

Degree Project Level: Master's

Migration and Identity in Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*

A Black Feminist Perspective

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Subject/main field of study: English Literature
Course code: EN3063
Credits: 15 ECTS
Date of examination: 7th January, 2019

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Introduction

1

People migrate for a variety of reasons, experiencing displacement in search of a better life, to escape poverty, political persecution, social and family pressures which play out in different ways for men and women (Boyd and Grieco 2003). The idea of pursuing lifelong dreams and the opportunities that are available are some of the reasons why people decide to migrate. What is generally left out of the preparations to migrate is how to achieve those dreams and goals. Prior to the sixties, the search for “white man’s education” was the primary cause of male emigration in colonial and postcolonial African nations. Historically, the African males migrated more than their female counterparts, whose migration was more driven by their status as wives, than by profession, or the search for education (Uwakwe, Rotich and Okpala 15-16). Much like the process of globalization, migration is highly gendered and inflected by economic factors (Omolola and Adesunmbo 52). Nkiru Nzegwu’s “Immigration and African Diaspora Women Artists” links the reasons of female migration from Africa to economic factors, war, interethnic conflicts and contends that, since these forces present no feasible options, migration is a matter of necessity rather than choice. She further states that in the past, “only African men received immigration permits and African women emigrated as wives and fiancées to Britain ...; they [African women] are now emigrating on their own cognizance” (Nzegwu 304). For Nigerian migrant women who have faced the conundrum of cultural inequality in their home country, a move to Britain is one that is met with expectations. However, after migrating, trying to settle in and taking advantage of those opportunities often becomes a challenge. The struggle to overcome obstacles in the country of

destination leads to a transformation of the individual and ultimately to the search for a new identity, which involves multiple forms of negotiation.

Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta captures the issue of migration, particularly relating to women, in the phrase “*Second Class Citizen*”, which is the title of her first novel published in 1974. Emecheta is one of black Africa’s “most prolific female writers” (Okonjo-Ogunyemi 61). She was alienated from her mother tongue by colonialism, and cut off from many other Ibo women by Britain’s class-ridden society. Her childhood experience of injustice in Nigeria and life in Britain in her late adolescence and young womanhood years considerably affected her works. In addition to these shaping experiences there are her impressions of and meditations on living in exile. Her novel *Second Class Citizen* is based on her own experiences as both a single parent and a black woman living in Britain in 1960s (Semenya 20-1). In the novel, her female protagonist, Adah comes to the United Kingdom to join her student husband and is faced with the challenges of being a black woman, and an immigrant.

The establishment of black women’s literary traditions began in a conscious effort to create a space for black women’s writing and to illustrate a distinction between black women’s realities and the realities of others (Christian 348-359). The literature within this tradition is influenced by how black women perceive themselves and the world around them. As a result, identity is an important part of black women’s literature (Hooper 74-81). Race, class, gender are all components of one’s identity and are critical in the formation of one’s lived experiences (Crenshaw 377-383). Besides these crucial factors in identity formation, migration facilitates shifts in identity, and it also defines the forms of agency by which specific challenges may be met (Uwakwe, Rotich and Okpala 19). Emecheta’s

literary migrations serve her position within the African canon but they also place her within another literary frame, namely that of Black British or Black diaspora writing.

In Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*, migration involves male and female characters; however, her concentration is on female migration. She portrays her heroine searching for the freedom of woman from patriarchal systems, and also struggling to maintain her self-identity. Emecheta experienced migration firsthand and knew that migrants go through all forms of transformations to reach their goals. For immigrant women, the new cultural modalities in the host country offer many ways to challenge and transform women's work and identities. Gender, race, class are all issues with which they grapple in their struggle to attain individual identity. In other words, as migrants in new locations and spaces, identities may have to undergo new processes of transmutations as people may have to individually or collectively negotiate social, economic and psychological transformations.

However, black feminists claim that the interests of all women should be represented, pointing to profound class differences and antagonism among women. Black women have struggled not only against the domination of a white patriarchal society but also of black patriarchal society. Mae Gwendylon Henderson's "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialects, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition" finely explains this issue saying that "They [black women] enter into a competitive discourse with black men as women, with white women as blacks, and with white men as black women" (qtd. in Henderson 185). Philomina Steady calls for an African feminism which combines racial, sexual, class and cultural dimensions of oppression to produce a more inclusive brand of

feminist thought through which women are viewed first and foremost as human, rather than sexual beings. For her, feminism is an ideology which advocates freedom from oppression which is based on the political, economic, social, and cultural manifestations of racial, cultural and class biases (Steady 2).

