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RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE IN FICTION: AN  
ANALYSIS OF MAY NWOYE'S *ENDLESS SEARCH*

IKEDIUGWU, OGE A.

Department of English and Literature

University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria

E-mail Address: [Ogediugwu@yahoo.com](mailto:Ogediugwu@yahoo.com)

Phone: +234 7086548298

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UGWU, ESTHER NKIRUKA

Department of English and Literature,

Faculty of Arts,

University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria

E-mail: [nkyugwu@yahoo.com](mailto:nkyugwu@yahoo.com); [nkyugwu@gmail.com](mailto:nkyugwu@gmail.com)

Phone: +2348023367830

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**Abstract**

*The essay explores the painful life of the protagonist, Nkoli, from the United States of America to her home country, Nigeria. In the course of the study, Nkoli's naivety and lack of foresight, her husband's gross selfishness and heartlessness and the country's attitudes towards*

*women are projected as the major causes of her hardship. Even when she becomes aware of her problems and their sources, she lacks that will-power to fight for her freedom to liberate herself from the culture that is set in the interest of men's chauvinism. There is a reversal of fortune which eventually liberates the protagonist and subjects the evil perpetrators to shame thereby making justice to prevail at the end.*

**Key words:** Retributive, justice, punishment, selfishness, and freedom.

### **Introduction**

*Endless Search* is a bitter story of Nkoli who is married to Chuma, a university don. Nkoli unfortunately has only two children for her husband. The unfortunate aspect of it is that the children are girls and, in the Igbo culture, a woman who has only girls is not different from a woman who has no children. This is because the girls will eventually marry outside their family and leave the father childless thereby exposing the family to the danger of extinction, since there is no male child to keep the family in existence. So in Igbo culture, a woman with an imbecile male child is better than a woman with twelve daughters. Initially, Chuma seems not to bother about the sex of the children, apparently because his PhD is being sponsored by Nkoli. He seems to disregard all his mother's pressures to marry another woman who will give him male children. But immediately he finishes his education in the United States of America and returns to Nigeria, things dramatically assume a new dimension. Ma Grace, Chuma's mother, becomes uncontrollable in her pressures to push Nkoli out of the marriage and Chuma concurs in everything the mother says. Eventually, Nkoli is pushed out of the house and Ma Grace brings in Arima, her daughter-in-law, to temporarily take-over Nkoli's house works till Chuma marries a new wife. But God has a way of reversing evil plans, rescuing the victims and punishing the offenders. Before we proceed to the analysis, it is necessary to look at the theoretical background and review of scholarship.

## **Concept of Justice**

Justice is a concept of moral rightness based on ethics, rationality, law, religion, or equity. It is also the act of being just or fair. According to most contemporary theories of justice, justice is overwhelmingly important. John Rawls claims that “Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought” (3). Justice can be thought of as distinct from and more fundamental than benevolence, charity, mercy, generosity or compassion. The association of justice with fairness has thus been historically and culturally rare and is perhaps chiefly a modern innovation in western societies. Plato defines justice as having and doing of what is one’s own. A just man is a man in just the right place, doing his best and giving the precise equivalent of what he has received. This applies both at the individual level and at the universal level

There are many types of justice that people can seek when they have been wronged according to the Wikipedia. They include distributive justice, procedural justice, restorative justice and retributive justice.

Distributive justice, also known as economic justice, is about fairness in what people receive. Its roots are in social order and it is at the roots of Communism, where equality is a fundamental principle. If people do not think that they are getting their fair share of something, they will seek first to gain what they believe they deserve. They may also seek other forms of justice.

In procedural justice, the principle of fairness is also found in the idea of fair play as opposed to the fair share of distributive justice. If people believe that a fair process was used in deciding what is to be distributed, then they may well accept an imbalance in what they receive in comparison to others. If they see both procedural and distributive injustice, they will likely seek restorative or retributive justice.

