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**Space, Culture and Power in Buchi Emecheta's Novel Called Kehinde <sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT**

When it is considered related with power, possible meanings of space and culture gain a more importance. In postcolonial literary theory, power is introduced to be something in the hands of the people belonging to Western world. Due to this, the colonizer's cultural knowledge about the colonized's culture and space determines the social rank and location of non-Western people. Cultural superiority of western world over non-western world is formed due to power- knowledge relationship in postcolonial literary theory. According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, knowledge in postcolonial context isn't guiltless because it is the output of its producers. Thus, dominant power gives a new shape to such concepts like space, culture and power belonging to subordinate people. Within this context Buchi Emecheta's interesting novel called Kehinde tells the story of a couple trying to decide on staying in London and returning to their own country, Nigeria. In the novel Kehinde as a female and her husband Albert as a male experience the multifaceted influence of both living in the center and belonging to periphery and reflect the influence of space, culture and power in their life, family and social circumference. Hence, it is analyzed in the study how Emecheta tries to show the reader the fact that power dominates everything and causes complication in man's life referring to postcolonial literary theory while constructing the postcolonial identities in the novel.

**Key Words:** Space, culture, subordinate, power, postcolonial, Emecheta, female.

**1. Introduction**

It is not a new fact migration symbolizes the human continuity, adoption, transformation and movement from one place to another. In this context, "all habitable land in the world had been occupied by human beings" (Adler & Gielen, 2003:4). It causes many changes in the lives of human beings psychologically, socially and culturally. "Migration has been responsible for the fall of civilizations and the rise of others" (Adler & Gielen, 2003:4). Global migration has had profound and irreversible consequences for both the human species and the world's physical environment. The lives of the migrants and those who arrived before them change by the influence of migration (Adler & Gielen, 2003:4). Thus, migration has transformed itself within its relationship with time, space, culture and man. Together with the globalization the categories of migration have referred to the new facts such as belonging, subordination, otherness, hybridity within the periphery of space, culture and power.

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As a part of migration the concept of travelling within the cultural space and time includes the transitions from one place's cultural traits, traditions, symbols and life perceptions to another (Öncü & Weyland, 2005: 22). Due to the transitions occurring in the global map words, cultural symbols, appearances have begun to blur, and borders have got mixed and transformed into something different in shape. It means that diversity of human population in metropolitan cities is equal to the concept of cultural diversity and puts forward increasing problems like identity and belonging. The main source of this fact is directly related with the global culture's dominating influence over minor and local cultures. Because of this influence local cultures are subject to modifications and transformations in postcolonial context. By travelling within the borders people have the possibility to meet and acknowledge the limits of the power of different cultures, beliefs, races, ethnic groups in their mutual encounter.

Thus, identities are always reproduced by the dominant power, and cultural belongings show their existence through the power balances appearing in the struggle between the concepts of the self and the other. In this context, it can be said that cultural identities and belongings appear to be the product of power relations (Öncü&Weyland, 2005: 27-28). As a metropolitan city, London shelters people who are migrants and out of place. This situation creates a passage of multicultural identities and belongings located between the periphery and complexities of the concepts of self and other, main and subordinate, man and woman, white and black, western and eastern and so on. In this sense, Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* (1994) is a novel in which these dichotomies are gracefully exemplified in the representation of the subordinate characters living in London and Nigerian in origin.

Hence, it can be said that the purpose of this study is to reveal the subaltern positions of the characters due to their postcolonial situation and highlight the complications of being subaltern subjects both in Britain and Nigeria in the light of postcolonial theory with references to Gramsci's and Spivak's concept of subaltern. As a controversial issue, Emecheta gives the panorama of problematic postcolonial situations of Nigerian migrants in Britain in terms of the concept of the subaltern identity in a great sensitivity due to the fact that Britain has a great migrant population coming from its old British colonies and forming a postcolonial society. Thus, this study aims to show the social and cultural positions and conflicts of the migrants in Britain with references to the concept of subaltern identity connected with postcolonial theory of literature.

## 2. Theoretical Frame of the Concept of Subaltern

In the beginning of the twentieth century British Empire was a dominant power in a great part of the world including Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, Canada, Australia and Ireland. Later, the century became the century of decolonization. Boehmer (1995) defines colonialism "as the settlement of territory, the exploitation or development of resources and the attempt to govern the indigenous inhabitants of occupied lands" (p.2). In this context, postcolonialism covers not only historical continuousness but also change. Nowadays it is still connected with the modes of representation peculiar to colonialism in spite of the changing political map of the world as a result of the decolonization (McLeod, 2000: 33). Moreover, it can be asserted that postcolonialism is in the center of the changes and challenges continually within its theoretical frame:

Postcolonialism names a politics and philosophy of activism that contests that disparity and so continues in a new way the anti-colonial struggles of the past. It asserts not just the right of African, Asian and Latin American peoples to access resources and material well-being, but also the dynamic power of their cultures, cultures that are now intervening in and transforming the societies of the west (Young, 2003:4).

