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EXPOSURE TO ANOTHER CULTURE: SHAPING THE SELF OF THE SUBALTERN IN BUCHI EMECHETA'S *KEHINDE*[*]

Başka Bir Kültüre Maruz Kalmak: Buchi Emecheta'nın Kehinde Eserinde Madunun Benliğinin Şekillenmesi

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this study is to defamiliarize Gayatri Spivak's pessimistic approach regarding the condition of the subaltern as a female subject. Spivak's subaltern, misrepresented by the male-dominated West and the male-dominated East and therefore not belonging to any particular social group, has no history and cannot speak for herself. The position of the subaltern woman is examined based on Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* (1994), which deals with the circular migration of the eponymous character – Kehinde – from Nigeria to England, back to Nigeria and then back to England. The novel explores the binary between the self and the other of the subaltern woman in relation to the native and host cultures. To this end, the study uses several postcolonial concepts by Homi K. Bhabha, discussed at length in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), such as mimicry, liminality, appropriation, and ambivalence, which, in its turn, conceptualises the position of the Nigerian subaltern woman in relation to cultural difference. The study foregrounds the validity of the popular woman theory known as African feminism, which specifically addresses the situation of African women. This approach also makes it possible to redefine the traditional concept of femininity in Nigerian culture. The study shows how cultural difference affects the growing consciousness of the subaltern woman, which ultimately helps her to become an independent person. The study concludes that, unlike Spivak's subaltern, the Nigerian subaltern creates her own space from which she can speak for herself in the male-dominated society.

Keywords: African feminism, ambivalence, cultural difference, liminality, Kehinde, Nigeria, subaltern

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[*] This paper is extracted from my PhD dissertation titled "A Deconstructive Reading of the Nigerian Subaltern: Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn*, Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*". The dissertation is available in full text at the https://acikbilim.yok.gov.tr/.

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ÖZ: Bu çalışmanın amacı, Gayatri Spivak'ın bir kadın özne olarak madunun durumuna ilişkin kötümser yaklaşımını yabancılaştırmaktır. Spivak'ın madunu, erkek egemen Batı ve erkek egemen Doğu tarafından yanlış temsil edilen ve bu nedenle herhangi bir toplumsal gruba ait olmayan, tarihi olmayan ve kendi adına konuşamayan bir kadındır. Kadın madunun konumu, Buchi Emecheta'nın *Kehinde* (1994) adlı romanı temel alınarak incelenmiştir. Bu roman, esere adını veren Kehinde adlı karakterin Nijerya'dan İngiltere'ye, oradan tekrar Nijerya'ya ve sonra tekrar İngiltere'ye dairesel göçünü ele almaktadır. Roman, yerli ve ev sahibi kültürlerle ilişkili olarak kadın madunun benliği ve ötekisi arasındaki ikiliği araştırmaktadır. Bu amaçla çalışma, Homi K. Bhabha'nın *Kültürel Konumlanış* (1994) adlı kitabında ayrıntılı olarak tartıştığı taklit, melezlik, kendine mal etme ve ikirciklik gibi çeşitli postkolonyal kavramları kullanarak Nijeryalı kadın madunun kültürel farklılık karşısındaki konumunu kavramsallaştırıyor. Çalışma, Afrika feminizmi olarak bilinen ve özellikle Afrikalı kadınların durumunu ele alan popüler kadın teorisinin geçerliliğini ön plana çıkarmaktadır. Bu yaklaşım aynı zamanda Nijerya kültüründeki geleneksel kadınlık kavramının yeniden tanımlanmasını mümkün kılmaktadır. Çalışma, kültürel farklılığın madun kadının artan bilincini nasıl etkilediğini ve sonuçta bağımsız bir kişi olmasına nasıl yardımcı olduğunu göstermektedir. Çalışma, Spivak'ın madunundan farklı olarak Nijeryalı madunun erkek egemen toplumda kendi adına konuşabileceği kendi alanını yarattığı sonucuna varmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Afrika feminizmi, ikirciklilik, kültürel farklılık, sınırsallık, Kehinde, Nijerya, madun

