

وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي

MINISTRE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPERIEUR ET DE LA  
RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE.

UNIVERSITE MOULOD MAMMARI DE TIZI OUZOU  
FACULTE DES LETTRES ET DES LANGUES  
Département d'Anglais



جامعة مولود معمري تيزي وزو

كلية الآداب واللغات

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية

Domaine : Lettres et Langues.

Filière : Langue Anglaise.

Spécialité : Littérature et Approches Interdisciplinaires.

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master in English

Title:

Silence and Voice in Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* (1977) and  
Maissa Bey's *Nulle autre voix* (2018)

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Promotion : 2021/2022

## **Dedications**

*To*

*My parents.*

*My dear siblings.*

*METAHRI Lynda.*

## **Dedications**

*To*

*My grandparents.*

*My parents.*

*My dear siblings.*

*My husband.*

*MESSOUDI Aziza.*

## **Acknowledgements**

First of all, we would like to thank the Almighty and merciful God who gave us the strength and the patience to accomplish this work. We would like to express our gratitude to Dr. GADA Said for his patience, availability and above all his precious advice, which helped to fuel our reflection. Our thanks also extend to the members of the jury; Dr. HADJ BACHIR Sabiha, Dr. GADA Said and Mr. LAOUARI Mohamed Larbi and to our teachers in the Department of English of Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou.

## **Abstract**

This research paper compares and studies the themes and characters in Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* (1977) and Maïssa Bey's *Nulle autre voix* (2018). It shows how the two authors analyzed the position of African women relying on *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984), a book written by the African American author and feminist activist bell hooks. This theory allows us better understand the unequal and oppressive gender relation treated in the two literary works. In this analysis, we found that despite the difference of the two works eras, they shared the same issues of oppression, silence and resistance. The two authors, in their writings, described the oppression of women and how they are dominated by men in the African patriarchal society. They also depicted how these women resisted and sought independence. In both novels, the authors described women's positions and their freedom desire in their societies. In our study, we examined women's silence and voice and concluded that Emecheta and Bey used their characters' voice to depict their suffering and then showed their resistance against oppression.

**Key words:** African, Oppression, Silence, Resistance, Independence, Freedom

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## Introduction

Literature has played a massive role throughout history. It is defined as a group of works of aesthetic value that unleash the imagination and the art of writing. Literature is a way of expressing feelings and revealing to the reader or listener what is going on inside a person; it invigorates the mind and supplies oxygen to the human body.

Literature is not only a work of art, but a means for painting vivid images of social, political and ideological issues in a particular society. Literary works are used as tools to express different political opinions and to expose social injustice.

African literature has been described as being masculine because it is dominated by male characters who ignore women. In articles written by men, African women are portrayed as weak and submissive. This unfavourable perception of women irritates African women, especially the two African authors; Buchi Emecheta and Maïssa Bey to correct this false belief with their books; *The Slave Girl* and *Nulle autre voix*. They denounce the unfair treatment and the male domination in a patriarchal society. By presenting lovable, supportive and strong female characters, they aim to advance women and achieve gender equality.

This study explores the issues of silence and voice presented in *The Slave Girl* (1977) by the Nigerian novelist Buchi Emecheta and *Nulle autre voix* (2018) written by the Algerian author Maïssa Bey. These novels try to expose the African women's inferior position within the African society. Emecheta and Bey aim to rewrite the status of women and to resist against all patriarchal oppression and domination. In other words, the authors try to highlight the suffering of African women in their novels and go further to give voice to the ignored silent women.

Dominated by male figures, modern African literature embodies the forces that allow the patriarchal order to be maintained in African societies. Despite women's injustice and

oppression, African women still oppose patriarchal systems and want to be free from discrimination and segregation.

The subject of this research, therefore, deals with the subordination of African women in patriarchal societies. It also illuminates the status of women in Nigeria and Algeria and their resistance to all forms of oppression and violence. Its main purpose is to shed light on the comparative study of Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* and Maïssa Bey's *Nulle autre voix*; two recent examples of African women writers entering a male-dominated world and grappling with patriarchy. The condition of women is dealt with through literature. Both authors fight against the inferiority of women and try to free them from any form of discrimination and injustice. In other words, the authors are committed to end gender inequality, restoring women's status and giving them a unique sense of self-definition.

## **a- Review of Literature**

Buchi Emecheta and Maïssa Bey are two prominent voices in African literature, representing different parts of the continent and offering unique perspectives on same issues of oppression, silence and resistance, focusing on the experiences of women and their portrayal of the struggles faced by African women within patriarchal societies. Both author's narratives have been the subject of interesting critical analysis, where different scholars have examined and discussed their works from a wide range of view points and critical fame works. Here is an overview of the critical literature surrounding their works.

Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* has attracted significant critical attention, with scholars analyzing various themes such as slavery, gender, patriarchy, colonialism, and the intersection of personal and societal oppression. Below are some of the prominent critics and their perspectives on *The Slave Girl*.

Katherine Frank in her book *The Death of the Slave Girl: African Womanhood in the Novels of Buchi Emecheta*, writes that “The Slave Girl, this book that Emecheta most fully explores her central vision bondage, her underlying metaphor of African womanhood as a condition of victimization and servitude”<sup>1</sup> as she highlights a key theme in Emecheta’s work—female bondage. Frank’s perspective emphasizes the way Emecheta portrays African women, not only as victims of colonial or traditional systems but also as participants in a continuous cycle of subjugation, be it through slavery or marital roles.

In his 1988 article, Chimalum Nwankwo shows that “Okolie in *The Slave Girl* is a male creation of the author who is a replacement at the author’s shooting range. He is also a funnel for evil and a community diabolic monolith.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, he asserts that without Okolie’s existence, Ma Palagada; the earth goddess in *The Slave Girl*, would have been engaged in other means of survival rather than commodifying slaves.

Another review by Florence Stratton, *In Contemporary African Literature and The Politics of Gender (1994)*

Emecheta’s female characters are complex characters whose personalities are defined and whose destinies are determined by their interaction with their environment. Her novel, *The Slave Girl*, is set at the beginning of the twentieth century when the Nigerian people exchanged the colonial rule of the Portuguese with that of the British. Respectively, like her mother country, Ojebeta exchanges one master for another. She has to endure the double burden of patriarchy and colonialism, of gender and class. The exploitation of the female protagonist coincides with the European colonization and enslavement of the Nigerian society.<sup>3</sup>

The diverse female characters in Emecheta’s works have distinct personalities and destiny that are shaped by their interactions with the outside world. Ojebeta trades one master for

another, just like in her native nation. She bears the dual burdens of class and gender, colonialism, and patriarchy.

Wihelmina Lamb shows that “Education is the crucial liberating force in the lives of Emecheta’s heroines and in the fact their degree of servitude is inversely proportional to the amount of education they receive.”<sup>4</sup> Ojebeta’s later education, however, takes on the lineaments of traditional female learning.

While Maïssa Bey's novel *Nulle autre voix* has been praised for its lyrical prose and powerful themes, it has not been without its detractors. It has received a great deal of criticism from several quarters, particularly regarding its treatment of complex social issues. Critics have pointed to the book's exploration of themes like the struggles of Algerian women and the challenges they face in a patriarchal society. The narrative centers on an unnamed woman who, after killing her abusive husband, spends fifteen years in prison. This act serves as both a culmination of her suffering and a bizarre form of liberation, challenging the traditional roles imposed on women within her culture.<sup>5</sup>

Ali Bedrici a prominent Algerian critic and scholar who has critiqued Maïssa Bey's *Nulle autre voix*. His analysis focuses on the themes of silence, and the complexities of women's voices in the context of Algerian literature.<sup>6</sup> Bedrici's work often highlights Bey's unique narrative style and her contribution to feminist literature in the Arab world.

