

Identity Crisis: Dynamics of Colonial and Precolonial History as a Continuum in Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*

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In this paper the author proposes to analyse Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price* as a creative document that unfolds the dynamics of the colonial and the precolonial history as a continuum to reflect the change in the ethnicity of the Nigerian society. Colonization laid the foundation of a new world to the natives that was exploitative, oppressive and racist. This transition and all its complexity are very aptly depicted in *The Bride Price*. Intellectuals like Franz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Baba and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o very strongly voiced their opinion that colonization was not just economic but more importantly it was psychological and cultural exploitation. Franz Fanon in his *Wretched of the Earth* argues among other things that the colonizer's aim was not just to exploit the colonized economically but also strip them of their sense of identity and dignity. The colonized were projected as the primitive, the uncivilized, who had to be moulded in the image of their masters, psychologically and culturally. Edward Said says that the West created the image of the "Oriental" as opposed to the "Occidental" and justified that there was a dire need to educate and civilize the Oriental who became a willing slave. The term that Ngugi Wa Thiong'o uses to describe the colonial invasion is, "Cultural bomb". The precolonial stage was thus associated with the primitive and colonialism with the civilized. This left the natives not only confused and uprooted from their ancestral heritage but also created a rift within them. This division had many layers that totally scattered the deep-rooted soil of African way of life that led to a massive upheaval in their ancient traditional way of life. This rift that was initiated with colonialism was between the so called

educated and the uneducated; Christian converts and the Traditionalists; men and women etc. This trial of angst, anguish and the identity crisis that Africa underwent under the Imperial sway is very powerfully captured by Buchi Emecheta in her novel *The Bride Price*. Being a female writer from Nigeria, Buchi Emecheta tends to project the precolonial history in Africa not simply as a glorious era of communal harmony but she does not hesitate to mirror the gender inequality that existed during the precolonial era. *The Bride Price* is the prism through which is reflected an attempt to highlight and understand gender politics which is an important and crucial component of the identity crisis as it existed in Africa. Buchi Emecheta's view regarding a woman's place in the society is closer to what Chimamanda Ngozi and bell Hooks advocate. They propagate for a broader and more inclusive understanding of feminism in the global context that involves everyone regardless of their gender in dismantling societal norms that perpetuate inequality.

The Bride Price, published in the year 1976, makes use of a love story to unravel the polemics of the Nigerian society that is caught between two worlds – the ancient, traditional, tribal world that is not yet dead and the new, complex baffling modern western world that is being initiated in Nigeria with the coming of the British. And this world is slyly and insinuatingly making its way into the lives of the natives thus bringing about a conflict in the very structure of traditional African set –up that had for centuries remained unchallenged. The novel is also an expose' into the exploitation of Nigerian women, within their tribes through the age old, ancient customs, traditions and practices. Buchi Emecheta being a female African writer dwells deep into the ancient, intimidating practices of traditional tribes and exposes these practices as a means of justifying the torture, domination and psychic control over the female sex in traditional African tribes. In this Buchi is quite in contrast to many African male writers who chose to project ancient traditional African society as mainly an ideal, matriarchal society. No doubt Buchi Emecheta reflects the communal fabric of the African society where the interest of the community takes precedence over individual desires but at the same

time, she does not hesitate to bare the truth as perceived by a female writer by contrasting it with the western ethics in a dynamic, vibrant and pulsating manner. The interweaving of the patriarchal and the matriarchal thread that constitutes the societal tapestry of Africa, more specifically Nigeria is laid threadbare by Buchi Emecheta in this novel especially through the age-old practice of bride price. In Africa bride price is the money that is paid by the bridegroom's family to the bride's family at the time of marriage. Buchi Emecheta defamiliarizes and exposes the exploitative nature of such practices in a society that is in the throes of transition and change, emanating from its contact with the western civilization.

