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sur les langues maternelles tenu
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à l'Université de Kara**

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Exemples :

En effet, le but poursuivi par M. Ascher (1998, p. 223), est « d'élargir l'histoire des mathématiques de telle sorte qu'elle acquière une perspective multiculturelle et globale (...), d'accroître le domaine des mathématiques : alors qu'elle s'est pour l'essentiel occupée du groupe professionnel occidental que l'on appelle les mathématiciens (...) ».

Pour dire plus amplement ce qu'est cette capacité de la société civile, qui dans son déploiement effectif, atteste qu'elle peut porter le développement et l'histoire, S. B. Diagne (1991, p. 2) écrit :

Qu'on ne s'y trompe pas : de toute manière, les populations ont toujours su opposer à la philosophie de l'encadrement et à son volontarisme leurs propres stratégies de contournements. Celles-là, par exemple, sont lisibles dans le dynamisme, ou à tout le moins, dans la créativité dont fait preuve ce que l'on désigne sous le nom de secteur informel et à qui il faudra donner l'appellation positive d'économie populaire.

Le philosophe ivoirien a raison, dans une certaine mesure, de lire, dans ce choc déstabilisateur, le processus du sous-développement. Ainsi qu'il le dit :

le processus du sous-développement résultant de ce choc est vécu concrètement par les populations concernées comme une crise globale : crise socio-économique (exploitation brutale, chômage permanent, exode accéléré et douloureux), mais aussi crise socio-culturelle et de civilisation traduisant une impréparation sociohistorique et une inadaptation des cultures et des comportements humains aux formes de vie imposées par les technologies étrangères. (S. Diakité, 1985, p. 105).

Les sources historiques, les références d'informations orales et les notes explicatives sont numérotées en série continue et présentées en bas de page.

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BERGER Gaston, 1967, *L'homme moderne et son éducation*, Paris, PUF.

DIAGNE Souleymane Bachir, 2003, « Islam et philosophie. Leçons d'une rencontre », *Diogène*, 202, p. 145-151.

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LITTERATURE

Women's Socio-cultural Identity and Contemporary Challenges: An Appraisal of Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl*

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Abstract:

Using postcolonialism and semiotics as literary theories, this work underscores human behavior and interactions as a means of subjugation and marginalization of women as appeared in Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl*. It also examines the creative and socio-cultural transformation of women identity with a particular emphasis laid on the languages as a double-edge sword and domineering power. Out of this study, it has been revealed that the writer has resorted to her literary style to highlight women enslavement as well as the various challenges they daily face as result of socio-cultural assumptions inherent in their *milieu*.

Key words: Aesthetic, Change, Female, Identity, Slavery

Résumé :

Ce travail souligne le comportement et les interactions humaines comme un moyen d'assujettissement et de marginalisation des femmes comme cela apparaît dans *The Slave Girl* de Buchi Emecheta. A l'aide des théories littéraires telles que le postcolonialisme et la sémiotique, il examine la transformation créative et socioculturelle des femmes identifiées, avec un accent particulier mis sur les langues comme une épée à double tranchant et un pouvoir dominant. De cette étude, il résulte que l'écrivaine a eu recours à son style littéraire pour mettre en exergue l'esclavage des femmes ainsi que les différents défis auxquels elles sont confrontées quotidiennement en raison des hypothèses socio-culturelles inhérentes à leur milieu.

Mots clés : art, changement, esclavage, identité, féminin.

INTRODUCTION

Language and its related aspects have always been the concerns of many writers in their literary creations. Buchi Emecheta like any other African writer has made use of some linguistic techniques in *The Slave Girl*. These techniques are used to interpret human life in many aspects. So, the social and cultural situations of women are the core of literature and society through the use of a means of communication to make known what has been concealed. In this context Meena Piday writes the following words.

