

**EXPLORING THE CONCEPTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL
COLONIZATION AND “INTERIOR COLONIZATION”:
REPRESENTING THE SUBALTERN WOMEN IN BUCHI
EMECHETA’S *DOUBLE YOKE***

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One of the most distinguished female writers to emerge from Post-colonial Nigeria, Florence Onye Buchi Emecheta candidly portrays the miserable condition of women in male dominated Nigerian society. Through her fictions such as *Second Class Citizen* (1974), *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977), *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *Double Yoke* (1982) and *The Family* (1989), Emecheta deals with serious issues like sexual politics, racial prejudice, clash between tradition and modernity, subordination of women in Nigerian society. Emecheta is a pioneer in upholding an authentic, authoritative and unadulterated female perspective in contemporary African literature. A leading female voice in contemporary African literature, Emecheta is “praised for her engaging, compassionate rendering of African women, motherhood, and the impact of Westernization in postcolonial Nigeria.” (qtd. in Hunter 4) The present paper tends to buttress on ‘interior colonization’ – a term used by Kate Millet in *Sexual politics* (1970) – of women characters, the double yoke of tradition and modernity that they have to undergo in Emecheta’s self-reflexive novel *Double Yoke* (1982).

In her famous book *Sexual Politics* (1970), Millett has pointed out that the “the relationship between the sexes was one of “dominance and subordination”. This power relationship was institutionalized ... it was a form of “interior colonization,” a kind of oppression “sturdier than any form of segregation, and more rigorous than class stratification” (qtd. in Maggie Doherty web). In Emecheta’s bildungsroman *Double Yoke* women characters suffer from, as Millett has termed in *Sexual Politics*, ‘interior colonization.’ They have been grossly misrepresented and underrepresented. They have been treated (mistreated) as subalterns. Subaltern Studies is a branch of history that tends to focus on the history of the neglected and marginalised sects of the society. The term ‘Subaltern Studies’ originates from Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci’s prison writings which were later collected in *Prison Notebooks* (written between 1929 to 1935) referring to those persons or groups of lower rank and station who are marginalised because of class, gender, race, religion and ethnicity. In her *magnum opus*, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1985)

Spivak chalks out the pathetic condition of the subaltern women who are silenced by the dominant voice of patriarchy. As Spivak notes:

... as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. (qtd. in Nelson and Grossberg 287)

She further admits that “subaltern as female exists as the unrepresentable in discourse, a shadowy figure on its margins. Any attempt to retrieve her voice will disfigure her speech” (qtd. in McLeod 193). Thus Spivak deals with, as Christopher J. Lee points out in *Subaltern Studies and African Studies* (2005), the “problem of “woman as subaltern” not merely in terms of political subjugation, but also in textual terms of linguistic and discursive erasure: women had no voice within colonial texts and, by extension, hegemonic Western accounts of South Asian history”(Lee 4).

In *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008), Fanon explores how blacks suffer from inferiority complex and aspire to be whites. Fanon also points out the psychological effect of colonialism on the colonised. According to Fanon violence is an integral part of colonialism. In the reviewed work of Anna Johnston’s *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800-1860* (2003) Mark Knight explores how Johnston is “interested in the relationship between missionary writing and discourses of gender, class and race” (Knight 364). Contact with the missionaries not only changed the life-styles of the natives, it also re-defined and re-shaped the colonial culture. School was the most fruitful medium through which the minds of the Africans were to be penetrated. In *A History of the Church in Africa* (2004), Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed state that “school should not be elitist and thus a divisive factor in the social body”(Sundkler and Steed 250). But in the novel *Double Yoke* (1983), proper education stumbles in the hands of its perpetrators. *Double Yoke* which was originally intended to be entitled *Prostitution: Nigerian Style* is set on a campus of a Nigerian university in the 1980s. The novel reiterates the aspect of psychological colonization. It tells the story of a female undergraduate Nko and her educated lover Ete Kamba at the University of Calabar where “even in the supposedly most enlightened context within Nigerian society, young, educated females are also subjugated to male domination, and Nko is made to plea for female emancipation on her university’s campus just as Nnu Ego would have done in her village” (Grau 1). The novel is actually a meta-narrative as Ete writes his assignment that the new lecturer Miss Bulewao has given him to work out in his creative writing class – “What type of Nigeria would I like to

see?" (7). Ete writes from his masculine point of view. He decides that he would object to the abject injustice meted out to him and his girlfriend Nko by Professor Ikot. He would write against the maltreatment the students, especially the female ones, receive from the Professors in the university campuses:

He would write and tell the outside world that masses in the university campuses are oppressed. That on campuses like Malabor, four, five or even six students sometimes have to share a room, whilst young and sometimes unmarried senior lecturers have three bedroom houses and flats. That not being satisfied with that, they sometimes did steal their girl friends. Just like Professor Ikot had done to his Nko. (12)

Thus Ete Kamba harbours a grievance against Professor Ikot. "The primary concern of the novel," as Florence Stratton endorses in her illuminating book *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*, "is to highlight a dialogue on gender as one of the defining features of the contemporary literary tradition" (Stratton 127).