Another critic by Mohammed Rachid Beneddra (2020), in his article, *Creative Paratopy in Nulle autre voix by Maïssa Bey*, stats that “Maïssa Bey’s novel *Nulle autre voix* ‘No Other Voice.’ This feminist author deals with a new theme of an Algerian woman in prison, a place supposed to be only for men.”<sup>7</sup> He focuses primarily on contemporary Algerian literature. He engages with themes such as feminism, identity, and the complexities of cultural discourse in Algerian narratives. His analyses often incorporate psychoanalytic and enunciative approaches

to explore how gender and societal norms influence literary characters and plots. He explores the theme of female criminality in Maïssa Bey's *Nulle autre voix*, discussing the societal stigmas surrounding women in prison, which reflects broader issues of honor and desocialization in Algerian culture.<sup>8</sup>

Beneddra explains that “Female criminality is a taboo subject in Algeria because prison represents, in a way, desocialization,”<sup>9</sup> the Algerian women are treated more harshly than men because they represent family’s honor. Nevertheless, Bey breaks this norm and makes her voice heard by committing a crime to liberate herself from oppression and violence, he argues,

There had been no other Algerian author who dealt with such a subject before, which bodes well for this feminist writer trying to make her “voice” heard, a voice of a woman who served fifteen years of imprisonment after having murdered her husband.<sup>10</sup>

Mohammed Rachid Beneddra adds that,

“Bey, who, let us recall, is known for her feminism, tries to legitimize the crime that the ex-convict committed as a result of domestic violence. So, it is about feminist discourse questioning the unsaid that the woman conceals, denouncing the patriarchal society in Algeria.”<sup>11</sup>

In other words, he claims that the feminist discourse denounces the mechanisms of patriarchy within the Algerian society where the women’ rights are violated. His work contributes to a deeper understanding of how literature can reflect and challenge societal issues, particularly concerning gender roles and identity within Algerian society.

From our review of the existing literature on Buchi Emecheta and Maïssa Bey, we have concluded that the works have been criticised from the feminist point of view. Concerning Emecheta’s *The Slave Girl* has received considerable literary attention about the main characters of the story and the major theme which is education while, in Bey’s *Nulle autre voix*,

many critics focused mainly on Bey's portrayal of the theme of violence. Many articles have evidenced that the crime committed in bey's *Nulle autre voix* is considered as being a therapy for the protagonist sufferings and pains. Our purpose in this dissertation is to offer some clarification about women's reaction against male-domination within the patriarchal society in African literature by comparing the two works.

### **b- Issue and Working Hypotheses**

This comparative study is based on the assumption that the two works were written in different periods and places, but belong to the same literature called African Literature. The two novels have in common a representation of women; their oppression and struggle for their freedom. The female protagonists in both novels are depicted as oppressed and inferior, but they do not accept this situation of being submissive. That is why they struggle and endeavour to find the way to break the established order which sees male as central in society. They try to change customs in their culture. The aim of this analysis is to expose the issue of women's position in the patriarchal society, and how they break the imposed silence they suffer from and make their voice heard. Thus, it is in this perspective that our work raises these questions: Did Buchi Emecheta and Maissa Bey work on the same issues? Did the Nigerian women face the same problems as the Algerian women? Was the Algerian background of nineties similar to the Nigerian background of seventies to deal with the same issues?

### **c- Methodological Outline**

Our present study aims to demonstrate that Buchi Emecheta and Maissa Bey have always fought against injustice in hope of establishing freedom. Besides, we are going to show the ways into which they raise their voice to defend women's inferior position within their patriarchal societies. In our work, we have used the IMRAD approach which is made up of four sections. We have introduced the general background of the topic. Then, in our review of

literature, we have provided an insight into the criticism of the two novels received in relation to the themes and characters, then we have introduced the issue of our work. In the second part, we explained the theory applied in our research which is 'Bell hooks *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre (1984)*' to support our work, we have preceded to the introduction of materials in which we have presented the two novels. In the results section, we present the findings reached in our comparative study about Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* and Maissa Bey's *Nulle autre voix*, in terms of Silence and Voice. Finally, in the discussion, we present three chapters: the first one reveals the novels protagonists' silence in Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* and Bey's *Nulle autre voix*. The second chapter deals with the rise of voice in Emecheta's and Bey's novels. To end with, the conclusion of our dissertation includes the whole ideas exposed throughout the research and suggest other perspectives of research.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Frank Katherine, 1982, *The Death of The Slave Girl: African Womanhood in the Novels of Buchi Emecheta*, 479.

<sup>2</sup> Chimalum Nwankwo, 1988, *Emecheta's Social Vision: Fantasy or Reality*, 38.

<sup>3</sup> Florence Stratton, 1994, *Contemporary African Literature and The Politics of Gender*, 116.

<sup>4</sup> Wilhelmina Lamb, *Buchi Emecheta: A New Voice from Africa, an Unpublished Essay Quoted by Katherine Frank*, 481.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.lesmissives.fr/index.php/2021/01/02/quand-les-mots-liberent-nulle-autre-voix-de-maissa-bey/>

<sup>6</sup> Bedrici, Ali .2020. *L'écriture pour transcender la violence, LIBERTE*.

<sup>7</sup> Beneddra, Mohammed Rachid. 2020. *Creative Paratopy in Nulle autre voix by Maïssa Bey*, 206.

<sup>8</sup> <https://journals.umcs.pl/ff/article/view/10672>

<sup>9</sup> Beneddra, Mohammed Rachid. 2020. *Creative Paratopy in Nulle autre voix by Maïssa Bey*, 205.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 208.

## **Method and Materials**

### **1-Method: Bell hooks *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984)**

This section aims to define and explain concisely the definite concepts of our work; feminism, womanism, patriarchy and education. Since, we make an analysis of such literary works of Buchi Emecheta and Maissa Bey, we intend to borrow theoretical auspices from *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984) written by the African American theorist and author Gloria Jean Watkins, known as bell hooks. It emerges from privileged women who live at the center, whose perspectives on reality rarely include knowledge and awareness of the lives of women and men who live in the margin.<sup>1</sup>

### **Feminism**

Feminism, according to bell hooks, is “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, for Hooks, feminism is a way to end the exploitation and the harsh condition of women. It is centred around the experiences of marginalized women; it is a means of liberating women from oppression and discrimination.

In short, feminism is a political movement committed to eradicating systemic oppression and other forms of injustice. It fights against domination as a means of empowering women to have the ability to control their own bodies.

Feminist Criticism in the 1960s and 1970s treated the representation of women in literature, focusing on the portrayal of female characters and revealing the patriarchal system established within the African societies.<sup>3</sup>

### **Womanism**

Black feminism so-called Womanism, according to Bell hooks, is a movement that aims to make an end for gender exploitation, racism, and oppression in all its forms. For her,

Feminism is an appeal to end the harsh reality and the stereotype that women are just properties, objects in the hands of men and means to fulfil their desires. It is, then, a way for liberating women from discrimination.

For Ogunyemi, “womanism is a global ideology that defines it with an emphasis which focuses on race, gender, class and culture. Black womanism that celebrates roots and ideals of black, that is what gives a balanced presentation of black womandom. Its concern is on the struggle for black sexual power as it is with the global power structure that subjected in blacks.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, it is a type of feminism that maintains that sexism, class oppression, and racism are linked, claiming that black women’s experience has a different and severe type of oppression than white women.

Hudson Weems claims that womanism is distinct from other forms of feminism which focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of African women. And has a different agenda and set of objectives. She goes on to say that there is a huge difference between the relationship of a white man and a white woman, and the relation of black man with black woman because the black woman fights against all oppressive forces that oppress her, her children, and the black man, while the white woman fights against the white man.<sup>5</sup>

Womanism as a term was invented by Alice Walker as it is mentioned in her collection of essays *In Search of Our Mothers’s Gardens: Womanist Prose*, published in 1983. Then she named it a black feminist or feminist color. Gender oppression, race and class domination were the three issues that Alice Walker’s womanism dealt with.

Alice Walker claims: “Black woman is oppressed beyond recognition- oppressed by everyone”<sup>6</sup>. It means black women are more oppressed than white women because of their skin’s colour. She adds, “womanist...tradition assumes because of our experiences during

slavery, that black women already are capable.”<sup>7</sup> It is the cause that Walker characterises the tradition of black women’s bravery under extreme circumstances of slavery and racism.

In fact, Alice Walker seeks female strength, liberation and self-realization. Thus, feminism save women from male submission, violence and being protected also from sexism, then enable them to achieve equality through education and employment also obtaining better outlook.

## **Patriarchy**

Bell hooks defines patriarchy as a system of domination that not oppresses women but also dehumanizes them by limiting their freedom.<sup>8</sup> Reference: “Understanding patriarchy”: published in various anthologies and online resources

Hook states that patriarchy has no gender.<sup>9</sup> in other words, he emphasizes that patriarchy is a system that affects both men and women, not just something imposed by men on women. It harms everyone by creating rigid roles and expectations based on gender.

He adds: “the first act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is not violence toward women. Instead, patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves.”<sup>10</sup> This statement suggests that the violence against women is not the first act of aggression that patriarchy demands of males. Rather, patriarchy harms men by forcing them to suppress their emotional lives, which can be seen as a form of "psychic self-mutilation."

