
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Girl Victim-Images: An Iconographical Analysis of Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*

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| ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyse girl victim-images through figures in Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*. This work is carried out through the application of Erwin Panofsky's iconography analysis that involves three levels which are the pre-iconographical description, the iconographical analysis, and the iconological interpretation. This research paper evaluates the field of the novel as a literary genre especially the theme and character through figures in the production of *The Bride Price*. The result has shown that Buchi Emecheta instils the Ibo tradition and, by extension, African traditional treatments and handling of a girl. The girl endures humiliation, oppression, domination, gender discrimination, and tragic death after her father's death. She is forced to accept the husband that his people choose for her, and the bride price must be paid. When it is not paid, the girl never survives after the birth of her first child. She suffers from numerable atrocities in the hands of a man who is the father's relative. Despite the suffering that the girl endures, the symbolic nature of the figures' elements, such as the sun and the branches, sends the message of resilience, hope, and positivity.

| KEYWORDS

Bride price, denounce, girl, hope, symbolic, victim-image.

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1. Introduction

The depiction of the African woman in African Literature has been a matter of great critical interest. Some literary critics, with the exception of a few, have argued that male creative writers, who dominate African literature, have depicted African women negatively (Davies 1986, Chesaina 1987). This negative image has a connotation that makes the African woman look an accepting creature of fecundity and self-sacrifice. On the basis of this understanding, the foremost task of this study is to investigate how Buchi Emecheta portrays the African girl in her fictional work *The Bride Price*. This novel is the poignant love story of Aku-nna, a young Igbo woman, and her teacher, Chike, the son of a prosperous former slave. As their tribe begins to welcome Western education and culture, these two are drawn together despite the traditions that forbid them to marry. Aku-nna flees an unwanted and forced marriage to join Chike, only to have her uncle refuse the required bride price from her lover's family. Frustrated and abandoned by their people, Aku-naa and Chike escape to a modern world unlike any they have ever experienced. Despite their joy, Aku-nna is plagued by the fear that she will die in childbirth—the fate, according to tribal lore, awaiting every young mother whose bride price is left unpaid.

In a paper presented at the second African Writers' Conference in Stockholm, Sweden (1986), Buchi remarked that: For myself... "Being a woman and African born, I see things through an African woman's eyes". This assertion is a pointer to the crux of our study. In a way, Emecheta concurs with a number of views advanced by some critics in an attempt to explain the dominant negative presentation of the African woman, particularly by male creative authors. Perhaps, as the critics have speculated, male writers only observe the woman. They do not have a chance to experience her plight first hand. Thus, they are insensitive to her feelings about

polygamy, wife beating, wife inheritance and many other aspects of the African woman's life. That is possibly why they do not address these issues in their works (Brown 1981, Taiwo 1984, Leslie 1987). On the basis of this contention, this study concerns itself with what Emecheta, as a female writer, sees 'through an African woman's eyes.'

The objects of this study are figures in the novel that demonstrate the victimization of the girl. This study has three objectives: first, we want to identify and investigate the iconographical content of the girl-victim aspects in the novel of Buchi Emecheta to analyse the Nigerian symbol concept in Buchi Emecheta's novel. By the way, it shows how the girl is a victim in the novel and argues that literature is a powerful means that explores the negative constraints of a tradition under which girls are defined in purely monetary terms. For the purposes of our study, we focus specifically on the issues Emecheta handles that affect African girls.

The problem that calls for this study's attention is what Buchi Emecheta see about the African girl. The central question we ask is the following: How and why is the victim-image of the girl portrayed in the novel? We also ask: How does the society in which Buchi Emecheta sets her works regard or understand the concept of girlhood? and what is the mother's and the girl's own understanding of it? The hypothesis is that modern Nigerian girls might rebel against traditional marriage customs. Rebellion against the unwanted values of tradition could contribute to the construction of girlhood, womanhood, and the experience of true love.

As a result of this, the researcher appreciates the talents of writers from the post-independence era to the current era. Besides, the study holds holistic importance on the relationships between the aspects of Nigerian culture in the literary work of Buchi Emecheta and the contribution to the knowledge of Literature. The study also highlights the symbol of culture in the Nigerian writer's novel with a detailed description of the content and aesthetics of the figures.

This study intends to proceed from the framework of the iconographical analysis to the study of literature. It emphasises the qualitative methods because they were able to elaborate more in-depth in the analysis of data later; they also focus on the external aspects of work by making detailed figures of lines, colours, main subjects, as well as the background of each figure as presented in the description of figures. In this regard, Erwin Panofsky emphasises more on the aspect of content, the meaning of intrinsic, as well as the symbols and themes in figures (Panofsky, 1955). The method of the study also explains the subject image, image, and illustration. Erwin Panofsky also emphasises the development of symbols and semiotics behind the work. Buchi Emecheta's novel is more focused on the issues that surround the position and image of the African woman. To state it clearly, we resort also to a psychological approach.

For sampling purposes, we have selected a number of figures from *The Bride Price* by Buchi Emecheta, which is then analysed based on its formal elements and the iconography meaning of the visual elements. We then do a critical study of the text. First of all, we study the figures-images in the novel under scrutiny. Second, we address ourselves to the themes or the primary concerns of the writer in his work. The next step is a critical analysis of characterization. Again, for purposes of our study, we centre our interest on the female character, especially the girl. It is through this analysis that we make conclusions about Emecheta's depiction of the African girl.

2. Girls Psychologically and Emotionally Affected

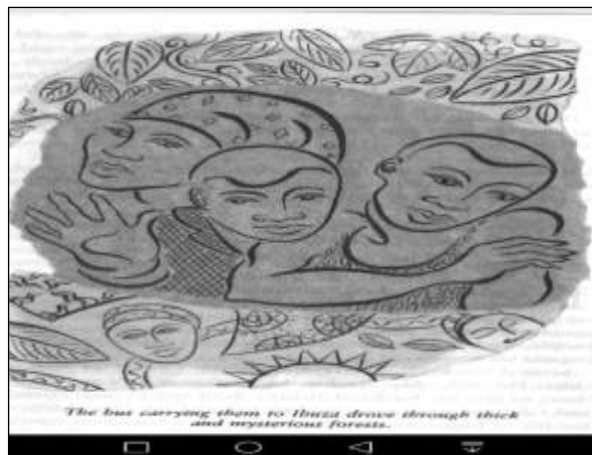


Figure 1, Emecheta, 1976: p. 20.

From a psychological perspective, trauma occurs when a child experiences an intense event that threatens or causes harm to his or her emotional and physical well-being. Trauma can be the result of exposure to a natural disaster such as a hurricane or flood or events such as war and terrorism. Witnessing or being the victim of violence, serious injury, or physical or sexual abuse can be traumatic. Accidents or medical procedures can result in trauma, too. Sadly, about one in every four children will experience a traumatic event before the age of 16.

