

“Othering the Other Sex in Buchi Emecheta’s *The Bride Price* and *The Slave Girl*: A Snail-Sense Feminist Analysis”

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Abstract: The paper tackles the issue of gender, sex and otherness in Emecheta’s *The Bride Price* and *The Slave Girl*. It first provides scholarly definitions of the three concepts (sex, gender and othering) before specifying their operational meanings as the study uses them. Then, it shows that gender constitutes a serious predicament for the Igbo woman because of its social constructions, considerations and attributes. As a result, the findings showed that Igbo women are marginalized, exploited and oppressed on the basis of certain customs and traditions such as the bride price, the kidnapping of young girls, the widowhood rituals, and the preference of male children. They also revealed that Emecheta is rather for an African feminism based on negotiation, conciliation, alliance and complementarity than a feminism based on confrontation and the use of force to enable the emancipation and the empowerment of the African woman.

Key words: gender, sex, othering, negotiation, confrontation and feminism

Résumé : L’article aborde la problématique du genre, sexe et l’altérité dans *The Bride Price* et *The Slave Girl* d’Emecheta. D’abord, il fait un aperçu de ces trois concepts (genre, sexe et altérité) tels que définis par certains spécialistes du domaine avant de préciser la façon dont ils sont utilisés dans le texte. Ensuite, il démontre que le genre constitue un sérieux obstacle pour la femme Igbo à cause de ses constructions, considérations et attributs sociaux. Par conséquent, les données ont montré que les femmes Igbos sont marginalisées, exploitées, et opprimées sur la base de certaines coutumes et traditions telles que la dot, le kidnapping des jeunes filles, les rituels des veuves et la préférence des garçons. Elles ont également révélé qu’Emecheta est pour un féminisme africain basé sur la négociation, la conciliation, l’alliance et la complémentarité plutôt qu’un féminisme basé sur la confrontation et l’usage de la force pour permettre l’émancipation et l’autonomisation de la femme africaine.

Mots clés : genre, sexe, altérité, négociation, confrontation et féminisme

Introduction

Buchi Emecheta, like Chinua Achebe, could eventually be rated as the mother of modern African female novel. This may be explicated by the fact that she had been one of the most prolific female writers and the well-known African female novelists in the world. She had written more than thirteen novels and other literary genres. Above all, she was among the first female pioneers of African female literature, starting from the sixties, who initiated a female literary tradition articulated around the everyday experiences of the African woman. The concern of the paper is actually to account for the interrelatedness between otherness and gender in Emecheta's *The Bride Price* and *The Slave Girl*. Such a thematic choice can be explained with the fact that otherness and gender seem to have been one of the contemporary subjects of predilection raised in literature and in literary debates. Also, their investigation may enable to construe the particular way through which such highly important topics are developed in the genre of the African female novel. In regard to the foregoing, the objective of the study is therefore to show how this African female novelist tackles the issues of otherness and gender in *The Bride Price* and *The Slave Girl*. To achieve such an objective, the following questions need to be raised: what is otherness, gender and sex? How are they treated in *The Bride Price* and *The Slave Girl*? What kind of feminist ideology is developed in the foregoing works? In order to find some answers to these research questions, the African snail sense of feminism approach⁴² is adopted to analyze and criticize Emecheta's sense of feminism as foregrounded in the two novels.

1-Sex, Gender and Otherness: a Scholarly Conceptual Overview

Since the paper discusses and decorticates the implications of otherness, sex and gender in an African cultural and historical context as encoded in two literary narratives of Buchi Emecheta, it is axiomatic to provide some scholarly definitions of the three terms. To begin with, GayatriChakravortySpivak is believed to be the first to have coined the concept of othering. Spivak relates this concept to identities' fabrications and confrontations on the basis of dualistic and binary historical representations. It is in regard to this that, she uses othering systematically to analyze and comprehend "the fabrication of the representations of historical reality."(271) She as well specifies, in the essay "The Rani Sirmur", that the very process of

⁴²It is a new African feminist theory developed by AkachiEzeigbo, a Nigerian female writer and professor at the English Department, University of Lagos(Ezeigbo,A.(2012). *Snail-Sense Feminism: Building on an Indigenous Model*. Nigeria: University of Lagos). According to Ezeigbo, Snail-Sense Feminism is all about African women's clever uses of negotiation and diplomacy in patriarchal systems of socialization to assert and affirm their self-actualization and empowerment.

othering is at the same time *classed*, *gendered* and *raced*. That is, the double or triple subjugation of colonized or ex-colonized women. The implications of such a concept involve class, gender and racial factors in the definitions and specifications of roles and the state of being in a society and in the world in general.