In restorative justice the first thing that the betrayed person may seek from the betrayer is some form of restitution, that is, putting things back as they should be. The simplest form of restitution is a

straightforward apology. Restoration means putting things back as they were, so it may include some act of contrition to demonstrate that one is truly sorry. This may include action and even extra payment to the offended party. Restorative justice is also known as corrective justice. Restoration may well not be enough for the betrayed person and they may seek revenge of some sort, whereby they can feel the satisfaction of seeing the other person suffers in the way that they have suffered. Revenge can be many times more severe than reparation as the hurt party seeks to make the other person suffer in return.

Retributive justice is a theory of justice that considers punishment, if appropriate, to be the best response to crime. When an offender breaks the law, he or she forfeits or suspends his or her right to something of equal value, and justice requires that this forfeit be enacted. This is sometimes taken to mean that justice involves vengeance on behalf of the aggrieved party, or society as a whole. In ethics and law, “let the punishment fit the crime” is the principle that the severity of penalty for a misdeed or wrong doing should be reasonable and proportionate to the severity of the infraction. The concept is common to most cultures throughout the world.

Proportionality requires that the level of punishment be scaled relative to the severity of the offending behaviour. However, this does not mean that the punishment has to be equivalent to the crime. A retributive system must punish severe crime more harshly than minor crime, but retributists differ on how harsh or soft the system should be overall. Traditionally, philosophers of punishment have contrasted retributivism and utilitarianism. For utilitarians, punishment is forward-looking, justified by a purported ability to achieve future social benefits, such as crime reduction. For retributionists, punishment is backward-looking, justified by the crime that has been committed and carried out to atone for the damage already done. Depending on the retributivist, the crime’s level of severity might be determined by the amount of harm, unfair advantage or moral imbalance the crime caused.

According to *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopaedia*, in the 19th century, Immanuel Kant argued in *Metaphysics of Morals* that the only legitimate form of punishment the court can prescribe must be based on retribution and no other principle. He is of the opinion that judicial punishment can never be used merely as a means to promote some other good or the criminal himself or for civil society, but instead it must in all cases be imposed on him only on the ground that he has committed a crime. Kant regards punishment as a matter of justice, and it must be carried out by the state for the sake of the law, not for the sake of the criminal or the victim. He argues that if the guilty are not punished, justice is not done. If justice is not done, the idea of law itself is undermined.

There are two distinct types of retributive justice. The classical definition embraces the idea that the amount of punishment must be proportionate to the amount of harm caused by the offence. A more recent version advocated by Michael Davis dismisses this idea and replaces it with the idea that the amount of punishment must be proportionate to the amount of the unfair advantage gained by the wrong doer. Davis introduced this version of retributive justice in the early 1980s, at a time when retributive justice was making resurgence within the philosophy of law community, perhaps due to the practical failings of reform theory in the previous decades. This version of retributive justice by Davis is particularly important because our essay focuses more on it than on the other version, the classical definition. Merriam-Webster has posited payback, reprisal, requital, retaliation, revenge and vengeance as the synonyms of retribution.

May Ifeoma Nwoye was born in Onitsha, Anambra State of Nigeria. She holds the B.Sc degree in Accounting, George Washington University in Washington D.C. and Masters in Business and Public Administration in Finance from South Eastern University also in the District of Columbia. She also has a Ph.D in Accounting from the University of Benin. She has just finished her tenure as Bursar at the University of Benin, Benin City. She has written many books and novels and has published many papers. However, not much has been

done on Nwoye's literary writings and this essay probably seems to be the first scholarly work on her writings of cruel cultural practices.

This essay discusses Nkoli's life with Chuma; the mother-in-law's activities to get Nkoli out of her marriage and the eventual reversal of plans and punishments of the perpetrators of cruel cultural practices.

The novel, *Endless Search*, is a painful story of a lady, Nkoli, who is married to Chuma, a University don, at the Ukunu City University. Nkoli has not attended any higher institution. Chuma has married her while he is still a university student in the United States of America. She does all sorts of menial jobs to see her husband through his university education on the agreement that Chuma will support her own higher education immediately he is through with his. Nkoli goes through many untold hardships for the well-being of her family and to sponsor Chuma's education. She is very happy and does not in any way complain about her sufferings for she is very hopeful that things will change for better when her husband is done with his doctorate degree and starts work. According to the novel,

Nkoli worked in several factories in support of her husband while he was in school. They lived in one bedroom apartment... in North Dakota State where most low income workers lived. At first, they lived in an efficient apartment... to make both ends meet (9).

