Journal of Critical Applied Linguistics Studies

ORIGINAL RESEARCH
E-ISSN: 2981-1678
Volume 3, Issue 1, pp 100-125

Gonbad Kavous University

Linguistics Society of Iran

Cognitive Colonization and Gendered Identity: A Critical Analysis of Buchi Emecheta's Selected Novels

Yalda Mansouri[1], *Zahra Bordbari**[2], *& Negar Sharif*[3]

ABSTRACT

The present study analyzes *Second-Class Citizen* and *The Joys of Motherhood* through a cognitive postcolonial framework, suggesting that colonial oppression depends not only on material factors but is also sustained through the internalized emotional and cognitive frameworks associated with gendered divisions of labor. Using Patrick Colm Hogan's concepts of practical identity and emotion, Frantz Fanon's ideas of psychological colonization, and Suzanne Keen's notion of strategic empathy, the research shows that Emecheta presents womanhood not as a static social category but rather as a dynamic cognitive process influenced by affective memory, ethical responsibility, and habitual thought. In *Second-Class Citizen*, Adah's diasporic experience reveals the nature of colonial expectations, which lead to cognitive dissonance as racialized marginalization transforms the protagonist's ambitions, self-evaluation, and sense of belonging. On the other hand, domination occurs in the context of a domestic ideology where mothering becomes an instrument for the psychological imprisonment caused by societal condemnation and emotional responsibility. The character of Nnu Ego can be seen as an example of pragmatic identity formed under patriarchal norms, while Adaku refuses to see female identity only in terms of reproduction. Through the focus on emotional memory and narrative techniques that control empathy, this paper tries to demonstrate that Emecheta's novels reveal the struggle of minds and identities against influences and control from outside and the way this control can be resisted.

Article History

Received:
2025-8-25
Revised:
2025-9-20
Accepted:
2025-10-19
Published:
2026-1-1

Keywords:
cognitive, empathy, emotion, postcolonial, practical identity

[1] Department of English Literature, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran;
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1922-1954; *Email:* Yalda.mansouri6320@iau.ir
[2] Corresponding Author: Department of English Literature, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran;
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3507-2413; *Email:* bordbari@riau.ac.ir
[3] Department of English Literature, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran;
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9983-6737; *Email:* neg.sharif@iau.ac.ir

1. Introduction

Buchi Emecheta, from 1944-2017, was one of the most significant writers of African women's literature in the twentieth century. In her works, she explores themes such as colonialism, patriarchy, migration, racism, gender discrimination, and the oppression of African women specifically.

Literary critics have recognized the importance of Emecheta's novels to African feminist and postcolonial discourse due to her emphasis on the oppression of women both in Africa and abroad (Petersen, 1992). In this study, the term "colonialism" refers not only to the period of British colonial rule in Nigeria but also to the consequences of colonization.

This study focuses on *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), which portray women living under different yet interconnected forms of oppression. *Second-Class Citizen* depicts the life of Adah, whose journey to London exposes her to racism, poverty, and gender-based oppression, thereby forcing her to confront her place as a Black woman in a deeply stratified society. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego represents a woman whose identity is shaped by the belief that motherhood is the ultimate source of fulfilment for women. This idea, in turn, leads her to self-sacrifice, suffering, and disappointment. Therefore, the novels demonstrate that women's identities are shaped within systems of domination that are normalized through ideas of respectability, duty, and self-worth.

Previous research on Emecheta's literature has represented a lot of valuable information about motherhood, migration, resistance, and economic agency; however, this study examines psychological aspects of domination. This research intends to investigate how colonialism and patriarchal systems affect the psyche of women, apart from affecting their life conditions.

Although oppression can be seen as a sociopolitical phenomenon, the current research is going to deal with the psychological dimension of oppression through the study of the internalization processes which lead to feelings of inferiority and self-loathing in the female characters. To achieve this objective, the current research will employ three major theoretical perspectives: Frantz Fanon's theory of psychological colonization, Patrick Colm Hogan's theories of practical identity and emotion, and Suzanne Keen's theory of narrative empathy.

2. Literature Review

The works of Buchi Emecheta have received considerable academic scrutiny, mainly from the perspectives of feminism, gender, and postcolonial literature. Her portrayal of African women in patriarchal and colonial contexts and during processes of cultural change has been analyzed extensively by critics. Accordingly, there is a great deal of scholarship concerning topics like motherhood, gender roles, education, migration, and female resistance to oppression.

Feminist approaches play an important role in studying motherhood in Emecheta's work. Adesina and Jegede (2019) use feminist critical discourse analysis to examine motherhood alongside other socio-cultural and gender-related problems affecting women in *The Joys of Motherhood*. At the same time, Sindhu and Frederick (2021) emphasize the duality of the concept of motherhood: on the one hand, it is given great social significance, while on the other hand, it involves high emotional costs. Meanwhile, Dasari and Sakunthala (2021) as well as Frank (1982) pay special attention to women's inner lives and their complicated relationships with their daughters.

Early critics such as Umeh (1980), Bazin (1986), and Daymond (1988) suggest that Emecheta's fiction requires a distinct critical approach-one that does not rely on traditional perspectives developed largely through male viewpoints. For instance, Umeh emphasizes the psychological complexity of Emecheta's female characters and compares them to the more stereotyped images presented in novels by male authors. On the other hand, Bazin and Daymond focus on Emecheta's narrative techniques.

Additional researches have focused on exploring the role of gender in the construction of colonial history. Debates about *The Bride Price* and *The Slave Girl* (Abdul, 2019; Haroun, 2016) illustrate the connection between economic issues and colonial administration. Equally, studies such as those by Olufunwa (2003) and Charyulu (2016) examine the roles of education and migration in Emecheta's protagonists' struggles for independence. In more recent criticism, Mironenko (2018) and Sezer Toraman (2022) have focused their attention on diaspora and its influence on traditional power structures.

Despite the significance of this body of scholarship, most of the existing literature is still largely limited to sociopolitical theories and examines patriarchy and colonialism as external forces. While this perspective is significant, it risks treating identity as a product of purely

external systems. The internal cognitive processes that explain how oppression is internalized remain somewhat obscured.

