

**FLESHING OUT MEMORY THROUGH FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS:
PSYCHOANALYZING VIOLENT GIRLHOOD EXPERIENCES IN BUCHI
EMECHETA'S *THE BRIDE PRICE***

Ifeoma Ezinne Odinye

Department of Language and Literature
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria
ifeomaodinye@gmail.com
ie.odinye@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

*African feminist writing includes narratives primarily energized by oppressive female experiences. In *The Bride Price*, Emecheta is preoccupied with exposing culturally induced violence, consciously expressed in her reconstruction of gender roles in the Ibuza community. This research examines Emecheta's fictive portrayal of the girl-child who is discriminated, abducted, stereotyped or forced into marriage and her efforts to escape not only from her oppressors but also from the psychosocial trauma of her violent experiences. This paper adopts feminism and psychoanalysis to capture how violent experiences inhibit the physical and emotional growth of the girl-child by causing mental disturbances such as fear, anxiety, depression or neurosis. The study shows that violent experiences affect the physical and psychological development of the girl-child which often leaves her frustrated, depressed, unfulfilled or dead. In *The Bride Price*, Aku-nna tries to reject oppressive cultural subjection to men through self-assertion, but becomes totally overwhelmed and unable to escape the neurotic consequences of her experiences.*

Keywords: Feminist Consciousness, Psychoanalysis, Girlhood, Violence.

Introduction

A significant feature of depicting female experiences by African writers is the call for change. This is expressed in fictional works in the form of "protest against various sociocultural and traditional obstacles that hinder the growth and self-actualization of the girl-child" (Shodipe, 174). Emecheta, as an African woman writer has the consciousness to situate the struggle of her girl protagonist within African cultural realities by depicting her struggle against patriarchy and cultural subjugation (Kolawole 1999, 34). However, Emecheta's efforts to create a female character with strong, positive and courageous disposition have created the problem of doubtful psychological state of mind. In fact, her female character ends up projecting a "psychological disorientative behaviour driven by predilection to resist male chauvinism" (Nweke, 197).

Significantly, *The Bride Price* as a novel that ends with a psychological disorientative behaviour or signs of neurosis in the female character is indicative of the unsureness of a steady life for the girl-child in patriarchal African society. But the fact remains that the plight of the female gender would have been more disastrous in many African cultural milieux without the efforts of feminists, critics and literary artists in exposing and condemning gender discrimination, stereotype and inequality (Ibid).

Emecheta, just like Adimora-Ezeigbo, explores and exposes the structural systems of sexual violation, oppression, harassment and rape inherent in societies (Chiluwa 2014, 129). This has led to diverse concepts that have been employed to capture African female experiences within African contexts. In this study, the principles of feminism and psychoanalysis are employed in interpreting the girl character's actions to see the negative physical and psychological effects of cultural stereotype, inequality, discrimination, abduction and early marriage on her.

Significantly, Buchi Emecheta engages the past as the ridge to her creative effort in order to satisfy her psychological fulfillment. Emecheta's feminist consciousness enables the readers to contextualize authorial thoughts and feelings, while allowing them to see how the discourse of girlhood in African fiction is partially the product of a return to the author's childhood memory - a process that defines the selected novels' engagement with the ideas of time, space and past events. The ideational metafunction of this paper is hinged on gender-based violence to construct the consciousness, choices and responses of the girl characters in the selected novel. This is aimed at highlighting and analyzing the strategies employed by the girl characters to resist different patriarchal powers that inhibit their freedom and childhood. The analysis is thematically, stylistically and theoretically explored.

Psychoanalytical Focus in Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*

In *The Bride Price*, Buchi Emecheta's semi-autobiographical novel, gender stereotype and the violation of girl-child's rights are investigated. In writing the novel, Emecheta juxtaposes her real life experiences with Aku-nna's fictional plight. To support the above statement, Marie Umeh observes that "art and reality collided in Buchi Emecheta's life" (3). This submits Emecheta's selected novel to psychoanalytical criticism. Psychoanalytical literary criticism is

categorized into four broad types based on its object of study. It significantly explores the author of the work; the contents of the work; its formal construction; or the reader of the work (Eagleton, 155).

