

THE PREMISES OF SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM IN BUCHI EMECHETA'S *THE SLAVE GIRL* AND *THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD*

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***Abstrak:** Literature remains an important part of every society because of its didactic and aesthetic functions. From the pre-literature era to the present, literature is still as a source with which to appreciate human creativity and burden to look at human experiences and actions, more critically, satirically and sometimes, pleasurable. Literature has the ability to stimulate human consciousness to reality and points to human follies. Through the major forms of literature, writers of all ages have been able to capture the social, political and cultural moods and experiences of their societies.*

***Keywords:** Language, meaning, Symbolical Interactionism*

Background

Novel explores many thematical issues in society and has been consistently investigated by many thesis writers because of its social, economical, cultural, religious and political relevance. The textual materials are constructed to be enjoyable, comprehensible and also applicable by society (Habib, 2005: 2).

In a nutshell, the investigation toward one of the literary genres is pointed to reveal the aesthetic value of the interwoven bond between elements of literary development, and also expected to take the values in it. This study uses two novels to find the values. These values are universal since they are applied in the performance of society, such as

moral values, ethics, religion, and culture. These values are reflected in the characters, by describing mind, characteristics and behavior. In addition, how a character interacts with other characters also deserves attention.

Besides using the language which is easier to be understood by everyone, the interaction between characters also makes use of both verbal and non-verbal symbols. The way how people think of a lot of practices is determined by the language. Language is actually not only seen as a 'means of exchange message, but symbolic interactionism sees the position of the language more as a set of ideas that is exchanged to others symbolically that is symbolic communication. This statement is supported by Blumer (1969: 78-79): Symbolic interaction (it will be abbreviated as SI) refers to the individual as a special character of interaction between human beings especially in a real when human beings tried to interpret or 'define' the act and not solely to interact by giving response to each other. Therefore, the interaction is mediated by using symbols, interpretation, or determine the meaning from others is equivalent with the process of interpretation between stimulus and response of human behavior.

Different use of language ultimately determines the difference in the way human thinks. However, many meanings of a language is determined by the context or social construction, often individual interpretation was instrumental in the modification of the symbol that we caught in the process of thought. Meaning refers to the language and refers to the process of thinking. Then language determines how the meaning and thought processes. Thus, all three are closely interrelated. Interaction is the third major study in the perspective of SI.

By harmonizing themselves with the expectations of others, then it is possible the interaction to happen. The more capable person takes over social feeling and translates the form of identity or selfhood. Basically human interaction uses symbols, and the way humans use symbols, represents what they mean to communicate with others.

From the former discussion, the thesis writer would like to use the three premises of SI to make interconnection with the two african novels. This is based on Nooy's opinion that the three premises of SI are highly relevant to the processes of literary criticism (Nooy, 2009: 40). And the african novels are very interesting to read and there is unique custom in Africa that we can learn as the experience of life. The people that are presented and studied in the two stories experience life in a world that is filled with modern and traditional ways of life. By living in a blended world, the modern and the traditional one, the characters presented in the two stories have to face a challenging life. Therefore, for the thesis writer it is very interesting. The two novels which will be discussed, *The Slave Girl* (1977) and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) (those will be abbreviated as *TSG* and *TJoM*) are written by Florence Onye Buchi Emecheta. She is one of the most well-known female writers in Africa. She was born on July 21, 1944 in Lagos, Nigeria.

This study discusses Buchi Emecheta's works because they give influence to Nigerian society eventhough Buchi Emecheta has written not more than 20 novels. She is not only a successful author but also has an astounding academic record. The theme of her works is mostly talked about the condition of women in Africa. She also has written numerous plays for the BBC, as well as children's books. In the early 1980s she ran a publishing company called Ogwugwu Afor and she was a member of the Britain's Advisory Council on Race. She got some awards for her career, which include New Statesman Jock Campbell Award for *TSG*, 1979, selected as the British Home Secretary's Advisory Council on Race, 1979, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1982, and one of the Best British Young Novelist, 1983 (<http://postcolonialstudies.emory.edu/buchi-emecheta/>).