Cognitive approaches to literature provide a useful means of examining the less visible psychological effects of oppression. Haraway (1988) draws attention to the cultural formation of subjectivity, while Keen (2008) explains how narrative techniques encourage readers to engage with characters both emotionally and intellectually. Bringing these perspectives into dialogue with postcolonial criticism, the present study uses Hogan's concept of practical identity, Fanon's account of colonial psychology, and Keen's theory of narrative empathy to examine how Emecheta presents domination as an inward as well as a social experience. This approach makes it possible to trace how colonial and patriarchal values become embedded in habits of thought, emotional responses, and forms of self-evaluation.

3. Methodology

This paper uses a qualitative and comparative approach to study Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* and *The Joys of Motherhood*. This analysis involves a comparison of these two novels because they represent different yet interconnected forms of oppression against women during the colonial and postcolonial periods. Whereas *Second-Class Citizen* centers on migration, racial discrimination, and marital inequality in diasporic Britain, *The Joys of Motherhood* focuses on issues relating to maternity, domesticity, and social expectations in colonial Nigerian society.

This paper uses close textual analysis of selected passages from the novels under study. The paper emphasizes those parts that clearly portray motherhood, displacement, racial discrimination, domestic responsibilities, humiliation, and emotions. When studying these parts, emphasis is placed on Emecheta's narrative voice, emotionally charged vocabulary, moments of introspection, and self-appraisal in order to show how the characters construct and reshape their identities in colonial and patriarchal contexts.

These moments will be analyzed by theories of Fanon, Hogan, and Keen as guiding frameworks. Focusing on their works will enable us to see how domination is internalized emotionally, habitually, historically, and societally. This makes it possible to view identity as an ongoing process of construction and deconstruction.

4. Theoretical Framework

In the current study, the central focus lies on utilizing the methodology of cognitive postcolonial analysis that aims at studying the impact of the colonizing and patriarchal system not only on the socioeconomic conditions but also on the cognitive perception, emotions and morality of the women. The literature in the field of postcolonial literary studies demonstrates that dominance in some cases does not manifest through power structures such as politics and the economy. It may also operate through the creation of mechanisms that make people see the world around them. The literature may provide an insight into the way the ideologies operate through thinking, emotions and morality.

In postcolonial discourse, the contribution of Frantz Fanon may be regarded as one of the first attempts at analyzing the psychological consequences of colonialism. In his work *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon states that "the black man possesses two dimensions: one with his fellow Blacks, the other with the Whites" (Fanon, 2008, p. 1), and he recognizes the separation as a result of the colonial project. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon asserts that decolonization changes the colonized individual completely and produces "new men" (Fanon, 1963, p. 36).

Thus, through Fanon's works, it may be seen that colonization is not only about domination but also about the creation of new forms of consciousness among colonized people. Colonialism changes the perception, identity and relations of the colonized subject with the social environment. Through cultural hierarchy, racial classification, and institutional authority, colonial discourse encourages the internalization of feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, and displacement.

The cognitive literary theory of Patrick Colm Hogan may shed further light on these insights. Hogan offers a useful framework for understanding how ideological systems become ingrained as cognitive and emotional habits of everyday life through his concept of practical identity. Hogan (2015) defines practical identity as "a complex of propensities and competencies that enable one's interaction with others in the social world" (p. 335). Through repeated social interaction, individuals learn socially conditioned modes of perception, emotion, and moral reasoning that are in line with cultural standards. Pride, shame, obligation, loyalty, and responsibility are organized by communal norms that prescribe how individuals understand their

roles in the family, community, and broader society. Such an approach therefore explains how systems such as colonialism and patriarchy become socially normalized through everyday cognitive practices that shape how individuals assess themselves and evaluate others. Cultural narratives, social expectations, learned behavioral responses, and emotional scripts can thereby become increasingly integral to a person's practical identity.

While Fanon and Hogan provide theoretical accounts of how power structures influence consciousness and identity, Suzanne Keen provides a way to understand how narrative form mediates readers' engagement with such experiences. In "Strategic Empathizing: Techniques of Bounded, Ambassadorial, and Broadcast Narrative Empathy," Keen explains that narrative techniques can encourage readers' emotional and cognitive engagement with fictional characters (Keen, 2008). In literary reading, empathy is influenced by narrative perspective, emotional framing, and the degree of familiarity or distance between readers and characters. By employing techniques such as focalization and interior monologue, along with rich emotional detail, narratives can create spaces in which readers may understand how characters process their experiences within particular social worlds. Keen identifies three varieties of strategic empathy: bounded empathy, which addresses an in-group; ambassadorial empathy, which addresses selected outsiders to cultivate empathy for an in-group; and broadcast empathy, which appeals broadly by emphasizing common vulnerabilities and hopes (Keen, 2008). Postcolonial literature employs narrative empathy that enables the reader to gain an understanding of the subjective experiences of characters within various cultural and historical backgrounds.

The works of Fanon, Hogan, and Keen are considered good examples of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of oppression in literature, as each author examines this phenomenon from psychological, social, and cultural viewpoints. Fanon looks into the effects of colonialism on consciousness and the development of inferiority complexes in colonized people; Hogan describes how ideology is formed in identity as the result of habitually performed social and emotional reactions; and Keen discusses ways in which literary means help to connect with inner experiences of fictive beings. These theoretical grounds form the basis for an analysis of *Second-Class Citizen* and *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta.

5. Discussion

What makes this study significant is the fact that it takes into account the interpretation of Emecheta's works beyond sociological or feminist realism interpretation, paying attention to the way in which Emecheta's novels are cognitive maps of colonialism and patriarchy based on emotional memory, narrative empathy, and practical identity. This study proves the point that oppression is maintained on the basis of emotional reasoning on an individual level and how resistance occurs once the oppression process is questioned. What is more, novels by Emecheta not only show how domination occurs, but also how normal emotions can turn into a means of oppression once internalization processes take place. This means that once the rules of motherhood and respectability are turned into emotional obligations, oppression does not have to be perceived as something forceful, since it turns into something taken for granted, leading to humiliation. By reading *Second Class Citizen* and *The Joys of Motherhood* from the perspective of practical identity and strategic empathy, this study shows how these internalized norms make the characters psychologically vulnerable. The narratives explain the characters' choices and reasoning through emotion while at the same time uncovering the psychological costs of those choices.