Psychoanalytical criticism of Emecheta's *The Bride Price* is based on exploring the author and the contents of the author's work. Eagleton observes that, "it is the most limited and problematical because psychoanalyzing the author is a speculative business, and runs into the problem of discussing authorial intention to the work of literature" (155). In this study, the psychoanalysis of 'content' – commenting on the unconscious motivations of characters, or on the psychoanalytical significance of objects or events in the text is achieved through the complexity of reductive actions or relationships linked to the author's experiences in the real world (Ibid). Therefore, in this study, the researcher offers a psychoanalytical account of Emecheta as she reveals herself in her novel, or examines the symptoms of the unconscious in her text as seen in reality. In *The Bride Price*, there is a confrontation between the troubled mind of the girl protagonist and the consequences of her action; there is conflict between human agents (patriarchal figures) and her destiny. As a theory, psychoanalysis seeks to explain the complex relationships or conflicts between Aku-nna and others by giving insights to the role of traumatic experiences in heightening emotions (fear or anxiety).

In the novel, Emecheta seems to have been stimulated to raise burning questions about the condition of the girl-child – 'for was she not a girl? A girl belonged to you today as your daughter, and tomorrow, before your very eyes, would go to another man in marriage. To such creatures, one should be wary of showing too much love and care, otherwise people would ask, 'look, man, are you going to be your daughter's husband as well?' (*The Bride Price*, 17). Psychoanalysis would interpret the above submissions by Emecheta as a form of castration. The girl-child is physically and emotionally castrated (Eagleton, 134) from birth. She has no real ownership of herself. This thus results to feelings of inadequacy and dependency on men for survival. We become intensely aware of Aku-nna's inner conflicts through the above rhetorical questions. Throughout the novel, Aku-nna becomes entangled in finding a solution to her inner conflicts and her all-pervasive feelings of powerlessness over her gender and cultural norms. This suggests that girls are trapped in a culturally instituted patriarchal ideology which limits their full rights as members of a given society.

Psychoanalytic criticism of *The Bride Price* adopts the methods of interpreting literary texts by Freud and other theorists. Freud asserts that fictional texts, like dreams, express the secret unconscious desires and anxieties of the author; hence, a given text is a manifestation of the author's own neuroses (Freud 1993, 26). This research therefore, psychoanalyzes Aku-nna as the projection of Emecheta's psyche.

Aku-nna's frustration in the novel has strong connection with authorial consciousness. In reality, Emecheta has struggled to train her children alone. Also, like Aku-nna, she fears a permanent castration from her children. In her autobiography, she confesses this fear of castration – "this was going to be my lot. I was going to give all I had to my children, only for them to spit in my face and tell me that I was a bad mother and then leave and run to a father who had never in all his life bought them a pair of pants" (*Head Above Water*, 238). In the novel, Aku-nna never recovers from her deep consciousness of physical and emotional castration – permanent castration from the support of her biological father and dreams. As a result of her father's death, Aku-nna becomes depressed and disillusioned as she awaits fate to direct her life. The bond between Aku-nna and her father suggests Freud's account of the girl's process of Oedipalization which is not separable from sexism (Eagleton, 134). According to Eagleton,

The little girl, perceiving that she is inferior because 'castrated', turns in disillusionment from similarly 'castrated' mother to the project of seducing her father; but since this project is doomed, she must finally turn back reluctantly to the mother, effect an identification with her, assume feminine gender role, and unconsciously substitute for the penis which she envies but can never possess a baby, which she desires to receive from the father. (135)

Eagleton observes that for the girl-child to enter into Oedipus complex, she must change her 'love-object' from mother to father (Ibid). In this situation, the girl cannot be threatened with castration since she has been castrated already. Aku-nna, like other girls and women in Igbuza community is castrated by Igbuza patriarchal tradition and figureheads. She is relegated to the background and only valuable in the issues of bride price and marriage. This explains why Aku-nna turns her object of love, from her mother to her father and finally to her prospective husband. By this, she assumes the same role like her mother, doing

house chores, giving birth and nurturing both the man and the children. The above process of Freud's Oedipalization stipulates the structure of relations by which we come to be men and women we are. It also signals transition from pleasure principle to reality principle; from the enclosure of the family to the society at large (Eagleton, 135). In fact, this process of Oedipalization is a deliberate way of subjugating the female gender as well as creating a dominant class. The term, 'castration' is very important in understanding the process of Oedipalization. Castration denotes the act of removing power from a person. Freud's idea of castration places the girl-child as an inferior personality that has no rightful ownership to herself and others (Eagleton, 134).

