

## **The rescue of male ambition in buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price***

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### **Abstract**

This article addresses the issue of male ambition in connectivity with the female individual's worth in Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*. It sheds light on the realm men generally put forward to move very far up the social ladder with the adversity of colonialism, at the expense of women. The paper demonstrates that, traditionally, the legitimization and enactment of patriarchy in African societies is used as a springboard to enhance men's ambition, but in actual fact marginalizes women's growth. It also lays emphasis on the centeredness of assets women are expected to yield to meet male ambition in their family given that the bride price which seals the social contract of marriage comes out as a source of tension and cultural rupture. The study provides the intrinsic relationship between the sacredness of myth and fate, i.e., contrarily to the traditional African women, who blindly abide by the way of conduct dictated by primitive cultural conventions, some of them challenge patriarchy as a whole, at their peril, in the quest of happiness.

**Keywords:** African women-ambition-bride price- colonialism-cultural rupture

### **Introduction**

There is an intrinsic vicinity between history and literature. Modern African literature is essentially rooted in colonialism. In his paper entitled, "Writing Against Neo-colonialism", Ngugi Wa Thiong' O comes to a threefold faction of African literary history: the age of the anti-colonial struggle; the age of independence; and the age of neocolonialism. (Wa Thiong' O: 1988:92) <sup>[17]</sup>. The pervasiveness of anticolonial discourses in Male and female African writers account for the negative side effects colonialism has brought about in all aspects of life to indigenous people. The stakes at the economic level are high as colonialism robbed the continent of its erstwhile splendor:

European merchants and institutions accumulated huge sums of profit from shipping along the famous triangular trade routes connecting the colonies [...]. This accumulation of wealth was invested in establishing European financial institutions, including the stock exchange and large banking institutions. (Beckman, 2005:270) <sup>[4]</sup>

Beckman sheds lights on the economic destruction of Africa, but if we dig deeper, we will easily see that the day on the economic balance breaks down, the social status of men degrades and affects, negatively, women's role and status. In his essay, "The Changing Roles of Women in Ndebele Fiction", Tommy Matshkayile-Ndlovu studies the Ndebele people, one of the most popular tribes in Zimbabwe after the Shona. He insists on the social disintegration and subjugation of women as they started to experience ostracism and how motherhood took hold over female ambition and entrepreneurship because of poverty and patriarchy:

When one talks of the changing roles of women, it is important to refer to both the past and the present in order to identify what their roles were once and what they are now [...] The two sexes shared responsibilities in the cornfield [...] The young men and the young women, too, had ample

Time to interact and socialize in a manner that was approved by their community. The constant interaction between young women and young men satisfied emotional and social needs, thereby promoting a stable and balanced community. (Matshkayile-Ndlovu, 2007: 92-93) <sup>[11]</sup>

Essentially, it is in this context and the homogeneity of the two sexes in some ethnic groups, critics like Oyeronke Oyewumi talk about the awkwardness, inapplicability and irrelevance of gender issues in relation to geography:

[I]n Western societies, physical bodies are *always* social bodies. As a consequence, there is really no distinction between sex and gender, despite the many attempts by feminists to distinguish the two [...] According to anthropologist Shelly Errington, 'Sex (with a capital 'S') is the gender system of the West'. (Oyewumi, 2016: Xii) <sup>[13]</sup>

Even though Oyewumi makes a discrepancy of the asynchronous relationship between Sex and gender, what stands out is that sexism and female subordination are born on the crest of colonial rule in Africa, with the exacerbation of life and the breakdown of tradition and culture, as women are used to serve men's will.

It is in this context and reality we should understand Buchi Emecha's fiction when she decries the abusive treatment of women to satisfy men's needs, at their expense. Her novel under review, *The Bride Price*, provides useful details about the low treatment of women through the issue of the bride wealth attached to marriage. In fact, the paper does not revolve around the "unfinished business" of women through structural and physical violence *per se*, but examines how the woman subject is "exploited" to nurture and materialize men's economic and social status with a rapidly-changing Igbo society under the colonial yoke.