## **Education**

Bell hooks advocated for a radical pedagogy that fosters critical thinking and self-awareness. She believed education should empower individuals to challenge oppressive systems and that it should be accessible to everyone, not just the elite. Bell Hooks had a deep

and revolutionary understanding of education, seeing it as an essential instrument for social and personal transformation.<sup>11</sup>

For hooks, education is not just about giving information but about encouraging critical thinking and making sure that the voices of those who are often ignored are listened to. She saw education as a way to empower people and supported a teaching approach that promotes critical thinking and personal development. hooks believed that education should be available to everyone and should help people change and question societal standards.

## **b- Materials: Biographical Background on Buchi Emecheta and Maissa Bey**

### **1- Buchi Emecheta**

Buchi Emecheta is Nigerian author and sociologist, is a well-known female author. She was born in Nigeria on July 21st, 1944 and passed away on January 25th, 2017. When she was 16 years old, she married Sylvester Onwordi, a student who had travelled to the University of London. While working and writing, she battled to care for and nurture her five children. She started writing pieces based on her daily experiences, such as the hardships and challenges she had in England after moving there with her husband. As she detailed in her work *The Bride Price*, her marriage breaks down as a result of her abusive and insulting spouse. He even burned her first manuscript. Emecheta was forced to labor extremely hard to rewrite the identical document after the original was destroyed. Emecheta addresses a variety of issues in her literature and seeks answers, including economic exploitation, the effects of colonialism on African Black people, and the oppression of African women. In reality, several African writers rejected Buchi Emecheta's writings because they thought they shared the same values and viewpoints as feminists and white westerners. In her article 'Feminism with a little f,' she attempts to demonstrate that she is not a feminist and that she holds other opinions. She

wrote different works for children; she was the author of more than 20 books among them: *Second Class Citizens* (1974) and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *The Slave Girl* (1977).<sup>12</sup>

## **2- Maissa Bey**

Maissa Bey, pen name of Samia Benameur,

C'est ma mère qui à penser à ce prénom qui a déjà voulu me le donner à la naissance... et l'une de de grand-mère portait le nom de Bey... c'est donc par des femmes que j'ai trouvé ma nouvelle identité. Ce qui me permet aujourd'hui de dire, de raconter, de donner à voir sans être immédiatement reconnu.<sup>13</sup>

Born in 1950 in Ksar El Boukhari, Algeria, is an Algerian woman of Letters. She learned the French Language thanks to her father who was a school teacher, he was kidnapped by soldiers during the Liberation war and was tortured to death two days after his arrest. Her father's death had a major influence in her writings. After studies at the secondary school of Fromentin in Algiers, then higher studies, Maissa Bey become a French teacher in heigh school in Sidi Bel Abbes, where she now resides and leads a cultural association: 'Paroles et écriture.' She has always been bulimic and eager to read, she even said that reading helped her to build herself and overcome her sufferings and difficult reality. Writing has always accompanied the author from the beginning, it was personal writing to expel her pains as she said, her writings consists of describing the real and expressing the revolt and the fight against despair.

The specificity of the writing of our writer lies in the fact that she has the desire to tackle the subjects which are not often treated and which are considered as taboo. For Maissa Bey, writing was not a choice but rather a necessity conveyed by wounds and sufferings, that is why she decided to take the word of those people who were abstain and refrain from speaking and of those who have been forbidden and confiscated to speak. They were intended to break the silence, to bear witness and to denounce the injustice experienced by women who were satisfied by the rules imposed by patriarchal societies. She wrote many novels among them; *Au commencement était la mer* (Roman, édition Marsa, 1996), *Entendez-vous dans les montages*

(Roman, édition de l'Aube, 2002), *Puisque mon cœur est mort* (Roman, édition de l'Aube, 2010, prix de l'Afrique méditerranée/Maghreb, 2010), *Hizya* (édition Barzakh, 2015) and *Nulle autre voix* (édition Barzakh, 2018).<sup>14</sup>

## **c- Synopsis of the Novels**

### **1- *The Slave Girl* (1977)**

*The Slave Girl* is a novel written by a Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta, published in 1977. It is a novel which portrays how the human body becomes property. *The Slave Girl* is Emecheta's the fourth book. It is preceded by *The Bride Price* and followed by *The Joys of Motherhood*. The author describes the life of the female protagonist named Ojebeta and the other slave girls who sold to slavery. In fact, buying and selling people was accepted and allowed in this period.

In the 179 pages of *The Slave Girl*, the protagonist lives as a slave but later on she decides that is her own right to choose her private life without any master who decides in her place. She attends school and she fight to free herself and seeks to have a private life. The author highlights the position of women within the Nigerian society; they were weak, silent and oppressed. At the end, Ojebeta; the protagonist of the novel, after becoming educated, had her freedom and lived in peace.

### **2- *Nulle autre voix* (2018)**

*Nulle autre voix* is a novel published by Barzakh edition in Algeria in August 2018. It contains 202 pages as a collection of encounters between two Algerian women, the first is a female crime writer looking for a job and the second one is the criminal, the anonymous protagonist of the story. The content of this story is about a woman who spent fifteen years in prison for killing her husband. The novel is a composite work of fourteen letters, each letter

addresses a particular theme or period of her life, spanning her entire childhood and adolescence.

The author tells the simple life of a woman from her childhood until she got married to a foreign man, who should be her husband, her right hand in life, but unfortunately, it was not the case, he devalued and mistreated her during all those years of marriage. So, she killed him to free herself and served fifteen years in prison, she told her own story in her diary transformed into a novel, this diary contains fourteen letters, each dealing with a part of her life.

## End Notes

- <sup>1</sup>[https://funceji.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/bell\\_hooks\\_feminist\\_theory\\_from\\_margin\\_to\\_centerbookzz-org\\_.pdf](https://funceji.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/bell_hooks_feminist_theory_from_margin_to_centerbookzz-org_.pdf)
- <sup>2</sup> Hooks, bell, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. South End Press, United States, 1984, Prefaces.
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.byarcadia.org/post/feminism-and-feminist-literary-theory>.
- <sup>4</sup> Ogunyemi, C. O. 1985. *Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English*. *Signs* 11(1): 63-80.
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- <sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Torfs, *Alice Walker's Womanism: Theory and Practice* (Leuven: Katholieke universiteit Leuven, 2007, 2008).
- <sup>7</sup> Refre Goda Baltrusaityte, *Breaking the Boundaries of Masculinity: Men and Woman in Alice Walker's novel the color Purple* (University of Amsterdam: Faculty of Humanities).
- <sup>8</sup> <https://archive.org/details/UnderstandingPatriarchy>
- <sup>9</sup> <https://blogs.newschool.edu/news/2014/10/bellhooksteachingtotransgress/>
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- <sup>12</sup> <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/biography-buchi-emecheta-alphonse-baraza>.  
*Nulle autre voix*, Maissa Bey (barzakh, 2018), 111.
- <sup>13</sup> [http://awsa.be/uploads/outils%20p%C3%A9dagogiques/Maissa\\_Bey\\_outil.pdf](http://awsa.be/uploads/outils%20p%C3%A9dagogiques/Maissa_Bey_outil.pdf).
- <sup>14</sup> Bey, www.arabesque-éditions.com.

## Results

This section of our piece of research contains the main findings we have reached after our investigation. Our research is a comparative study between Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* (1977) and Maissa Bey's *Nulle autre voix* (2018). This analysis is centred on the issue of women's silence in the patriarchal societies and their resistance to bring back their freedom as they are portrayed in the two works. To realize our task, we have applied bell hooks' *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984). Our investigation has tried to demonstrate the harsh living conditions of women in such patriarchal societies.

In the first chapter of our discussion, we have dealt with women's silence in both Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* and Bey's *Nulle autre voix*. We have evidenced that the female protagonists of the two novels are silent and oppressed by the patriarchal system of the African societies. Ojebeta, the protagonist of *The Slave Girl* lived a long period of silence and sold to slavery. First, the unnamed in *Nulle autre voix*, as a child, was traumatised by society and her mother. Then, when she was married, her husband dominated and violated her. The position of women in the Algerian and the Nigerian societies, through the female protagonists of the novels, show that they are not treated as male; they are always inferior.

In the second chapter, we dealt with women's voice and resistance of the women's characters of Emecheta's and Bey's novels. Despite the harsh conditions and the unfairly treatment, both the novels protagonists did not remain without reaction and each one of them finds a means to liberate herself from oppression. The aim of the two authors is to liberate women from injustices and establish their freedom.

Our study of the issues silence and voice, in both Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* and Bey's *Nulle autre voix*, has revealed that women have been oppressed within the African societies (Nigerian and Algerian), despite the different periods during which the two narratives were

written. Both Emecheta and Bey offer valuable insights in the lives of women and the ongoing search or the quest for liberation and freedom.

## **Discussion**

In our discussion, we show how oppression and patriarchal societies push the African women to be warriors; their only objective is to free themselves from dehumanization and differentiation. The first chapter deals with the female characters' silence in both author's works.