The above thoughts capture the Oedipal family and cultural patriarchal figurehead that Emecheta wants to project about her Ibuza Igbo community. In her common knowledge about the Igbo worldview, she acknowledges that, 'when a child grows, he must return to his roots - his father. Aku-nna, like Emecheta has adopted this belief that she ends up desiring the repression of her dream of acquiring education after the death of her father. The bond between Aku-nna and her father is seen as a manifestation of cultural relation which is strongly tied to gender roles and marriage. This is seen in the choice of name given to the protagonist of the novel, Aku-nna. Emecheta in *The Bride Price* clearly depicts that the name, Aku-nna which literally means 'father's wealth' is given to the girl character as a treasure to be valued through bride price (*The Bride Price*, 10). Indeed, Emecheta's title, *The Bride Price* reflects just one phase in the condition and oppression of the girl-child in a patriarchal society. From the title, it is deduced that a girl's bride price is a valuable desired asset to Ibuza men. This explains why Ezekiel Ochia trains Aku-nna in school with his little income. Aku-nna in return resolves to make a good marriage so that her bride price, that is, the money usually paid to the family of the bride by that of the groom will compensate her father's diligence in training her (*The Bride Price*, 10). Aku-nna's hard luck is subtly hinted amidst all her excitement to make her father happy through her bride price. A deep-down feeling of disappointment and worthlessness that is the lot of a person whose father is dead quickly envelops Aku-nna.

Psychoanalysis as a theory that observes the mind and human behaviour captures Emecheta's thoughts through her girl protagonist, Aku-nna (Colby, vii). The psychological origin of Aku-nna's depression is traced to her father's death.

In Emecheta's perspective, the Ibuza cultural milieu recognizes the patriarchal father, family and cultural norms as agents of fascism (Mezu, 133). Like her character, Aku-nna, Emecheta believes that her biological father is a shelter to her family. In the novel, we become aware of Aku-nna's inner thoughts and fears through her soliloquy, which externalizes and dramatizes her inner conflicts so powerfully - "Aku-nna said to herself. It is not that we have no father anymore, we have no parents anymore" (*The Bride Price*, 28).

In fact, Emecheta seems to suggest that the death of Aku-nna's father forcefully subjects her to the level of an orphan even though her mother lives. Aku-nna's contemplative thought evokes a feeling of pity as she laments: "father is the shelter". So not only have we lost a father, we have lost our life, our shelter" (*The Bride Price*, 28). Emecheta, in her autobiography, *Head Above Water* nostalgically recalls her private thoughts about the symbolic role of her biological father as the shelter of the family. She confesses and acknowledges the need for a father figure just like her girl protagonist, Aku-nna: "As a child, I was brought up thinking that a happy home must be headed by a man.... A home without him, "nna anyi, our father," at the top is incomplete, and all those from such a home should go about with a chip on their shoulders" (242). To denote these inner tensions, Emecheta seems to emphasize that in Ibuza Igbo community, a fatherless family is headless and porous.

Generally, this research analyzes other characters by assuming that all such characters are also part of the projections. The significance of this approach in analyzing the selected text is that - it validates the usefulness of literature in interpreting reality. The focus on the physical and psychological well-being of the girl protagonist helps to rediscover the relevance of psychoanalysis in the selected novel for study. In essence, this study seeks to find evidence of unresolved emotions, psychological conflicts, guilt and ambivalences in the text. Therefore, the behaviour and reactions of the girl protagonist or that of other characters are traceable to the author's childhood traumas, family life, sexual conflicts and fixations in the novel. Also, in this work, the evidence of psychoanalysis in the literary text is expressed indirectly as disguised or encoded in dreams or through psychological features such as symbolism (repressed objects), condensation (ideas, thought or persons represented using images), and displacement (fear or anxiety perceived and associated with an image) (Abrams 1999, 247).

In *The Bride Price*, Emecheta deals with the theme of girl-child oppression, forced early marriage, discrimination and sexual abuse. Psychoanalysis is thus employed to understand the mental functioning and the stages of growth, and development of Aku-nna as the protagonist of the novel. *The Bride Price* is an imaginative construction of Ibuza community (Delta region), in mid-west Nigeria. In the novel, the girl character, Aku-nna forms the focus of this research. The Ibuza community, Ma Blackie (Aku-nna's mother) and Okonkwo (Aku-nna's stepfather) represent the people who owe the girl-child (Aku-nna) support and protection during her stages of growth and development; but have failed woefully. Emecheta's characters serve as good models for the application of psychoanalysis because they possess dominant symbols in Freud's principles. Aku-nna exhibits an internal conflict borne out of the loss of her father and oppressive patriarchal cultural mores.