The angst of the society torn between two diametrically opposing cultures and ways of life is analysed through the families of two brothers: Ezekiel Odia, who leaves his village and moves out into the world and his elder brother, Okonkwo who lives in Iboya, remains confined to his village, is rigid and static in his beliefs and opinions. He is reluctant to let go of his ancestral way of life. He remains untouched by the western cultural influence that was digging deep into the African society through the spade of education and religion. Okonkwo does not send his children to school. Their way of life like that of their ancestors continues to be based and concretised on agrarian means. So, existence for Okonkwo and his family is comparatively peaceful devoid of competition and only based on day-to-day routine life. Okonkwo's only ambition is to gain the title of Eze. That for him is the only milestone that he aspires for in his humble existence. He is completely untainted by the western system of education. For him that kind of education is meant for slaves. Okonkwo even remains untouched by Christian missionaries' preaching and their endeavour to civilize him, for their tentacles have not reached this part of Nigeria yet. Okonkwo prides himself on being a native free-man who has many wives, children and maybe even slaves. He wears his traditional attire and now and then has to beat his wives to control them. Polygamy for him is not a taboo. That his youngest wife is young enough to be his daughter does not at all prick his conscience. So, Okonkwo leads a traditional way of life that has been followed through

eons and generations. He knows and understands only this kind of life and so can accept no other. This for him is his ancestral legacy with which he can never tamper. He is a patriarch in his own right, owning his wives, his cattle, his children, his farm and his antique way of life is a mark of him being a freeman and not a slave. His steadfastness to his culture is a natural course of life for him.

On the other hand, is his younger brother, Ezekiel Odia, living in Lagos, working for the white man as a head moulder at the Loco yard, attired in the uniform provided by his master. His master, the white man trusted him more because people like Ezekiel had the distinction of having served the white man in the war. Ezekiel has adopted his master's religion, is a good Christian who goes to the church regularly along with his family. He is the first generation of Nigerians to realise the importance of western culture and now he makes sure that his children get the right kind of education through English schools for he ardently believes that these two qualifications of western education and religion would ensure his children's success in the new emerging Africa that was surely moving away from its antiquity and adopting the new way of life. No doubt Ezekiel's war experience and his job with the white man has somewhat made him the white man's willing bondsman but his roots in traditional African psyche have not been totally uprooted. Like the white man and like his elder orthodox brother, he is a devout patriarch. His wife, his children, his room apartment are his property. Ezekiel represents those Nigerians who had moved away from their roots but had not been completely displaced from their beliefs and customs and thus struggling between two cultures. This confusion is reflected in his relationship with his wife and his daughter. When Ezekiel comes back from war after many years and his wife, Ma Blackie is not able to bear him children, he nags her and accuses her of being infertile. This, despite the fact that he already had two children from her: Akuna, their daughter who is just fourteen years of age and their son, Nna-nndo who is eleven. Ezekiel's male centric mentality blocks his mind to rationalize that it could be his infertility that is proving to be a hurdle in his desire of becoming a father once more. In the most absurd fashion, he even

complains and grieves that his payment of a hefty bride price to Ma Blackie's parents and their marriage being sanctified through Christianity has all gone in vain. After spending so much of money, Ma Blackie has given him only one son and of course the daughter is not to be counted. Ezekiel's confused state of mind is reflected in the fact that despite being a practising Christian his belief in the native doctors remains firm for he doesn't hesitate to send his wife to a native witch doctor for curing her infertility but to no avail. So finally, to pacify her husband, Ma Blackie goes to Ibuza, her in-law's native town to, "placate their Oboshi river goddess into giving her some babies" (8). In her absence Ezekiel's foot infection that he had got from the war, becomes fatal and so he has to be taken to the hospital. And his children are now left to themselves. While leaving he reminds them that they will always remain his. The children are unable to understand and it is only later that the significance of the statement hits the readers. While going to the hospital his love and tenderness for his children unfolds. No doubt his behaviour towards his wife is somewhat that of indifference because her worthiness as a wife is measured in her capacity to bear children and looking after the house and family. But his daughter reserves a special place in his heart. He has a soft corner for her. He does send her to school yet he has not been able to rid himself of seeing her as a liability. He names her *Aku-nna* meaning "father's wealth", because the only consolation that a father could get from the birth of a daughter would be her bride price. Even *Aku-nna*, knows her place in the family: "*Aku-nna* knew that she was too insignificant to be regarded as a blessing to this unfortunate marriage" (9). So here is this little girl, barely fourteen, who has been so conditioned by this male centric society into believing that her only worth is in being a submissive member of her family and so she is determined:

Not to let her father down. She was going to marry well, a rich man of whom her father would approve and who would be able to afford an expensive bride price. (10)

This is all she wants from life. Her father pities her for she appears to be so vulnerable both physically and emotionally. Probably *Aku-nna*'s western education and her mental conditioning through the new religion,

Christianity has drilled the quality of being submissive into her psyche. After her father's departure to the hospital her neighbours assume the role of the children's protectors, for in the traditional African society, "everyone is responsible for the next person" (14). This sense of belongingness to the community is witnessed during the mourning and funeral of Ezekiel. At this hour of pain and grief, the entire community provides a support system to the children. For them it is imperative that a child belongs to the entire community. This is a matriarchal society where community welfare is a priority and each and every member of the community owns a responsibility towards its children who belong to all and not just to their natural parents.

MaBlackie too is given full emotional and psychological support. The delicate balance and conflict between the two cultures –the western and traditional that had been part of Ezekiel's life becomes a marked feature of his death too, specifically on the day of his funeral that is narrated with such comic ironic tones because it cannot be decided by the villagers whether he should be buried as per the Christian tradition or the traditional way. Finally, the decision is left to Ezekiel's eleven-year-old son, who is totally awed and baffled by all that is happening. He is now his father's heir to carry on his legacy. But the question is what is the legacy. So, not so much by conviction but more because of the pressure and urgency of the circumstances, he blurts out that he would want his father in Heaven. This is a moment of victory for the western culture because now Ezekiel will have a Christian burial. But how ironic that this new culture and way of life fails to provide the bereaved family a means of livelihood. For survival they have to return to Ezekiel's ancestral home in Ibuza, where his elder brother would adopt them and provide for them.

Paradoxically Aku-nna who had been so keen and eager to listen to Aunt Uzo's stories of traditional African lives in the distant past is now standing on the threshold when this distant past is going to become her destiny. Aku-nna had so enjoyed the stories narrated orally by one of her neighbours. Aunt Uzo's stories, which were not narrated passively but demanded an active participation from the listeners as well. Not

only that but each story had some philosophical lesson. What was the most attracted part of these stories was that these stories evoked life and times of the distant past of the forest people involved in rituals and life of times that belong to an unknown, yet known age, where people:

Had been real forest people, whose births, marriages and deaths were celebrated alike with wild dances of coal-black maidens wearing short raffia skirts, performing the aja or oduko with bells on their thin ankles (24).

Ironically after her father's death Aku-nna along with her mother and brother is thrown and dragged back into such times, which become for her a nightmarish experience, exactly for the reason that her upbringing in an environment of new Africa has made her a misfit in the traditional Ibuza cultural set-up, that appears to her alien and from which she is totally estranged. Thus starts her journey back into the deep recesses the precolonial age, as it becomes inevitable for the family to go back to Ibuza. On the one hand there is the hard fact that the earning member of the family is dead and to earn a livelihood in Lagos would be next to impossible. On the other hand, there is a way out for the family by going back to Ibuza, because conventionally after Ezekiel's death, his family would be adopted by his elder brother. Aku-nna knows her destiny that the bride price that her marriage would fetch would be used to pay the school fee for her brother Nna-nndo. She is prepared for this and can only hope that she gets a good husband rich enough to pay a handsome bride price. But she is definitely not ready for what she encounters in her hometown.

The journey from Lagos to Ibuza is an experience in itself for Aku-nna. In going back, she is going back to a world from which her bond has been completely severed. What strikes her at first is the contrast in the landscape. As they travel on, the forest and the vegetation become thicker and greener. People as they walked along had seemed more happy, relaxed and healthy, than their relatives in Lagos. Among the women who come to welcome MaBlackie and her children is Aku-nna's first cousin Ogugua, who is of Aku-nna's age but is a complete

