Volume 20 Issue 81
Originally issued as A20



Global Journal of human-social science: A
Arts & Humanities - Psychology
Volume 20 Issue 20 Version 1.0 Year 2020
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

African Beliefs in Buchi Emecheta's Writings

By Dr. Epounda Mexan Serge & Dr. Bokotiabato Mokogna Zéphirin

Université Marien Ngouabi, Congo Brazzaville

Abstract- The belief in Africa is multifaceted and has been a major influence on art, culture and philosophy. Today, the continent's various populations and individuals are mostly adherents of Christianity, Islam, and to a lesser extent several traditional African religions. In Christian or Islamic communities, religious beliefs are also sometimes characterized with syncretism with the beliefs and practices of traditional religions. However, a close look at African people shows that they are largely rooted on other sort of beliefs that we intend to scrutinize throughout this study. Thus, this paper aims not only at identifying existing beliefs in African culture but also at showing their sacredness in the life of people based on the writings of the African woman writer, Buchi Emecheta.

Keywords: *belief, africa, religion, christianity, islam, buchi emecheta.*

GJHSS-A Classification: *FOR Code: 190402*



Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:



© 2020. Dr. Epounda Mexan Serge & Dr. Bokotiabato Mokogna Zéphirin. This is a research/review paper, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 Unported License http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/), permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

African Beliefs in Buchi Emecheta's Writings

Dr. Epounda Mexan Serge [α] & Dr. Bokotiabato Mokogna Zéphirin [σ]

Abstract- The belief in Africa is multifaceted and has been a major influence on art, culture and philosophy. Today, the continent's various populations and individuals are mostly adherents of Christianity, Islam, and to a lesser extent several traditional African religions. In Christian or Islamic communities, religious beliefs are also sometimes characterized with syncretism with the beliefs and practices of traditional religions. However, a close look at African people shows that they are largely rooted on other sort of beliefs that we intend to scrutinize throughout this study. Thus, this paper aims not only at identifying existing beliefs in African culture but also at showing their sacredness in the life of people based on the writings of the African woman writer, Buchi Emecheta.

Keywords: belief, africa, religion, christianity, islam, buchi emecheta.

Résumé- la croyance en Afrique est à multiples facettes et a été d'une influence importante sur l'art, la culture et la philosophie. Aujourd'hui, les différentes populations du continent et les individus sont presque des adhérents du Christianisme, de l'Islam et à une moindre mesure plusieurs religions traditionnelles africaines. Dans les communautés chrétiennes ou Islamiques, les convictions religieuses sont aussi quelquefois caractérisées par syncrétisme avec les croyances et les pratiques de religions traditionnelles. Cependant, un regard minutieux sur les peuples africains montre qu'ils sont grandement inculqués sur d'autres sortes de croyances que nous avons l'intention de scruter au cours de cette étude. Ainsi, ce travail ne vise pas seulement l'identification des croyances existantes dans la culture africaine, mais aussi la présentation de leur sacralité dans la vie des peuples basés dans les œuvres de l'auteur féminin africain, Buchi Emecheta.

Mots clés: la croyance, l'afrique, la religion, le christianisme, l'islame, buchi emecheta.

I. Introduction

Africa is a large continent with multitudes of nations, which have complex cultures, innumerable languages and myriad dialects encompassing a wide variety of traditional beliefs. Although religious customs are sometimes shared by many local societies, they are usually unique to specific populations or geographic regions. All traditional African religions are united by a shared animistic core with special importance to ancestor worship. In this context, the word "traditional" means indigenous, that which is foundational, handed down from generation to generation, meant as to be upheld and practiced today and forevermore. A heritage from the past, yet not treated as a thing of the past but that which connects the past with the present and the present with eternity. The majority of Africans are adherents of Christianity or Islam and combine the practice of their traditional belief with the practice of Abrahamic religions, which are widespread throughout the continent. They have both spread and replaced indigenous African religions, but are often adapted to African cultural contexts and belief systems. The World Book Encyclopedia has estimated that in 2002 Christians formed 40% of the continent's population, with Muslims forming 45%. Indeed, Christianity is now one of the most widely practiced religions in Africa along with Islam and is the largest religion in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, several syncretistic and messianic sects have formed throughout much of the continent, including the Nazareth Baptist Church in South Africa and the Aladura churches in Nigeria. Notwithstanding, there is also fairly widespread populations believing in people, sacred objects or places, witches, death from where they draw faith. A closer look at Buchi Emecheta's writings reveals the existence of several beliefs among which some and their implications in the life of people will be considered in the present study.