The couple is compelled to move into "a one bed-room apartment" when they have their first child who is a girl. During this period, Nkoli is a cleaner at the North Dakota State Central Hotel, and, at the same time, an assistant at a fast food restaurant. She works for fourteen hours daily and only has a day off on weekends. They have two daughters who are very beautiful and Chuma loves them passionately. According to the novel, "Chuma loved his little children very much. They were pretty little girls and Chuma had never for once wished they were boys" (9). Here, the author provides a background summary of the couple's circumstances so that the reader is left in a balanced position to appreciate and access further actions in the novel.

Chuma's selfishness starts to manifest itself immediately he gets his Ph.D. He suddenly decides to return to his country the following month without any prior notification to his wife and without any apparent cause. Nkoli has pleaded with him to give her little time to gather herself together: buy herself a few dresses as she has none at the moment. Chuma stubbornly fails to see reasons with her and threatens to abandon her in the United States of America and return to Nigeria. His selfishness beclouds his sense of reasoning: it does not occur to Chuma that he will himself find money to equip his wife and children with some essential things they require for returning home, knowing full well that Nkoli would have provided herself with those essentials if she had not been spending money on his education. What she gets from Chuma is "Next month I must go... If you want to stay, you stay until you can buy enough dresses" (11) and that is final. There are obviously some sorts of arrogance and rudeness in the above extract which helps to project Chuma's insensitivity to the fore. His insensitivity foreshadows his ugly treatments of his wife when they get back to their country. This is a wife who has thrown away every enjoyment opportunity she had for his sake; now that he has fully actualized himself, he does not want to put her happiness into consideration: it does not even occur to him that he would have waited for Nkoli to assert herself academically before returning to his country. His major motivation for returning home is to go and show-off his doctorate degree as there are only a few Ph.D holders in his country. The novel puts it thus: "His one thought was to return to his home country where he would join the respected educated minority" (10). In spite of all the pleadings, Chuma returns home with his family.

While at home, Chuma's insensitivity towards Nkoli's feelings continues in earnest. An instance is on one occasion when Nkoli tells her husband about her mother's illness and the woman's desire to see her, Chuma retorts: "Your mother is too troublesome... if she is not well, why couldn't she go to a nearby hospital and receive some treatment?" (16). Chuma neither wants Nkoli to go to see his mother-in-law at home nor does he want the woman to come to their house on

the campus. Nkoli does not need any sooth-sayer to tell her that she is “alone in her mother’s ordeal” (16). When she announces her departure to the village to see her mother, Chuma bursts out: “Have you instructed the maid on what to do?” (18). Chuma does not want to suffer himself: that is why Nkoli must provide everything and give all necessary instructions to the maid before she goes to see her sick mother. His wife is simply an instrument which he must use to solve his problems, her feelings and her own problems notwithstanding. Even to send ordinary greetings to his sick mother-in-law is not in his agenda how much more rendering a financial support for her treatment. Nkoli is sincerely disillusioned. According to the novel, “She had many wonderful dreams about how her mother would be looked after when she got married. She had hoped her husband would help her put a zinc roof over her mother’s house” (19). A husband that has not sent a common greeting to his sick mother-in-law will provide money to zinc her house? This is an illusion. Even to aid his wife’s transportation is not forthcoming. While in her absence, Chuma has the guts to discuss and criticize Nkoli before Arima, his gossip sister-in-law, “... Don’t you know that when Nkoli’s mother is sick every other person will go to hell?” (22). This is in response to Arima’s question: “who did she leave the children for?” just as if she does not go to see her own mother when she is sick. There is an undertone of bitterness and rancour in Chuma’s statement which encourages Arima to go on with her condemnation of Nkoli. This is in agreement with the Igbo proverb which says that it is the mouse inside the house that tells the mouse outside that fish is in the basket.

