

**NEGOTIATING MODERNITY, RESISTING TRADITION: GENETIC STRUCTURALISM  
ANALYSIS ON BUCHI EMECHETA'S *THE BRIDE PRICE*  
(MENEGOSIASIKAN MODERNITAS, MELAWAN TRADISI: ANALISIS  
STRUKTURALISME GENETIK PADA *THE BRIDE PRICE* KARYA BUCHI EMECHETA)**

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### Abstrak

*The Bride Price* adalah sebuah novel yang ditulis oleh Buchi Emecheta dari Nigeria pada tahun 1976. Novel ini berfokus pada persepsi oposisi biner antara modern dan tradisional (cara berpikir yang modern dan tradisional) dari suatu suku didalam masyarakat yang digambarkan dalam novel *The Bride Price*. Pikiran modern karakter utama perempuan dan laki-laki mencoba untuk menentang adat istiadat dan norma-norma yang melekat pada masyarakat. Ada dua masalah yang dibahas pada penelitian ini. Pertama, pemikiran-pemikiran modern dan tradisional pada *The Bride Price*, kedua, konstruksi pandangan dunia didalam *The Bride Price* dan yang ketiga adalah struktur sosial yang seperti apa yang muncul pada kelas sosial masyarakat Nigeria. Selanjutnya, kami menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif untuk artikel ini. Artikel ini dimulai dengan analisis novel dan menggunakan teori strukturalisme genetik. Didalam pengaplikasian teori strukturalisme genetik, kami menganalisis pandangan dunia pengarang dan struktur sosial masyarakat Nigeria. Sehingga, ada beberapa hasil penelitian pada artikel ini dengan menggunakan strukturalisme genetik. Kami menganalisis oposisi biner antara pemikiran modern dan tradisional didalam novel, pandangan pengarang pada jalan pikiran karakter utama perempuan, dan kondisi kultur sosial di Nigeria antara tahun 1950an sampai 1970an.

**Kata Kunci:** *Modernitas, Tradisi, Strukturalisme Genetik, Konstruksi sosial masyarakat Nigeria*

### Abstract

*The Bride Price* is a novel written by Buchi Emecheta from Nigeria in 1976. This novel is focused on the perception of a binary opposition between modernity and tradition (the modern and traditional thoughts) in a traditional society as a reflection through the novel of *The Bride Price*. The modern thought of main female and man characters try to resist the customs and norms, which bond in the society. There are three problems to discuss in this article. The first is the modern and traditional thoughts in *The Bride Price* novel, the second is the world view's construction in *The Bride Price*, and the last is the social structure prevails in Nigerian social class that makes them have the world view. Furthermore, in examining the article, we use qualitative research method for this article. This article begins with the analysis of the novel and uses genetic structuralism theory. Applying Goldmann theory of genetic structuralism, we analyse the world view of the writer and Nigerian social structure. Therefore, there are some results of this article use genetic structuralism, We break the analysis of the binary opposition between modern and traditional thoughts in the novel, the world view of the writer through the female main character's way of thinking, and social-cultural condition in Nigeria in 1950s until 1970s.

**Keywords:** *Modernity, Tradition, Genetic Structuralism, Nigerian Social Construction*

### Introduction

*The Bride Price* is one of the novels written by Buchi Emecheta and published in 1976. She is a Nigerian novelist. Buchi Emecheta in *The Bride Price* shows the confrontation of tradition and modernity in African society, particularly in Nigeria, a country in the west of Africa, as the discursive effect of English colonialism in the past.

The concept modern in this research is the modern on the way of thinking that is influenced by European thoughts as one of discursive effects of colonialism that brought

modernity. Moreover, what we mean the traditional in this research is the tradition which is related to the way of thinking of the people and some customs that influence the way of doing something in their society. Modern and tradition have world view in the society. The world view of traditional society is obviously quite different from Western constructions. The world view is Goldmann's concept. This concept is one of basic concepts of genetic structuralism. Genetic structuralism is a theory, which discusses about the structure of the text, in this case text is the novel, also the author and socio cultural condition that prevail in the

society. Goldman (1963:156) states the basis of genetic structuralism is the hypothesis that all human behaviours are an attempt to give a meaningful response to a particular situation. All human behaviours try to create a balance between the subject and the object of action, which is brought by the environment.

In order to know how modernism discourse influences the female main character's traditional thoughts by using the world vision of the writer through the female main character. We formulate some questions. The research questions are as follows:

1. How are the modern and traditional thoughts in *The Bride Price* novel?
2. How is the world view's constructions in *The Bride Price*?
3. What kind of social structure prevails in Nigerian social class that makes them have the world view?