Buchi Emecheta has long been seen as an important feminist author, and her novels reflect this empowering view of Black women (Charles 280). As a writer and black feminist, Emecheta describes herself as a feminist with “a small f”. In her speech, “Feminism with a Small ‘f’”, originally presented at the *Criticism and Ideology: The Second African Writers Conference* in Stockholm, she states: “Being a woman, and African born, I see things through an African woman’s eyes. I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African women I know. I did not know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist then I am an African feminist with a small f” (Emecheta, “Feminism” 175). Emecheta goes on to state that: “There are so many feminist dogmas I believe in, like education and the freedom of the individual: in fact I’m a feminist plus, but there’s no root in middle class feminist attitudes now for the black woman’s plight” (Emecheta, “Feminism” 175). The preference for a black feminist approach in this thesis is important since the novel is presented from within a predominantly female sensibility. Emecheta’s female characters are representative of the characteristics of the African woman. To quote Cynthia Ward on Emecheta’s feminist themes:

her novels represent the experience of the African woman struggling to assert herself against historically determined insignificance, a self constituted through the suffering of nearly every form of oppression

..., a self that must find its true voice in order to speak not only for itself but for all others similarly oppressed (83).

Emecheta's fictions especially lend themselves to black feminist readings because of the ways in which they challenge the cultural norms of gender, race, and class.

Second Class Citizen elaborates on the challenges a black migrant woman faces in London in the 1960s and 1970s. The novel focuses on the struggles of Adah, and her survival, not only of herself but also of her dreams, while growing into womanhood/adulthood, moving from a middle class position in her native Nigeria to a second class in a predominantly white European society. She struggles with motherhood and with being a wife, and supporting her entire family along with being her own independent person. Adah is in a constant battle to try to preserve her womanhood, and when she finally leaves Francis, her husband, she experiences a strong sense of relief. After leaving Francis, Adah has moments of loneliness and despair but in the end she comes out triumphant because of her willpower.

Emecheta's works, especially *Second Class Citizen*, have been extensively analyzed. From a feminist perspective, Ifeoma Odinye, in her essay entitled "Feminism and Self-Assertion of Female Characters in Buchi Emecheta *Second Class Citizen* and Zaynab Alkalis *The Stillborn*," carried out a comparative analysis of the two authors' novels and explores feminism and the plight of feminine gender as regards the issue of self-assertion. Odinye states that in Adah's fierce commitment to a better life for herself and children, "she became very resourceful, and wrote a novel" (50). Adah's attempt is seen as an awareness of response to the stifling conditions of her existence. Longjam Bedana and Laishram

Sangeeta in their essay “Search for Identity and Home in Buchi Emecheta’s Novel *Second Class Citizen*” focus on the female character in the novel. They explore how Emecheta has represented the degree of experiences and cause of being homeless and the loss of identity of the self through the female character, Adah Obi. According to them, Adah, after a constant fight against sexism and racism, “embraces an identity which allowed her voice as a writer and welcomes a second home in England which gave freedom from traditional patriarchal oppression and stereotyping of African women” (35).

On the other hand, Omar Sougou’s “The Experience of an African Woman in Britain: A Reading of Buchi Emecheta’s *Second Class Citizen*” relates the experience of a contemporary African woman in Britain and emphasizes that the novel *Second Class Citizen* examines issues beyond female oppression and explores the racial discrimination the narrator faces in England. Florence Orabueze, in her article “The Feminist Crusade against Violation of Women’s Fundamental Human Rights: Miriama Ba’s *So Long A Letter* and Buchi Emecheta’s *Second Class Citizen*” considers *Second Class Citizen* as a literary work that is imbued with various preoccupations. She observes issues affecting women, and examines the issue of motherhood, denial of women the right to formal education, and male-child preference. She considers these issues and concludes that in the novel, Emecheta shows how “a woman can gain her freedom and pull down the walls erected by society to cage her” (Orabueze 117). On the other hand, Anthonia Yakubu recapitulates *Second Class Citizen* as a fiction in which Emecheta depicts Adah to show that women could be independent of their men and husbands, generally through economic and financial independence. She believes that Adah would have suffered more from Francis if she were not

financially independent. She therefore encourages all women to try and be independent of their husbands by working hard to acquire formal education and using the same to earn a living for themselves. Yakubu's points of assertion are Adah's ultimate victory from the shackles of Francis's oppression: "Adah effectively puts Francis, her husband; in second class rail of the ladder by her financial/economic independence of him ..." (Yakubu 75).

The previous studies looked at different aspects of Emecheta's fiction and even read *Second Class Citizen* as a feminine and postcolonial text. The above mentioned works also bring up the issue of identity, the influence of the colonial hegemony on the individuals in the postcolonial world order, and how Emecheta challenges and redefines them in her novel but none has specifically read *Second Class Citizen* as a black feminist text and focused on challenges the female migrant faces in constructing her self-identity. This study is therefore different from the aforementioned because it will highlight from a black feminist perspective the challenges the female migrant faces in constructing her self-identity, how she has managed to establish herself as an individual as well as the ways in which migration impacts on her. From a black feminist perspective, the paper will therefore scrutinize the challenges faced by the female African migrant, Adah in constructing her individual identity in Britain as reflected in Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*, and the essay contends that Adah is determined to triumph over her challenges in order to construct her self-identity and strive to achieve freedom and fulfillment from oppression.