Arima would not have known what to gossip about Nkoli if Chuma does not provide the grounds for it. Not only that he encourages Arima to say bad things against Nkoli in her absence, he joins in doing so. Yet when Chuma’s own mother is sick, he is sympathetic and goes to see her even when she is not ill; he does not abandon her to die. Nkoli does not expect Chuma to treat her mother exactly as he does his own mother but she expects Chuma to be fair to a reasonable extent. As Plato puts it, “it is only reasonable to give yourself a larger portion of the cake when you are sharing it out” (30). No sane person



will expect equality in the treatments. What does Chuma stand to gain by discussing his wife with Arima? Their gossip could only succeed in making Arima look down on Nkoli. What is his benefit from it? This is his faithful wife who had stood by him when things were hard. His education fails to inculcate in him that by bringing his wife low before people, he is also bringing himself low.

When Nkoli was toiling day and night to sponsor his doctorate degree in the U.S., he had promised her that her education would take precedence over anything else when he finished, but now that he is through and lecturing, he does not want to hear about Nkoli's furthering of her own education. Each time Nkoli reminds him about her higher education, he starts to give reasons why it should not hold and even accuses her of being most unreasonable. As Nkoli puts it, "... when I first reminded him about my education, he said we had to settle down before getting into any plans... The second time, he asked me to have patience..., the third time I talked about it, he said that I was being unreasonable" (35). Looking at the above citation, Chuma's gross selfishness is clearly discernible. Considering the enslavement of his wife in America to support his own education, she does not need to remind him about her own education. It is Chuma, in his effort to reward her that should be pushing his wife's higher education now that he is a lecturer in the University. He accuses Nkoli of being very unreasonable. If actually his wife is unreasonable and selfish as he wants us to believe, she should have used her money to enhance her own education or to buy things for herself but the novel indicates that Nkoli gives him all the money she earns to support his education. Chuma had refused to spare a moment to wait for his wife to prepare herself before returning to their country. Now he wants Nkoli to wait for donkey years before she goes for further studies. He wants to make it impossible for her as time does not wait for anybody.

Above all, Nkoli is not getting younger. It is said that justice delayed is justice denied: Chuma deliberately wants to deny her the much desired higher education as this will enhance her life and make her happier. This portrays Chuma as a sadist of the first order. Quite

ridiculous! It is men like Chuma that Azikiwe, U. Advises that “... education will enable women to improve their families, health and diet, increase their productive ability, improve their socio-cultural status as well as to enable them to discharge their responsibilities as mothers, wives and members of the society effectively” (134). Eunice Nwodo concurs when she writes that “The education of women is so wonderful that it enhances the well-being of both the family and the state” (99). From the citations above, it is glaringly obvious that Chuma’s standing between his wife and higher education will only succeed in hindering his own family’s well-being and development, and also the development and well-being of the society at large. As an educated man, he is very much aware of this fact. His fear is that if Nkoli gets higher education, he ceases to lord it over her as he wishes. Education will surely empower her and make her assert her rights when the necessity arises.

Whether Chuma likes it or not, he should realize that, according to Igbuzor, O., “Education is a human right that should be accorded to all human beings solely by reason of being human” (9). It is a way to deprive his wife a higher education as Nkoli needs higher education even more than Chuma. Ako Nai also warns that “There must be improved and adequate education for women if they are expected to play positive leadership roles as producers, managers of household consumption, mothers, professionals and activists in the community. Adequate education therefore is an indispensable ingredient for their economic and socio-political emancipation from men’s domination. An educated woman is empowered and can play positive leadership role and be less dependent” (42). In this case, it is in the best interest of humanity in general and women in particular to allow Nkoli to get the higher education she so much cherishes.

To still make her going further in education impossible, Chuma lures her into opening a joint account with him when she secures a teaching appointment in the University Staff School. They sign and withdraw money whenever they want. But Chuma soon manoeuvres everything and goes to withdraw money alone. Nkoli says that “The painful part

