



## FEMINISTIC STRUGGLE IN AFRICA: A CRITICAL VIEW ON BUCHI EMECHETA'S *THE BRIDE PRICE*

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### ABSTRACT

One of Buchi Emecheta's best-known contemporary books, *The Bride Price*, is a vehicle for expressing the voice of a female character. The research discusses two topics: the first is a patriarchal society, where women suffer and end up being the sole victims, and the second is African culture, which Emecheta harshly criticizes. Men are in complete control of the family unit. The novel illustrates the perils of culture and traditions as well as insensible sexuality. The paper is an attempt to critically analyse the theme of women's education as represented by Buchi Emecheta in her novel *The Bride Price*. Traditional African society adheres to culture, particularly when it comes to paying the bride from the groom's family. It will focus on how a variety of male and female characters portray women's education in the book, as well as their divergent and conflicting viewpoints on education.

**Keywords:** African Culture, Patriarchy, Colonial Issues, Feministic Struggle, and Bride Price

### Introduction

Buchi Emecheta immigrated to the UK in 1962 and began writing more than twenty books. Among his ground-breaking

and masterpiece works published in London are *The Slave Girl* (1977), *The Bride Price* (1975), and *Second-class Citizen* (1974). She has been recognized

and honoured for her work on themes like enslavement, liberation, sacrifice, and feminism. She has also established the voice of women in the majority of her writings. Rejecting any restrictions placed on women by racism, slavery, oppression, or colour. Specifically, Aku-nana, the protagonist and victim, lives in an Ibuza household where her stepfather permits her marriage on the condition that she pays the bride price. The author has also touched on some of the issues that Nigerian women faced following colonization.” The history of the Criminal justice system in Nigeria dates back to the colonization of the country in the late 1800s by Europeans, who introduced imprisonment based on their correctional system.” (Otu, 293)

It also illustrates the damage caused by societal customs that prevent women from acting independently of their desires. Women are human beings, too, full of ideas to turn into deeds, sentiments, and emotions that compel them to express a plethora of dreams and viewpoints to share.

### **Life of Aku-Nna**

The heroine of *The Bride Price*, Aku-nna Odia, lost her father, Ezekiel Odia, when she was only thirteen years old. She was referred to as her “father’s wealth” as she would bring a hefty bride price in the event of her marriage.

He had named her Aku-nna, meaning literally “father’s wealth”,

knowing that the only consolation he could count on from her would be her bride price. To him, this was something to look forward to. Aku-nna, on her part, was determined not to let her father down. She was going to marry a rich man of whom her father would approve and who could afford an expensive bride price (Emecheta,10).

It was a custom upheld in Nigeria. Being the best of the self-assured ladies, Aku-nna desired to maintain her honour. She worked to become independent by getting an education. However, Ezekiel was embarrassed by his thin and ill daughter, whom he referred to as a “living dead,” or Ogbanje. He was concerned since a dead person would not bring him much money and was derided by mankind. Ma Blackie went back to Lagos shortly after Ezekiel passed away to bring her kids to Ibuza, a tiny hamlet where customs were still practiced. Solidly built. This section of the story planted the seeds for the unexpected diversion of Aku-nna, given that the father provided the family with refuge, Odia’s passing took away all of their aspirations, traditions, and evil activities. “Buchi Emecheta, in her novel *The Bride Price* (1976), depicts the clash between the traditional customs of a small Ibo village in Nigeria and the growing influence of Africa’s European colonizers, as seen through the eyes of a young girl” (Babae and Siamak,151)



