

Selfhood and Identity in Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* and *The New Tribe*

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Language can only deal meaningfully with a special, restricted segment of reality. The rest, and it is presumably the much larger part, is silence.

– George Steiner

ABSTRACT

Racism and colonialism were interrelated in Africa under white rule. Both drew a line between superior white man and inferior black man. Western colonialism was justified on the ground in order to civilise native savages. Europeans present Orientals as barbaric, instinctive, savages, brute, exotic others and uncivilised. Africans are considered savages and exotic others. They are considered as devilish, diabolic and infernal and in this way they are related to inferiority and in context of exotic other they are related to primitivism. Westerners define a self-image of Europe and Africa. They describe that European culture and identity is superior and African culture and identity is inferior. I have raised these issues in my research paper in general and women's selfhood and identity in particular. The objective of my paper is to look into various phases of exploitations as well as victimisation of the woman in black African society and how do they reciprocate the challenges they possess over the period of time. This victimisation is triplicate in manner for which I have submitted arguments and points.

Keywords: racism, colonialism, silence, other, selfhood, black feminism, Africana feminism, recognition and identity.

In George Steiner well known book *Language and Silence* Steiner has strategically related silence to the 'bigger part' of reality and how it works in our lives. All through this debate I have contended that speech and silence are elements of human transactions which make a huge difference in the social procedures. Moreover, our understanding of its relationship to the exertions of making discourse permits us to "listen" to this larger part (the 'Other') that by and large lies voiceless. I have likewise contended that the "gendering of silence" in the lives of women has made it especially challenging for analysts to wander into the investigation of verbose works on silence. In any case, due to its extreme nature and co-reliance with speech, silence gives an ideal model that is good with, however not the same as, the language of writing. Whilst silence declines the predominance of words, its execution gives a means to make generative spaces inside verbal and visual language. I recommend that it is through this execution that women can talk and rupture the codes of typical language, with language of and from the body.

Michelle Boulouse Walker places her dialogue of women and silence in connection to philosophical talk and the maternal body. Through her feminist and psychoanalytic probeings we can exhibit how negative relationship with silence traversed into Western thought and are certain in differential developments of sex. This demonstrates how women's connection to silence varies to that of men, and is along these lines reflected in the specificity of its explanation through their imaginative practices. In his interpretation of the French feminist philosopher Michele Le Doeuff's critical stance on philosophical and scientific texts, Walker writes:

Here (socio-biological) references abound, attesting to the activity and exteriority of the male (even *in utero*) as against the passivity and interiority of the self-enclosed female. "From the beginnings in foetal life, 'masculinity' is a thing of drama, conflict, struggle, danger, openness to influence, relation to an Other, while

‘femininity’ is tranquil, immobile, unfolding of the inherent, self-enclosure in the same. (19)

This comparison of the feminine with passive interiority, inaction and non-transferability is taken further in Walker’s contention that the maternal body specifically, “occupies the site of radical silence in the texts of Western philosophy, psychoanalytic theory and literature” (1). By taking a cue from the French feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray’s revisionist reading of Plato’s illustration of the hole as an allegory for the womb Walker successfully shows how in this reconfiguration of woman, Plato, “ deforms her as quiet network” (12). Her summation of Plato’s politics of women’s representation reflects its significance for feminist studies:

In Plato’s world woman is not a subject that speaks. (Or at least one who speaks for herself.) She remains mute, reduced to the mute passivity of her reproductive role. She is the unacknowledged place or grounding substance from which the masculine subject draws his reserves and resources. Woman as (*hystera*) is paradoxically the silence that guarantees (masculine/philosophical) speech. She is the receptacle for speech, its possibility, though not its articulation. (12)

Walker calls attention to the point that Plato alludes to the mother as a receptacle and an invisible, formless being who “in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible” (13). Woman as body, with references to the womb specifically, convey relationship in myth and writing of compartments or repositories that could be void or brimming with blood and liquids of obscure, sometimes evil matter (29-34). Likewise, those who fear silence view it as an unknown and mysterious space, inaudible and inarticulate, containing the hidden and concealed (Dauenhauer 22-23, 86-106). At the point when seen as unfilled, the womb is typical of hollows and internment chambers. Barbara G. Walker clarifies, the words ‘womb and tomb are semantically related’ (102). Correspondingly, malign silence is seen as an unfilled or dull

space, a void or semantic vacuum, a pit or tomb holding the potential for the revocation of being (Dauenhauer 136, 86 – 106; Sontag 27, 32).