Postcolonial theory as a field of study has versatile subdivisions. Among them, subaltern studies group, which becomes popular in 1980s, focuses on the contraversial problems related with the theory like subaltern subject by intensifying on the subaltern identities in India (McLeod, 2003: 24). Among this group, Antonio Gramsci, who is a Marxist theoretician, talks about the concept of subaltern in his article called Notes on Italian History. Gramsci uses the term to denote low class people dominated by an elitist ruling class. As Gramsci is a political activist he firstly uses the term for the representation of oppressed workers. For him, the subaltern's existence should be noticed. Thus, he became interested in the subaltern studies, consciousness and culture (Francese, 2009). Gramsci studies the history of the subaltern groups gradually. He intensifies on the subaltern groups' changing place in economic production, their relation to the dominant political formations in terms of the advocacy of limited rights and autonomy (Gramsci, 1971).

On the other hand Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, postcolonial feminist critic, reflects her ideas on subalternity in her article called 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'. She especially focuses on the term 'speak'. Spivak explained subalternity as a problematic concept with references to historical developments occurring as a result of the politics of capitalism. She considers subalternity to be situational (Spivak, 1991). Besides, she analyzes Indian Sati women losing her voice as a subaltern group situated in a place between the domination of white men and brown men (Spivak, 1991).

For Spivak, the subaltern cannot speak because of the fact that it cannot be interpreted truly. Hence, she claims that the subaltern does not have a history and cannot speak due to the colonial production adding that the female subaltern is heavily in shadow in a male dominant world (Spivak, 1988 ). Thus, it becomes clear that the silence of female depends on the misinterpretation of the subject for her.

### 3. The Conceptual Analysis of the Novel

With a style of brightness, Emecheta introduces the story of a woman who questions her position as a Nigerian female and searches for independence. Albert and Kehinde Okolo as the Nigerian migrant family live in London for 18 years until Albert's sisters persuade him to return to Nigeria. Kehinde does not agree with them because their two children have lived in London and have not been to Nigeria. Moreover, she understands that she is pregnant. Unfortunately, she has to have an abortion due to Albert's insistence. Finally, Albert returns to Nigeria although Kehinde stays in London for a while in order to sell their house. In fact, Kehinde willingly stays in London to organize the selling of the house and her resignation from her position at work before returning to Nigeria:

It looked as if she was the only one in the family satisfied with their stay in England. Albert could hardly hide his delight at the thought of going home, and the children had been infected with his enthusiasm Kehinde wondered why she found it so difficult to join in (Emecheta, 1994: 41).

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After the return of Albert and the children to Nigeria, Kehinde begins to manage on her own as a lonely woman. However, she notices that she is a half-person without her husband and decides to depart for Nigeria. On her arrival, she is upset down for meeting Albert's second wife. She is so horrified by this fact and can not adopt herself to her new position which makes her subordinate as a female, a partner and a mother, respectively. Her new position makes her more determined to return to England and establish a new life for herself in London once again. Her problematic relationship with her family members including her husband and children develops in a parallel perspective with her recollections of a problematic childhood: Kehinde's twin and her mother were dead at birth. Unfortunately, everybody in the family believes that she had eaten her sister. This superstitious quality makes her injured and guilty but later she rejects her subordinate and superstitious position. She does the same thing and exhibits the same opposition to Albert and everybody who places her to an inferior rank as a female and an individual.

During this period Kehinde experiences the difficulties of living as a single female in spite of the fact that she is married indeed. Nobody among Nigerians understands her staying alone in London even her best friend, Marioomo's husband. She is accused of being disobedient as a married woman, who is far from her husband and children. Men are disturbed by her successful management both at work and home in the novel. For them, she must be permissive and pretend to be a woman who is respectful to traditional Nigerian life style making the women subordinate rather than independent women.

Moriammo's husband strictly criticizes Kehinde and he is angry with his wife because of her friendship with Kehinde:

What was Moriammo, a good muslim wife, doing at all, with a Christian woman who had sent all her family away so she could have a good time? Any man could go to her now, had Moriommo thought of that? What would Olimide think of her when he grew up? It was a shame of Kehinde's husband Albert: "He spoke with contempt of inadequacies of men like Albert, who leave their wives at the mercy of all comers in London, who take their wives to clinics to abort their babies because of money. Why did he go back to Nigeria when they both had good jobs? It was because of greed and the love of women. It was obvious Albert must have another woman by now, and had no further use for Kehinde (Emecheta, 1994: 57).

