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MASCULINITY: RETHINKING GENDER STRUCTURE &HEGEMONY IN BUCHI EMECHETA'S NOVEL *The Bride Price*

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ABSTRACT

African writers explore the construction of masculinity in African society by examining the intense social expectations placed upon men, particularly the obligation to produce male heirs, maintain patriarchal authority, and embody strength and control. Simultaneously, these men endure layered subjugations under imperialism and slavery, carrying the collective burden of colonial trauma while struggling to preserve their identity and agency.

Buchi Emecheta's characters also face several hardships, as they themselves were alienated from their own society due to race and black skin complexion. Though many writers write about female subjugation, the hardships faced by men are never told tales. On analyzing masculinity as a contested and fragile construct in Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*, this paper fills this crucial gap. It contends that in addition to marginalizing women, patriarchal and colonial systems also force men to conform to constrictive gender norms, which causes psychological disruption and cultural emasculation. The study provides a more comprehensive perspective of oppression that goes beyond binary gender narratives by reconsidering gender hierarchy and hegemonic masculinity within a postcolonial context. By replacing colonial administration with indigenous authority, British colonial intervention undermines traditional masculine roles. A crisis of masculinity when hegemonic ideals endure but are no longer achievable results from men losing their cultural authority and autonomy. The paper illustrates events where men are subjugated by their menfolk of the same community.

Affect Theory is utilized in literary studies to examine how texts depict trauma, emotional atmospheres, silences, and bodily reactions to social control. It emphasizes how emotions are formed politically and culturally and are not just personal experiences. In addition to laws and structures, hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy, and colonialism also operate through affective mechanisms, including guilt, fear, shame, and emotional control.

Keywords: Affect theory, Masculinity, Hegemonic Masculinity, powered-Gender Structure, Patriarchy, Cultural Emasculation.

Literature can be connotated with multiple meanings. In general, it means a creative, imaginative work of art by a person who uses various techniques to convey their core idea to readers. Nigerian Women writers produce the sufferings faced by men simply as a domination over men, but as a critical reversal of patriarchal power, exposing gender imbalance, social injustice, and rigid masculinity within traditional and modern Nigerian society. These

Nigerian authors significantly explain the control and dominance over women, but they hardly proved the male abuses and male oppression and all the insults faced by menfolk. Themes such as racial suppression, patriarchy, power, and control are prolonged throughout their works.

Nigerian-British novelist Buchi Emecheta (1944–2017) was born in Nigeria and wrote extensively about colonialism, gender, culture, and migration. Emecheta, who writes mostly from a feminist and postcolonial viewpoint, examines African women's real-life experiences in patriarchal countries while also highlighting the larger socioeconomic structures that influence both male and female identities. Traditional Igbo conventions, marital customs, and the effects of British colonial power on the indigenous population are all commonly examined in her novels.

Emecheta illustrates how colonialism undermines gender norms, family structures, and ideas of identity by depicting persons torn between tradition and modernity. Her ability to describe women's hardships without neglecting the complicated constraints males endure under both patriarchy and colonial dominance is what makes her a valuable contributor to African literature. Buchi Emecheta, one of the major feminist writers, strongly exposes not only the victimization faced by Igbo women but also the brutal treatment and domination faced by the Igbo men in her most acclaimed work, *The Bride Price.*

C.N.Conell Australian feminist sociologist, in her most acclaimed work, *Masculinities* (1995), coined the concept of Hegemonic Masculinity. She borrowed the term Hegemony from Antonio Gramsci. She explains masculine hegemony as: “Hegemonic Masculinity is the configuration of gender practice which embodies the cruel answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell 77)

Buchi manifests the concept of Hegemonic masculinity in her work, *The Bride Price,* through the male characters, Okonkwo and Chike. She compares and contrasts both the positive and negative aspects of the characters; the former is portrayed from a negative perspective, while the latter reflects a positive one. Okonkwo, who belongs to the upper caste, as Aku-nna’s stepfather, measures value through wealth, social status, and dominance, often behaving irrationally in an effort to assert his manhood, whereas. Chike, an Osu descendant **(Outcaste or Slave lineage), a** teacher, is deprived of his own rights, though he is literate and possesses a good profession; he could not voice out against all the insults that society gives back in the name of tradition and culture. He is represented as the subjugated masculine.