We hope the result of this study will benefit the readers and those who are interested in the study of genetic structuralism analysis. Concerning the problem to discuss, this study has four goals. They are:

1. to describe the binary opposition between modern and traditional discourse
2. to understand world view of the writer through the female main character and the structural descriptions in the novel
3. to analyse socio-cultural condition of Nigerian society

### Research Methodology

This research is conducted by using the qualitative research method. Using the library research in collecting data concerns to the genetic structuralism. The type of data applied in analysing *The Bride Price* is qualitative data since the data are in the form of sentences or words. The term of qualitative data is a type of data that deals with collecting and analysing information in a form of non-numeric (Blaxter, et al, 1996:60). The data will be written in the research as quotations. The research uses inductive method to analyse the data. Shaw (1972:107) states that in inductive method, movement of thought, expressed or implied is always from the specific to general. All of the data from the novel and social condition at that time will be categorized in order to understand the novel better, as the representation of modernism discourse on the way of thinking of intellectual middle class in Nigerian post-colonial society, which is influenced by European thoughts. The analysis of the binary opposition between modern and traditional discourse will be processed by the theory of genetic structuralism to understand the world view of the writer through the female main character's way of thinking and the descriptions of modernism discourse in the novel.

### Result

Based on the data which have been collected and analysed, it is found the binary opposition between modern and traditional thoughts which becomes the structure of the novel and the world vision of the writer through the female main character's way of thinking. The main female character

(Aku-nna) is in a dilemma. She lives in the traditional society with her modern way of thinking. As a portrait of women in this era, she tries to use her modern thoughts in the society who have traditional thoughts. In the end of this story Aku-nna can not resist the traditional culture and adapting new culture, because the traditional culture embeds and she bonds with the rules and customs in her society..

### Discussion

In discussing this article, we try to analyse the conflict between the traditional generations in the novel. They are Aku-nna and Chike (slave descendant) who are exposed to the colonizers' new discourse and tend to reject the African traditional culture.

The first discussion in this article is the modern and traditional thoughts which consist of the binary opposition between modern and traditional thoughts of gender in African Society. We give an example the custom in Nigerian society. If a girl marries without the price, it is assumed that she is not a virgin or she is not worth marrying. In this case, a girl becomes a property for her family, Therefore, big bride price is a great honour to the bride. In this society, we know that the bride price is an important thing in marriage. Nigerian society believes that the consequence if the bride price is not paid, the bride will die when she bears the first child. That is the consequences if someone resists the customary of marriage. The people in this traditional society believe it will happen if the marriage spouses do that.

Actually, from the men's position, a man is ready to marry and the society says that he must pay the bride price actually marriage is seen as a symbol of the man's ability to live separately with his family. It is also evidence that a man has a responsibility in society and has enough money to pay for his bride price. Therefore, there is equality if we see the traditional thoughts of gender from the men and women position. The traditional thoughts of gender, customs, and norms in Ibuza society toward women not only give negative effects for women but also it becomes kindness for women and their families.

The perception of the binary opposition between modernity and traditional in Nigeria actually emerged in the era of 1930s since the introduction of Western Education (Ibewuiké, 2006:181-182). However, this era becomes the new perception of thoughts in Nigeria. The problems in the novel indicate the reality in Nigeria in the era of 1950s, which are taken from several sources, strengthen the indication of the relation between the novel and the reality. Like most other African states, Nigeria is a product of colonialism. There are three points which is mostly controlled by European, namely; economic, law, and education side. European controls economic side by exploiting the natural resources, Nigeria's law by connecting the law and religion, and education side by religion and slave descendants.

The first is economic side. In 1950s, the power of British still created a system that was oppressive in order to be able to exploit the resources in this country. Exploit resources become one of their oppressions. They thought

that Nigeria especially in Lagos and Iboza had economic assets. In particular, they exported the resources to the Western economy. The quotation below shows the condition which is related to the situation at that time.

She did not wish to have to carry baskets of akpu to market on her head. Her type of trading was different and less strenuous: she would go to the town of Ogwashi to buy the kernels, have them bagged and sent to Iboza via the one and only lorry which made that trip. On Nkwo market days the bag were transported to Asaba, and Ma would follow on foot; she sold the kernels to eastern Ibo traders, who would have them reprocessed and exported to England to be used in the manufacture of famous brand name soap. The cakes of soap would then be reimported to Nigeria, and women like Ma Blackie would buy them. The kernels, thus, made a completely circular journey.

