actions . . . He would lose a great part of his gratuity, but they would give him a small pension" (220).

Although De Soto might attribute Nnaife's loss of pension to public corruption or to the lack of limitations on public authority, Emecheta is demonstrating, rather, how the conditions and provisions of poverty worsen with the weakening of public supports and that public supports in the Third World are weakened because foreign economic interests undermine state power, as to augment their own accumulation and decrease local competition: After all, economically powerful nations become economically powerful through a system of state supports denied to developing economies. Nnu Ego and Nnaife cannot acquire assets because those making decisions about crime, discipline, work conditions, and benefits to the poor are serving different interests and different agendas which clash with the public's social welfare: "[most of] the jury . . . were Europeans." In contrast to the faith De Soto has in the market itself as an equalizer in the interests of everybody, Emecheta shows how the market allows private power to influence the implementation of the law. The public system of accountability to employees and citizens here translates into the maintenance of colonial power, foreign investment, the exploitation of cheap labor, and the turning of the poor themselves into assets for the profits of the rich. "The British own us, just like God does, and just like God they are free to take any of us when they wish" (148).

Like De Soto, Nnu Ego sees the promise of fortune in the marketability of knowledge: "when he finishes his education," she says confidently of her first son, Oshia, "then we will all be better off" (191). Yet throughout the novel the demands of the market block the regularity of her children's schooling, either because Nnu Ego cannot meet the payments of school fees, or because she needs her children to help her with her trade, or because she needs to use her small allowance to buy, for example, a sewing machine that would enhance her sales by giving her a skill if she could only find the time to learn and develop it, or even because the necessity of eating must compete with schooling: "I had thought Oshia would be going to school, starting after Christmas. Now we have little money to buy even food," Nnu Ego despaired" (85). "[L]earn as much as you can from school," she later tells Oshia, "because when they demand the next school fees, I don't think I shall be able to pay" (173). Sometimes, she is able to scrounge together enough funds to get her kids private tutors when the regular school fees get too steep, even while acknowledging that the option of private education makes lessons sporadic and less rigorous: "So at the beginning of the next term Oshia and his brother Adim attended a private class at Adam Street, where the teacher taught them how to write neatly and do some sums. All the other complicated subjects were forgotten. Oshia knew that the arrangement was nothing compared to a 'real school' but there was nothing he could do about it" (174). Emecheta also makes it clear that the rich are not subject to the same delays, insecurities, discontinuities, and downright threats to the promise of education when Nnu Ego announces that Oshia's friends the Folorunsho do not have to leave school because they "own Lagos" (173). Emecheta is pointing out that public education is here failing because it is structured as an unregulated, privatized market, which does not promise equal freedom for everybody.

The constant butting-up against need and desperation affects the girls' education more than the boys', as the twins Kehinde and Taiwo, forced to leave school, end up partially illiterate: "The twins will have to leave and help me in running the house and in my trade," Nnu Ego confesses. "They don't need to stay long in school—only a year or two" (174).¹⁷ "We have Adim and Nnamdio to think of and, with Oshia's big school fees, we cannot afford fees for the twins . . ." Nnu Ego confesses later when her co-wife Adaku questions her about the twins' lack of schooling and illiteracy. "I personally do not regret it. They will be married in a few years. They can earn an added income by trading" (189). Nnu Ego here considers school to be a rare public asset for which her children compete, while the ones that win the not-so-fair-competition are set, at the start, with patriarchal privilege. Without recourse to education, the girls are forced into the informal economy as unskilled laborers.

Indeed, there seem very few other options for the twins besides prostitution or teaching, though Nnu Ego's co-wife Adaku suggests hopefully, tentatively, even if unconvincingly that "there may be a future for educated women" (189). Adaku left the house because, as the second wife and as a mother only of girls, she felt disadvantaged and disrespected. She opened her own market stall, though it is understood that her large profits came when she sold her sex. With this, she paid for her daughters' education. *The Joys of Motherhood* illustrates the limitations of a model of knowledge-acquisition based on the market by indicating the inherent inequalities produced in a market that can only maintain itself by undercutting public institutions and providing cheap labor to attract foreign private investments. Thus the novel criticizes the idea—just below the surface of De Soto's arguments and Milken's practices—that schools should turn children into capital.