This reading supports Solberg's (1983) observation in "The Woman of Black Africa: Buchi Emecheta's Voice in the New Nigerian Novel", where he represents the hardships African women face and Emecheta's "denunciation of the ill effects of male dominance in Ibo society". Solberg's analysis helps us see how social and cultural environments shape people's inner feelings and influence how they think and feel within wider postcolonial and patriarchal realities.

5.1 The Joys of Motherhood: Practical Identity and Maternal Cognition

5.1.1 Gendered Labor, Emotional Cognition, and Narrative Empathy

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Patrick Colm Hogan's notion of "practical identity" (Hogan, 2015, p. 335) sheds light on Nnu Ego's inner life. Her self-image is constructed from societal expectations of motherhood, child-rearing and self-sacrifice, which are wrapped up in patriarchal

values and public scrutiny. These expectations create a psychological burden and come into sharp relief during the crisis following the birth of her twin daughters:

> The arrival of her new twin daughters had a subduing effect upon Nnu Ego. She felt more inadequate than ever . . . "God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage?" she prayed desperately. "After all, I was born alone, and I shall die alone. What have I gained from all this? Yes, I have many children, but what do I have to feed them on? On my life. I have to work myself to the bone to look after them; I have to give them my all. And if I am lucky enough to die in peace, I even have to give them my soul. . . When will I be free?" (Emecheta, 1979, pp. 186–187)

From this passage, the self is defined purely in terms of duty. The term "appendage" is key as it denotes how Nnu Ego sees herself not as a complete being, but rather as an appendage of masculine lineages. Even when faced with a point of crisis, Nnu Ego still judges herself according to the same standards which are the reason for her oppression. The transition in the passage, from physical labor- "I have to work myself to the bone"- to the "soul", shows how sacrifice has come to dominate her practical sense of self. What results is not only physical fatigue, but rather cognitive fatigue as well. Nnu Ego is clearly aware of the oppression she faces, yet is unable to imagine a life outside its terms. The question "when will I be free" goes beyond mere frustration. It is an indication of Nnu Ego's realization of how her identity has been limited through her role as a mother, societal responsibilities, and the pressure from her community.

This inner crisis is not limited to Nnu Ego's personal reflections; it also shapes how she perceives others. Since practical identity operates through habitual social practices and cultural conditioning, it reveals itself not only in her beliefs but also in her spontaneous reactions to others (Hogan, 2015, p. 335). One such case is where Nnu Ego first encounters her husband-to-be in relation to Ibuza masculine ideals:

> When in walked a man with a belly like a pregnant cow, wobbling first to this side and then to that. The belly, coupled with the fact that he was short, made him look like a barrel. His hair, unlike that of men at home in Ibuza, was not closely shaved; he left a lot of it on his head, like that of a woman mourning for her husband. His skin was pale, the skin of someone who had, for a long time, worked in the shade and not in the open air. His cheeks were puffy and looked as if he had pieces of hot yams inside them, and they seemed to have pushed his mouth into a smaller size above his weak jaw. And his clothes—Nnu Ego had never seen men dressed like that: khaki shorts with holes and an old, loose, white singlet. If her husband-to-be was like this, she thought, she would go back to her father. Why, marrying such a jelly of a man would be like living with a middle-aged woman! (Emecheta, 1979, pp.42-43)

This passage is crucial not simply because Nnu Ego perceives Nnaife as unattractive but because it reveals the culturally conditioned framework through which she reads gender. The weak, soft body she describes takes a kind of inventory of failed masculinity: the "belly like a pregnant cow," he wobbles when he moves, his face is "soft" and then "puffy," with a weak jaw and pale skin, he's hairy - rather than masculine hair like facial hair to show your virility but long hair indicating that you don't belong in Ibuza. It is, however, an issue of cognitive illegibility rather than revulsion. The body of Nnaife does not fit the embodied code of what a husband should be, as Nnu Ego knew from her experiences.

In this sense, the moment cannot be separated from how the narrative impacts the reader's reaction to Nnu Ego's judgment. Keen's idea of strategic empathy can help explain how this process takes place. First, Emecheta uses the strategy of engaging the reader with Nnu Ego's evaluation and makes it clear why the woman feels repulsed due to the collection of negative physical characteristics in the man. On the other hand, however, the scene goes beyond encouraging the reader's sympathy with Nnu Ego's disgust because Emecheta also emphasizes how culturally conditioned the woman's perception is.

For instance, the woman's perspective can be understood in light of traditional gender roles and an understanding of masculinity that is specific to village life but is challenged by colonial urban experience. Therefore, the scene can be read as an instance of strategic empathizing:

readers may register the force of Nnu Ego's disappointment while also recognizing the limitations of the cultural framework through which she perceives Nnaife (Keen, 2008)

5.1.2 Material Dependency and the Internalization of Colonial Hierarchy

After showing how colonial labor damages Nnaife's masculinity, Emecheta turns to a more intimate form of colonial power in The Joys of Motherhood: its effect on maternal judgment. She presents this not through a major political event but through a small domestic moment involving "a lot of old babies' clothes which [the Madam] had brought with her from her last visit to England" (Emecheta, 1979, p. 54). The scene shows that colonial power is not expressed through direct coercion but through pressures associated with necessity, comfort, and survival.

The scene begins with the physical quality of the clothes, which can be seen in the way that Nnu Ego reacts to them. They are old, but they are also "clean" and "beautiful and soft," and hence she forgot about "her pride" (Emecheta, 1979, p. 54). The significance of these points lies in the manner in which they emphasize the gap between the cultural values and reality. She must decline, yet the clothes are so comfortable and clean. Emecheta thus does not imply that colonialism consists merely of economic exploitation. Colonialism is also a system in which small comforts make dependency more acceptable.