In Emecheta's fictional world, Okonkwo and Okoboshi are metaphoric symbols of patriarchy, which bind the female gender to cultural myths and superstitions. The psychological origin of Aku-nna's rebellion is hinged on the concept of the superego which presents a conflict between her and her cultural agency. Aku-nna, as a rebellious non-conformist struggling with internal and external conflicts - loss of a father figure, oppressive patriarchal customs and *eros*, is trapped within a world of physical and emotional isolation. The Ibuza myths and superstition have secretly injected in her a feeling of guilt, fear and anxiety. The rejection of oppressive tradition by Aku-nna in the novel results in the release of superego aggression that consumes her, her family and the Ibuza community. Significantly, Aku-nna ends up as a neurotic before her death. In fact, the concept of superego, both at individual and cultural level, is vital in understanding the dynamics of Aku-nna's rebellion against cultural mores. Freudian superego is perceived as a successor to Oedipus complex, the internalization of parental and cultural values, or the source for inflicting punishment towards the self.

Male Child Syndrome: A Precursor to Girl-Child's Psychological Problems in Ibuza Community

In Ibuza cultural milieu an unusually high value is placed on male children. Emecheta in *The Bride Price* shows that sons are the most valued possession than daughters. Grace Eche Okereke and Itang Ede Egbung observe that "in Africa, especially the traditional context, children are of great value and constitute the

primary reason for marriage. But male children are valued more highly than female children because they secure the lineage through procreation, while the female children marry and leave their natal homes and are, therefore, seen as a loss to their families" (2059). For Ezekiel Odi's, Nna-nndo his son, is the child recognized in the family. This is seen in Ezekiel's quarrelling attitude towards his wife, Ma Blackie. He often reminds his wife that after "paying heavy bride price on her head; he has only a son to show for it (*The Bride Price*, 9). Aku-nna on her own knows that she is "too insignificant to be regarded as a blessing to her parents' marriage. Not only that she is a girl, but she is much too thin for the approval of her parents" (*The Bride Price*, 9). The above statement by Ezekiel is discriminative and demeaning to Aku-nna. This is indeed gender stereotype. In the novel, the psychological and emotional torture that Aku-nna experiences are based on her sexuality - she is not valued because she is a girl. Therefore, in exploring the above quotation from the angle of feminism, feminists must insist on equal regard and treatment for both sexes.

The distorted image of Aku-nna painted by Auntie Matilda is indeed a stereotyped image of the girl-child in African society. Auntie Matilda, a relative to Aku-nna's father represents one of the agents that suppresses the girl-child. During her condolence visit to Aku-nna in their one-room apartment in Lagos after the death of their, Auntie Matilda articulates her feelings to Aku-nna:

Can't you see that you have no father anymore? You are an orphan now, and you have to learn to take care of whatever clothes you have. Nobody is going to take care of whatever clothes you have. Nobody is going to buy you any more, until you marry. Then your husband will take care of you. "The pity of it all," put in Auntie Matilda, "is that they will marry her off very quickly in order to get enough money to pay Nna-nndo's school fees." (*The Bride Price*, 38)

The above quotation depicts the oppression and discrimination of the girl-child in the hands of relatives as a result of her sexuality. Walking in line with Auntie Matilda's ideological stance, Aku-nna cannot enjoy a certain degree of freedom after her father's death because, she is a girl who must rely on a man for survival. The above ideological stance indeed includes the existence of patriarchal realities which is psychologically oppressive to Aku-nna. Mohammed rightly points out that Aku-nna's emotional plight is "not self-imposed psychological torture

rather, the activities of other women have been examined as the root causes of such mental pains" (465).

As a feminist, Emecheta exposes and repudiates the traditional conventional practice of female subjugation in the novel. During Ezekiel Odi's burial ceremony in Lagos, Aku-nna and Nna-nndo are the chief mourners. Their cries of grief are expected to be more than the other mourners, but Nna-nndo as a male child is singled out for special treatment. Grown-up men hold him to discourage him from crying to avoid hurting himself. Aku-nna is encouraged to continue crying because, culturally women are supposed to exhibit more emotions (*The Bride Price*, 30). The above treatment indicates favouritism. Boys are culturally superior to girls regardless of their age.

This treatment by Aku-nna's relatives and Ibuza kinsmen imposes on Aku-nna a feeling of being oppressed as a girl-child. The above act inflicts psychological pain on Aku-nna and it is called gender-based violence.

Also in the novel, Aku-nna's right to education is challenged because she is a girl. After the marriage between Aku-nna's mother and Okonkwo (her step-father), Aku-nna's education is not considered a priority anymore by Okonkwo's children and wives. Emecheta in depicting the above scene suggests that denying the girl-child rights to education because of her gender is psychologically harmful. Even though, the Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (qtd in Offorma, 4), which is adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December, 1949 stipulates that "everyone has the right to education", yet "parents tend to treat boys specially and care-givers tend to prefer that the girls take up routine environmental sanitation activities more than the boys who often are left to play as the girls work" (Amadi, 151). Okereke et al further observe that "there is a tacit cultural assumption in Africa that, in the face of lean resources, the girl child's education is sacrificed on the altar of her brother's" (2060).