Author α σ: Faculté des Lettres, Arts et Sciences Humaines (Université Marien NGOUABI, Congo Brazzaville).
e-mails: mexanserge@gmail.com, zephirinbokotias@gmail.com, bokotiabatozephirin@gmail.com

II. Buchi Emecheta and the Material

The literary history of Africa reveals that writing has been dominated by men, with comparatively few women producing literary works. This has been attributed to the highly patriarchal nature of the traditional and modem African society, which has continued to give more space for self-affirmation to men. Through institutionalized systems, women have continued to be comparatively disadvantaged when it comes to opportunities in education that is essential for self-expression and production of artistic works.

Born in Nigeria in 1944, Emecheta attended primary and secondary school in Lagos, Nigeria. She obtained a degree in Sociology from the University of London. Married at age 16, she emigrated with her husband from Nigeria to London in 1962. She began writing stories based on her life, including the problems she initially encountered in England. These works were first published in *New Statesman* magazine and were later collected in the novel *In the Ditch* (1972). That work was followed by *Second-Class Citizen* (1974), and both were later included in the single volume *Adah's Story* (1983). Those books introduce Emecheta's three major themes: the quests for equal treatment, self-confidence, and dignity as a woman. With more than a

© 2020 Global Journals

dozen novels to her credit, Buchi Emecheta is arguably one of Africa's prolific writers. Her presence within Africa's literary landscape is enhanced by the fact that she is an African writer (Nigerian) who has lived out of her country and Africa most of her life. Some critics have mentioned that her university training had a great influence on her writing. She has produced a number of novels and is recognized as one of the first female writers to overtly address issues of feminism.

In a chronological way, her novels include *In the Ditch* (1972), *Second-Class Citizen* (1974), *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977), *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979*), Destination Biafra* (1981*), Naira Power* (1981), *Double Yoke* (1981), *The Rape of Shavi* (1986), *and Head Above Water* (1986). Other Novels include *Gwendolen* (1989) *and Kehinde* (1994*)*, among others. The primary materials used for arguments in this study are Buchi Emecheta's two novels: The *Bride Price* and *The Slave Girl* since they corroborate to the research theme. However, other fictional works of the author have also been used as reference sources. Apart from these, some literary critical works of the same interest have been used as secondary sources for the collection of data. Buchi Emecheta is a feminist who focuses on the victimization of women in her community. The title of the novel *The Bride Price* is very critical as it suggests that it is about price of a bride. Published in 1976 by George Braziller in New-York*, The bride Price* is a story of a young girl, Aku-nna, meaning ''father's wealth'' whose life is forbidden by customs and traditions and although she gets caught in a battle between the old and the new. Aku-nna's life shows that tradition is not an easy enemy to fight with. In Ibo community the daughter fetches a very good bride price to her father. It is a source of family income and marriage has become a business. Thus, Bride price is a marriage payment wherein Aku-nna's father expects. Unfortunately, Aku-nna dares to choose her own life partner against the wish of her father. She is allowed to complete her education because her diploma degree will enhance her bride price. After education Aku-nna has a new vision for life and her dreams give her strength to rebel against the traditional customs of her community.

The Slave Girl however, centers on Ojebeta who was sold as slave by her brother, Okolie. Published in 1977 by Buchi Emecheta, *The Slave Girl* is an irony upon Nigerian culture. As a matter of fact, the title of the novel reflects the burden upon the soldiers of a girl. The word slave is a label for the girl. *The Slave Girl* is a story of Obejeta whose journey starts from girlhood and end with permanent slavehood and the author has not given identity to the girl. The title suggests Emecheta's quest for selfhood. Being a female novelist she is searching for a place, a place free from gender bias where a woman can be known and respected as a human being. Ojebeta's parents die when she is very young. She is left with her two brothers. After her parents' death her brother Okolie wants to sell her. He takes her to Onitsha market and sells her just for seven pounds and ten shillings. There she becomes a domestic slave. Ojebeta is lost, is displaced, screams and tries to run away. After this overview on the novels which centre this study it matters to recall that a belief is something that a person holds to be true. It may either be a conviction that the world is flat or that the world is round or a conviction that human beings were created by a supernatural power or that they evolved from other organisms by a process of natural selection.