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Introduction

This paper aims to defamiliarize Gayatri Spivak's pessimistic approach regarding the condition of the subaltern as a female subject. Based on Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* (1994), the study explores the possible potential of the subaltern woman to create her own space from which she can speak for herself in the male-dominated society. Spivak's concept of the subaltern is thus employed to examine the situation of the Nigerian woman in postcolonial society. A postcolonial reading of the novel draws on Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity, appropriation, and mimicry to conceptualise the position of the Nigerian subaltern woman in relation to cultural difference. In *Kehinde*, the binary between the self and the other of the subaltern woman is explored in relation to the native and host cultures. The study also explores the impact of both cultures on gender relations in 20th-century society. The significance of this study is to show that African feminism as a vernacular discourse addresses the problems of Nigerian women and that the subaltern woman, though a subaltern in a patriarchal society, has the potential to assert her own independence. In this context, African feminism is useful as a critical approach to address the major problems of the African woman who is subjected to exploitation due to the imposed subordination by the repressive policies of the male-controlled system. Furthermore, by adopting Spivak's concept of the subaltern, the

study examines the position of the Nigerian woman who is marginalised by her society and exercises her power from the periphery. It is noteworthy that despite Spivak's approach that denies agency and voice to the female subject within patriarchal institutions, a number of studies that have emerged recently examine the representation of the subaltern woman by either problematising Spivak's pessimistic view or attempting to give voice to the subaltern within oppressive cultural systems.[1]

The concept of the subaltern has gained particular prominence in postcolonial theory since the Indian scholar Gayatri Spivak explored the issue in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1987). Spivak develops a gendered analysis of the subaltern by examining the situation of Indian women and their representation in Western discourses. She points to the fact that the subaltern has no history and cannot speak in the context of colonial production and that the subaltern as a woman is even more deeply overshadowed (Spivak, 1987, p. 287). The author argues that the question of "woman" seems more problematic, claiming that "if you are poor, black and female, you get it three ways" (p. 294). Squeezed between the two discourses, the subaltern is unable to raise her voice because "there is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak" (p. 307). With this argument, however, Spivak does not intend to portray the subaltern as a passive subject; rather, her critical approach aims to question the system in which she cannot speak, but for which she is spoken or silenced.

In *Kehinde*, the employment of Spivak's subaltern is combined with the African feminist approach, also known as womanism. This is a model of African female discourse that emphasises different aspects of womanhood. Ogunyemi (1996) explains womanism in the African context as follows:

> "[W]omanism is a black outgrowth from feminism. Womanism is black-centred; it is accommodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism; unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand" (p. 60).

This critique adds to the significance of the research as it helps to shed light on the perspective of the African vernacular woman in a patriarchal society. This attitude also shows how Buchi Emecheta as a writer constructs the authentic image of the Nigerian woman, which is misrepresented by the male-dominated literary tradition.

[1] See Prakash (1992), Libin (2003), Maggio (2007), Saffari (2016), and Darder & Griffiths (2018).

A postcolonial reading of Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* (1994) focuses on Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of cultural difference, which he discusses at length in his key text *The Location of Culture* (1994). Bhabha emphasises the notion of cultural difference rather than cultural diversity in revising colonial history (1994, p. 49). This is a more accommodating stance in the articulation of culture, allowing the concept of cultural identity to be built (p. 50). On the other hand, he argues that cultural diversity is based on empirical and pre-given knowledge, whereas culture is not pre-given but, on the contrary, must be articulated (p. 50). Bhabha opposes the unity or totality of cultures, which is the discourse used to explain the nature of the colonial period. He claims that a cultural system is not unified and sufficient in itself (p. 52). He argues that colonial mimicry is "the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as the subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (p. 122). By this argument, he implies that in reforming and civilising the Other, the coloniser still retains a sense of difference (p. 122). Bhabha sees mimicry as an ambivalent concept created by colonial discourse. Since the discourse of mimicry is built on ambivalence, it must constantly produce slippage for the sake of difference, which is itself a process of denial (p. 122). Because of this sense of incompleteness, the colonised becomes almost exactly like the coloniser, but never quite conforms to the system that governs them both. Obviously, Bhabha does not offer a solution to the problem of cultural difference, as he considers any kind of polarisation dangerous. Bhabha's postcolonial concepts are widely used in literary criticism to rethink the principles of colonial history and culture.