The conflict is further emphasized when the text recalls Ibuza culture, stating that "in her culture only slaves accepted worn outfits for a newly-born baby" (Emecheta, 1979, p. 54). According to this tradition, every baby would be wrapped in a new hand-woven cloth and be celebrated via the birth rituals. Clothing was not just an object of daily use. It symbolized respect, dignity, and freedom. It also has the odious implication of lesser status. This contrast is utilized by Emecheta to demonstrate how compassion in a colonial, oppressive state forces Nnu Ego into her conflicting state through economic poverty under colonial conditions, which forces Nnu Ego into conflict with her inherited understanding of value.

The scene also depicts how this change is connected to urban space. Nnu Ego asks herself, "After all, who knew her in Lagos? She was just a mother among so many thousands of others" (Emecheta, 1979, p. 54). This moment represents the weakening of collective identity in the colonial city. In Ibuza, social customs were enforced because the gaze of others gave the behavior meaning. Anonymity alleviates that pressure in Lagos. Consequently, practices that

once formed identity start to lose their potency. Emecheta depicts the city as a particular space where colonial modernity both dismantles older social forms and leaves individuals more vulnerable to material moral compromise.

The language in the passage also conveys this inner change. While Nnu Ego convinces herself early on that "it did not matter very much," later on ", it did not matter" (Emecheta, 1979, p. 54) is all she can say. While "very much" may seem like a small omission, it is quite meaningful. This indicates that her resistance is weakening. If initially the excuse is somewhat half-hearted, it evolves into a broader acceptance. Emecheta shows how colonial conditions slowly redefine moral judgment and values through such delicate change.

Through Patrick Colm Hogan's concept of practical identity (Hogan, 2015, p. 335), this scene demonstrates how Nnu Ego's practical identity as a mother takes shape through practical action rather than belief. What defines proper motherhood depends on the rituals of dignity and respect, care and provision for children, but the poverty in colonial Lagos made it difficult to practice the practical aspect of an identity based on motherhood. This is the reason why the before and after binary is more than an idea of motherhood; it is performative identity. Therefore, it makes clear that Emecheta shows how identity is rewritten in the colonial setting, which demands certain sacrifices from women.

5.1.3 Motherhood, Economic Pressure, and the Courtroom Scene

The Joys of Motherhood allows Emecheta to reveal the difference between the cultural concept of motherhood and the suffering of Nnu Ego. While being a mother means to be respected and fulfilled, Nnu Ego's life turns into the story of growing economic hardship, emotional stress, and self-sacrifice. On one occasion, the narrator says: "Her love and duty for her children were like her chain of slavery" (Emecheta, 1979, p. 186). The chain is an important metaphor here because it transforms the meaning of motherly love from that of protection into the meaning of restriction. The "slavery" metaphor further proves the same, for it suggests both hard work and lack of freedom. In this way, motherhood becomes more of a constraint than an ideal. This moment can be understood through Hogan's concept of practical identity (Hogan, 2015, p. 335): the maternal role through which Nnu Ego has defined herself no longer provides the emotional meaning or social stability it promises and instead becomes a source of suffering and depletion.

This is not merely personal exhaustion, but exhaustion embedded in the colonial economy as women's labor is taken for granted and given a reduced value, while men's wage rates remain inadequate. At the same time, Nnu Ego recognizes that cultural expectation amplifies this suffering . Many of the men assume the role of commanding respect from women; they are in charge of the children, and women must strive to be respected by the children. "The men make it look as if we must aspire for children or die… it is still a man's world, which women will always help to build" (Emecheta, 1979, p. 187). The phrase "must aspire for children to die" is striking because it puts the thing that is supposed to be nurturing, to be emotionally rewarding, into pain and focuses on the failings of attachment rather than its strengths. Her idea that women help to build this "man's world" is also indicative of a conscious understanding that patriarchy is present not only in men's power, but in their forced adherence to patriarchal expectations of women. Based on Hogan's concept of categorial and practical identity, this passage shows Nnu Ego's increasing realization of the contradiction between her socially imposed identity as a mother and her personal identity.

In the concluding courtroom scene, this tension becomes more pronounced. Although Nnu Ego explains that she pays the children's school fees and helps to feed and clothe the family, she still interprets Nnaife's authority over her as legitimate. She attempts to defend his behavior, saying, "Well, he is a man, isn't he? Men are expected to be like that. My father—" (Emecheta, 1979, p. 217). The unfinished reference to "My father—" matters because it reveals how instinctively Nnu Ego interprets her husband's behavior through the model of masculinity represented by her father. The lawyer's exclamation, "We are talking about your husband, not your father" (Emecheta, 1979, p. 218), emphasizes the difference between Nnu Ego's traditional interpretive schema and the colonial discourse of law that calls for individual responsibility. This is further emphasized by Adaku's reply, "Nnaife does not own anybody, not in Nigeria today" (Emecheta, 1979, p. 218). The use of the word "own" indicates the way marriage is treated as property, and "not in Nigeria today" reflects the change and de-stabilization of traditional forms of authority in the context of colonial modernity.

Nevertheless, the scene also reveals the limitations of the change. Nnu Ego remains emotionally connected to the values of duty, marriage and motherhood regardless of everything that happens to her. By reading "mother" as a categorial identity, we can explain this contradiction. While the categorial identity of "mother" continues to organize the value of

women, Nnu Ego's experience of being a mother is shaped by hardship, restrictions and emotional exhaustion.

5.1.4 Cognitive Reflexivity, Internalization, and the Panoptic Logic of Motherhood

The concept of "narrative universals" by Hogan (2003) is useful in making sense of the impact of emotions in the story of Nnu Ego. As such, the emotional concerns of family responsibility, sacrifice, and loss appear to be recurrent. These concerns are not necessarily universal in a similar way, but the strength of the tragedy lies in their distortion through the colonial and patriarchal institutions that make for internal oppression. This internal element becomes especially evident when Nnu Ego comes to realize the part women play in sustaining those norms that oppress them: "But who made the law that we should not hope in our daughters? We women subscribe to that law more than anyone" (Emecheta, 1979, p. 187).

