

## Evolution of the Self: Post Colonial Feministic Reading of Buchi Emecheta's *Bride Price*

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### Abstract

This research shows that the African women are not entirely liberated from the patriarchal traditional system. Emecheta brings out the root cause of women's oppression is on because of sexism. It challenges male dominance and traditional gender norms. Women are the victims of sexism and in particular black women mostly discriminated because of their sex. As Emecheta herself stated, aside from obtaining figurative freedom Akunna must literally free herself after being kidnapped by her sexually abusive suitor, Okoboshi. He attempts to rape Akunna in order to solidify her status as his official wife. She escapes by shamefully lying that she is not a virgin, which vehemently repulses him. Ultimately Chike secretly helps Akunna escape from Okoboshi's familial compound and in the midst of this scene Emecheta writes that a few stars were peeping shyly from behind the thick dark clouds.

**KEYWORDS:** Self, Feminism, Post Colonial, Dominance, Tradition.

Buchi Emecheta is one of the most important post colonial writers in the African history. Born in Lagos, Nigeria, her works mainly explicates the portrayal of African Woman. *Bride Price* traces the growth of women and their evolution of self. It also presents the rituals and the traditional practices prevail in the African culture. Her novels that lead to increased awareness about pressing issues impacting the lives of women in Nigeria. It is an attempt to integrate notions of womanhood, sexuality, identity, culture, religious belief, and material factors into a discursive order. Her texts also reveal personal expressions of Igbo culture that offer conflicting views regarding the nature of traditional African values.

The present paper aims at highlighting the challenges women face in patriarchal societies. Aku nnas' resistance to adopt traditional terms and philosophies in defining these experiences which are linked to her outright rejection of African cultural superiority. In addition to this, it can be argued by fighting against the traditional norms, values, and institutions that have a negative impact in the lives of African women.

*Encyclopaedia Britannica* states regarding the bride-price, "the practice is common in most parts of the globe in one form or another, but perhaps most prevalent in Africa" ("Bridewealth"). Bride-price is money or property given by the bridegroom to the family of his bride. Such a system is still followed by the native Africans. According to the custom of Africa, a girl marrying without bride-price is a disgrace to her. Aku nna's family expects high bride price for her. But Aku who has European sensibilities stands as an iconoclast of the African traditional manner. She breaks out the traditional African customs of marriage. According to Wieschoff's research, "the bride price payment ensures that a man can afford to comfortably

support a wife and is given in exchange for the services that women provide as wives, mainly cooking, home maintenance and the birth of children” (299).

Emecheta created the protagonist, Aku nna to be adventurous and to be a rebel. Aku’s early life developed in such a way as to lead her down a path of decided self interest. She was naturally strong willed, and was willing to accept the society disapproval for her actions in order to live her life the way she wanted to. It makes her to expand barriers of attitude and behaviour. She wanted full independence to invent herself as she wished. When told to marry someone for high bride price she rejected the notion of being part in the traditional customs. Aku nna wants full freedom in quest of herself, at any cost.

After the death of Ezekiel Odia, thirteen year old Aku-nna and her brother return to Ibuza to their uncle home. Ma Blackie was inherited by Okonkwo. Aku-nna as a thirteen year old girl “fitted the key into the key hole” indicates the responsibilities and the importance of her contribution to the home and society. She is aware about the seriousness of her mother’s problem for infertility.

Many a time she had heard other women living in the same compound make songs of her Ma Blackie’s childlessness. She had heard over and over again her Ma Blackie and her Nna quarrelling over this great issue of childlessness. Nna would go on and on, talking in that small, sad voice of his, telling Ma, reminding her, that he had to pay double the normal bride price before he was able to take Ma as his wife. (9)

Emecheta presents the growth of Aku nna through various roles: as daughter, sister bride and wife. The death of Nna brings a sense of restlessness to Aku nna about her future. She imagined her future that, “we have no father anymore. There is no longer any schooling for me. This is the end” (18). The voice of the narrator presents the Nigerian traditions which makes women life more pathetic after the demise of head of the family. Emecheta elaborates the traditional African beliefs and its expectations on black woman to be weak and inferior to men. “Nobody cried anymore. All tears had already been shed. Aku-nna, still weak from her earlier swoon, moved mechanically as if pulled by a string” (44).