is that before ever the month ends, all the money would be gone. I tried to question him once and he got very angry saying that I have no right to question him about money” (35). There is a clear evidence of men chauvinistic tendency when he upholds the cruel tradition that a husband owns the wife and everything she has. That is why Nkoli should not query Chuma about their joint account. This behaviour reduces Nkoli to a mere object in the hands of Chuma. Chuma wants to monopolize all the money in their joint account and yet does not release money for his mother-in-law’s treatment. He aims at crippling his wife financially so that she can neither go to higher institution to assert herself academically nor give any financial aid to any of her relations. However, Nkoli is to be blamed for accepting to open a joint account with Chuma. Why should she lack the power to resist her husband’s intimidations? It is for women like Nkoli that Adeleye warns: “Nigerian woman no longer takes ‘yes’ for an answer. She is no longer contented with just her matrimonial home, but is now facing the challenges of the time. She is now fast liberating herself from the man’s yoke and is plunging into what used to be man’s world” (71). So, Nkoli needs to really decide whether to be herself or to remain a slave in Chuma’s grip. If she decides to remain inept, well she cannot face the challenges facing women in the society and that negates the principles of feminism.

The novel has it that everything Nkoli does irritates Chuma. But, when they were abroad, Chuma respected and virtually worshipped her. What causes his radical change of attitudes now? In Nkoli’s own words: “Chuma and I don’t seem to agree on anything nowadays. Chuma’s behaviour has changed drastically and the change becomes worse each time he talks with his mother” (35). Looking at the above extract, there is an obvious indication that Nkoli attributes Chuma’s drastic change to her mother-in-law. Chuma is exposed enough to know that he should give to Ceaser the things that are Ceaser’s and to God the things that are God’s. Above all, he should know what is good and what is bad. He is old enough to stand on his feet and not to be pushed about like a *Zombi*. How can his illiterate mother tell him what to do in his own family? The fact is that Nkoli has lived with

Chuma for many years, but she seems not to have mastered him. Chuma has used Nkoli to ascend to the peak his career; now she can go to hell. The mother had been writing to him when they were in the United States of America, but each time he got such letters, he had always discarded them and continued happily with his wife. So, to accuse her mother-in-law now is naivety on the part of Nkoli.

Chuma's mother is mischievous, no doubt about that. She resents Nkoli and wants her son to marry another wife because Nkoli has no male children. Nkoli knows this but still accommodates and treats her nicely. On one occasion, Chuma has flogged Nkoli mercilessly for no just cause. According to the novel, "He... withdrew his belt from the loops... He hurried back to the living room and turned to Nkoli lashing at her with the belt. Take that f-i-aa! Fi-a-a! And that!... fia-a!fe-a! She twisted herself convulsively" (46). Chuma has earlier smacked her and given her bruises on the face; lashed out at her on the mouth thereby "putting her in an ungainly position" (46) before he decides to use his belt. What offence has Nkoli committed to necessitate these beatings. Nkoli's offence is that Chuma's mother has visited the house and Nkoli has greeted her nicely and inquired about the people at home. Ma Grace, Chuma's mother, becomes very aggressive and accuses Nkoli of going to see her sick mother but fails to come to see her. She refuses to look at Nkoli in the face and to listen to her apology and explanation. Upon that, Nkoli stoops down and asks: "Mama what will you like to eat?" (45). The woman refuses to be pacified and becomes even more aggressive. Chuma tries to calm his mother down but Ma Grace feels that her son is not protecting her enough and stumbles out of the house and vows not to visit again. Immediately she leaves, "the room was very silent but tense. Chuma stopped before Nkoli, and shot a mean look at her. "I'm sure you are very happy now" (45). When Nkoli demands to know her offence in the case, he becomes more than ever furious and beats her mercilessly. Nkoli would have become a corpse but for the timely intervention of neighbours. From all indications, it is clearly discernible that mother and son do not want Nkoli in the house any longer: no wonder then that no one blames her when she moves out of the house to save her

life. Not only that this is a gross injustice, it is man inhumanity to man which must not be left unpunished. Before she leaves, Chuma makes sure that Nkoli does not leave the house with anything; even her personal effects are taken away from her. As Chuma puts it; “When I married you, you didn’t bring anything along with you. So you’ll leave my house the way you came” (50). Even her children are taken away from her. She leaves the house, crying bitterly and painfully too and Chuma is very happy with himself and does not see anything wrong in his actions. Why does Chuma do all these evils and gets away with them? It is because of the environment he finds himself: the environment that does not protect the interests of women; the environment that takes women as second class citizens; an environment that takes wives as slaves and men’s properties, and an environment that uses women to further men’s interests. If they were still in the U.S., Chuma dares not lay his hands on his wife, unless he wants to spend part of his life in prison; lose his property to his wife and comes out to pay alimony to his wife for the up-keep of their children.