Black Feminist Approach

In the early eighteenth-century in America, black women formed clubs united around issues that were unique to them; from those clubs sprang black feminist literary criticism (KaaVonia 60-1). The black feminist movement was greatly concerned with recovering the history of black women and this was mainly done through establishing a literary tradition that would depict the experiences of black women. Thus, black feminist criticism emerged as an ideology, “a process of inquiry by which scholars and critics read, analyze, and theorize about literary works by black women writers and texts in general, regardless of the race, ethnicity, or gender of the author” (KaaVonia 61). For Barbara Smith, black feminist criticism plays an important role in making black women’s literature “recognizable” (Smith 26), in that it provides a “non-hostile and perceptive analysis of works written” (27) by black women. While feminism emphasizes the inequalities between men and women, black feminists emphasize the diversity within the concept of ‘woman’, which for much feminist analysis was construed as a unitary category. Black feminism aims to give voice to the experience of black women in reflecting on the varying forms of subjugation they have experienced (Hill Collins 1990). Black feminist thought focuses on the liberation of black women from the oppressors of race, class, gender, and sexual exploitation and on providing a community for black women’s self-awareness and self-empowerment. This body of thought aims to emancipate and empower black women and in so doing challenge their oppression. Black feminist thought is therefore distinct from other forms of feminist criticism in a sense that it focuses on black female experience and emphasizes such issues as race, gender, class, motherhood and family. However, the expression of such themes and ideas is not easy for black

women as they have always been socially oppressed. Thus, black feminists argue that the liberation of black women entails freedom for all people, since it would require the end of racism, sexism and class oppression. As Angela Davis states, “Black women experience a triple oppression” (Davis 17), through the interlocking and simultaneous systems of oppression of racism, classism and sexism. Because black women are able to acknowledge this, they are committed to working on those struggles in which race, sex and class are simultaneously factors of oppression. However, its most basic efforts seek to pose the question about the intersectionality of race, class and gender issues.

Black feminist thought also carries with it a praxis that could empower and change the lives of black women. It sees black women’s oppression and their resistance to oppression as inextricably linked. Thus, oppression responds to human actions. Black women writers not only portray black women’s resistance to the ascribed stereotype of womanhood, or motherhood, but they also put great emphasis on black women’s personal growth towards more positive and individual self-definition. In this sense, Emecheta’s novels can be seen as an example of the Black feminist viewpoint. Her idea of feminism is rooted in Ibo life and culture. As Emecheta’s *Second Class Citizen* belongs to the Black women’s literary tradition, it can be argued to constitute an appropriate novel for a literary critical analysis from the perspective of Black Feminist criticism. The fiction depicts the African female migrant and the challenges she faced in an alien land, Britain.

Race: Racial Discrimination, and Resistance

Race, gender and class interact with one another to form Adah’s suffering. According to Black feminist thought racism, class oppression and gender are

inextricably bound together. As bell hooks affirms throughout her book *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, black women identities can only be seriously thought of when race, gender and class are all considered together. Black women cannot and would not benefit from taking a moment to think only of being black, then another to think only of being women. They are all at once, and the oppression they have faced is singular to them, neither black men nor white women have experienced exactly the same (hooks 28-9). The triple oppression is therefore the basis upon which black feminist works, such as those of Emecheta, can be examined.

Part of Adah's struggle in *Second Class Citizen* deals with the issues of race and being black in the face of English racism. Race is a social construct based on skin colour or various types of physical characteristics. Racism could be defined as political and social practices based on differences between races. According to Patricia Hill Collins racism is "a system of unequal power and privilege where people are divided into groups or races with social rewards unevenly distributed to groups based on their racial classification" (Hill Collins 300). Emecheta sheds light on Adah's challenges as a woman, a black person, and as an immigrant. Adah had always dreamt of going to England to have a better life. As Abioseh Michael Porter states, she "grows up believing that the United Kingdom is synonymous with heaven" (Porter 125). Oppressed and discriminated in Nigeria, as a woman, Adah expects that she will find comfort and happiness during her stay in Britain with her family, for Britain appears to offer "freedom" for her. As Barthelemy avers, "female biology and patriarchal imperatives focus the women's attention on liberating aspects of Western culture even as the women seek to find ways to adhere to indigenous culture that Emecheta believes oppresses them" (Barthelemy

560-61). When finally, Adah arrives in England, she is given a cold welcome, as captured in the title of the chapter titled, “A cold welcome” (Emecheta 32). This cold welcome Adah receives on her arrival in England foreshadows the eventual challenges that she goes through. She comes to realize that the real England is different from the “land of her dreams” (23). The realities of life in England have quickly diminished the image of a perfect heaven. The white people she sees “looked remote, happy in an aloof way, but determined to keep their distance” (34), yet, Adah is determined to live there. However, Adah’s aspirations about the future help her overcome her disappointment, comforting herself by asserting that her:

children must have an English education, and for that reason, she was prepared to bear the coldest welcome, even if it came from the land of her dreams. Though she was a little disappointed, but she told herself not to worry. If people like lawyer Nweze and others could survive it, so could she (Emecheta 33).

