



Double Colonization: A Postcolonial Feminist Study of Buchi Emecheta *The Slave Girl*

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*The research attempts to explore the novel, entitled *The Slave Girl* written by Buchi Emecheta, who herself was in a struggle to find an escape from the colonized society and its restrictions. With no other option in sight, she migrated her native land. In her novel, she depicts a variety of female characters, who are being made accustomed to slavery through the imposition of patriarchal domination and colonizers' authoritarianism as well as by means of an inequitable system of rule. In this study, the researchers analyse and evaluate the text of the novel while applying the postcolonial feminist theory of 'Double Colonization of Women.' The researchers try to analyse the position of women, who undergo slavery and double colonization in the colonized region like Nigeria.*

INTRODUCTION

Women have been exposed to double colonization and slavery for a very long time. Meanwhile, the legacy of colonialism traces back to ancient times (G. Spivak 115). In the same vein, African women faced a marginalization and oppression at the hands of the cultural customs and colonizers settled in Nigeria. Buchi Emecheta is one of the African women who belong to Nigeria, thus, she wrote multiple novels that portrayed the condition of women in the colonized Nigeria, however, she gives the detail about two most famous tribes living in the suburbs of Nigeria, Ibo and Igbo. She was accustomed to the fate of slavery and double marginalization deeply rooted in African society from 1901 to 1960. Her most prominent novel, 'The Slave Girl,' was one of the mouthpieces of her destiny, fate, and experience as a slave or a colonized object in a colonized Nigeria. Moreover, Emecheta published this novella in 1977, when Nigeria was still under the threat of colonization, where women were deprived of all the basic opportunities and facilities, however, they also lacked the freedom to express and freedom to live without the consents of the male dominant society (Rani B and R. 96).

In this study, the researcher will try to analyze the Nigerian novel, keeping in view its contextual

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circumstances and its impact on the social, political, and economic structures of the colonized state, under the influence of colonization and gender dominance.

According to Bella Brodzki's essay 'Changing Masters,' where she explains that women were facing slavery in ancient times while they are under the paradigm of slavery in the modern period as well. This phenomenon of slavery that specifically includes women, is a universal satire on the patriarchy and colonial masculinities (43). As per her narrative regarding the African-American slave objective, she explains in her essay about the conditions of slavery in the Nigerian novel and how women endure the conditions of slavery that are forcefully imposed on them (43).

As per her analysis, slavery has occupied a central position in the postcolonial discourse for the philosophers and theorists from Europe and America (42-43). It is said that in history, Africa and its states like Nigeria were under the pressure of the institution of slavery that was subjugated upon them by superior races, gender power, and dominant roles. Brodzki herself exclaims the idea that slavery is a discursive construction that might lead to the destruction or abolishment of the self-identity because it colonizes the mindset of the weaker bodies like females (44). Buchi wrote novels that showed the suffering of the African women who were deprived of gaining different roles in society, however, they were considered the prominent subject of the marriage institution and for bearing children (Brice and Nguouabi).

In a critical review, Julianah Ogunseiju says that 'The Slave Girl' is one of the most read books in which the writer has portrayed pre-colonial Africa in a very versatile way. Though the writer also suggests that pre-colonial African women were pre-occupied or pre-colonized by the disparate system of patriarchy, while after the arrival of the colonizers, they became doubly colonized, thus, being owned by others (Ogunseiju).

Aims and Objectives

The objectives of the study are the following:

- Double colonization or double oppression is a part of colonized society and it can be massively seen in the text as well.
- A female protagonist faces the issue of double colonization from the hands of patriarchy and the colonizers too.
- Gender oppression is being portrayed in the novel that is the result of cultural and colonial dominance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