Connections between silence, the womb, tomb and women's innovativeness are unmistakably obvious in the speculation set forward by George Steiner that women may be voiceless in workmanship in light of the fact that they can reproduce, or that they have wombs (Steiner 207-208). He incorporates the expressions of Robert Frost with his own particular to ask: "Do women their "ripe thoughts" in "their brain in hearse, /Making their tomb the womb wherein they grew?"(208). Steiner's question which promptly precedes the complicated expression in fact contains an explanation to the problem it raises:

Can we honestly think further about creation and genesis, about the bringing into being of life forms which relate the poem or the painting to existentiality itself, if we do not consider the essence of form-giving that is childbirth and the abstinence [of the voices of women] from *poiesis* which this act may entail? (207-208)

Negative impression of silence an absence of human movement, conclusion of correspondence, indiscernible, garbled and an evil void to be maintained a strategic distance from, are adjusted to women as the negative other: self-encased, inert, nonsensical, incoherent and dreaded as the suspicious obscure. These recognitions consolidate to position the nature and assemblage of woman as silence.

The case for women having been silenced has been unequivocally contended by Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock, Germaine Greer, and Linda Nochlin, alongside numerous others. Tillie Olsen recognises the silence which is a vital piece of imagination, and the unspeakability of women who fear to talk due to persecution or different restrictions on their discourse. She remarks:

These are not natural silences – what Keats calls *agonie enuyouse* (the tedious agony), that necessary time for renewal, lying fallow,

gestation, in the natural cycle of creation. The silences I speak of... are unnatural; the unnatural thwarting of what struggles to come into being, but cannot. (8)

Olsen clarifies that the internalisation this unnatural silence by women can abandon them to a deprived state of discourse, feeling that they have no right to talk, nor have anything of worth to say. Inside patriarchy, women have generally been situated in an untenable space that influences their everyday lives and their view of themselves inside society. Characterised by the talk of others and in this manner seized of the desire of discourse and activity, a lot of people are determined to move beyond the antagonistic or void space of their forced silence. Teresa de Lauretis alludes to Julia Kristeva to pose the question: 'how to be "that which is unspoken" and at the same time to speak "that which is repressed in discourse"; how at once to be *and* to speak, to be *and* to represent difference, otherness, the elsewhere of language?' (*Alice* 76).

My paper is the result of the study of this silence and women's struggles to recover their voice. The mental and behavioural fenced in areas that these weakening impacts make have provoked numerous women, including the novelists concentrated on here, to change the commonplace language utilised within patriarchal society, or to search out different manifestations of discourse through their safe and subversive practices. Their representative writings give me an arranged and re-epitomised endeavour to talk through its safe, on the other hand, perceptible structure. These novelists have demonstrated how when seen as favourable, silence is invited as a space and a knowledge of obvious vicinity, both positive and re-establishing. Silence might be seen as a mental space for easing of strain and a place of refuge or shelter which is free from both inside and outside reproach. It might be a space for rest and restoration far from preoccupations, for pondering, centre, and the quest for serious ideas and exercises. Some think of it as a profound space for the suspension of thought through and through; to move

stunningly into a knowledge of the unspeakable or unsayable, depicted as the completion or full void of silence (Dauenhauer 16-22). Others, for example, George Steiner and Susan Sontag combine it with the spiritual dimension accomplished in the generation and the presentation in art. I am suggesting that once within silence, either by choice or circumstance, silence has much to offer as a condition that engenders an alternative mode of communication through creative practice.

A cognizant commitment to use the positive characteristics of silence as a ground for the generation of significant discourse blocks any complicity with those that would force it. The co-reliance of quiet with articulation makes it clear that the target of its practice is not a withdrawal from correspondence, but it's inverse. Dauenhauer clarifies that to perform silence that is not locked in with something or another person would undervalue, or undermine the complex enthusiastic engagement that the execution of silence obliges (Dauenhauer 23-24). He states clearly that: "Without the conjunction of discourse and silence, discourse would collapse into mere untemporalised language and silence would collapse into mere muteness or non-signitive vision" (77). Not all thinkers take this perspective. Dauenhauer brings up that both Hegel and Marx prioritised the essentialness of discourse or talk over silence (Dauenhauer 86-87). On the other hand, Dauenhauer happens to help his case of the co-reliance of silence and speech, with understandings of silence by Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Merleau-Ponty and Picard (Dauenhauer 109-139). Similarly, Steiner, and Sontag accept that silence can't work on its own and is at its best when it rouses activity and a route for the human soul to move past the confinement of verbal language. Dauenhauer clarifies how Eastern conventions relate silence with craving, thought and activity, and that whilst these customs perform quiet with mysterious plan, all exhibitions of silence oblige both talk and activity (Dauenhauer 111).

