

A Quest For A Better Life And Racial Discrimination In Buchi Emecheter's Second Class Citizen

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Abstract

Many black Africans migrate to Europe in search of a better life. However, they face different challenges in the process such as racism, rape, lack of accommodation in Europe. Thus, this study aims at examining how the quest for a better life and racial discrimination is portrayed in Buchi Emecheter's *Second Class Citizen*. The study adopts psychoanalysis theory to analyze the data. The findings of the study show that many Africans consider Europe as heaven, as a source of happiness as a place of freedom and enjoyment while Nigeria and Africa at large as hell. As a result, they want to go and have a better life in the West. Also, the findings show the extent to which Black Africans are racially discriminated there. They are considered inferior, unimportant by the whites, and nobody wants to even associate with them. The study identifies some implications of the findings and makes some recommendations for further studies.

Keywords: African-Europe migration; the quest for a better life; racial discrimination

INTRODUCTION

Migration involves the movement of people from one place, country, or locality to another with intention of setting permanently or temporarily at the new location. People migrate for a variety of reasons which include a quest for a better life, wealth, running out of poverty, violent conflict of some communities. In the process of migration, they experience displacement, extreme poverty, starvation, warfare and environmental degradation, family pressures which play out in different ways for men and women. Many Africans migrate to Europe and the West in general because they are not satisfied with what they have or the kind of life they leave in Africa. They think when they get to the West their lives will be improved. Recent statistics of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs shows that 26% (about nine million) of African migrants have moved to Europe. This constitutes about 12% of all international migrants on European soil. Many Africans face various challenges in trying to achieve their dream in the West like rape, racism, homelessness. Much like the process of globalization, migration is highly gendered and inflected by economic factors. Among the benefits of migration include a richer and more diverse culture which helps to reduce labour shortage. Some succeed in getting a better life there but many fail. What is generally left out is how to achieve those dreams and goals through migration.

Many Scholars and authors like Wole Soyinka (1963) in his poem *Telephone conversation* exposes the kind of racial discrimination blacks are facing in the West

as the result of migration, even after the passing laws against it. Also, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2013) in her novel *Americanah* shows racial discrimination against black Americans in America. Throughout the novel, the confusion of blackness creates tension for Adichie's character. Black Americans have less privilege in the American racial hierarchy. This has been the mentality of many Whites in the West. For instance, a European writer, Joseph Conrad clearly shows this in his book *Heart of darkness* by disregarding Africans. The author maintains the racist implication that Africa is an uncivilized land where Africans are seen as inhuman, animal and carnival. All these works show the challenges black Africans face while pursuing their dreams in the West.

Despite all the scholarly works to create awareness of the difficult lives that Africans face in Europe and the effort of the government to discourage and stop illegal Africa-Europe migration, the problem persists. Therefore, there is a need to create more awareness to let Africans see the difficulties involved in illegal migration to the West, to discourage and stop them from going there in search of a better life. Also, more awareness should be created to let African realize that better life could as well be found in Africa. To create more awareness, Emecheta in her book *Second Class Citizen* portrays a quest for a better life and racial discrimination using her character Adah. Therefore, the study aims to examine how Emecheta portrays the quest for a better life and racial discrimination in Europe in her book *Second Class Citizen*. To attain the objective, the study has formulated the following research questions

1. How does Emecheta portray the quest for a better life?
2. How does Emecheta portray Racial Discrimination?

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR AND SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

Florence Onye Buchi Emecheta was born in Lagos, Nigeria, to Igbo parents, Emecheta was orphaned in childhood. This circumstance inevitably forced her to marry early (at sixteen, in 1960) and by age twenty-two, she had become the mother of five children. Fleeing her oppressive marriage in 1966, Emecheta moved to a slum in London and struggled to support herself and her five children by working in the library at a British Museum. Although she has resided in Britain since 1962, Buchi Emecheta is generally known as Nigeria's most prolific woman writer. She has authored numerous novels, several children's books, and teleplays, and earned the undisputed place in African literature as a strident articulator of the female sensibility.