Undoubtedly, the African culture is rooted upon a tradition, which remains a legacy from ancestors. However, the Nigerian religion in general and Iboland's religion in particular is based on the belief that there is one creator, God also called Chineke or Chukwu. Yet, the creator can be approached through numerous other deities or spirits in the form of natural objects, most commonly through the god of thunder known as Amadiora. There is also the belief that ancient ancestors protect their living descendants and are responsible for rain, harvest, health and children. In Buchi Emecheta's writings however, some other beliefs have been identified and stand as our main concern in the following discourse. Thus, what are they? In addition, for what are they?

a) Witches

In order to grasp what ''witch'' is, it imports to define witchcraft from which it originates. As a matter of fact, Wehmeier and Ashby (2000:1371) define witchcraft as "the use of magic powers, especially evil ones." This concept therefore refers to the use, by some people of evil magic powers to harm or cause misfortune to others. Additionally, the definition given by Hayes (1995: 339-340) really corroborates when he considers witchcraft as

> *"… the supposed power of a person to harm others by occult or supernatural means, without necessarily being aware of it ... (T)he essence of witchcraft and sorcery is the causing of harm to persons or property by invisible means".*

According to this passage, a *witch* is a woman who is believed to have magic powers, especially to do evil things, and is made popular in stories and legends. Because *witches* were very good at making things happen, the word eventually also came to describe an ordinary person who is particularly good at something. *They* are often characters in fantasy stories and can be good or bad and may serve as a guide or mentor for major characters in a story. Usually, they are wise old women, sometimes with a long white beard and flowing robes using a wand or cast magic spells to help or harm other characters.

In the African context a witch may even go without clothing, a scenario that specifically applies to night witches. Light on the implementation of witchcraft

© 2020 Global Journals

is shared by many scholars. Parrinder is one of them. Indeed, Parrinder (1971:61) reveals that "The witch is generally thought to fly at night from her sleeping body and feed on the soul of her victim who thereupon sickens and dies." This amounts to the most horrendous act of destruction of another human being – feeding on his or her soul. In an analogical way, Kritzinger another critics who formulates a comment about African witches. In this connection, Kritzinger (2004:180) writes:

> *In Africa, witches are always viewed as evil, and are not always female. In many African countries, it is believed that witchcraft runs in the family and that one is born a witch. Witches are believed to have a natural inclination to carry out evil, making people ill and even causing death.*

While the power of witches is denied in some parts of the world for several reasons, in Africa this belief is still topical. That is why, being African woman writer, Buchi Emecheta's literary productions are not an exception. Indeed, characters in her novels are imbued with such beliefs and this, doubtlessly for some reasons too. Thus, why is this practice so common and running in these characters? One of the main answers among several is the characters' protection against enemies, a belief which stands standard in Ibo community. Truly, witches have two facets: whether they act for people's profit or on their detriment and people also believe on them very often when their needs met otherwise they would desire to get rid of them. The following case from Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* (1977:20) where witches were cast away from the community for their misdeeds is telling much:

> *All Okwuekwu Oda knew for sure at the time that no journey was too hazardous to make in order to ensure the life of this little girl of his. He pondered sometimes about this great Oba Idu whose chief wife, they said, was also a chief witch and priestess. Normally, witches in Idu were cast away to live apart from other human beings, where they were left to fend for themselves until they died, miserably, as befitted any witch; but the big king kept his chief wife, to guard him and tell him who his enemies were.*