Owing to this, we must give attention to articulation with which silence exists together and with which it is enunciated in writing. The phonetic spaces of a novel hold the particular segments of silence and expression. Nonetheless, no doubt silence cannot exist as the property of a craftsmanship (Sontag 9-11). It can never be noiseless in light of the fact that symbolisation dependably expresses. Regardless of this, scholars can paint about the knowledge of silence, giving a scrutinising visual space of reprieve from the hyperactivity of the world. In this thesis I have argued that discourse analysis offers new ways of seeing and “hearing” women’s silence. A look at the major concerns of each of these representative works will help us review and reaffirm the core argument of this paper.

The emergence of black feminism in the 1970s, (Clenora Hudson-Weems) an offshoot of white feminism, has witnessed the response of many black women who have not readily embraced the concept of feminism for a variety of reasons, in spite of its legitimacy in the academy and the desire of many to be a legitimate part of the academic community. To be sure, embracing an established, acceptable theoretical methodology-feminism-is one of the most reliable, strategic means of ensuring membership into that powerful, visible community of academic women, which extends far beyond itself and secures for its supporters not only job possibilities and publications, but also prestige and high visibility. While many other black women naively adopted feminism early on, because of the absence of an alternative and suitable framework for their individual needs as Africana women, more are reassessing the historical realities and the agenda for the modern feminist movement, and have bravely stood firm in their outright rejection of it. For many in the academy who reject it and who go beyond by creating alternative paradigms, they experience blatant unsuccessful attempts to silence them via ostracism and exclusion from the academic circle of either publications (including not being referenced by other scholars), and/or dialogue (including not

being invited to participate in some of their conferences in order to articulate yet another interpretation of our struggle as nonfeminists). Better still, too often, parts of their paradigm have been lifted from their theoretical construct, appropriated and reshaped into a revised form of black feminism by those established in the field. This concept is unanimously given by Iva E. Canruthers which is a rejection of feminism, and by extension Black feminism, which yet reigns high as a most controversial issue today, both inside and outside the academy, particularly as it relates to the role of the Africana woman within the context of the modern feminist movement.

African literature can be divided into three distinct categories: pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial. Pre-colonial literature often takes the form of oral narratives that are sometimes accompanied by music and center around the trickster figure. Colonial literature examines the horrors of slavery and the slave trade, revolting against colonialism and drawing inspiration from Africa's past. Postcolonial literature focuses on the clash between indigenous and colonial cultures, expressing hope for Africa's future. Within these categories is a subset of African women writers who focus on the ordeals that women face in a patriarchal and colonialist country. Their work often contains sub-themes of women finding strength in each other's company when abandoned or dismissed by their husbands and fathers, who are, in turn, subjugated by the English. The narratives depict the struggles of women trying to hold together their families and preserve their cultures, but they often find themselves overruled by men.

The term 'race' is an artificial construct used to classify people on the basis of supposed physical and cultural similarities deriving from their common decent while racism an important factor of post colonialism is an ideology which believes in the superiority of one race on another. The English had equated blackness with death and evil centuries before they

met any black people. Thus the first reaction to people with black skin was to assume that they were some form of devil or monster.

Literature is regarded the reflection of society. As far as African literature is concerned, racial relations serves as a dominant theme in most of the narratives. Many Afrocentric writers have attempted to bring out the stigma faced by the enslaved blacks to sustain their identity in respond to Eurocentric forces. Negritude was one of such movement to assert the identity of black origin. Many writers have attempted to portray the experience of blacks living under the regime of imperialism. Their narratives tell the whole story of enslavement; how they were bought and sold; how they got the dehumanized treatment by the colonisers which left no options for them but to accept the new ways of life incorporating aspects of colonial ways in their original cultural identity.

Buchi Emecheta is a Nigerian novelist based in Britain since 1960. She is one of the most important female writers to emerge from post-colonial Africa. Buchi Emecheta is distinguished for her vivid description of female subordination and conflicting cultural values in modern Africa. Emecheta was born on 21 July 1944 in Lagos, Nigeria to Igbo parents. She worked as a community worker in Camden, north London.