There were differences in customs between the sexes. A man with several wives may rise to become the leader, Obi, but a girl with prior exploits, Matrimony, was never valued. The book does a really good job of portraying this. When Aku-nna was mistreated by Okoboshi for pretending to be an immoral lady, he rejected her. Despite her purity and innocence, she was dismissed as a person and tossed aside. Later, as a representation of the impurity, he gave Okwonko's family an empty pot. In Aku-nna, the person he had abducted. Okoboshi demonstrated what kinds of guys are unkind to women when they are made fun of. Regretfully, Aku-nna cherished her instructor, who was descended from a slave. This dashed Okonkwo's hopes of getting a sizable bride price. Her "new brothers" threatened to murder her if she wed the slave. The role of slaves was taught while living under the colonial rule of Europe; upon their independence in 1960, they rose to the top and took on the role of masters. Consistently, Blackie, who had a degree, wished for her kids to have more knowledge than her. Both men and women in Okwonko's household detested this. There was a great deal of social inequality in the community. Her new family thought highly of an intelligent Aku-nna. "Achieving the power of balance is not an easy task. Feminist educators have recognized the contradictions found

in women's experiences as educators." (Irwin,15) However, it benefited Aku-nna at a critical juncture to be courageous and self-assured as she tried to get away from Okoboshi's brutality. In Nigeria, no one ever anticipated a woman experiencing this kind of independence. Any man who is like Okoboshi may handle the woman in the same manner that he handled Aku-nna. In the end, Aku-nna manages to locate the guy of her dreams, despite her disdain for the family of her father. As a consequence, Ma Blackie got divorced. "A woman who does not like another woman to be independent is the pathetic state of the Black women community" (Muthulakshmi,5827). Every woman in the book is enslaved in some way that never ends. From going about their own lives, Mama Blackie, her mom, had to go.

Children to her spouse by herself to Ibuza to beg the goddess to grant her another youngster. Ironies abound throughout their lives. Aku-nna had to go through. Despite facing several obstacles to marrying the guy she desired, she ultimately lost her life. As long as they thought the death was brought about by the irrational notion that the woman would die giving birth to her first child if the bride price was rejected. Ogugua, the cousin of Aku-nna, was used to the wicked traditions and rituals upheld in her hometown. The book describes her awareness via intuition about the culture and her adaptability.

Even the other spouses of Okwonko were deeply ingrained in these customs; they had to regard their other sisters as inequitable and envious.

### **African culture**

The majority of cultural customs discriminate against women, which is somewhat unexpected. Still, as Africans, we are obligated to uphold the customs and traditions of our homeland since they have evolved into anything that is handed down through the generations. Most of these behaviours impact women, and the community takes it all seriously.

Buchi Emecheta used the figure of Aku-nna to represent the tyranny of girl children. The protagonist of the book, Aku-nna, deals with a lot of issues from her culture. Following her father's passing, her father's brother, Okonkwo, looks for Ezekiel Odia, Aku-nna, her brother, and her mother. In Ibuza, Odia, female kids are tortured mentally. Aku-nna's mother, Ma Blackie, has some money, and with that money, she uses it to pay for her kids' education. Aku-nna is attractive and slender, and she draws a lot of young guys in Ibuza. Meanwhile, she has not yet begun her menstrual cycle. The new father of Aku-nna starts getting ready for a big bride prize Aku-nna. In the meantime, she develops feelings for her instructor, Chike Ofulue, whose ancestors were slaves (Osu). Aku-nna is old enough to be married when her menstrual cycle starts.

Numerous young males arrive to pursue her, and Okonkwo gets generous proposals. One evening, she and a few young ladies in her age group were rehearsing a dance for the impending Christmas party when a group of guys barged in and took her hostage. Following a confrontation and many hardships, Aku-nna and Chike Ofulue eloped. In his ideal world, Okonkwo's stepdaughter would be the chief, Obi. Regretfully, she dashed his father's hopes, and her father was not compensated with a bride price from Chike. Aku-nna gives birth to a child and passes away as life carries on. The tale comes to an unhappy end, and Emecheta indicates these problems, leaving it up to the reader to decide whether any answers exist.

### **African patriarchal society**

In Africa's traditional patriarchal culture, marriage is seen as very important and serious. Typically, the bride and groom get married, and their children become the groom's future heirs. We must reproduce. "Nna would go on and on, talking in that small, sad voice of his, telling Ma, reminding her, that he had had to pay double the normal bride price before he was able to take Ma as his wife" (Emecheta9). In African marital customs, the groom must provide financial or other support to the bride's family. Bride price is one of the prevalent social rituals in Africa that is observed within the form of



marriage, in which the prospective husband is required to reimburse the bride's family.

