
A Study of Struggle, Fight Back, and Rebuilding her Lives by The Protagonist in Buchi Emecheta's Novel the Bride Price

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Abstract

This study explores the experiences of women in Buchi Emecheta's novel *The Bride Price*. It focuses on how female characters face different forms of subordination, such as cultural expectations, gender roles, and family pressures. Despite these challenges, the women in these novels show strength by resisting unfair treatment and trying to take control of their own lives. The study also looks at how they rebuild their identities and find new paths to freedom and self-worth. Through these stories, Emecheta highlights the struggles and courage of African women in a male-dominated society.

Keywords

Resistance, Subordination, Reconstruction,

Introduction

Buchi Emecheta is one of the most powerful voices in African literature, known for writing about the lives and struggles of women in traditional Nigerian society. Her novels often focus on how women are mistreated because of their gender and how they try to overcome the limitations placed on them by culture, family, and society. In *The Bride Price*, Emecheta presents female characters who face oppression in different forms, such as forced marriage, motherhood as a burden, and even slavery.

However, these women do not remain silent victims. They question the rules around them, resist harmful traditions, and work to rebuild their lives with courage and strength. This study examines the journey of these characters from subordination to resistance and ultimately to reconstruction. It also highlights how Emecheta utilizes storytelling to demonstrate the significance of women's agency, voice, and self-worth in a world that often seeks to deny them these qualities.

Through this novel, the study will explore how women find ways to survive, fight back, and grow stronger in the face of struggle.

Overall Narration of *The Bride Price*

The Bride Price is the story of Aku-nna, a young Igbo girl in Nigeria, who faces many struggles as she grows up in a traditional society. After her father dies, Aku-nna and her younger brother are taken to live with their uncle in their hometown. Her uncle, Okonkwo, sees her as property and expects to receive a high bride price when she gets married. In their culture, a high bride price brings honor and wealth to the family.

However, Aku-nna falls in love with Chike, a schoolteacher from a family of freed slaves. Even though Chike is kind, educated, and respectful, Aku-nna's uncle and the rest of the community disapprove of him because of his family background. According to tradition, someone from a slave family is not worthy to marry a freeborn girl like Aku-nna.

Despite all the pressure, Aku-nna and Chike secretly get married. Her uncle becomes furious and refuses to accept the bride price. In Igbo belief, this is a serious offense—if a girl's bride price is not paid and accepted, it is said that she will not live long. In the end, even though Aku-nna tries to live a happy life with Chike, she dies in childbirth, fulfilling the traditional curse. The novel ends tragically, showing how deeply harmful cultural traditions can be, especially to women.

Aku-nna, the protagonist of the novel

Aku-nna is more than just a fictional character—she represents the typical girl-child in traditional Nigerian (especially Igbo) society. From a young age, her life is shaped by cultural expectations about womanhood, obedience, and marriage. Her experiences reflect the limited freedom and constant pressure faced by girls, particularly in matters of family honor and marriage.

At the beginning of the novel, Aku-nna is portrayed as a quiet, thoughtful, and obedient girl. She is deeply affected by the death of her father, which marks the start of her downward spiral into a life controlled by others. Her sensitivity is visible in how she observes the people around her, often silently absorbing their expectations while struggling internally. She is considered an innocent and Sensitive girl.

As the story progresses, Aku-nna begins to develop her thoughts and desires, especially after attending school. Education opens her mind and helps her question the traditional role women are expected to play. It becomes clear that she wants more than just to be someone's wife—she wants to live with dignity and love.

Her growing attachment to Chike marks a turning point: she starts thinking and deciding for herself, even though she knows the consequences could be severe. This shows moral courage and emotional maturity.

Aku-nna's life is controlled by her uncle Okonkwo, who sees her mainly as a means to gain wealth through bride price. When she chooses to marry Chike—a man from a slave-descended family—Okonkwo and the community reject her. This shows how women, even when educated and self-aware, are still trapped by rigid cultural systems.

Aku-nna becomes a victim of both gender and class discrimination. Her husband is educated and loving, but social rules say he is "lesser" because of his family background. Her uncle's refusal to accept the bride price seals her fate.

Though quiet, Aku-nna is not weak. By eloping with Chike, she resists both her uncle's authority and the expectations of her culture. This act is a form of rebellion and self-reconstruction. She chooses love and partnership over tradition and obedience.

Her move to start a new life with Chike is a hopeful attempt at rebuilding—an effort to create a life based on mutual respect, not control. This makes her a subtle but powerful symbol of female resistance.

Despite her courage, Aku-nna dies in childbirth—symbolically fulfilling the traditional belief that a girl whose bride price isn't accepted will not survive. Her death is tragic, but not a defeat. Emecheta uses this ending to critique the cruelty of tradition, not to show weakness in Aku-nna's character.

She dies, but her choices leave a lasting impression. She becomes a martyr for change, showing that women deserve the right to choose their path, even if society punishes them for it.

Rebuilding Situations in *The Bride Price*

Aku-nna's Inner Strength and Education is the first step that she takes to rebuild herself. After her father's death, Aku-nna begins to develop a stronger sense of self. And she begins to value education and uses it as a tool to improve her self-development in her life. Going to school helps her think independently and stand beyond the traditional gender roles. This is the first step in her rebuilding. In this sense she tries to shape her future in a different from not in the form what tradition expects.

Aku-nna choosing love over tradition is the second step of her rebuilding. Aku-nna's decision to marry Chike, who was a man rejected by her society, is a bold act of resistance and self-reconstruction. By following her heart, she tries to rebuild her life on her terms, rather than accepting a forced marriage arranged for profit and status. Even though it leads to rejection and hardship, her choice reflects courage and personal growth.

Aku-nna breaking free from patriarchal control is the third step in rebuilding herself. Living with her uncle, Aku-nna is treated as property, expected to bring in a bride price. When she escapes this control by moving with Chike, she attempts to reclaim her autonomy and rebuild her life in freedom, away from family and cultural oppression.

Although Aku-nna tries to rebuild her life, she ultimately dies in childbirth, fulfilling the cultural "curse" of unpaid bride price. Her death is symbolic—it shows that rebuilding in such a rigid, oppressive system is extremely difficult, especially for women. Emecheta uses this tragic ending not to show failure, but to critique the system that blocks women's freedom and growth.

Conclusion

The Bride Price by Buchi Emecheta is a powerful novel that explores the struggles of women in a traditional and male-dominated society. Through the character of Aku-nna, the story highlights how harmful cultural practices—like forced marriage and the importance of bride price—can control and even destroy a woman's life. Despite these pressures, Aku-nna tries to take charge of her future by choosing love, education, and independence. Her tragic death shows the high cost of resisting tradition, but it also draws attention to the need for change in how society treats women. Emecheta uses Aku-nna's journey to criticize oppressive customs and to give voice to the silent suffering of many African women. In doing so, the novel leaves a lasting message about the importance of freedom, identity, and women's rights.

Aku-nna is a well-drawn and deeply human character who reflects the painful reality faced by many African women. She starts as a shy girl but grows into a young woman who dares to dream of freedom and love. Her life is shaped by oppression, but her resistance—even in silence—is powerful. Through Aku-nna, Buchi Emecheta delivers a sharp and emotional critique of the social systems that limit women's choices and highlights the importance of education, autonomy, and dignity for girls and women everywhere.

In *The Bride Price*, the theme of rebuilding is present through Aku-nna's inner development, education, and bold choices. Though her life is cut short, her actions represent a powerful attempt to reshape her destiny, making her a symbol of quiet but meaningful resistance against patriarchal traditions.

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