As a structure, the study is divided into three parts. Part one lays emphasis on the impact of poverty and money on the social status of men, part two will be articulated on male and female entrepreneurship and part three will be dealing with the issue of bride price.

## 1. The Impact of Poverty and Money on the Social Status of men

The advent of colonialism in Africa has changed a great deal in Africans' lifestyle and culture. The economic growth was badly stirred inducing people to sink in an unprecedented precarious situation. Henceforth, money becomes scarce for the masses when the means of production are in the hands of the intruders. In his book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Walter Rodney<sup>[12]</sup> pinpoints the plight and misery which Africans have undergone resulting from colonialism and how crucial money appears to be for the same Africans. He comes up with factual materials about the expenditure for social life. For instance, in Nigeria, it was less than one shilling nine pence whereas in Britain, it was six pounds and fifteen shillings, in 1934, well before the welfare state, which is very scandalous.

One would ask the question to know the crux of the African economic downfall regarding colonialism. The history of the world reveals that in olden times, there did not use to be a kind of currency for trade and Africa was not an exception to that rule. During the pre-colonial epoch, Africa, the ultimate means people could rely on to earn their keeping was, indeed, farming. Although they used obsolete equipment in farming, one way or another, they found their way to get by with the crops. In fact, so practical was their system that the interactions, of any kind of nature, have been laid upon swap. In a word, fairness and virtue have been of common knowledge; they are the very foundation of African cognitive ethos in a situation of despair and/or drought. Therefore, people could basically be stirred to the depths of their souls in their daily lives, crowned with ups and downs, but worked hard and helped one other to extirpate themselves from the eeriness. Therefore, according to their cultures, they exchanged and paid in kind.

Contrary to what the African has known so far, he sees himself drifted away from the right path to the wrong one as far as his traditional and social structure are concerned. Not only is he colonized but also is driven in a deep crisis that altered all his economic balance. "Monoculture" is just one of the many negative impacts of colonialism on Africa as it enhances poverty, malnutrition and diseases, which symbolize the significant value of money. Time to talk about it; Emecheta does not manage to denounce that colonialism yields impoverishment that goes hand in hand with malnutrition. Besides, she pinpoints the issue many a time in *the joys of Motherhood*. Through Nnu Ego, one of the protagonists, Emecheta depicts that, during colonial epoch, poverty has been at its height and was so fierce that one could hardly tell the difference between malaria and other health ailments related to an unbalanced diet. To substantiate this, Iyawo Itsekiri, a woman living next to Nnu Ego, comes to rescue the latter's son, Oshia, when her husband left her to seek a better job. Oshia is seriously sick because of malnutrition, which her neighbor, Iyawo, is fortunately full aware of:

Iyawo made of the stew, hoping that she would be able to tempt both Nnu Ego and Oshia, for she still suspected that malnutrition and not malaria was the main cause of the boy's illness. (Emecheta, 1996: 104)<sup>[10]</sup>

In the same way, Emecheta blows the whistle on the inaccessibility of people to basic first health care. Not only are the indigenous poor, but the health service is obsolete,

not to say absent, to take good care of them when they are sick. Emecheta astutely denounces the impoverishment of the African continent by the white man, leaving the colonized defenseless and hopeless. For instance, there are not enough midwives to help women give birth to their babies. The sum total of these consequences is a high rate of child death that most people attribute to a divine decree that befell them resulting from their badly reckoned actions from their ancestors or personal gods commonly known as "chĩ". In a country where there is poverty, money always yields a great impact on people. In *the Bride Price*, Buchi Emecheta talks about it at length. The man, chief of the family and breadwinner, works the land to nourish his family. Yam becomes the most important staple food for the people. Because of its strenuous cultivation and value, some refer to it as "king of the crops". The fact that the cultivation is tough suggests that the chief of the family needs as many hands as possible to help him in the field. This justifies the large number of polygamous men and the importance of masculinity among the Africans.