African thought and culture today concern the survival of African culture under 'modern conditions' and its development in the context of healthy cultural change and continuity. (Onwubiko,8).

Bride prices are often paid in cash, although other goods like "cowries" and "yams" are also mentioned. There are also references to "farmlands," "palm wines," and animals like "goats" and "cows." If the bride passes away during delivery, all Africans, regardless of how contemporary, generally assume that bride prices are not paid. Society has become African male poets who rose to prominence by elevating women and presenting them with acknowledgment and dignity of self. For example, in *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and Okonkwo, the protagonist spends the seven years of his exile seeking solace in the hamlet of Mbanta, his mother's birthplace. The book clarifies that the Earth is revered in African culture as a "mother," and there is a custom to appease the planet Goddess. These depictions of women as mothers and goddesses may be found throughout African literature. As a writer in a culture where men predominate, Buchi Emecheta discusses the challenging circumstances of African women living in a culture ruled by men.

One of those is her marriage process, in which she is forced to marry a rich family, and a good deal of price must be given in hand immediately and in return. She is unable to resist the decision, Emecheta wants to show that a woman can also voice out her/their decision(s). It is also an attack on the traditions in Nigeria in making women silent, and in order not to reject any decision from a patriarchal society, she is against it or them. (Abdul,203)

She never holds back when exposing the wrongdoing and vicious actions taken by African males against women. She is one of these authors whose writings are centered on changing the way that African women are stereotyped. When the Africans began to practice kidnapping women and forcing them into marriage, the lady was not in favour of marriage. "Bride price payment has implications on gender relations, values, expectations and roles. In her ethnographic studies in Kiisi District in Kenya, Silberschmidt conceptualized violence as a problem of transition from traditional to modern society (Kaye, Dan K et al. 1)

An additional strategy to get married when the lady disagrees with the adoption is to kidnap the lady and force her into marriage. These tactics are used by African males to take advantage of helpless women, and Emecheta shows how

a lady may be forced and defrauded inside the customary African civilization.

Most Ibuza men seemed to beat their women, and then nobody would put in a kind word for her. They would say to her. "Why did you get involved with an OSU in the first place? These slaves do not know how to treat the sons and daughters of free men. It is like giving gold to a pig. It would not know what to do with it. Her eyes mirrored her thoughts, and she felt like crying again. (Emecheta 91)

African women cater to the oppressed instead of speaking out against it to accept the idea that, in a patriarchal culture, a man's actions are always correct. African women's virginity or purity is significant, and this is reflected in marriage, which not only increased the cost of marriage but also considered the fact that every African woman at the time of marriage was not alone in increasing the cost of marriage, but also because every African woman defies this customary rule of society, which is so prohibited and regarded as having committed a horrible offense. "At the heart of Mbiti's definition lies an ideal of marriage equality. However, this equality is not characterized by any forms of masculinity and manhood ideologies and African cultural norms in terms of sociological constructs of gender roles" (Baloyi,12)

### **Idea of Christianity**

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The influence of Christian marriage on traditional African culture has been significant. For Instance, in the life of Ezekiel :

In his lifetime, Ezekiel was a typical product of this cultural mix. He would preach the Gospel on Sundays, he would sing praises to the European Living God, and he would force his children to pray every morning, to pray before and after meals; but all this did not prevent him calling in a native medicine-man when the occasion arose. In fact, behind his door was a gourd containing a magical potion that served as protection for the family; a man must not leave his family unprotected. (Emecheta, 29)

The tale depicts colonization and the growing adoption of Western culture and ways of life. At the start of the book, Aku-nna's father made a point of saying that because he had married, he should have had more sons. Aku-nna's mother is in the church in a customary manner. Aku-nna even had dreams of obtaining married in the same two ways: "one for the white man's deity in Ibuza, and one for the lovely goddesses of the church" (Emecheta,3).

Additionally, Ben Adegor, a friend of Chike, christened Aku-nna and Chike's English bed "Joy." shows unequivocally



that Western culture is accepted, and that African men and women find it more liberated from their unavoidable taboos and civilizations. Emecheta attempts to convey that individuals such as Aku-nna and Chike, who suffer from caste and misogyny, find comfort in the new culture brought about by colonialism. Despite their Due of their self-reliance and Western education, Aku-nna and Chike fall prey to the male-dominated African society.