As Homi Bhabha explains in his *Location of Culture* (1990) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay “The Rani Sirmur”, Edward Said also defines the term *othering* or otherness as a device developed by the West to categorize and discriminate against people or cultures of other nations on the basis of their Western particularities. It allows Europeans to reflect and render the West as the reference and the norm of the cosmos. Any other norm that is non-Western is consequently rejected and exoticized. To sustain such a point of view developed by Said in *Orientalism* (1978), Linda Colley, in an article “Britishness and Otherness: An Argument”, writes that:

As Edward Said has remarked of the European empires in general: “The Orient. . . helped to define Europe for the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.’ Possession of such a vast and obviously alien empire encouraged the British to see themselves as a distinct, special, and—often—superior people. They could contrast their law, their standard of living, their treatment of women, their political stability, and, above all, their collective power against societies that they only imperfectly understood but usually perceived as far less developed. Whatever their own individual ethnic back- grounds, Britons could join together vis-à-vis the empire and act out the flattering parts of heroic conqueror, humane judge, and civilizing agents(1992, PP.324-25).

It is imprinted in the quotation that otherness is also ideologically constructed on the basis of the cultural and racial specificities of the West. Westerners have done so in order to categorize and represent other nations as inferior and underdeveloped in opposition to a superior and civilized West. Thus, othering means binarism or polarity. By the latter it may be guessed that the process of othering allows the maintaining of a center (the West) which is hegemonic and a periphery (the South) which is dominated and looked down upon.

As for the authors of the paper, othering the other signifies the different ways according to which a given category of human beings is conditioned, viewed, treated and depicted in a given socio-cultural context or literary work. Such concept consists of rendering a person unfit or an outcast within his or her own cultural location or in a completely different one by deliberately limiting his or her roles, rights and even his or her own psychological freedom through sexist and racist networks and social structures. In other words, it refers to the postcolonial concept of the Self, standing for the West, which is “superior”, “intelligent”, “capable”, “civilized”, “modern”, and “powerful”, and the Other, representing the South or the Third World, which is

defined and portrayed negatively because of its supposed inferiority. In addition, such a concept is still used by feminist, postcolonial and cultural studies scholars to investigate and analyze the different ideologies promoted by the colonizer in colonial discourses as also emphasized in Spivak's "The Rani Sirmur". They do this in order to comprehend and explicate the mechanisms through which people of other nations have been colonized and dominated psychologically, politically, economically and culturally. Such a diagnosis permits a better understanding of the relationships between gender, sex and society, as well as the discriminations that are done on the basis of the concept of othering or gender.

Regarding sex, it should be understood as the biological formation of a human being on the basis of being born with the female or male sex. It is neither social nor constructed culturally. To put it in another way, sex implies the physical appearance of people either they are men or women. That is why, the *Cambridge Advanced Dictionary* (7th edition) defines sex as "the state of being either male or female." Sex, per se, has no social or ideological implications. However, the concept of gender is a complex whole. It has different scholarly views. For instance, the French philosopher, Simone De Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex*, explains that the concept of gender is socially constructed to discriminate the female sex against the male one. She thinks that no one is born inferior, but it is society that is responsible for making a woman an inferior human being in society. *The Second Sex* shows that gender allows society to define and determine the roles, the privileges and the physical attributes of each sex. The socially gendered divisions of roles lead to the marginalization, oppression and exploitation of women. In the same direction, the *Cambridge Advanced Dictionary* (7th edition) also defines gender as "the physical or social condition of being male or female."

As we have elucidated the different concepts that underpin this work, the following sections attempt to explain how gender construction in Igbo culture can create instances of othering or binarism between male characters, as the Self/Center, and female characters, as the Other⁴³/periphery.