This is exactly what happens when Aku-nna's father dies leaving his family with no source of income. Auntie Matilda knows that Ma Blackie has no job in Lagos and cannot pay Aku-nna's school fees; therefore, she quickly adopts the Ibuza cultural mentality of using marriage as an escape route for the girl-child in difficult situations. Iloba, Okonkwo's first son also refuses to see the need of educating the girl-child. Iloba does not support Ma Blackie's decision of sending

Aku-nna to school. This is evident in his statement: “why waste money on her? Thundered Iloba. I would never do such a foolish thing as to pay for her schooling” (*The Bride Price*, 74). This depicts the neglect of the girl-child and consequent abuse of her rights to education and overall development during childhood. Iloba, Okonkwo’s first son also refuses to see the need of educating the girl-child.

The categorization between boys and girls creates social differences in society which results in inequalities. Showalter vividly points out that in patriarchal societies low premium is placed on women and female children, whereas to sell a son would constitute a drastic violation of patriarchal culture (146). Showalter’s view reflects in Auntie Uzo’s statement concerning Aku-nna’s marriage: “she will gladden the heart of an educated man, you mark my words. Most girls from Lagos are very quickly married away to rich and educated men because of their smooth bodies and their schooling” (*The Bride Price*, 38). Indeed, Aku-nna’s mind has been prepared to accept her fate as a girl. Rose Ure Mezu notes that as “a child, Aku-nna does not mind belonging to the father to whom she feels bound by, a kind of closeness to which she could not give name” (134). Mezu goes further to suggest that “in Emecheta's worldview, all men – husbands, fathers, and brothers – are slave masters and tyrannical oppressors; the only option open to women is to choose the lesser of all these evils” (143). The above stipulated views are indeed a true reflection of Aku-nna’s situation. After her father’s death, “Aku-nna knows that she has to marry, and that her bride price will help in settling Nna-nndo’s school fees. According to the narrator, “Aku-nna did not mind that: at least it would mean that she would be well fed. What she fears is the type of man who would be chosen for her” (*The Bride Price*, 52).

Psychoanalysis would interpret Aku-nna’s feelings of inadequacy and dependency on men as emotional castration from personal ambition to be educated. Aku-nna discovers that marriage would rob her of her dreams; she also knows that the oppressive forces from her new household (Okonkwo’s family) have contributed to her lack of mental stability. Marriage therefore becomes an escape route injected into Aku-nna’s unconscious so powerfully that she ends up desiring her own repression of her father’s dream to train her in school.

Violent Cultural Experiences of Girls in Ibuza Community: A Psychoanalytical Perspective

To Emecheta, culture and tradition are oftentimes agencies of gender inequality. Instances of female subordination as a result of tradition and culture feature prominently in *The Bride Price*. This concern is buttressed by Omolara Ogundipe Leslie (1994) who identifies “traditional structures as one of the mountains on the back of the African girl-child” (11). In the novel, the girl-child is helpless in the face of cultural subjugation. Girls experience a great deal of oppression under tradition. They are subjected to situations that have emotional and psychological implications. Indeed, these oppressive principles are insulting to the female gender and hang on their necks like an albatross. Aku-nna like other Ibuza girls is a victim of early forced marriage and sexual exploitation. Charles C. Fonchingong in analyzing Aku-nna’s fictional plight observes that Emecheta “traces gender inequality in the Igbo society as hinging on the tenets of gender socialization process, customary and traditional practices” (139). This explains why Emecheta imbues her major character with radical rebellious traits to confront and rebel Ibuza taboos, norms and superstitious beliefs that bind the female gender in chains.

There is the inability of the Ibuza traditional society to treat all the citizens equally. Girls are forced into marriage, while boys are given the freedom to live their lives. Worguji rightly points out that “one cannot expect any remarkable improvement if relations of gender in the family remain unchanged” (142). In *The Bride Price*, the culture of allowing boys to fiddle with, romance and squeeze a girl’s breast once she starts experiencing her monthly menstrual cycle whether she approves it or not is indeed an act of violence which violates her human rights. According to the omniscient narrator, “their custom allowed this. Boys would come into your mother’s hut and play at squeezing a girl’s breasts until they hurt; the girl was supposed to try as much as possible to ward them off and not be bad tempered about it. So long as it was done inside the hut where an adult was near, and so long as the girl did not let the boy go too far, it was not frowned on” (*The Bride Price*, 97). Okoboshi’s dehumanizing behaviour towards Aku-nna offers a good example to cultural oppression of the girl-child. The narrator explains that Ma Blackie waved aside her pleas and cautions: “You mean you have nice breasts and don’t want men to touch? Girls like you tend to end up having babies in their father’s houses, because they cannot endure open

play, so they go to secret places and have themselves disvirgined" (... (*The Bride Price*, 121).

