

African Diaspora: Dreams, Desires, Distress and Existential Enigma in Emecheta's Second Class Citizen

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Abstract

The deliberations, debates and discussions on the advent and repercussions of colonialism, post colonialism and its effects have been done by numerous authors, both male and female across the globe. There is one opinion that all these writers hold for sure, colonialism is no curse, it is no bane but not a boon too. They choose to sit on the fence. One cannot exactly come to conclude that these writers have begun to accept the change of the western world but at the same time, the loss of one's roots is imminent and evident. There is a decay over the lost past but still the future is hopeful and optimistic for them. The paper traces the dreams of Ada and how she had wanted to get to England and live the life of her colonizers despite being a second class citizen herself.

Key Words : Colonization, Education, Gender, Culture

There have been strong anthropological evidences and references about the origins of migration and displacement. The first scientific proof to be accepted as authentic is the migration of Siberian hunters roughly twenty thousand years ago, precisely during the ice age from Asia to America on foot to escape the climatic conditions and its hostility. Being a man, being able to migrate rests on two theories, the ability to move from one place to another, and the ability to

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reproduce. After the advent of civilization and progress, the first migrants were agriculturalists who moved from one place to another to expand their cultivation techniques and changing habits by getting themselves mixed up with a new population and getting to adapt their practices and establish settlements which are called Demic Diffusion. There is another aspect to it called the Cultural Diffusion, where ideas and practices are carried forward to a new land. The most feasible example is the use of trade and commerce to carry the cultural ideas and identity of one country to another. The hunter gatherer system gave rise to migration and settling down at establishments so as to increase production and supply through farming. On the whole, migration is both a social and a biological necessity. In the later times migration meant moving to less inhabited lands or settling down with people where population was the lowest. The Germanic Eastward Migration can be seen as the most palpable example to show mass migration with people settling down at cities for the purpose of political or religious reasons. A large chunk of German population had moved from Germany between the ninth and the fourteenth centuries to get themselves settled over Central and Eastern parts of Europe and this led to the seeds of displacement and a tiff with the local population. Massimo Livi Bacci in his work, A Short History of Migration gets to define the gradation of migration.

Man has widely spread over the face of the earth and must have been exposed during his incessant migration to the most diversified conditions. The inhabitants of Tierra del Feugo, The Cape of Good Hope and Tasmania in the one hemisphere and of the arctic regions in the other must have passed through many climates and changed their habits many times, before they reached their present homes. (1)

The Golden Revolution, an adage used to refer to the age of queen Elizabeth is one of its kind to perpetrate and support sea faring and voyages. In a way it is migration that gave rise to

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colonization and now the syndrome has reinvented in the name of globalization carrying cultures through commerce. *Second Class Citizen* by Buchi Emecheta, the debut novel of her which explores the pangs of being transported to an alien land far from the home culture and the way Ada managed to navigate and survive the horrors of being married and the problem of being a migrant. There is a tone of existence that looms over the entire novel for the very title, is expanded from the *Second Sex*, and analyzes the idea of migration through the dimensions of race, class and sex. The word second has a more deep meaning, women or Eve, biblically created second from the rib of Adam is prone to struggles and abuses ever since she has been born and still seen as inferior and a weaker sex from the cultural and patriarchal codes of conduct.

There have been many historical instances of migration where it is men who are kept at the center, who come to new lands seeking greener pastures for they are driven by penury, social and familial pressures and necessities and even fearing religious persecution. *Second Class Citizen* as a novel has its own uniqueness for it speaks of the struggles women have to confront in case they desire to be independent after education and employment in a foreign country. The novel is an eye opener to the readers who wish to migrate to a new land clinging on to their husbands. They are fine and good if the marriage works but in case it turns out to be a disaster then it is the woman who has to rebuild her identity not as the head of a family but as a second class citizen. The word class, is a Marxist term to designate the ones who are inferior in terms of economics and social strata. The author is deemed a second class because she is a woman and more than that she is a black migrant, an idea which was new for a woman during the aftermath of the Second World War. The *second Sex* forms the crux of all the writings of women after the world wars and in a way Emecheta has drawn metaphoric references from the book to make her novel become a testimony of the problems of women in case they are to get

educated or get to a different frontier across the world. The quote from the work, *An Analysis of Simone De Beauvoir's The Second Sex* written by Rachele Deni gives an explication to the aforesaid idea.