Whereas, the second Chapter sheds light on the protagonists' voice established in the two narratives. We noted that for Emecheta's *The Slave Girl*, education is the only means to free woman from oppression and patriarchy while in Bey's *Nulle autre voix*, violence is an act of liberation.

### **Chapter One: Silence in Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* and Maissa Bey's *Nulle autre voix*.**

Silence plays a crucial thematic role in both Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* (1977) and Maissa Bey's *Nulle autre voix*(2018). In this chapter, we deal with the major cause of the ignored silent protagonists; Ojebeta and the Unamed, in the two literary works written by Emecheta and Bey.

#### **a- Patriarchy in Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* and Bey's *Nulle autre voix*.**

Patriarchy plays a central role in shaping the lives of the characters, especially the protagonist. The novel illustrates how patriarchal values intersect with traditional practices.

In *The Slave Girl*, Okolie is the selfish brother of the female character Ojebeta; the little girl who became orphan after the death of her parents. The first time, when she came under his responsibility, he decided to sell her without thinking about her future.

“Bend down, he said rather impatiently. She obeyed at once, noting the irritation in his voice,”<sup>1</sup> the statement shows how Okolie behaves unfairely with his sister. He gives her orders and does whatever he wants. After the death of her parents he considers himself as her responsible; the one in charge of her. The only thing Ojebeta does is obeying her brother. She remains silent without any reaction. It means that once her brother raises his voice, Ojebeta must do what he wants.

“A girl was owned, in particularly, by her father or someone in place of her father or her older brother, and then, in general, by her group or homestead.”<sup>2</sup> This previous statement confirms that the woman is always under the responsibility of the man and always dependent on him; her place is always next to a man who is the owner and she is his slave seeing her as an object.

Every woman, whether slave or free, must marry. All her life, a woman always belonged to some male. At birth, you were owned by your people, and when you were sold you belonged to a new master, when you grew up, your new master who had paid something for you would control you.<sup>3</sup>

Woman, according to the statement above, is merely the property of her family. This passage encapsulates the essence of the main character Ojebeta’s royalty: from her brother, who sold her into slavery, to a man who paid the price for his pride. Ojebeta, Emecheta’s protagonist, is portrayed as weak, unable to stand up for herself.

No woman is ever free. To be owned by a man is a great honor. So perhaps in a sense your brother was not too much in the wrong. He only took the money that by right belonged to the first son of the family, Owezim...So you must forgive Okolie.<sup>4</sup>

This quotation explains that women themselves accepted patriarchy. As Uteh, Ojebeta’s aunt. Even though she is a woman, she tells Ojebeta to forgive her brother, Okolie, for selling her into slavery.

The chief wife of the master of the house had died, and it was necessary for her husband to send her to the land of the dead accompanied by a female slave. The one chosen was a particularly beautiful slave with smooth skin and Black closely cropped hair, who was said to be a princess captured in war from another Ibo village; she had made attempts to return to where she came from.<sup>5</sup>

Buchi Emecheta explains that even among women there is difference. When the chief 's wife died, he orders to burry an alive female slave with his wife.

“Can you imagine what this place would be like if there were no Pa? Would Ma be able to control giant slaves like Jienuaka by herself?”<sup>6</sup> The author shows that Pa is able to control giant slave as he is physically fit, and also that Ma Palagada is unmanageable; she is a simple woman.

She was happy with her husband, happy to be submissive even to accept an occasional beating, because that is what she has been brought up to believe a wife should expect.<sup>7</sup>

In a way, the author portrays Ojebeta as a female who accepts being submissive because, for her, a wife must accept to be at her man's needs. On the other hand, Ojebeta's husband, Jacob, is depicted, by Emechata, as a traditional wife-beater; in this context represents a man shaped by a rigid patriarchal culture, expected to assert his power through physical or emotional control.

Female characters in this novel, particularly, the slave girls as Ojebeta, Chiago and Ammana, portrayed as silent and their voices not heard out. They remain without any reaction against the oppression of men for instance, her Master Pa Palagada who gives order and his voice is always heard.

“For days she had cried silently.”<sup>8</sup> In this statement, Ojebeta when she was in the house of Palagadas, even when she cried cause of the bad treatment and she was considered as slave her voice was not heard.

Involuntarily tears of self-pity and frustration welled up in her eyes, dropped down her cheeks and then into the morning water. there were so many things she wanted answers to; but she sensed that her brother, who was now her most frequent companion, was too preoccupied with his own private problems to listen to her.<sup>9</sup>

From this quotation we can understand how Ojebeta was oppressed. The little girl cannot tell her brother her feelings or talking with her. Okolie is the first male character who oppress Ojebeta and made her in passive position, then silent female.

“They had never considered that slaves and servants were human like themselves,”<sup>10</sup> this quote highlights how the two daughters of Ma Palagada look to slaves and servants as they are different in their attitudes because both of them are wealthy. We can say that as they are not viewed as human it is logical that her voice is not heard and always silent.

A few of the local people, especially those who traded with the foreigners at our market, had seen red-faced men, who were supposed to be white. Those men, however, seldom brought their wives with them. They usually made do with girls, giving them babies and leaving them.<sup>11</sup>

In this statement, Emecheta demonstrates how man can use a woman for his own needs and pleasure. This saying says that a woman’s job is to bear children, and a man’s job is to abandon him and not to assume any responsibility for him. We are also aware that the female body is being exploited. Furthermore, given that the females were black and the father was white, we can argue that there was some prejudice involved.

The word ‘silent’ is repeated several times in this novel as this term means that there are characters who are silent within the novel’s story.

In Emecheta’s works, several kinds of imagery might be used to describe how women are expected to conform to societal norms, rendering them powerless, subservient, and devoid of individuality or autonomy. “Would start behaving like these girls who so reminded her of the wooden dolls.”<sup>12</sup> From this statement, the author compares the behaviour of the slave girls is like a doll without a sprite which cannot move or doing things like they want.

If a good wife was in trouble of any kind, instead of calling on God to help her she could call either the name of her husband or of the god of her husband's people certainly not the gods in the huts of her own father, for they should cease to exist for her, the day her bride price is paid. From that day she should be loyal to her husband, his god and his people, in body and spirit.<sup>13</sup>

As this previous quotation illustrates that certain societies hold beliefs that place women in a subordinate position. For example, after marriage, a woman's body and spirit belong to her husband, and she calls on her husband's god rather than her own father in times of need. We can infer that ideas like this one have a special impact on a girl's, daughter's, or wife's life.

“Chiago broke down crying quietly in her sleeping clothes,”<sup>14</sup> Emecheta demonstrates how the slave girl keeps her feelings and does not cry openly but she cried silently as in the case of Chiago: refers to one of the girls who are dehumanized like the protagonist; because she is afraid that her master will hear her voice.

Buchi Emecheta represents women and men in different attitudes. Women are submissive and accept everything. Female characters in this novel particularly, the Slave Girl were oppressed psychologically and physically, this why they were silent most of the time and their feelings were kept to themselves.

Maissa Bey's *Nulle autre voix*, illustrates the story of an inhumed, locked up woman who lives under the weight of her family and society A woman who has suffered the injustice of a society that favors men to the detriment of women. It addresses social problems.

Maissa Bey reveals real facts about the status of the double oppression women. There are laws imposed on women and any attempt to overcome them is a fatal error.

Les femmes ne tuent pas. Elles donnent la vie. C'est même leur principale fonction : génitrices. Toute tentative de sortir de ce schéma fait d'elles des monstres. Des monstres de cruauté et d'insensibilité. Des femmes hors norms.<sup>15</sup>

She suggests a traditional view of women, emphasizing their role as life-givers due to their biological capacity to bear children and enhancing the lives. She also highlights that any attempt by women to reject their maternal role often criticized by society, judged harshly and considered cruel and inhuman.

Bey deals in depth with the issue of battered women, which takes on a new dimension throughout the novel. She retraces the protagonist's suffering since her childhood, where she spent ruthless days, she writes,

Encore un détour par l'enfance. Petite, je passais des nuits à gémir, des nuits ponctuées de réveils en sursaut réclamant une présence qui ne venait pas pourchasser les peurs et les ombres. Je m'en souviens encore. Je ne me laissais jamais couler dans les profondeurs du sommeil. Une part de moi restait toujours en éveil, aux aguets, comme si, suspendu au plafond ou caché derrière la porte fermée, planait un danger inconnu qui n'attendait que l'obscurité et le moment propice pour fondre sur moi, m'écraser ou m'emporter quelque part.<sup>16</sup>

This quotation reflects the narrator's psychological struggles during her childhood experience of fear, anxiety and sleeplessness. The protagonist, by revisiting her past trauma, captured the vivid description of sleepless nights behind closed doors emphasizes feelings of abandonment, loneliness and a lack of security.