In *Sexual Politics*, Millett talks about, as Gloria Steinem observes, "the politics of male dominance, of owning women's bodies as the means of reproduction...." [qtd. in *Kate Millett, Ground-Breaking Feminist Writer, Is Dead* at 82 (2017) web]. Like all other male protagonists in Emecheta's novels, Ete is a champion of male-contrived value system. One of his burdens is to marry an innocent yet educated modern African woman who would be a virgin – a woman with "no little secrets" and "easy to understand":

A very quiet and submissive woman, a good cook, a good listener, a good worker, a good mother with a good education to match. But her education must be a little less than his own, otherwise they would start talking on the same level. (26)

Ete's mother is the epitome of womanhood – the type that never questions. He wishes that his future wife would be like his mother. He does not want to be dictated by a woman and therefore craves for a woman below his standard for he knows that his privileged status as a male would be threatened:

His mother, to him, had been the epitome of womanhood, the type whose price was above the biblical rubies. The type who took pride not in herself but in her man. The type who would always obey her

man, no matter what, even if he commanded her to walk through fire, the type that never questioned. (37)

Thus as a male member he wants to subjugate her future wife. He finds such a possibility in Nko when he meets her at Arit's party. Subsequently Ete leads Nko to the corner of his house and fulfils his sexual desire. But even after the sexual encounter, Ete is not sure whether Nko is a virgin. Ete's dream of marrying "an educated virgin" (54) is, as it were, shattered to pieces as he does not find drops of blood arising out of their sexual encounter and therefore he rants:

...What Christian girl would let herself be disvirgined by the wall? If you were a virgin, which I'm sure you were not, –I went to check –you see, so I know. There was not a drop of blood. You are a prostitute, a whore, and you keep putting on this air of innocence as if you were something else. A whore, a shameless prostitute! (57)

Thus even though Ete uses Nko to satisfy his sexual gratification, he accuses her of being a prostitute. To overcome his mental turmoil, he visits the religious leader Professor Elder Ikot who instead of giving him reassurance taunts him for choosing Nko as his girlfriend. It is to be noted that though Ete is not the virginal hero, he desires an educated virgin.

"One of the myths which Emecheta debunks in *Double Yoke* is the myth of (male) masculinity. She uses the new African females who are encumbered by tradition and at the same time are expected to carry the burden of acquiring suitable education", asserts Ezenwa- Ohaeto in "Replacing Myth with Myth: The Feminist Streak in Buchi Emecheta's *Double Yoke*" (Ohaeto 158) included in Marie Umeh's *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta* (1996). Ete's girlfriend Nko is under double yoke as she wants to be an academician as well as an obedient wife. Nko's ambition in life is to get a good husband and to help her family. She tells her mother: "Oh mother, I want to have both worlds, I want to be an academician and I want to be a quiet nice and obedient wife, the type you all want me to be" (94). Thus Nko is in the 'female quandary' (qtd. in Khan and Ghosh 174) and it is through Nko the novelist "explores the no-win situation that young African women face as they balance career and higher education with the strictures of tradition" (Khan and Ghosh 174). Actually Nko suffers from, to use a term from Kate Millet, 'interior colonization'. (qtd. in Khan and Ghosh) In *Sexual Politics*, Millet observes how women are forced to accept their subordinate status in the society. In *Kate Millet, Ground-Breaking Feminist Writer, Is Dead at 82*, published in 2017 Parul Sehgal and Neil Genzlinger

point out how “From depictions of the sexes in literature, she examined how women were socialized to accept, even defend, their lower status in society, a process she called “interior colonization.”” (Sehgal and Genzlinger web) Voices of women are thus choked by the institution of patriarchy. Nko’s mother is repressed by the prevailing power structure as she acknowledges, “We had to keep quiet, because we did not know many of the things our men knew.” (94) Thus both – Nko and her mother – have slavish allegiance to tradition. Nancy Topping Bazin points out in “Feminist Perspectives in African Fiction: Buchi Emecheta and Bessie Head” (1986), “Because of their patriarchal socialization, mostly by their own mothers, they too see life from a male perspective and often accept value system and rules which follow from that” (39). Professor Ikot decides to supervise Nko’s work and very soon Professor’s evil intentions are overt to her. It is her dream of getting a good degree and establishment in life that urges her to move forward. She is well aware of the fact that “Women like her were being presented with a kind of double yoke. She was now expected to carry the two yokes and to come out smiling at the end.” (109) In order to pursue her academic goal, she is forced to accompany Professor Ikot to Kwa Falls. On their way to Kwa Falls Prof. Ikot casts looks of triumph at Nko and he seems to say “if you don’t let me sleep with you at any time I feel like it, you don’t get your degree” (139). Nko never feels so cheap as she is before Professor Ikot and there is no question of turning back. At the Falls Nko is sexually exploited by Professor Ikot. After the fatal episode at Falls, she rushes towards her room and cries in agony. She apologises in front of her lover – “it’s over Ete Kamba. I have lost my innocence. Please don’t ask me to explain. It is over.” (142) Thus Nko is not only physically stigmatized but also psychologically disrupted.