This is a rare case of cognitive reflection, where memory, emotions, and socialization interact with each other. The word "subscribe" carries a double meaning, whereby patriarchal law seems to be something outside but is also maintained by a system of learning that makes sacrifice a virtue and one's worthiness contingent on serving the oppressive order. Read through a cognitive postcolonial perspective, the moment also reveals the process of internalized domination; that is, Nnu Ego is not just restricted by rules "out there" but also evaluates herself according to standards produced by patriarchal authority. Her suffering is thus sustained by a received epistemology wherein sacrifice is rendered a virtue and self-worth is made dependent on service to an oppressive order.

The process of internalization could also be analyzed using Hogan's theory of practical identity (Hogan, 2015, p. 335). Being aware of herself as a woman based on a certain pattern of self-understanding that associates the value of a woman with her being a mother and confirms motherhood via giving birth to sons, Nnu Ego sees herself mainly as a mother. The practical identity is not the outcome of a personal choice; on the contrary, it is a cognitive-emotional structure acquired through repetition of certain social evaluations and reactions. In this sense, Emecheta presents maternal oppression as both a psychological and social phenomenon: there is no fulfillment, while sacrifice is habitual for Nnu Ego.

The persistence of patriarchy may also be analyzed in terms of panoptical mechanisms of marriage and family discussed by Tanrıtanır and Karaman (2020). In their analysis, the underestimation of the roles of women in marriage and the position of women in terms of social

subordination in marriage is highlighted. The panoptical approach of Tanrıtanır and Karaman (2020) serves as a useful addition to Hogan's approach and explains how social scrutiny may lead to self-regulation.

Marriage becomes a site of constant appraisal, and women anticipate judgment from the community, and they adjust themselves accordingly. Nnu Ego monitors her conduct, emotions, and desires in order to satisfy expectations of being "obedient" and "respectable." This process illustrates how socially acquired behaviors become embeded in practical identities. For women in this case, it is not simply an issue of following externally established norms, but of internalizing them as moral obligations. Self-monitoring thus becomes an emotional habit grounded in the fear of exclusion and the constant pressure of being judged in an environment where women's value lies only in domestic work and childbearing.

5.1.5 Adaku and the Reshaping of Practical Identity

Emecheta introduces a new kind of character through Adaku, who rejects conventional standards of value to make a radical break with the male-dominated world of the novel. As other characters navigate themselves through the patriarchal order, Adaku's act of breaking away is a consequence of a reconsideration of female value scripts. It is especially evident in her last conversation with Nnu Ego when she rejects the affective scripts of marriage and maternity: "I cannot live up to your standards, senior wife. So, I have to set my own" (Emecheta, 1979, p. 169). Later, Adaku reinforces this decision by describing the independent life she intends to build: "I want to be a dignified single woman. I shall work to educate my daughters, though I shall not do so without male companionship". "They do have their uses" (Emecheta, 1979, pp. 170-171).

When Adaku declares that she cannot "live up to" these expectations, she is doing more than just stating a failure of herself; in fact, she is exposing the fact that she feels oppressed by the very standards. The enforcement of these rules is done primarily by women who have already been oppressed within their position, as can be seen when Adaku refers to Nnu Ego as the "senior wife." By declaring that "So I have to set my own," Adaku achieves a cognitive shift: she defines her own standards instead of being held to patriarchy's standards.

Her aspiration to be a "dignified single woman" is a direct assault on the Ibuza tradition that asserts that a single woman equals failure or a stain on the family. By pairing "dignified" with "single," Adaku breaks the link between female honor and marital status. This is not just a

change of lifestyle, it is the process whereby "the 'thing' which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself" (Fanon, 1963, p. 37). Adaku's assertion, then, is a rejection of the ideologies that value women only in the eyes of men.

Unlike Nnu Ego, whose thoughts are still influenced by patriarchal ideology, Adaku realizes that this mode of thought is the reason for the pain women suffer and the way they oppress each other. It is for this reason that she decides to distance herself from it. Later, the narrator describes her new life:

> On that very day, Adaku was living up to the meaning of her name: 'the daughter of wealth.' She told Nnu Ego that she was giving up selling beans and peppers; she was buying a larger stall . . . She was leasing [her former stall] to someone who would pay her yearly. 'That will take care of my rent, at least,' she finished, laughing" (Emecheta, 1979, p. 170).

In this scene, social marginalization is transformed into economic agency. The phrase "living up to the meaning of her name" indicates that Adaku's identity is no longer tied up with her reproductive capacity but with her economic power. The material language of self-sufficiency is emphasized through the words "bigger," "leased," and "rent." Her comment about men "do have their uses" marks an arresting shift in the patriarchal narrative, that man was no longer the primary protagonist of women's world, but a tool for her use, without any need for them to rely on him for survival or identity.

From Hogan's perspective, Adaku's transformation reshapes practical identity itself. Her transition from a junior wife in a polygamous family to an independent entrepreneur demonstrates the potential of the cognitive reworking of identity in response to oppressive norms. She is not only oppositional but adaptive, to educate her daughters instead of mostly marrying and paying bride price. She is doing so - and making sure that the cognitive break she has gained can be passed on to the next generation.

Therefore, Adaku's departure is one of the novel's most radical acts of decolonial self-definition. She demonstrates how domination can continue to exist for as long as the emotional and cultural assumptions are not questioned. Her decision does not destroy any colonial or patriarchal systems established by itself, but it undermines the inevitability of such systems. Through Adaku, Emecheta suggests that profound resistance begins with the refusal of inherited

habits and with the insistence that identity is not a fixed script, but something that can be reclaimed and reshaped through self-definition.