(The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. "What is the Child Traumatic Stress?" https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/childrens_mental_health/what-is-child-traumatic-stress.pdf), 2003, issue of Claiming Children, the newsletter of the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, www.ffcmh.org, which was co-produced by the Federation and the NCTSN.

2.1. The First Level: Pre-Iconographical Description

This first image is found in the second chapter of the novel entitled "The Journey to Ibuza". It can be divided into three (3) parts. We see two characters, a boy and a girl, side by side, represented in great detail in the middle of the image; one is on the right side, and the other is on the left. We also see Ma Blackie, Odi's wife, behind her two children, Akun-na, the girl and Nna-nndo, the boy, who has raised his hand. Akun-na has closed his hands. She has a line on the right. His face presents traits that communicate the state of sadness.

In accordance with the text, it follows the trip of Ezekiel Odi's family; after the death of the latter, they are obliged to leave Lagos and go to Ibuza, a small village in the East part of Nigeria: "So Ma Blackie and her children had to return to their home town, Ibuza, where Okonkwo, Ezekiel Odi's elder brother, and his family lived " (Emecheta, 1976: p. 21). "The Journey to Ibuza" reveals to us that the woman character on the middle left side in great represents: Ma Blackie, mother of Aku-nna and Nna-nndo and former wife of Ezekiel Odi, now inherited by Ezekiel Odi's elder brother Okonkwo and has to become his wife (Emecheta, 1976: p. 23). The boy character in the middle of the image represents Nna-nndo, the son of Ma Blackie and Ezekiel Odi and the little brother of Aku-nna. He wants to eat, but Ma blackie says to him he has to wash his hand first before eating. We can read the following: Ma Blackie said to him, "No wash, no rice" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 21-22). That is the reason why a right hand is presented beside him. He had raised his hand because he had asked his mother to wash his hands and face before eating during the journey when they stopped somewhere, in the marketplace near the river, in Asaba town, which was the nearest to Ibuza. Thus, this is identified in the text. It is written: You must wash your faces and hands. No wash and Rice, do you hear me? Nice people wash their hands before they eat. Go and wash your face! (Emecheta, 1976: p. 21-22)

And the last character, the girl on the right side, is Aku-nna, daughter of Ma Blackie and Ezekiel and sister of Nna-nndo. She is worried about how their new life will be in Ibuza, if they will have the same privileges as when they were with their father, if she will be able to keep on with school, if she will get married if her husband will be nice to her. (Emecheta, 1976: p. 21). Aku-nna and Nna-nndo look sad because they do not want to leave Lagos, where they have lived (Emecheta, 1976: p. 21).

Above them, there are different forms of branches and leaves, and a cross is in the middle of them. Below, we can see the sun and two other small human faces. In the left corner of the image, there is the moon and a few stars scattered all over the place.

2.2. The Second Level: Iconographical Analysis

"The journey to Ibuza" is the direct consequence of "The funeral". By definition, this term from the *Oxford English Dictionary 12th edition* means a ceremony or service held shortly after a person's death, usually including the person's burial or cremation. In fact, the chapter tells about the funeral of Ezekiel Odi: "As soon as family and friend in Lagos heard the death of Ezekiel Odi's death, the mourning began" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 12). After reading the chapter of the novel, "The Funeral", the text reveals that the boy and the girl in the middle of the image are Nna-nndo and his sister Aku-nna on the right side, both children of Ezekiel Odi, who died and for whom the funeral is organized. They are the chief mourners and are expected to cry in a particular way because it is their father who is dead: "... Aku-nna and Nna-nndo were the chief mourners. They were expected to cry particularly loudly and desperately; after all, it was their father who had died..." (Emecheta, 1976: p. 12)

Nna-nndo is the boy on the left with a sad face, and his hands crossed on his chest, wearing a boy knee-breeches and smaller than his elder sister; he is mourning the loss of his father "Nna-nndo does not use many words but screams and throws himself about..." (Emecheta, 1976: p. 13). The girl on the right side is Aku-nna. According to the tradition, she was expected to mourn more than Nna-nndo, his brother, because she is a girl, and the position she adopts proves that she is mourning and dancing at the same time:

Aku-nna did not stop, even when the other mourners became tired. This was expected of a daughter: 'She is doing very well,' the neighbours said to each other", or "...She sang about her father. 'My father was a good provider. My father went to church every Sunday...' (Emecheta, 1976: p. 13)

The moon on the right corner and the few stars above Aku-nna and Nna-nndo express time, especially the night. In fact, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the moon is the natural satellite of the Earth, visible (chiefly at night) by reflected light from the sun. The star is defined as a fixed luminous point in the sky, which is a large, remote, incandescent body like the sun. In the text, the author shows: "The moon was full and bright. It was a hot night, and the men took off their shirts..." (Emecheta, 1976: p. 14). This means that the ceremony had lasted all night. As well as when the author said, "The moon disappeared, the grey morning mist was everywhere; then the sun rose and a new day began." The three characters at the bottom of the image represent the members of the family, friends and near relations who came to mourn Ezekiel Ochia's death by dancing in a circle as illustrated in the novel: "...The near-relations of the dead man remained inside the house, crying and singing " (Emecheta, 1976: p. 13). The way that they are joined one after the other shows that they are singing and dancing during the ceremony to express their sadness. We can read: "Now the men began to dance – still in a circle, hand in hand. Round and round they went, faster and faster, kicking up clouds of dust, singing loudly and wildly...The women came out to join their men. Soon, the circle became too large and broke up into several smaller ones" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 13).

Branches and leaves above them represent the forests of the countryside of Benin. The novel wrote: shows it "...After it passed Benin, the countryside changed. The soil was redder, and the forests were more mysterious" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 21).

The sun is defined, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, as the star around which the Earth orbits. In other words, it is the light or warmth received from the earth's sun. According to the text, the sun represents a day, a hot day with a bright sun, as expressed by the term: "The sun rose, warm and golden" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 22).

At the bottom of the image, on the left and right side, the two small faces represent their relations, women who pick them up and take them to Ibuza after selling their cassava: "She pointed to a group of about fifteen women who were coming towards them. Each was carrying a big basket of cassava on her head. Ma Blackie called out to them, and they hurried to welcome the Ochia's family. They were kind and sympathetic" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 22).