In other words, the more wives a man has, the more male children he expects from them to give to thrive his business. Therefore, fathers hold dear of their male children. However, one would ask how the African farmer could cope with the supremacy of the white man in his own country when we take into account the fact that there has been a striking gap-level between them, for the latter has more equipment and labor force while the former uses a technique that is still in its infancy. This surely explains the chronic poverty and the great impact money represents for the people and the inferior status of African women.

In *the Bride Price*, although countless people live from hand to mouth, there are a few elite among them who have enough economic means to get by. This shows one of the disparities of poverty that enhances jealousy among the people. For instance, descendants of slaves whose fathers and ancestors were the ones who first had the guts to send their children to the white man's school have a good social status in their community, which leads the freeborn to hold them in low regard:

... So he (Chike Ofulue) was taken by surprise when one evening his father solemnly called him into their sitting-room, which was furnished like some tropical Victorian parlour, with stiff leather chairs, colourful cane window blinds and a mighty fan[...] The people of Ibuza will never forgive him (Chike's Father) for being so prosperous. (Emecheta, 1976: 84)<sup>[8]</sup>

Mr Ofulue is basically a vivid example of Nigerian new elite insofar as he has achieved the goal that almost all ambitious rural people yearn for. This is to say, they all dream of a "zinc-roofed house" that represents the pinnacle of hope for almost all. The irony is, although Mr Ofulue is prosperous and has managed to shift for himself to have a furnished-modern house like the one the White man owns, the freeborn look him down. For them, his status of domestic slave cannot herald him as a respectful person.

Through the character of Mr Ofulue, Emecheta hinges on education and training as a pillar to any individual's self-realization and fulfilment to lead a decent life. Emecheta likens Mr Ofulue to his son's contemporary, Ben Adegor, she depicts as the embodiment of security as far as money is concerned. In fact, Adegor went from rags to riches, he lives now happily with his wife, Rose. Given that Ben Adegor is out of the wood from now onward, he lends a helping hand

to his friend, Chike, after he has eloped with his lover, Akunna, from Ibuza. Adegor has the power of decision making with his respectful profession as the Church Missionary Society school headmaster of Ughelli; He later on helps Akunna to work as a junior teacher in his own school after she has settled down in Ughelli with her husband:

He (Adegor) had also told Chike he could offer them accommodation in his old hut, now that he had bought a new zinc-roofed house from an Ibo trader [...]. (Emecheta, 1976: 146) <sup>[8]</sup>

In fact, the economic value of money has a great impact on people. They live in a society where a man is judged by what he makes of himself as an ambitious person with the acquisition of titles that defines his worth. Besides, in *Things fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe sheds light on the individual's merit and personal entrepreneurial that define the high social profile of Igbo people. Okonkwo, the protagonist in *Things fall apart*, has always made unflattering remarks towards his father, Unoka. Okonkwo is not proud of his father, instead he disdains him, for the latter has led a lazy lifestyle; he compares him to a woman: [...] among these people a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father. (Achebe, 1964: 7) <sup>[1]</sup>

In this respect, Achebe's viewpoint about self-worth and ambition is congruent with Buchi Emecheta. But, in *The Bride Price*, Emecheta highlights the breakdown of the Igbo society that is shaken by the adversity of life and insists more on the unprecedented situation and the bias relationship between men and women. But even though the living conditions are precarious, almost all men still cling to restore their dignity in the eyes of their people as they set their spirits and minds on the three titles that consist the backcloth of personal promotion and self-esteem among their kinsmen. The crux of the matter is that, the acquisition of such titles requires a large amount of money in a country where colonialism is at its peak, and where misery encroaches on people's psyche. This betokens the sacredness and stakes attached to the assets women can generate in their marriage, which leads some critics to talk about men's self-centeredness in using women as "commodities" to achieve self-realization.

## 2. Male and Female Entrepreneurship

If we agree that the social and economic situation of Africa under colonialism is drastically shaken and has consequently devalued the status of men and women, we will easily understand the intrinsic relationship between male ambition and the "objectification" of women. In reality, from the day on a man's worth is wrenched by the stiffness and side effects of colonialism, we will easily understand his resolution to the female subject to give him a hoist to see his most ambitious projects come true.