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It is a story of a ‘Slave Girl’ - Ojebeta who was the only daughter of her parents and an only sister of her two elder brothers. After the death of her parents because of the outburst of an epidemic in the form of a ‘felenza,’ she was sold by her younger brother Okolie to Pa Palagada in the Onitsha market in Nigeria, only for Eight English Pounds. Ogbanje Ojebeta used to wear numerous lucky charms on her hands, feet, and neck that were given to her by her father, as she was born after prolonged hardships and prayers, she was gifted with all these accessories that would protect her from all the evils. But fate exposed this little girl to the brutalities, insecurities, sacrifices, suppression, and inhibition of the colonized African society, at a very early age. Ojebeta lived in a busy city named ‘Onitsha’ as a sold slave with other slaves like Chiago, Amanna, Nwayinuzo, and Ijeoma who were kidnapped by the robbers and then sold to Ma Mee, Ma Palagada and, Pa Palagada the local traders in the Eke market who bought slaves. Moreover, due to the invasion of colonizers, there was a shift from following a traditional religion or culture to Christianity and teaching delivered by the missionaries, court, and church. Likewise, Ojebeta along with other slaves learned the culture, writing, and teachings of the British Christian system and was converted to Christianity as well she changed her name from Ogbanje Ojebeta to Alice Ojebeta. Later on in the novel, Pa Palagada son’s Clifford fell in love with Ojebeta, who thinks that her life is going to be changed after her marriage, but the arrival of Pa Palagada’s daughter Victoria along with her children increases the sufferings of Ojebeta once more. Ojebeta tired of all the hardships flee away from the city after the death of Ma Palagada and goes back to her village, Ibuza, where she takes a sigh of relief after meeting all her relatives and family members. Though there she is admired by everyone because of her manners, good behavior, beautiful features, and her work. Then, eventually, there comes Jacob, who falls in love with Ojebeta as soon as he sees her. They plan to get married with the permission and agreement of their families and tribe, as they both were orphans, so they have to take permission from the people of their village. Soon they both escape to Lagos, where Ojebeta meets her two brothers Owezim and Okolie. Ojebeta starts her family with Jacob as she thinks that Jacob is her new master. Later on, Jacob pays off the previous owner of Ojebeta, Clifford. The chain of slavery ends there, but she shows submissiveness as a slave to her husband Jacob. It seems like she has been transferred as a slave from one man to another.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher has chosen a Qualitative research method for this study. According to Goodman’s

definition of conducting a qualitative method, is to analyse and interpret a text under a normally given setting. However, the researcher will apply the textual analytical approach, to observe and evaluate the text along with its meaning.

The main purpose of this study is to analyse the female suppression, repercussion, and marginalization due to double colonization stirring within the Nigerian society. This research will use the qualitative plus textual methods to analyse the African woman's sufferings and its impact, when they are facing double colonization by patriarchy and the colonizers, collectively.

Moreover, the researcher will carry out a theoretical underpinning while focusing on the two most famous theorists related to postcolonial feminist perspectives by Gayatri Spivak 'Theory of Subalternity,' and Chandra Mohanty's 'Under Western Eyes' and 'Double Colonization' of women, from the John McLeod's book 'Beginning Postcolonialism' (2000).

ANALYSIS

In the book, 'Beginning Postcolonialism,' McLeod explains the concept of 'Double Colonization' while depicting the term 'Orientalism' used within the context of the patriarchal system of rule and colonizers' superiority (120). Nigeria has been a British colony since 1901, which was further followed by other European colonizers that include Portuguese and Dutch in particular. This colonial umbrella stretched its power all over the continent of Africa, therefore, African's were subjugated by the Western colonizers. However, African women who were living in this colonized society were under the influence of double marginalization by the two dominant entities.

The postcolonial discourse embedded the idea of freedom and right to speak under the Spivak theoretical lens of 'Can the subaltern speak?' likewise, if we analyze the text under the similar underpinning of the theoretical framework we shall come in contact with multiple references from the text, 'The Slave Girl,' because Emecheta also talks about 'Third World Colonies,' and 'Third World Women.' However, the researcher also wants to investigate the colonial structure that doubly colonizes the African women who belong to the native communities, like 'Ogbanje Ojebeta,' who faced oppression by both natives and foreign colonizers, giving her no space for escape.

Colonization of Women by the Patriarchal System of Nigeria

Women depicted in the Nigerian novel by Emecheta shows that women were underrated and neglected whenever it comes to the allocation of people to different positions and duties that were assigned to the well-deserved individuals. However, they were considered the unwanted objects of the society due to which 'Umuisagba were a tribe mentioned in the novel who was famous because of its strength, pride, and bravery, whereas, many of the conservative homes were reluctant to marry girls from there' (Emecheta 11). This idea provides a platform for Spivak's concept of a lower-class community.

Native communities of men of Africa believed that women always brought shame and embarrassment to their manhood and reputation. As Emecheta in the prologue of the novel says, "*So if you do not wish your hut to be brought to shame by some women.....*" (11). This explains that women were treated as second-class citizens, therefore, they were considered a shame (C. Mohanty). Further, in the prologue of the novel, women are bound to call upon the Gods of their husband or the Gods of their husband's people, women were forbidden to practice their own beliefs, religion, and tradition after they were married (11). Hence, it analyzes the unequal situation of the patriarchal system when it comes to dealing of men with women (McLeod 121).