2.3. The Third Level: Iconological Interpretation

The interpretation of elements can be totally different depending on culture, belief, thought... To begin with, "branches" are symbols of family and connection to ancestors. The branches themselves symbolize the family. The tree symbolizes all generations of one's family. Branches in the world of the Bible were either on trees or vines and were relatively rare given the arid climate. So, the picture of a healthy and fruitful tree is a symbol of vigor and prosperity. "Branch" or "branches" refer to families (Gen 49:22) or rulers (Ezek 31:3,6). Broken or unfruitful branches symbolized judgment or the downfall of a person or nation (Job 15:32; 18:16; Dan 4:14; Isa 9:14; 17:6; Jer 11:16). But God always gives the hope of restoration, and branches figure in the symbolism of redemption as well: "When that day comes, the branch of the LORD will be beautiful and wonderful. The image of judged or redeemed branches reaches its climax in the prophecies of the messianic branch and the salvation he brings. The Old Testament includes six central passages in which the word branch is used to refer to the coming Messiah (Isa 4:2-6; 11:1; Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zech 3:8; 6:12). Jeremiah declares that the branch will represent God like no other. The tree sprouts from seed grows and creates strong branches. When we get older, it gives us new fruit that restarts life in the next generation.

Leaves are an endemic part of human lives. The leaves, which are a flattened structure of a higher plant, typically green and blade-like, that is attached to a stem directly or via a stalk, represent the native Medicine man that Ezekiel Ochia called when necessary. In fact, leaves, being the main components of photosynthesis and transpiration, also have curative virtues and are traditionally used to heal people. We read: "...but he always called in native medicine man when he wanted one" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 12). Leaves hold symbolism in many cultures, but in general, they symbolize fertility and growth.

The green leaves of spring and summer depict hope, renewal and revival. Blazing yellow, orange and red leaves of fall represent the change of season. In philosophy, Leaves are a perfect illustration of the fundamental interdependence of existence. Leaves demonstrate the necessity of relationships. Without the leaf, there is no flower; without the flower, there is no leaf. In Christian religions, leaves are often symbols of hope amid hardship. There are many instances of leaf symbolism in the Bible where God gifts prophets and chosen individuals with leaves as symbols of peace, love, and hope. Leaves also represent the passing of time, as most of them so obviously change with the seasons. Additionally, they delineate a connection between all living things because of their inherent importance in the ecosystem.

The cross, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is a mark, object, or figure formed by two short intersecting lines or pieces on which Christ was crucified. It is also the emblem of Christianity. The cross, then, is not only a symbol of the crucifixion and redemption, but it invokes Christ through its physical proximity to his crucified body and its role as a relic of the crucifixion, almost as a relic of Christ himself. The cross is the most important symbol of the Christian faith because it represents the message that is at the heart of the gospel, without which there would be no Christianity at all. The gospel, in a nutshell, is that Jesus Christ died on

the cross to pay for the people's sins. The cross is central to that message. As a matter of fact, the ceremony is organized due to the death of Ezekiel Odia, who "was Christian and a church-goer" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 12).

Both the cross and leaves, combined together, express the fact that Ezekiel Odia's funeral was like that, too, with both native and Christian ceremonies. The moon symbolizes mystery, feminine energy, and cyclical change. Many cultures associate the moon with time and the passage of months and use it to track the calendar. Moon symbolism carries many hidden meanings for those who know where to look. In a philosophical context, the moon, the largest and brightest object in the night sky, has long inspired curiosity and wonder. It appears at night, the time of sleep and dreaming that sometimes seems to approach the borders of death and the after life. Radiating an air of mystery and magic, the moon is also associated with love and often serves as a symbol of unattainable beauty. Biblically speaking, references use the moon symbol to highlight cosmic events, divine epiphanies and the ephemeral nature of human life. The moon reflects inner knowledge, or the phases of man's condition on earth, since it controls the tides, the rains, the waters, and the seasons. It is the middle ground between the light of the sun and the darkness of night and thus often represents the realm between the conscious and the unconscious.

The moon, its presence in the night sky, its journey as it rises and sets, and its light that reveals human activity is also a potent metaphor in the verbal and visual arts of Africa. A feminine symbol in many African societies, the moon is often linked to life itself through lunar cycles that align with human and agricultural fertility and that structure ritual calendars. In planting season, people begin to watch the moon closely, just as they watch the months before giving birth to the child. Without the moon, there would be no life. The moon can, therefore, represent pagan, natural, elemental forces that lie outside of the structures and traditions of organized religion. And, of course, the moon has often been viewed as a symbol of wild, uncontrollable forces.

The sun represents life, but it is also known to typify energy, power, positivity, and clarity. The sun is a natural force that is outside of people's control. It also illuminates the world around us, helps living creatures navigate the planet, and sustains many essential ecosystems. While the sun can be a harsh master, beating down mercilessly in many areas and causing droughts, there is no living without it. The sun has been an important symbol for millenia. It has been worshipped as a god, incorporated in sacred symbols and continues to be perceived as an awesome element of nature without which life on Earth could not exist. In modern times, the sun retains its symbolic properties in literature. Psalms 84:11 "For the Lord God is a sun and shield". In this Bible passage, the sun is used to describe God, who is good.

To sum up, on the low, we have women. So, those women were passengers on the bus. We also have Sun which symbolizes the day. This tell is associated with the story of Ezekiel Odia's family's travel to Ibuza, his Ancestors' village or land. The antagonism of Okonkwo's wives is oppressive to Aku-nna rather than just rivalry, as seen by Osa, and of significance is her own mother's betrayal of all her trust by siding with Okonkwo's household against Aku-nna. African society overall is a patriarchal one where men have all the power to decide what should be done. In the ceremony of her father Ezekial's death, they ask his son Nna-nndo to say the prayer and be near his grave as he is "the heir of the father." It is even up to the husband to choose the work of his wife without any discussion:

Aku-nna remembered only scraps about what life in Ibuza would be like. She knew she would have to marry, and the bride price she would fetch would help to pay the school fees for her brother Nna-nndo. She didn't mind her. She would have liked to marry someone living in Lagos so that she would not have to work on a farm and carry cassava. She had heard stories of how strenuous farm life could be for a woman" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 51).

This links in as well to the title where Emecheta precisely gives literal meaning in reference to the traditional practice of payment in return for a wife, a disgusting trade. Second of all, the symbolic meaning of it denotes women's submission and obedience to their husbands. In addition, Emecheta concentrates on the lack of bond between mother and daughter and systematically, she makes the girl child realize the lack of bond between her and her mother; thus, "Aku-nna knew that there was a kind of bond between her and her father which did not exist between her and her mother" (Emecheta, 1976: p.12). This lack of bond between mother and daughter is the consequent result of all the oppression that the girl child suffers at the hands of her mother in the home. Similarly, this lack of bond between mother and daughter results in a situation of betrayal. Aku-nna's father, having died, she, her brother and their mother move from Lagos to Ibuza, where the mother is quickly inherited by their father's elder brother, Okonkwo. Okonkwo, handsome and strong even in old age, easily gets Aku-nna's mother, Ma Blackie pregnant, a child that Ma Blackie has looked for, for several years after the birth of her last son. The fact that her own personal interest has been fulfilled, Ma Blackie betrays Aku-nna, who falls in love with an Osu lineage called Chike. She sides with the entire household to reject Chike as an outcast even though she knows that her daughter's happiness depends on her marrying Chike. The girl is disappointed in her mother because she, her brother and her mother used Chike's little presents of beverages, cans of milk and other sanitary gifts. So it surprises her that her mother could suddenly join in the condemnation of Chike to the extent that "Ma Blackie cried and cursed

her fortune in being saddled with such a daughter" (Emecheta, 1976: p.125) to all present to hear. This outcry truly devastated Aku-nna, and she doubts that one's mother could ever be one's best friend. In addition, she wonders if her mother has "encouraged her to accept Chike's friendship in order to just use him like a convenient tool, to ferry them through a difficult period of adjustment?" (Emecheta, 1976: p.126).