Shaping the Self of the Subaltern in Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde*

Buchi Emecheta's writings generally benefit from her sociological training and focus on issues such as the oppression of black people in a white society and male-female relations in traditional society. Her works have redefined the one-sided image of African women painted by male writers. Her contribution to African and postcolonial literature includes such notable novels as *Second-Class Citizen* (1975), *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977), *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), and *Kehinde* (1994). Emecheta's books cited as a path to women's empowerment, consist of three stages: discovering one's own voice, creating forms of collective solidarity, and engaging in political activism (Dawson, 2010, p. 118). Emecheta, who is described as "the first successful black woman novelist to live in Britain after 1948", also addresses the central issues affecting black women, particularly their attempt to find an identity in Britain (p. 118). Ogunyemi

describes these novels as “the been-to (dis)advantage”, noting that Emecheta’s been-to fiction spans sharply contrasting worlds from which she deviates, arrives at, revisits and longs for, but also criticizes (1996, p. 220). Indeed, there are a number of African writers who have written about migration, but Emecheta’s first-hand experiences combined with her writing create a powerful tool with which the author reconstructs the lives of immigrants going through difficult times of change and adaptation to a foreign culture. Romanus Muoneke (2006) therefore believes that no one has experienced migration to the extent that Emecheta has (p. 54).

Kehinde (1994) is classified as one of Emecheta’s ‘been-to’ novels, which focuses on the main character's search for her self. It is the story of a Nigerian family, namely the Okolos, who came to England with the wave of Nigerian student immigration of the early 1960s. Albert and Kehinde Okolo have been living in London for 18 years when Albert’s sisters put pressure on him to return to Nigeria. Albert is also determined to return to Nigeria to “be someone ... to show off his own lifestyle, his material success" (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 6). Since her two children have never been to Nigeria, Kehinde is strongly against this idea. She has also recently found out that she is pregnant. Forced by her husband, she has an abortion. Albert leaves Britain earlier than the rest of the family to make preparations in Nigeria for the arrival of his wife and children. After a while, Albert sends for the children. Kehinde is lonely at first but manages on her own. Eventually, she begins to feel like a “half-person” without Albert, gives up her job and travels to Nigeria (p. 59). On arrival, she is horrified to learn that during the two years of separation, Albert had the opportunity to reclaim “his birthright” of polygamy by taking a second wife (p. 35). Kehinde decides to return to England and build a new life there. Kehinde's troubled relationship with Albert and her children finds its counterpart in her memories of a difficult childhood. Kehinde means ‘the last-born of the twins’, which means that Kehinde was the second-born of the twins when her mother gave birth to her. However, Kehinde’s twin was stillborn, and her mother died in childbirth, leading the family to believe that she ate her sister. Therefore, Kehinde is haunted by the voice of her dead sister in London. Once she goes to the country where she was born and raised, the voice stops haunting her. Kehinde has to face the realities of her community, which still practises polygamy, suggesting that women are inferior to men in their society. On her return to England and considering what she has been through, she murmurs to Taiwo, whose voice visits Kehinde for the last time, “Claiming my right

does not make me less of a mother, not less of a woman. If anything, it makes me more human" (p. 141).

