
REPRESENTATION OF FRICTION AND INFLICTION IN *BRIDE PRICE*

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Abstract:

This paper aims to elucidate the encounters that a thirteen year old girl faces and how traditions and superstitions dominate on each other in her livelihood. The novel will be examined from the arena of trauma related to the custom of bride price associated with it. It details the darkest pains of their life and its influence on their thoughts. It explores on how they fight with destiny to carry over their hope in lives. The woman does not have an access to any authority in their societies as well as in the families. Their duty is considered as to bear children and take care of the responsibilities of the family. Bride price is the money or property given by the bridegroom to the family of the bride. The girl's voice is totally silenced and her real worth remains unknown to the society. Emecheta in her perspective tries to depict that woman is more valuable than money and her value is not evaluated by her bride price. She tries to create a better perspective to the future, full of faith, reliance and self direction for women.

Key words: *Bride price, Nigeria, pain, silence.*

Buchi Emecheta is one of Africa's the highly glorious writers in present times. She was born in Lagos, Nigeria, on 21 July, 1944. At a young age, Emecheta was orphaned and she spent her early childhood years being educated at a missionary school. In 1960, at the age of sixteen, Emecheta was married to Sylvester Onwordi, a student to whom she had been engaged since she was eleven. After their marriage, Sylvester and Buchi moved to London. Over the course of her six year marriage, Emecheta gave birth to five children. Buchi Emecheta's works deal with the portrayal of the African woman. Buchi Emecheta in her novel *The Bride Price* (1976) tells the story of the friction between the age to age customs of a small Ibo village in Nigeria and the invasive influence of Africa's European colonizers, as seen through the perception of a young girl. The bride price, a fee that is traditionally paid by the prospective husband's family for the future wife, is a theme that is seen throughout the novel. Emecheta uses this practice of bride price to represent women's submission to men in African culture. Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*, is the initial work that seriously brought Emecheta into fictional narration. Published in 1976, *The Bride Price* deals with the adolescence and marriage of the African woman. Emecheta has once said that the first book she wrote was the *Bride price* which was a romantic book, but her husband burnt the book when he saw it. She was the typical African woman, and she had done this privately, she wanted him to look at it, approve it and he said that he wouldn't read it. *Bride price* is the transfer of a large wealth of goods and services to parents of the bride during marriage. It is the transfer of wealth during marriage and it depends upon the economic status of the groom. It has historical significance and clearly reflects on the complexities of the societies that existed at that point of time. In the patriarchal society setup, women are silenced and the power imminently lies in the families elders. It is a traditional practice that has predominantly existed in Africa. Leaving home means that the daughter can no longer contribute to the wealth of the parents or family. *Bride price* is the first bonafide novel of Buchi Emecheta. This work is considered by Emecheta as her brainchild. The chief concern in her works is women and details the traumas that confront them in each and every walks of the society, be it political, ethical, economic and social. She and her ancestors had been through many sufferings and she knows what it means to be a woman and how she is treated as a second

class citizen in the African milieu. Woman is considered as a disposable commodity. The society that Emecheta points out in bride price is Ibuza, an Igbo speaking community of Bendel state in Nigeria, which happens to be Emecheta's home. Bride price is the sum a Nigerian male has to pay to buy a girl from her parents.

Superstitions hold Nigerians strongly and their traditional customs is a part of their lives. Thirteen year old Akunna is the protagonist in bride price. After the death of her father in Lagos, 13 year old girl Akunna returns to live in her family village Ibuza, where her father's brother lives. Akunna was followed by her brother Nna ndo and her mother Ma Blackie to the village. Many Nigerian women are denied of the privilege of education, but she was allowed to continue her schooling as her relatives believe that it would increase her bride price for the benefit of her uncle. Akunna falls in love with her teacher Chike, but the tribal taboos that they follow denies Akunna from marriage with Chike. Akunna is kidnapped by the son of an Ibuza family and after the abduction, her relatives agree for their marriage with the abductor. Chike rescues her from him and elopes to another village. They hold a belief that women who challenges the traditional beliefs and elopes, will eventually die in childbirth. Chike makes a lot of attempts to convince their family and offer them the customary bride price. But Akunna's uncle, because of vengeance neglects to receive it. Superstitions play a pivotal role in African culture and heritage and ancient curses seems to hold power according to their belief system. The blame usually went to the girls. "A girl who had had adventures before marriage was never respected in her new home. Everyone in the village would know about her past. There men who would go about raping young virgins of thirteen and fourteen, and still expect the women they marry to be chaste as flower buds. An impotent man was very rare in Ibuza, and the few that existed were no more than living dead." (Emecheta 114) Bride price and polygamy are accepted as key factors in the dynamics of Igbo tradition. Divorce was rare but separations were not uncommon. 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. They had the belief that the practice of giving bride price was the pivotal step in marriage. A woman owns and controls property brought into marriage and also the income during marriage.

