

## Violence and Sexual Harassment in Nigerian Novels: The Nego-Feminist Option

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### Abstract

Taking advantage of women in most modern legal contexts is illegal. The unwelcome sexual advances have often been accompanied with violence of differing degrees. Such advantages from sexual abuse or sexual assault into forced marriages and to mild transgressions that include simple teasing, offhand comments, or minor isolated incidents in the life cycle of a female such as demonstrated in Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price* (1976) forcefully calls attention to how they should be remedied. In the village of Ibuza, harassment is so frequent and severe that it creates a hostile and offensive environment for budding girls of marriage age – and a question shoots: what is the way out for novelists in deconstructing the life of such young girls as Aku-nna, the lead female character? While Emecheta takes the option of a strong backlash on the male class, new female writers like Ify Osammor in her *The Triumph of Water Lily* (1996) have made feminism to evolve by certainly bringing to disrepute the oddity of the male but in an amiable way that would appear to yield better results. This option of Nego-feminism charges both sexes to be willing-partners in progress. The option speaks in the monologic voice of unquestioned authority, determined by experience, knowledge and practice. Its dialogic (competing) voices speak in new official language and new official thought. In short, where the arrant feminism is a closed gender genre reflective of what has already occurred, Nego-feminism is open — to the present and the future. As such, the novel is almost by definition a progressive genre, which Osammor uses the different expectations that society holds for gender roles to twist the tragic situation of *The Triumph of Water Lily* into a tighter knot than radical events would otherwise permit.

There is 'pornography of violence', women, voyeurs, and witnesses while articulating anxiety blurring contact of two cultures: modernisation and tradition in Emecheta's *The Bride Price* (1976). 'Pornography of violence', a phrase coinage by India's Alok Rai in his *Inventing Boundaries* (2000:365), signifies in *The Bride Price* borders of rape in the display of caste system with its disturbances, or commonality that has advantages for injustices of the human world. Emecheta's novel impeccably demonstrates tribal residues inter-facing with modernisation and she provides a lead way for this violence. It is not difficult to see Emecheta's feminist didacticism in this direction. Her handwriting is everywhere in trying to show the way, if not too seen everywhere. We see the authorial intrusion in her exploit of 'pornography of violence', caste system and commonality. Emecheta rises to moralise, a torch-bearer as she bears witness on the African sociology of literature. Wendy Griswold (2000) argues that all African writers are astutely bearing witness to disastrous issues of the continent in their novels; writers are social commentators.

The nubile Aku-nna in *The Bride Price* (1976) is ambushed. Recklessness cannot describe it. In consequence, she is now a limp bride by her captors (pp.130-1) and later bleeds in her mouth from severe hit by her husband which sends her to unconsciousness (pp.145-6). But Aku-nna does not only face physical violence from her husband, he also prepares her for sexual violence.

While Aku-nna arrived at her new home heart-broken, half-conscious, in a limp, and half-clothed, the women of her groom's house took her in,

praising the smoothness of her body. She had not a single scar, and her hands were so soft. They giggled as the senior Obidi poured chalk, the symbol of fertility, on her breasts and prayed to his ancestors that Aku-nna would use it feed the many children she was going to have for his son Okoboshi. They fanned her and blew into her ears, but she remained weak and listless, so somebody suggested the local gin. It burned Aku-nna's throat so that she coughed and, and her new nurses laughed and welcomed her to her husband's home (p.139).

Isn't it possible here that women in this public spectating are their own problems? They facilitate the male-dominant/female-submissive dynamics here, in my thinking. Women are happy when a co-woman is kidnapped into marriage! Should this be? Anger and despair was not enough for Aku-nna because, Okoboshi, the new hateful husband, comes to her in the night to doubly claim his right. The marriage has to be consummated, and it all appears it has to be by force. Sadly, in a powerful, skilful, wrestling over-match for Aku-nna, Okoboshi