The *Second Class Citizen* by Buchi Emecheta is about the struggle of Adah (the main character) and her survival, not only for herself but also her dreams, while growing into a woman, moving from a high-class position in her native Nigeria. Adah has the dream of going to the United Kingdom to have a better life and change her way of living, though she is in high class in Nigeria. She sees the United Kingdom as a place of freedom and a place of having a better life. Therefore, she is questing for a better life. When Adah reaches the United Kingdom, she meets with racial discrimination. Adah and her family must live in a rundown neighbourhood when they arrived in London. Her husband, Francis, tells her: "Everyone is coming to London, the West Indians, the Pakistanis, and even the Indians so that African students are usually

grouped with them. We are all blacks, all coloured, and the only houses we can get are horrors like these" (page 35). The white English people view all Brown coloured foreigners as the same, and they make housing available in immigrant neighbourhoods for them, but not in neighbourhoods where English-born white people live. The English hold stereotypes that all brown people are the same and should be segregated in housing, medical care, and other areas.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive research design to solely describe the situation or case under study. It is a theoretically based research design that encompasses gathering, analyzing and presenting collected data. By implementing an in-depth research design like this, the research can provide insight into the how of research. It emphasizes the description of entities, processes and meaning that are not mathematically or statically examined or measured. It is because of this that the researcher chooses the method coupled with the nature of the study.

The study adopts psychoanalysis as a theoretical framework. The theory studies human's characters, motives, desires and conflicts encountered by categorizing the human mind into three: id, ego and superego. Based on the postulation of this theory, it is applicable to this work because the psychological criticism can also focus on the characters of the work, analyzing their motives, desires and conflicts even though these characters are fictional. Furthermore, psychoanalytic criticism is also applicable to the issue of racism to study the psychological effect that gives birth to racial discrimination.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Quest for a Better Life

Emecheter portrays the quest for a better in the text by showing the West particularly the United Kingdom like heaven, and a source of happiness while Africa is a hell. Emecheter compares the United Kingdom with heaven which every person wants to be. The people of the Ibuza community where Adah come from seeing the United Kingdom as special. They see people who come from the United Kingdom as Messiah. All the love that they have for the United Kingdom makes them see it as heaven. They consider going to the UK just like visiting God. This is to say they see the United Kingdom as an important place and place of a high level of happiness and having a better life. Also, it is a place where one's problem will be solved since is like visiting God and when one visits God, his problem will be solved. For example, when the Ibuza women were preparing for the arrival of the town first lawyer from the United Kingdom, the title the United Kingdom when pronounced Adah's father sounded so heavy, like the type of noise associated with a bomb. The women of the Ibuza community bought identical cotton material from the UAC department store and had it made into lappas and blouses of the same style. They dyed their head, and straighten it with Combs to make it look European. These women were so proud of the new lawyer because to them it meant the arrival of their own Messiah.

To Adah's father, going to the United Kingdom must sure be like visiting god, the United Kingdom be like heaven. The love that Adah has for the United Kingdom,

became part of her life, her everyday-dream is the United Kingdom. And also in real life, people have dreams of going to heaven. Although Adah is working at the library and she is among the first-class citizen in her community, she still sees the United Kingdom as a better place for having a better life. For instance, when Adah and her husband Francis were sitting in the room, Adah said to Francis that she has a dream of going to the United Kingdom why won't they go since they can afford it. As seen in the text.

"I have been thinking; Adah said all of a sudden ' I used to dream that one day I would go to the United Kingdom, why don't we save and go now that we. Shall be able to afford it? (Page 27)

Lastly, the United Kingdom like heaven makes one proud to be there. If you will be opportune to go to heaven, is something to be proud of. Their People go to the United Kingdom for various reasons. Adah believes that she may not come back a millionaire but she would come back with pride. Since people see the United Kingdom as a place of having a better, so when you go, you will have a better life and when you come back, people will see you as a person that is enjoying his life. So Adah will be proud of being in the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom as a Source of Happiness