As earlier stated, racism is part of the challenges Adah faces and she is bound by the effects of racialization in the public spaces of London. She must live in a run-down neighborhood when she arrives in London. Adah’s subordinate status as a black immigrant in Britain is not a simple issue of economics but on the basis of one’s race. Adah’s husband, Francis, tells her: “Everyone is coming to London, the West Indies, the Pakistanis, and even the Indians, so that African students are usually grouped together with them. We are all blacks, all coloured and the only houses we can get are horrors like these” (Emecheta 35). The white

English people view all brown-colored foreigners as the same and they make housing available in immigrant neighborhoods for them, but not in neighborhoods where English-born white people live. The color of Adah's skin determines the kind of housing that she will have access to, such that "every door seemed barred against them; nobody would consider accommodating them, even when they were willing to pay double the normal rent" (Emecheta 71). Nearly all house-to-let notices blatantly state, "Sorry no coloureds" (59). Adah is faced with a "half room ..., very small, with a single bed at one end and a new settee bought with the money Adah had sent to buy her a new top coat with" (35). This denial of access to a decent living space is presented as having psychological effects on the new immigrant, Adah, who must quickly learn her place as 'second-class citizen:

She [Adah], who only a few months previously would have accepted nothing but the best, had by now been conditioned to expect inferior things. She was now learning to suspect anything beautiful and pure. Those things were for the whites, not the blacks" (71).

These experiences stifle her hopeful nature and she begins to distrust those around her.

However, Adah chooses to resist this relegation, employing various strategies to circumvent the limits placed upon her by her skin color, such as changing her accent when speaking to potential landlords over the phone. The very existence of black feminism suggests that black women always have a choice and the power to act, no matter how bleak a situation may appear to be. Adah knows that there are various accents in London and her voice on the phone call for the

vacant room in Hawley Street would make clear that she is an African. In a tragicomic scene, Adah disguises her voice while speaking on the phone to a potential landlady in order to arrange an initial interview. In this scene, accent has a role in judgements of identity construction; it plays an important role in Adah's construction of identity. This is in order to transgress the boundaries of her black identity which had been a great obstacle for social acceptability.

Furthermore, the kind of pressure placed upon Adah to foster out her children from within the diasporic community indicates that they have become entangled in the racist agenda. Adah chooses not to let this influence her; moreover, because she goes to England and has the aspiration to succeed, she is able to face the challenges. By whatever strategy Adah uses to contain racial discrimination, one point is clear: she tries to resist this social attitude. In choosing not to foster her children out, she is contesting the terms offered by both the host society and the developing gendered norms of the Nigerian migrant community, claiming her full reproductive role alongside her working life.

The entanglement of these raced and gendered politics can be seen in Adah's different interactions with the welfare system in the form of predominantly female social workers and NHS staff. In an incident, just before the birth of Adah's third child, she is assessed by two midwives who immediately construe her as one such neglected black mother: "Can you read English?" asked the older midwife with the white hair. It dawned on Adah that, to the big midwife, if you couldn't read or speak English, then you were illiterate" (Emecheta 110). Additionally, the narrator of *Second Class Citizen* indicates another paradox at the heart of the racial politics of domesticity; that not all white women are good mothers with good homes, but 'whiteness' actually compensates for the potential

lack of the qualities for fostering. In this context, Emecheta writes in *Second Class Citizen*:

As soon as a Nigerian housewife in England realized that she was expecting a child ... she would advertise for a foster-mother. No one cared whether a woman was suitable or not, no one wanted to know whether the house was clean or not; all they wanted to be sure of was that the foster-mother was white. The concept of 'whiteness' could cover a multitude of sins (44).

Here, white women come to be understood by Nigerian women as more capable in the domestic realm; however, the narrator in *Second Class Citizen* emphasizes that it is not only white Britons who subscribe to this logic, but that it also influences Nigerian women's selection of a foster mother for their children. In order to exploit black women, dominant groups have developed controlling and stereotyping images, by claiming that black women are inferior. This negative stereotype is attributed to black women. According to bell hooks, the "negative myths and stereotypes have effectively transcended class and race boundaries and affected the way black women were perceived by members of their own race and the way they perceived themselves" (hooks 70). In this light, Dionne Blue in her essay "Breaking the Silence: Racial Identity Development of Post-baccalaureate African American Women" purports that black women must contend with stereotypical images that permeate through society. These include the "stereotyped images of mammies ... single mothers, welfare abusers ..." (Blue 121).

