



Research Paper

Exploring Liminal Dichotomy in Buchi Emecheta's Second Class Citizen

- 1) Falke Aishwarya Rajendra, M.Phil English Studies Research Scholar at CHRIST (Deemed to be University)
- 2) Dr. P. John Joseph Kennedy, Professor, Dean, Humanities & Social Sciences at CHRIST (Deemed to be University)

ABSTRACT: *Individual performativity in a displaced surrounding is subjected to constant change. The space catering to this displacement remains undefined, hence is liminal. The paper is an attempt to explore the novel Second Class Citizen by Nigerian novelist Buchi Emecheta under this notion of liminal space. The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae "threshold people" are ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Proposed by Arnold Van Gennep in Les Rites de Passage, (1977) it analyses physical displacement as a three-part structure: separation, transition (liminal period) and incorporation. Homi Bhabha deriving from Gannep stressed the importance of border locations as the threshold environment in Location of Culture (1994), he refers to liminality as a transitory, in-between state or space, characterized by indeterminacy, ambiguity, hybridity, potential for subversion and change, leading to emancipation of the individual as, 'The Third Space of Enunciation'. An in-depth analysis of the two theories lead to dichotomous identification of liminal space. In the following paper, this dichotomous identification of liminal space will be explored through the spatial transactions undergone by the protagonist Adah Obi. Her character will be positioned in a 'threshold' (doorway to transitions) shift from origin to liminal and the subversions undergone by Adah in Second Class Citizen will be studied as liminal experiences, further leading to emancipation.*

KEYWORDS: *Emancipation, Liminal, Space, Identification.*

Received 28 March, 2019; Accepted 08 April, 2019 © the Author(S) 2019.

Published With Open Access At www.Questjournals.Org

I. INTRODUCTION

Post colonization Africa has been encapsulated in writings of displacement. The term African diaspora consists of writings the worldwide communities of Africa's people. Post- displacement traumas and loss of identity are the terms chiefly dealt as a part of Diaspora novels. The movement of the diaspora from one space to the other can then identified under numerous theories of post colonization. The paper will focus on the space enacting through the passage of the African women from one physical/geographical location to the other.

African Novelist Buchi Emecheta, in her writings predominantly focuses on the conditions of the women belonging to the African tribes living in and away from Africa. Her autobiographical writings make an exploration of pre and post colonized Igbo culture and exposes its impact on contemporary society. Broadly critiqued as feminist, her novels challenges human-relations in the Nigerian culture and the spaces in which they are enacted, in a continuous form of physical movements. The enactment of the African women moving within a space that is indefinite and where a summation to solidarity is not possible is then identified as indefinite or liminal.

'Liminality' or 'liminal' is derived from the Latin *limen* meaning 'threshold'. Liminal space is the 'in-between' location of cultural action, in which according to various cultural theorists, anthropologists, and psychologists meaning is produced. Studied by Victor Turner, in his work *Liminality and Communitas* where, French anthropologist Van Gannep devised the terms, 'betwixt and in-between'. The terms relate to the study of an individual's shift in physical location in *Les Rites de Passage* (1909) in the theory of 'liminal space' referring to the state of "'In-betweenness' or 'ambiguity', defining the transitional phase from the roots to the other, leading to identity conflicts" (Cook & Sather). Homi Bhabha further deriving from Gannep stressed the importance of border locations as the threshold environment in *Location of Culture* (2004), referring to liminality as a transitory, in-between state or space, characterized by indeterminacy, ambiguity, hybridity, potential for subversion and change, leading to emancipation of the individual as, 'The Third Space of Enunciation'.

Tracing the struggles of Igbo women in the Nigerian society and her further migration to the United Kingdom, *The Second Class Citizen* by Buchi Emecheta displays the evidence of passage in an undefined space. Adah Obi the protagonist undergoes a lot of limitations from her childhood to her journey to London. Emecheta reflects her struggles and passage with issues like growing up as a girl orphan in the Igbo society, the intractability of an African husband, the unfamiliar and haphazard normative distinctions between private and public life, also her unfamiliarity of the European country. This paper hence, aims at the exploration of Vann Gannep's and Homi Bhabha's concepts of the liminal space in the novel *Second Class Citizen*, looking into the incessant shift in the physical location and a shift in the psychology of the mind, adhering to each first-hand setting.