Together with Albert's leaving from London, Kehinde is immediately reduced to an inferior woman by the people thinking like Tunde, Moriammo's husband. It is a known fact that the term subaltern is used to denote an inferior military rank and a general attribute of subordination. Kehinde is placed to a subordinate position when she returns to Nigeria. She is upset down in Nigeria for the reason that she understands her husband is married to a young educated woman called Rike and has a little son. As this second wife works at university as a teacher having a ph.d. degree, the members of family including the servants respect her rather than Kehinde who is penniless and financially dependent on her husband.

Antonio Gramsci used the term subordinate in subaltern studies, and then Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak preferred to use this term in the postcolonial theory. Gramsci uses subaltern “interchangeably with subordinate and instrumental to describe non-hegemonic groups or classes” (Morton, 2007: 97). People become aware of the “common properties of subordinate groups as a whole –the shared fact of their subordination, their intrinsic weakness, their limited strenghts” (Morton, 2007: 97). Kehinde is so overwhelmed to meet such a situation which makes her passive:

Here women were supposed to stick together and a wife to give her husband room enough to be a man. This was not new to her so why was she finding it so difficult to accept? She felt she was being cheated, undervalued. She looked at Albert’s young wife, a much more educated woman, bowing down to tradition. But though it, she had acquired a home and a big extented family for her children to belong to. In spite of her decorate, she had got herself hooked to a man eighteen years her senior, with a wife and two children in England. Kehinde knew she did not stand a chance against Rike, with her Lagos sophistication. They were not playing by the same rules (Emecheta, 1994: 89).

At last, Kehinde understands that “there was no place for her in the family” (Emecheta, 1994: 89). In the relationship of space, culture and power, Kehinde becomes a passive woman in Nigeria. The space and culture in Nigeria make her a person having subsidiary importance in the family when her situation is compared with Rike and her husband, Albert. As a migrant who lived in London for a long time, she can not be successful to orient herself to the culture that makes women passive in terms of their gender roles in the family life and social surrounding.

In this context, the emphasis on elitist approach is a known fact in subaltern history. “Subaltern history had successfully shown that the man or citizen who was the soverign subject of bourgeois history writing was in truth only the elite” (Morris, 2010: 83). As a marginal woman Kehinde considers the point which is not expected from her and decides on returning to London because she is like an alien in Nigeria. Of course, as a migrant they have versatile problems in England but she undertands that she is an individual in England and refuses to live in a polygamous family in Nigeria. Nigeria as a place in the eastern side of the world and its cultural codes make women obedient and dependent to their men. Thus, submission becomes an important characteristic that a woman should have in Nigeria. For a woman like Kehinde adopting herself to the type of European female pattern it is the only solution to go back to London, to her own home metaphorically. In this experience, she understands that she belongs to London in terms of place and cultural belonging. Hence, she refuses to accept the Nigerian traditions and attitudes in the service of men in an unequal and one-sided way. Due to this fact, she falls away from her own culture as a result of her migrant identity and problem of belonging. Finally, she understands that she has to belong to a culture which unwelcomes her during the years passing in London: “She took hold of herself. Surely it was foolish to pine for a country where she would always be made to feel unwelcome. But then her homecoming had been nothing like the way she had dreamed of it” (Emecheta, 1994: 96). Thus, she is pushed up the shores of marginality once again and “she found herself once more relegated to the margins” (Emecheta, 1994: 97).

Additionally, Kehinde is often influenced by her twins’ inner voice and she is confused, mentally. Her twin sister is dead but it is the voice of commonsense and always warns Kehinde against her traditional patterns of behaviour and thought as in the case of point of decision to return to England:

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Inside the narrow hallway, the smell of the London terrace house welcomed her like a lost child. Before she could suppress it, a voice inside her sang out, 'Home, sweet home!' Taiwo, who had not spoken to her since she had gone to Nigeria, was back. Kehinde rebuked the voice: This is not my home. Nigeria is my home'. As she said it, she knew she was deceiving herself, and Taiwo would not let her get away with it. We make our own choices we go along' came the voice. This is yours. There's nothing to be ashamed of in that (Emecheta, 1994: 107-108).