The presence and challenge against controlling images imposed on black women is another significant concern in Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*. Adah challenges and rejects these controlling and stereotyping images. Trudy, the white minder of Adah's children, neglects them. When she is queried, she denies sternly Adah's accusation. As Trudy, the English foster mother, treats Adah's children in a cruel manner and tells lies about her treatment to the children's social officer, Adah experiences a process of enlightenment as regards the superiority of the English society: "she [Adah] listened to Trudy destroying forever one of the myths she had been brought up to believe: that the white man never lied ... But Adah could not stop thinking about her discovery that the whites were just as fallible as everyone else. ... Why, then, did they claim superior?" (Emecheta 42-3). This interrogation is actually a turning point for Adah, because with this question, she admits the reality around her. Challenging this stereotype has been an essential part of Adah's struggle for survival; the struggle to reject this controlling image and embrace knowledge is essential to her survival. Dionne Blue states that "Black women have begun to avert these negative images while giving validation to images that are more authentic and appropriate" (Blue 121). Whiteness symbolizes ways in which privileges are attained by some and denied to others. Thus, recognizing white privilege is a step towards racism and its discriminatory practices. Being black means that one does not have the opportunities of those who are white which creates a sense of being trapped into the inferior position of the "second-class".

Class: Struggles against Classism, and Determination

According to Valerie Bryson, class is a group of people who share a common socio-economic position, involving a hierarchical structure which also provides a sense of identity and a relation to other classes (Bryson 55). In *Second Class Citizen*, class differences that may have kept different facets of the population apart in Nigeria become conflated into one “immigrant community” in the face of rising racism on the part of the host nation. While living in Lagos, Nigeria, Adah has grown used to the life of an elite, educated woman, with many servants and a great deal of social status, despite her subordination within the family. When she arrives in England, Adah learns from Francis that British racism disregards the Nigerian class system, and that all Africans, both men and women are thrown together as second-class citizens. Black women face more challenges than men in the class system. According to bell hooks, black women’s social status is “lower than that of any other” because of their place in society. They occupy the bottom place in society (hooks, “Black Women” 281).

Adah’s prior status as a member of the elite class in Nigeria, who now must live in the same house with “such Nigerians who called her madam at home” (Emecheta 36) further highlights the fall in social positions derived from their migration to Britain. Some of the Nigerians were of the same educational background as Adah’s paid servants. Commenting on the situation of Black people in London as seen by Adah, Omar Sougou cites Adah’s disillusionment at the sight of the single room Francis, and she have to share with their two children. Of greater disappointment to Adah is the fact that the landlord and neighbors are working class Nigerians, “A microcosm of the community she meant to rid herself of” (Sougou, “The Experience” 513).

However much Adah insists upon class mobility, Francis tells her: “You may be earning a million pounds a day ... but the day you land in England, you are second class citizen. So you can’t discriminate against your people because we are all second class” (Emecheta 37). The description “second class” has a psychological effect on Adah: “Francis had become so conditioned by this phrase that he was not only up to it but enjoying it too” (38). If other blacks are willing to settle for second class citizenship, Adah kicks valiantly against this designation. What Adah dislikes about her people is their acceptance of the status of second class citizens, to which they want Francis to drag her, forcing her to accept work in the t-shirt factory. Adah obstinately refuses and instead applies for jobs in which she can employ her university education. Since there are few other educated black people occupying such professional positions in England at the time, however, Adah’s successful application leaves her isolated from other black women both at home and at work.

Emecheta recreates some of the lived conditions for Adah in England in a language that speaks to the first class that the novel’s title necessitates. As mentioned above, Adah, as a second class, activates a mode of speaking directly to the first class that reveals an over-determined, individual identity extant in spite of its adversarial social condition. Here, Adah shows an increased optimism of the possibility of successful integration as she learns that rebuilding her life and identity allows her greater personal opportunities and a chance to participate in fostering a more inclusive society. Through Adah’s refusal to settle down for a second class status; Emecheta reveals the strength of a woman in an oppressive atmosphere. She shows awareness and the determination that a woman can triumph over everything impossible and gain her status.

This theme of class in *Second Class Citizen* demonstrates how Adah becomes incorporated into the society; in fact, this sheds light on how Adah has managed to establish herself as an individual. She works hard to build her social status; she never accepts a low social condition and she always struggles for her independence. In the beginning of the novel, Adah, an Igbo, is seen to be given Western education in one of the Christian missionaries' schools in Lagos namely the Methodist Girls' High School. Emecheta shows how much Adah strove to be educated, and how often she was frustrated. Education is a mighty step forward for Adah in her various challenges, and she is able to free herself from the masculine bonds quickly because of the economic empowerment education bestows on her. As Jude Agho and Francis Osighale state:

Through the character of Adah, Emecheta also emphasizes the significant function of education in the political, social and economic liberation of woman as demonstrated by Adah. If Adah had not been educated she would not have been able to become the family's breadwinner. With education, a woman is free (606).