We can however learn from the above quotation that dignified men keep their wives whoever they are for their own interest as the king Oba Idu did keep his. Another analogical instance of belief experienced in Ibo community is that which consists in consulting the oracle though supported by wizards. Indeed, there is the Oracle of the Hills and the caves in which the oracle is called Agbala, a women who then gets possessed by the spirit when the people come to consult the oracle. When people have troubles or anything, they may travel to the oracle and ask for advice. The people will usually listen to everything that the oracle says because they believe that it is very wise. Put differently, in Ibo traditional society, when something goes wrong in the welfare of the individual or his family, he immediately wondered who had caused it to happen. In most cases, the individual would suspect that someone had used evil magic, sorcery, or witchcraft against him or his household, animals, or fields. This is the case experienced by Ikemefuna in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as he was wondering about his mother's fate, whether she is alive or dead. What is important to know in this consultation is that the implementation went through the song as Achebe puts:

> *He sang it in his mind, and walked to its beats. If the song ended on his right foot, his mother was alive. If it ended on his left, she was dead. No, not dead but ill. It ended on the right. She was alive and well. He sang the song again, and it ended on the left. But this second time did not count. The first voice gets to Chukwu or god's house. That was a favourite saying of children. Ikemefuna felt like a child once more. It must be the thought of going homes to his mother (1958:42-43).*

It is now understandable that African people in general and Ibo people of Nigeria in particular are often subjected to incredible suffering because of the activity of witches or even evil forces. However, they also don't hesitate to consult the same ''witches'' for several purposes, some of them being protection, discovering his or her destiny, to name only a few. It is a belief that Ibo community trusts and shows their faith. In Buchi Emecheta's writings also the belief in oracle is commonly share by and among members of the community. The vivid instance is that of Nnu Ego, the protagonist of *The Joys of Motherhood* who through Agbadi, her father consults the oracle. As a matter of fact, Nnu Ego becomes pregnant and seeks her own protection and that of the expected new born baby. In this connection, Emecheta (1979: 79) writes:

> *…she wrote to her father and told him what she had noticed, that she was going to have another child. He sent messages back in reply to say that the Oracle foretold that it would be a boy, who would go far in modern learning but who in so doing would attract a lot of jealousy. All the required sacrifices for him had been made to take away any evil eye people might cast on him, so that instead, he would be loved by many. Agbadi sent charms for Nnu Ego to wear as a kind of protection around her neck and special home-made soap for bathing as part of the ritual.*

So far, people come from far and near to consult the oracle. They came when misfortune dogged their steps or even they had a dispute with their neighbours. One of the purposes had been to discover what the future held for them or to consult the spirits of their departed fathers. In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo who did not have the start in life (the start that many men usually had) did not inherit a barn from his father for he was a lazy man. And *the story was told in Umuofia of how his father, Unoka had gone to consult the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves to find out why he always had a miserable harvest* (1958:12). If the Ibo people centre their beliefs in witches in one hand, other kinds of beliefs are not to be ignored in the other hand. Native doctors are also part of these beliefs.

© 2020 Global Journals

b) Native doctors

To Christians, the bible says *''and call me in the day of distress, I shall rescue you and you will glorify me''* (Psamms50:15). Believing in the power of The Almighty God, at any circumstances Christians invoke God who is always attentive to their cries. This is because Christians recognize that they are limited and there is a powerful force which can rescue them in time of distress. While doing so, Christians recall to God his own wordings to them which stand as a promise. However, if Christians believe in God for multiple reasons, in some communities around the world, people also believe in other forces provided they reach their target. This is the case of the Nigerian Ibo community as exemplified in the fictitious world of Buchi Emecheta. In fact, instead of God's power, they believe in native doctors who refer to African traditional men or women who possess special powers that can be used to heal people. They are therefore engaged and involved in the broad task of resolving health or illness issues, as well as in predicting the future in order to bring transformation that will improve the conditions of individuals within black African communities. Among their diverse responsibilities, we can mention the healing of relationships that is between fellow humans, people and their ancestors, people and nature spirits, and between people and the environment. As such, they are held in high regard within the communities since they have exceptional knowledge and powers that can be used to aid people with a two-fold aim to remove the influence of sorcery and evil spirits and restore the wellbeing of the soul or spirit, or providing a solution to the troubled person. These attributions resemble the description of native doctors made by Shorter. In fact, Shorter (1985: 8) paints the different activities, skills and even competencies of native doctors in the following terms:

> *The term is used to refer to traditional diviner-doctors in pre-literate societies, particularly in Africa. Divination is a form of revelation. It goes beyond mere diagnosis, the examination of the patient and the knowledge of natural cures and remedies to include the analysis of dreams, the restoration of mental hygienic balance and the dynamics of human and supra-human relationships. The healing performed by a traditional diviner-doctor is carried out at various levels and by various means. There may be a greater or lesser proportion of treatment of physical ailments, using herbal remedies. There may be a care and respect for the natural environment and a preoccupation with social reconciliation as a prerequisite for healing. Attention may be paid to the effects of enmity, to cursing, to witchcraft and sorcery, as well as to the intervention of ancestral spirits and non-human or supra-human agencies.*

The name native doctor does not therefore convey the full spectrum of the role and function of the traditional medicine man or woman, the term diviner can also to some extent be associated. However, in Buchi Emecheta's writings some characters in quest of solutions to their troubles believe in native doctors. Accordingly, in *The Slave Girl*, Umeadi experiences fatalism in so far as each time she gives birth to a baby girl, this latter always passes away. This fact, coming timelessly forces Umeadi to consult native doctors where she could not only be aware of ''causes of these deaths'' and also of ''what to do'' in order to stop the recurrence of such fatal fact. To this effect, the following passage based on the survival or not of Umeadi's daughter serves as illustration:

> *Umeadi, you'd better get up, 'remarked Ukabegwu's wife. Your Ogbanje, this visitor, looks as if she is staying this time. She is crying out with hunger. Why not put her to your breast? Umeadi did as she was told and as it became apparent that the child might indeed live, her mind went to all the sacrifices she had made to her chi, the personal god to whom every Ibuza individual appealed in time of troubles. Her loss of daughters had continued for many years, however that Umeadi had reconciled herself to the fact that maybe that was her lot. Now the new baby suckled with so much force, she was convinced there was some life in this one. She handed the baby to Ukabegwu's wife, and ran as fast as her health would allow to the house of her dibia, the native doctor who said to her: ''your child would stay this time if you tie her with safety charms…It is our duty to make her stay as long as possible, until she is grown enough to reject her friends.* (1977: 17-18)

As we can read from the aforesaid, dibia plays important roles in the life of people. He, not only comfort troubled hearts but also suggests a way out to heal them from afflictions. This time Umeadi has saved the life of her daughter since she observed the native doctor's prescriptions: ''she did as she was told''. This belief, considered as common standard in African communities is also certified by the Kenyan writer Ngugi Wathiong'o. Accordingly, in his *Wizard of the Crow,* Ngugi (2007: 279) opines that

> *A person cannot be cured by word or deed unless she or he believes in the power of that word or deed. Now, our people say that good advice springs from frank words, and when it comes to curing on illness, taboos should be in the way…*

The above quotation backs up the African people's beliefs in native doctors, the implementation of their skills to heal or relieve people but also consents to qualify native doctors as advisers. In the vision of the writer people engaged in this belief would trust without any doubt for the achievement of the belief. Unfortunately, Kanurrer did not meet the goal because of his dubious attitude. Additionally, one of the many functions of native doctors is to grow, mix and sell various herbs for medicinal purposes. In this way they refer to herbalists as mixtures are available for almost anything, from medical problems to love potions. Thus, together with native doctors, they both provide protection in the form of personal charms against evil.

So far, in Ibo community, whenever a person suffers or experiences difficulties he or she doesn't hesitate to seek assistance from his dibia, the native doctor. The case of Umeadi tells much as she was

© 2020 Global Journals

healed from her recurrent loss of new baby girl. This is done thanks to the belief of a native doctor's mysticism, as we can understand from the following passage:

> *…thus, Ojebeta remined in the land of the living, with her mother Umeadi, her father Ukwekwu Oda and her two brothers, close by the Eke market. She was cherished and marked with special tattoos, and she thrived and grew, and had to make annual visits to the dibia at Ezukwu who adjusted her charms as she grew from babyhood to girlhood. (1977: 21).*