Every aspect of oral tradition is present in African novels, from the narratives of epic style to myths, songs for every occasion, proverbs, figures of speech, folktales and fables, chants and incantations, names and naming styles, ceremonies, language and imagery and are deeply rooted in the traditional cultures of Africa (Piday, 2014)

It is in this perspective that writers use some techniques as linguistic features for the expression of social iniquities resorting to language as well as culture and tradition. Hence, writers handle many skills to express social iniquities through language, culture and tradition. Given that

literature is the artistic, imaginative and creative expression of individual and group experiences, nature and values of a group of people over a certain period of time by the medium of language...It is a representation of life experience and reality of the world through linguistic creativity and imagination (Agyekum, 2013, p.2)

It is worth mentioning that the interpretation of literature is based on the language and the cultural background used by the author to deliver his message.

Thus, the diversity of opinions on gender role and identity brings about consciousness raising and disagreement. In fact, *The Slave Girl* tells the story of Ogbanje Ojebeta who, following the death of her parents is sold into domestic slavery. Through this plight, she learns the painful lessons of what it means to be owned by another. Indeed, women issues as well as the various challenges they daily face have always been the concerns of many writers and critics in their various literary creations. This problem of women did not leave Pamessou Walla (2019) aloof. He therefore, highlights the challenges of female emancipation through history with the emphasis laid on Churchill's female characters.

Akoété Amouzou (2024) also explores the ideological ambiguities in Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* and social relevance of some issues; it also proclaims the liberation of women from patriarchal yoke. Kemealo Adoki (2010) as for her and dealing with women awareness, has shed light on how women gained the awareness of their plight in the hands of men and exposes the unfairness and inequalities in the patriarchal system whereby women are exploited. Still, Kemealo Adoki's (2019) *Socio-Cultural Issues and the Quest for Female Gender: Substantial Challenges in Sefi Ata's Everything Good Will Come* underscores women's quests and exposes injustice in the patriarchal system whereby female characters are subjugated.

This work points out human behavior and interactions as a weapon of subjugation and women dehumanization. It also examines the creative as well as the socio-cultural transformation of women identity in Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl*. Furthermore, it delves into how African women are undermined in their marital life and families and finds out the genuine problem and how that should be looked upon for women identity renewal. This analysis focuses on the interaction of characters and their mental behavior and a thorough evaluation of the question in order to attenuate these social misdeeds for the harmonious development of women in African societies.

Furthermore, the factors that influence the human behaviours or individuals' identity will be taken into consideration. The use of postcolonialism and semiotics help show that female gender is the traditional and cultural manifestation contextualized by a local language.

From the postcolonial stance, it is revealed that this theory explores the reality of slavery to the forefront of imagination and highlights the marginalization; and given that we refer to this approach as the historical phenomenon of colonialism with effects such as slavery and cultural discrimination; postcolonial criticism will help look at the concept of violence on female gender focussing on discursive and artistic language dimension. In fact, as *The Slave Girl*, is dealing with female trauma in male chauvinistic setting, it is evident that this work has to do with the hypothesis raised. By the same token, Aschcroft (1995, p, 45) opines that "postcolonialism has been used as a retooled-notion of class and ambivalent discourse of colonial power". Therefore, it is used to adjust the idea of class and gender identity. Subsequently, it is a tool of rethinking female gender identity in African context.

For the Semioticists, this approach provides tools that describe the style, the meaning of words and their functions. In this sense of relationship among sign, object and meaning, Halliday and Hasan (1991, p,3) consider that the concept of semiotics derives initially from the concept of the signifier and signified. All these elements are vital for the understanding of a literary text through the interpretation of these signs and symbols. Besides, some signs indicate that enslavement is handled in *The Slave Girl*. For example, through the use of words and phrases such as "Slave girl" (Emecheta, 1977, cover page). As a consequence, the title embodies the meaning of the novel whereby the protagonist is involved in slavery. As a result, Emecheta wanted to pinpoint a certain reality in African continent in general and in Nigeria in particular. In the light of these critical theories, this study lays bare the characters' mindset and their mind of thought in the geographical setting depicted.