Emecheter portrays the quest for a better life in the text by showing the United Kingdom as a source of happiness. Many people want to be happy so the United Kingdom is a place of happiness and a source of happiness because having an education in English schools is a way of having freedom in life. To the people of the Ibuza community, if any child attends an English school is seen as a successful person. Thus, Ada wants to go the UK to have the best education. For instance, when Adah brother started school at Ladi Lak institution, an English school this was the time when Adah dream started to nudge her. Whenever she took her brother to school, she would stand by the gate and watch all her friends since she is not opportune to be at the school. As seen in the text

“She likes the school because it English school and the best school in the society. The proprietress was trained in the United Kingdom this makes the school best among others” (page 9)

Emecheter also shows the United Kingdom as a place of civilization by making the Europeans and people who live with them like civilized people who always come to the African society with new things. When the Europeans come to the Ibuza community, the people in the community see the Europeans as special people, so they make special things for the Europeans arrival. The Ibuza people will be willing to see these European, they see the Europeans as civilized people and people who are having a better life, and this makes some of the Ibuza people quest for that better by wanted to move to Europe countries to have a better life. For example, Ibuza women a day went to a wharf, these happy women to welcome someone who had been to have a taste of that civilization; the civilization which was soon afterwards to hook them all, like opium. These women see the United Kingdom as a place of civilization. As it is in the text,

“The European arrival to Ibuza gaped at them; they had never seen anything like it before, the climax of it all was when an Englishman took their photograph.”(Page 16)

Also, the United Kingdom as a source of happiness shows the United Kingdom is a place of enjoyment. Emecheter portrays the quest for a better life in the text by pointing and showing how people who live in the United Kingdom have a luxurious life. Since Adah sees the United Kingdom as a Pinnacle of ambition and she is allowed to go, she went to Francis mother, who appealed to her to allow her to go, she makes an example with various women who had been to England and show how they are living in luxury life. She has to tell Francis’ mother that people in the United Kingdom are living luxurious life, not like people in Nigeria. One can say that Adah is showing that if you go to the United Kingdom you will be rich. So she is creating a way to convince Francis mother to allow her to go because the United Kingdom is a place of changing life which can be from bad to good life. For instance, after Francis went to the United Kingdom, Adah went to Francis mother appealed to her to look at all the women who had been to England, pointing out those facts that they all drove their cars showing that they will be rich when they get there. As seen in the text,

"Think of it Ma Francis in his big American car and I in my small one coming to visit you and Pa when you retire." (Page 35)

Lastly, the United Kingdom as a source of happiness in the text shows the United Kingdom is the pinnacle of ambition. Each person has his ambition so to the people of the Ibuza community; the United Kingdom is the place for achieving their ambition. Adah wanted to go to the United Kingdom because to Adah, her arrival in the United Kingdom will be the highest point of her ambition. Mostly, many people are born with ambition so for Adah, to be in the United Kingdom will make her achieve her ambition. For instance, As the talk about Nweze's arrival (the lawyer) went on for month and month. Adah talked about him to all her friends at school telling them that he was her cousin. Well, everybody talks big, so she might as well. But she made a secret vow to herself that she would go to this United Kingdom. Her arrival there would be the Pinnacle of her ambition. As shown in the text.

"Adah made a secret vow to herself that she would go to this United Kingdom one day, her arrival there would be the Pinnacle of her ambition” (Page 17)

Africa as a Hell

On the other hand, Emecheter portrays Africa as hell in the text by showing how people in Nigeria suffer from poverty, misery among others. These make them quest for a better life in the United Kingdom since it is seen as a place of a better life. The author shows that females suffer in Nigeria just as Adah suffered in her house. When Adah's father died, she suffered and that did not stop Adah from achieving her dream she usually goes to the housework and manages to go to school as she will finish and go to the United Kingdom to have a better life. Emecheter shows how people in Nigeria are suffering which makes their quest for a better life. For instance, when Pa Noble is in Nigeria, he complaint that he never wore clothes until he was taken into the army. Yes, he said all children in Nigeria were brought up like that suffering. As it is in the text,

“There was no food, people died of dysentery every day” (Page 102).