In the course of the discussion, Emecheta has raised significant notion of shame in girls and women if they make a mistake before marriage:

The blame usually went to the girls. A girl who had had adventures before marriage was never respected in her new home; everybody in the village would know about her past, especially if she was unfortunate enough to be married to an egocentric man." (Emecheta, 1976: p. 85)

3. Orphan Girl Child



Figure 2, Emecheta, 1976: p. 7



Figure 3, Emecheta, 1976: p. 15.

Skinner D. et al. I (2004: p. 2) write:

An orphan is defined as a child under 15 years of age who has lost their mother ('maternal orphan') or both parents ('double orphan'). It is also being more generally accepted that the loss of the father would also classify the child as an orphan. Within the orphan grouping, layers of vulnerability are addressed as one system for understanding the situation.

3.1. Iconographical Description of Figures 2 and 3

Firstly, the image is divided into three parts. On the top, we have many objects, such as the leaves, stars, the moon, and the cross (Emecheta, 1976: p. 15). In the middle, we can see two persons: a girl and a boy. The first is Akun-na, and the second is Nna-nndo, both of Odia's children. This image strengthens the historical fact of this novel. In this image, we have the portrayal of one character in the centre. This one is Aku-nna, a young girl 13 years old, daughter of Ezeckiel and Ma Blackie; she is seated on the veranda. On the upside, we have elements of the kitchen: calabash, spoon, fork, pot, leaf, flame, sun and pieces of iron. Concerning space and time, this character is in Lagos, especially in the family house. As far as the time is concerned, it is 4 o'clock, and "the sun hanging like a huge red ball in the sky" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 9). The message that the character conveys is sadness.

3.2. Iconographical Analysis

In this image, there is a young girl named Aku-nna on the veranda waiting for her parents, who were absent, especially her father, who is sick and was taken to hospital for three weeks. She is very sad. Her posture and face express this sadness and worry. We have confirmation in (Emecheta, 1976: p 9). Furthermore, she sat on herself, her hands on her chin, demonstrating her pensive state; she wondered when she would see her parents again. She missed them very much (Emecheta, 1976: p. 9).

First of all, we have leaves. In the novel, they refer to traditional rituals. These rituals are represented in the text: "When each woman had gourd with small stones inside, they shook them in dancing and singing" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 14). Secondly, the moon and stars represent the night. Thus, it is even said: "The moon was full and bright; it was a hot night" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 14).

Finally, we have the cross, which is the representation of Christianity during the funeral. It is written in the novel: "Then the Christian songs began" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 14).

In the middle, we have two persons. The common feature between them is sadness because they have lost their father. Indeed, Akun-nna and Nna-nndo did not stop crying; even the mourners became tired. This was expected of the daughter. While Nna-nndo, the boy did not use many words because it was right for boys to cry less than girls, according to their custom. Then, they were bare-foot because they were overturned by their father's death.

On the bottom, those three people who did not wear any shirts lead us to a given traditional group which was performing rituals: "It was a hot night, and the men took off their shirts" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 14). They joined hands in a big circle and began to move from side to side wordlessly. Then a voice rang out; the singer was calling in death.

4. Iconographical Interpretation

Concerning the interpretation of the image, we have three levels of objects: The first level includes a calabash, spoon, fork, and pot. The second concerns a leaf and flame. The third one is about the sun and slices of iron.

In general, in Africa, the calabash is used for many different reasons. Basically, it is used in the kitchen; it allows you to make soup-ladle and bowls. It is also used to make instruments of music like Kora or Gooni, maracas and tambour. It is also used as the object of decoration.

In Nigeria, people call it ugba or duma; it is typically used as utensils in rural households, such as clean rice, stove water, palm water, and food containers. It symbolises the embodiment of women's mythical power, the ability to control physical and spiritual forces to create life through procreation. In *The Bride Price*, the calabash contains water, as asked by Uncle Joseph; it is a container in which water is stored (Emecheta, 1976: p. 8).

As for the spoon and fork, widely speaking, they are known as flatware or cutlery. The spoon is an implement consisting of a small shallow bowl-shaped receptacle supported by a handle. The fork is used to lift heavy meat and as a carving tool rather than for actual dining; both are used for cooking, serving, and eating food. But the fork was used for especially reason by slave-hunter during a period in Africa to prevent the slaves they had captured. In *The Bride Price*, the use of a spoon and fork is for kitchen utensils. The spoon is used to cook food: "... make you hot soup..." one cannot make soup without a spoon (Emecheta, 1976: p. 4).

In addition, the 'pot' is a recipient which allows people to cook food. Each pot in this image represents one family (Emecheta, 1976: p. 9).

At the second level of objects, we have leaf and flame. Generally speaking, in Africa, the leaf has several meanings and serves as food and in traditional medicine.

The flame or fire symbolizes evening or night, and people around the fire for storytelling. The interpretation of fire thunder as a symbol of God's presence in African traditional religions. It confirms the burning bush in the Bible representing the divine presence; it is also a sign of wisdom and knowledge. Fire has always had the capacity to draw people together. That is what we read in the novel. The neighbour who cooked in the same kitchen as Aku-nna had come to console to sympathize with her during the death of her father.

Then, the sun is a great star which gives light. It symbolizes hope according to African culture. We can also rise again from difficult and dark situations in people's lives. In religion, it symbolizes divinity or God's sun; it also represents life, power and energy. In literature, the sun can represent a divinity, hero, knowledge and joy. Here, in this image, the novel says that it is 4 o'clock in the evening, "the sun was hanging like a huge red ball in the sky" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 9). This sun sends a message of resilience, hope and positivity to Aku-nna; she should hope her father recovers: "The sun that sets today will rise again tomorrow." this proverb teaches that the nature of life is and that we should always have hope for the future.