Moreover, Emecheta also highlights the concept of 'Bride Price,' which has to be paid by the groom to the father of the bride. This shows how females were de-valued and dis-regarded by the male-dominant society. ".....*For they should cease to exist for her, the day her bride price is paid*" (11). Hence, it was expected of the married women to be *loyal to 'the husband, his Gods, and his people, in body and in spirit'* (11), however, women or daughters of Umuisagba were destined to comply with this tradition of obedience of male power (McLeod 121).

Though men of the Igbo society could marry and '*keep as many wives as they wanted*', and women had no say in it. Although the father of Ojebeta, Ogbanje always blamed his wife for the dead children, she has borne (13). It highlights the notion that women were supposed to be the child-bearers for the males and who could increase the male line for their tribe. Moreover, according to Emecheta's novel, 'The Slave Girl,' men were considered to be prestigious and respectable, while women were known to be housemaids or slaves (Korang). As explained at one instant, "*Since an 'unclean' woman was never allowed into the hut of a man with the Alo title*" (16). Women were colonized by the patriarchal system and scheme in the sense that, "*Girl children were not normally particularly prized creatures*" (18). This points towards Robin Visel's idea of 'Partial Colonization,' by the hands of the superior race (2). At another instant in the novel, the author depicts the ugliness of the women for the men of the tribe or the village was unbearable. They could not be married to the king or the leader of the village if they were ugly or ungrateful (19). However, this novel also portrays the old culture and tradition of the African society that after the death of the husband/man who owned a title, his wife would also die with him after some time, whereas, "*She was forbidden to visit the stream, to bathe, to enter any hut, where the man of the family had a title*" (26). On the other instance, the novel says that '*mourning women*' should be limited to only one place, as she is treated like a prisoner, just like the mother of Ojebeta (27).

Women in the Nigerian society were treated as the property of men who could be sold, purchased, and married in return for any suitable bride price, however, it was considered a bad ritual if Ibuza women married someone from Asaba or Ogwashi, if they did so, they were considered sold, lost, or slave (32). According to Visel, African women suffered foremost double-oppression from the patriarchal structure and by the colonists (39). Ojebeta was sold in the market by her brother as she was a burden to her brother who couldn't afford her expenses as it is mentioned in the novel, "*He was giving his sister away into the keeping of this rich lady, and getting some money for her.....*" (Emecheta 35). This shows that women were given marginalized and oppressive status (Visel 44).

Double colonization or patriarchal dominance is shown in the above instant like, "*Family matters in which the first daughter of the house ought to have been consulted they always ruled her out*" (Emecheta 37). Moreover, her fate was already decided by her elder brother, which meant that she was supposed to be sold (40). Like this in Nigerian society women were victimized (C. Mohanty). The postcolonial feminist theory represents the suppressed women under the control of male dominance and colonizers rule that bestow upon the women that result in slavery (Tyagi 45), as Ma Mee says, "*Slavery was evil, but it was a necessary evil that was implemented on unwanted female children*" (Emecheta 61). In Ibuza men paid a heavy bride price, however, when Okolie sells Ojebeta, Pa Palagada gives him almost eight English pounds for a "*well-fed and healthy girl*" (64). Hence, it was not the bride price it was Ojebeta's selling price, whereas, Okolie says that "*When she grows up.....you can give her away to any man you fancy.....and get your money back*" (64). This points towards the patriarchal mindset for whom women were a commodity (G. Spivak).

Women were misinterpreted by their ruling and colonizers counterparts who considered them to

be weak and immature (G. Spivak), whereas, it is depicted in the novel when Amanna says to Ojebeta, “*Women are with big mouths, big appetite, and big brains*” (85). As at one instant, Clifford says that “*Women were created as playthings for men, they were brainless, mindless, and easily pliable*” (95). Double colonization is a source through which women are under pressure, however, women struggle against the gender issues that they faced while living in the patriarchal society, but still they fail to find their lost identity and lost position (Tyagi 45). Likewise, the novel depicts that “*Ojebeta, now a woman of thirty-five was ready to change masters*” (Emecheta 174), this instant is directly related to Brodzki’s analysis of ‘Changing Master.’ However, it was difficult for the women in the novel to enjoy their freedom, self-identity, or exercise their own individuality, as they were supposed to obey their providers and rulers (Emecheta 168). These are basically the perspectives of postcolonial feminism that was also known as third world feminism because they were always under a command (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Triffin).

Furthermore, one of the chapters of the novel is named “*Slave with a new master,*” this indicates towards the main idea of the novel that the author wants to address that “*Ibuza women would never be free, while they will be colonized all their life*” (163). Hence, it indicates the fate of the women in the African society who were never free while they were struggling to gain their honor, respect, position, and empowerment back from their dominant rulers and counterparts.