This study uses these two novels that have postcolonial elements and they convey similar issue in case of SI, but those elements are not going to be analyzed from colonial point of view as the sources of data. This analysis uses the three premises of SI theory advanced by George

Herbert Blumer. It is known that the author of the novel *TSG* (1977) and *TJoM* (1979), have a specific purpose to be conveyed to the reader through the meaning, language, and thought of the novel revealed in the interaction of each characters.

Research Method

This study explores the two novels: *TSG* and *TJoM* written by Buchi Emecheta and is designed to get information on the central characters in *TSG* and *TJoM* objectively. Then, the data and the result of data analysis are in the form of phenomenon description such as words, phrases, sentences, statements and dialogues of the main characters and that appear in the novel. Since the objective is to describe the premises of SI of the main characters, the study will apply Sociological Approach from Sociology which is proposed by George Herbert Blumer in his theory of SI. The analysis of SI by using the literary works are basically identical with literary analysis as Nooy's stated that the three premises of SI are highly relevant to the processes of literary criticism (Nooy, 2009: 40).

The defining feature of 'naturalistic research', according to Blumer in Hammersley (1989: 153) that it attains to understand a phenomenon or indication which is happening naturally in natural context through the whole observation in certain surface without any changes. The main purpose is to observe and understand human behavior or group behavior in certain situation (Blumer, 1979: xxiv).

Analysis

1. Meaning

The concept of meaning is used to analysis of the main characters' interaction. Blumer analysis the that human act toward things or other people which given by meanings they understand about the object or the human beings, and an interpretive process is used by the person in each instance in which he must deal with things in his/

her environment. It is shown that humans act depend on the meaning toward an object and it is not adhere to the object but appear from human thought.

The process of meaning formed in the two novels are when the main characters learn everything by observing the environment around them. They find the meaning and define the interaction of other people when they are interacting. From the experience they encounter, the two main characters have a different experience action toward the things.

In *TSG*, Ojebeta grows and becomes a good mature lady. People define Ojebeta depends on her daily life that people see from her life in past and now.

Ojebeta was by no means a bad-looking girl. Her greatest assets were her carriage – for she was straight as a palm, a feature she inherited from her parents – and her white teeth which flashed every time she smiled. She had very shiny black hair, which Ma made sure was cut very closely to her head every other week to avoid her having lice. Her skin was often darkness brown possible without being actually black. Her face, too, would have been as smooth and beautiful as her body were it not for the leafy patterns her parents had had tattooed on her cheeks and forehead. On of inner qualities was that Ojebeta did not know how to tell lies; in fact perhaps sometimes she was too outspoken to be tactful, just like the majority of people from Ibuza who prided themselves on being capable of speaking their mind, whatever the consequences (TSG, p.132).

From Blumer theory, it can be studied that people define Ojebeta through interpretative process. They give meaning from Ojebeta's daily performances and then conclude after observing her. It is from her parents from Ibuza. The people's obrservation results interpretive process that Ojebeta's face, too, would have been as smooth and beautiful as her body were it not for the leafy patterns her parents had had tattoo on her cheeks and forehead. She has good inner

qualities of not to say something in lying. Her attitudes make her people proud of her (TSG, p.132).

While in *TJoM*, Nnu Ego grows and becomes a good mother. She has capability to assign and reveal the meaning in the relationship among her family and environment.

But after all the times, she becomes a good mother for her children. It is illustrated below:

“What is the matter?” she asked at last when she saw that Oshia’s temper was not so violent. “Come , son, tell your mother. Tell ...” (TJoM, p.99).

“He isn’t my friend any more. They told me to go away.”

“Well, Oshia, you can’t force people to invite you to their sarah.” ... Nnu Ego could see in her mind’s eye what must happened...” (TJoM, p.99).

From Blumer ‘s point of view, it is studed that when Nnu Ego talks with her son Oshia, she can understand what happens to her son. Then she tries to explain the situation and she promises to Oshia will send him to school like other children in Lagos when she gets money. It can be defined based on Blumer theory, Nnu Ego learns how to handle her children patiently when they have some cases. What she has already done is very great.