Kehinde is a novel that deals with the circular migration of the eponymous character – Kehinde – from Nigeria to England, back to Nigeria and then back to England. The narrative perspective alternates between the third and first person. At the very beginning of the novel, Emecheta creates an image of a Nigerian immigrant family living in "a typical East London mid-terrace house with a small living room" and thus supposedly accustomed to the English way of life (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 2). On the other hand, they try to preserve their culture and eat Nigerian food, "ground rice and Egusi soup" (p. 2). Kehinde also reproaches her son for not speaking his mother tongue, to which her son replies, "You mean your mother tongue. Mine is English. Remember you said that when I was born, the first thing you said to me was, "Hello Joshua!" So, I speak the first language I heard" (p. 3). This ambivalence, which Bhabha characterises as "neither one nor the other", embodies the condition of the main character (Bhabha, 1994, p. 181). In this context, the "in-between space" in which Kehinde tries to define her position between the self and the other is based on the articulation of the hybridity of cultures (Bhabha, 1994, p. 56).

Kehinde's cultural dilemma concerns her status as a subaltern woman born in Nigeria and living in England. This is evident in her relationship with her husband. Kehinde and Albert seem to have a perfect relationship in their marriage. She has a well-paid job and can "talk to her husband less formally" than women in Nigeria who live in traditional polygamous marriages (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 6). Also, unlike her native culture, she considers her husband "a friend, a compatriot, a confidant" (p. 6). Since she is the main income earner in the household and has joint property, Kehinde can claim an independent social status in England. The fact that most of the income comes from Kehinde makes her children and Albert dependent on her. However, she prefers to pretend that the breadwinner is her husband, thus denying her rights and privileges granted by the host culture. In this way, she creates an imaginary Nigeria in which she is expected to behave like a traditional, subaltern woman.

> "In fact, Albert was only being realistic, since Kehinde earned more than he did. It was because of her position in the bank that they had been able to get a mortgage. But a good wife was not supposed to remind her husband of such things. When Kehinde said 'your house', she was playing the role of the 'good' Nigerian woman. Conversely, when he said, 'our house', he was being careful not to upset her. After almost sixteen years of marriage, they played this game without thinking" (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 4).

By behaving like a submissive wife, Kehinde tries to please her husband, which she impressively demonstrates by, among other things, agreeing to abortion. As for the cultural dimension, it is noteworthy that abortion is frowned upon in Nigerian society. This is explained by the fact that motherhood is a task assigned to women from childhood, as a prerequisite for social acceptance, which gives them a joyful and privileged status (Mohan, 2017, p. 7). Therefore, motherhood and care are seen as important biological acts that women are expected to perform (p. 7). Accordingly, children are a sign of wealth and necessity in Nigeria (Berrian, 1996, p. 172). Moreover, they serve as old-age provisions for ageing parents, especially for male children who ensure the lineage of the family (p. 172). Kehinde, who has been brought up to respect her traditional values, also tries to dissuade Albert from abortion by explaining that in her culture "people are more valuable than money" (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 7). For Albert, however, who is preparing to return to Nigeria, Kehinde's pregnancy is an unwelcome surprise. He decides that he cannot afford to have another child because, with his income alone, he could not save for the two of them to go home, let alone feed another mouth (p. 22).

Consequently, Kehinde develops into a depressed and melancholic person. Hurt and humiliated by her selfish husband, she believes that Albert has brought her down to the level of the prostitute they encountered outside the clinic. Kehinde compares herself to this woman and concludes that for Albert all women are the same, "just bodies, convenient vehicles which, when they took on an inconvenient burden, could be emptied of it by the same means" (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 17). She believes that women who have abortions are no better than street prostitutes. Triggered by the feeling of motherhood, Kehinde boldly declares, "I am a mother. A mother of two… I am not a whore, beating the street. I am a respectable woman" (p. 23). The abortion also signifies a break in the relationship between Kehinde and Albert and indicates the end of their married life. Kehinde firmly believes that abortion is a violation of her traditional beliefs and values, which changes the dynamic of her relationship with Albert forever. She puts up a brave front and whispers to herself, "I am not going to cry, stupid woman. Two children are enough. I don't care if my mother already had eight children…" (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 24). In the meantime, she is determined not to have any more children and finally has her tubes clamped. This decision can be seen as the first step towards self-knowledge of the subaltern woman, supporting Emecheta's view that a woman should have full and total control over her body. By claiming control over her body, Kehinde challenges the

traditional role of a subaltern woman, for in her culture tubal ligation is unconventional. From the standpoint of African feminism, the female body in African feminist writings serves as a focus of discourse that can more effectively validate the goals of feminist critique, in that, as a site of cultural contestation, it has the potential to develop discourses beyond its material essence. In this context, Marie Umeh believes that by taking control of her body, Kehinde realigns her life outside the restrictive definitions of patriarchally controlled womanhood (Umeh, 1996, p. xxviii).