Just as if his wickedness is not enough, Chuma goes to the bank and instructs the workers not to allow Nkoli to withdraw money anymore from their joint account, and from there, he proceeds to her boss and requests that she should terminate Nkoli’s appointment. This is after telling lies that Nkoli has brought in tugs to beat him up. All this is to make life so difficult for her. The questions now are: was it Chuma’s mother that advised him to open a joint account with Nkoli? Is it Ma Grace that tells Chuma to instruct the cashier not to give Nkoli money from their joint account? Is it Ma Grace that advises Chuma to go and terminate Nkoli’s work? The obvious fact is that Ma Grace is an illiterate and as such is not knowledgeable in these areas and, therefore, cannot offer any advice. The fact is that mother and son are mischievous but Nkoli does not notice it. Her love for Chuma tends to shadow her good sense of assessment. If she had been in a detached position, she would have assessed Chuma correctly and known that there is nothing in the breadfruit she is killing herself for. All these actions of Chuma help immensely to create suspense in the novel

which in turn helps to arouse the reader's curiosity and to sustain his or her interest till the end of the novel. Although Chuma has succeeded with the bank, he fails to succeed with Nkoli's boss for she advises Nkoli: "Just keep up with your good work. I am a woman myself. So I understand what you are going through ... I would have advised that you open a separate account... What I will do is to try to get your salary by cheque this month. Hopefully by next month, both of you must have forgotten about this unfortunate incident" (56). If Chuma has also succeeded in terminating Nkoli's appointment, what would have been her fate? The fact is that Chuma goes to the extremes in trying to inflict pains on his wife. Even some enemies with conscience would not go to such extents how much more a person that calls himself a husband: a loyal and faithful wife that has once enslaved herself for the well-being of the so-called husband. Her boss, however, pays her in cheques as she has promised.

All these suppressions are geared towards silencing and humiliating women to accept second class position and perpetually remain under men's domination. Men want it that way even though they know the effects on their families and society at large. Denice Pauline observes: "African marriage systems have often been condemned on the grounds that they debase women; the submissive attitude a wife must adopt towards her husband; the generally acknowledged right of a man to beat his wife..." (4). To support the above view, Morgan, R. writes: "Women are an oppressed class; our oppression is total, affecting every facet of our lives. We are exploited as sex objects, breeders, domestic servants and cheap labour. We are considered as inferior beings whose only purpose is to enhance men's lives. We identify the agents of our oppression as men" (598). Feminism rejects this and upholds the equality of all human beings. Mabel Erwierhoma represents it thus: "Feminists believe that women are human beings, that the two sexes are... equal in all significant ways, and that the equality must be publicly recognized" (39). So, the goal of feminism, according to Currie, D. and Kazi, H. "is to eliminate... social injustice. Feminism per se is a struggle to realize a just society, free from sexual oppression" (87). All these citations are only theories to

Chuma and not things to be practised by the arrogant man such as Nkoli's husband.