contrast to her. She has never attended any school and is more a replica of what MaBlackie would have been in her younger days; bold, vivacious, loud and even boisterous, “Ogugua was much darker, however her skin shone now, polished by a light morning perspiration...She was bolder, too, Aku-nna noticed.” (64). Ogugua is a little woman in the traditional African set-up, judicious and wise about a woman’s role and her tactics in playing that role. Aku-nna appears to be so naive and vulnerable in front of her. Ogugua does not hesitate in telling Aku-nna that it was only a matter of time before her father that is Ezekiel’s elder brother-Okonkwo would marry MaBlackie. Since he has already inherited her and everything that belonged to Ezekiel. Aku-nna is shocked and starts to pity her mother and so resolves to study hard and become a teacher to protect her mother. This is a traditional patriarchal society, where everything, inanimate and human are the property of a single male inheritor. No doubt the matriarchal, communal fabric of the society forms its very strong foundation. It is because of this solid matriarchal base that women in traditional African setup are bold, shrewd and vibrant to take up the challenges of living in the patriarchal setup as opposed to their counterparts in the modern towns of Nigeria who have adopted Christianity and western education and are conditioned to be submissive and docile. Aku-nna and Ogugua become representative of this two opposing cultural ethos. Ogugua despite her lack of western education is confident, bold, aggressive, at once in tune with her traditional way of life and ready to accept its challenges, which for her are not challenges but a way of life. Aku-nna’s western education on the other hand, makes her vulnerable and susceptible to this new way of life which paradoxically is not new but it is her inheritance and legacy from which she had been uprooted long back even before her birth and now the challenge is whether the sapling that had been uprooted can be planted back in its ancestral soil.

This challenge is unfolded through Aku-nna’s relationship with two men who are in complete contrast to each other. On the one hand is her adopted father Okonkwo who is an orthodox traditionalist. On the other hand, is Chike, who is a slave descendent but now through education,

he and his family have risen financially and intellectually in the society but are still haunted by their ancient, ancestral legacy of being slave descendants. Okonkwo welcomes MaBlackie and her children within their household. Being totally ignorant and oblivion of the western influence his only ambition in life is to gain the title *Eze* within his tribe. For that he needs more money that he can now get through the bride price that his brother's daughter would fetch. So, he lets MaBlackie have a few luxuries despite a silent opposition from the other members of his family. Okonkwo even lets MaBlackie send her children to a missionary school. Even to a diehard traditionalist like him it becomes clear that an educated daughter would fetch a better bride price. Through the ambition of Okonkwo is projected the deep-rooted effect of colonialism that has finally managed to penetrate its tentacles deep inside the African traditional roots and is all set to uproot the solid tree of African culture, through its very powerful instrument of capitalism. It is the money, the capital, that is used as a bait to trap the unsuspecting natives. MaBlackie too becomes an innocent victim of exploitation of the capitalistic system. The money that she had saved from her husband's gratuity she invested in trading palm kernels:

For she did not wish to have to carry baskets of akputo market on her head. Her type of trading was different and less strenuous: ...; she sold the kernels to eastern Ibo traders, who would have them reprocessed and exported to England to be used in the manufacture of famous brand name soaps. The cakes of soap would then be re-imported to Nigeria, and women like MaBlackie would buy them. The kernels, thus, made a completely circular journey (74).

Colonialism exploits without the victim's knowledge. And Ma Blackie is an exploited elite. Her children are going to the missionary school. She becomes the envy of Okonkwo's household. Sending a girl to school is not really encouraged in this part of the world. But MaBlackie has Okonkwo's support, not because he believes in educating a girl, but because it brightens his prospect of getting a bigger bride price through *Aku-nna*. He needs this capital to fulfil his ambition of becoming an *Eze*. It is ironic that this great native traditionalist who appears to be

untouched by the colonial influence is in a very subtle way being taken into its fold. People like Okonkwo are also being entrapped by colonialism. His decision to loosen the reins of domestic and familial control is met with silent opposition from other members of his family especially one of his wives, Ngbeke who because of her jealousy is able to provide a glimpse of the hard truth that the family will have to encounter later. When her sons had been convinced by their father on the relative merit of sending a girl to school with the prospect that she would bring a large bride price, it is negated by this jealous mother who more out of envy tries to turn her sons and through them her own husband against MaBlackie. For Ngbeke argues that the bride price would not go to Okonkwo but to Aku-nna's brother, Nna-nndo and the new European law will be on his side. The land is now being governed by new and strange law of the white man. She warns that MaBlackie will make full use of that law. Ngbeke in her heightened state of frustration and jealousy declares Aku-nna to be a 'ogbanje' - "a living dead". For she has all the characteristics of an ogbanje-she is timid, shy, soft spoken, unsure, not well built. Such girls, "die young, usually at the birth of their first baby. They must die young because their friends in the other world call them back" (79). Aku-nna's good behaviour becomes her greatest drawback in her ancestral environment. Her people do not understand her. If she feels like an alien among her own people, for these people also she is nothing less than an enigma. She realises that, she was trapped in the intricacies of Ibuza tradition. "She must either obey or bring shame and destruction on her own people" (116). And so, life moves on as Aku-nna and her brother accept the fatality of their situation; that there is no escape from the countless and unchanging traditions of their own people. Even MaBlackie has become oblivion to the emotional needs of her children, especially Aku-nna. It never strikes her that they are like babes who have lost their way in the deep forest and need their mother's guidance and support. The emotional need of Aku-nna is lost to her as she gets involved and has to survive in the family politics.