The story of Aku-nna in no way depicts an ideal childhood. Childhood is that stage in life where freedom exists under the guidance of adults; yet in Aku-nna's situation, childhood experiences become a tunnel which channels emotional and psychological pain, especially the pain of being forced into early marriage that will impinge on her development. Thus, in depicting Aku-nna's experiences, a strong tension exists between childhood and forced adulthood; the abrupt changes that Aku-nna experiences, obscure the reality of her childhood to the extent that she cannot maintain a critical stance in her life. For Aku-nna, childhood harbours a painful memory of exploitation and abuse that could follow her in adulthood. In depicting the assertive nature of Aku-nna's struggle, Emecheta suggests that some cultural societies prey on childhood innocence as they prey on the unsuspecting innocence of girl-children. Hence, girls become unprotected and vulnerable under the care of those who should have protected them. Chunga resents girls' "oppression and maintains that the notion of childhood and protection stems out the belief that children are vulnerable" (79-80).

The girl-child experiences a great deal of oppression in society; if she is not asked to go through the tradition of forced marriage, she is kidnapped or subjected to the obnoxious tradition of 'isi muo', a tradition which supports young men "who have no money to pay for a bride to sneak out of the bush to cut a curl from a girl's head so that she would belong to him for life (*The Bride Price*, 103). Chitando (2008) quoted in Timothy Chunga maintains that "patriarchal oppression results in the suffering of the girl-child"(26). T. Ngoshi (2010) goes further to observe that "girls are married off too early in their lives such that they are robbed of the pleasures of youthful femininity" (245).

In the novel, Aku-nna is kidnapped one night during a dance rehearsal by the Okoboshi Obidi family. Twelve men rush into the room where her sisters and cousins are practicing for a community festival; after finding Aku-nna, the Obidi men throw her over their shoulders and take her into the forest. According to the narrator, "What was a girl to do in a predicament of this sort? There was no use in struggling. There must be at least twelve of these men, all running, running and breathing hard. So this was to be the end of her dreams. After everything,

she was nothing but a common native girl kidnapped into being a bride. The realization was so painful..." (*The Bride Price*, 126)

In the novel, Emecheta cannot deny the encroachment of traditional culture into the freedom of the girl-child. Her visionary perception in exposing the problem of abduction or early forced marriage shows that she is not silent on the issue. Through the character of Iloba, Emecheta stresses that the structural system of female harassment underpinned by patriarchy should be abolished because it is outmoded. Iloba confesses: 'One would have believed that we were all civilized now, and that this kind of thing had stopped happening,' ... (*The Bride Price*, 132). Disagreement and hostility are the result of this kind of man's inhumanity against the girl-child since minimal bride price is offered to the parents of the girl after abduction (*The Bride Price*, 133). Anger swells up in the raging hearts of Okonkwo's family that Okonkwo's sons plan to kidnap and cut the locks of hair from the heads of all the girls in the family that is responsible for this outrage against their half-sister.

Rape or forced sexual intercourse is one of the observed cultural practices Emecheta explores in the novel. According to the Ibo tradition, once a girl is disvirgined by any man, the girl automatically becomes a bride to the man without punishing the man who commits the crime of rape. The family of the girl has no power over what has befallen their daughter and is compelled to accept her fate without agitating. When Aku-nna is kidnapped by the Okoboshi's family, her family searches for her and bemoans her fate. The narrator explains that "even as they were doing all this, they knew it was useless. Aku-nna had gone. All the man responsible had to do was cut a curl of her hair—"isi nmo" – and she would belong to him for life. Or he could force her into sleeping with him, and if she refused his people would assist him by holding her down until she was disvirgined. And when that had been done, no other person would want her anymore. It was a shame..." (*The Bride Price*, 132).

Okoboshi's sister also confirms the above cultural practice by warning Aku-nna to willingly sleep with her brother without being stubborn, because "Okoboshi would only have to call for help and all those drunken men would come in and help him hold her legs apart so that he could enter her with no further trouble. The men would not be blamed at all, because it was their custom and also because Okoboshi had a bad foot" (*The Bride Price*, 135).

