
THE AFRICAN ETHOS IN BUCHI EMECHETA'S THE BRIDE PRICE

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Abstract: Patriarchy is the parasite that African culture must rid itself of, in order to survive. Buchi Emecheta's writing gives an illuminating glimpse to the readers peculiarly, Nigerian culture which is passive and patriarchy. This paper aims to shed light on the inequality issues and the cultural taboos that created a pitiful picture of Nigerian women and their role in the society. Buchi Emecheta is one of the Africa's highly respected writers in present times. Emecheta looks at how sexuality and ability to bear children can sometimes be the only way femininity and womanhood can be defined. The Bride Price eclipses many themes from bride price to tradition and the caste system in Nigeria. The Bride Price, a fee that is traditionally paid by the husband's family for the wife, is a theme that spins its way throughout the novel. Aku-nna's love and later husband, Chike is a slave born to slave parents and therefore, she is inadmissible to marry him but Chike wins her with his benevolence. Although Aku-nna tends to break the center and decentralize the society of traditional beliefs, she is not successful because she does not have the public acceptance. This novel is also a criticism against those traditional values, especially when they concern women's rights and autonomy.

Key words: Patriarchy, Gender Equality, Culture, Education

Introduction: Many people may confuse that seeking God is the purpose of life, but everyone must accept the idea that the meaning of life is to find happiness. God made all of us so that we can help others, and men and women are both made by God. Why should it be pre-decided that this is what a man can do and that is what a woman can do. Gender inequality is still a major issue in our world. It not only causes society to teach men to think of women as their sex toys and their cheap entertainment. They associate being a victim with 'femininity' and that is problematic. In Nigeria it is observed that the womanhood is reduced to a mere infidel and a second-class citizen, hence there is the commonality of general belief system that the best place for women is in the kitchen. Education gives women the opportunity to be less dependent on men and to have more control over their sexual and reproductive health. As research accumulates, it is becoming increasingly obvious that God made men and women different in many ways. The Bride Price traditionally legalizes marriage. Girls are being abused, forced into marriage and pregnancy because of the lack of education. Among the most important female authors to emerge from postcolonial Africa, Nigerian-born Buchi Emecheta is distinguished for her vivid descriptions of female subordination and conflicting cultural values in modern Africa. Her best-known novels, including *Second-Class Citizen* (1974), *The Bride Price* (1976), and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), expose the injustice of traditional, male-oriented African social customs that relegate women to a life of child-bearing, enslavement, and victimization. Emecheta demonstrates the value of education and self-determination for ambitious young women who fight against sexual discrimination, racism, and unhappy marital arrangements to achieve

individuality and independence. Emecheta's fiction emphasizes on the plight of African women who struggle against patriarchal family structures, unfair gender stereotypes, and contradictory social values in contemporary Africa. African literature in recent years particularly after the independence from colonialism obtained a very gigantic position in the world literature and caused manifold critics to center their look on it. Most of the African writers have done their best to designate the drawbacks of today and gaps of past in various forms. Although there is much criticism on Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*, in the realm of my research about the mentioned topic this aspect has been relatively overlooked. This paper is a challenge to expose and explore the vibrant encounters of modernity and tradition with their dominances on each other from the perception of the author who does her best to bring hope of the future back and eradicate the falsehoods of the past in the sights of African varied castes by the novel *The Bride Price*. The Bride Price, a fee that is traditionally paid by the husband's family for the wife, is a theme that knits its way throughout the novel. Emecheta takes us back to Lagos and Ibadan during the 1950s, where the protagonist is Aku-nna, a young Nigerian girl whose father dies when she is thirteen; in Igbo's culture it is the father who is supposed to be one's life and shelter, that if the father is lost, they have lost both of their parents, mother is considered only as a woman and women are made-up to be boneless. For example, three weeks later when the children learn their dad's death. Nna-ndo the protagonist's brother laments, "We have no father anymore. There is no longer schooling for me. This is the end" (24). The women are out of access to any authority in this society and families, their job is just to bring out children and take care of them and their husbands and a childless

woman has no worth in such society. The Bride Price is set in Ibuza, revolves around Aku-nna the heroine of the novel who faces many problems from her abusive society and the clash between her desire and the demand of the society. After her father's death, her mother is inherited by her uncle Okonkwo and consequently, Aku-nna returns to Ibuza with her mother. Polygamy another significant tool of traditional Africa becomes a part of female oppression. When Aku-nna reaches Ibuza her step-sister Oguqua informs her, "You still don't know the customs of our Ibuza people! Your mother will become my father's wife. My father has inherited everything your father owned, and he has 'inherited 'your mother too'" (23). In the context of Nigerian male dominated society, women were exploited in many ways when a girl attains puberty, the patriarchal society declares her to be capable for her marriage after her menstrual cycle. The other toughest issue in this novel is the society's point of view against slavery and the slave's families. Slavery in Africa consisted of one tribe kidnapping people from another tribe, then holding them captive and forcing them to work. Slavery in the history of Nigeria has a deep root, to the extent that we are able to discover its effects and continuation in modern Nigeria as well. In Nigeria slavery was a trade for a longtime and the possessors could sell, exchange, lend or borrow them, mainly the female ones were used in sexual relationships and males to outdoor jobs with excruciating conditions. It was used to bury a slave alive when his or her owner died. However, Aku-nna falls in love with her teacher that affects Aku-nna's path of destiny and society beliefs. Chike Ofulue, her lover is a descendant of slave family whose social status totally condemned from the society. It is a belief that if a woman's husband fails to pay her bride price, the bride dies in child birth. Despite the protestations of her family

and a would-be suitor who kidnaps her, Aku-nna elopes with Chike and dispossesses her uncle of her bride price. In the end, Aku-nna succumbs in childbirth, fulfilling the fateful superstition that a woman whose bride price is unpaid will not survive the birth of her first child. It is a belief that if a woman's husband fails to pay her bride price, the bride dies in child birth. Afterwards, every girl in Ibuza was told the sad story of Aku-nna and Chike. "If you want to live long time, they were told, 'you must accept the husband that your people choose for you, and your bride price must be paid. If it is not paid, you will never survive the birth of your first child'" (85). Aku-nna and Chike played their excellently to prove that life is filled with unconditional affection, not money, people's background cannot be a good criterion for their evaluation and proof that the concept of slavery has been eliminated from the dictionary of modernized society. They showed that life can be sweeter by accepting the meaning of sacrifice for each other. It was noticeable that education could change the attitudes towards positive ways and modernity far from negative customs. Besides, education brings industry and progress to cities that lead to comfortable life. Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price* eclipses many themes from Bride price to tradition and the caste system in Nigeria. Aku-nna's love and later husband Chike is a slave born to slave parents and therefore she is inadmissible to marry him. But Chike wins her with his kindness. Although Aku-nna tends to break the canter and decentralize the society of traditional power, she is not successful because she does not have the public acceptance. Progress in any society requires adapting, changing. My paper is therefore a cry for justice because; believe that it is within our powers to eliminate all the man-made discrimination and subjugation against women

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