Nnu Ego was not, indeed, better off when Oshia finished his education. Oshia's education kept taking him farther and farther afield as he procrastinated the time of his return to help out his family, to pay for his brothers' and sisters' education, and to work for his country's development. "Adim knew, after talking to his brother during the holidays when he was home, that though he would like to help his parents, that help was going to be a very long time in coming" (191). Finally, Oshia won a scholarship to study in the United States. The implication is that Nigeria's investments in national education are inadequate for future national development. Education becomes another institution of foreign control, turning Third World children into opportunities for foreign investment.

In many of Emecheta's books, she talks about the transformative promises of education, and how the inherent conflict between education and the market crushes these possibilities. In *A Second Class Citizen* (1974), for example, the main character, Adah, hopes that her education will give her an advantage in potential earnings, and even open up opportunities for herself and her children as she decides to continue her education in London. In the end, though, Adah is disappointed, as the hardships of the market force her constantly into difficult work situations, intensified by persistent racism in hiring practices, the absence of public supports for child care, health and housing, and the inadequacies of public protections against her husband's abuses, so that her intellectual pursuits remain constantly thwarted.

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, education at first seems not only the answer to individual ambitions but also the hope of postcolonial nationhood: "People agreed that it was worth the trouble one had to go through to train children in a difficult place like Lagos. 'But things are changing fast,' said Ubani [one of the neighbors] . . . 'They say that in the not-too-distant future we shall be ruling ourselves, making our own laws'" (199). Oshia, in

fact, contends that his education will lead to a future of self-governance. Speaking of the educated classes, "[The new Nigerians] will do [the job of ruling ourselves, being District Officer or Reverend Father] even better, because this is their country. They have never been given the chance before. Now things are changing and Nigerian politicians are springing up and demanding our rights" (199).

However, the Nigerian educated classes, like Oshia, did not return to govern with respect for people's rights to self-determination, nor did Nigerian self-governance favor the working poor in terms of formalizing their assets, capitalizing their savings, or offering them control over the means of production and thus the conditions of their working and non-working lives. Instead, the return of the postcolonial technocrats and the foreign-educated has revealed that foreign education did not lead to Nigerian enrichment but to the continued disparity between rich and poor as well as to the continued profiting, from Nnu Ego's cheap labor, by an established elite. As a 1996 update in *The Economist* reports:

anger is palpable just below the surface. People complain fiercely, even by Nigerian standards, that their wealth and their future have been stolen . . . The prices of staple food and transport, the two that matter to the urban poor, are rising fast. Health care has slipped backward. Education, the only honest way out of poverty, is a disaster: schools are without books, teachers unpaid and universities on strike (again).

Hardly a bastion of radical thought, *The Economist* recounts that the deregulation of banking has permitted the educated elites to get wealthy off of foreign exchange, and this in turn has allowed for the despoilment of public resources as the financiers linked to foreign interests get rich and massive public monies disappear (around \$60 million, according to *The Economist*). The top arm of the supposedly civilian government had earmarked certain oil revenues for the development of public highways, but the military, profiting from oil looting, was unlikely to go along. Because of the growth in military power bolstered by the oil industry, "[m]ost Nigerians lived better before the 1973–74 oil-price rise," Pat Utomi, an economist at the Lagos Business School, says. Clearly, Emecheta's informal markets of the urban poor will not be able to get their interests represented against this kind of militarized, multinational control of national income, nor would representing their property and assets free up their access to these types of controlled markets or make them competitive.

Emecheta is aware that reducing education to the market will foster a growth in militarism, or rather, that markets and militarism go together.¹⁸ To show this, she parallels Oshia's scholarship in the United States to the tactics of the British colonialist army. Just as Naife was taken from his home and family and forced to work for British shipping or to defend

British interests in Burma during World War II, Oshia is sent abroad to train as a scientist-technician in the new economic administration of his country. Oshia even started school with Naife's earnings from his "slave pay" on the ship; this "slave pay," at least at the beginning, covered the costs of Oshia's khaki school uniform as well as his fees (112). Just as Naife promised to send a salary that ended up arriving too late or not at all and never was enough to provide for the family, Oshia's lucrative return is also constantly delayed. Though Oshia, indeed, consents to go abroad and learn to work for the implementation of colonialist law whereas Naife is coerced, Oshia's education to be a technician for the new global economy—in Nigeria, most likely in the service of the oil companies or the military or both—appears here as repeating the colonialist practice of exploitation, violence, and forced conscription of nationals for foreign interests.