So Adah's education and economic viability are emphasized as means of her identity transformation. This, in turn, gives her a lot of power to deal with her challenges. Thus, migration increasingly offers Adah education and career opportunities that may not be available, or be denied, to her in Nigeria. Education, therefore, imparts knowledge, discernment, exposure and self-esteem. Adah believes in the importance of education right from the beginning of the novel; in addition to the first time in schools, she steals or rather borrows money from her

relatives to apply to the Methodist School. Education is necessary for the development of an intellectual mind and a questioning attitude towards the patriarchal order that aims to subordinate women as subservient creatures. Adah's growing consciousness and awareness as she is educated present a challenging young woman to the image of ordinary African female. It is education that Emecheta points out as a liberating factor in the life of Adah. However, despite all of Adah's challenges as a second-class citizen, she finally succeeds in building a secure sense of identity and struggles her way out to become a first-class citizen.

Gender: Oppression, and Thrust towards Independence

Apart from the novel's elaboration on the class differences, Emecheta also discusses the discrimination between sexes. Adah suffers from gender discrimination in England. Women are allowed to come to Britain as long as they are married and their husbands are already in England: "It is allowed for African males to come and get civilized in England. But that privilege has not been extended to females yet" (Emecheta 34). Adah tries to negotiate her own position and the possibilities of repositioning herself in a hostile environment. She feels confused about being part of the people around her. She is aware of her own incongruity with the British society: "England is a silent country; people are taught to bottle up their feelings and screw them tight, like the illicit gin her parents drank at home" (Emecheta 100). Adah's alienation is intensified by the fact that the Nigerian community restricts her by re-imposing the patriarchal values of the mother country, while the English society treats her as a second class citizen because she is black. By working at the North Finchley library Adah is seen to be taking a 'white man's job' and is berated for refusing to foster her children out.

She was, as her neighbor describes it “having her cake and eating it too” (Emecheta 69). Rather than lauding Adah’s success, her compatriots resent her for transcending her allocated position as a black immigrant. However, this resentment is deeply gendered, as the possibility of obtaining a ‘white man’s job’ is understood as a natural goal of the male African students who come to study in Britain in the years following decolonization. Adah is caught between her Ibo culture and her social positioning in Britain, neither of which she can feel at home in. Her attempt to resituate herself in her new environment leads to a sense of disorientation, and displacement, which in turn leads to a sense of insecurity and uncertainty about her position. Adah even questions whether she has done the right thing by coming to England. She started “to lose faith in herself. Had her dream of coming to the United Kingdom been right after all or was she simply an empty dreamer?” (Emecheta 54).

Adah remains caught in patriarchy, as Francis proves to be an abusive and selfish husband. To Francis, Adah is simply born to fulfil her stereotypical role as a woman: to stand by her husband, to take care of his children or to work for him. Francis easily embraces the downward mobility offered to him by England. He faces difficulties in his attempt to live up to the masculine norms. To come to terms with his inferior status, Francis convinces himself that good accommodation and jobs are not accessible to the blacks. He asserts to Adah that “in England the middle-class black is the one that is lucky enough to get the post of bus conductor” (Emecheta 34). The inferiority complex can be ascribed to socio-cultural and economic realities. Francis’s sense of inadequacy in Britain is also revealed in his lack of motivation to complete his studies, which results in his repeated failure at his exams. Francis struggles with his studies and finds himself unable to succeed

personally or professionally in London. He “had come to such a situation that he had told himself subconsciously that he would never pass his examinations. He had as it were told himself that his ever becoming a Cost and Works accountant in this world was a dream” (158). Francis’s failure takes its toll on his relationship with Adah. Thus, the social and economic realities have contributed to the instability of their husband-wife relationship. Francis’s failure makes him bitter, he punishes Adah for his perceived inadequacy by beating her; he belittles her, refuses to work, has affairs with other women, and even disallows Adah from using birth control. Black women experience violence because of “vulnerability due to their race, sex, and class” (Crenshaw 357). To Francis, “a woman was a second-class human, to be slept with at any time, ..., if she refused, to have sense beaten into her until she gave in, to be ordered out of bed after he had done with her, to make sure she washed his clothes and got his meals ready at the right time” (Emecheta 175).

The abuse is accompanied by the pressure Francis puts upon Adah to be the primary earner for the household, while she is afforded little in the way of rights within the domestic space. As one critic articulates, Adah’s position in the household resembles that of a female ‘slave’ who must toil to feed her ‘master’ as well as satisfy his sexual urges (Oha 298). Although it is Adah’s salary that pays the rent for their flat, Francis still positions himself as its rightful owner. Francis’s identity rests within his masculinity, since he is not permitted to exude this characteristic in Britain. One passage in *Second Class Citizen* reveals the frustration of the men who reach Britain only to have “their dreams crushed within them” (Emecheta 83). For many men, like Francis, leaving Africa to reach “the dream of becoming an aristocrat became a reality of being a black, a nobody, a