The pieces of iron in this image symbolize the industry where her father has worked. The preservation of these objects or tools from the post-colonial period till now plays a significant role in the promotion of African culture around the globe. These objects of art raise the glory, power, and pride of African civilization. Some of these utensils, such as the calabash, are used during wedding ceremonies. The calabash is also used as a musical instrument, which allows the singing of traditional songs.

From the interpretation of images, postures, attitudes and all the objects we see, we point out the following aspects that reveal Aku-nna's qualities: she is Ma Blackie's daughter. She is a sharp and clever girl. As the novel opens, these qualities are clearly shown not only in her performance in school but also in her keen and critical perception of reality. Although she is so young, at the age of thirteen, she is able to understand the injustice and prejudice in her father's insistence that Ma Blackie should see a medicine man. Aku-nna understands the unfairness in the arrangement where her mother is referred to as being childless despite her being a mother of two.

Because of their predominantly urban upbringing, Aku-nna is very cynical about the Ibo traditions and ways of life, like bathing in the open. She cannot understand why she should not marry Chike, although her society calls him a slave. Therefore, Aku-nna is not keen on subscribing to the socially recognized laws on relationships between slaves and free boms. She loves Chike and is ready to get married to him despite all odds. This standpoint attests to Aku-nna's independent mindedness and determination to live her own life, free of the dictates of Ibo traditions and customs.

Aku-nna's reaction to her situation and independent mindedness is different from her step sister, Ogugua's conformist behaviour. This perhaps tells a lot about the artist's conception of the urban and rural upbringing. Aku-nna's urban upbringing and her acquisition of formal education seem to have liberated her or inculcated in her a sense of freedom. Thus, her perception of herself and other people is clearly more objective than that of Ogugua, who is brought up in the rural, dominantly Ibo community where her decisions are shaped by cultural etiquette. In Aku-nna, therefore, Buchi depicts the positive impact of formal education and urbanization, that of inculcating freedom of thought and conscience. The image stricken here is that of the dynamic, receptive African woman. The juxtaposition of Aku-nna and Ogugua is the author's way of presenting a conservative woman in the latter and the dynamic fast changing young African woman in the former.

The African woman is not an ignoramus. At least, this is what Buchi wants to say in the lengthy portrayal of Aku-nna interacting and relating to men. Aku-nna is not only brilliant at school but also very witty. She shines in her class and performs well in her examinations. On the other hand, she clearly outwits her family and escapes her forced marriage. She slips through the fingers of a traditionally sanctioned, forced marriage and gets married to Chike, her choice. The wit and determination to have her way confirm that Aku-nna is a defiant African girl, defiant to tradition and cultural confinement. These are positive attributes that strengthen the image of a determined woman and an independent minded one.

However, one notes that at the back of Aku-nna's mind is the submissive spirit characteristic of Ibo and, by extension, African cultural adherents. When she thinks of being married to Chike, she submissively concludes that she would want him to own her; "She would belong to him for life and never be able to return to her parents". One notes that although really Aku-nna is independent minded and defiant of tradition, she is not opposed to marriage. This is possibly Emecheta's own position on the condition of the African woman. Emecheta seems to say that the African woman could be independent and free of traditional confinements but still honour and respect marriage. Buchi Emecheta is not against patriarchy as long as its attendant practices, which are usually against women, are avoided. One such practice, of course, is that of lack of choice of a marriage partner. This is a point on which Buchi differs from Western feminists who see patriarchy as the prime source of women's woes. Apart from Ma Blackie and Aku-nna, other women characters in *The Bride Price*, like Ma beauty, Ogugua and her mother, are not well developed. In fact, they are merely mentioned in the novel.

The lack of connection between Ma Blackie and Aku-nna denies her the essential protection she needs from her mother even when it is needed most, even her mother helping in fanning her ordeal for the tradition to have a safe passage for her. This kind of surprised Aku-nna: "She was beginning to hate her mother for being so passive about it all" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 120).

Aku-nna understands from her terrifying tradition and society that women must be submissive and obedient to the rules and regulations set by males. Relief is out of the question for African women as their responsibility becomes clear—taking care of children and husbands, in addition to working hard to survive. It is a desperate and boring way African women want to live their lives; just like machines, they do exactly what they are told. One can see this from the conversation between Aku-nna and Matilda when they talk about women and hasty marriage for the sake of money and their own safety as Matilda ends the conversation with a sad voice, saying: "This is the fate of us women. There is nothing we can do about it. We just have to learn to accept it." (Emecheta, 1976: p. 37)

5. Girl Child Kidnaped and Sexually Abused



Figure 4, Emecheta, 1976: p. 55.

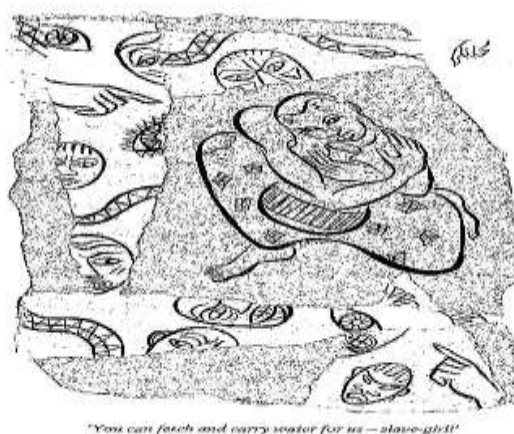


Figure 5, Emecheta, 1976: p. 65.

5.1. Pre-Iconographical Description

The image shows a girl placed upside down. We have a reversed image of the girl with a facial expression of terror, masks, snakes, rope, and eyes. The image is divided into three parts. On the left, we can see masks, eyes, and a rope. In the middle, we can see a woman in the wrong position, head down and feet up. On the right, there are masks, a snake and a rope (Emecheta, 1976: p. 55).

In Figure 5 under, we can see the images of three snakes. The first is up, the second is down on the right, and the last one is in the middle at the right. There are seven heads surrounding the young girl. We can also see three fingers indexing, four eyes, one calabash and the presence of the young girl in the picture. The first level of description is the presence of the three snakes. Many cultures consider snakes as good omens since their sight presence can signify transformation, change, and, in some cases, total rebirth. In many cultures, people give snakes a positive connotation, and snakes can be deeply rooted in culture. Snakes are associated with lies, evil, temptation and transgression. Snakes also symbolize fertility, rebirth, renewal and even immortality. In Christianity, snakes symbolize death, destruction, and poison. In the Christian tradition, Satan (in the guise of the serpent) instigates the fall by tricking Eve into breaking God's command. Thus, the serpent represents temptation, devil, and deceit. In Africa, snake beliefs are logically classified into python worship, ideas of fecundity, phallicism, and productiveness. According to the Igbo people, the species of snake known as the python (Eke in language) is treated with utmost respect and dignity, while in some other areas in the same Igboland, the python is regarded as a dreaded reptile because of its venoms. The Igbo people who revered the pythons honour the python to the extent that it is taboo ('Aru'in Igbo language) to harm or kill the python. In a situation where the python, which goes by the name " Eke" in the local parlance, is killed, the wrath of the community where the incident takes place is always brought to the person who committed the crime, and he or she is compelled to accord the snake a befitting burial that of a human being. To these Igbo people, the killer of the python, wherever he/ she hails from, has committed a sacrilege, and to avert the wrath of the goddess, all the necessary rites and traditions associated with the burial of human beings in the area are given to the dead snake. The Igbo people who revere the python regard the snake as a representative tradition of one of their deities and, therefore, a custodian of the culture and tradition. The visit of the snake to people's homes could mean a different thing as the snake is said to have the power to bring good or bad fortunes. If, for instance, a noble person is about to pass on, a python could visit a relation of the person by dying in the person's house.