Colonization of Women by the Foreign Rulers of Nigeria

Emecheta in her novel highlights the women's role and women's colonization by the hands of the foreign colonizers. She talks about Black African Women in Nigeria and their fate and fortunes living in this conservative and oppressed society. It's depicted in the novel that “*Nigeria was being taken over by Great Britain*” (14), whereas, the people of Nigeria was not aware of the fact that their country and their villages were amalgamated and partitioned by the British, keeping them colonized mentally, physically, and politically (14). This shows that women from all sides were suffering through double colonization (Brice and Ngouabi). Women were sold to white people as slaves, though they tried to abolish slavery in the region, they couldn't completely eliminate it from African roots (Gates Jr.). At one instant in the novel when Okolie thinks about the colonial days, “*His attitude recalled those days when it was easy for the European to urge the chief of a powerful village.....to wage war on the weaken one to obtain slaves for the new world*” (70). Colonization has restricted or limited the role of women in the patriarchal and colonized society more than before. It enables the degradation of one's individualism that further causes exploitation with slavery. Moreover, multiple institutions were working in Nigeria such as United Africa Company Europeans and Local church Missionary Society School. These institutions also colonized and resisted the movement of women and the lower classes. As described in the novel, “*In the church, they were taught that women's heads were holy and should be covered*” (99). However, women were occupied with the rules and laws of missionary and church they thought that it was a fashionable religion.

In Nigeria, Emecheta displays the helplessness of women at one instant, when a white man slaps on the shoulder of Ojebeta in the market, she couldn't resist his slap neither she could say anything in return, however, the white men were making fun of her helplessness and miseries (103). This points to the fact that African, Black, Colonized women were defenseless and vulnerable to danger all the time (C. T. Mohanty 43). The politics of feminism and women's struggle are one of the core elements of postcolonial feminism. Moreover, in the Nigerian society women as slaves or as colonized beings were marginalized even by the church as shown in the novel, “*The slaves and servants, happy to have been blessed, walked back to their designated places.....away from*

their superiors” (105). Though Nigerian women were supposed to follow a modern and elite culture that was brought by the colonizers, they even took European names and exchanged them with their names this shows how much they were pressurized and pursued by the foreign rulers who wanted to make them civilized and cultured (C. Mohanty).

CONCLUSION

‘The Slave Girl,’ is a historical novel that is examined under the lens of a postcolonial feminist perspective. A postcolonial novel explains the colonial role and how they affected the society and culture that they colonized. In this study and specifically in this chapter of the research, the researcher will interpret and answer the questions that are being asked in the first chapter.

Women living in a Nigerian society faced oppressive situations, however, they were spending their lives as a slave or housemaids. The issues that Ojebeta faced due to double oppression of double colonization were quite broader in terms of their suffering, the struggle of existence, identity crisis, being a subaltern, and having no prominent representation in the African society. They were treated unjustly, brutally, and given the title of ‘Third World Women’ (C. T. Mohanty).

They were basically under pressure because of hegemonic masculinities and cultural disobedience at the hands of the patriarchal and colonizers' rule. Moreover, gender oppression is being portrayed in the novel as a result of cultural and colonial dominance because women were neglected in every field of discourse. The male-dominant culture has shaped Ojebeta to become an attractive maiden who can work in the fields, can bear children, and is worth a good amount of bride price. However, colonial dominance has shaped her to become an elite slave or a maid who should follow Christianity to promote traditional slavery and the global economy.

Double colonization of women is seen in the novel in many places and there are various evidence and references given in the novel that depicts the hegemonic rule that is explained in the fourth chapter of this study as well. The author of the novel usually in her works talks about African society, colonized Nigeria, and the role of black women in the colonized society. She has been a victim of slavery, oppression, and doubly colonized society that is eventually portrayed in her novels as well. She surely condemns how women suffer when being owned by others and how they lose their self-respect, significance, and identity.

Moreover, Henry Louis Gates writes in his essays that complete abolishment of slavery is an arbitrary thought, however, after 1865 there was a time when slavery was being abolished or was coming to an exit point, but the slave narrative as a genre still exists (27). He also talks about the harshness of slavery in which Africans rights were violated, whereas, these African women were unable to resist the oppression and dominance faced by the hands of the colonizers as well as the patriarchy (Gates Jr. 27).

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

For future research, there are still various issues in the novel that can be studied, analyzed, investigated, and researched for conducting future studies, like Slavery and Nigerian superstitious beliefs.

DILIMITATIONS

Due to the constraint of time and length: This study is primarily focus on the single text of the Nigerian novelist Buchi Emecheta, 'The Slave Girl.' The researcher has applied the postcolonial and feminist perspective of double colonization represented by Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Mohanty in the essay, 'The Double Colonization of Women.'

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