Language is another vivid aspect of the novel that points to Kehinde's ambivalent position between the self and the other. It is noticeable that Kehinde makes extensive use of Nigerian pidgin, one of the English-based creole languages spoken as a lingua franca in Nigeria. Kehinde's Nigerian pidgin is notable for its overly anglicised content. The dialogues between Kehinde and her friend Moriammo are a good example of this:

> "Nigeria na country where dem dey paper-qualification mad. All this in-service training and experience wey I dey get here no go mean nothing'… 'Where you de all the time, Moriammo? We no get Barclays any more. Na Union bank now. Nigeria don boycott Barclays because of that trouble for South Africa" (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 51).

Kehinde's hybrid language is closely related to Bhabha's views on "the difference between being English and being Anglicised" (1994, p. 128). Bhabha describes this strategy as "metonymies of presence" and argues that this mimesis is produced through repetition and becomes different each time (p. 128). In this respect, Kehinde's attempt to use both languages in the same content is the act of enunciation that functions as an intermediary between Nigerian pidgin and English. Kehinde's ambivalence is an example of the in-between that denotes the cultural space between the self and the other, which, as Bhabha argues, "carries the burden of the meaning of culture" (p. 56). In some cases, Kehinde's liminal position is also expressed in her loyalty to tradition, which blinds her to the extent that she is no longer able to judge as an individual and behaves like a traditional subaltern woman who conforms to established cultural norms without questioning them. Given certain norms imposed by African patriarchy, this shows that both women and men contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes imposed on them by the indigenous culture. Emecheta illustrates this attitude in the chapter "The Party", where Kehinde's strong dependence on tradition becomes clear. Although she has had a painful experience, Kehinde again makes a concession to her husband by giving him a big farewell party, to which she appears in a traditional Nigerian dress.

> "Kehinde did not let Albert down. She treated her guests to the whole array of Nigeria traditional styles and fabrics, from guinea boubou to aso-oke iro and buba, to the Igbo lace blouse and George lappa, ending with the Igbo ceremonial costume of white otu-ogwu. This consisted of a cloth wound around her body beneath the armpits, leaving her shoulders bare. Precious coral beads adorned her neck, hair and ears. The outfit was to emphasise her position as first wife of the first son, and the mother of a son herself. Kehinde revelled in the impression she created" (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 38).

The extensive use of indigenous words to describe Kehinde's flamboyant appearance is aimed at mocking the main character's clumsy efforts to pass herself off as a traditional subaltern woman. Emecheta ironically describes how Kehinde carries out her cultural practises by changing her clothes ten times "as rich men's wives did in Nigeria, to advertise their wealth and boost the ego of the man of the house" (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 37). Furthermore, the fact that she is the mother of a son makes her particularly proud, because in Nigerian culture it is considered a woman's prerogative to have a son, which strengthens a woman's position in the family. Kehinde dotes on her son Joshua, who enjoys many privileges and great importance in the family. She dismisses his rudeness as "the normal behaviour of a fourteen-year-old boy establishing his identity" (p. 3). Flora Nwapa believes that "[i]f you can educate a boy at an early age, he will grow up to appreciate women and to appreciate his wife" (Nwapa as cited in James, 1990, p. 114). She adds that "[a] woman who says she is oppressed and then has a son and treats him like a king, such a woman is perpetuating the problems we are complaining about" (p. 114).