This work is divided into two parts and copes with female enslavement and the aesthetic used to rehabilitate female gender identity and its challenges in *the Slave Girl*.

1-Female Enslavement in *The Slave Girl*

The enslavement is the act of making someone slave. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 9th edition* defines the verb “to enslave”, coming from the term enslavement as “to make somebody slave or to make something or somebody completely dependent on something so that they cannot manage without it” (Hornby, 2015, p.511)

Many issues are raised in order to show female gender's servitude in Buchi Emecheta's *Slave Girl*. Given the plight individuals are undergoing, it makes sense to pinpoint that marriage is a union between two persons who are invited to help each other since they are united for the better and the worse. Henceforth, common sense would direct that they sympathise in case of emergency. Enslavement is translated in the following attitude of Ekwukwu, Umedi's husband, when the latter was totally indifferent before his wife's suffering at the time, she was expecting a baby. The aloofness of the husband and his neglect toward his wife before her suffering can be perceived as a kind of subjugation. This situation is set down as a hell, since the dissatisfaction and failure of this dear desire is ascribed to the irresponsibility of her husband. In this respect, the western oriented literature confirms this line of thinking as it is put that

One outstanding characteristic of West African writing is a return to past-a past which was almost wiped out by two important events, the slave trade and colonialism. The writers attempt to recreate the simplicity and romantic attraction of traditional way of life of the African disrupted by his contact with the Western world; they show the devastating effect of this contact on his literature, which has led to his present dilemma. (Taiwo, 1967, p.29)

It is revealed that; the above quotation denotes the issue of post-colonial identity and discourse that discloses the effect of slave trade and colonialism on Africans as well as women social life in patriarchal arenas. Then, post-colonial societies arouse the factor of identity change and cultural difference, the elements that are raised in *the Slave Girl* through the depiction and characterization of some characters such as Okolie, Pa Palagada, Ma Palagada, Clifford, Ojebeta, to mention just but few.

In this regard, Ukabegwu's wife after having offered a help during the birth of Ojebeta complains about the birth of a baby girl “Oh dear, Umeadi, what have you done again? You have a daughter, and you know daughters never stay with you, I am sorry” (Emecheta, 1977, p10).

This attitude shows the complete disregard of women from birth and the influence of superstition on them. It is my contention that Emecheta is unveiling the mistreatment of women not only in the family but also in marital life. Another distressful issue raised is that of traditional load that African women carry. Given what has been said, it is understandable that the protagonist is a victim of this misdeed. Because she undergoes some traditional burdens, and various difficulties. This is women's plight during the nativity in this era and area. The atmosphere described, shows that men are not concerned with women's problem. We realize that there is no medical treatment and women are left maintain their pregnancy without any care. So, women bondage is revealed through this neglected attitude. This can lead to evidence that "the woman's body is used as playing and after leave her alone to suffer" (Nagannavar, 2019, wp). Throughout all the aforementioned matter in question, it is obvious that women experience subjection as their plights are shown during childbearing in the field and epoch pictured. So, it is clear cut that there is a need to stop this iniquity.

Another wickedness raised aloft is, the question of Okolie's greediness which leads him to sell his sister because of being in need. We notice that after having undertaken this course of action, he took *eight* English pounds the amount proposed by the buyer. In this process, Ojebeta considers herself as a lost person without any identity. It is referred that Ojebeta suffered the agony and humiliation, on first being called slave. She tries to run away because she had had her identity charms brutally cut away from her. To restore the relative feeling and the belonging to an identity, the buyer Ma Palagada consoles her while she was worrying by stating that:

You are not lost, little girl with pagan charm. You are just a domestic slave. Subsequently, the woman's identity is in perpetual slavery. Even in her family or in her husband's. In this line of thought, it is put:

Every woman, whether slave or free, must marry. All her life a woman always belonged to some male. At birth you were owned by your people, and when you were sold you belonged to a new master, when you grew up your new master who had paid something for you would control you." (Emecheta, 1977, p.113).