Sigmund Freud in his essay 'The "Uncanny"' studies the impermanence of dislocation. He describes it as derogatory extant and fearful state of mind. According to Freudian psychoanalysis, in a migrant community, "There duality of culture is mentioned in migrants. Their cultures are always, "being tossed in between both: their 'original culture' and the culture of the 'new land'" (Freud 2003)

The protagonist Adah Obi, is positioned by Emecheta to the impermanence of the form and mind throughout the novel. An intelligent, strong-headed, ambitious girl, fighting for her education against the colossal odds set in the social structure of Lagos. Since childhood, she is drawn towards getting educated, making herself realize it as a pathway to liberation. Her journey begins by enforcing self into the classroom of a friendly teacher in the neighborhood and eventually gets enrolled in a school. Her parents (especially the orthodox mother) ceases to be wise enough of the idea of girls getting educated. Eventually, her reasonably liberal father dies to post her admission in a school. As a result, she unwillingly has to move in her maternal uncle's home, undertaken as a ward-cum-slave. Living in miserable conditions and exploitation, her dint of hard-work to keep herself motivated gets her a scholarship in a highly competitive secondary school.

In her years of growing up, she manages to keep her score with a first-rate of performance, securing a post of a librarian at the American consulate in the city of Lagos. She now had a job that would cater her towards a middle-class life. In this period she meets Francis Obi, young and strong contrary to her elderly marriage alliance offers. Adah marries Francis in aspiration of love, support and some necessary masculine support in surrounding of Lagos. Her salary caters to their financial needs. Francis, still a student decides to go and continue his studies in Britain (against the will of his parents) It was supported by Adah because Francis proves to be a medium for her to fulfill her childhood dream of living in England. Francis now lives in England and Adah soon follows with their two children. But her arrival to Britain is a metaphorical cold welcome. Like other protagonists of African novels, she faces troubles in the alien country of the whites. It is far different from the place she was conjured. Realization hits her on various levels, but more personally when Francis who owing to her financial dependence on Adah loved and respected her, now is anti-social, reproachable and abusive. The man becomes the liability with inferiority, laziness and utter irresponsibility. She tries to support and sustain at first, but Francis's irresponsibility grows in direct proportion with their increasing children. Confrontation of contraceptives leads to domestic abuse. She has her fifth child at the bare minimum age of twenty-two. He spitefully puts her first manuscript to fire. *Second Class Citizen* ends with her seizing her and children's independence, making preparation to start life all afresh.

Katherine Fishburn in a cross-cultural analysis reads Emecheta as complex. Under the term, 'cultural plurality' (Fishburn 52), she advocates the works of Emecheta to be beyond challenging set cultural norms by negation. Instead, a balanced reading of Emecheta shows that "for every attack, she makes on traditional culture, she makes a counter-attacking which the values of the traditional culture can be shown as positive" (64). In a way of exposing problems and proposing solutions for the same, Emecheta's critiques on African beliefs and by large problems of individuality applies to both patriarchy and imperialism.

Exploring Liminal Space – Geographical and Psychological:

1) Growing up as a girl in the Igbo Society:

“Whenever Adah was told that Ibuza was her town, she found it difficult to understand” (Emecheta 01). An objective reading of Buchi Emecheta’s *Second Class Citizen* from a conventional perspective witnesses Adah lacking belongingness in the Igbo household. The author positions her into an unidentifiable space of understanding since “She was a girl who had arrived when everyone was predicting a boy” (Emecheta 7). Van Gannep in *Les Rites de Passage* denotes the first phase of passage as of separation eventually leading to the alienation of the individual from the origin; which here lies in Adah’s birth in Lagos instead on their family’s nostalgic narrative of the land Ibuza. A demographic approach to liminality is observed for Adah being a girl in an unrelated social space. As a matter of fact, in Emecheta’s portrayal of the physical alienation, a thought process of Adah leads her “to regard her being born in a godforsaken place like Lagos as a misfortune” (Emecheta 8). Homi Bhabha in *Location of Culture* comments on the commencement of unhomey lives leading to a place ‘Beyond’ which “establishes a boundary, a bridge, where ‘presencing’ begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world” (Bhabha 13) Hence Adah’s location in the unhomey space leads to a condition of the ‘extra-territorial’. Hence a physical sense of dislocation also results in an alienation of the mind, where a separation at such an initial level, in a study on alienation by Erich Fromm, defines it “as the result of a traditional and ritualistic society which disturbs the feelings of man.” (Fromm). The growth of the personality of person and factors responsible for alienation are subject to the influence of social conditions on human existence.