Commenting on this extract, we can say that this is the demonstration of the spiritual power from which native doctors through their dibia possess or embody the liability to force away invisible forces which bewitch members of the community, to release captives them and bring solutions to the multiple issues of their daily life. In the case of Ujebeta's daughter, the mysticism proves itself useful on sending away evil forces through a ceaseless metal bell ring. It has been noticed that in African communities, wealth, childbearing, kindheartedness, politeness or courtesy, and other values generate some jealousy on the other side where these values lack. Moreover, the Ibo community is not an exception. Indeed, in the fictitious world of Buchi Emecheta such behaviours are obversed. One way to sort out from this tricky implication or realities or even antagonism is entrust oneself to native doctors. The Ibo society being a polygamous one, it is in this climate that senior wives even consult native doctors to ensure the life of their children vis-à-vis the junior wives. Thus, Nnu Ego stands as stereotype. By so doing, senior wives believe in the magic power of native doctors or the dibia as the following quotation sounds:

> *Nnu Ego rushed Oshia to the native medicine man who listened to the boy's story. He didn't say that the boy was imagining the whole thing or tell him that he was lying; after all, he had his livelihood to earn. Instead, the dibia danced and jabbered and spat and convulsed in turn, and then announced in a strange voice: ''the child is right. You must protect your sons against the jealousy of the younger wife. If you bring me two hens and a yard of white cloth, I shall prepare a charm for your sons to wear. No jealousy will be able to reach them after that'' (1979: 129).*

In the African continent, this reality is currently experienced despite the fact that the author's concern is about her actual time and life; what justifies the autobiographical dimension of her writings. To end this sub-section, we can say that native doctors are very important within Ibo community and this for many reasons raised above. If one group of people believe in their magical power for protection, another one believe in it for different needs including childbearing, wealth, foretelling future happenings, harvest, fertility, etc. Moreover, giving birth is the expected result of a woman once married and she proves herself useful within her household when she bears children. Unproductiveness refers to bad lot that drives many women to believe in strange powers or consult native doctors able to likely change their situations. In Ibo society this practice was and is still newsworthy. Thus, with reference to Buchi Emecheta's writings, Ma Blackie is an evidence. In fact, facing barrenness Ma Blackie has no available possibilities than consulting a native doctor believing in his magic power which can help her meeting the goal. She made her way every morning to Ezekwu, the place in Ibuza where her medicine-man lived. She had to be up very early at the first cockcrow and often receives decoction from the magic man with proscription to follow as Emecheta writes:

> *She was not to wash her face, or chew any chewing-stick, talk to anyone, but was just to walk very fast, in the jewy mornings to the medicine-man's hut. There she would gulp down the roots mixture which was rapidly fermenting and tasted like a kind of wild but unsugared wine. She would wash her face with some of it, and then enter the hut to give the medicine man his special greetings, ''Igwe'', which meant ''the heavens''… (1976: 45).*

The reading we can make from the aforesaid is that Buchi Emecheta's fictitious world comprises a lot of beliefs including that in native doctors where Ma Blackie is one of the believers for her unproductiveness. From there, we can realize how important native doctors are in a traditional society when people meet their target after a strict respect of instructions.

However, it is important to notice that Western medicine is primarily interested in the recognition and treatment of disease. But traditional medicine through native doctors seeks to provide a meaningful explanation for illness and to respond to the personal, family and community issues surrounding illness. Native doctors explain not only the 'how' but also the 'why' of a sickness' and to some extent appear like spiritual advisers. But the belief in native doctors is not sufficient to cover our analysis. Another worthy belief in Ibo community is also necessary: the belief in personal god.

c) Chi or Personal God

There is a variety of health-related beliefs held by people throughout Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. This means that apart from the universal God that everyone believes in, there are also other gods from which people consider as true gods able to provide solutions to their problems. In this connection, Appiah Opoku 2007 develops a similar conception from where he recognizes the existence of indigenous practices among local people. Accordingly, he writes:

> *Since time immemorial, local people have developed a variety of resources management practices and approaches that continue to exist in tropical Africa, Asia, South America and other parts of the world (Appiah-Opoku, 2007).*

In Ibo society however, local people believe in Chi, considered as a personal god. Thus, in reference with Buchi's writings, what is Chi? What is his implication among owners?