Analyzing this excerpt, one can say that a woman is ideo-culturally bound to suffering and subjugation. From childhood to wifhood, a female agent is subjected to socio-cultural hardships. Then, she belongs to men. In Ojebeta's marital life, she is even considered as a woman who belongs to men even sold to her husband through the bride price.

Furthermore, Ojebeta, is a girl who is disregarded and considered as a none entity, or a slave girl, coming from the family of Umeadi and Okwuekwu. This personality is exposed from the beginning of her existence. At the beginning, the way she is born is snot what should be awaited in every family. The narrator has it that her life is attached to the dibia and should follow some prohibitions and rituals. This is a typical sign of enslavement and subjugation. To highlight this issue, it is stated that Ojebeta "was cherished and marked with special tattoos, and the thrived and grew, and had to make annual visit to the dibia at Ezukwu who adjusted her charms as she grew from babyhood to girlhood" (Emecheta, 1977, p.14).

These involuntary actions, exploitation and *rendez vous* of the *dibia* are actions that make the protagonist a slave. So, this spiritual subjugation can be seen as physical or psychological abuse. As she is scared, this may lead to injuries and isolation of the individual because of these abnormal features. The practice of these tattoos bears a deep meaning. When you experience this plight, it is like choosing a design that will have personal significance to you. In our context, this is done without Ojebeta's consent because she is a baby and in order to make her still alive, some spiritual tattoos are applied. This ceremonial ritual holds a spiritual significance to Ojebeta's parents. In so doing, Emecheta highlights the traditional deeds that can hurt and enslave individual.

Still, the analysis of Emecheta's text shows that Ojebeta was laughed at in Eke market because of her facial tattoos and charm. This mockery has been possible because of the strange and unfamiliar way she looks like. All these signs give her another identity different from others. By portraying the character in such a situation, Buchi Emecheta lays bare the derisive atmosphere which can illustrate the image of someone who loses his or her freedom. This aspect can be viewed as a psychological bondage. In addition to being orphan, Ojebeta has also been victim of slavery when her brother sold her. This can symbolize the enslavement knot. Analyzing the matter in question, "Halliday and Hasan suggest, involves the interaction of two common coherence or the text relationship to its extra-textual context (the social and cultural context of occurrence), and cohesion the way the elements within a text bit together as 'a unified whole'. The result of the interaction of these two dimensions ...of language which is using linguistic resources in a meaningful way within a situation and cultural context." (Suzanne, 2004 p.24). As a text is a sign, many clues are used to highlight African social and cultural realities.

Then, there is a use of igbo language such as "*jortu-ma*" (Emecheta, 1977, p 6) to refer to a court messenger, "*nso*" (Emecheta, 1977, p.9) menstrual cycle, "*Alo*" (Emecheta, 1977, p 9) a title referring to an unclean person, "*chi*" (Emecheta, 1977, p 10), personal god, Ogbanje, visitor. The emphasis laid on these words which exemplify the meaning and value of African tradition and culture is a proof that semiotics has foregrounded the interpretation of the text and its context. For Gleason (1955, p.3) "The native speaker has his attention focused on something else, the subject and discourse. This may be the situation which is being described, some ideas which are being presented, or some social formula which is being repeated." In the light of this theory, the critical observation shows that this approach has been helpful all through the analysis of the hegemony that female gender underwent.

In so doing, Emecheta is valuing her native tongue and cultural value. This is an aesthetic used by the novelist to show female enslavement in order to awaken human beings' awareness on the African chauvinist society.

Furthermore, this attitude annihilates the protagonist's female identity as she becomes a woman and a slave. Talking of these men's irresponsibility, T. Sindhu and G. Sathurappasamy (2019, p.51) argue that:

He sacrifices her childhood by selling her into slavery. In an instant, Ojebeta's future is no longer guided by heartfelt promises of love and attention but by insistent demands for labour and service. Ojebeta's childlike attributes contrast highly with the treatment she remains as a woman and a slave."