The Bride Price: A Projection of Radical Feminism and Reality

Emecheta brings Aku-nna's assertive nature to the fore as she fights against patriarchal Ibuza tenets which support rape as a way of forcefully having the consent of the girl-child. The protagonist, Aku-nna devises a new plan to free herself from the humiliating experience that is capable of giving her perpetual trauma. She is a girl pushed to the wall and on the slippery path of revolution against her oppressors. She is thus forced to assume a feminist fight since her fundamental rights have been violated. Aku-nna is not ready to face frustration, debasement, physical and emotional pain arising from forced sexual intercourse as Okoboshi violently pushes her on the bed. According to the narrator, "She kicked him in the chest, he slapped her very hard, and she could smell the gin on his breath" (*The Bride Price*, 138).

Emecheta equips her protagonist with oratorical skills. These skills are feminist tools that give Aku-nna the freedom to decide her destiny and obtain freedom from society's oppressive restrictions. To stop Okoboshi from committing the inhuman act of rape, Aku-nna lies that she has been disvirgined by her teacher and best friend, Chike Ofulue. Aku-nna insults Okoboshi: "look at you, and shame on you. Okoboshi the son of Obidi! You say your father is a chief--dog chief, that is what he is, if the best he can manage to steal for his son is a girl who has been taught what men taste like by a slave" (*The Bride Price*, 138). Aku-nna's confession however infuriates Okoboshi who refuses to touch her calling her names. Aku-nna's feminist oratorical skill achieves a desired result because, it helps to ignite Okoboshi's hatred for her. Aku-nna is further humiliated when Okoboshi spreads lies that she had been defiled by a common slave, Chike Ofulue. This further demoralizes Aku-nna and her family. In Okoboshi's family, Aku-nna is humiliated and ostracized as if she has committed a sacrilege. Amidst the raging rumour, Aku-nna is given an old lappa like a young widow by Okoboshi's family to scorn and humiliate her before the villagers. The above act by Okoboshi's family appears to be a strategy to oppress the girl-child and frustrate her emotionally.

The utopian romanticizing of emancipation pushes Aku-nna to take a drastic action. She escapes from Okoboshi's house and elopes with the love of her life, Chike to Asaba and marries him without the official bride price on her head.

Aku-nna chooses total rebellion because she has been so oppressed. She rebels against Okoboshi and the Ibuza cultural mores because she wants to fight for her honour. In psychoanalysis, the *ego* is the most central part of the mind that mediates with one's environment. The *ego* is ever under the control of the *id* in order to expose the reality of human experiences. Aku-nna's *ego* operates according to the pleasure principle which focuses on her instinctual drive and desire for *eros*. In this act of rebellion, *eros* signifies the life instinct that pushes Aku-nna to engage in life sustaining decisions. This also explains why Aku-nna adopts revolutionary superego aggressiveness as the only way to escape Oedipal tyrannical powers and achieve her freedom. This superego is what Eagleton calls 'the unruly, insubordinate unconscious' (Eagleton, 136).

Aku-nna's rebellion points to a respectable road where feminist ideology must be allowed to fuel her struggle for freedom. Emecheta's concept of feminism is radical and very necessary in achieving total freedom for the girl-child. The reason for the fight points to the fact that Emecheta understands that African girls and women enjoy a low degree of freedom in the pre-colonial Igbo society. Indeed, Emecheta projects a feminist stance which spurns compromise and complementarity between sexes. In essence, Aku-nna's refusal to remain caged by the patriarchal traits spells true radicalism. To Emecheta, it is very difficult not to become hostile in the face of oppressive situation.

Consequently, Aku-nna uses all the aggressiveness in her psyche to fight against patriarchal oppression, thus moving beyond the level of ego and superego. In fact, her hatred for patriarchal oppression does not allow the guilt-producing superego to deliberate on the consequences of her quest for self-pleasure; but one thing is clear – the unconsciousness can always return to plague her (Ibid). Eagleton observes that in the midst of patriarchal laws, the girl-child begins to form what Freud calls 'superego', the awesome, punitive voice of conscience... (136). Aku-nna consciously rebels Oedipal guilt (depression), patriarchal tradition and castrations to escape from family and traditional forces that hinder her happiness. She decides to follow her heart in direct opposition to the Ibuza social and cultural norms. Aku-nna aggressively challenges the Oedipal guilt, Ibuza cultural norms, and the constant castration of her dreams that she is left with the option of making a total disconnection from her family and Ibuza tyrannical customs.