2-The Other Sex in Igbo Culture

It is commonly held that people in different societies live in accordance with a set of beliefs and practices which emanate from their own customs and traditions. Igbo culture is not an exception to such a reality. Like any other people, they live and behave in harmony with the

⁴³To be clearer, this postcolonial term refers to the social and psychological ways in which one group tends to exclude or marginalize another group. This is done so in order to establish the hegemony of the dominating group over the dominated one.

customarily laws and principles of their land. As reflected in the works of Emecheta, Igbo culture is based on the belief that the future of a family can only be assured by having male children. Such a belief shows that such a society is regulated by the traditions of patriarchy⁴⁴. To better comprehend what we entail by the latter, bell hook defines patriarchy as:

...A political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. (2004, p.17)

This is the reason why in Igbo society; people give more privileges and respect to the male figure than the female one. As a consequence, men control all spheres of the society, and women, from their childhood, are unconsciously *interpellated* to uncritically accept their socially constructed roles and attributes. This status quo is maintained through the Igbo socialization system. In Igbos' system of socialization, mothers play very important roles. Their roles consist of educating and rearing their young daughters according to the established customs and traditions. This stance is illustrated in most of Emecheta's novels. For instance, in *TheBride Price*, people can see that from the beginning of the story Aku-nna is depicted as unwanted in her own family due to the fact that she was born a girl and a woman-to-be while her parents were longing for a boy. This attitude of her kinsmen engenders a profound psychological alienation of the protagonist vis-à-vis her family and society. In the face of the prevailing values in her society where women are "thingified"⁴⁵, *subalternized* and oppressed, Aku-nna rapidly becomes conscious of the predicament that her gender constitutes for her well-being and self-assertion. She is represented in *TheBride Price* by an omniscient narrator as a good observer who does not hesitate to question herself about the validity of the treatment that is given to Igbo women. In such light, the narrator explains:

Aku-nna knew that she was too insignificant to be regarded as a blessing to this unfortunate marriage. Not only was she a girl but she was much too thin for the approval of her parents, who would rather have a strong and plump little girl for a daughter. Aku-nna would just not put on weight, and this made her look as if she was being starved, but she simply had not the kind of appetite that her brother Nna-nndo had. And was not the end of the disgrace that she was showing to her family... (Emecheta, 1976, p.3)

The excerpt reinforces the idea that the protagonist has the feeling of being treated and regarded as the other in her own family and to a larger extent in her society because she does not feel full membership among her people and society. That is to say indirectly that girls, like

⁴⁵This is a term coined by the researcher to refer to the *thingification* and objectification of Igbo women in the type of Nigerian society portrayed in *The Bride Price*.

Aku-nna, are neglected and marginalized because of the beliefs associated with having girls or daughters, especially the thin ones. In closely analyzing the story of *The Bride Price*, it would be realized that having only daughters represents in the Igbo people's mind a social failure or to some extent even a misfortune. The writer, through the character of Aku-nna, is implicitly demonstrating the extent to which the marginalization of women can lead to a world of polarities between the two sexes. That is to say a world of inequalities and injustice wherein women are treated as subhuman beings without any rights. They are, therefore, relegated to playing secondary roles in society. On the other hand, boys and men are privileged and cherished as the masters of the society at the expense of women who are confined to the roles of subjugated slaves. In this dynamics, Aku-nna, in one of her discussions with her little brother Nna-nndo, says that:

It is so even today in Nigeria: when you have lost your father, you have lost your parents. Your mother is only a woman, and women are supposed to be boneless. A fatherless family is a family without a head, a family without shelter, a family without parents; in fact a non-existing family. Such traditions do not change very much. (Emecheta:1976, p.25)

In the above passage, Emecheta uses the device of irony to delineate the ideology generally associated with the place of the male figure in Igbo society as if fathers were the only parents of children. It unambiguously explains the importance of males at the expense of the females in society. Thus, the idea of Othering one's self among and within one's own people and culture is the way the other sex is viewed, defined and her roles are determined according to the patriarchal values and beliefs of her people, and they are considered as the norms of their culture. In the discussion with Nna-nndo, the narrator reveals that the heroine understands the social ordeal in which women are due to the phallogocentric orientations of Igbo families and society. For instance, when Aku-nna's father dies, she is puzzled and treated as an alien among her own people because of the *subalternity* of her rank as a girl and a woman-to-be. Automatically, and without asking the protagonist and her mother about what they would like do with their lives, their people send them to Ibuza where they are to become the wife and the daughter of the heroine's father's brother. At this point in the story, it can now be seen the extent to which the heroine's mother and herself have been othered in their own socio-cultural environment of birth. The sum total of these practices and beliefs confine Igbo women within an oppressive psychological space of alienation, submission, marginalization and voicelessness as reflected in the psychological conflict of the protagonist of Emecheta's *The Bride Price*.