5.2 Second-Class Citizen: Practical Identity under Racialization

5.2.1 Cognitive Dissonance and Diasporic Identity

Shifting from rural Nigeria to the immigrant experience in London, *Second-Class Citizen* dramatizes the psychological dimensions of racialized inferiority through Adah's first confrontation with the hostile domestic landscape of the metropole. Her arrival in London does not produce the dignity she had imagined; instead, it confronts her with a cramped and degrading space that immediately unsettles her sense of self:

> The house was grey with green windows. She could not tell where the house began and where it ended, because it was joined to other houses in the street… Francis opened the door into what looked to Adah like a tunnel. But it was a hall, a hall with flowered walls! It was narrow, and it seemed at first as if there were no windows. Adah clutched at Titi, and she in turn held her mother in fear. They climbed stairs upon stairs until they seemed to be approaching the roof of the house. Then Francis opened one door and showed them into a room, or a half-room. It was very small…. (Emecheta, 1983, p. 34)

Adah's inferior status as a racial subject begins to show in the arrangement of spaces within her new surroundings. The importance of the comparison between Lagos and London lies in the fact that, while Adah's life in Lagos is associated with relative independence, London stands for constriction and social restriction. The houses are described as "joined to other houses," organized into "straight rows"; the hall looks like "a tunnel"; finally, Adah finds herself trapped "in a room, or a half-room." In the series of increasingly restricting images, the physical space seems to shrink in on Adah. While the house does not open itself to Adah, it closes in on her and foreshadows the racial and social restrictions that will be imposed on her in London. The confinement of Adah in space becomes one of the first signs of the transformation from an independent and successful woman in Lagos into a racialized "second-class citizen" in London.

This domestic setting prefigures the more explicit assertion made by Francis:

> You must know, my dear young lady, that in Lagos you may be a million publicity officers for the Americans; you may be earning a million pounds a day; you may have hundreds of servants: you may be living like an élite, but the day you land in England, you are a second-class citizen. So, you can't discriminate against your own people, because we are all second-class (Emecheta, 1983, p. 36).

What Francis expresses is the conversion of the already visible reality into social knowledge, and hence, which results in the destabilization of Adah's self-concept and practical identity. In light of the distinction made by Hogan among practical identity, self-concept, and categorial identity (Hogan, 2015), the self she has built around aspiration and education is destabilized by a world that refuses to recognize those coordinates; migration brings not only disappointment, but a disjunction between "inner" and "outer" self, between a sense of identity and a sense of "second class."

This conflict can also be illuminated by Fanon's observation that "The black man possesses two dimensions: one with his fellow Blacks, the other with the Whites" (Fanon, 2008, p. 1). Although Fanon's immediate subject is the Black man, his account of divided racialized self-perception can be cautiously applied to Adah's experience as a Black woman. Adah's self-perception becomes divided as she is forced to experience herself through the racialized gaze of the metropole, which already presumes Blackness to be inferior. Inferiority, therefore, becomes a psychological consequence of an externally imposed social perception rather than an inherent personal quality.

Finally, Suzanne Keen's discussion of narrative empathy sheds light on readerly alignment in these moments of cognitive dissonance. The narrative evokes Adah's shock and disorientation as an emotional rather than an abstract fact, thereby inviting the reader into a strategic empathy (Keen, 2008), in which the reader may be drawn into Adah's emotional logic, but remains conscious of the racial and colonial structures that create her marginality.

5.2.2 Colonial Domination as a Cognitive Environment

Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* does not just portray racism and prejudice experienced by Black immigrants like Adah; it also shows the wider social context that influences one's way of life and thinking. Adah's diasporic experience exposes the friction within her practical identity as her social aspirations collide with racialized exclusion, most notably in her fantasies of dining in London restaurants:

> She usually walked along Finchley Road, looking at all the restaurant windows she passed. She used to tell herself that, when Francis qualified and she had become a librarian, Francis would bring her to such places to eat. She sensed that, in her case, it was an empty dream. Even if Francis did qualify, he would never have the courage to bring her to a restaurant to eat, not in London anyway, because he firmly believed that such places were not for blacks. Adah knew that his blackness, his feeling of blackness, was firmly established in his mind. She knew that there was discrimination all over the place, but Francis's mind was a fertile ground in which such attitudes could grow and thrive. Personally, if she had had the money, she would have walked straight into such places and was sure she would have been served. But what was the point of her dreaming about it, she had no money!" (Emecheta, 1983, p. 52)

This scene portrays the internalization of colonial inferiority as the key feature of the colonial subject's psyche, as described by Fanon (2008). Francis has not just embraced his position; he has created his own "common sense," his own mind the "fertile ground" where colonial exclusion has flourished. The restaurant is a boundary that Francis does not cross: it's a practice of the colonial power to be an internal regulator of behavior.

A cognitive postcolonial reading reveals a sharp difference between Adah's and Francis's practical identities in this scene. Francis' identity is constructed by anticipated rejection; by avoiding the restaurant, he excludes himself before any external rejection happens. Adah, on the other hand, demonstrates cognitive resistance. Her reasoning that money should be the key to access for services does not recognize racial barriers as natural. She is not yet in open revolt, but she is still thinking of being part of the "environment" which Francis has already given up and has already surrendered.

Emecheta presents Adah's desire and Francis's resignation in such a way that she makes the "cognitive environment" of colonialism an active force. Keen's concept of strategic empathizing helps explain this narrative effect: the narrative may align the reader with Adah's disappointment and encourage the reader to recognize her conflict as an effect of colonial power rather than a personal failure. (Keen, 2008)

5.2.3 Motherhood, Social Worth, and Internalized Expectations

The conflict in Adah's life escalates with her encounters with the patriarchal and colonial system which constitutes motherhood. The social value that Adah holds is not an abstract notion; rather, it is a performative need because she has to consistently show her value as a wife by having children, especially sons. This internalization of the patriarchal expectation can be seen in Adah's attempts to tell the nurse at the hospital about her position:

> Adah knew all that. But how was she to tell this beautiful creature that in her society she could only be sure of the love of her husband and the loyalty of her parents-in-law by having and keeping alive as many children as possible, and that though a girl may be counted as one child, to her people a boy was like four children put together? […] "Do you know, I'm making another one!" she volunteered, to show the nurse how good a wife she was. The nurse, who either did not understand, or whose idea of a good and valuable wife was different from Adah's, nodded but said nothing. (Emecheta, 1983, pp. 56–57)

This particular passage provides an important insight into Adah's practical identity. According to Hogan, Adah's effort to justify her pregnancy means that Adah's identity conforms to the socially learned patterns of her culture, despite her isolation in a London hospital. She is trapped in a rigid cognitive framework in which her sense of security and happiness depends heavily on having children and, particularly, keeping her son alive.