The colonial world was definitely a man's world, and women were not allowed to play any meaningful role in it except as petty traders and farmers. (Boahen, 1987:107) <sup>[5]</sup>

A closer scrutiny of the issue shows that colonial supremacist laws and African peoples' own cultural dharma work together to rob women of their self-worth to not only rescue men from the tyranny of the White man, but more precisely to help them achieve their own social agenda, which is a typical form of violence. Henceforth, this injustice cannot escape female writers like Buchi Emecheta:

... [M]ost of the episodes that I have used usually come

from what I have seen or experienced or what somebody who experienced it told me. (Umeh, 1996: 450) <sup>[16]</sup>

The novelty of the book under review is its pivotal gear on the marriage issue and the exploitation of the woman subject as a pure foible for men to move up a few rungs from the social ladder, with the undercurrent hard time.

A good instance of male ambition at the expense of woman Emecheta highlights in the novel is the female protagonist's uncle, Okonkwo, and his inclination to achieving a high social status. When he remarries Akunna's mother after the death of her father, he perpetrates all forms of violence upon her to satisfy his ambition, which shows the naked nature of his pessimism on women.

In other words, the first title he intends to receive which is like a feather in his cap is associated with an expensive celebration day on which people will drink palm wine and eat at their will. To crown it all, he is a mere polygamous peasant. Consequently, He casts his eyes on Akunna to use her as a prop for the money that will surely come out of the young girl's wedding when everybody knows that one share of that very sum should be kept in store for the schooling of Akunna's younger brother, Nna-ndo, the legitimate heir of that money by right of tradition following the death of their father.

For his gluttony and resilience to be promoted at any cost, Okonkwo twists the right of tradition that enacts the young girl's brother grounded in masculinity and phallic supremacy. The hen Okonkwo offers to Akunna into womanhood does not evidence his kindness and consideration towards the girl, but his impatience and strain for money and own interests: She (Aku-nna) did not know that her uncle (Okonkwo) wanted to be an Obi, how much he wanted the Eze title. (Emecheta, 1976: 110) <sup>[8]</sup>

On the other hand, though Okonkwo has a burning desire for money, he is haunted by a preposterous feeling that prevents him from accepting any kind of money resulting from Akunna's marriage to her dream love, Chike, a descendant of a slave. Through his reaction, Okonkwo is an exception to the rule against countless people who advocate that "*money has no smell*". For him, it does as long as it comes from a descendant of slave. The other reason for Okonkwo to repel Chike and his money is that he wants to conform with the community's low conception of the caste system and does not want to start something that none of his kinsmen will follow. Henceforth, he appears in the borderline of ambition and pride. Eventually, he does not fulfil his ambition, nor does he swallow his pride, because after Chike has eloped with Akunna, Okonkwo turns back to everything that the latter holds dear of and curses her:

So it became as no surprise to Ma Blackie to see the image of her daughter one morning in front of Okonkwo's chi, his personal god [...] Still, Chike's persistence had moved him to offer Okonkwo a bride price of fifty pounds, double the amount that the Ibuza custom originally stipulated [...] Okonkwo had refused and, to add insult, made Ofulue understand that he had not given his daughter to any slave. (Emecheta, 1976: 156-157) <sup>[8]</sup>

Another embodiment of male ambition is Ilabo, Okonkwo's son. His character is used as mouthpiece to show that some Igbo people are great "losers", which impels them to be resentful and selfish: He (Ilabo) was a promising farmer, working hard to get a wife, but knew inside himself that he was nothing more than a farmer. (Emecheta, 1976: 74) <sup>[8]</sup>

As has been noted, it appears that under colonialism, the

Ibuzian farmers live in total despair to make ends meet and assure a better life for their families. But strangely enough, there are some who emerge and struck it rich by adopting new ways and means to gain profit without women's rescue or exploitation.