Throughout the foregoing conditions, one can infer that "women have been socially, politically and economically dominated for centuries across cultures through patriarchal systems" (Walla, 2019, p.79). Thus, women as female gender experiences this injustice reducing them to slaves. In this context, Kpedzoku, quoting Frank (1984:85) makes the point that "...slavery...is for Emecheta the inherent condition of African women..." (Kpedzoku,2019, p.126)

Thus, the protagonist of *The Slave Girl* refuses to live as a slave. She denies that identity because "no slave has saved any identity, since they had no identity.... money was not paid to them" (Nagannavar, 2019, wp)

The events portrayed, show that female gender is enslaved in their environment. From her childhood, Ojebeta undergoes issue of slavery till her adult age. In fact, after her parent and relatives - "brother" - she becomes a "slave with a new master (Emecheta, 1977, p 169), and experiences misfortune, for her she gives shapes to misfortune. (Emecheta, 1977, p 1) In fact, when Ojebeta was about to change a master or to be sold again, she expresses her worries by stating that she "...could not wish for a better master (Emecheta, 1977, p 184). This is the new identity of "the slave girl", though being a woman, she remains a slave. She changes one master for another. In this vein, the narrative points out that

...no slave retained any identity: whatever identity they had was forfeited the day money was paid for them.....She might have lost her identity, but at least she could still hold on to the dream of it.

They started back to the stalls, and Ojebeta found that it felt strange to walk without the charm that from birth had been tied on both her arms and her back. It was going to be difficult for her to walk and swing her arms like everybody else. It was going to take her a long time to learn to be somebody else (Emecheta, 1977, pp 68-69)

The foregoing quotation underscores the loss of Ojebeta's identity. The physical and spiritual features have disappeared and she is no longer at ease.

All these cases refer to the atmosphere of gender burden that leads to insecurity in multidimensional fields. This matter is unveiled, and the state of affairs can be either a means of exploitation of the deprived or a means of revenge against the subjugator. It is clear that the novelist is showing the embodiment of slavery within social system and its impediments in

colonial era. As a matter of fact, Ma Palagada, a female character is an epitome of this wrongdoing who deals with child trafficking as she buys girls and uses them in her activities. Here, Buchi Emecheta indicates ways used by individuals, which includes women to reach an agreement on some patriarchal systems. But these misconceptions are females' pitfall as they are used as a source of income called "slave trade". This ambition led Ojebeta's brother, Okolie to sell her at the age of seven and the latter becomes the slave of Ma Palagada household. As a result, slavery and "identity fit in postcolonial context (Hova, 2019, p.15). Thus, it is worth mentioning the use of this approach which is a tool that helps to analyse the issues of female enslavement. Drawing on to the postcolonial approach used to accustom the idea of class and gender identity, Emecheta's work is an underpinning that uplift the shift and women identity change.

Consequently, the protagonist returned to her self-esteem "as it is hard to behave like someone else who has lost her identity but still wants to hold her dream. (Nagannavar, 2019, wp)

Sexual exploitation or rape, are other issues handled through the analysis of the characters portrayed in *The Slave Girl*. This attitude is a sexual act forced upon a woman or a girl without their consent. Here again, another character Chiago is sold as Ojebeta. She is sexually harassed by her master", then, it is easy to perceive that Pa Palagada and his son, Clifford abuse and mistreat the "slave girls" even attack them physically for sex matter. Talking of the harassment of Chiago and Ojebeta, it is stated:

...But now they said this equally horrible son was coming from wherever they had dumped him for the past four years-was she to be used as a plaything for him too?...