The author showcases Okonkwo as a character with a colonial attitude and a harsh mentality, interested in making money. This made him remarry his own brother’s wife, Ma Blackie. As a second wife, she had to follow the laws set by the senior wife, and after her husband’s death, she was emotionally unprepared to marry again, consumed by deep grief. She had experienced such a traumatic situation that she had to look after her son and daughter amidst all her grief. Emecheta portrays the character Ezekiel Odia, father of Aku-nna; his presence was very little, his identity as a male alludes tightly to his service in World War II, where he fought for the British troops. He was an ideal person and a good father, but his tragic death marked the beginning of Aku-nna’s suffering in the story. After his death, she is forced into the control of other male authority figures and becomes a victim of power and dominance, where emotional presence and fatherly love are absent. Before the death of Ezekiel Okonkwo’s pride developed much more, and he claimed that he was the eldest and that every other in the family must obey his words. This is evident from the following quote. “If Ezekiel blames you for going back without finishing your treatment,' Okonkwo tells Ma Blackie, tell him I said you were to do so. Remind him, in case he has forgotten, that I am the eldest and first son of our father. It is for me to say the word, and for Ezekiel to obey” (*The Bride Price 60-70*)

Okonkwo is ambitious, and he boasts of himself as a leader with courageous pride. He concentrates only on the wealth that he receives with the marriage of Aku-nna, which is the bride price, a custom of the Igbo tribe. Even Ma Blackie had given more bride price to her husband, Ezekiel. This kind of receiving more bride price is a tradition that, after marriage, the couple would live a long-lasting and happy life ahead, if not something misfortune might happen in their life.

The tradition restricts the women who belong to the Igbo culture from going out, wearing jewels, and pursuing education, but Okonkwo gave concessions to his women, and he never restricted to do all these kinds of things. This is satirical that only if Aku-nna gets an education, he can find a new groom who can pay him more bride price. Aku-nna got her education, where she chose her school teacher, Chike, an Osu slave, as her husband. There was a misconception that if a girl attains puberty, she has the privilege to get married. With the fear of getting married, she masks the truth.

Okonkwo was more agitated and furious after hearing about the relationship between his daughter and an Osu slave. Since he belongs to the upper clan, as a father, he was not willing to receive bride price from a lower caste man. Though Chike is a teacher by profession, he can lead a good life with Akun-nna, his descendants were slaves. To abandon their relationship, Okonkwo once kidnapped Aku-nna, but to escape from the threat, she lied that she was already married to Chike.

Despite the fact that Okonkwo is portrayed as a negative character to some extent, he imposes his control, commitment, and responsibility as a stepfather. He is not a typical emotional father, but his love is measured in money and tradition. Notwithstanding that a father who takes care of his family possesses the state of double consciousness, he never admits his daughter to be unlawful relationship. Despite the overwhelming emphasis on money, the absence of a bride price subjects the bride to societal suspicion and moral judgment.

The women would become a laughing stock, that if a woman receives a low bride price, she will not lead a happy life, and she cannot give birth to a baby boy. In Igbo culture, begetting a male child is a source of pride. Okonkwo is overwhelmed by the greed of getting money by bride price received by Aku-nna, and at the same time, his authoritative control in the society and his leadership quality will perish if he doesn't receive the bride price.

In contrast, Chike is portrayed as a moral and uncomplicated man with a life full of ethical values. He belongs to the slave generation as his forefathers and fathers had been enslaved in the Osu tribe. In other words, Osu means outcast. He was labelled as an outcast by his society, deprived of rights, social acceptance, and marital legitimacy.

Nna-nndo Odia Aku-nna's younger brother reflects male social conditioning and represents the continuity of patriarchy then. His portion, portrayed by Emecheta, is limited. The ancestral village men also face this kind of oppression and anxiety that if the bride price is violated, it causes a sin to their family as well as to their community. Osu people were socially untouchable like Dalits in India. These people were segregated and were prohibited from indulging in social activities considered to be more impure than others. These people were hired to do menial jobs like sanitation workers, housekeeping, maintenance, in charge, etc.

Emecheta critiques the dehumanizing logical tradition and exposes caste-based oppression within Igbo society. Although the Igbo society is male-centered and male-controlled, some men lack respect. This is evident from the optimistic character like Chike. The author argues that men in tribal society were prone to multiple subjugation as, similar to women. She exposes masculinity as a regulated and often alienating social constraint.