At the second level, the description shows the presence of heads. They symbolize the influence of the gangsters of two sex ladies, and men are to convince the young girl to accept the marriage by forcing her. The gangsters demonstrate the domination of the strong upon the weak person.

In addition, there are fingers indexing. In fact, in different cultures and traditions, finger indexing means many things. In the case we talk about the description of the picture, we notice that there is intimidation of the young girl by pointing to her, designating her, and calling her to pay attention. Then, the position of the young girl is meaningful. The position of the young girl in that image shows disappointment. She is totally sed in front of this behaviour presented by many persons about the forced marriage without her acceptance.

Regarding the image, we see African traditions folklore, which depicts the state of someone; thus, in the image, we see a disappointed and desperate person who takes the bottle of wine probably, which could be a kind of celebration led by powerful persons represented by snakes to constrain her to do things according to their desires. In fact, the image shows simply the state of the young girl who has been forced to marry someone she does not love in marriage. Akun-na was influenced in many manners: the gangsters, the snakes anywhere, eyes, and fingers indexing. We interpret this as a threat towards the young girl.

5.2. Pre-Iconographical Interpretation

At this level of our study, the interpretation passes through, first of all, the mask. It is a form of disguise or concealment usually worn in the front of the face to hide the identity of the person and by its own features to establish another being. The mask usually represents supernatural beings, ancestors, and fancies or imaged figures. In traditional Africa, masks symbolize spirits of the dead, totem animals, and other supernatural forces; Maiden masks representations of adolescent females, impersonating Igbo deals of youthful feminine beauty. In their original context, they were danced by male performers during festivals honoring important patrons' deities, as well as for entertainment.

The snake is one of the oldest and most widespread mythological symbols. The snake has been associated with some of the oldest rituals known to mankind and represents a dual expression of good and evil. Similarly, among the Igbo people of southerner Nigeria, the snake is symbolic of the earth as it burrows into the earth as well as transverses across it.

Then, the symbolism of the rope represents help and the possibility of climbing to new summits in waking life. Broadly speaking, like trees, ladders, and spider's webs, the rope is one of the ascension symbols since they provide the means, as well as standing for the desire, to ascend. When knotted, they symbolize chains or bonds of all sorts and possess hidden or magical properties. According to the Igbo culture, the rope is not presented by someone who is financially buoyant.

The eyes are probably the most important symbolic sensory organ. They represent clairvoyance, omniscience, and a gateway into the soul. Other qualities that eyes are commonly associated with are intelligence, light, vigilance, moral conscience, and truth. The concept of "the eye of the sun or god" exists as a masculine and feminine solar deity which forms a part of the solar veneration among the Nri-Igbo in northern Igboland.

Last but not least, the girl placed upside down indicates silliness, sarcasm, irony, passive aggression, frustrated resignation, sexual violence, viol, etc.

Masks represent the tradition; they are often used during various ceremonies and performances. They serve as a means of connecting with the spiritual, establishing communication with the ancestors with the facial expression.

The girl placed in the reverse position with the facial expression of terror is Aku-nna, who was kidnapped by almost twelve men during the Christmas Ajua dance, where all fifteen-year-old girls did a special dance: "Suddenly Aku-nna realized what was happening; this is the end of all, my dreams" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 56).

Ropes represent bondage, restraint or confinement. It symbolizes being tied down and restricted, both physically and metaphorically, by someone or some people:

Then, they all began to scream at the tops of their voices. Some of them reached the door and tried to get out, but strong hands were holding the door closed. Then there were more footsteps, and strong hands caught Aku-nna around the waist. Here she is! Cried a voice. Let us go! Aku-nna tried to scream, but a rough hand covered her mouth, and she was unable to make a sound (Emecheta, 1976: p. 56).

A rope indicates stress, uncertainty, and fear. Here the rope shows the control of kidnapers on Aku-nna; she has no word to say, even her parents cannot say anything; traditions seem to cover the misdoing of some villagers, such as Okoboshi's family, on women. Aku-nna is locked in a world where there is no right for women; they are only for marriage, so the rope shows ties of traditions and parents' control over their girls, not letting them choose their lovers or what they want to make of their lives.

The snake represents negative forces in Nigerian tradition. In general, they are portrayed as dangerous creatures, capable of causing harm if not approached with caution. Here, they represent the unknown people who kidnapped Aku-nna at night. In connection to this, the novel writes:

Then suddenly, the oil lamps in the dancing hut all went out. There was the sound of heavy feet. Strange voices, men's voices, were heard. There were at least twelve men running, carrying her along. She lost consciousness, and she was still unconscious when she arrived in her new home (Emecheta, 1976: p. 56).

With the presence of snakes, Aku-nna is afraid of what is going to happen to her; she is worrying about her current position, and all her dreams seem to vanish.

The masks represent a form of disguise or concealment usually worn over or in front of the face. In the story where Aku-nna is kidnapped by unknown people, she can just hear the voice but cannot see faces: "Here she is! Cried a voice." Let's go! (Emecheta, 1976: p. 56). The masks show the unidentified characters that kidnapped Aku-nna.

Through the eyes, people control Aku-nna. In fact, the kidnappers watched all she was doing and knew where she was and at what time they could kidnap her, knowing that she could not get married to Okoboshi; she does not love as we read in the novel: "Aku-nna had been at school with Okoboshi, and had not liked him at all" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 49). Those kidnappers brought her to Okoboshi's family in expectation of a forced marriage. Aku-nna, in an upside down position, shows how much she is threatened by the fact she has been kidnapped. She knows that she will probably be forced to marry someone she does not really love. The story has another façade (Emecheta, 1976: p. 51). She thinks it is the end "This is the end of all my dreams; she thought they are kidnapping me" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 56).