(Emecheta, 1976:73)

That is Ma Blackie's life in Iboza. Ma Blackie sells the kernels in order to get much money for her family and expects to earn the family income. Iboza society knows trading system. All the agriculture products are brought and sold to the market. In the market, there was economic activity between indigenous people and European. The indigenous people have to sell their agriculture to European, because agriculture and market play an important role in their life. It becomes the rule before Nigeria gets his independence. Moreover, Nigerian does not have the modern equipment to process it.

The second is the rule of law which connects it with religion. From 1914 to independence in 1960, Nigeria had four major constitutions, each named after the colonial governor who formulated it. They are the Clifford Constitution (1922), Richards Constitution (1946), Macpherson Constitution (1951), and Lyttleton Constitution (1954) (<http://www.countrystudies.us/nigeria/67.htm>, accessed on February 1, 2013). However, the European colonial rule becomes prominent rule for Nigeria until their independence on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1960.

Goldmann states that the presence of human facts will show the relation between historical actions and cultural works (literary work) as human facts (1981:42). In *The Bride Price*, it becomes the fact which is related to the situation at that time. The quotation below shows the conditions in the society. The one from indigenous people who want to exploit the children from European way of life, in particular their parents marry in church. The European law, which prevails in Nigeria will protect them. The quotation below shows a conversation between Iloba (Aku-nna's cousin) and Ngebeke (Iloba's mother).

Then Iloba shouted at his mother: "My father and nobody else is going to have that bride price!"

"What about Nna-nndo? The other day his mother said he must go to college. What do you think she use to send him – cocoyam? She too has her eyes on her daughter's bride price. The new European law will be on her side if she

claims the money for her son. So, you had better tell your father to think like a man.

(Emecheta, 1976:77)

They discuss Okonkwo's plan to get Aku-nna's bride price. Regarding the era of 1950s, it is the era of white man's law. The quotation above is an example if the parent marry in church, their children are protected by the constitution above and the tradition's law cannot disturb them. However, the white man still stays and all the people have to follow the white man's rule if their family do not want to get the punishment. Ngebeke has a fear that it will happen to her family if Okonkwo does the wrong thing towards the white man rule. However, she wants him to think twice.

The third is education side. Many Nigerian in the era of 1950s were able to read and write. Education helps them to find the new window for their happiness. Emecheta is one of middle class persons and an educated, tries to explore her native country. The people who have modern thoughts see the Nigerian society as the traditional society in the era of 1950s. They see that the free will of each person is important and does not bond with customs and norms. However, the human rights and acknowledging the rights are important for every person.

The modern thought of people in Nigeria cannot be separated from European discourse at that time. Edward Said (cited in Venn, 2000:60) states that colonial discourse (European discourse) is a system of statements that is made to talk about colonies and colonial people, colonising power, and the relationship between them. It is a system of knowledge and believes about the acts of colonisation. However, colonial discourse brings knowledge of European self-understanding and introducing that Europe and Europeans put themselves as modern, civilized, and superior people.

Adopting the new view of European discourse is difficult to do especially for people of patriarchal society. It is not a simple thing to change people's way of life that exists for a long time. As the time passed, people and the society begin to change their way of thinking and perception. They see injustice in traditional thoughts, however they consider that the traditional way of thinking is lower than modern ones. Several people who notice the injustice, in which the women are in, tried to release them from that condition. This is the effect of European discourse. Some of them keep their old value and combine it with the new way of life. This result is a new form of Nigerian, which is influenced by European discourse.

The two main characters (Aku-nna and Chike) from Emecheta's novel create new thoughts in Nigerian society although they do not have the public acceptance. Their education opens their mind to think rationally towards the customs and norms in their society. This novel is published in 1976 and there is a relation with the condition in Nigeria especially Igboland in 1970s. Education is developed and people start to follow the progress of education and choose the choice to keep their traditional thoughts of education or to adopt and follow the new reconstruction of education. The quotation above becomes the fact of the education's condition if we see the conversation in this novel.

Ofulue looked his son for a long while, then pointedly reminded him that he would have to work hard at his studies to get into university in the coming year.

"I was not considered good enough for a scholarship," he snapped resentfully.

"I know that," his father replied slowly, as though he intended to help Chike to on being sorry for himself. "But you have chosen an odd course. Sociology." He pronounced the word like a German: Sokiology. "Maybe the examiners have never heard of it. I am not quite sure myself what you aim to become after this sociology course. An office worker? A Politician? We have too many politicians already, and anyway you don't need a university degree to be a good politician. Can't you change your subject? He asked, after a pause.