She proves that she not only can be a good mother for her children but also she can be a good wife by accepting the new wife and share a husband with other wife.

Nnu Ego is not only as the mother of her boys but the spiritual and the natural mother of this household. Her relation with the second wife seems good for the first time. It can be seen from what Nnu Ego says:

“But, daughter, you need to know your husband. You go to him, I’m sure he has many tales to tell you.” (TJoM, p.123).

From Blumer theory, it can be defined that Nnu Ego tries to make a joke with Adaku then she laughs the first real laughter she has let herself indulge in since the arrival that morning. Nnu Ego may look very happy as senior wife. But actually she feels so hurt and does not know what to do for welcoming the new second wife.

From the above explanation, based on Blumer's point of view it can be understood that Nnu Ego has capability to assigns and reveals the meaning in the relationship among her family and environment. She proves that she can be a good mother for her children. She also proves that she can be a good wife by accepting the new wife then sharing a husband with other wife. Even it is so hard for her, but the life must go on whatever will happen then.

2. Language

Language is the source of meaning. Human beings get the meaning of something by interaction with the others so it can be stated that meaning is the result of social interaction (Morrione, 2004: xiii). Meaning is not attributed to the object, but negotiated through the language used. Language is the form of symbol so that the theory is called as SI (Blumer, 1969: 3). Based on the understandable meaning, someone can give a useful name to differentiate the object, characteristics of the object, characterization or other behavior. So that the second Blumer's premise is that human has capability of naming something.

Therefore, if we wish to understand human behavior we must know how people define the things – objects, events, individuals, groups, structures – they encounter in their environment.

In *TSG*, the process of learning language, Ojebeta learns from how people name something like *chi* and *dibia*.

This is very important process of naming something when the individual want to learn meaning through the language. The situation of giving a name on a thing begins with Ojebeta as the only baby girl

who can be born and alive in her family. They believe this because of *chi* does not want the baby alive. So her father Okwuekwu Oda brought Ojebeta to the *dibia*, a native doctor says that he must tie her with safety charms in order to make her alive. Then Ojebeta's father goes to get the charms that must consist of cowries, tops of tins brought by Potokis, and real bells from metal (TSG, p.10). All *dibia* give to Ojebeta are symbols of living. This is what Ibuza trust in the *dibia* as a native doctor. Then, Ojebeta has special appreciataion from the *dibia* and she must visit him once a year as gratitution.

From the above story, based on Blumer's theory it can be understood that Ojebeta learns how people in Ibuza name things like *chi* as they believe as a personal god that will guide a person's life. The *chi* also may influence the human's life in positive or negative thing. She learns also about the *dibia* who can give them solution for the health problem. Those two names are common name in Ibuza.

While in *TJoM*, the process of learning language, Nnu Ego learns from how people name something like *chi*, *ogogoro* and *dibia*.

All of girls are lovely babies and she says she is only now with the son she will start love her husband and there is no reason to hate her husband. In Ibuza, a wife is a labour for husband (*TJoM*, p.53). Nnu Ego believes that her *chi* will help her to make her dream come true.

Another naming thing is mentioned in the following quotation:

Nnu Ego had asked wide-eyed, "Why do they call our *ogogoro* illicit? Many of my father's friends were jailed just because they drank it." (*TJoM*, p.111).

People in Ibuza calls one of the drinks is *ogogoro* as a locally made alcohol. It beverage Nnaife serves the guests with lots and lots of *ogogoro*. They drink this kind of drink to celebrate the new baby comes then give the name for a baby. People sing and dance until they are tired of doing both.

The next is when people in Lagos get ill, they will come to the *dibia* as the following quotation:

Oshia started to smile, stifling the urge to laugh out loud. "Mother, do you mean the type of medicine man you used to take me to? The one that said that the ghosts were in Father's old guitar?"

Nnu Ego nodded. "Such *dibias* helped us look after you." (TJoM, p.193).