In this novel, the protagonist has experienced a great grief of isolation and lack of affection. Throughout her life, she suffered and endured all the pains; she felt emotionally neglected like something ingrained. She was deprived of her legitimate rights, struggling to fit in both within her family and society, she asserts,

Une enfance solitaire, sans amour, une mère autoritaire, abusive parfois, des frères qui portaient leurs attributs de males avec une assurance tranquille, un père absent, déconnecté de la réalité, une difficulté presque congénitale à trouver sa place dans la famille puis dans la société.<sup>17</sup>

She brings back the most buried memories, the wounds, pain, hate, anger, and loneliness she suffered from,

Même prononcés avec force, ces mots avaient perdu leur pouvoir d'évocation macabre en ce temps-là. Ils ricochaient sur les consciences sans laisser d'impact. Victimes d'accoutumance, ils faisaient partie de notre quotidien depuis tellement d'années. Atrocités. Barbarie. Sauvagerie. Horreur. Cruauté. Et les auteurs de ces actes avaient reçu l'absolution définitive.<sup>18</sup>

In the previous statement reflects on how certain words, despite being spoken forcefully, have lost their emotional and psychological impact over time. The words mentioned—atrocities, barbarity, savagery, horror, cruelty—are powerful, but they no longer evoke the same reactions they once did. The protagonist suggests that society has become desensitized to these concepts because they've become a constant part of daily life.

The main character narrator of this novel takes us in her animated daily life full of suffering and misery; she always feels alone, disconnecting from the surrounding world.

She is wrapped in her thoughts and experiences which create a silent and overwhelming inner world. She writes,

Depuis que je suis livrée à la solitude et au silence dans cet presque vide, seuls les bruits de vie des autres me rattachent au monde. Le plus souvent, absorbée par ma propre vie, je suis enfermée dans une bulle de silence. Rien ne m'atteint. Rien ne me distrait de moi-même.<sup>19</sup>

The heroine had a lonely childhood and a violent adolescence because she grows up in a conservative family that does not value daughters, whose only concern is to marry her, “tiens bien ta maison et tiens ton mari, m'avait –elle conseillé sur un ton qui ne souffrait d'aucune ambiguïté tout en repassant ma robe de mariée.”<sup>20</sup> She is often oppressed, isolated and condemned to silence, her role is doing the household chores, obeying all of her brothers' orders. At the same time, she does not have a good relationship with her family including her mother, as their relationship is based on self-interest and selfishness.

Parce qu'il ne me regardait jamais avait été d'accepter Ce mariage arrangé sans penser aux conséquences de cet arrangement .il n'en avait vu que le côté matériel et les avantages qu'une alliance avec une famille comme la nôtre pourrait représenter pour lui.<sup>21</sup>

Her mother doesn't care about her feelings, the only goal of her family is that her daughter marries a man from a rich family. The protagonist's attachment to her mother, Farida; a dressmaker, is bad. She is a protective and cold woman, filled with anger and indignation, she asserts,

A la fois protectrice et suppliante, parfois elle s'adressait à son petit dernier qui savait la pousser dans ces derniers retranchements. Froide, sèche, coupante, vibrante de colère et d'exaspération dès qu'elle croyait comprendre que je voulais lui tenir tête.<sup>22</sup>

As for her future, the protagonist denounces the traditional forced marriage to which she was forced by her mother, but also the obsession with virginity that pushed her mother who had all the authority over her body even controlling her monthly period, she underlines,

A vingt-sept ans, poussée par une mère terrifiée à l'idée de m'avoir sur les bras toute sa vie, j'ai accepté la demande de mon premier et unique prétendant : le frère d'une de ses clientes, présenté comme un brave homme, sérieux et inoffensif. Je me souviens encore du regard désappointé et pensif de ma mère lors du premier essayage de la robe de mariée qu'elle avait tenu à me confectionner elle-même. Vous dirais-je encore que, jusqu'à mon mariage, elle tenait à jour le calendrier de mes règles et qu'elle allait jusqu'à fouiller les poubelles pour y rechercher et vérifier mes serviettes hygiéniques ?<sup>23</sup>

In Bey's *Nulle autre voix*, the male character is depicted through constrained view; limiting his representation to one particular model that of domination and authority. The domination of the male sex is well illustrated in this novel where the protagonist is often oppressed, she says, "personne n'a jamais pris conscience de ma détresse. Pourtant les signaux étaient là : le mutisme

dans lequel je me suis réfugiée pendant mon adolescence.”<sup>24</sup> She is condemned to silence, thus, she says :

Il exigeait de moi respect et silence. Les règles de cohabitation ont été définies et appliquées dès les premiers instants, alors que nous faisons à peine connaissance.<sup>25</sup>

She is at the center of a long struggle always dependent on the man who is an obstacle to her freedom. She accepted an arranged marriage with a predatory and violent man imposed by her family, she has no feeling towards him, no value in their lives. She marries him in a traditional way without realizing the consequences of this marriage which has made him feel bad and lives in great ordeal.

Que l’homme n’était pas jaloux. Simplement parce qu’il n’avait aucune raison de l’être. Qui voudrait de toi ? Qui aurait l’idée de t’accorder un regard ? me jetait –il souvent sur un ton méprisant, reprenant sans le savoir les paroles prophétiques de ma mère.<sup>26</sup>

He is an authoritarian, selfish, serious and severe man. He rarely speaks to her except when he needs something, he sees her as an object in the house. We can illustrate the statement by this passage from the novel: “Et enfin un mari qui correspond presque exactement au portrait-robot des hommes classés dans la catégorie prédateurs violents.”<sup>27</sup> The husband considers his wife, the protagonist, as a slave born to serve him and submit to his authority in absolute silence, she reveals, “baisser la tête, se taire, obéir n’était pas nouveau pour moi,”<sup>28</sup> she adds, “j’étais là pour le servir, pour lui servir. Pas pour lui tenir compagnie.”<sup>29</sup>

Through the pages of the novel, we focus deeply on the heroine’s life. She is struggling to achieve safety in her life defying the male domination, she lives under the oppression of silence and contains her motives in face of a society that forgives nothing. In fact, she understands that there is a difference between the male and female sex, she affirms:

Très tôt, j'ai compris –et admis – que mes frères et moi n'étions pas faits de la même étoffe. Plus tard, la force, la véhémence et la récurrence des discours, dans et hors de mon lieu familial, m'ont fait comprendre –et admettre – que mes semblables et moi étions génétiquement programmées pour l'obéissance, la soumission. Surtout ne prenez pas cela pour un discours féministe !<sup>30</sup>

The novel's female protagonist is presented as a weak creature, a slave in front of the male figure, she is only useful to take care of the children and to keep the house. She refuses to live as she wants for fear of the society's punishment, in this regard she reveals,

Les apparences on en revient toujours à cette histoire de visible et de caché ! je suis passés maitresse dans l'art de la dissimulation et du mensonge. Que rien ne se voie! Que rien ne s'entende."<sup>31</sup>

She endures and obey the traditions of her preservative and patriarchal society which does not allow the free existence of the female sex and puts her at an inferior position than man. In other words, she is predisposed to obedience and submission, the following excerpt faithfully illustrates her distress:

Plus tard, la force, la véhémence et la récurrence des discours, dans et hors de mon milieu familial m'ont fait comprendre-et admettre-que mes semblables et moi étions génétiquement programmées pour l'obéissance, la soumission.<sup>32</sup>

The patriarchal society forces women to grow up obsessed with the perfection of physical appearance and obliged them to pretend another character during their adolescence which develops the women 's self-acceptance.

The protagonist was not part of this category of women who colors their face to please, she does not look like those who spend hours looking at themselves on the mirror:

Une fille, ça se regarde longtemps et souvent dans la glace. Ça tombe amoureuse tous les quinze jours. Ça essaie des soutiens gorges rembourrés, des coiffures, du rouge à lèvres, des chaussures à talons et que sais-je encore !<sup>33</sup>

We can even understand that she does not have time for her, she says, “je n’ai jamais attaché d’importance à mon apparence.”<sup>34</sup> She is presented in a violent image full of slavery and differentiation; she lives in a society based on the outside which paints the woman by her faults and her low, it offers always justice for man, as it is quoted:

Vont dans les rues et à qui personne ne permet d’oublier qu’elles aussi sont des cas : du jeune garçon qui leur met la main aux fesses, comme ça, pour s’amuser, aux vieillards qui dardent sur elles des yeux lubriques tout en se léchant les lèvres.<sup>35</sup>

During the years of terror, women lived under an oppressive life situation marked by fear, control and violence. They forced to wear the scarf, imposed by the controlling authority, obeying the patriarchal society’s laws.