Emecheta strongly represents the discrimination of women as a sex in dominance to the patriarchy in Adah’s schooling to separating from Francis in the United Kingdom. In her torn life between Ibuza, Lagos and the UK, Bhabha uses the term ‘Cross-cultural’ (13) initiation in an attempt to place the unhomey post displacement. Post her father’s demise Adah is on a constant move. The new family cherished Adah’s presence serving them as an unpaid servant but she is able to gain education. Her positioning in the house leads to a binary site, an initial suppression of women from the traditionalist gender-biased norms where, “children, especially girls were taught to be useful early in life” (Emecheta 18) which in return licensed her to study in school. A physical shift in liminal space acts as a medium of gaining an education, an eventual progression towards empowering her. The space ‘beyond’ home Adah finds an opportunity to education breaking the African stereotype of considering women, “Sacred and fragile, and are respected most in the grounds of their gender and housekeeping duties. Historically, women are positioned as a second in command in the family” (Peter Okoro Nwankwo)

To deconstruct on the image of the fragile Emecheta uses education as her only accompanying factor in her narrative of displacement. Adah’s continuous quest for education lands her up in practices of lying, stealing two shillings to get admission in school, gets caned by her cousin, a continuous series of submission.

Nabudere on the emancipatory knowledge forms a distinct category of knowledge, which, in the African context have two aims:

Firstly, to identify problems that impact negatively on peoples’ lives arising out of the colonial and post-colonial experience; secondly, to identify tools, which can resolve those problems and contradictions in a positive manner. In short, emancipatory knowledge is a liberating and humanizing process. (Nabudere 22).

The intractability of an African Husband:

“Ezidihihi hi degolf, oma oba” (Emecheta 09)

Meaning – When a good man holds a woman, she becomes like a queen

Marriage leads to a major shift in a completely newer surrounding leading to her entering through a ‘threshold’ with a major shift divulging into a different perspective of the African household. Her education gains her respect for her in-laws and a younger man in marriage. Adah’s domesticity is diminished into the perfect cover of working for American Consulate Library. But nevertheless, her position is supposed to remain intact only for providing money to his sisters and Francis’s education in London. In spite of all, she is supposed to remain in the clutches of patriarchy and submission for instance Francis questioning his father;

“Do you think our marriage will last if I allow Adah to go work for the Americans? Her pay will be three times my own. My colleagues at work will laugh at me. What do you think I should do” (Emecheta 20)

His father’s express a blatant negation over the subject, subjecting the availability of Adah’s money for Francis. There is an utter lack of empathy for her, in a society sans women’s identity is doubly suppressed, first being a black and then a woman and hence has to express herself in the codes of patriarchal structure. Speech

and silence can be seen in binary opposition with Adah because to fulfill her 'London Dream', it should start with the man. Francis moves to London.

Giving birth to Francis's child and then financing Francis's studies in London while pregnant with the second child. As a woman, Adah represents an act of unleashing that post-dialectical moment. In a patriarchal society, a wife is supposed to cry on husband's departure, Adah couldn't on Francis's departure to London.

Adah in London:

Second Class Citizen, apart from being a bildungsroman journey of Adah Obi also focuses on the concept of idealization the United Kingdom as a utopian space to live in. Her entrance to England is metaphorical to the cold England weather, where Adah is supposed to live in a Nigerian ghetto of a one-room apartment, with two toddlers and a husband as a liability to feed and care for.

Arnold Vann Gannep's analysis of the phase of transition defines it as, "a concept of special validity within a linear framework of time and space" (Colin Turnbull) which in Adah's case acts as a "halfway house of racial and cultural origins bridges the 'in-between' diasporic origins of the colored African and turns it into a symbol for the disjunctive displaced everyday life of the liberation struggle" (Bhabha 19) In London for Adah life changes upside down, it remains nothing like in Lagos. "It captures something of the estranging sense of relocation of the home and the world (Bhabha 13) Emecheta dissolves the private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social space for Adah to be interstitially questioning her binary spheres of living in a second class neighborhood but working in a first-class British library. The utopian image of London blurs to her, providing Emecheta a double edge narrative of Adah leading to hybridity, "a difference 'within' a subject that inhibits the in-between" (19)

Adah's life in London juggles between the social and cultural liminal spaces, she places herself in a continuous validation of situations never seen before. A physical accommodation into a grey house, in which "she could not tell where the house began and where it ended because it was joined to other two houses in the street" (Emecheta 37). Francis's change in gestures, where he "kissed her in public with everybody looking" (Emecheta 36) a very civilized English gesture, which was forbidden back in Lagos.