I remember the last time, Chiago went on. "I was foolish those days. I was bending down sweeping the floor when he came up behind me and jumped on me. He pulled at the small breasts I had then...I was not at all developed...It hurts so, and I screamed. Do you know what he did? He slapped me hard on both sides of my face. I cried and told his mother, and was ordered to shut up. (Emecheta, 1977, p.92).

As the quotation testifies, the unbearable atmosphere and sexual harassment that both protagonists are suffering demonstrate the level of slavery they experience in this environment. In depicting this setting, the mood and characters interaction, Buchi Emecheta revisits the status of women under bondage and physical, sexual, psychological pressures. In the light of what precedes, it is clear that the novelist is showing that though slavery has been abolished and prohibited, people still use other means to perpetuate this misdeed. Then, needs are in place to reintegrate women value in the society.

2- Dehumanizing Narrative and Women's Value Rehabilitation in *The Slave Girl*

For many decades, African women have been misrepresented and this misconception of African women has worsened and disabled them in various domains. In this part, the literary devices will mark the path of the interpretation. This analysis involves the deprive of human dignity throughout the degrading conditions or treatment of female gender and the correction and alleviation of their pain from trauma.

The depiction of "slave girls" in the novel under study best illustrates this wrong view of African feminine gender in the society. Wole Soyinka, in his analysis related to this thematic and with a particular attention paid to women role, opines that

Critics have offered various interpretations of his treatment of women. Most female characters in African literature tend to belong either to the city type with loose morals and a victim to man's tyranny, or to the strong-willed typed exercising their power over men, indeed, "ruling them". Clearly, women in real life do not conform to this dichotomy of stereotypes, and are likely to behave very differently according to their own individual characters. (Badiane Ba, 2006, p.39)

From this excerpt, it is arguable that female characters' attitude is the replica of what African society and its dogmas make of them. Consequently, the traditional and patriarchal conception of a woman, a mere merchandise, a none entity starts to disappear in the life of Ojebeta. As she meets another owner as a husband, she is happy to have a new master. It is my thought that, when the fairer sex is confronted to this difficulty, they struggle by all means to overcome this situation. Most of the time some come out of their ignorance and promote education of all sorts or a new vision of life. In this vein, the protagonist and the narrator affirm that

The contract is completed after all these years, I feel free in belonging to a new master from my very own Ibuza, my mind is now at rest.

...Then she walked round to where Jacob was sitting feeling very important and expensive, and she knelt in front of him.

Thank you, my new owner, Now I am free in your house, I could not wish for a better master"

Ojebeta giggled like a young girl of fifteen. For had she not been rightly valued? Would her mother Umeadi have wished another life for her daughter? Was the glory of a woman not a man, as the Ibuza people said?

So as Britain was emerging from war once, more victorious and claiming to have stopped the slavery which she had helped to spread in all her black colonies, Ojebeta, now a woman of thirty- five was changing masters. (Emecheta, 1977, p.184)

Considering the statement above, one can easily contend that women should stop being wild. And patriarchal system has faded leading to freedom and emancipation emergence. The narrative of Emecheta presents a situation whereby the protagonist feels free in belonging to a new master after many years of alienation. With this life experience of the protagonist Ojebeta, one can deduce that Buchi Emecheta displays female self-fulfilments. The narrator maintains in the novel the status of this character where her position of slave undergoes a metamorphosis

from servitude to self-affirmation. Discussing this change of identity that she had been undergoing before, against her wishes, it is established that the protagonist's brother had abandoned her, without any relative as she is an orphan but against all expectations that might lead to a good ending. The portrayal of event towards the end connotes that the protagonist is empowered so that women can cease being voiceless. In this regard, Ngezem's contention is to urge to depart from the conventional interpretation of *A Doll's House* by highlighting that the landmark play, apart from being a celebration of female freedom and equality between genders as many hold, is an enactment of the reversal of roles in universe that is insidiously hostile to change of functions and self-fulfilment (Ngezem, 2006, p.151)

The quote above, makes one understand that the writer redefines the traditional ties by raising female gender awareness through their plight. This work is a call for female gender reconstruction which is a challenge as the protagonist's bondage does not end. Her struggle for a survival and freedom and all her efforts are in vain to the extent that she was only changing masters.

