Imaging African Womanhood: A Womanist Reading of Selected Works of Buchi Emecheta

ABSTRACT

This dissertation endeavours to cull out the subjectivity of the African female, which has been scarcely researched, as framed in the novels of the contemporary Nigerian writer, Buchi Emecheta. Since women are the traditional repositories of culture, their sociological ambience is sketched out along with their projection in literature. Their subject positions are traced within theoretical parameters converging on the specifically African concept of ‘womanism’. Here we find that the multifaceted figures of oppression acting upon the Third World women in terms of race/class/gender are cumulative in determining her existence. This study is an analysis of the three phases in the development of the woman of Africa historically - the precolonial, postcolonial and immigrant periods. Emecheta could be read as the womanist voice of the Nigerian scenario based on the transformation in the psyche of the women portrayed in her works. Whereas the precolonial women in her writing end as martyrs at the altar of patriarchal hegemony, the second phase of her writing expounds the feminist rebellion of the postcolonial African women who question the status quo. The protagonists of the final category epitomise the hybridized generation for whom alienation has given way to the outlook that the ‘world is her oyster’. This womanist study is also an investigation into the less acknowledged fact that the African woman did not attain liberation as a western bequest, but that it is as essentialised nature ingrained into her down the ages. Though doubly marginalized as subaltern female, the woman of Africa is gaining a distinct voice and agency.