The novel also deals with the question of solidarity among women. Emecheta expresses her disappointment with some Nigerian women who do not support each other and argues that half of the problem lies with the women since "they are so busy bitching about one another that the men say the women are acting just as expected. If we as women don't put one another down, things should work out better" (Emecheta as cited in James, 1990, p. 36). Emecheta's frustration with Nigerian women mentioned above is expressed in Kehinde's initial views, which are largely informed by patriarchal discourse. To this end, the author introduces another woman from the same culture, Mary Elikwu, who serves as a perfect counterpart to Kehinde. Kehinde treats Mary Elikwu, who left her husband because he beat her, rather contemptuously. She does not believe that domestic violence should be grounds for divorce and considers her compatriot "a woman who refused to work at her marriage" (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 39). Alluding to this case, the author also sharply criticises those women who "in their ignorance

pass judgment on their sisters" (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 132). This attitude is obviously informed by phallogocentric considerations that lead the main character to live her life within the framework of patriarchy, as she feels incomplete without a man and conforms to the stereotype of a traditional subaltern woman. Talking to Moriammo about Mary Elikwu's case, Kehinde explains that "some women choose a life like that to prove how tough they can be" (p. 11). She despises women who achieve self-realisation at the cost of giving up their private lives.

Kehinde's unsympathetic attitude towards her female compatriots is due to the influence of her native culture, which preaches to her patriarchal ethics and values. In some cases, Kehinde's self leans too much towards her Nigerian roots, confirming the fact that the source of her moral inclinations is cultural. For this reason, she regards Mary Elikwu as "a fallen woman who has no sense of decorum" (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 38). Mary Elikwu is described as a liberated woman in contrast to Kehinde. As an educated and self-confident woman, she frees herself from the shackles of stereotypical gender roles that push her into the position of a submissive subaltern. She is aware that in her culture "a woman who leaves her marriage is always marginalised" (p. 39). Moreover, in defiance of the traditional norms of her society, she refuses to use her husband's name, which surprises Kehinde because, in her culture Nigerian women "dying for the title, even professors or doctors or heads of companies still call themselves 'Professor (Mrs)' or 'Dr (Mrs)'" (p. 39). Therefore, Kehinde sees herself in a more favourable position, yet does not give up wondering "how Mary Elikwu coped on her own" (p. 39).

Paradoxically, although Kehinde practises Nigerian culture in England, it never occurs to her to return to Nigeria. She feels that they are doing well in London and have no reason to return to their own country. Unable to comprehend Albert's decision to leave England, she inwardly blames his sisters who try to influence their marriage through letters and newspapers reporting on the Nigerian oil boom. Albert and the children subsequently leave England for good and settle in Nigeria. Overwhelmed by the feeling of loneliness and longing for her children, Kehinde realises that the only way to put an end to her 'half-person' situation is to join her family in Nigeria. The great binary between Kehinde's self and the other comes to the fore when she ruthlessly cuts her ties with England by quitting her well-paid job, which she explains with the usual reason for immigrants: "I never intended to settle here permanently" (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 62). Before leaving her favourable position in England to join her family in Nigeria, Kehinde refuses to

properly consider her decision to leave, as well as her colleagues' warning that "jobs like [hers] are hard to come by" and that "there are men who can't wait to step into [her] shoes, with all the unemployment" (p. 62).

Kehinde's first epiphany occurs when her state of insecurity and helplessness causes her to ponder why she has found herself in the position of a "fallen woman" or "the streetwalker she had condemned when she was covered in furs and purring like a spoilt cat in Albert's Jaguar" (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 61). She begins to see her own position as a mirror image of Mary Elikwu's. According to Muoneke (2006), Kehinde experiences "life in the ditch, similar to Adah's ordeal in the earlier novel, except that she has no children for whom to provide" (p. 66). She comes to understand better the plight of divorced women and widows like Mary Elikwu, who are ostracised by their own communities. This is aptly illustrated in the following episode:

> "She stretched her hand out many times before she eventually had the courage to phone Mary Elikwu. She had no idea what she was going to talk to her about. Was she going to ask her what it meant to be rejected? She began to understand how widows feel, not only at the loss of their husbands but also their friends" (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 61).