De Beauvoir exploits her arguments of women as inferior through three frames of reference. The first is historic materialism, which addresses the influence of social and economic conditions and class on shaping history. She then employs existentialism a philosophy that emphasizes personal freedom and choice in a world where there is no God or other higher power. Then she brings psychoanalysis in examining the underlying causes of human behavior. (10)

Ada, the central character of the novel, a name which she feels is a familiar one, the one which could be pronounced by people from her own country, the Ibo clan and also by the English is pulled down by two opposing forces, the necessity to break her martial ties and become independent because she feels that it is marriage that has made her weak as a person and as a woman. The other is the force of being able to survive as a woman in a foreign land, which means she has to take care of herself and her children without going back home and also prove herself that she is capable to confront the country where she had come as a migrant. The novel is a way presents her transition from being a migrant to becoming a citizen. To make the journey fruitful she had walk out of the most important taboo, a woman could move to another country only with the help of a man and could not live there without him, in case she does it would be unsafe for herself and the children. One of the reasons the author begins the story of when Ada is eight years old is to make sure that how her dream, had made her travel thus far and how she had made sure that the dream would not turn to a nightmare. Even before the story begins, even much before the ball sets rolling there is one important idea that the author wants to establish, the

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way men and women are treated in Africa in general and Ibo clan in particular are not just the same. There is always a graph, a similar crest and trough that runs across almost all the novels of Emecheta, the autobiographical vein which tells her that she must stand up for herself and the necessity becomes when she finds her father die a sudden untimely death, leaving her and her family under their uncle who exploit her and treat her as an object.

The very first word of the novel begins with a pronoun, it, which does not clearly signify what the author certainly wanted to communicate. There is yet another paradox added to the word it when she says that the dream began without no actual hint of where the dream would end or take her to. Even in one of the interviews Emecheta had confessed to the fact that she had been brainwashed about the U.K that the country was a paradise and a visit there would mean paying a visit to the good God. The novel begins much like a fairy tale where England is shown as a fairyland but when the plot progresses, the readers come to understand the fact that truth is much more stranger than fiction. The word elite, the title of her second chapter forms the crux of the storyline. It is well known and widely accepted that Africa had been one of the poorest countries around the world and migration, historically began there among the other places across the globe.

Two important cultural confrontations are discussed initially, the first is the way education is seen as the passport to migration and financial success and the other is the manner by which colonialism is becomes more replete and modern. There is a mention of an attorney upon whom the entire community pin their hopes on. He is, their representative, someone whom they believed would fight for their rights and needs. The entire town gathers to welcome the lawyer Nweze and Ada wanted to make it for the welcome. He was one of those many professionals who had gone abroad, to the U.K to make a mark there and return to his country to

flaunt his degree and inspire the rest of the crowd to get there. All that Ada understood was one thing, she needs to get herself equipped and education was the only way to get to England.

On the planes of topography, there is a shift from rural backdrop to urbanization with Lagos left to lurch and the people trying to shift to Ibadan, the model city where many professionals relocated. It was a place which was to develop in terms of roads and electricity. Ada was not complacent, she wanted money and wanted to pride herself that she would go abroad and then come back home explaining all and sundry that she has realized her dreams. The same idea gets reflected in her work, *Joys of Motherhood*, where she finds Africans incompetent because the job market after colonization demands education and the hunter gathering which had been the profession of men, with women working in the fields have now been replaced with offices and factories. Ada chose to get to school refuting her parents' demands to stay at home. It was a time when women were not educated and felt that the least education she could get is to know to read and write along with little arithmetic. Her brother had been sent to an elite school where the proprietor was trained in the U.K, the Lady-Lak institute which boasted of English education with sky high fees. She always envied her brother and showed signs of disobedience and became slightly rebellious when she saw her brother going to a good school while she stood unlettered.

Emecheta is one writer who is traditional in tone and temperament but modern and even western in her attitude. All that she had wanted was to emulate the west and be a part of their lives by living abroad. The episode where she wanted to enroll herself in the Methodist School, a small sectional institution which she had decided to go without her parents' knowledge is proof enough of her wanting to get herself educated because she wanted to fulfill her dreams of going overseas. The teacher Mr. Cole, who was handsome and was as dark as leather, is an example to

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show the black pride and their innate desire to adopt the western way of life. There are two schools which she discusses, the first is the Sunday School, a hint of Christian morals that was brought into their colonies and the school that taught them to read and write. Every section of the novel is a vivid description of how culture had changed and how the people have begun to get modernized with the turn of the century.

There were two buildings in the compound, one was the church and she had heard from her friends that the church was never used as a classroom. She knew which was the church because, even though, she had not started school, she attended Sunday school in the church. With her head up, she walked down the center, looking for Mr. Cole's class. (10)

The entire novel is an example of existential struggle for a woman, who wanted to soar high but could not because she was a woman and the other, she was an African woman, crushed into codes of patriarchy and race. In a way, Ada is a girl who has this never say die attitude who could still make it to the top despite all odds because she was resilient and persistent in her efforts to make sure that she lived her dreams and realized it not only because she had yearned for it but also because her father had wanted her to be in a place where even God would love to visit.

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