5.3. Iconographical Analysis

Reading through *The Bride Price* reveals that Okoboshi's family kidnaps Aku-nna, an accepted village custom, in an attempt to make her Okoboshi's wife. After kidnapping her, Okoboshi tries to "devirgin" Aku-nna. She deceives him that she is not a virgin any more, a trick that works perfectly well. When Aku-nna first sees him after she has been kidnapped, she notices that his smile "had a kind of crookedness about it; instead of gracing the centre [sic] of his face, the smile was drawn lopsidedly towards one of his ears. It was the smile of an embittered young man. He hated her, that much she could see.

In light of what we have said above, it seems clear that patriarchal tradition evidence in the foregoing description disregards the woman. By refusing the girl his rightful and natural place as a mother, this extreme patriarchy turns a blind eye to the fact that the woman is a worthy party in any family. Besides, this tradition makes demands that render the girl's humanity 'void'. The illustration in the novel is: There were men who would go about raping young virgins of thirteen and fourteen and still expect the women they married to be as chaste as flower buds (Emecheta, 1976: p. 84)

The story of the novel is about tradition and marriage. What happens to Aku-nna is linked to the weight of tradition when his mother is inherited by another man. In fact, it is traditionally accepted to inherit a brother or cousin's wife in case of the husband's death. Regardless of the impact this has on one's first wife, the Ibo culture recognises it. Ma Blackie in *The Bride Price* also undergoes the same experience. When her husband dies, she is inherited by Okonkwo, her husband, together with her two children. Throughout the novel, we do not see any mutual interaction between Ma Blackie and her new husband apart from incidents of coition of making decisions about the marriage of Ma Blackie's daughter, now Okonkwo's inherited daughter, Aku-nna.

The effect of polygamy is seen in *The Bride Price*. This is specifically in Okonkwo, Ma Blackie's inherited husband's home. The many wives Okonkwo has married have nothing in common other than the fact that they share him. There is intense jealousy among them and extreme dislike for one other. The negative attitude between the wives surfaces when Aku-nna, Ma Blackie's daughter, is taken to school and does well. In the understanding of the other wives and their children, educating Aku-nna is a waste of resources. After all, traditionally, she is only expected to be married and fetch bride wealth. This jealousy of other wives is the source of the intense pressure on Okonkwo to have Aku-nna get married. In turn, the pressure of marrying makes Aku-nna decide to marry before she has accomplished her plans of completing her primary education and proceeding to high school. It is Buchi Emecheta's contention that this cultural practice of wife inheritance and polygamy negates the woman's individuality and her humanity. The husband tends to grantedly treat his wives as a group and hardly takes into account their individual whims.

The Ibo tradition and cultural practice that form Buchi Emecheta's setting do not have room for a woman's claim not only to property ownership but also to ownership of children and even gods. A woman does not own anything because she herself owned. Also, she does not have any gods to whom she can appeal; she is only expected to appeal to the gods of her husband and possibly those of her people, although she is expected to forget the latter as soon as she gets married; her husband himself is some kind of God.

Traditional arrangements, therefore, entertain some undue limitations for women. Buchi's idea seems to be that tradition is the first culprit in assigning responsibility for the African woman's plight, while the man is the second. However, Emecheta's depiction of cultural or traditional inhibitions on the woman leaves a lot to be desired. One wonders why Buchi sees nothing positive about tradition's treatment of women. The sheer traditionally accepted position of wife deserves a positive portrayal. In any case, the same tradition that provides for wife beating also demands that the future husband part with a huge amount of bridewealth. There is certainly a positive element in the payment of bridewealth, which is the high esteem placed on a marriageable girl. The general understanding of society is that once a girl has reached the age of marriage, she is a precious part of the family whose value is so high. The aim is not to defend the cultural practice of bridewealth but to point out that Buchi's portrayal of tradition and its treatment of women cannot go unchallenged.

An equally important theme that Buchi seems interested in her works is that of girlhood. In handling this issue, Emecheta presents two prominent perspectives from which the concept of motherhood is examined. First and foremost, the artist gives a communal or general social perspective to the issue of motherhood. She then concerns herself with the girl's own perception of the issue. The two perspectives, as we will realise, have a casual relationship in that the general communal expectations of the girl or the mother, for that matter, are inculcated in the girl's psyche, particularly anticipations and goals.

In another instance, during the moon light visitation to commemorate *Aku-nna* translation into womanhood; in the process, she was being molested by Okoboshi, her supposed husband, but for timely intervention, she is rescued by Chike with a punch, which sent him fuming on the ground, only for her mother to attack Chike with verbal assault, "If you want to prove yourself a strong man, why don't you do it outside and pick a man who does not have a limp?" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 124). Ma Blackie outright rebuke of Chike shows her hatred and exposure of her girl child to any dick and Harry, even without asking from Chike's side of the story. But when *Aku-nna* tried to narrate her ordeal to her mother: "Oh...Mother, *Aku-nna* begged, please don't say anything. Okoboshi was hurting me, he was..... He was wicked-oh Mother, please listen" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 124).

This consequently displays the oppression often fueled by mothers in the home. Instead, she stood to rebuke her daughter:

You mean you have a nice breast and don't want men to touch? Girls like you tend to end up having babies in their father's house because they cannot endure open play, so they go to secret places and have themselves disvirgined. Is that the type of person you are turning out to be? I will kill you if you bring shame and dishonour on us. How can he hurt you with all these others watching? And yet you allow a common.....(Emecheta, 1976: p. 125).

This excerpt from the novel *Under Scrituny* again heightens the slackness in mothers, especially when she fails in her role as a mother to her girl child; abuse, molestation rough-handling become inevitable because she sees nothing wrong in the open breast of the girl during moonlight play. This has, in most cases, led to teenage rape, consequently leading to long term psychological trauma or scar. *Aku-nna* was faulted by her mother even when it was crystal clear she was faultless. Although she sees her mother as a supporter of the tradition and custom of *Ibuzé*, to the detriment of her girl child's happiness, which she has put behind, only to uphold the tenet of the society. This proves to be a problem in itself as Ma Blackie later becomes so involved with the second family that she forgets about her daughter *Aku-nna* making her quite sad. By now, *Aku-nna* begins to realize that she has lost both her father and mother.

The place of virginity in the African culture is held in high esteem. The only thing that can survive *Aku-nna* at the end of the novel is her lies to Okoboshi, stating that she has already lost her virginity to someone else. It is clear that in African society, only a virgin girl is preferable, and as a result (of her lie), Okoboshi leaves *Aku-nna* because this would bring shame and would never be acceptable by any of his family members, bearing terrible consequences once people hear about it. It is as if devirginising a woman would be an honour for the whole family as they celebrate it as a real virtue. The knowledge of disvirginity after the first night with her supposed husband was received with a great scoff.