Racial Discrimination against Blacks

Emecheter portrays racial discrimination by showing the blacks are not important in Europe, blacks are inferior in the United Kingdom and People are categorized based on their races in the United Kingdom.

Blacks are not Important in Europe

Emecheter portrays racial discrimination in the text by showing how Blacks are considered unimportant in the West. There, the blacks are less regarded in terms of everything in life, for instance. In London, blacks do not live in the same place as the Whites, their accommodation is usually not as good as that of the whites. For instance, when Adah arrived in the United Kingdom, she sees most of the houses seemed to have the same curtains for their windows. 'They all look like churches; you know; monasteries; Adah remarked. They build their houses like that here because is not as plentiful as it is in Lagos. 'We may never be as bad as this. Jammed against each other.' Francis did not make any comment but opened the door for her. He opened another door and shows them into a room or a half room, it was very small with a single bed. Adah manages to ask “are we going to live here?”. As seen in the text

"Francis opens the door into what looked to Adah like a tunnel. But it was a hall with the flowered wall. Francis opened another door and shows them into a room or a half room, it was very small with a single bed. Adah manages to ask are we going to live here.” (Page 41)

This shows that although many Africans dream of a better in the West, they may not necessarily get it there. Some of the houses they live in Africa are better than the ones they live in London. The blacks cannot stay with their children in the country, their children are rejected in the society. To the Europeans, Blacks and coloured cannot live with their children in the country even if they are rich. Landlords do not allow their black tenants to be in the house with the children. For example, before Adah comes to the United Kingdom, the landlord and landlady warned Francis that it was going to be difficult for Adah to be with her children in the United Kingdom. As seen in the text,

“They consoled themselves with the fact that after all the children would not stay with their parents at home.” (Page 52)

Accommodations are for the Europeans not for the blacks even if a landlord is willing to give once he noticed that the tenants are blacks, he will not give. Adah and Francis had to look for another place to live. Adah would read and re-read all shop windows with advertisements, nearly all the adverts had 'sorry no coloured on them. Every door seemed barred against them nobody would consider accommodating them even when they are willing to pay double of the normal rent. They had one hopeful experience but they were rejected as soon as it was known they are blacks and they have children. As shown in the text.

"Every door seemed barred against them nobody would consider accommodating them even when they are willing to pay double of the normal rent." (Page 77)

Generally, blacks are considered inferior in the West. The Europeans believe that the blacks are different from them and can never be the same as them. Also, the Europeans believe that the blacks are penile agenesis. To the Europeans, African men are not having a penis. They do not see Africans as equally human because they racially discriminate against them. For example, the old Nigerian Mr Noble left his family in Benin and come to England to read law, but he failed to make it. He searched for work in all the offices his disappointed mind could think of, but with no success. His mates ask him to remove his trousers they want to see whether the Africans have tails or not. As seen in the text,

"On one occasion, Mr Noble was asked to remove his trousers. His mates the whites wanted to see whether the Africans have tails or not." (Page 90)

The Europeans believe that the blacks are different from them; they even consider animals are better than the blacks in the United Kingdom. To them, their dogs are even better than Africans, as it is better to let the dogs kill the blacks than the blacks kill the dogs. For instance, when Francis later starts working at the post office in the United Kingdom, he said to his wife Adah that the most frightful part of the whole business of the Post office job during Christmas was the English dogs the Europeans favoured their dogs more than Africans. As seen in the text.

"They love dogs, the English do. Yes, they would rather the dog butcher a black than let a black man kill the dog." (Page 140)

People are Categories in the United Kingdom

Emecheter portrays racial discrimination in the text by unveiling how people are categorized in the UK based on their race, colour or ethnic background. Different groups of people come to the UK for various purposes. The West Indian, Pakistanis and even the Indians, and African students are usually grouped. However, the blacks are seen as different people in the eyes of the Europeans. The blacks suffer the most at the hands of the Europeans. For example, when Adah see their accommodations in the United Kingdom, she managed to ask Francis whether they are living in a house that looks like a tunnel and Francis told her that accommodations are very short in London especially for black people. As shown in the text,

"The west Indian, Pakistan and even the Indians, and African students are all blacks and coloured and are usually grouped " (Page 41).