© 2020 Global Journals

Chi represents a personal god that each individual has. It is there to fulfill a lot of roles within the owner. In Buchi's literary work also characters believe that in their daily life each individual possesses his personal god detaining supernatural power. Whatever told by the personal god must be implemented the owner as chi has the knowledge of foretelling the future. This is what Nnu Ego experienced as she was living in the conditions of unproductiveness. In fact, Nnu Ego was told in a dream to pick up a dirty boy lying in a stream and this was a way out for her state of barrenness in a community where self-confident or value as a woman depends on the children you have. Nnu Ego believes in what she dreams, receives advices and consolations as the following passage from Buchi advocates:

> *It was then that people understood the reason for her irrational behavior. Even some of the men had tears of pity in their eyes. Pieces of advice and consolation poured from people she had never seen and would never see again. Many took the time to tell her their own stories. Even the woman who had slapped her told her that out of six pregnancies she has only two children alive, yet she was still living. She reminded to Nnu Ego that she was still very young, and said that once babies started coming, they came in great numbers…she is not mad after all. The woman took it upon herself to inform the crowd in her imperfect Yoruba. ''She has only just lost the child that told the world that she is not barren''. And they all agreed that a woman without a child for her husband was a failed woman. (1979:62).*

Admittedly, Nnu Ego faces a two – dimensional situation: one can read affliction or unhappiness on one hand and hope on the other hand. Indeed, the loss of a child is often followed by some worries but with the presence of her Chi, Nnu Ego believes in a long run to bear and give birth to children who this time will live for long. From there, we can understand how the personal god centers the life of his owner. He is there to change the owner's misfortune into fortune, to set free the captives, to heal the sick persons, to bring solutions to any problems. Since Emecheta's geographical fictitious area is the same as that Chinua Achebe's, for they originate from the same community that is Ibo land, Achebe also paints and advocates the necessity of each individual to have his personal god which is the source of all happiness. This extract from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958: 10) tells better as the narrator puts:

> *Near the barn was the small house, 'the medicine house' or shrine where Okonkwo kept the wooden symbols of his personal god and of his ancestral spirits. He worshipped them with sacrifices of cola nut, food and palm- wine and offer prayers to them on behalf of himself, his three wives and eight children.*

This is to say that all members venerate personal god or chi for he has the ability to intervene at any case. That is why each individual must live in perfect harmony with his chi from which his future depends on. The character of Nnu Ego in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* is example as she expects having a baby boy according to her dream when she fell into that tired sleep often characteristic of early pregnancy and saw a baby boy, about three months old. As we can see, Nnu Ego believes in the operational mystical power of her chi, a belief that each member of the community must consider for the fulfillment of promises. A man's Chi has the ability to bring fortune or misfortune to his owner and this depends on the behavior presented by the owner. It is admitted in Ibo community that the loss of children at childbearing or a few days after its birth is considered as failure with regard to her husband and as such is ranked among unworthy and undignified women. This is one of the beliefs effectively approved by this community and Nnu Ego experienced it as soon as she lost her child. Actually, Nnu condemned her chi who possesses the capacity and ability to protect her and her family; what is even the reason of having a personal god. In fact, when the Chi does not approve one's ways, he would allow curse instead of blessing. For Nnu, her Chi has taken her child away and is no longer a mother or a woman for having lost only child. Another kind of belief which is also common in Ibo society is the in the mysticism of the river goddess. Thus, what is the river goddess and what is its implication on the life of this people?

d) River Goddess

Many authors agree with the idea that a belief is part of life. As such an individual cannot live without beliefs. Among the Ibo people the belief in river goddess is legendary as the country part is geographically covered with an important number of bodies of water: rivers, streams, lakes, sea. River goddess is one of the many gods that this people believe in, a female deity who resides in water with supernatural power. It is of course, a kind of idolatry, but a positive source of happiness where people find solutions to their diverse issues. Every member of the community is right to go and get purified in a river hoping in exchange to be healed of his pain. In Buchi Emecheta's writings this practice is remarkable and recurrent. Indeed, in *The Bride Price,* it is known that Ma Blakie experiences troubles when it comes to giving birth. She becomes worried about and this situation preoccupies other members of her community. Thus, believing in the power of the river goddess, Okonkwo thinks that her case may be resolved once she meets the river goddess. This can be evidenced in the wordings of Emecheta when she writes:

> *Were there any clever medicine-men in Lagos? Okonkwo asked. Why, all they had there were those people they called ''dokitas''who poured poison water into you and called it medicine. Ma Blackie, he affirmed, was to stay in Ibuza and had her system purified by the clear and unpolluted water from the Oboshi River; the river and the goddess of the river were gifts to all Ibuza people from the greater gods. It was the right of all Ibuza's sons and daughters to come to have*

© 2020 Global Journals

themselves cleansed by the river whenever they found themselves in difficulties in distant places of work (1976:47).