War

The Joys of Motherhood chronicles how the new corporate imperialisms have managed to fracture the public supports for labor and education in the Third World. In fact, the imperialist assault on Nigeria's public sphere was aggressively carried forth by a violent public intervention to force in the kind of market reforms that De Soto advocates. In the time between *Efuru* and *The Joys of Motherhood*, the Igbos were involved in a brutal civil war in which potentially one million Igbos were starved to death. In 1966, there were massacres of Igbos in the northern part of Nigeria (an estimated 10,000 deaths, with substantial evidence that the army contributed, most likely with the knowledge, if not the consent, of the regime in Lagos), followed by a massive migration of Igbos from the northern to the eastern part where Igbos dominated, and then the succession of eastern Nigeria, renamed Biafra. The ensuing war lasted three years.

Lagos's strategy in the civil war consisted of blockading Biafra and trying to starve it into submission. Such a strategy, of course, made civilians the primary victims of the war. Nigerian officials acknowledged as much: "I want to prevent even one Ibo having one piece to eat before their capitulation," proclaimed the Nigerian military commander on the southern front. And Lagos's highest ranking civilian declared, "All is fair in war and starvation is one of the weapons of war." (Shalom)

Biafra had large deposits of oil. Under the contention that their former colonialist status granted the right to intervene in another sovereign nation's internal affairs, Britain backed the cruel efforts on the part of the Lagos government to end the succession. The United States, wanting Britain's continued support in their own war against Vietnam, also backed Lagos, suspending aid to eastern Nigeria while continuing it in other parts (private relief organizations continued to provide food but had trouble

getting it into Biafra because of Nigerian control of transportation networks). As Nnu Ego asks in *The Joys of Motherhood*, "Are we not all slaves to the white men, in a way? [. . .] If they permit us to eat, then we will eat. If they say we will not, then where will we get the food?" (117). Both Britain and the United States heavily armed Nigeria's increasing militarization by endorsing and provisioning a war with ethically unsound claims against the rights of a people to self-determination and self-protection against genocide.

Emecheta is aware that market liberalization was enforced through military means and not, as De Soto would interpret, as a result of the people's democratic desire for self-determination. Emecheta's novel about Biafra called *Destination Biafra* (1982) tells the story of an elite Ibo girl Debbie who, having been educated in Britain, returns and joins the Nigerian military. When the massacres occur and the war breaks out, her father is one of the first Ibo politicians killed. She is then solicited by the Nigerian government to travel to Biafra and ask the new president of the Biafran government, Abosi, to concede to a unified Nigeria. En route, she is brutally raped by Nigerian soldiers and witnesses the atrocities of torture and starvation that the Nigerian command is inflicting on the Igbo refugees fleeing their homes for Biafra. By the time she reaches Biafra to make her request, the Ibos have almost lost the war and the Nigerians have withdrawn the offer. Having learned class oppression by sharing the experiences of her people at war, Debbie decides to collect her notes from the journey into a memoir called *Destination Biafra*. "Oh, white man," she asks, "don't you understand your own language now?" (230). Learning, like Nnu Ego, that the privatization of public interests is leading to mass starvation and death, Debbie's turn toward identity in literature is defined as her new awareness of the Nigerian public, an awareness that opens the possibility of acting in defiance against foreign control, systematic starvation, militarism, new forms of imperialism, market exploitation, and damaging representations. As Debbie forsakes her marriage agreement with a British military advisor along with her attachments and contractual working arrangements with both the British and Nigerian governing classes, she concludes: "No, I am not ready yet to become the wife of an exploiter of my nation" (245).

Today, the same now well-supplied, technologized, and modernized military that stamped out Biafra, now under the front of a "freely elected" civilian government, is still mobilized against democratic organizing and political movements for self-determination, particularly in the case of environmentalist opposition. For example, on 4 January 1999, a helicopter known to be used by Chevron Corporation¹⁹ swept over two Nigerian villages—Opia and Ikenyan—spraying bullets.²⁰ Four people were killed. The attack was in response to a massive demonstration in May of Chevron's

presence in the Nigerian Delta where the unarmed Oguni villagers were protesting against the environmental damage Chevron was causing (nine people were killed then), followed by Chevron's allegations that some youths from the village had threatened to occupy one of their rigs (Goodman and Scahill). As Emecheta concluded in the final paragraphs of *Destination Biafra*, "Nigeria badly needed that stability [provided by an ample supply of guns and bombs imported for the purpose of ending the resistance in Biafra] to allow foreign investors to come in and suck out the oil" (245). The continued defense of the public through its institutions is necessary to stave off chronic war for the purpose of resource and labor control. There is a growing need to look at the ways cultural production has been appropriated into the service of corporate expropriation, imperialist military conquest, and market hegemony, and how culture has envisioned the social production of power as well as the public's options.