In demonstrating how the protagonist of *The Bride Price* has the feeling that she is like an outcast and an unfit human being among her people, we can also see that things start to become

more and more complicated for the heroine following the death of her father who is depicted in the story as the only shield for Aku-nna against her marginalization and oppression. For instance, when her father dies, Aku-nna is allowed to stay in school by her uncle, Okonkwo who is now her new master, just because of the money that he would gain when he decides to marry her to a man whom Aku-nna neither loves nor approves of. It is also a belief and a practice among Igbo people to charge high bride prices for girls who are educated because of the scarcity of “educated” girls at the time. When the time comes to marry Aku-nna, Okonkwo, her uncle, starts making calculations about the amount of money that the bride price would amount to for him! He thinks that Aku-nna should be given into marriage to the person who will offer a high price as dowry.

However, at the same time, he is worried about the relationship between Aku-nna and her teacher, Chike. For Aku-nna’s uncle, Chike is an “Osu”, a slave who should never get married into any decent Igbo family. The irony of the situation is that Aku-nna and Chike really fall in love with each other and are even planning marriage. As the voiceless Other within the interstices of her society, Okonkwo stands against the choice and will of Aku-nna and she is unexpectedly and forcedly kidnapped into marrying Okoboshi from the Obidi family as if she was not a human being with full reason and emotions. Paradoxically, in the past, Okoboshi was always making fun of Aku-nna and the two were like cat and mouse. Despite this tense and tight relation between the two characters, Okoboshi surprisingly kidnaps Aku-nna into being his bride. As it is established in their tradition, especially when a girl is kidnapped by one of her suitors, that suitor naturally wins the right to marry the kidnapped girl. As a result, Aku-nna’s parents arrange the marriage between the two without even consulting the heroine either she is for or against. This indicates the oppressive nature of such cultural practice of the Igbo people and the violation of some the rights of women such as the freedom in speech and in decision-making.

3-Psychological Effect of Cultural Othering upon the Other Sex

In order to show the extent to which gender constitutes a real predicament for African women, especially Igbo women, Emecheta, in *The Bride Price*, depicts the alienating and sad experience of Aku-nna within her culture. And she does this to unveil how gender, according to some beliefs, negatively affects the self-confidence and psychological stability of African women. In the same pace, it renders them as the Other (an alien or ‘slave’) within the social fabric with a negative gaze⁴⁶. In *The Slave Girl*, it is noticed that the protagonist is

⁴⁶**The gaze** is the angle from which the different stereotypical attributes and beliefs about women or a person are projected. It is like a camera limiting the life of women to the view that its lens can only record.

psychologically and emotionally affected because of her “inability” to express herself freely and to make her society accept her own choices and decisions as far as her own life is concerned. It is invariably the male figure who always decides everything for the family, as well as the society. The female voice is never heard or even if heard is not considered. Like *Aku-nna*, women are consequently constrained to live on the margins of their society if they want to survive. When *Aku-nna* succeeds to elope with Chike, despite her forced marriage to Okoboshi, she is cursed and left alone by her people. And at the end of the story, she dies while delivering her first child because of the heroine’s non-respect of the customs of her people (as the result of the curse). The novelist does this in order to shock the reader by representing *Aku-nna* in a naturalistic manner in which she is not given any chance to survive. The use of this naturalistic method in the novel by Emecheta is meant to show the extent to which women are victims of some socio-cultural practices and beliefs.