En ces jours de terreur, le foulard faisait partie de la panoplie de survie des femmes. Des jeunes filles avaient été exécutées parce qu’elles refusaient de le porter.<sup>36</sup>

This submission to paternal and fraternal authority which grows that the protagonist is forbidden from leaving the house unless she wears the scarf revealing her fear of social judgment.

## **b- Violence in Emecheta and Bey’s Novels.**

The World Health Organization in the WRVH, Violence is defined as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.”<sup>37</sup>

*The Slave Girl* is a book full of examples how men treat women badly; women are exploited and oppressed by the male figures within the patriarchal society. From the title of the book we can understand that women are not treated like human being as the term slave means

no rights no independent life. Pa Palagada is the kind of men who has a control over women particularly the slaves, for them he means a big punishment or a devil.

Pa Palagada is very strict; he blames the girls and he use a cane which uses to punish slaves for any sort of mistakes whether big or small. For instance, “Amanna’s bed-wetting was more disturbing. She had been caned several times.”<sup>38</sup>

What do you think you are doing, making so much noise that we cannot talk in the house? what, eh, what? come up to the parlour –and, you, go and get me whip. I will teach you two to laugh properly next time.<sup>39</sup>

The Master Pa palagada is an unfair man as the power and control is under his hand. He acts as he pleases and every time the innocent slave girl does something wrong or not in Pa Palagada’s favour, he beats her directly without searching to understand.

“Oh, you were too young then. You don’t understand. He fiddles with me. He used to make me do things...o my chi, help me in this household.”<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, the slave girls were abused also sexually from their master. As it is illustrated in this statement Pa Palagada not only beats the slave girls but also, he exploits them sexually as Chiago, the oldest slave girl in the Palagadas house.

The most important was that a slave who made an unsuccessful attempt to run away was better off dead. Such a slave would be so tortured that he or she would be useless as a person, or else might be used for burial.<sup>41</sup>

As it is illustrated in the book the treatment of the slave who want to run away from his master it is better for her to dead because her punishment will be severe and cruel.

She thoughts about Pa Palagada—he was not completely mad in the sense that he needed locking up, but he was a very intolerant master. The only method he knew of making those under him do as he wanted was by caning. If you did not look at him when he was talking to you, you got the cane. If you stared at him too much, you were caned. If you laughed at him, the same treatment applied; but if he cracked a joke and you did not laugh, you were caned.<sup>42</sup>

From this quote, we determine that the slave girls such as Ojebeta, Chiago and Amman were under the male oppression and manipulation and that they were living under physical violence. From this statement we can understand how strong the male character is, because he feels no kindness and clemency toward the slaves.

“How dare you keep me waiting? don’t you now we’ll miss the ferry? she raised her right hand to strike as usual but Ojebeta used her clothes basket as a shield”<sup>43</sup>

In this quotation, Ojebeta was not only maltreated from her Master but also from the daughter of her wife Victoria.

While, Bey’s *Nulle autre voix* describes the protagonist’s painful life, where the verbal violence, whether moral and physical has a very profound impact on her psychology: “J’ai souvent songé au suicide. Aux mille et une manière de mettre fin à une vie qui ne m’offrait aucune promesse de bonheur.”<sup>44</sup> In this passage, the protagonist depicts that she is dissatisfied and has attempted suicide several times because of the lack of security, enjoyment and comfort in her life.

In such retrograde society, she suffered violence at all stages of her life: childhood at home, at school, as a couple; each period of his life had a heavy and painful weight.

Pour moi, la première violence est de s’arroger le droit de disposer de l’autre. Du corps de l’autre. Au nom d’une supériorité légitimée par la naissance, le sexe, l’argent, la position sociale ou encore par des lois humaines ou divines.<sup>45</sup>

Belonging to a conservative family where she lives in a harsh condition cast doubt on her origins to the point of paternity confusion, she says:

A dix ans, j’avais persuadé toutes mes camarades de classe, mais aussi mes deux frères, que j’étais une enfant adoptée. Normal, disaient-ils sans méchanceté, tu ne ressembles à aucun d’entre nous.<sup>46</sup>

The novel's protagonist experiences such acts of verbal violence from her mother, she narrates,

Ma mère ne levait jamais la main sur moi. Quand j'étais enfant, c'est tout juste si elle élevait la voix pour me réprimander ou me donner des ordres. Néanmoins le plus léger haussement de ton me terrifiait et entraînait une réaction incontrôlable : un écoulement involontaire d'urine.<sup>47</sup>

The mother was bossy and fierce towards her daughter, the protagonist. She asserts that her mother was strict and authoritarian:

Ma mère ne criait pas. Elle n'avait besoin de crier. Tout était dans l'intonation, dans le regard aussi. Quand la colère montait, elle décochait des mots qui atteignaient leur cible et se fichaient dans le vif de la mémoire.<sup>48</sup>

The mother exercises her laws through physical and verbal expressions, "d'une voix lourde de menaces, l'index pointe sur moi. Un index noueux et sec comme un bâton. Baisse la tête, je te dis, baisse la tête,"<sup>49</sup> and the daughter silently accepts all her reprimands.

A more difficult type, the psychological violence of her husband. She accepted an arranged marriage without thinking about its consequences. She married a man who addresses her to carry out his orders and satisfy his instinctive needs, writes,

Chaque fois qu'il levait la main sur moi, chaque fois qu'il m'insultait, m'humiliait, me trainait dans la boue de ses fantasmes les plus violents, les plus répugnants, si avilissants que je n'oserais jamais les évoquer devant vous, je me persuadais que la seule issue était la mort.<sup>50</sup>

The protagonist claims that sex between her and her husband was a dirty and exhausting act, affirms that she has never felt joy, love or enjoyment with her husband even during the most intimate moments, she narrates:

C'était ça le sexe pour moi. Dououreux, sale, répugnant, violent, avilissant. Je croyais que ce n'était que ça : cette violence, cette douleur, cette humiliation de n'être rien d'autre qu'un réceptacle où se déversent la jouissance de la domination et l'illusion de la toute-puissance de l'homme.<sup>51</sup>

Overwhelmed by sorrow and pain, she finds herself cloistered between the walls of home. She often thought about suicide, because of the abusive man with whom she lives a daily hell, she writes,

Il est arrivé derrière moi dans la cuisine, à pas de loup. Il m'a sonné un coup de pieds sur les mollets. De toute ces forces. Je suis tombée sur les genoux.<sup>52</sup>

She adds, “le sang coulait toujours. J'ai refait le pansement. J'ai entendu un moment puis je suis allée le rejoindre dans la chambre,”<sup>53</sup> despite his bad treatment towards her, she is totally hooked on her man, by fear, she is never existed for herself.

He considers his wife-the protagonist- as a slave born to submit to his authority whether she wants it or not, she argues, “éteins les lumières! Ce qui dans son langage veut dire : Viens me rejoindre dans le lit, je n'aime pas attendre,”<sup>54</sup> she adds, “à ces yeux je n'étais qu'un instrument multifonctions, polyvalent, programmé pour assurer son bien-être.”<sup>55</sup>

The husband's violence shows his strength and dominance over his wife, the protagonist:

Quand il rentrait à la maison après une journée de travail, il me suffisait de regarder son visage pour savoir que, à plus ou moins court terme, la gifle, le coup de poing ou le coup de pied allaient partir.<sup>56</sup>

She is used to be attacked by this husband; when he comes home, she just has to look at his condition and guess what nightmare awaits her in the evening. He is described as a monster who feeds on his wife's weakness, silence and submission, as it is depicted in the following passage:

Ses yeux étrécis, deux fentes aussi étroites, aussi luisantes que des lames de couteau, avec le même tranchant, ses mâchoires serrées, sa façon de se laisser tomber lourdement sur le fauteuil, sans un mot son un regard pour moi, étaient autant d'indices de la violence à venir.<sup>57</sup>

Maissa bey's and Buchi Emecheta's main characters, through their novels, are passive and silent within the patriarchal societies. In fact, by reading both novels, we discovered that the two protagonists were under the male control. The female protagonists were oppressed, dominated, maltreated and neglected by male figures who can be a father, a husband or a master.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> *The Slave Girl*, Buchi Emecheta (Royaume-Uni, 1977), 33.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>15</sup> *Nulle autre voix*, Maïssa Bey (barzakh, 2018), 32.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 118-119.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>37</sup> Krug E, Dahlberg L, Mercy J. *et al* *World report on violence and health*. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2002

<sup>38</sup> *The Slave Girl*, Buchi Emecheta (Royaume-Uni, 1977), 88.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 92-93.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>44</sup> *Nulle autre voix*, Maissa Bey (barzakh, 2018), 45.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 164.