Kehinde's hopes of returning home as a respected 'been-to' woman are dashed, however, when she learns that while she was away Albert had the opportunity to 'reclaim his birthright' by taking another wife, a cultured university professor. Moreover, within two years Albert "[has] fathered a son and has another on the way" (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 86). Kehinde, then, must confront the realities of her culture, where polygamy is still practised, and women are relegated to a subaltern position. When traditional Igbo values meet Western values, says Berrian (1996), "the result is often confusion and conflict within a person who must try to reconcile the different ways of life mandated by the two belief systems" (p. 177). This is particularly true of Kehinde's dual situation. Having spent most of her life in England, most of the Nigerian traditional norms and practises, including polygamy, have become completely foreign to her. After many years of contact with the host culture, Kehinde is aware of the values of Western society, where polygamy is considered a patriarchal instrument of oppression that subjugates women. Even her best friend Moriammo makes fun of her, saying, "it's lucky that Alby decided to go polygamous in Nigeria and not here in London. It would have been much worse for you here" (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 101).

Kehinde draws particular lessons from what she experienced during her year-long stay in Nigeria, realising that her position as an unemployed older wife "[does] not stand a chance against Rike with her Lagos sophistication"

because "they [do] not play by the same rules" (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 89). After experiencing contrasting situations in two different cultures, Kehinde becomes more determined to become a self-accomplished woman. In her opinion, the fact that Rike is a "young woman with a doctorate degree in literature", who has a maid, a Peugeot and a son does not give her a respectable position in society, as she remains marginalised within her own culture (94). Thus, Kehinde's initial perception of her tradition is deconstructed by her own words:

> "Raising children is no longer enough. The saving grace of for us women is the big 'E' of education. This girl, Rike, doesn't even have to live with us because her education has made her independent, yet she is content to be an African wife in an Igbo culture. How come we in England did not see all this? I think perhaps Mary Elikwu did" (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 95).

Kehinde acknowledges that Mary Elikwu has "has foresight, going to college and having herself educated, after so many children" and the fact that "when women are married, they feel they have an advantage over a woman who is living by herself, even if the latter is a million times happier" (*Kehinde*, 1994, pp. 95, 101). This realisation echoes Emecheta's belief that "marriage should not be the only career left to women; it should be one of the careers" (1982, p. 117). Therefore, for Kehinde, Mary's thorny path to liberation through education must serve as a model for all women. The author portrays Kehinde and Mary Elikwu as a backlash against their patriarchal society. However, this does not mean that the author abjures marriage in general; on the contrary, in her works and interviews, Emecheta repeatedly emphasises that "[she] [writes] about women who try very hard to hold their family together until it becomes absolutely impossible. [She] [has] no sympathy for a woman who deserts her children, neither [does] [she] have sympathy for a woman who insists on staying in a marriage with a brute of a man, simply to be respectable" (1988, p. 175).

In light of her unpleasant experiences in Nigeria, Kehinde comes to terms with her position as a woman, wife and mother. She recognises that "there is no place for her in the family" because "the circle [has] closed in her absence and she [does] not have the strength to fight her way back in" (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 91). She also acknowledges the fact that Albert never felt at home in England, whereas in Nigeria he has more "room to be a man" and "the kind of freedom he [has] longed for in England" (pp. 89, 117). Kehinde's insight into Albert's position in Nigeria is out of proportion to her own. Having experienced both cultures first-hand, she holds contradictory opinions that exacerbate her dichotomous position between the self and the other.