From the above quotation, it is clear that *dibia* can help Oshia to give medicine for him. Nnu Ego believes that all hope the *dibia* and all those medicine men is speaking the truth.

From the above story, based on *Blumer's* theory that human beings have the unique ability to name things, it can be understood that Nnu Ego learns how people in Ibuza name things like *chi* as they believe as a personal god that will guide a person's life. The *chi* also may influence the human's life in positive or negative thing. Then she learns *ogogoro* as a local drink which is made of alcohol in Ibuza. She learns also about the *dibia* who can give them solution for the health problem. Those three names are common name in Ibuza.

3. Thought

Thought is the process of role taking others. This premise is thought that modifies each individual's interpretation of symbols (Blumer, 1969: 5). In this case, the individual must give valuated symbol shown by others accurately. So that it is easy for them to anticipate others. It is shown that meaning is not the final thing but it is always in progress of giving meaning which is continuing. Here the individual interprets the symbol modified with the process of thinking. In this case, the individual must be sharp to value the symbol of others so he/ she is able to anticipate the act of others.

In *TSG*, the process of thought, Ojebeta learns how to learn a religion in the church and modernity in one of local Church

Missionary Society school. She has changed from little girl as a slave and gets good experience from the owner. But she never forgets her people and custom in Ibuza.

After all, Ojebeta arrives in Ibuza and spends the time with her people. She looks differently from her people with traditional custom and Ojebeta becomes modern person. One of instance of her modernity is shown below:

‘It’s the work of the devil. The Bible and the Catechism books say so. I must be married in church.’ (TSG, p.157).

From the above quotation, it can be learnt that Ojebeta can think and dream that like other women, Ojebeta dreams to be a bride and married in a church as in common Christian belief. The reasons why they have to married in the Church are stated below:

1631 This is the reason why the Church normally requires that the faithful contract marriage according to the ecclesiastical form. Several reasons converge to explain this requirement: [132]

Sacramental marriage is a liturgical act. It is therefore appropriate that it should be celebrated in the public liturgy of the Church;

Marriage introduces one into ecclesial order, and creates rights and duties in the Church between the spouses and towards their children;

Since marriage is a state of life in the Church, certainty about it is necessary (hence the obligation to have witnesses);

The public character of the consent protects the “I do” once given and helps the spouses remain faithful to it.

(<http://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/courses/264/ccm-matri.htm>).

Therefore, it is shown that Ojebeta learns the good thing in her life and becomes religious person as she gets from the Church in every weekend. That is a good dream from a religious point of view. She also feels free after she is back to her people there in Ibuza. No one complains to everything she does. It is shown in the novel:

Ojebeta did not need this latter admonishment at all. She was happy to be free, to enjoy her people, to watch her small savings grow, to go with her age-group and friends to the big market to select the abada material to buy for this celebration or that one (TSG, p.161).

From Blumer's theory, it can be understood that Ojebeta learns something important in her environment. It seems that she has her charms with her people in Ibuza. After nine years she leaves Ibuza since her childhood. She never regret for all she encounters for several years. Because all of she gets is more than everything in her life.

While in *TJoM*, the process of thought, Nnu Ego has already proved that she can be a good daughter for her parents, a good wife for her husband, a good mother for her children and a good mother for her household. She does the best struggle for them so her dream to be a good mother has already come true.

Nnu Ego's jealous still reveals in her scream at Nnaife and his girl:

"Where are we going to put them all?" she screamed at her husband and the girl, whom she suspected would soon start breeding as well. "Have you gone mad or something?" She went on bitterly: "We only have one room to share with my five children, and I'm expecting another two; yet you have brought another person (*TJoM*, p.184).

From the above quotation, it can be understood that Nnu Ego does not want to hide her disapproval that she refuses to share a room with her husband's new girl and all their children. She also does not want that girl sleep on her bed. Besides, it is probably because Nnaife could not earn much money. So it makes Nnu Ego work hard to find money for survival. The point is only one reason that Nnu Ego is jealous of the new wife.