Menfolk also face traumatic exploration as a son, father, brother, or husband. They owe their own responsibility; their endless toils are never told tales. The discourse on male oppression is not confined to a single historical

moment. Symbolic narratives from religious and mythological traditions—such as the Genesis account of Adam and Eve have occasionally been interpreted to suggest an early anxiety about male authority and female influence. This indicates that power negotiation between genders has existed across historical periods, and psychological pressure affects men as much as it affects women, largely because men are burdened with greater social and familial responsibilities.

A subtle re-examination of masculinity within traditional Igbo society. Through the male characters and social customs, Emecheta questions traditional, rigid ideas of manhood, authority, and power, suggesting that traditional masculinity requires transformation.

Affect theory is a term coined by multiple theorists in literature, but evidently it was coined by Silvan Tomkins in his psychological work *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* (1962–1992). It estimates or foregrounds how male characters experience emotional repression and anxiety. Men are expected to perform authority while concealing fear, desire, or vulnerability. Colonial disruption intensifies this emotional burden, producing affective states of frustration**,** loss, and emasculation, though these remain largely unspoken.

He defines innate biological affects as the primary motivational forces that shape human behavior and consciousness. As an Osu, Chike inhabits a socially stigmatized identity that repeatedly exposes him to shame–humiliation, particularly when his love for Aku-nna is rejected on caste grounds. Tomkins argues that shame is activated when interest or joy is abruptly interrupted; similarly, Chike's emotional investment in love, education, and modern values is continually disrupted by communal prejudice. Yet his response is not violent rage but affective regulation. Instead of performing hyper-masculine aggression, he internalizes and manages humiliation, thereby embodying an alternative masculinity shaped by restraint, endurance, and emotional control. His identity is thus not constructed through domination but through the negotiation of caste-induced fear, suppressed anger, and persistent emotional vulnerability. An affect-theoretical reading, therefore, reveals that Chike's masculinity operates within an economy of shame and desire, demonstrating how social stigma restructures male subjectivity at the level of embodied feeling.

The practice of bride price reinforces patriarchal authority; it also places significant pressure on men, reflecting another dimension of gendered oppression. Within such cultural systems, masculinity is measured by a man's economic capacity to pay the bride price, thereby tying male identity to financial performance and social expectation. In *The Bride Price*, men are compelled to conform to these norms to validate their masculinity and social legitimacy. Failure to meet these expectations may result in social humiliation, exclusion, or diminished status. Thus, hegemonic masculinity not only privileges men structurally but also regulates and burdens them through rigid cultural obligations. Women's agency is excluded from marriage-related decisions because only men negotiate and pay the bride price. Through this transaction, a woman's moral value and social validity become reliant on male favor. If the bride price is not paid, the woman's chastity and worth are questioned, and male authority is affirmed as the gatekeeper of honor and respectability. This leads to societal stigma.

In addition, men are under pressure from masculine hegemony to exercise economic dominance; their ability to pay the bride price validates their masculinity. As a result, whereas bride price gives males structural advantages, it also psychologically weighs them, ensnaring both sexes in strict patriarchal expectations. Emecheta reveals this contradiction by demonstrating how the custom promotes masculine dominance while subtly undermining moral judgment and emotional autonomy.

Men are reduced to the roles of unpaid providers and protectors. As a result, *The Bride Price* shows how patriarchal institutions maintain themselves through pervasive victimization and how hegemonic structures govern both men and women. In literary masculinity studies, this dynamic necessitates more intersectional and

inclusive methodologies. males rely on patriarchal standards and societal acceptance to justify their manhood, whereas women rely on males for social and economic support. Buchi Emecheta complicates traditional depictions of masculine leadership by emphasizing moral accountability, emotional depth, and the ability to be grateful in his portrayal of the male ego.

The advent of Western education, Christianity, and colonial administrative authority, reverse traditional Igbo social systems, is a clear example of British colonial expansion in *The Bride Price*. The missionary schooling of Aku-nna is a noteworthy instance in which colonial education is used as an instrument of ideological control.

The paper examines how Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price* challenges traditional interpretations of African feminist discourse by showing how patriarchal structures and British colonial dominance oppress both men and women. Male characters under colonial rule also endure psychological relocation, loss of authority, and cultural emasculation, in addition to overt gender-based discrimination experienced by female characters. Colonial authority destabilizes traditional masculine identities and undermines communal cohesion through the degradation of indigenous customs, the imposition of Western education, and the reorganization of economic and social structures.

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