Oboshi is one of the rivers in Ibo land and it was there that Ma Blackie was advised to go and get purified in order to likely become productive. Through this extract Emecheta clearly shows the existence of belief in river goddess by both Okonkwo who advises Ma Blackie and ma Blackie herself who fulfills the offer. Similarly, the belief in objects is remarkable within Ibo people. While this sub-section highlights the belief in river goddess, other beliefs are not to be ignored. As a matter fact, although raised by another writer, the belief in the magic power of trees is also worthwhile. The existence of a sacred tree is noticed in the village where the whole villagers stood round in a huge circle waiting for to view a wrestling match. Accordingly, Achebe (1958:33) through his narrator puts:

The wrestlers were not there yet and the drummers held the field. They too sat just in front of the huge circle of spectators, facing22 the elders. Behind them, was the big and ancient silk-cotton tree which was sacred. Spirits of good children lived in that tree waiting to be born. On ordinary days young women who desired children came to sit under its shade.

It is certain that the belief in different things, be it river goddess or any other object is a mere idolatry. This means that Ibo community is idolatrous, rooted in their tradition which requires them to consult goddess when facing difficulties. Ma Blackie in quest of children was advised to get purified in the river is an evidence. From then, it can be admitted that despite foreign religions (Christianity and Muslim) which invaded the Ibo environment, this people remain attached to their traditional religions made of several beliefs. That is why like the other beliefs, the river goddess is also of great importance for this people as they get purification of their bad lot. So far, the river, with it ''water'' symbolizes life, wealthy as from water people draw essential for life.

III. Conclusion

This paper centers on African beliefs in the writings of Buchi Emecheta. It has been recognized from the outset that the faith of Ibo people has been gained by two foreign main religions but this fact does not prevent them to believe in their own traditional religion. It is in this perspective that a number of beliefs common to Ibo community have been purposely recorded and analyzed. In fact, the whole writing of Buchi Emecheta is full of traditional beliefs but the novels of *The Bride Price* and *The Slave Girl* have been selected to lead this study. Throughout the paper, we have shown that Ibo people strongly believe in the mystical power of many people or objects among which witches, native doctors, personal god, and river goddess. We also have not failed to show that the purpose of these beliefs was multidimensional: healing from diseases for some, getting productivity, protection, and wealth for the others, knowing the future as well as finding solutions to any situation that they confront with. Such are the cases experienced by Buchi Emecheta's characters in the novels chosen for this study.

References Références Referencias

1. Achebe, Chinua 1958. Things Fall Apart, Heinemann.
2. Appiah-Opoku, S. 2007. Indigenous beliefs and environmental stewardship: a rural Ghana experience. *Journal of Cultural Geography,* 22, 79-88.
3. Emecheta Buchi 1976. The Bride Price, New York: George Braziller.
4. ----------1977. The Slave Girl, New York: George Braziller.
5. ----------1979. *The Joys of Motherhood*, New York, A.W.S, Heinemann.
6. Hayes, S 1995. Christian responses to witchcraft and sorcery. *Missionalia* 23(3), 339-354.
7. Kritzinger, J N J et al 2000. Exploring theology: An introductory dictionary in Engelbrecht, J (ed), compiled by Mary Ralphs. Pretoria: Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa.
8. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, 2006. Wizard of the Crow, New York: Anchor Print.
9. Wehmeier, S & Ashby, M 2000. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary.* Sixth Edition.
10. Shorter, A 1985. *Jesus and the witch doctor: An approach to healing and wholeness*. London: Oribis Books.
11. The Holly Bible.

© 2020 Global Journals