I don't want to change, Father. We cannot all be doctors. There is a great deal you learn when you are a sociologist," Was Chike's defence of his chosen profession.

"You must apply again this year. Even if you are not given the scholarship you want, I will pay the university fees," his father said, looking away from his son like a shy woman would.

(Emecheta, 1976:85-86)

They discuss the higher education for Chike. His father wants him to be a doctor or a lawyer, because they are the famous careers of Nigerian elite. Although they are slave descendants, they are a part of Nigerian who is interested in education and becomes teacher in Church Missionary School. Even though not the whole Igbo land (Ibuza society) thinks about education, Chike and his Father become the reflection of Ibuza people in this era.

The effect of education's reconstruction in the era of 1970s can be seen in *The Bride Price*. It is shown the people from one generation to other generation start to change their mind. The main female character (Aku-nna) and Chike are the reflection of educated people represent the young generation of Nigeria in the era of 1970s. Aku-nna as a woman who has a modern thoughts stands between the modern background of knowledge and the old customs and norms in her society. Although she chooses the European way of thinking, she still concerns for the tradition and taboo in Nigeria.

"Is that all necessary? Since you know now, is it so important that they know as well? Just give them their bride price in peace, because you know what they say: If the bride price is not paid, the bride will die at childbirth."

(Emecheta, 1976:154)

That is Aku-nna's fearlessness. Although she resists some traditions and norms in her society, her modern thoughts which is influenced by European discourse cannot reject all the tradition in Ibuza. She also thinks the consequences if her husband to be does not pay the bride price. She still lives between tradition and modern. The

example above is applicable with Goldmann's accommodation. The obstacles which is experienced by Aku-nna makes her doing accommodation to get a balance with environment (society)

Those characters are the reflection of Nigerian people in 1950s until 1970s. However, the literary works, in this case is *The Bride Price* novel reflects the reality of Nigeria social structure in of 1950s until 1970s. Aku-nna is in a dilemma life in the society with her modern way of thinking. As a portrait of women in this era, she tries to use her modern thoughts in the society who have traditional thoughts. Finally, she tries to resist the customs and norms, which bond in the society. Her resistance does not get public acceptance, because there is not an acceptance of changing and adapting new cultures.

In writing this novel Emecheta focuses on this topic, because she becomes an aspirator who represents the social class or collective subject in Nigeria. Emecheta is a middle class person who is educated and the member of some organisations in Nigeria, such as Ogwugwu Afor Publishing Company, Advisory Council on Race, and a regular contributor to some magazines and newspapers (<http://literature.britishcouncil.org/buchi-emecheta>, accessed on April 18, 2013). *The Bride Price* is written by Emecheta as a human fact, which represents how the European thoughts try to embed to the African culture. Therefore, concerning those era, the Nigerian social structure is constructed and shown clearly through the literary works.

## Conclusion and Suggestion

*The Bride Price* is one of the novels written by Buchi Emecheta and published in 1976. This novel shows the clash between tradition and modernity in African society, particularly in Nigeria, a country in the west of Africa, as the discursive effect of English colonialism in the past. Modernity in this case is modern on the way of thinking that is influenced by European thoughts and traditional way of thinking of the indigenous people and some customs in 1950s until 1970s in Nigeria especially in Lagos and Ibuza. *The Bride Price* also looks at the caste system in Nigerian culture that discriminates against descendent of slaves. The story of *The Bride Price* shows the characters that represent this era. Emecheta in this novel tries to negotiate the modern thoughts as the reflection of intellectual middle class that is influenced by European thoughts and traditional cultures existing in Nigeria post-colonial society.

The main female and male character (slave descendant), Aku-nna and Chike, represent the people in 1950s until 1970s who are exposed the new discourse and tend to reject the African traditional culture, because of their education. Although they try to reject the traditional culture, they do not get support from the society and finally it makes them adapts by doing accommodation to get a balance with their environment (society).

In 1950s until 1970s consisted the Nigerian with new ways of thinking. Education brings a modern way of thinking as a one of colonial discourse. At the end of this novel, it is signed by the death of the main character. From the analysis above, I conclude that the death is not a symbol

of the victory of tradition, but she does not have the ability for existing modern thoughts in a traditional society without the society's support.

This article can be an inspiration to the other researcher to analyse the novel uses postcolonial perspective. However, by using postcolonial theory, it can break the analysis deeply.

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