In *The Slave Girl* the same idea of representing women as the other within their own socio-cultural interstices also prevails. As the title of the novel indicates, Ojebeta is portrayed as a slave. The novelist does this to reflect the sexist perceptions which are born with the construction of gender meanings in Igbo culture. First of all, the story begins with the birth of the heroine as a weak and helpless being. Her parents as well as her relatives think that she will not live long because of their notion of the “Ogbanje”. In Igbo cosmogony, it means a living dead child who comes and goes. In fact, the idea of the Ogbanje is related to the Igbo belief that when a child has a poor health, as well as he or she is thin, he or she is expected to die soon after birth. However the troubles for Ojebeta begin when her two parents suddenly die because of felenza and her family faces serious financial difficulties. Due to the bad and difficult conditions in which Ojebeta’s family lives, her only caring elder brother, Enuhu, leaves the village for the city in search of job. Ojebeta is left with her lazy and money-minded brother Okolie. He has a farm but he rarely goes there and everybody in the village knows it. Ojebeta is now seen by his own brother as the means to solve his financial problems, especially, to secure the money for the coming age-group celebration. Instead of working to acquire money and also being afraid of the burden that his sister would be for him, Okolie decides to get rid of her by exchanging her for some money (seven pounds in total) from Ma Palagada. She is one of their far-away relatives who knows how to make money in spite of being a woman. The very act of selling his own sister into bondage is another strategy adopted by the novelist to show how the other can be viewed as a property that can be sold as a commodity. The following excerpt illustrates what we have been discussing in consistence with the idea of othering the other in one’s own social cultural environment:

Okolie's heart sank. Should he or should he not go ahead with his plans? But who wanted to be saddled with a little seven-year-old sister? And he did not want her living with Uteh, because he did not like Eze. No let her go to Ma Palagada, and he would collect some money from her. OgbanjeOjebeta's fate was decided. She must be sold (Emecheta, 1977, p.36).

Emecheta, through the voice of the narrator of *The Slave Girl*, indirectly reveals that African women, especially the Igbo ones, are so degraded that they can even be sold into bondage. It entails that they will be working on the account of their owners without being paid for the work they do. They may even be abused or exploited physically. Ojebeta is accordingly given to Ma Palagada in exchange for some money. Once there in Onitsha, she begins selling and working for the Palagadas. She is virtually enslaved to Ma Palagada and company. She is shouted at, insulted and beaten whenever the Palagadas are not pleased with one or some of her activities or behaviors. In some cases, she has even been the object of sexual harassment on the part of Clifford.

The act of Okolie to sell his sister to the Palagadas has psychologically affected the heroine. She could not understand how her only brother could do this to her. The psychological interrogations from the part of Ojebeta, as ingrained in the narrative, clearly show the extent to which she sees herself as an alien and outcast in her own family as well as in the Palagadas' house. The othering of Ojebetais manifested through her changing of status and identity. For instance, when her parents were alive, she was a free and cherished girl, but the death of her parents causes her enslavement. This newly acquired identity through selling makes her vulnerable to exploitation, sexual harassment, physical brutality, and above all to a psychological trauma. From time to time, she could talk to herself as if she was a mad young girl by interrogating her consciousness about how and why her elder brother and relatives could treat her in such manners.

As a reminder particularly in Igbo culture, when a woman's husband dies, she is requested to follow a certain number of traditional restrictions which will directly condition her to live on the margins of society. And after observing such imposed limitations on her freedom, she is expected not to live long after her husband's death. For example, in *The Slave Girl*, when Ojebeta's father dies, her mother, Umeadi, sees her freedom restricted and she is treated as the other within her own community. She is treated as an outcast by her own people as if she was responsible for the death of the husband. The sum total of all this is that Igbo women are maltreated through a set of cultural rituals that they go through when their husbands die. During these cultural rituals, women are made to regret the death of their late husbands through mourning. These manners of mourning dead people affect Igbo widows psychologically,

emotionally and socially because of their isolation in society. To illustrate this, Emecheta, through the voice of the narrator expounds:

Umeadi mourned for her husband, and whenever Okolie could take time off from his dance practice he would come and fetch water for his widowed mother, for while in mourning she was forbidden to visit the stream, to bathe, to enter any hut where the man of the family had a title. In fact a woman in mourning was not really expected to survive long after the death of her husband... (Emecheta, 1977, p.21)

It becomes evident that Igbo women are second class citizens who live on the margins of their society because of their status as the other. Thus, being a woman in such a society was tantamount to being rated as the other; therefore, a thing and property that could be possessed or got rid of at any moment. *The Bride Price* and *The Slave Girl* actually demonstrate that the concept and understanding of gender according to Igbo culture is a predicament for the emancipation and empowerment of women. However, the experiences of Aku-nna and Ojebeta as girls and women-to-be show that African women are sometimes oppressed, marginalized and exploited. This is generally due to the second class status that is conferred to them as the other (in reference to females) in some African societies contrary to the self (standing for males). Such a relationship between the two sexes is synonymous with the kind of binarism that exists between the West and the South. The former is positively represented according to an ideology of superiority and the latter in stereotypical representations and according to an ideology of subalternity. Such a belief is also deliberately maintained to psychologically indoctrinate African women in society as conveyed in the personalities of Aku-nna and Ojebeta.