Another aspect is the aesthetic used by the writer to convey her message. In this vein, Henri Lopes (1997, p.97) states that, "l'écriture est le véhicule du message". Semiotics reads that signs and symbols are decoded in a text in order to infer a meaning. In this sense, the writer represents Okolie who is in need, and expresses a message showing that he is in a hurry. It is revealed that Ojebeta's brother asked her to change the pace of walking on their way to Ma Palagada's in this way "Ojebeta, we must hurry, we must hurry" (Emecheta, 1977, p35). Emecheta makes use of a technique to show how ambitious and restless the character Okolie is in the situation depicted. Repetition of the word 'hurry' is also used to involve the attention of the receiver or listener, here, the protagonist, and reveals Okolie's attempt to achieve his goal which is to bring her sister Obanje Ojebeta in exchange for money.

Indeed, the author's method that points out apostrophe and repetition indicate that her literary technique is suitable to lay a particular emphasis on the message she wanted to convey through the novel. In other words, the attitude of this character, Okolie, discloses a feeling of eagerness to make his intention possible and without any delay. As a result, his thought of selling her sister should not be doomed to failure.

Moreover, the use of other devices such as simile and metaphor show a comparison. In fact, the novelist handles these techniques to give Ojebeta an atmosphere of despair. By crafting the story in this particular style in the novel, is very telling "And the young in white I saw there, who looked like a ghost and walked like a ghost and a sleep walker was the new bride?" Yet again, the author raises a kind of conflict between traditional and modern ideas. The expounding of characters' relationship shows an atmosphere of conflict between Ojebeta and Clifford. These words of Pa Palagada could tell one more "It is like a dog barking so forceful and full of anger (Emecheta, 1977, p119). This idea highlights the simile used to express an anger because

of injustice and inequality observed in the treatment of the slaves. Some are privileged whereas others are ill-treated. In our context, Clifford's planning to avoid giving Ojebeta hard word in exchange for a relationship between them is a corroboration of an unfair treatment that should be revisited. What is more, some symbols are called out to identify traditional setting in this fictional world. For instance, cowries and Kolanuts. Cowries play a vital role in African context.

In addition to the fact that they are a currency, they have a spiritual connotation as they are used to protect human being. In the *Slave Girl* Umeadi uses it with the help of the dibia for his daughter's protection. It is observed that after Ojebeta's birth, Umeadi wears her cowries so that she protects her from death. So, the narrator has that "Your child will stay this time if you tie her with safety charms. These must consist of cowries, tops of tins brought here by protokis, and real bells made from metals" (Emecheta, 1977, p.18). Like cowries kolanuts are essential in African culture. Africans use these objects during ceremonies, and to welcome people. Indeed, Ukwuenkwu shares kola nuts during the court ceremony. In this vein, the narrator reports that "Okwuenkwu had smiled, and had chewed kolanut with the new D.O and this interpreter" (Emecheta, 1977, p16). The analysis displays that kolanut symbolizes peace and warmly welcome. As "language is one of the most important and characteristic forms of human behaviour" (Gleaso, 1961, p v), its function is undeniable. In the novel *The Slave Girl*, many characters embody language to express their feeling and emotion. Some words and phrases even sentences are taken in. These words are "Oh, oh-have you been waiting for me long? "" (Emecheta? 1977, p 52). This style is used by the writer to express Okolie's sympathy to Ma Palagada for having being late. To express the protagonist's misfortune and sorrow, the following conversation is illustrative

"I don't know we had such people in our town." Said Ojebeta

"Oh, yes, we do... I'd like to go to oplu oyibo too, to get away from this place." (Emecheta, 1977, 146).