Buchi Emecheta's novels expose the injustice of traditional male oriented social customs relegating the life of women to servitude and victimisation. She is distinguished for her vivid portrayal of female subordination and conflicting cultural values in modern Africa. Her writings revolve around the theme of race and gender identities in post-colonial Africa. Her novels represent the Igbo culture and subjugation of women, clash between tradition and western imperialism. She represents women as equal to men eradicating all the gender prejudices. Being a post-colonial writer, she writes for the imposition of western white values on the indigenous African culture.

Emecheta's books repeatedly raise a voice of protest against the privileged patriarchal system that subjugate the women such as widow inheritance, exclusion from financial security and reduce their status to any object devoid any personal entity. She challenges the double colonisation of women by the hegemonic order i.e.; race and gender. She exposes the role of traditional woman that demand women's self-sacrifice in Nigeria.

Postcolonial literature refers to the body of works produced in the countries sharing the history of colonisation by European powers. It often addresses the problems and consequences of the decolonisation of a country, especially questions relating to the political and cultural independence of formerly subjugated people, and themes such as racialism and colonialism. Post colonialism is the study of effects of colonisation on indigenous culture and society. Post colonialism in Africa gets its voice in the works of prominent African writers from Chinua Achebe to Buchi Emecheta. So far as African literature is concerned, it is the sum total of the many small units of literary works produced in different parts of African continent.

Emecheta has also successfully combined her early and late life experiences both in colonial Nigeria and postcolonial London. As a Nigerian Ibo, Emecheta translated her local experiences into a global context through her knowledge of another language and culture. Yet the difficulties she experienced in becoming a liberated woman and an acclaimed writer at the same time originated from the imperialistic and patriarchal discourses which classified her as racially inferior and ideologically marginalised.

Her novel *The Second Class Citizen* deals with the story of Adah who after tolerating the rigid gender bias in her own African society moves to London to fulfill her unaccomplished dream but there she experiences the racial prejudices barring the blacks. The second class treatment of black in western countries is central theme in the novel. Both Adah and Francis suffer from

the racist attitudes of many English people and that Adah at first has her own stereotypes to overcome. She eventually becomes a proponent of anti-racism and anti-sexism and insists that she and her children fight for first-class citizenship. After a long struggle against gender stereotypes in her own country and racism in United Kingdom, she enables herself to establish her own identity as a writer.

Her another novel *The New Tribe* presents the story of a Nigerian boy Chester adopted by A white couple Ginny and Arthur Arlington. This is a most atypical Emecheta's novel in its focus on Chester, a Nigerian male adolescent adopted by a white English couple. The return to Africa signifies the end of Chester's nostalgic dream to reclaim its African kingdom and brings him into contact with Nigeria's harsh reality of social and political chaos. Tellingly, at the end of the novel, Chester is reunited to his adoptive family and to her fiancée Esther who had warned him before he embarked on his expedition: "You don't seem ready to accept reality... We don't belong in Africa, we're British. Black British maybe, but this is our home now." To Esther, Chester's idea to leave for Africa is like "chasing a dream. But for Chester it was something to find his roots, his identity. Buchi Emecheta is a prominent writer from Africa. Buchi Emecheta is a black woman writer from the same continent. Her novels reflect the stories of women jeopardised by traditional patriarchal system and racism. Her fictions evince an abiding reverence for African tradition and folklore that reflects the divided loyalties of Africans torn between tradition and modernisation.

Buchi Emecheta herself comes from the colonised and oppressed black community. Her writing is influenced by the experience she has gone through in her own life. The present paper aims to bring out the different aspects of subjugation portrayed the experience of blacks under the regime of imperialism in Africa. My enthusiasm in the investigation of silence and voice identifies with my revelation of the unequal

spaces given to men and women for their vocal interpretations. These discoveries have ended up being both liberating and weakening in nature. The discoveries have made my craving to handle something of the many-sided quality of silence, its innate qualities, its relationship to discourse, and the part it has played through the hundreds of years in the lives of women. In this paper I have considered the specificity of women's silence and exploring a little however characteristic example of contemporary Women writers to show how the burden of silence can significantly repress the ways women talk and act. It can go about as an imperceptible divider that keeps them from being seen and heard. It is crucial that these key issues be attended to in the event that we are to comprehend the centrality of silence and discourse in the lives of women.

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