According to Bhabha, "the concept of cultural difference focuses on the problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority (1994, p. 50). In this respect, Kehinde's double position arises from the struggle for supremacy, which Bhabha describes as "a cultural supremacy" that emerges "only at the moment of differentiation" (p. 51). Thus, the main character's in-betweenness comes to the fore again, this time in Nigeria, complicating her already difficult situation. On the one hand, she considers "it [is] foolish to pine for a country where she would always be made to feel unwelcome"; on the other hand, she finds herself "relegated to the margins" in Nigeria and thus alienated from her own culture (*Kehinde*, 1994, pp. 96, 97). In the broadest sense, Kehinde's struggle between the self and the other mirrors the situation of most Nigerian women living outside Nigeria. In line with this approach, Hawley (1996) suggests that these women "have taken root in the West but have maintained their 'twin' identity in their homeland" (p. 336). The author adds that the women are subject to "univocal declarations in the country of origin based on their sex and to univocal declarations in their new countries based on their nationality" (p. 336). Similarly, Emecheta's Kehinde "falls somewhere 'between' Great Britain and Nigeria in [her] psychological and spiritual milieu" (p. 336).

After a year in the oppressive atmosphere of Nigerian life, Kehinde flees to England. Her "surge of elation" attunes her to the stimulating season of spring and anticipates a new beginning (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 107). She feels reunited with a familiar environment where everything pleases her:

> "At Heathrow, to Kehinde's surprise, even the immigration officers were welcoming… Only a few hours before, still in Nigeria, she had thought the whole world was collapsing. Now she noticed that the trees the council had planted along the street were just beginning to bud. In a few days, they would burst into bloom, and it would be spring" (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 107).

As Kehinde enters her London terraced house, she is greeted by Taiwo's welcoming voice: "Home, sweet home!" (p. 108). Encouraged by this reunion, Kehinde removes the 'For Sale' sign with the loud declaration that "this house is not for sale... This house is mine" (p. 108). Kehinde's claim to her London house is the first step towards her conscious acculturation in the host country. This act also paves the way for her self-realisation as a woman and as an individual. To this end, she fully realises her potential and obtains a degree in sociology. Emecheta, who has also achieved remarkable success through her personal efforts, strongly advocates the role of education in women's self-actualisation. She asserts that education helps women to educate a generation and that "if one educates a woman, one educates a

community, whereas if one educates a man, one educates a man" (Emecheta, 1988, p. 175).

Conclusion

Kehinde can be considered a true sociological account of the female perspective on the position of a Nigerian woman. Emecheta (1988) explores the social implications of "being a woman and African born through an African woman's eyes" (p. 175). Within this framework, the author is primarily concerned with illuminating the position of a subaltern woman who rediscovers her culture with the perception of what has been and can no longer identify her new self with it. It is worth noting that the been-toism employed by Emecheta helps to highlight the vast difference between a person who has been to another place and a person who has never been exposed to another culture. In this respect, Kehinde's visit to Nigeria and her subsequent return to Britain can be seen as a journey of self-discovery or self-search through which the Nigerian subaltern woman forms a new social space within the host culture. Kehinde's status as a self-made woman is in line with the dynamic idea of African womanhood, which is characterised by positive attributes such as esteem, liberation, and the ultimate self-realisation of women. Kehinde affirms these qualities by asserting that "claiming my right does not make me less of a mother, not less of a woman. If anything it makes me, more human" (*Kehinde*, 1994, p. 141). This closure confirms Bhabha's view that the self and the other merge to articulate the cultural difference of the new individual self. By accommodating both cultures within her new self, Kehinde, as a subaltern woman, creates her own space from which she enunciates her empowerment.

Kehinde is a contemporary portrayal of a Nigerian subaltern woman, in which Emecheta gives a first-hand account of the experiences of the eponymous character, who undergoes significant changes as a result of exposure to two different cultures. Marginalised in her own country, she seizes the opportunity to live an independent and respectable life in England. In this respect, her self-awareness is crucial to her self-discovery, through which she moves from a state of powerlessness to one of self-realisation. The theme of the journey from England to Nigeria and back represents the emancipation of the subaltern woman. With the help of education, which contributes to her self-realisation, she finally develops into an independent woman. Owing to this new attitude, the subaltern woman forms a synthesis of native and host culture and appropriates only those values that contribute to the improvement of her status in society.

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