Aku-nna does not know where to turn for support. She desperately fights the eruption of tender feelings in her heart for Chike, her young

schoolteacher who is barely twenty-four years of age. She had first met Chike on her arrival when she was on her way to her village Ibuza along with her mother and the women of her community. Seeing her tired Chike had offered her bicycle ride which she refused not because she was a coward but the young men riding the bicycle realized, “that there was a kind of delicacy about her, for she had not yet been toughened by life as had the girls born and bred in Ibuza” (69). It is this quality of Aku-nna that attracts Chike towards her. As her lessons with Chike starts, he cannot help falling in love with this girl, “even had it occurred to him what was happening he was powerless to stop the process. He had never seen a girl so dependent, so unsure of herself, so afraid of her own people” (80). Both Aku-nna and Chike fall in love with each other. For Aku-nna she can relate to Chike in this alien land of her ancestors. He is the only one who appears to be familiar and understanding. For Chike Aku-nna’s alienation from her own people makes her so fragile that his natural instincts of protectiveness that finally blossoms into love is so powerfully evoked in his heart. The tragedy is that both of them realise the futility of their ardent desire for each other. Aku-nna has been told multiple times that Chike is a slave descendent. In the conversation between Ngbeke and her sons, when Ngbeke hints at the prospect of such a relationship between Aku-nna and Chike, the immediate reaction of her sons is that of anger. They express their resentment that there can be no such relationship between a slave and a member of their family. That according to them would be the greatest insult that could befall their family. And of course, Aku-nna could never be interested in a slave. Besides, “how could a quiet girl like Aku-nna attract such a learned man like Chike, the headmaster of the whole school...and a common slave” (80). There can never be the marriage of heaven and hell. This is the dynamic reality of Chike’s position in the new Africa. His being a slave is a thing of the past. With the coming of the British the class of slaves were the first to get education and they were among the first to adopt the new religion of the whites and so “these same educated slaves ended up commanding key positions” (74). But then the past, present and the future are one continuum reality. Chike and his family have risen financially, intellectually and in terms of

status in the new Africa but the past continues to haunt their present. There is an unspoken compromise between the slave descendants of antiquity who have become slaves of the colonial power on the one hand and the freemen of antiquity who are on their way to becoming willing bondsman in the new regime. According to that compromise both do not interfere in each other's lives. Chike is a modern progressive man, who aspires of going to the university. For him being a slave descendent holds no meaning for him. But because of the unspoken law between the freeman and slaves of antiquity he thinks it wise not to meddle with old practices and traditions. However, when Aku-nna comes on the scene, Chike cannot stop himself from falling in love with this innocent girl. He tries his best to nip the budding of such tender feelings in his heart for Aku-nna. Even his father tries to put some sense into his son's mind by telling him that Aku-nna's father was his junior in school so he would not want Chike to spoil her. To which Chike reacts, "How can a man spoil an angel" which shows that his feeling for Aku-nna is true and genuine. He loves her passionately. Perhaps if people had left these two individuals alone, they would have conquered their private feelings for each other. But it is precisely the antagonism that they encounter from all quarters that gets them closer to each other. This antagonism is not just from their family and community but also from students in school. It is through this antagonism that Buchi Emecheta exposes the ancient customs and practices of traditional African tribes as patriarchal power structures to oppress and dominate the female sex. These practices are exposed as exploitative and torturous in nature. Buchi unlike some male African writers like Ngugi Wa Thiong'o does not glorify their ancient past. This is because she is a female who has witnessed and experienced these practices as powerful tools in the hands of the male centric society of traditional African tribes. *The Bride Price* reflects her black African consciousness in which is embedded memories of these dark practices. The autobiographical element in this novel is very strong. Buchi Emecheta herself acknowledged that of all her novels, *The Bride Price* was closest to her heart. The trials and tribulations of Aku-nna are at once synonymous with Buchi Emecheta's own experiences. In baring the reality of patriarchy to understand the