When Nkoli leaves the house, Chuma brings in Arima, the village gossip and sister-in-law, to help in the management of his house. But soon, Chuma becomes fed-up with her services. According to the novel, "she had cost him a lot within a short time" (66). All the foodstuffs; all ingredients and drinks disappear from the house. Her indiscriminate phone calls accumulate a lot of bills for him. The sitting room, bedrooms and the kitchen are in disarray. As if these problems are not enough, Chuma is summoned to the police station to clear himself of the allegation against him. Rose Dizi, Chuma's student and girl friend, is caught at the "International Airport with... some cocaine" (73). It is rumoured that a University don is associated with cocaine business. Chuma is sincerely terrified. All these happenings around him make him to miss his wife. The novel has it that, "When the discomfort became unbearable, he yearned for his wife. It was the first time in months he missed her terribly" (74). It is only when things are difficult for Chuma that he remembers his wife, but if things are okay for him, he does not think about bringing his wife back to the house. Nkoli, on her part, is sincerely frustrated. In her frustration, she longs to join her husband and children. This is because Igbo women traditionally abhor separations from their children and by extension, their husbands. A good opportunity manifests itself when one of their children falls sick. When Nkoli gets a wink of it through her daughter, she feels bad and sincerely wishes to see her. She eventually goes to see the sick girl; cooks food for the house and helps to feed the girl. She then returns to the Fuoras where she stays. Chuma goes to see her boss the following day to obtain a permission to talk to her during the school hours. The permission is granted; they discuss and eventually reconcile and live together again. Before the reconciliation, he has sent Arima packing out of his house. Arima, in the course of nursing her wounds, goes home and tells Ma Grace about Nkoli's return with the hope that Ma Grace's action will help to soften the ground for her, Chuma tells both Mother and sister-in-law off and warns Arima never to enter into his house again. In

spite of this action, we do not consider Chuma a good husband. His action here has been propelled by the rough times he had while Nkoli was away. If he now shows a positive change, it is because of his fears of falling back to similar ordeals. It is, however, good that he shows a positive change, the reasons and the circumstances notwithstanding because it will help their children to grow and develop well. Research has shown that “The first five to seven years in the life of every individual... was dominated by the mother who served as the key intellectual, socio-cultural and spiritual guide. The teaching of basic acceptable behaviours from correct greetings and courtesies to good interpersonal relationships was the responsibility of the mother. Mothers taught often indirectly through demonstrating the desired behaviours and expecting emulation from the child” (65). The effects of Nkoli’s absence from the house have already started to manifest on the children especially on their feeding and academic work. Taiwo, N. submits that “It is only when the home performs its educational function efficiently that the school can hope to strengthen the foundation of greatness and intellectual achievement laid for the child to utilize his potential to enrich the cultural heritage” (qtd in Adebile 263).

Ma Grace cannot bear to lose her son to Nkoli and so she goes to Usail, a native doctor, and gets a “hate potion” (104) which, when sprinkled on Chuma’s food, will make him hate his wife terribly. She does as she is advised without realizing that what she has is a death portion. After eating the food, Chuma falls to the ground and loses consciousness. There is panic in the house and he is immediately rushed to the hospital. Everybody loses hope of his survival. Arima instigates Chuma’s relations that Nkoli is a witch and has now killed her husband. Because of this, Chuma’s relations forbid Nkoli from seeing or staying with Chuma in the hospital. They lock her up in the house with the hope of dealing with her when their brother finally gives up the ghost. When the two women keeping watch over her fall asleep, Nkoli wants to sneak away through the back door but she is debarred by Arima. Out of a terrible anger, Nkoli gives Arima blows that leave bruises on her face and trip her to the ground. She then goes



to stay with Chuma in the hospital; tells the doctor and then her husband, when he comes back to consciousness, all her ordeals. The doctor prevents Chuma's relations from seeing him. Chima eventually demands to be allowed to see them. He tells them off to their faces and they shamefully return to their respective homes. This is ironical and reversal of fortune: what has been planned for Nkoli shifts from Nkoli to the planners themselves. He soon recovers because the poison has not damaged any of his organs. He is discharged and he returns to his house but Ma Grace is nowhere to be found. Nkoli and Chuma search for her and finally find her in a market at the outskirts of the town. She looks haggard and weak because she has not eaten anything since then. The husband and wife carry her home and try to feed her but she has lost her appetite. She gives up the ghost before the day breaks. The action of Ma Grace suggests that, if Chuma had not repented and turned to his wife, he would have met his untimely end in his mother's hand. Everything that has happened is retributive justice in progress: it serves Ma Grace right; it serves Arima right and it even serves Chuma right; so that in future, everyone should learn to mind their business.

### **Conclusion**

This essay has established that the author employs the principle of retributive justice in her novel, *Endless Search*. The employment has helped to place things in their proper perspectives and made the culprits suffer even more than the offences they have committed. This gives a firm support to Plato's stance that injustice, the freedom from all restraints, cannot possibly be wise or virtuous and, therefore, cannot lead to happiness.

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