Chima is a good example. He is one among many other people who look at things with an artist's eyes. Chima is an Ibo trader who left the Eastern region to come to settle down in Lagos in order to eke out a living. Once his business flourishes he becomes a turncoat. He changes gear into transport only after he has made a lot of money in trade. Chima's spirit of entrepreneurship is a very interesting case in point insofar as he resorts to go back to his native land to branch out his business. He is the archetype of the ambitious Nigerian who, before independence, attempts to find his way to riches while the white man is tormented to saving as much as possible in Africa:

This was a type of venture into which many Nigerians seemed to be rushing as the country moved towards self-governing in the fifties, and this Ibo trader, Mr Chima by name, had succeeded in buying out a foreign firm which was leaving prompted by rumours of approaching Independence. (Emecheta, 1976: 146)<sup>[8]</sup>

Beside Mr Chima, there are still some other illustrious people like Mr Adegor, a new rising elite. Adegor is the outcome of what the white man has made of the first indigenous people that were forced or sent to him to be educated. Adegor has succeeded his life under colonialism:

He (Adegor) had bought a new zinc-roofed house from an Ibo trader who having made his pile of money among the Urhobos was returning to the Eastern Region to start another business in transport. (Emecheta, 1976:146)<sup>[8]</sup>

There is one thing noteworthy, Emecheta seems to say that, even though the newly-educated African does not further his studies under colonialism, he can content himself with a standard minimum of life: his so-called education appears to be a means of survival. Chike has not yet passed his A level, nevertheless, works as a teacher and now wants to apply for an oil company.

In fact, Emecheta upholds the idea that Christianity is synonymous with economic promotion for the Igbo people as long as it helps them secure a job, hence their freedom. Analysing Emecheta's literary work, Omar Sougou invokes that, somehow, under colonial Africa, with Christianity some Igbo people, particularly traders, help themselves to more than their shares at the expense of the unconvincing ones. Christianity retrieves the converted the might to enhance their business and spirit of entrepreneurship. Sougou makes a poignant analysis which is in conformity with Emecheta and many critics about the issue. In *the Slave Girl*, through Ma Palagada, Emecheta denounces the rather unorthodox method of socio-economic growth of certain Igbo people associated with domestic bondage and perversion:

Christianity signifies money and power; conversion to it bestows on the merchant's privileges such as the monopoly and preferential trade terms that Ma Palagada enjoys. The ideology of the colonial order penetrates the semi-agrarian Otu Onitsha and its pre-industrial economy [...] the identifiers of those who, like the Palagadas, subscribe to the new ideology and constitute a new class in the process of formation. (Sougou, 2002: 72)<sup>[15]</sup>

Ma Palagada practises domestic slavery: she buys the young girl, Obejeta, from her brother and many other ones. These

girls are of great value for her as they constitute the labor that runs her trade at Otu Onitsha market. But the irony is that, the very businesswoman, Ma Palagada, who takes the rise from her "slaves", seems to be bonded to the white man. She also appears to be the counterpoint of characters like Obejeta, Amanna, Jienuaka, Chiago to name but a few, who are all victims of servitude. Ma Palagada herself embodies ambiguity since she represents both a role model for women and conversely carries the mentor of the perverted villain character. She has the White man under her sleeve and has lived as concubine with him.

One cannot put forward the concept of entrepreneurship under colonialism in Africa while silencing the contribution of women particularly. Under colonial Africa, farming does not always feed its man, this urges some women not to fold their arms. Instead, they attempt to find ways and means to set themselves free from tyranny. Emecheta uses Ma Blackie to epitomize the relatively emerging peasant amid a totally rural area. The writer lays the stress about how attitudes vary from urban women to those from the rural. The former tend to be more independent yet bonded to their families. Unlike the rural women who wreck their back in farming the land and act as "means of transportation" to carry crops, the urban and educated women don't want to be enslaved by any kind of patriarchal tradition. Emecheta merges into Aku-nna's inner feelings and reads through her mind. She describes the plight that weighs the protagonist down and epitomizes Aku-nna's apprehension and unlikelihood to becoming a prospective submissive rural woman following the death of her father:

What she feared was the type of man who would be chosen for her. She would have liked to marry someone living in Lagos. So that she would not have to work on a farm and carry cassava. She had heard stories of how strenuous farm life could be for a woman. She had heard that a farmer husband did not give housekeeping money.... (Emecheta, 1976: 52-53)<sup>[8]</sup>

Through this intrusion, Emecheta makes a leap into the rural family politics that awaits Ma Blackie in Ibuza. Her life is shorted to farming and trading cassavas at the market. The writer further insists on how unsustainable the cassava trading process is, starting from the beginning to the end the women of her like are between the devil and the deep blue sea: how could my mother fit into this type of life? (Emecheta, 1976: 64)<sup>[8]</sup>

Emecheta departs Ma Blackie from the other rural women as she is exempt from the hard-working conditions other rural women undergo. She is somehow independent thanks to the money she keeps aside from her late husband, Ozekiel Ochia. This once again contrasts Okonkwo to Ozekiel, for the former is a precarious farmer. Moreover, Ma Blackie stands out from the others since she meddles in her Palm Kernel-trade, which is less energetically demanding than farming:

Her type of trading was different and less strenuous: she would go to the town of Ogwashi to buy the Kernels, have them bagged and sent to Ibuza via the one and only lorry which made that trip. On Nkwo market days the bags were transported to Abasa, and Ma would follow on foot.... (Emecheta, 1976: 73)<sup>[8]</sup>

At all events, the rural women as well as Ma Blackie, through their modest activities, seem to develop entrepreneurship that cannot thrive as their style are cramped by sexism and servitude.

The spirit of entrepreneurship Emecheta highlights in *The*

*Bride Price* is also central in *Dew in the Morning* by Shimmer Chinodya. Through, young Godi, the main protagonist, Chinodya fictionalizes the African peasants' policy under colonialism with a certain entrepreneurship harboured by women he epitomizes with Masiziva, Godi's mother. She works hard as a farmer to make ends meet like Ma Blackie in *The Bride Price*. They are two characters in different space, yet made of the same stuff. Ma Blackie and Masiziva are the mentors of the entrepreneurial-African women under colonialism:

Mother spends the day weeding, and pacing the field in her tattered gumboots, defending her precious crops from cattle and goats. In the blazing sunshine or drenching rain she was the human fence of our fields. (Chinodya, 2001: 141) <sup>[6]</sup>

### 3. The Issue of Bride Price

People live in community e.g., groups. A group, according to some sociologists, is: A number of people who feel a common identity and interact in a regular and structured way, on the basis of shared norms and goals. (Bassis and others, 1980: 171) <sup>[3]</sup>

If we take this definition for granted, we will agree that people who live in a given society have to abide by the norms enacted by the group. Marriage, which is a sacred union between two persons legally celebrated, is part and parcel of any individual's life. It is an old age tradition that changes from one continent to another and from one society to another. In this respect, a marriage celebration, whatever the society, goes hand in hand with a bride price. The term bride price is itself synonymous with various other terms among which are the most conventional ones such as dowry, bride wealth to name some but a few. Then, bearing in mind its major impact on marriage celebration, it would be of paramount relevance for us to reiterate its definition of the bride price:

A payment in the form of money, property, or other valuable asset that is made by or on behalf on a perspective to the bride's family in certain cultures or societies."<sup>1</sup> <sup>[18]</sup>

Above all, the bride price is variable in space and in time according to the two engaged persons. African people are very concerned with the bride price issue, for them, not only is it traditional, but is a union thoroughly based on family politics. It heralds countless writers to bend down on the issue and pinpoint the dynamics it embodies.

The bride price is central in Emecheta's works, particularly in the novel under review and holds various impacts on Igbo people's cultures that stiffen with colonialism. This infers a double-edge problem of the bride price: at first it grounded in customary principles and had a socio-economic impact with colonialism.