4-The Feminist Victimization and Significance of Both Female Characters

Emecheta, as an asserted and gender committed novelist, has strategically developed a feminist literary discourse of victimization in *The Bride Price* and *The Slave Girl*. She does this by modeling two kinds of heroines with distinct features and handling of social challenges and obstacles stemming from male established norms. She uses the naturalist tool of victimization to stir up the awareness of her people and to make them aware of the gender challenges at stake in her society. For instance, Aku-nna is characterized as a tragic heroine whereas Ojebeta is made as an implied traditional heroine. What do we then mean by the latter? The explanation and understanding of this point can clarify the particularities of each heroine in consistency with Emecheta's victimization of both main characters. First, Aku-nna in *The Bride Price* and Ojebeta in *The Slave Girl* are cast as victims of the established tradition of the bride price

payment. The payment of the latter as it may be comprehended from a close analysis of the narratives, is synonymous with enslavement and purchase.

The foregoing signifies that the Igbo institution of marriage abides by the rules of commercialization and money making. Women and girls become the products and goods to be auctioned. Second, the development of *Aku-nna* is done on the basis of revolt and demise. She goes against the will of her uncle in the name of love. This revolt of the heroine against the tradition of her people constitutes her tragic flaw. It greatly contributes to her downfall at the end of the story. She dies because of love, and because she was the victim of the curse of her uncle and the non-payment of the bride price. The uncle curses her for the non-respect of the tradition. The death of *Aku-nna* in the end of the story interrogates the feminism of Emecheta and shows her ambivalence (torn between respecting traditions and women's total freedom, especially in marriage and decision making). The sad closure of *The Bride Price* may discourage many women and young ladies to stand up for their rights and to struggle against the negative phallogocentric traditions which deprive them from their freedom and rights. *Aku-nna's* death attests that she is a tragic heroine. Besides, she fails to live her dream and to profit from the love that she struggled for although she delivered a baby girl.

Like *Aku-nna*, *Ojebeta* is also enslaved and sold by her own brother for money. She is a victim of man's power because her fate is decided by male figures. Both characters' developments in the stories show that the Igbo society victimizes the other sex because women are voiceless and rendered as objects or property to be sold or bought.

Unlike *Aku-nna*, *Ojebeta* does not die in the end of the story, but she suffers from sexual abuse, physical violence and inhumane treatment like an object and an animal from Clifford and Pa palagada. She is a traditional heroine because she survives and the future sounds bright for her at the end of the story. In this frame of mind, *Ojebeta* highly discovers that it was vital for her to learn to read and write because of their importance. She actually understands that education could grant her freedom and prosperity someday, especially when she is to develop or set up a business which she succeeds to do in the end of the narrative. In addition, she realizes that the respect and freedom of a woman always come from education and financial empowerment. It is due to this belief that the novelist makes *Ojebeta*, a model character for marginalized or exploited women, that is strategic in freedom, financial autonomy and respect's attainment. Also, *Ojebeta* learns that her body (sex) is another instance of power and can be used to negotiate with the male figure, especially to overcome patriarchal norms without physical or direct confrontation.

The kind of feminist ideology developed and advocated through the character of Ojebeta is the snail sense of feminism because she avoids confrontation and prefers negotiation and conciliation with patriarchal norms of her society. She is a character of strategies. Before each social hindrance, she adopts the kind of strategy that fits like the snail. Depending on the situation, she can use her body, formal education or her financial power to attain her goal peacefully.

As for Aku-nna, the sort of feminist thought conveyed through her character is that of Western radical feminism which is geared toward confrontation and abrupt break-up from the socially established norms and practices. She stands against a whole social system based on masculine orientation. Society crushes her because she challenges traditions and her kinsmen by eloping with her lover without the consent of the latter. Added to that, she violates a social custom of high importance which is to elope with an *Osu* (outcast) man as well as the custom of the bride price was never respected. The story tells us that both Igbo and *Osu* never marry with one another because of class (nobles and slaves) and strong social creed. The Igbos are portrayed as noble people whereas the *Osu* people are seen as slaves. No one should dare to rule out such a social norm. The heroine unfortunately does not respect such a norm because of the kind of Western education that she received. She confronts her society on behalf of love and freedom of choice, but the consequences of such a behavior resulted in her death in the end to story. The narrator substantiates such a view point through the following:

So it was that Chike and Aku-nna substantiated the traditional superstition they had unknowingly set out to eradicate. Every girl born in Iboza after Aku-nna's death was told her story, to reinforce the old taboos of the land. If a girl wished to live long and see her children's children, she must accept the husband chosen for her by her people, and the bride price must be paid. If the bride price was not paid, she would never survive the birth of her first child. It was a psychological hold that existed for a very long time (Emecheta, 1976, pp.176-177).