After returning to London, Kehinde begins to live together with her male tenant five years younger than her. Her love relation with him is heavily criticized by her teenager son because she is still married to Albert. Her son thinks that everything that Kehinde has belongs to him because he is a male. Of course, that is a culturally Nigerian attitude to place the male into the center and to ignore the existence of the female. Kehinde culturally adopting herself to the western perception of life style refuses her son's expectations from her and breaks her own culturally Nigerian codes and lets herself free claiming that she is also a part of polygamous family in a satiric attitude implying that she is doing the same as her husband. By this way her marginality shows itself because marginality is also a field of power (Öncü&Wayland, 2005:188). Thus, she tries to show the cultural difference in terms of power referring to space in two opposite sides of the world and the duality of female and male.

In this context, 'space' comes forward as a key word in the narratives of globalization and gives rise to the occurrence of new identities due to cultural harmony of individuals. Kehinde internalizes the life and culture in London rather than in Nigeria. For Buttimer and Greverius, individuals adopt to their social and physical surrounding by loading meanings to them and this surrounding is in harmony with individual's social and cultural identity and this makes individuals more confident and in peace (Öncü&Wayland, 2005:107). Thus, Kehinde prefers living as a subordinate migrant and a Nigerian female in London having more rights and money rather than living in Nigeria as a subordinate, obedient, passive and penniless female.

#### 4. Conclusion

As a consequence, it is understood that Kehinde represents the subaltern identity and she has to choose her new position due to the influence of the western culture and perception. This denotes the subaltern history's fragmented structure. "Subaltern histories were fragmentary, disconnected, incomplete, that subaltern consciousness was split within itself, that it was constituted by elements drawn from the experiences of both dominant and subordinate classes (Morris, 2010: 83). It is also clear that Kehinde as a female is both outside and inside the domain, in which he has to live. Her situation as a female changes due to the space and culture. She has different kinds of lives from each other in London and in Nigeria. According to the Partha Chatterjee, "Research into the subaltern history had shown that the subaltern was both outside and inside the domains of colonial governance and nationalist politics" (Chatterjee, 2010:295).

Additionally, individual problems of the disenfranchised groups are reflected together with the social problems of them in the novel. Whereas Kehinde as a married female working in a bank in London has a good position among the Nigerians like her, she has a pejorative position in Nigeria. She

suddenly has a second rank position as a wife and mother because of her husband's marriage to a young and educated and rich woman working at university and having Ph. D on philosophy. Her husband always stays with his new wife and baby. Kehinde is also separated from her own children because they are in a boarding school and happy there. The children enjoy with their young step-mother, too. Kehinde's situation as a penniless and a subordinate woman in her own country demonstrates that she has been split within herself as a result of her experiences between the dominant and subordinate classes as a migrant. For Spivak "the subaltern as a female is even more deeply in shadow" (Spivak, 1988:287).

Kehinde as the protagonist of the novel is portrayed as a subordinate and a member of the disfranchised groups. It is a fact that Spivak's critic of English literature emphasizes the superiority of British culture (Morton, 2007: 16). Hence, it seems that Emecheta writes in a perspective depending on the superiority of British culture by making Kehinde return to England at the end of the novel. For Spivak, the subaltern cannot speak and women are silenced because they are subject to colonialism and patriarchy (Riach, 2017: 11). Kehinde is obliged to be subordinate because of the fact that she is also a subordinate as a migrant in Britain. It can be said that it is a kind of epistemic violence inflicted through thought, speech and writing instead of physical harm (Riach, 2017: 11). Kehinde is thought to affirm his husband's privileged status as a male in Nigeria and she is expected to be submissive. However, she is in harmony with her female identity in Britain. Thus, she prefers having the female identity type within the concept of western world despite of her subaltern position there. On the other hand, her husband acquires a powerful position in Nigeria. In patriarchy, men have all positions of power and women cannot speak for themselves (Riach, 2017: 11). Everybody in the family and in the society respects him, and they are in the service of him as well because of his male identity in Nigeria. In this sense, power dominates and reshapes people's lives according to its content.

Finally, it occurs that the positions of the characters in the novel change due to the influence of the space, culture and power. In this context, Emecheta's Kehinde can be read as a novel denoting subalternity and its relationship with colonialism. Moreover, such perspectives like the silencing of subaltern and the marginality of the subaltern are highlighted in the novel in order to show the problematic situation of subaltern identity. In this context, the study's main purpose includes to display the ways to hear the subalterns in Britain. Thanks to Spivak's discourse, cultural position of the subaltern characters in Kehinde has been analyzed. In this sense, her discourse as a method of showing the situation of the subaltern identities can be applied to other subaltern identities in the British novel as in the example of *Kehinde*. In this sense, Emecheta carefully gives the panorama of the subaltern situation among the migrants who have to live both inside and outside as a reflection of periphery and center in her fascinating novel called *Kehinde*.

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