"She hates being treated like a native woman who was not supposed to know the important happenings in her family until they had been well discussed and analyzed by the menfolk" (Emecheta 69). Contradiction to his modern gesture, Francis's phallogocentric beliefs in his state of mind remained the African suppression of women. Neither Adah's economic empowerment cater her in standing up on the physical front. A continuous subjection of Francis's physical abuse, lack of interest in the family, physical relationship with Turdy, the registered baby sitter/prostitute, and her constant phase of being pregnant with Francis's children, physical torment on the usage of contraceptive, to Francis burning her first manuscript of *The Bride Price*, Adah's life in London was traumatized in effect to displacement with a complete lack of care in any form. Impeccably

E. Levinas writes, "The real world appears in the image as it were between parentheses" (6). The outer edges of this parentheses form her job in the British library between the first class citizens of Britain, the inside had a life with Francis in the Nigerian neighborhood. Bhabha's idea of the insider's outsideness in the binary reading of Adah.

Writing leads her to the path of enunciation through separation from Francis. Working in the library at the British Museum she discovers her gift to write and hence seeks a path towards it. In the process of enunciation there locates;

A split between the traditional culturalist demand for a model, a tradition, a community, a stable system of reference and the necessary negation of the certitude in the articulation of the new cultural demands, meanings, strategies in the political present, as a practice of domination, or resistance. (Bhabha 50)

A breakthrough in the marriage happens when on a rainy day Adah is out buying daily essentials for the family, Francis at home burned her brain-child and a constant abuse, life with Francis becomes purgatorial for her and hence "Adah walked to freedom, with nothing but four babies, her new job and a box of rags" (171)

II. CONCLUSION:

Towards the end of the novel Adah negotiates the narratives of their existences as well as of particular spaces of meanings and different identities within the postcolonial modernity which Bhabha states, "is signified from the time-lag, or temporal caesura, that emerges in tension between the epochal event" (Bhabha 351) and as hence enunciation for Adah in the form of separation leads into a progressive space. It is also stated at the level of abstraction, this is a precarious condition to experience, characterized as it is by 'indescribable existence' with a 'sense of disorientation' and 'a disturbance of direction' (Turner 48).

The novels of Emecheta predominantly explores the plight of women. In relation to the struggle against the patriarchal colonialism, Adah goes free from the clutches of men by education being the medium on different levels. Firstly in a society where women do not go for a job, Emecheta's Adah becomes an exception in breaking the norms of society. An entrance into the third space of enunciation is hence observed initially with a deletion of the history of tribal oppression by moving to London. A space in which Adah enters through her journey could have been either powerful or powerless, but Adah leans on the path of self-enunciation, hence becoming powerful.

This process of attaining enunciation allows her to omit her history of being physically abused by Francis as she attains financial stability through her first class job. A replacement of her racial and individual traumas is observed leading her to the third space of enunciation. Her job as a librarian and her writings gains her empowerment.

In this journey towards acculturation to a newer environment, London gives her new reasons to settle independently. She is loved by her colleagues at the library where she is cherished and loved. They even seek out to Adah and also furthermore appreciate her writing. A journey of liberation from the Igbo repression to getting accustomed to the English world order, Adah's experiences form a source of realizing her dreams. Towards the end of her novel, Emecheta with a slightest indulgence of an undercurrent romance when a crying Adah is called out "Nne nna" (Emecheta 174) by a long lost friend amidst a crowd and ends up paying for her taxi, permits Adah to look into societal barriers, leading her into a space of enunciation. A dichotomy is hence observed in Emecheta's narration of *Second Class Citizen* where her protagonist Adah Obi is repeatedly displaced, being subjected to her circumstances and how a series of protests paves her way to emancipation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- [1]. Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London; New York: Routledge, 2004.
- [2]. Buchi Emecheta, *Second Class Citizen* (London: Fontana, 1977)
- [3]. Dani Wadada Nabudere (2006) *Towards an Afrokology of knowledge production and African regeneration*, *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies - Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinarity*, 1:1
- [4]. E. Levinas, 'Reality and it's shadow', in *Collected Philosophical Papers* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), pp 6-7
- [5]. Eustace Palmer, "The Feminine Point of View: A Study of Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*," *African Literature Today* 13 (1982): 54-65.
- [6]. Fromm, Erich. *The Fear of Freedom*. New York: Keagan Paul, 1942.
- [7]. Gannep Arnold, *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1960 Print.
- [8]. Katherine Frank, "The Death of the Slave Girl: African Womanhood in the Novels of Buchi Emecheta," *World Literature Written in English* 21.2 (1982): 476-97;
- [9]. Lloyd Wellesley Brown, *Women Writers in Black Africa* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 198132, DOI: 10.1080/18186870608529704
- [10]. Miyamoto, Kaori, "Erich Fromm's theory on alienation." (1987). *Masters Theses 1911 - February 2014*. 2481.
- [11]. Turner, Victor Witter. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti- Structure*. Chicago: Adeline Pub 1969.