Emecheta represents Aku-nna's rebellion as an inward tragic event, reinforced by her family's hostility towards her choice of man and the oppressive patriarchal norms of Ibuza community. In fact, the psychic energies of Ibuza superstitious norms violate and destroy Aku-nna's psychic wholeness, fragmenting and ultimately dissolving her personality that she dies while giving birth to her daughter. Towards the end of the novel, there is a deathly instinct in Aku-nna in which her aggression is resolved and guilt displayed. This assertion proves Aku-nna's plight; ultimately, she lacks the needed courage to resist the mythical cultural beliefs or taboos of the Ibuza community. Therefore, emotional torture as a result of unpaid bride price and Okonkwo's fetish behaviour towards her heighten the Oedipal guilt that makes Aku-nna psychologically depressed.

The authorial third-person point of view links the protagonist's neurotic state to the societal pressure which revolves around the negative consequences of unpaid bride price during childbirth. According to the narrator, 'anyone who contravened was better dead. If you tried to hang on to life, you would gradually be helped towards death by psychological pressures' (*The Bride Price*, 141). But then, Aku-nna's fears, unfortunately, come to be realized – especially her fear of dying during childbirth. Aku-nna suffers a lot of mental anguish and dies in her knowledge of the patriarchal myth that punishes female offenders for flouting traditional custom.

Aku-nna's rebellion is radical and western in ideology. This act of rebellion is directly linked to Emecheta's real life experience when she defied her family tradition and rejected the man chosen for her by elders in her family (Umeh, 2). Like Aku-nna, Emecheta too eloped with her classmate, Nduka Onwordi and did not have a traditional Igbo marriage ceremony with all the blessings from family members and friends in their village (Ibid).

The Bride Price has an unhappy ending like Emecheta's love story. Emecheta's bride price was not paid because her husband could not afford the money her family demanded. Her husband, Sylvester, felt humiliated that she likened him to an outcast because he had been unable to pay her family bride price. Marie Umeh explains that 'Sylvester destroyed the only copy of Emecheta's novel to prevent public exposure of their marital affair' (3). Her husband's mean act forces her to give the novel an unhappy ending. Umeh further explains that "Aku-nna's guilty conscience, poor health, and anxiety from traumatic village

experiences precipitate a nervous breakdown which ultimately leads to her premature death" (Ibid). Aku-nna's mental breakdown also mirrors Emecheta's depression caused by her failed marriage, which ends in divorce (Umeh, 3). Despite life challenges, Emecheta has remained courageous and more mature in handling her problems, but in *The Bride Price*, Aku-nna's immaturity exposes her to Oedipal destructive powers of guilt (*Head Above Water*, 4). Emecheta accepts that the tragic ending of the novel is a result of her failed marriage and rebellion against the patriarchal figureheads in her family. Emecheta seems to have noticed the huge consequences of the Oedipal guilt she has imbued her protagonist with. In her auto biography, *Head Above Waters*, she emphatically states her opinion about her stance on cultural norms, feminist radicalism and consciousness. She confesses:

I had grown wiser since that manuscript. I had realized that what makes all of us human is belonging to a group. And if one belongs to a group, one should try and abide by its laws. If one could not abide by the group's law, then one is an outsider, a radical, someone different who had found a way of living and being happy outside the group. Aku-nna was too young to do all that. She had to die. (166)

Conclusion

In concluding this paper, it would be apt to buttress that hate for oppressive cultural norms and forces are consuming passions that fuelled Aku-nna's rebellion. Her choice of a man is indeed a challenge to the Oedipal figure heads; an attempt to defy Oedipal norms that militate against her pleasure principles. In fact, Aku-nna's mission of rebelling against 'Oedipus figureheads and symbols – Okonkwo, Okoboshi, the Ibuza customs or belief leads to a total breakdown of her psyche and body. Aku-nna's rebellion fails because she is incapable of completing her struggle for life instinct. She succumbs to Oedipal guilt and becomes subjugated. She moves into the level of preconscious and is unable to fight her death instinct. Indeed, the desire to resist patriarchal forces completely eludes her. Deleuze et al see Aku-nna's pathologic condition as a process of deterritorialization (363) because she cannot control her mind and actions again. She dies as a psychological victim of Ibuza cultural myths and superstitious beliefs. The omniscient narrator acknowledges the fact that "every girl in Ibuza after Aku-nna's death was told her story, to reinforce the old taboos of the land" (*The Bride Price*, 168). This is indeed, the way patriarchal hegemony has psychological hold on the girl-child to perpetually oppress and subjugate her.

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