In *the Bride Price*, Emecheta focuses on how masculinity and patriarchy oppress the female progeny. That is, the father is the one entitled to benefit more than anybody else from the "wealth" granted by the in-law in recognition of accepting to marry his daughter. Therefore, it appears that a female child, on the part of her father, is the sole shorthand of her "commoditization" as there is a bondage that lies there in between the father and his daughter. By any means, there seems to be exploitation in the relationship of Aku-nna and her father as there is some personal motivation that energizes the so-called love that Ezekiel confers on his

daughter:

Ezekiel Odia often pitied his daughter, particularly because she took more after him than his Amazon of a wife. [...]. He had named her Aku-nna, meaning literary 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. (Emecheta, 1976: 9-10) <sup>[8]</sup>

Emecheta unfolds the truth about the patriarchal stance of the Igbo society that extends its tentacle to the family with parents' inclination to male children to the detriment of female ones who are more often than not used to meet the desire of men. This shows the extent to which the bride price legitimizes the supremacy of the male subject over the female one, because paradoxically, the heavier the bride wealth is the more demanding and intolerant the husband is with his wife:

... [H]e (Ezekiel Odio) would remind Ma Blackie that having paid this heavy bride price he had had their marriage sanctified by Anglicanism. And what had he to show for it all- an only son! (Emecheta, 1976: 9) <sup>[8]</sup>

In fact, the significant role of male children justifies why female children are, in the eyes of the people, money in kind to materialize their needs the father or the brother will receive when they are married in order to have a better life.

In some cases, the bride price can also bring about confusions and rivalries in the family, especially, when the head of the family appears to be self-centered in the way the dowry is going to be spent or shared. Mostly, it is used to pay the father's debts and help him distinguish himself in his community.

In another novel by Buchi Emecheta, *The Slave Girl*, the writer portrays Obejeta's elder brother, Okolie, and Okonkwo in *The Bride Price* in a bad light. The common denominator of the two is: their selfishness and pessimism with women. Reversely, the only difference between Okolie and Okonkwo is that, the latter is the legitimate beneficiary, as far as Aku-nna's bride price is concerned. Whereas, the former is denied that favor of his elder brother, Owezin, after the death of their father. Now that Owezin has gone to the "Olu oyibo", to seek for a better life, Okolie is determined to fulfill his dream to sell his sister into slavery, at any costs. Okonkwo as well as Okolie are highly ambitious characters who do not hesitate to use awkward methods, if need be, with women to come to the rescue them. Okolie dares drive his little sister into bondage for the sheer ambition of keeping a high profile among his people and his age group on a traditional event that they are looking forward to celebrating:

... [N]ot only had he (Okolie) sold his sister for less than half the price she would later have had for in marriage, he was also keeping all that money for himself. (Emecheta: 1977: 80) <sup>[9]</sup>

Almost all Igbo people are unanimous about the fact that education is the icing on the cake regarding the dowry. In fact, so absorbed are they with their daily hardships during the colonial epoch that what they long for is not theory but a key that fits the hole to open opportunity to solve the problems inflicted to them that stem from the white man's domination:

Aku-nna would fetch a big sum because she had attended school so long [...] what was the point of bothering to learn the alphabet, of what use would it be to them? It would not tell them which the best season for planting yams was; it would not tell them what their fate with a particular woman

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/bride+wealth>

might be. They had their own methods of knowing these things without the benefit of the ABC. (Emecheta, 1976: 110-115)<sup>[8]</sup>

On top of the importance that people have for the bride price we have to make allowances for the fate it heralds on the parts of the groom and particularly the bride. The outcome of the honeymoon that follows up the first days of the marriage is a turning point in the life of the newly-married man as an additional dowry in recognition of self-satisfaction. This leads to say that, if ever it is proven that the woman is not a virgin after the marriage, this will tarnish her image and that of her family, not to mention the poor quality in kind that her in-laws will grant her with the remaining of the bride price.