crisis of identity in Africa, Buchi Emecheta can be seen in conformity with feminists like bell hooks and Chimamanda Ngozi who believe in the need to challenge patriarchal norms and traditions that perpetuate inequality. Aku-nna's cousins who have now become her half-brothers, her adopted father and especially Okoboshi's, a physically handicapped young native boy of her village all are exposed as instruments of torture and exploitation in a deep-rooted patriarchal set-up that has maintained its hegemony since ages. The very thought that Aku-nna could marry Chike, an *onshu* i.e., a slave descendent evokes in the male members strong, passionate feelings as saviours of their family honour; a thing not to be tempered with by a mere girl. If she digresses, they will not hesitate to kill her. They forget or cannot be sensitive to her being a human being with feelings and emotions. She is nothing more than family property and has to live her life in accordance to their demands. Her worth is measured only in terms of the bride price that she can fetch for the family. Her bride price becomes her only valued asset. Her adopted father needs it for getting the title; her mother needs it for her unborn child; her own brother needs it for his education. Everybody is waiting for her to become a woman. Even her own brother has started behaving odd. Since he is a boy, he is given so much of liberty and importance that he has become a little arrogant commanding and demanding things to be done by his elder sister. In such an environment Aku-nna feels a little stifled. It is only in Chike's presence that she feels secure and comfortable. Chike finally declares his love for her but realises the futility of their love ending in a happy marriage. Both of them know that Aku-nna has to pass her exams to continue her studies otherwise she would be married immediately. Chike helps her in her studies and also provides her love and support in her hour of pain and anxiety. They continue to meet secretly or Chike visits her house on the pretext of helping her with her studies thinking that the time thus gained would somehow buy them time to unknot this impossible puzzle. A ray of hope is provided to the young lovers by Chike's father when he tries to make his son understand that the most rigid of the minds are liable to change. So before taking some extreme and drastic step, he very judiciously advises his son that they would try and talk to Aku-nna's family. Chike's

father is an experienced man and knows that a good bride price can act as a bait.

Okoboshi, who emerges as a strong rival for Aku-nna's hand is a cripple both physically and mentally. In his childhood he was bitten by a poisonous snake. He managed to survive the venomous bite but it wounded Okoboshi for life. He has a bad limp. Mentally he appears to be a sadist. He is Chike's student, studying in the same class as Aku-nna, but his only purpose appears to be to malign Aku-nna's reputation and feeling. Aku-nna dreads him. She cannot understand why he wants to marry her when he has so much bitterness in his heart against her. His confidence in claiming that Aku-nna will ultimately marry only him frightens her. Chike cannot openly challenge him, because customs of the tribe provide Okoboshi the right to claim Aku-nna as his wife. For that he has to simply cut a lock of her hair and then Aku-nna will not only be married to him but tied to him for life. Whether he loves her, cares for her or not is immaterial. She will be bonded to him for life and must serve him and bear him children and in the process will be ultimately tamed and harnessed like cattle. A woman's role is only to serve and breed. If at all there is a display of emotions, that becomes a taboo and can be punished with death. So Okoboshi takes resort under the shelter of these traditions, customs and practices to physically and mentally torture Aku-nna. The episode where he comes to MaBlackie's hut as one of the suitors for Aku-nna's hand is particularly reflective of this trait of Okoboshi. Aku-nna against her wish and desire has to entertain and make herself presentable to the suitors who come to her house for her hand. She cannot stop them from touching her if they so desire. Okoboshi takes full advantage of this practice to physically hurt her in Chike's presence. Chike is his teacher but that doesn't stop him from insulting and abusing both his teacher and the girl who he is so keen to marry. It is so apparent that he doesn't want to marry Aku-nna out of love but only because of the dark 'poisonous desire of revenge, hatred, frustration and sadist pleasure. When Okoboshi hurts Aku-nna, Chike cannot contain himself any longer. Both of them come to blows and in the process Okoboshi too gets hurt. MaBlackie instead of coming to