According to Millett, “[H]owever muted its appearance may be, sexual domination obtains nevertheless as perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power” (qtd. in Doherty web). The incident, better to say, the accident in Kwa Falls brings about a sea change in her life. Realising that there is no turning back, she demands a reward in terms of a good degree. Nko’s “head was held high, like a proud criminal condemned and determined to go the gallows without begging for mercy or wallowing in self pity” (148). She decides that she will not abort the baby she is carrying in her womb and wants to give birth to a baby out of wedlock. Actually she goes against tradition and wants to prove to the world that she can look after her own child. She wants to persuade her education simultaneously keeping in mind that education is the only gateway to her emancipation from subjugation. Helen C. Chukwuma pertinently observes in “Positivism and the Female Crisis: The Novels of Buchi Emecheta”

(1989) – “She wants to succeed in life as a woman desirable in her own right and as a qualified educated woman, financially capable of looking after her aspirations” (7). Her lover Ete Kamba feels that the shy village girl that he has met a few years ago has now become a sophisticated young woman. He wishes Nko has not come to this university. Thus Ete “tries to resolve the problem of ‘the new woman’ by shaping her character and plotting her story so as to reserve the position of dominance for himself” (Stratton 128).

Nko is the single female student in the creative writing class of Miss Bulewao – the most esteemed female writer in Nigeria and maybe the whole of Africa. Dearth of women students as well as female lecturers is to be seen in the university campus of Calabar. In the university it is not only the female students but also the female lecturers like Dr. Madam Edet who does not fully exert their selves. Instead, they let their male counterparts lead themselves. A highly educated woman like Dr. Madam Edet is more proud of her title as Mrs than Dr. and likes to play the role of the “gentle, the innocent, the religious, the ideally approved woman” (104). Professor Ikot’s wife is ‘busy’ giving birth to babies almost every year. Like Nko, other women characters are thus victims of cultural dislocation and psychological exploitation. The novelist exposes the ‘double colonization’ of women, to use a term from Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford’s *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Postcolonial Women’s Writing* (1986). The only difference between Nko and other women is that whereas other women are mute sufferers, Nko resists against psychological oppression.

In “Unpopular Opinions: Some African Women Writers” (1985), Petersen expresses that “Education, which is a passport to the middle-class life, a life to which Buchi Emecheta’s characters aspire, plays an increasingly larger role in her authorship, and in *Double Yoke* she confronts directly the prejudices surrounding the educated woman in Nigeria. *Double Yoke* is a blast, aimed at Nigerian men” (117). Ete feels disgusted with himself for he has taken Miss Bulewao, a woman, as her role model. Thus even an educated woman, if seen from the male gaze, appears to be a subaltern –an object of contempt and derision. An independent woman is not welcome to Nigeria. If a woman becomes independent, men will call her a feminist. Mrs Nwaizu, Nko’s roommate is right when she beautifully sums up the dilemma of women – “Here feminism means everything the society says is bad in women. Independence, outspokenness, immorality, all the ills you can think of” (104). A mature woman that she is, Mrs Nwaizu inspires Nko not to leave the university– “You are a nice girl. If you become promiscuous, which you are not, our men made you so” (156). Nko also harbours the

same thought that if she is to be called a prostitute; it is because of the two men – Ete and Ikot. Nko's roommates warn her of evil person like Professor Ikot and come to the realization that it is easy to use one's brain power than bottom power. Actually a man like Ete exposes the double standards of the society in that they want educated women to marry as well as search for a simple village girl. Florence Stratton reiterates in *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*:

Promoting a derogatory image of women, Ete's narrative valorizes the Manichean allegory of gender. Untroubled by the double standards he employs, Ete portrays Nko as the moral antithesis of his virtuous (though not so virginal) hero, himself. Representing himself as the innocent victim of female perfidy, he fixes her in the status of prostitute. (Stratton 129)

Thus the novel deals with the concept of psychological colonization. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon talks about "colonial alienation" as a psychological issue. The motive of colonialism is basically exploitation. Both – the male as well the female protagonists – suffer from dislocation, dispossession and disorientation. Fanon is thus concerned about the negative impact of psychological colonization. But there is not only psychological exploitation, there is also resistance against 'interior colonization' or what Ashis Nandy points out in *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (1983) the psychological resistance of colonialism. Nko's revolt against Professor Ikot after the Kwa Falls incident shows her courage and determination to slough off the cocoon of tradition. She understands that she has nothing to lose and if she does not come back from her subaltern status the so-called cankers of the society would completely uproot her and ravage her status in the society. At the end of the novel it is the new professor Miss Bulewao who polishes Ete's ideology and gives it a new direction. She coaxes him to ponder over their relationship and pleads him to accept Nko as his future wife, 'the New African Woman'. Now it is up to a traditional man like Ete to accept a modern woman – 'the New African Woman'.

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