second-class citizen” (Emecheta 83). Therefore, Francis’s interactions with Adah and at home are his main outlets for expressions of black masculinity that emphasizes his patriarchy. Although Adah is the financial backbone of her family, Francis often pulls his patriarchal strings to assert traditional authority as head of household, even after losing his status as breadwinner. According to Mike Donaldson, and Richard Howson’s “Men, Migration and Hegemonic Masculinity”, “The strong pressure on migrant men to be seen to be and actually to be the breadwinner puts them in a difficult situation. They often must deal with a range of personal, social, educational and institutional barriers that hinder their ability to settle and to meet these expectations” (213). Francis’s inability to conform to dominant norms affects his personal construct of masculinity. When Adah tells him about the completion of her novel, for example, he reacts mockingly saying, “Whatever was he going to hear next? A woman writer in his own house, in a white man’s country” (Emecheta 178). As Obododimma Oha articulates, “Adah is perceived not as house-owner or co-house-owner, but as a squatter” (Oha 298). Francis constantly “brutalizes, deliberately tries to inject a feeling of inferiority within her, and when all that fails, he tries to deprive her of what she values most—her children and her potential to become a writer” (Porter 273). Sue Thomas asserts that “The family becomes for Francis the final site on which he may redeem that masculinity, and on which his failure to do so becomes most intimately and destructively demeaning” (Thomas 148). According to Ndungi Wa Mungai and Pease Bob, many men have met these challenges successfully, and adapted a renegotiated form of masculinity (112). However, others found it difficult and for quite a lot it has led to a family breakdown (112).

The fact that Adah is the bread-earner of her family, as opposed to her husband, shifts the typical idea of power from Francis, the husband who lives off of Adah's earnings, to Adah, herself. Her taking care of their children in London against Francis's demands shows her strength of character in the face of patriarchy. Not only is Adah firm in her beliefs, she is also emotionally strong enough to withstand her husband's trials and oppression. While sleeping with other women, Francis denies Adah access to birth control. Adah wants to use birth control, for she knows that they cannot afford having another baby. Moreover, her work is also interrupted by her pregnancies. Nevertheless, Francis insists that his wife should not use birth control. Francis's denial does not mean that he can control himself but it means his desire to exert his power over Adah's body and motherhood. Adah's desire for birth control is seen by her husband, Francis, as an attempt to steal rights of control over her body, which rightly belongs to him, and she receives a severe beating. Francis selfishly shames Adah in front of all the neighbors and the landlord for getting a birth control device. This incident inspires Adah to think seriously about leaving her husband: "She told herself that she could not live with such a man Now everybody knew that the man she was working for and supporting was not only fool, but that he was too much of a fool to know that he was acting foolishly" (Emecheta 155). Her insistence on getting a first-class job and her refusal to succumb to the norms generally accepted by her people destabilizes the hierarchies of gender and "stands in conflict with her husband's male pride" (Sougou, *Writing Across Cultures* 43), who is erased as the head of the family.

What finally propels Adah's resolute abandonment of Francis is her first attempt as a writer, to come to terms with her own reality: "Adah ... put

everything [in the story] that was lacking in her marriage” (180). According to Elleke Boehmer, “To write is not only to speak for one’s place in the world. It is also to make one’s own place or narrative, to tell the story of oneself, to create an identity” (Boehmer 94). Through this act of self-definition, Adah is able to fully acknowledge her sometimes suppressed but nonetheless insistent desire for female independence. Even though her final valedictory statement implies an awareness of forthcoming confrontations in her even more daunting role as a single black African, working mother, her expression of triumphant achievement and continued defiance points to the potential realization of a successful future, uninhabited by the traditional constraints of gender: “She was different. Her children were going to be different. They were all going to be black, they were going to enjoy to be black, they were going to enjoy being black, be proud of being black, a black of a different breed” (Emecheta 154). The character of Adah and her verbal expression is one of the forms to resist and reject the imposed social norms and in such a way create one’s own set of rules towards self-definition. Migration does offer Adah a method of resistance to categorizations of gender, race and class.

Conclusion

The thesis examined the challenges faced by the female African migrant in constructing her individual identity in Britain in Buchi Emecheta’s *Second Class Citizen*, and the impact of migration on the female identity construction from the perspective of black feminism. For black feminists, black women face triple oppression based on their gender, race and class (Hills Collins 1990). Black feminism’s central concern has been the transformation of societal relations based on race, gender and class. Thus, the issues of gender, class and race through the

life and experiences of the female protagonist Adah in Emecheta's novel are highlighted in this study. Emecheta writes about the female character's desire to go to England from Nigeria to live a better life and to secure her children's future. The journey to England is the fulfilment of a childhood dream resting on the myth of the glossy metropolis nurtured by colonized people like her father. It is a pursuit of better economic opportunities and a quest to enjoy matrimony away from the shifting customs of her motherland. Immigrant Adah faces many significant challenges in trying to acclimatize and settle into Britain.