In the United Kingdom, people are also arranged into rankings based on socioeconomic factors like wealth, income, education, and power. Unfortunately, only Europeans are having power, wealth and education. Therefore, the Europeans are the first-class citizen of the country and only first-class citizens can live with their children, not the blacks. No matter how rich or educated black is, he is not first class in the country therefore he cannot live with his children in the country. Even if the

blacks are with their children in the United Kingdom, they have to take the children to the Foster mother on which the children will be living with the foster mother. For instance, when Adah did not agree to take the children to foster mother, then the landlord started intimidation. The children must leave the house. He even took it upon himself to advertise for a Foster mother for them. Another couple, the Ojos, who had left their four children behind, advised Adah to send hers back to Nigeria. Everybody talks and speculates. As seen in the text,

"Only first-class lived with their children, not the blacks ‘ (Page 52)

The blacks are seen as inferior no matter how rich people are, some things are mainly for the blacks and there are things that are mainly for the whites. Even if the blacks can afford what is meant for the whites, they cannot get it because of the racial discrimination that exists between people. For example, the mortgage is mainly for the whites not for the blacks even if the black can afford it because the whites are racially discriminating against the blacks. For instance, when Pa Noble was pensioned off by the railway authority, he decided to face reality by investing his money in buying an old Terence house. He could not in any way get a mortgage, and so had to buy cash own. As seen in the text.

"Mortgage and things like that were for the fully employed, the young and at that time mainly for whites." (Page 91)

Moreover, the categorization of people in the United Kingdom, makes the Whites have control over the Blacks in the country. The whites are proud of living in their country, they see that anybody that is not white can never be part of them or control them even if he is in a better position of controlling them. Therefore, the Whites have to live the way they like in the country. For instance, when Mr. Noble who is black asked his tenants to increase their rent for him to reconstruct the house, they refuse to increase the rent and refuse to move out because they are whites and is their country. As seen in the text,

"It was the law. You could not evict a controlled tenant; you could not increase their rent, not even when you wanted to use the money for improvement.” (Page 92).

DISCUSSION

Emecheter portrays the quest for a better by showing that the United Kingdom is like heaven, the United Kingdom as source of happiness while Africa is a hell. Usually, many Africans see Western countries as countries of having a better life. These make them create various ways to migrate there to have a better life. They see Africa as a place of suffering so they have to leave because to them moving out of Nigeria or any African country is just like moving out of suffering. The findings relate to the psychological criticism theory which focuses on the motives, desires and conflicts of the characters. The postulation of this theory could be explained by the desire of the main character of the text which instigates her to migrate to the U K in her quest for a better life. Also, the theory explains the psychological patterns and effects of Europeans which makes them racially discriminate against the blacks. The findings of the study are in line with the findings of Abidamaiga (2018) on racial discrimination in Emecheter's second class citizen which reveals that race always

matters in the English society because it is responsible for the networks of oppression such racism.

CONCLUSION

The study examines the quest for a better life and racial discrimination in Emecheta's *Second Class Citizens*. The findings of the study show that many Africans consider Europe as heaven and a source of happiness as a place of freedom and enjoyment while Nigeria as hell. So they want to go and enjoy or have a better life. Also, the findings show the extent to which Africans are racially discriminated against in Europe. They are considered inferior, unimportant by the whites, and they do not even want to associate with the blacks. Based on the findings, the better life is not achieved by many Africans in the United Kingdom because they end up with discrimination, disgrace, abuse, abandonment etc. To avoid such misfortunes, Africans should not migrate to the West, especially through illegal means, in search of a better life because a better life could also be achieved in Africa and Nigeria in particular. This study is limited to two themes, the quest for a better life and racial discrimination, further studies can examine themes like feminism and intercultural communication in Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*. Despite the limitations, the study creates awareness on the misfortunes faced by many Africans in search of a better life in the West. It could also be an eye-opener for many Africans to remain and develop their countries.

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