From a Fanonian perspective, the described situation can be viewed as an example of failure of recognition. Selfhood and human values in Black Skin, White Masks are discussed by Fanon in the light of the role of other people's recognition for their formation. Thus, Adah's willingness to inform the nurse about "another one" goes far beyond a formal statement and

becomes the means of making oneself understandable through a known manner of understanding norms, according to which being a mother is an indicator of female worthiness and a sign of marriage. However, the nurse's silence denies any recognition. What Adah sees as something meaningful becomes meaningless in this particular situation and shows the lack of stability of such selfhood that is built around the recognition through traditional means in an unknown and inequitable social environment.

Finally, Keen's concept of narrative empathy can be used to understand the power of this particular scene. The scene may draw the reader into the irony of the dialogue: Adah believes that she is validating her importance, but the nurse's silence suggests that her understanding of worth is not shared in this context. The vulnerability beneath her explanation exposes the profound isolation of Adah as a diasporic subject (Keen, 2008).

5.2.4 Communal Surveillance and the Scrutiny of Immigrant Life

Adah's resistance to colonial and patriarchal conventions is immediately subjected to communal surveillance, which acts as a form of social discipline and discourages her from deviating from the dominant immigrant norms. For Adah's Nigerian neighbors, her aspirations for independence and professional success are not seen as accomplishments but rather as a rejection of the shared expectations produced by their second-class conditions. This resentment is expressed in the following passage:

> In fact, to most of her Nigerian neighbors, she was having her cake and eating it. She was in a white man's job, despite the fact that everybody had warned her against it, and it looked as if she meant to keep it. She would not send her children away to be fostered like everybody else; instead they were living with them, just as if she and Francis were first-class citizens, in their own country. . . . Well, if they were going to be different from everybody else, they would have to go away from them. When the fact of Vicky's admission to the hospital became known, everybody kept looking at Adah with an "I told you so" sort of sympathy. (Emecheta, 1983, p. 63)

This incident can be read through Hogan's account of practical identity and its relation to the social environment. Given the idea that self-perception depends on the social and material

environment that one lives in (Hogan, 2015), the Nigerian community acts here as a restrictive "material environment" that forces Adah to adjust her perception of possibilities to the "second-class ceiling" set by her neighbors. The neighbors' surveillance "followed her every step" and "waited for her to falter" because it seeks to delegitimize aspirations.

Importantly, this form of social control echoes Fanon's description of internalized domination. Namely, the "gaze of the colonizer" operates within the colonized society itself. By punishing deviations, the neighbors guard the existing order of subordination which may be exposed as not inevitable but rather a product of compulsion (Fanon, 2008).

Moreover, Keen's concept of strategic empathy makes the affective power of the scene more explicit. In this regard, Emecheta makes the reader feel not just British racism but also the feeling of loneliness of the immigrant who does not follow the norms set by society: "waiting for her to stumble" evokes a claustrophobic atmosphere where Adah has to fight for her identity and existence in London. In this context, the "mental work" of endurance implies enduring the constricting scrutiny of one's own community (Keen, 2008).

In this situation, Adah's goals become immediately reinterpreted as a moral flaw, particularly at times of crisis such as Vicky's hospitalization, where previous indications of toughness are seen as irresponsibility. Emecheta demonstrates the way in which immigrant motherhood is judged against constantly changing standards and the ease with which a community can redirect criticism toward the mother herself.

5.2.5 Decolonization as Cognitive Reorganization

Adah's departure from Francis can never be described in terms of heroic escape. Through Emecheta, freedom is portrayed as difficult, costly, and materially precarious:

> So, Adah walked to freedom, with nothing but four babies, her new job and a box of rags. Not to worry, she had not sustained many injuries apart from a broken finger and swollen lips. She was treated at the Archway Hospital. Francis's parting words were that if Adah thought he was coming to see her and her brats, then he would rather she start thinking of him as a bastard. Adah was happy about this; she did not want to see him again, never on this earth (Emecheta, 1983, p. 153).

The irony in "Adah walked to freedom" is immediate. Adah's "freedom" is quantifiable in the sense that it consists of four children, a job and a box of rags. This is

not about the glorification of freedom but rather of its toughest aspects. The phrase "with nothing but" not only denotes poverty, but also pain in determining what things matter more than others. The specific nature of the objects is notable: "four babies" emphasize the burden of motherhood while "her new job" is the first thing Adah claims for herself. The "box of rags" is perhaps the hardest part -her domestic life stripped of all values and dignity but still portable.

Emecheta avoids sentimentality in the scene through the focus on physical violence. The injured finger and swelling lips are tangible proof of the price of leaving behind her family. The notion of strategic empathy advanced by Suzanne Keen can be applied here: Emecheta's depiction of Adah's injury might prompt the reader to reflect on the physical price of survival (Keen, 2008).

The derogatory name of "brats" that Francis gives to his children leads to another important reaction by Adah: "Adah was happy about this." As Hogan notes, this indicates a change in practical identity since Adah stops considering Francis' acknowledgment as necessary to her practical identity and future actions (Hogan, 2015). In terms of Fanon, this choice can be interpreted as rejection of domination inside the subject rather than as an actual freedom from inferiority (Fanon, 2008). Yet, Emecheta does not provide any easy solution to this issue either. The fact that Adah discovers later that she has already been pregnant for three months proves that she carries in her body the burden of that past which she was trying to abandon (Emecheta, 1983, p. 153). Decolonization, thus, becomes for Adah a painful process of reorganization of practical identity.

6. Conclusion

Colonialism and patriarchy have been examined in Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* and *The Joys of Motherhood* as both exterior phenomena within the society and interior processes of enduring and resisting them. By means of applying the cognitive postcolonial approach and analyzing the ideas developed by Patrick Colm Hogan, Frantz Fanon, and Suzanne Keen, the presented study demonstrates how domination works through imposing certain normative expectations regarding obligation, value, and self-concept.