"Generally polygamy is legal. Bride price must be paid by the groom's family...A woman must change her birth name to her husband's name. If a husband has more than one wife, he is obliged to treat them equally and provide separate living quarters...A father generally receives custody of the children; if he dies, his family assumes custody....Parental duties are shared jointly. Daughters are frequently denied education since they are not permanent members of his family" (Emecheta 199).

It was never long before a visitor to Ibuza could tell from the culture, the traditions, the mode of keeping records, superstitions that this was an Igbo town. What was more difficult to make out was whether to classify the people as Christians for pagans. Many people went to church and about three quarters of those who did attended the Catholic Church, for there was a general belief in Ibuza in things mysterious. The rural setting of Emecheta's novels holds immense significance. The constant gossip associated with men and women of Nigeria, the rituals, the funerals and fertility and graphic descriptions of Nigerian life is retelling the perils of the rural land. Emecheta's portrayal of village life through all ups and downs is efficiently described. In the place of Lagos, the joys and sorrows are shared, but the crisis and communal violence often heads them in and around. There were various different societies in the town, most of them existing for social purposes, but it was one's age group that determined. Age groups were created at three year intervals, each one characterized by an important incident. Children born during civil war would become known as the children of Biafra and when babies born at that time grow into adolescence, they will hold meetings. This story they narrate is charged with philosophical lessons and are

rendered with familiarity and discretion. Their customs are invaluable marked and greeting elders with respect and reverence, participating in songs and dances, kole nut breaking, traditional marriage customs, all are prestigious for them. The rituals they follow are landmarks in African etiquette and it comprises their way of life and survival. Emecheta in this novel highlights women in pre-colonial Africa. As a sociological record *Bride Price* enumerates the various customs and beliefs of the land, many of them detrimental to the marginalized of the community. The hero and heroine in the novel *The Bride Price* are representatives of cultural beliefs and superstitions. The weird customs in the land which relegated women to being victims of fate are part of the novel. In Iboza young girls must be prepared for anything to happen. Some youth who had no money to pay for a bride might sneak out of the bush to cut a curl from a girl's head so that she would belong to him for life and never be able to return to her parents. African fiction encompasses how the customs diverge and bring forth the traditional prospects. Families exert a lot of pressure over their children for upholding the customs and it is passed on from one generation to another. All these traditions and customs point to a heavily patriarchal ambience, where women were only an appendage to men. As Katherine Frank says, "Such customs and mores, in fact, are actually institutionalized forms of male oppression: inheritance of widows by their brothers in law, the custom that a man could make an unwilling woman his wife by kidnapping her and cutting off a lock of her hair, the prohibition against women marrying descendants of slaves, and numerous other inhibiting manifestations of traditional culture in *The Bride Price* are all determined and enforced by men. (Frank 483) The pressure exerted upon them is the story of disobedience and indigenous practices they follow from time immemorial.

"Akunna amidst all of it was in deep distress and as it is seen, she screamed out in pain, he forced her on to the bed, still holding on to her arm, which she felt going numb. He slapped her very hard, and she could smell the gin on his breath. She knew she could not overpower him. The slap had been painful and she was bleeding inside her mouth. Tears of desolation flowed from her eyes as he knelt over her, untying his lappa with shaky hands. His chest was heaving up and down like a disturbed sea. If she was hoping for mercy and understanding, she was not going to get it from this man. He was too bitter" (Emecheta 220)

Bride price is the truthful testimony of the trauma and trepidation a girl of Akunna's age undergoes. The dilemma faced by Akunna is the unending pain of the generations of African womanhood. Though Akunna fails to resist her fate as she dies, her imprints are reflected in the African milieu by Buchi Emecheta. The value of a girl is decided by the bride price she has to offer. The story of taboos and rules by the traditional society and the oppressive male chauvinist regime is clearly reflected in *Bride price*.

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