Moreover, slaves' pity and sorrow are revealing the situation of Ojebeta's slavery when she is left with Ma Palagada and other slaves. She could not manage to stay without her brother. That leads her to run away, but in vain (Likibi, 2008, wp). This pity is expressed in the lines below

"Oh, my mother, I am lost" (Emecheta, 1977, p59)

As the excerpt suggests, women are victims of patriarchal chains and should be valued accordingly. Female gender humiliation through threats of violence devalues them and relegates them to sexual objects, images represented in *The Slave Girl* right through the characters, Chiago, Amanna, Jienuaka and Nwayinuzo and Ogbanje Ojebeta. In the novel, these characters are exploited sexually by Pa Palagada and Clifford Palagada. It is obvious that, in contempt of this misconduct, writers show interest as it rather, demeans and causes harm to gender identity. This reflection compels Kra Koffi to quote Achebe's words by stating that "the world or the nation cannot develop unless the masses are involved in the building of a political and moral

consciousness necessary for its development” (Kra Koffi, 2013, p. 94). The striking aspect of women dehumanisation hinders the development of our society in several aspects. So, one should show regards for the rights of female characters portrayed in Emecheta’s *The Slave Girl*, a fictitious setting as well as those of a real one, for a positive impact in the society. In that matter, Kra Koffi (2013, p. 94) opines that “...moral consciousness should start with the recognition both of female characters’ values and the recognition of the rights and dignity of the other races in their varieties. These are the necessary ingredients and tools for a balanced and successful globalization”. In the light of this analysis, we quite understand that Emecheta is reconsidering the problematic of gender which is a challenge not only in contemporary Africa but also in Nigeria. The aesthetic and imaginative arrangement is an awareness raising in order to rehabilitate the female identity in both areas.

This study has revealed that language is a double-edge sword. This is a means that has enabled Emecheta to combine Western and African realities to show her double patrimony. In addition, she used tradition and culture in Igbo environment to show how the identity of women changes depending upon the circumstances and the atmosphere. Therefore, Buchi Emecheta is promoting partnership and empowered women; and at the same time, revisits the hardships related to female gender and status.

CONCLUSION

In this work, an attempt has been made to examine the subjugation of women by men in many domains. Thus, the language of African literature cannot be discussed meaningfully outside the context of those social forces. Emphasis has been placed on how traditional conceptions on the female image affect, dehumanize and oppress women as well as effort made by female characters in ending their repressiveness. Moreover, it has handled the style used by Buchi Emecheta to reveal women enslavement and the challenges that they face. Similarly, it has coped with African culture and tradition and the impact of men chauvinism.

In the first part, we have dealt with women bondage throughout the analysis of *The Slave Girl*. We have first analysed the different characters who are involved in this phenomenon. Then, a scrutiny is made on the different ways that it can affect the victims, in our context the protagonist and other slaves. It comes out that the novelist is raising people’s awareness on the wrongdoing of the slavery to which people should have put an end; as they still use other means to perpetuate this misdeed.

The second part of our work was devoted to Buchi Emecheta’s aesthetic to convey a message on women dehumanizing, their identity change and its challenges. In this section, we have displayed different factors that disgrace women and analysed the processes of female identity change in *The Slave Girl*. Thus, it is revealed that the path is long in the mechanism of achieving a total freedom. As the case of the protagonist discloses, she moves from one master to another without any satisfaction. But Emecheta portrays her to accept her final destiny. From this

analysis, indeed, it comes out from the study that the author is inviting female genders to struggle to determine their destiny and be ready to be self-fulfilled and self-affirmed. In this regard, efforts should be made to empower women through entrepreneurship and partnership. Finally, this didactic message was possible thanks to the literary devices used by Buchi Emecheta throughout *The Slave Girl*.

As a matter of fact, it is clear-cut that the novelist has used an artistic creative to reveal social, iniquity and injustice for the renewal and the restoration of African norms and values. She has also demonstrated African realities and culture as well as Western ones.

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