From her mother-in-law, who instantly "spat at her and pointed without words at the water gourd" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 146), she became the talk of the village, pushed outside, with eager eyes of her fellow girls to see her, some to mock her, others to pity her or to repeat the accusing description of her as an empty shell, "why did you do it? One or two daring girls asked, It will kill your mother; another said" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 147). *Aku-nna* was subjected to extreme oppression, outside the jeering, mocking, and even physical beating, just to humiliate her to have committed a heinous act; only when she got to the stream, it got done on her the amount of beating she has received from her new people "Her mouth burned with pain as she rinsed it out with cold water. She knew that both her eyes must be swollen, for she found it difficult to lift her eyelids upwards.

Her head was still reeling like that of someone half-drunk. She allowed herself to shed a few tears into the silent stream" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 147). Although Chike and Aku-nna continue their serious and strong relations that eventually lead to their marriage:

Oh, will you do all that for me? I shall serve you till I die. I shall be a good wife to you. I shall always love you and love you in this world and the next and the next one after that until the end of time. (Emecheta, 1976: p. 156)

Nevertheless, Aku-nna endured pain and humiliation just to live with the man of her choice, only for death to have her even before her life even started.

Obviously, the author explains in the novel what was going through in Igbo and Nigerian societies. The denunciation of the ill-treatment of the girl is a kind of domination within Nigerian societies. Buchi Emecheta relates in his novel the way Nigerian people behave during the organization of marriage. In *The Bride Price*, the author first talks of a forced marriage. Three families encounter a marriage problem: Aku-nna's family, Chike's family and Okoboshi's family. Aku-nna is a young girl who is undergoing the weight of the tradition of her society. This young girl is clever and is in a good family. The young develops a love relationship with Chike, who is from a slave family. But as their society is badly ruled by local chiefs, they prevent the girl from having the liberty to choose her husband. They kidnap the girl at school just to force her to marry Okoboshi, whom she dislikes. Aku-nna's mother, Ma Blackie cried: "They have kidnapped my daughter. And she said," Was it for this that sent her to school?" "Kidnapped"! (Emecheta, 1976: p. 60)

Okoboshi's mother said to Akun-na, "D'ont worry; he will be gentle with you". You may even like it – lots of girls do! (Emecheta, 1976: p. 62)

In addition, African marriage has been for a long time a real challenge during the colonial period. However, the forced wedding involves the escape. Furthermore, here we notice that the mother of Okoboshi presents some advantages to Aku-nna for corrupting her so that she can accept Okoboshi. She showed Aku-nna a pile of new clothes. And she also said, "All these are for you". They look off her short dancing skirt tied a new round the waist. Then they paint the bed. The escape causes the refusal of this forced wedding in the sense that we have the presence of Okoboshi's eldest sister, who convinces Aku-nna to be together with her brother, and the bride is not pleased while the others are very pleased: "What's the matter? Demanded Okoboshi's eldest sister, who didn't like us. (Emecheta, 1976: p. 61-62).

Naturally, in the novel, we remark on the ill-treatment of the young girl by the boyfriend's family. The writer denounces some of the bad practices of their societies in treating the girl with disrespect. It is to say that the stronger dominates upon the weaker. The author also denounces the domination of the ruling class by the middle class. This part is justified when Okoboshi's family considers Aku-nna as an object, a prisoner and a slave: "So now you are a slave too! Well, the water gourds are there! Okoboshi's mother said coldly (Emecheta, 1976: p. 64).

Finally, this illegal deamour lived by the young girl in the society does not please her and her family. So, she decides to break all things in order to have the possibility to escape. It is said that the abused family on her could not let her live peacefully, pretending that Aku-nna was breaking their laws. That is the reason that they account for their ill-treatment of the young girl. While the girl decides to escape and join her former slave boyfriend Chike: "Our driver lives here, said Chike. He'll take us to Ughjelli in the morning" (Emecheta, 1976: p. 66). The novel also shows the use of voodoo wherein Okonkwo, the stepfather, practices dark magic to wish bad luck on Aku-nna. It was known in Ibuza that if you wished to get rid of someone who lived far away, you made a small doll in the exact image of the person and pierced the heart of the doll with a needle, or alternatively set it alight and allowed it to burn gradually. It was evident that it worked, though nobody was sure how because those who knew the art would not submit it to scientific investigation; the victim usually died very slowly and very painfully. When Ma Blackie sees the image of her daughter one morning in front of her husband's *chi*, she's scared and disturbed. However, Chike's father, when informed about it, tries to alleviate her fears by saying that these are psychological games and would not harm if Aku-nna was not told about it. However, fate had destined otherwise.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study, through the theory of Erwin Panofsky, show that figures in *The Bride Price* by Buchi Emecheta clearly depict girl victimisation. This work concerns Aku-nna's images from pictures in *The Bride Price*. Victim-images contrast with the innocence of the she-character in the novel. All the bad things that happen in her life affect her. One main reason for her tragic condition is the loss of her father because there is understanding as well as bonding between them. Emecheta has portrayed the sad and alienating life of Aku-nna. *The Bride Price* of Buchi Emecheta shows the condition of girls in African society. Aku-nna endures the humiliation and oppression of the other characters of the novel after her father's death. The impact of the oppression, domination, gender discrimination, and back magic leads her to a tragic death. It is a pitiable condition of Aku-nna because her

father is the only person who can understand her feelings. Aku-nna lost her father and then her own life, as well as her first child. In the society story of Aku-nna, a young girl is forced to accept the husband that his people choose for her, and the bride price must be paid. When it is not paid, the girl will never survive the birth of her first child. Aku-nna endures numerable atrocities. She suffers in the bands of a man; the man is a husband's relation like in Ma Blackie's case. Another common feature with Emecheta's primary characters is that they have a high self assessment or self perception. The author portrays an innocent African girl whose life is determined, at times unfortunately wrongly, by the male members of her society. In the end, she becomes a victim of the Okonkwo's black art. She successfully depicts the pitious picture of Aku-nna. The novel gives a message to the girls and women of contemporary society that if they want to survive in society and save their first child, they must pay the bride price. Therefore, one would rightly say that Buchi Emecheta uses figures of women and girl characters as a figure of style and a mode of communication. The theoretical and contextual contribution of this research takes into account the figures and text analysis clearly displayed in Buchi's work. Despite the sufferance that the girl endures, the symbolic figures elements, such as the sun and the branches, send the message of resilience, hope and positivity. Following this study, it is suggested that practices and reasons leading to girl victim-images should continue to be denounced in order to avoid people forgetting. In this regard, both writer and readers should work together to struggle against cultural disregard for the girl, the traditional practice of bride price and the culturally recognised style of marriage, the traditional etiquette in the Ibo community that requires the marriage partner of the girl be chosen by her parents or her family, the practice that the girl has to fetch some bridewealth for her father. The researcher also encourages Nigerian writers to sustain their support towards Nigerian cultural institutions as part of the effort to preserve and conserve the heritage in their literature for the benefit of future generations.

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