The foregoing ascertains the feminist ambivalence of the author who, on the one hand criticizes the othering of females in their society because of the custom of the bride price and that of class (Igbo and *Osu*), and on the other hand invites women to avoid confrontation and the use of force to be heard. This ambivalence of Emecheta can eventually be explicated with her snail sense of feminism as developed by Akachi Ezeigbo in the : *Snail-Sense Feminism: Building on an Indigenous Model* (2012). This kind of feminist approach is based on negotiation, conciliation, reconciliation and complementary relationships in opposition to confrontation and violent revolt as done by Aku-nna in *The Bride Price*.

5-The Didactic Feminine Lessons of *The Bride Price* and *The Slave Girl*

Following the story lines of the two literary narratives, it may be guessed that Emecheta's *The Bride Price* and *The Slave Girl* have distinct plots' structures. They are developed by Emecheta for specific feminine purposes. The first one is meant to show the ways through which passivity and mental ignorance of women may engender their *subalternization* and downfall. The second one is to delineate the intellectual, reactionary and economic patterns which may substantially enable marginalized, oppressed and silent female voices to be heard. This actually refers to the path in which the shackles of women's otherness could be broken for their self-actualization and empowerment as reflected in female characters like Akunna and Ojebeta. For instance, through Akunna and Ojebeta, the author shows that only formal education can help marginalized young girls to better understand the particular way through which they are marginalized, exploited and conditioned to accept the secondary roles in society. Besides, she explains that force and confrontation cannot help the African woman to emerge autonomously in phallogocentric environments. This view is sustained through Akunna who fails to survive in the end of the story because of her choice of confrontation and force. Another salient lesson is that only negotiation and conciliation can grant the African woman with the possibility to strategically break the shackles of patriarchy without confrontation. The development of the character of Ojebeta is a good example advocated. Furthermore, it can also be grasped that financial power or autonomy is another adequate means for women to gain respect, freedom and social empowerment. This thought is sustained through MaPalagada and Ojebetawho are two female figures who gained respect and freedom owing to their economic independence through the setting up and growing of their businesses in Emecheta's *The Slave Girl*.

Conclusion

To sum up, the issue of gender and otherness is a highly important topic tackled in the works of Emecheta. It is due to the gender consciousness of the author and her commitment for the well-being of the African woman in societies where gender means othering (marginalization, oppression, exploitation and exclusion) that she paints the everyday experiences and struggles of the African woman towards freedom and empowerment in her novels. The paper thus enables to comprehend that sex and gender's social implications and constructions, in most of the time, lead to the categorization of the African woman as the other. This standpoint is substantiated through the characters of Akunna and Ojebeta. Each character is the manifestation of a different kind of feminism. When the snail sense of feminism, which is a feminism of accommodation, negotiation complementary relations and conciliation, is imparted

through Ojebeta, radical sense of feminism, which advocates confrontation, revolt and the utilization of force, is conveyed through Aku-nna. The main finding of the study therefore shows that Emecheta is an ambivalent feminist who promotes two types of feminism: snail sense of feminism in *The Slave Girl* and Western radical sense of feminism in *The Bride Price*. The foregoing implies that she at the same defends some of her cultural values and criticizes those that constitute a serious hindrance to emancipate the other sex. She is against the Igbo rituals related to the widowhood, the custom of the bride price, the ‘thingification’ of women and the tradition of kidnapping young girls in making them your wives by force. Although she stands against such cultural practices, she also seems to be against any abrupt or radical rejection of African culture, or the non-respect of the culturally established norms as attempted by Aku-nna in *The Bride Price*. It is because of this stance that she rather propounds negotiation and conciliation to overcome established patriarchal norms as done by Ojebeta.

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