her daughter's defence fully and boisterously supports Okoboshi. Aku-nna is shell shocked. How could her mother have forgotten all the material and moral support extended by Chike in their hour of need and hardships? How could she be blind to Okoboshi's abusive behaviour and above all how could she be insensitive to her daughter's feelings that Aku-nna had not hidden from her mother. MaBlackie had just stopped herself short of calling Chike a slave. She is given another shock by her mother who in a heightened emotional state discloses that she is pregnant. Aku-nna's hopes of continuing her studies come crashing down. Now she knows for sure that she would not be allowed to continue her studies. She can no longer aspire to become a teacher. There was another claimant to her bride price i.e., the unborn child of MaBlackie. Aku-nna very rightly analyses that now MaBlackie would not go against the wishes of her husband, who had given her this happiness. MaBlackie too becomes a part and parcel of oppressive patriarchal domination. The only hope that Aku-nna had of her marriage being delayed for the sake of education are trampled upon by MaBlackie. This episode ultimately catapults into a great disaster and tragedy for Aku-nna. During one of her dance rehearsals for the upcoming festival for which all the girls of the village have to practice, she is kidnapped by Okoboshi's friends and family. The entire episode is so intimidating. It is made amply clear that there are no laws to protect the young, vulnerable girls. In the dreaded darkness of the night, while the girls are practising, Aku-nna is carried away to Okoboshi's house through sheer force and violence. Aku-nna is frightened out of her senses. She doesn't realise what is happening to her. It is only when the women of Okoboshi's household come to prepare her as a bride that truth dawns on her. For Aku-nna it is not marriage but suicide. She is trapped like an animal; abused and tortured both physically and mentally. She groans with pain and shock. She is told by the womenfolk that everything will be alright as she would be married and in due course would bear Okoboshi's children. She is even warned not to resist Okoboshi's advances that can lead to more violence and force. This chilling and monstrous advice leaves her in a pathetic condition. Her situation is worse than that of a

prisoner of war, a sacrificial animal and the irony is that all this torture and violence has the sanctity of age-old customs and traditions. This marriage ceremony is deep down a celebration of kidnapping, extortion and rape. The entire tribe of Okoboshi takes part in the celebrations and merrymaking. What is more shocking is that Aku-nna's own family too accepts this marriage. It is a part of the ancient practice that the family of the girl thus abducted is left with no option but to accept the marriage and more importantly the bride price. Okoboshi, a crippled man represents patriarchy at its height, as a strong but ugly monster that needs to be destroyed. When Okoboshi visits Aku-nna at night and tries to use force, Aku-nna reacts strongly and hysterically. She knows that she has to preserve her honour, come what may:

A kind of strength came to her, from where she did not know. She knew only that, for once in her life, she intended to stand up for herself, to fight for herself, for her honour. This was going to be the deciding moment of her existence. Not her mother, not her relatives, not even Chike, could help her now (136).

And so, she reacts in a way that surprises her also. She doesn't recognise the woman who blurts out that Okoboshi has gained nothing in marrying Aku-nna. She laughs hysterically and pronounces shame on Okoboshi by claiming that she has already been disvirgined by the slave Chike and she might be carrying his child. This shocks and stops Okoboshi instantly and he further hits and spits at her calling her a common slut. What double standards Okoboshi and his people have. Being a man gives him the right to do any kind of violence and damage to a female. But when a girl digresses even an inch from her defined role, she becomes worse than the beasts. The hollowness and hypocrisy of such practices is exposed. The novel delves deep into the hegemonic control being exercised over women in a systematic manner. The exploitation and heinous nature of such practices is scrutinised. But at the same time by making Aku-nna her own saviour instead of some male character rescuing her, Buchi Emecheta resonates feminism of both bell hooks and Chimamanda Ngozi, who advocate for women amplifying their voice and becoming agents in making choices about their life. The climax is