Black women's struggles with the issue of race, class and gender stimulate their fight towards independence and self-reliance. Emecheta's novel enriches understanding of how a new milieu can constrain or transform individual identity and relationships. Adah's quest for individual self-actualized identity sits at the novel's heart. What worries Adah most is the description 'second-class' (Emecheta 38), but she is determined to fight against this kind of humiliating attitude. She feels first-class only in the libraries she works in due to her education in Lagos. Through her jobs at three different libraries, she gradually gains economic freedom. Adah sees education as a way out to liberate herself from the perception of female gender. Her exposure to Western education and its associated influences leaves her more responsive to the prospect of both self-development and self-assertion, and these strengthen her resistance towards her husband. Adah's wish to educate herself is symbolically a wish to have control in her hands because knowledge is a symbol of power and power is traditionally a possession of men in society. She has a strong desire not to submit to her husband any more especially for the matters related to her body. Adah then decides to be fitted with a diaphragm without the permission of her husband.

Adah's ultimate emancipation comes not as a result of the intervention of any benevolent outside forces; instead she engineers her own liberation through the rediscovery of her voice. While staying at home to take care of her newly born fourth child, Adah writes a novel, which she regards as a literary brainchild and Francis destroys the novel. He of course refuses to read Adah's piece and tells her scornfully that she will never succeed as a writer because she is an African woman. Although Adah demonstrates her subordination to Francis by accepting his criticisms, she is pushed out of her thralldom when Francis cruelly destroys her manuscript. When he burns Adah's manuscript, Francis seeks to immolate what he perceives as a threatening expression of Adah's autonomy, and attempts to destroy the fundamental aspect of Adah's identity as an African woman. She never gives up, not even when Francis burns her first piece of work. Adah's writing is a vital site through which she reengages with her independent identity in a foreign land.

Due to the racist attitude of English landlords, Adah and her family are denied orderly accommodation and forced to live in a run-down neighborhood. Adah is treated as an inferior and second-class human being because of her skin color in the white community of England. She is forced to carry the burden of being a woman, a black together with class problems common to immigrants. Ada's struggle trying to find a new home demonstrates how her experience of race and gender intersect. She struggles against and challenges discrimination and racial prejudices hindering her construction of self-identity and personal development and self-realization. Adah consistently refuses to comply with the norms generally accepted by the immigrants and to which Francis, her husband also adheres: Adah suffers at the hand of Francis and immediate English-based African community. She is physically and emotionally abused by her husband,

ostracized by the latter and also punished by both for attempting to move beyond the confines of her socially allotted and racially defined position: “To most of her Nigerian neighbors, she is having her cake and eating it ... she would not send her children away to be fostered like everybody else ...” (Emecheta 75). These are basically to content themselves with the working class jobs, and to have children fostered out. Her disapproval of this mode of life causes the sufferings Adah encounters in her dealing with her people.

The novel describes how Adah reacts and responds differently to injustice and inhumanity imposed on her. Adah depicts the bravery and courage, the self-absorbedness in her which raises questions regarding black women’s self-identity and struggles to achieve freedom. The integration with the interracial community helps Adah’s transformation from a state of loneliness and helplessness to a state of belonging. Through her work and kind interactions with an eclectic group of coworkers at the library, Adah finds social connections that facilitate her work of authoring a novel. Ada takes the final decision to stop taking care of Francis and leaves him, which also marks the pinnacle of her constructing of her individual identity in Britain. She shatters the racist stereotype of black women. Being humiliated for a long time she had to find her own ways to express her black female identity. The immigrant experience, therefore, plays a leading role in Adah’s identity formation.

Adah’s success at breaking the marriage with Francis is facilitated by her migration to England and the education she has acquired. Her exposure to Western education and its associated influences leaves her more responsive to the prospect of both self-definition and identity formation. Indigenous patriarchy which conspires to produce the collusion of the hegemonic power is articulated by

Francis Obi: “You keep forgetting that you are a woman and that you are black” (Emecheta 167). The hegemonic nature of society inscribes a weaker section of the society with passivity and subjugation; Adah is a black woman who attempts to surpass gender, race and class roles in England, and indeed repeatedly overcomes the odds to survive as an individual. Black feminism cannot challenge race, gender and class oppression without empowering black women to become pro-active.

Finally, Adah exerts an indomitable will and self-determination in order to break out of fetters posed by a racial environment, class differences and gender challenges. Francis insists that Adah is second class citizen by virtue of her race, later he views Adah as second class relative to him because of her gender. He exercises a degree of domineering influence on Adah inside the home because of her gender and outside the home because of her race. Adah puts down restrictive forces and forms her new identity. By resisting marginalization on her marriage, Adah pushes towards selfhood, negotiating her frequent pregnancies through family planning, resisting spousal violence, poverty, child care, and finally emerges as the icon of immigrant female resilience. Her successful actions indicate her independence. They also symbolize appropriation of her own space in which she attains safety from her ex-husband’s abuse. Her new self is undergirded by this agency, and most importantly, by her creative act (writing) which signifies her ultimate selfhood. A close reading of Emecheta’s heroine, Adah, reveals the impact of migration on female identity construction. She welcomes her challenges in order to construct her self-identity, seek her individuality and self-realization in the wider world of women and strive to achieve greater freedom and fulfillment from oppression.

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