Emecheta shows the native customs when Ma blackie and her children enter into the land of Ibuza. Okonkwo, Ezekiel’s brother, who believes as the caretaker of the family turns as a hypocrite. Aku nna stands as a modern girl who opposes the traditional norms prevail in the society. Aku nna and Nna-nndo shortly acquired habitual things in Ibuza through their learning at school. Aku nna, more than her brother questions society’s gender determinations. Emecheta through Aku nna brings out the conflict between tradition and modern values. Ibuza stands for the traditional patriarchal values.

Learning in school the European ways of living and coming home to be faced with the countless and unchanging traditions of their own people. Yet they were like helpless fishes caught in a net: they could not as it were go back into the sea, for they were trapped fast, and yet they were still alive... (82)

The romance between Aku nna and Chike Ofulue, goes against the community’s conventions. As a girl Aku suffers more than Chike. It is not the manliness of Chike

impresses her but his ideologies and philosophies on the modernism. Emecheta's writings do reflect the sentiment that African men should adapt Westernized ideals in their dealings with women, like Chike who manifests as Akunna's savior. Sougou observes the way in which Emecheta deplores the domineering patriarchal aspects of her culture. He argues that,

The scathing manner in which oppressive customs are denounced leaves no doubt about the militant ideology driving the novel, which clearly supports feminist ideals. It equally emerges from this reading of the text that anger with the motherland... and awareness of an alien readership tinge the narrative and sometimes invest it with a vision close to that of colonial stereotypes. (70)

Emecheta projected black consciousness in her writings. A feminist is one who awakens the conscious about the women's life and problems. African feminist consciousness is the consciousness of victimization. Black woman are differentiated not only in terms of male standard and poverty but also by European women's standard. The novel makes a clear contradiction between tradition and modernity. Uraizee analyses Emecheta's use of Western ideology in assailing the oppressive aspects of Igbo culture. In questioning this issue she points out that "Emecheta, in her novels, seems to advocate a thorough Westernization of Nigerian patriarchy and in some places suggests that male oppression of female bodies and labor is more prevalent in black males than in whites" (21).

It shows that the African women are not entirely liberated from the patriarchal traditional system. Emecheta brings out the root cause of women's oppression is on because of sexism. It challenges male dominance and traditional gender norms. Women are the victims of sexism and in particular black women mostly discriminated because of their sex. As Emecheta herself stated, aside from obtaining figurative freedom Akunna must literally free herself after being kidnapped by her sexually abusive suitor, Okoboshi. He attempts to rape Akunna in order to solidify her status as his official wife. She escapes by shamefully lying that she is not a virgin, which vehemently repulses him. Ultimately Chike secretly helps Akunna escape from Okoboshi's familial compound and in the midst of this scene Emecheta writes that a few stars were peeping shyly from behind the thick dark clouds. Chukukere states that the true cause of Akunna's death is not simply due to childbirth alone. She indicates that "social tradition has become so ingrained in the heroine's mind that she is finally destroyed by "fear" and "her own inability to enjoy total physical and psychological revolt against stultifying conventions" (174).

Aku nna searched for someone who has a loving curiosity to explore her mind as deeply as or perhaps even more deeply than her body. Most of her neighboring friends were not conscious of their self and their search for self is limited contrary to Aku nna. It is the society which considers women as inferior to men and as second sex. Aku nna's refusal to accept the traditional beliefs creates a fear among the family and society. By transcending traditional gender norms, Aku nna urging the black women to break away from the patriarchal system from sexist oppression to regenerate their identity.

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