reached when Aku-nna, who has always been so submissive, is projected as a powerful agent, who amplifies the voice of the marginalized. Finally, Aku-nna escapes from this hopelessly bleak situation along with Chike. Both of them escape to another town of Ughelli, where with the help of some friends and the money that had been given by Chike's father they finally settle down. Chike gets a job in an oil company and Aku-nna works as a teacher. Their love story gets close to having a happy ending in a typical western fairytale style with the lady in love being rescued from the clutches of a monster and thereafter enjoying a blissful happy life ever after. But then this is not a fairy tale. It is a tale steeped in hardcore reality of the twentieth century Nigerian history. Chike and Aku-nna bask in each other's love and enjoy domestic bliss. But the ghost of past does haunt them on and off. They have crossed the barriers of distance and moved to a different town to escape from the precolonial historical legacy; but they could not escape from the barriers of time. They are so unsuccessful in disentangling themselves from their past. Chike provides support to Aku-nna's brother and mother too but the issue of bride price is so deeply embedded in Aku-nna's psyche that it has left a permanent scar of guilt on her conscience. Her bride price has not been paid and this weighs heavily on her heart and mind. Despite her education, she has not been able to rid herself of superstitious beliefs. Chike continues to reassure her that his father would pay double the bride price. Back in Ibuza the lovers have not been forgotten or forgiven so easily. They have desecrated their ancestral soil and have to be punished. Chike's father faces a lot of antagonism from the Okoboshi's family. His plantation is destroyed and his family lives under the shadow of constant threat because of which he sends his family away but cannot bring himself to leave his ancestral land. In a legal battle with the Okoboshi's family Chike's father wins only to further the enmity with the natives. This time the law is on the side of the slaves because it is based on English justice that makes no allowance for the freemen of antiquity. These are strange laws., "The free men had to plant new cocoa for the slave and the heavy fines were duly paid" (155). Buchi shows the dynamics of the new emerging Africa in such a vibrant manner. Through its policy of divide and rule the English have created a barrier

between the slaves and freemen of traditional African society by providing the slaves with their western brand of education and religion and thus empowering them against the freemen of antiquity. The polemics of the society are changing when in fact both the slaves and freemen of bygone days are being reduced to being slaves of the new masters i.e. the colonialists.

As for Okonkwo, he is reduced to an embittered man who has now totally forgotten his cherished ambition of gaining the title of *Eze* because of the shame that Aku-nna has brought to his name. He even disowns Mablackie as his wife. A thing that no Ibuza man in his right senses would do. He is distraught with anger, shame and a strong feeling of revenge. His own people have antagonized him against his own brother's daughter so much that he doesn't just stop at cursing her but makes a doll in Aku-nna's image and practices black magic to kill her. MaBlackie is frightened and even informs Ofulala, Chike's father, who advises her not to tell the young people, since he believes these curses work only when the victim is aware of it. Ofulala even tries to make peace with Okonkwo by offering him big amount of bride price that is outrightly refused by Okonkwo, who cannot free himself from his mental, psychological and cultural block. For him Chike is still a slave and he cannot give his daughter to a slave but his conscience doesn't prick him when he practices black magic to take his daughter's life.

This is the identity crisis that Nigeria is facing; transformation of power structures along with the dynamics of resistance and acceptance. *The Bride Price* echoes Bell Hooks' concept of inclusive feminism and Chimamanda Ngozi's intersectionality that emphasises the importance of recognising how different aspects of identity like race, class, gender and cultural background intersect and influence one another. In the novel Aku-nna and Cheke's love story is shaped and characterized not only because of the dynamics of gender but also because of their race, class, cultural background and even education. Both of them cannot live happily ever after, because Buchi shows that domestic bliss cannot be achieved in a land engulfed by so many identity issues. The novel is about to end on a note of hope, as Chike and dying Aku-nna name their

daughter, “Joy” but than simultaneously comes the writer’s last note that Aku-nna’s death becomes a lesson for all girls in the village for generations to come, that desecration of ancient customs and disobedience of one’s parents can never materialise into happiness. We as readers are left to draw our own conclusion. Does Aku-nna die because of black magic practised by her adopted father or is it the superstitious strain in her conscience that acts as poisonous guilt and gradually kills or is it nothing more than her medical condition of having a weak constitution because of which she is not able to bear her tough child birth and dies in the process.

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