While *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Second-Class Citizen* trace similar yet different paths of emotion and cognition, the character of Nnu Ego acquires her practical identity within the culture of sacrificial mothering, which highlights the psychological price of organizing one's practical identity according to patriarchal expectations. Conversely, Adah's personal development within Second-Class Citizen is related to increasing disharmony between her aspirations and her expectations based on racism and patriarchy. Awareness of being "second-class" disorganizes Adah's practical identity and promotes her resistance to domination.

Notably, this study has also uncovered the instances of cognitive resistance in Emecheta's literature. For example, the character of Adaku refuses to identify with the stereotypes of women's value being linked only to motherhood and self-sacrifice. Likewise, Adah resists the social roles and the oppressive identity that have been imposed on her by her husband, her immigrant community, and the racially charged atmosphere in Britain. Here, the cognitive notion of strategic empathy proposed by Keen explains the way Emecheta's narratives might prompt readers to empathize with the suffering and cognitive resistance experienced by her characters.

In Emecheta's novels, oppression becomes not only the force that acts on the self but also a complex network of beliefs, emotions, and habits that is part of it. Through its cognitive approach to liberation and oppression, Emecheta's literature demonstrates the impact that colonial and patriarchal structures have on one's understanding of duty, identity, and possibilities. Consequently, such an approach explains why the process of liberation is so intimate and painful for Emecheta's characters. It is clear that in the context of cognitive criticism, Emecheta's fiction implies that freedom can be attained neither via social nor political means alone.

Declaration

We confirm that this work is original and is not under consideration by any other journal.

Transparency Statements

The datasets analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all those who contributed to the completion of this project.

Declaration of Interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Funding

No funding was received for this study.

Ethical Consideration

This manuscript adheres to the ethical guidelines provided by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) for ensuring integrity and transparency in the research publication process.

References

Abdul, Z. K. (2019). Bride value: A feminist reading of Buchi Emecheta's *the Bride Price*. *Language Literacy: Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Language Teaching, 3*(2), 201–206.

Adesina, O. O., & Jegede, O. O. (2019). A feminist critical discourse analysis of Buchi Emecheta's *the joys of motherhood*. *Journal of English and Literary Studies*, 72–100.

Bazin, N. T. (1986). Feminist perspectives in African fiction: Bessie Head and Buchi Emecheta. *The Black Scholar*, *17*(2), 34–40. https://dx:doi.org/10.1080/00064246.1986.11414397

Charyulu, G. M. (2016). Women and motherhood: A study on Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*. *Journal of the English Literator Society*, *1*(4), 296–300.

Dasari, N. B., & Sakunthala, S. S. V. N. (2021). The otherness of motherhood in the selected novels of Buchi Emecheta. *Galore International Journal of Applied Sciences and Humanities, 5*(4), 8–11. https://doi.org/10.52403/gijash.20211002

Daymond, M. J. (1988). Buchi Emecheta, laughter and silence: Changes in the concepts "woman", "wife" and "mother". *Journal of Literary Studies*, *4*(1), 64–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/02564718808529852

Emecheta, B. (1974). *Second-class citizen*. Allison & Busby.

Emecheta, B. (1979). *The joys of motherhood*. Heinemann International.

Emecheta, B. (1983). *Second-class citizen*. George Braziller.

Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth* (C. Farrington, Trans.). Grove Press.

Fanon, F. (2008). *Black skin, white masks* (R. Philcox, Trans.). Grove Press.

Frank, K. (1982). The death of the slave girl: African womanhood in the novels of Buchi Emecheta. *World Literature Written in English, 21*(2), 476–497.

Haraway, D. (1988). Reading Buchi Emecheta: Contests for women's experience in women's studies. *Inscriptions, 3–4*, 107–124.

Haroun, M. A. N. (2016). Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl*: An Afrocentric discourse. *Egyptian Journal of English Language and Literature Studies, 7*(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.21608/ejels.2019.123252

Hogan, P. C. (2003). *The Mind and Its Stories: Narrative Universals and Human Emotion.* Cambridge University Press.

Hogan, P. C. (2015). The psychology of colonialism and postcolonialism: Cognitive approaches of identity and empathy. In L. Zunshine (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of cognitive literary studies* (pp. 1–22). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199978069.013.0017

Keen, S. (2008). Strategic empathizing: Techniques of bounded, ambassadorial, and broadcast narrative empathy. *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, *82*(3), 477–493. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03374712

Mironenko, E. (2018). *The nature of motherhood in the works of Buchi Emecheta* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Charles University in Prague.

Olufunwa, H. (2003). Earning a life: Women and work in the fiction of Buchi Emecheta. In I. Hoving, F.-W. Korsten, & E. van Alphen (Eds.), *Africa and its significant others: Forty years of intercultural entanglement* (pp. 35–44). Rodopi.

Petersen, K. H. (1992). (Florence) (Onye) Buchi Emecheta. In B. Lindfors & R. Sander (Eds.), *Twentieth-century Caribbean and Black African writers: First series* (Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 117). Gale. https://www.gale.com/intl/databases-explored/literature/buchi-emecheta

Sezer Toraman, Ş. (2022). *Womanly experience in diasporic spaces: Buchi Emecheta and Emine Sevgi Özdamar* [Doctoral dissertation, Middle East Technical University].

Sindhu, T., & Frederick, S. (2021). Representation of the sorrow of motherhood in Buchi Emecheta's *the joys of motherhood. Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, *17*(3), 2308-2313.

Solberg, R. (1983). The woman of black Africa, Buchi Emecheta: The woman's voice in the new Nigerian novel. *English Studies*, *64*(3), 247–262. https://doi.org/10.1080/00138388308598254

Tanrıtanır, B. C., & Karaman, F. (2020). *Panopticism and Buchi Emecheta: A critical approach to women's role and marriage in terms of panopticism in Buchi Emecheta*. Hiperyayın.

Umeh, M. (1980). African women in transition in the novels of Buchi Emecheta. Présence Africaine*, 116, 190–201.*