On Igboland, whatever the term or way in which a girl is wedded, whether with consent of her parents or not, under no circumstances shall the groom's family leave the bride price unpaid. Otherwise, the marriage will not be blessed by the world of the dead and that of the living. As the Igbo people hold dear of their ancestors, in-laws strive to be on the same wavelength with one another to avoid any kind of misunderstanding as far as the bride price is concerned. They do it out of fear to see misfortune befall them. Okoboshi is a vivid instance in *The Bride Price*, when he realizes that he cannot compete with Chike to marry Akunna, he resorts to force her into by means of abduction to forced-marriage. Through Okoboshi's resolution, Emecheta denounces an old age custom that is common in many parts of the world that cannot be associated with freedom as long as there is no consent between the bride and the groom, which is pure sexism:

A minimal amount was agreed upon as the bride price [...]. By the morning, when it was fixed, they should meet again, they would have discovered whether Akunna was a decent girl or one of those who went to their husband's couch on their marriage night empty [...]. Nobody had touched her. The keg of palm wine they must be of the very best kind. (Emecheta, 1976: 133)<sup>[8]</sup>

Okonkwo is proud and hardly can one make a tail or head of his true personality. He has a burning need for Akunna's bride price to meet his financial needs, yet spits on it out of pride since it comes from Chike, a descendant of a slave. In this, Emecheta is in the same line of thoughts with Achebe. In his essay, "The Trouble with Nigeria":

There is no doubt at all that there is a strand in contemporary Igbo behavior which can offend by its noisy exhibitionism and disregard for humility and quietness. (Achebe, 2001: 46-47)<sup>[2]</sup>

Likewise, the Ghanaian writer Ama Darko's *Beyond The Horizon* provides a crystal clear portrayal of female subjugation and the degree to which women are used to rescue men's ambition at their own risks. The female protagonist, Mara, is subject to the most crucial violence woman can take upon herself. Mara's husband overuses her to see his dream come true while treading on ethics governing a man's moral value by driving his wife into prostitution in Germany where they live as immigrants:

Yes! I've used myself and I have allowed myself to be too used to care any longer. But that does not render me emotionless. I've still got lots of feelings in me, though sometimes I am not sure if they are not the wrong ones. (Darko, 1988: 1)<sup>[7]</sup>

The soliloquy evidences Mara's disappointment, but tells a lot about her "strong personality". Because, beyond the

abusive experience Mara is victim, she is still dismayed by the extent to which her husband soils her image. She is in full swing in *individuation*. Carl Jung theorizes *individuation* as:

... [A] psychological growing up- the process of discovering those aspects of oneself that make one an individual different from all others. It is a 'journey' to self-recognition, to maturity. (Nnolim, 1979: 117-122)<sup>[12]</sup>

## Conclusion

Through characterization, Buchi Emecheta shows the objectification of women in the Nigerian society in particular and the African society in general. Moreover, she weaves her story around the bride price in her novel of the same title to show how the female subject is tirelessly overused by the male subject as "rescuers" under the crucial side effects of colonialism in Africa. The marriage issue and the bride price attached to it subjugate the woman as they are often means of social enhancement for the male individual (the father, the brother and the husband) and even the whole society who work in cahoots to smash her. Hence, patriarchy and sexism are abusively brandished as conventional weapons to sacrifice woman without a trial on the altar of profit regardless of human compassion. In fact, colonialism has not only impacted the woman's social status, but has also "enslaved" the male subject and enticed him to set his heart on woman in order to raise from his ashes. The resilience and inclination to materialistic and social values of the man prevail over his sister or wife. Beyond the tragic ending of the story, Emecheta has succeeded to put under the critical spotlights the issue of the bride price as a significant superstition defining the bride's fate at her first confinement. Her protagonist is heralded as a martyr since she sets herself as an example attempting to break loose with the shackles of restrictive cultures and male bondage, at her peril. The female protagonist, Akunna, appears as a feisty narrator who rekindles the debate over the bride price, a controversial issue in African and worldwide modern literature for its encroaching link with money, gender politics and global economic downfall leading some critics to posit that: "the bride price, an insult to women or a burden to men?"<sup>[19]</sup>

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