The traditional African culture has been greatly impacted by Christian marriage. The contrast between Christian marriage and African marriage becomes a challenge to the Christian ideology of marriage and the growing adoption of Western culture and way of life. At the start of the book, Aku-nna's father made a point of saying that because he had married, he should have had more sons. Aku-nna's mother was in the Church as well as the customary manner. Aku-nna even had dreams of obtaining married in the same two ways: "one for the white man's deity in Ibuza, and one for the lovely goddesses of the church.

Emecheta attempts to convey that individuals such as Aku-nna and Chike, who suffer from caste and misogyny, find comfort in the new culture brought about by colonialism. Despite their self-reliance and Western education, Aku-nna and Chike fall prey to male-dominated African

men and women alike and must confront the myth of unpaid bride payment. In the same way that was previously mentioned, bride prices are a very common and widespread custom in Africa. The novel's title, *The Significance of the Bride Price*, lies in the plot's overall framework. The husband cannot get the bride's price without it. Declare the children that his spouse bears as his own; in other words, the bride's price is required. Aku-nna" is a name that translates to Father's wealth.

Emecheta believes that several accepted types of masculine oppression by the patriarchal culture must be carefully considered and re-examined. In African traditional culture, the beginning of the female child is seen as an excellent way to get a decent bride price. "The task of the latter part is to explain how traditional African social and economic organization, once in full operation, were disrupted by the slave trade and colonialism" (Mammo, 11) Aku-nna's stepfather, Okonkwo, also anticipated significant bride payments from Aku-nna's marriage for his benefit, i.e., to use the funds to become an Obi. In actuality, her schooling was allowed to continue as they felt that an educated girl was more appealing for marriage. Get a greater bride price. In Emecheta's books, learning serves as a liberating force. Education is how Chike is permitted to fantasize about their new lifestyles, in which Aku-nna might work as a teacher at

a school and Chike in an oil firm to become self-sufficient earners. However, Aku-nna's elopement destroyed his plan with the slave-derived Chike Ofulue.

### Conclusion

Emecheta's *The Bride Price* provides a short overview of the bride price and African marital cultures lost. She supports the ability to write to expose the rigid traditions of marriage, bride price, and joining. In African culture, social events like "bride price" and "marriage" appear incomplete without one of them in society. Emecheta's autobiographical book has been effective in presenting a negative picture of Nigerian women and how they are portrayed in society. Emecheta masterfully depicted the actual effects of moms oppressing their daughters and the inequity that resides among women. Nevertheless, she gives a cliffhanger ending to her story for parents who want their child to survive. Eventually, the bride price turns into a delusional evaluation of all women. It is also required of her generation to pay for the cost of the bride. The author emphasizes in this book that self-education is essential to overcoming the traditions and behaviours that don't provide them with a way out of every problem the traditional African people encounter, nor does it improve the position of women. In doing so, the author hopes to preserve the customs and ritualistic rituals because disregarding these traditions and

conventions often results in death, regardless of the cause or academic. The protagonist's life lacks a personal identity due to her constant supervision and regulation by her father's aspirations, or her husband's dreams, for that matter. The most agonizing event that may occur to a woman is the total eradication of her individuality. She completely vanishes and ceases to exist—a full destruction of her identity and herself. The worst thing that can ever happen to a woman is this. Emechata, a female writer, feels it's important to identify women's complaints in her community. The research not only captures the reality occurring in Africa, but it is also carefully chosen since the same topic is covered in the researcher's own country of his civilization like a dark fog. The researcher attempts to communicate via this article to prevent such disputes and promote societal cultural awareness and self-awareness. Regretfully and unpleasant, masculine dominance under the guise of religion has complete control over women's authority, as seen in Africa and many other nations where a piece of black paper with some white writing on it represents women's rights. Undoubtedly, given the advancement of technology and globalization, the concept's presence would be unfortunate since, on the other hand, it still occurs in the researcher's nation and many other emerging nations.

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