## Chapter Two: Voice in Buchi Emecheta's and Maissa Bey's Writings.

Both Buchi Emecheta and Maissa Bey emphasize the significance of reclaiming one's voice as a path to empowerment and giving resistance to their female characters in the two novels.

### a- Education in *The Slave Girl*.

In her book *Trend and Issues in Nigerian Literature*, Dr. Ngozi Chuma Udeh makes the following points clear:

The female voices in Nigerian literature, therefore, came up as a total and implicit rejection of this derogatory lifestyle created by the norms of the society to restrict and subjugate women both in real life and in the fictive sphere since literature is a weapon of authority, women writers have together used it as a medium to promote and give value to the lives of women therefore filling successfully the guilt between the male and female characters in Nigerian novels. They based their argument on the premise that progress in the society can be fostered by steering clear of sexual segregation.<sup>1</sup>

This gender discrimination was denounced by African women writers. They desired for a higher position, claiming that the writer should be judged on the quality of his work rather than his gender, in order to bring harmony and justice to the world of writing for the benefit of both sexes.

In an interview with Julie Holmes, she says "If I was not to perish here, I realized that I find something I was good at my books are about survival, just like my own life."<sup>2</sup>

The voice in *The Slave Girl* is not rendered literally, which means to raise one's voice, but it is given physically by reaction. In the first sight, the protagonist was passive and oppressed but later on, she realised that she cannot be all her life a slave. Ojebeta was not like

other slave girls as Chiago and Ammana who accepted their position, Ojebeta reacts and struggles to gain her freedom.

When Ma dies, however, her immediate reaction is that of revolt against the prospect of a new slave/master relationship with Ma's daughter, Victoria: "I am not going to Bonny with you," she shouted defiantly. "I am going to my people. I'm going home!"<sup>3</sup>

The female character, Victoria, is from the upper class. From the beginning, she doesn't consider Ojebeta as a human being and she treats her badly. Ojebeta fed up; she would not any more obey miss Victoria. In the time, she asked Ojebeta to go with her to Bonny. Ojebeta had a courage and gave an answer with no, her eyes were round and shone with the first joy of freedom.

Emecheta changes the behaviour of her female character from silent to voice. At first, the perotagonist Ojebeta accepted all the manners and ways under she was treated. But the idea of going home was always in her mind, then after the death of Ma Palagada, she takes a decision to come back home, a decision that was not permitted for slaves but Ojebeta, by her desire to change the harsh condition she lives, she leaves for a better life.

Ojebeta breathed in deeply, then spoke. " Pa Palagada, I want to go back to my people, now that Ma has gone. I thank you both for looking after me so well up till now. I don't want to go to Bonny with Miss Victoria—I can't even speak the Bonny language..."<sup>4</sup>

From this statement, we understand that Ojebeta was not any more fear from her master Pa Palagada as she asked him that she wants to go to her home not with miss Victoria. We can say that Ojebeta is brave and says what she desires to her master. Ojebeta begin to know how to talk and can express her thoughts, her personality seemes to be changed.

No, Miss Victoria, I will not come with you. I shall pay back every penny my brother borrowed from our mother who has gone, and I shall pay it back to Clifford. She wanted me for Clifford, not for you. And Clifford is not here, so why should I go with you?<sup>5</sup>

As Victoria insists that Ojebeta should go with her, because her mother bought her and she should repay. Even though Ojebeta is brave; she refused then said that she pays back Clifford.

We can say that Ojebeta gained some respect from Clifford and his mother when he decided to marry her; the behaviour of the two is changed over Ojebeta. So, the proposal of Clifford gave some freedom to Ojebeta and also encourage her to speak. Through speaking, the character achieves self –affirmation.

Ojebeta is the character who represents the voice of many Nigerian women. In fact, in her novel, Emecheta portrays the protagonist as a woman who struggles to liberate herself from enslavement. We suggest that speaking which means voice can change life of the individual. Ojebeta, at once, speaks, expresses her attitude and gains her freedom from slavery. She breaks the chains of silence.

Education helps the protagonist's development; she becomes aware of what she wants to be and the way of behaving has changed. Education makes the voice of Ojebeta heard, everybody knows that, in some societies, girls are forbidden to go to school since it is not necessary for them because her roles are only to work at home and bearing children.

The second one is that, in the house of Ma Palagada, the slave girls are educated; they had a chance to attend school and also learned some skills. After attending school and learning in the house, the behaviour of Ojebeta was defiantly changed, she was not any more the girl who was sold by her brother; the way she talks, the way she answers not only that but also her

way of wearing cloths. She has self-awareness as a result of the education she has acquired. From education she built a great personality.

‘Yessima’. This was one of the first lessons you learned as a servant or slave, that when you were called by any lady, you did not answer ‘Eh!’ as you would do in your village; you were meant to reply. ‘Ma’am’—which usually came out sounding more like a goat crying for food. To men you said ‘Sa!’ So, in privileged houses the refrain was Ma. Sa. Sa. Ma. all day.<sup>6</sup>

From this quotation, Emecheta shows the development of the slave girls how they answer to their master. Yessima is more elegant in the way of answering; only educated girls who answer like that.

There girls were taught how to bake cakes from maize flour, how to lift their long dresses decorously when they walked to church; they were taught how to crochet and how to embroider chain-stitches in patterns.<sup>7</sup>

Emecheta portrayed the slave girls as they become educated and civilised. For instance, they know how to behave in the church. Learning much skills gives confidence for the individual to have the self-confidence.

“Ogbanje Ojebeta added the English name of Alice. Now if you call her just Ogbanje, or just Ojebeta, she would not answer.”<sup>8</sup> Ojebeta when she was slave, she definitely lost her identity. After returning home, not only her personality is changed but also, she changed her name which gives her some kind of being proud of herself.

Emecheta portrays how the protagonist, Ojebeta, struggles to liberate herself from man control; from weakness to self-awakened. Her behavior is completely changed.

“Ammana had also gone in to business and had a big shop, and a car”<sup>9</sup> in this quotation Emecheta demonstrates the development of an educated person as Ammana was a slave and later on she became a strong and a responsible female character.

Oh, yes, they were quite well when I saw them last, about a month ago. Your brother’s wife is from my village, you know, so we are in laws. But they never told me that they had an educated and well brought-up pretty young girl like you at all. In fact, coming back to Ibuza is always an Eye-open.<sup>10</sup>

“He really liked her. Such an intelligent girl.”<sup>11</sup> “Yes, the only girl we have who can read in Ibo and do some very nice needlework. She is well trained.”<sup>12</sup> With Jacob's description of Ojebeta, we can say that she is not the former character who cries all the time, but rather an educated and well-behaved woman who uses education as a means to free herself from slavery. The education gave Ojebeta another image and a positive look in the eyes of ‘Jacob’.

Education helps the protagonist’s mind to progress and this helps, too, the other slave girls to develop their thinking and confront the domination of men, and break the traditions which limited their needs in life.

### **b- Counter-Violence in *Nulle autre voix*.**

Bey’s *Nulle autre voix* describes the protagonist as a character paralyzed in the beginning of the story because of what she experienced during her childhood and the unjust treatment of her husband. It represents the revolt of a desperate woman who had the courage and the will to break the silence and challenge injustice. The protagonist says:

Je n’ai pas envie de rouvrir la plaie. Cela s’est passé pendant la période la plus meurtrière de cette décennie de terreur et de violences dont l’évocation reste difficilement supportable.<sup>13</sup>

She explains that the idea of, “supprimer, de le mettre hors d’état de nuire”<sup>14</sup> never left her:

L'idée est revenue. Chaque fois qu'il levait la main sur moi, chaque fois qu'il m'insultait, m'humiliait, me traînait dans la boue de ses fantasmes les plus violents, les plus répugnants, si avilissants que je n'oserais jamais les évoquer devant vous.<sup>15</sup>

From the first day, the first slap, she hated her husband. From the first night, the narrator develops a feeling of hatred towards him because of his cruel and ruthless behavior. She wants to completely eliminate the man who deprived her of her rights from her life, she writes:

Dès la première nuit, dès la première bouffée de haine, j'ai souhaité sa mort. J'en ai rêvé. Oui, des centaines de fois, j'ai rêvé pour lui un attentat terroriste, un accident quelconque, des mauvaises rencontres, une maladie incurable assortie d'une longue et douloureuse agonie. J'ai souhaité de toutes mes forces qu'il rôtisse en enfer,<sup>16</sup>

In short, the physical, sexual and psychological violence pushed the narrator to commit the murder to free herself from her abusive man, she states, "je me persuadais que la seule issue était la mort (...) Il allait mourir, il devait mourir."<sup>17</sup> she adds:

J'ai tué un homme. J'ai tué un homme qui. Mais peu importe qui il était. Ou ce qu'il a fait. C'était un homme... Je n'ai rien à dire pour l'instant.<sup>18</sup>

The novel opens with a scene that shows a woman advancing towards her husband, and in cold blood stabs him three times. The narrator, herself describes the scene:

Il sent que je m'approche de lui. Ses épaules se redressent légèrement. Il ne se retourne pas. Qu'aurait-il à craindre ? Trois coups. Trois coups seulement. Il n'a pas le temps de se retourner. Ni celui de comprendre peut-être.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, after so much violence suffered, especially from her husband, the situation becomes unbearable for the protagonist; a feeling of hatred and revenge is born to ensure her rightful

place and take into account her existence as it is mentioned in this excerpt: “Peut-être en tuant cet homme, je suis arrivée à ce que je souhaitais secrètement: obliger ma mère à tenir compte de mon existence.”<sup>20</sup> The protagonist takes revenge on her husband from whom she suffered all kinds of violence from him and also from her mother who erased her from her existence.