The process of Nnu Ego had an ability to take role with others. Here is as new couple, in Nnu Ego's second marriage she does

not understand what Christianity is all about but, like any bride bring from home, she simply follows in her husband's footsteps. They will return on a bus which for her was a great treat, that coming home in style (TJoM, p.48).

From the above story, it can be learnt that Nnu Ego just follows her husband on every first Sunday afternoons go to Ibo community that holds their own Christianity. She learns about Christianity from her husband by attending the Ibuza family meeting for the first Sunday in each month to Lagos island.

The different situation happens when Nnu Ego has had two girls at the same time with Adaku has a son. Unfortunately Adaku's son does not live for more than a few weeks, he dies of convulsions. It makes Adaku into deep depression and becomes almost impossible to live with. She blames everybody and everything for her loss. Then Nnu Ego tries to reason with her:

“You are still young and conceive very easily: don't give in to this little setback.” (TJoM, p.128).

From the above situation, it can be understood that Nnu Ego understands what Adaku feels because of lost a son. She ever has the same experience which makes her want to kill herself. Based on Blumer's point of view that human beings have an ability to take role the other, Nnu Ego can take role with other women by sharing a husband and can give good entertaint to Adaku in sadness condition.

The next situation is illustrated when Nnu Ego hears her father's illness. He is very old now and would like to see the boys (TJoM, p.149). Nnu Ego knows she can delay her journey home no longer (TJoM, p.149). Nnu Ego must go and see her dying father. Then she says goodbye to her father. Nnu Ego and her daughters shave the father heads of the widows and dress the in the mourning outfits (TJoM, p.152-153). After all, Nnu Ego knows that people will

soon start saying: “You have already proved you are a good daughter, but a good daughter must also be a good wife.” (TJoM, p.155).

From the above story relates to Blumer’s point of view, it can be learnt that Nnu Ego has already proved that she can be a good daughter for her parents, a good wife for her husband, a good mother for her children and a good mother for her household. She does everything for her family as the best struggle for them. Therefore, her dream to be a good mother has already come true.

Discussion

This theory is relevant to be used to analyze the two novels. Some Blumer’s three premises of SI found in two novels. In *TSG*, the process of meaning, Ojebeta learns everything by observing the environment around her. She finds the meaning and defines the interaction of other people. From the experience she encounters, she grows and becomes a good mature lady. The process of learning language, Ojebeta learns from how people name something like *chi* and *dibia*. On the process of thought, Ojebeta learns how to learn a religion in the church and modernity in one of local Church Missionary Society school. She has changed from little girl as a slave and gets good experience from the owner. But she never forgets her people and custom in Ibuza.

In *TJoM*, the process of meaning, Nnu Ego learns everything by observing the environment around her. She finds the meaning and defines the interaction of other people. From the experience she encounters, she grows and becomes a good mother. The process of learning language, Nnu Ego learns from how people name something like *chi*, *ogogoro* and *dibia*. On the process of thought, Nnu Ego has already proved that she can be a good daughter for her parents, a good wife for her husband, a good mother for her children and a good mother for her household. She does the best struggle for them so her dream to be a good mother has already come true.

Conclusion

The thesis writer concludes that the novels *The Slave Girl* and *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta found that the theory from Herbert Blumer's three premises of Symbolic Interaction between the individual are stated in those novels. In addition, the phenomenon such as political conflict, economic, custom, and religion from the main characters are experienced by them as the impacts in their life.

The process of meaning formed in the two novels are when the main characters learn everything by observing the environment around them. They find the meaning and define the interaction of other people when they are interacting. From the experience they encounter, the two main characters have a different experience action toward the things. In *TSG*, Ojebeta grows and becomes a good mature lady. While in *TJoM*, Nnu Ego grows and becomes a good mother. She has capability to assign and reveal the meaning in the relationship among her family and environment. She proves that she not only can be a good mother for her children but also she can be a good wife by accepting the new wife and share a husband with other wife.

The process of learning language formed in the two novels is happened when the main characters learn from how people name something in their Ibo custom.

On the process of thought formed in the two novels is happened when the main characters learn the use of meaning by the actor occurs through a process of interpretation.

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