The protagonist refuses her status as a submissive human being, faced her fears, rebels and ends up revolting against society, her family and her abusive man, she argues,

Comme si les traces de mon infamie étaient inscrites sur mon visage. Non, cela n’a rien à voir avec la peur ou la honte. Peut-être faut-il chercher ailleurs, du côté de la culpabilité. Je précise tout de suite : cette culpabilité-là ne provient pas d’une prise de conscience tardive de la portée de mon acte. Elle est bien plus profonde, bien plus ancienne.<sup>21</sup>

The protagonist’s suffering and the silence accumulated for years has yielded a crime with which she sought her freedom. Since she realized that her world has collapsed, since the harsh and oppressive conditions destroy her life and put her in hell, she couldn’t wear a mask and shuts up like before, she says, “je me suis tant de fois joué cette scène. Ce soir le rideau va tomber sur le dernier acte.”<sup>22</sup> She takes the action of killing her abusive man and frees herself from all sorts of discrimination and exploitation, she writes, “j’allais le supprimer. Je me répétais cette phrase et tout devenait simple, lumineux comme une évidence.”<sup>23</sup> The tortured woman is clearly thinking about taking action.

After hard times, the protagonist wants to free herself and this is can be only by putting an end to his torturer husband, source of his endless suffering.

J’ai purgé ma peine. Pour moi, dans ce mot « peine » il n’y a ni douleur ni chagrin. Pas non plus de regret. Rien d’autre qu’un sentiment de paix, une plénitude qui m’envahit chaque matin quand j’ouvre les yeux.<sup>24</sup>

She does not regret having been imprisoned because she does not feel pain or sorrow. On the contrary, she has peace of mind and leads a peaceful life.

“Quand les portes de prison se sont renfermées sur moi, je me suis brusquement sentie... comment dire... délivrée,”<sup>25</sup> she considers the crime as a mean that opens the door of her freedom; it breaks the chain that hinders her walk and does not let her move forward. She adds, “libérée de la peur. De la honte. Du dégoût du soi. De la haine. De la colère sourde tapie dans les entrailles,”<sup>26</sup> she doesn't have to worry about this man anymore, it's like coming out of hell.

The narrator ends her husband's life. She is aware of her repressive behavior. The crime helps her to liberate herself despite having lived for several years within the walls of the prison, she writes:

Je n'ai pas commis le meurtre du siècle, du moins je ne crois pas. Quel poids peut bien avoir mon histoire face à l'histoire qui déroule indéfiniment ses tablettes pour fixer l'horreur chaque jour dépassé sous nos yeux effarés et fascinés ? Oui, c'est vrai. J'ai commis cet acte de sang-froid. En toute lucidité. C'est à ce moment-là que m'est apparu le sens exact du mot « libération ».<sup>27</sup>

The protagonist imposes her presence, despite all sorts of injustice and marginalization that prevail and dominate her days, she considers the crime committed the only way in front of her to forcefully take her freedom and puts an end to her torture husband and let go of her bitter past. She tries to justify her act by making a comparison with the horror that exists in this world. She wants to prove that this crime is essential for her to have her freedom.

After her freedom, the protagonist speaks more as before without complexity, she expresses everything she does and what she feels. She expresses herself without fear, detached from all kind of oppression, she reveals, “voilà. J'ai franchi un seuil. Un autre. Je vous parle de mon corps. Plus exactement je vous décris des sensations qui se vivent seule, dans le secret d'une chambre.”<sup>28</sup>

Maïssa bey shows that the novel's protagonist is a strong woman who can reserve her rights and fight and free her soul and her thoughts within a society that marginalizes women. She expresses her revolt and her fight against despair as she has an intense desire to fight against the oppression, the pain, the anger and the injustices that she has experienced in the closed space (the family) and in the space public (society).

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Chuma, Udeh Ngozi. *Trend and Issues in Nigerian Literature*. Onitsha: Malchjay Publishers, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Emecheta Buchi. interview by Julie Holmes. “*The Voice*”. 9<sup>th</sup> Julie. 1996

<sup>3</sup> *The Slave Girl*, Buchi Emecheta (Royaume-uni,1977), 144.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.,158.

<sup>13</sup> *Nulle autre voix*, Maissa Bey (barzakh,2018), 143.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.,111.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 130.

## Conclusion

In this research, we shed light on the way women are portrayed in the two novels, relying on bell hooks *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (1984). The theory allows us to make a critical analysis of literary works of Buchi Emecheta and Maissa Bey. The two novelists strive to eliminate all forms of discrimination and changing the world by promoting gender equality. During the analysis, we found that the authors were committed writers. They are aware of their unfortunate situation, and as a result, they have the desire to expose the truth by speaking out and taking action to change the situation; thus, they aspire to a new free and democratic society.

Emecheta focuses on the struggle and unequal roles of women in African society. She devotes herself to literary writings to communicate her ideas and thoughts in protest of male control, and to restore women's dignity and independence, because African women were excluded and rejected by their communities in all areas.

Bey, in her novel, *Nulle autre voix* represents one of the literary voices crying out her revolt. Despite all the obstacles, and the attempts to stifle her, she knows by her courage to defy the laws of silence and prohibition and she tries to make the voice of oppressed women heard. She used her talent as a writer to tell men that the woman, this brittle being, is able of doing anything to obtain her freedom.

Our aim in this dissertation was to demonstrate and compare Emecheta's and Bey's main goal for writing their novels. As in *The Slave Girl*, Emecheta shows the discern of African stereotypical traditions that oppress African women, and encourages women's liberation through feminist discourse. They also reclaim their identity as voiceless victims, protest against all negative images associated with women, promote social justice in African societies, achieve social changes by providing equal status and equal rights to men, and finally put an end to marginalization and all other factors that contribute to women's status being diminished.

In the first chapter, as we moved on to discuss the writer's perspectives, we deal with the oppressive condition of the African women as represented in both Buchi Emecheta's and Maissa Bey's works. So, through the writing of the novels, both authors speak about the suffering of women experienced in reality and in their patriarchal society as victims of patriarchy and violence. The female characters were under the control of the male dominance; as we evidenced this is what makes these female characters silent. So, women are depicted as 'other' and inferior. Even though Emecheta and Bey used different languages (French, for the former and English, for the latter), they deal with the same issue and portray women in a similar situation.

In the second chapter, we have analyzed the ways into which Emecheta and Bey empower their women characters in their narratives; *Nulle autre voix* and *The Slave Girl*. We highlighted the only point where the two authors differ; the way of struggling and how they break silence.

In short, this dissertation has dealt with the role of African women in a patriarchal society. Through reading and analyzing the two African literary works *The Slave Girl* (1977) and *Nulle autre voix* (2018) we have analyzed the position of African women and their resistance to all forms of oppression. Despite all the obstacles and the attempts to stifle the protagonists of the novels, they know that, by their courage and desire, they are able to defy the laws of silence and prohibition. They do not give up and try with all the means they have to obtain their freedom. Both of these means; violence and education, given another chance to the female characters to free themselves from the male limitations and domination. By reading and evaluating to the African's novels *The Slave Girl* (1977) and *Null autre voix* (2018), the two authors are considered as a symbol of freedom and peace. They cheer on the African women to resist against the patriarchal regime in order to pursue their goals, ambitions and also to achieve their freedom and gender equality.

To conclude, we can say that our research has opened the door to other researchers to ask thousands of questions and investigations because the theme of the female condition is vast.

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