

Enlightened Yet Enslaved: Stereotypes, Psychological Internalisation and the Making of the ‘Other’ in Buchi Emecheta’s Double Yoke

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Abstract

Education is fundamentally positioned as a transformative force in women’s lives and is championed as a tool for empowerment and equality. Across policy documents, social narratives, and reformist discourse, the educated woman is portrayed as a symbol of progress, yet such women’s penalisation for choosing education is least acknowledged. Even as education expands women’s opportunities, it simultaneously positions them for intense scrutiny, contradiction and stereotyping. The contradiction between encouraging women to excel and warning them against transgressing prescribed boundaries is often overlooked. To contextualise this problem, Buchi Emecheta’s *Double Yoke* is chosen to present education as a contested space for women where intellectual aspirations are spiralled with moral surveillance for gendered control. This study seeks to examine how gendered stereotypes surrounding educated women operate within the narrative, shaping the social perception and psychological response by employing psychological concepts like stereotype threat and self-fulfilling prophecy. These processes reveal how inequality persists even in contexts where women appear to have formal access to opportunity. To deepen the analysis and situate the problem within a broader cultural framework, the study engages with Homi Bhabha’s “The Other Question”, which conceptualises stereotypes as an ambivalent and anxious mode of representation. By highlighting these dynamics, the study calls for a critical rethinking of empowerment that moves beyond access to education and addresses the deeper structures shaping gendered subjectivity.

Keywords: Stereotype Threat, Psychological Internalisation, Empowerment, Educated Women, Self-fulfilling Prophecy

Introduction

Education is often viewed as a liberating force, particularly for women in patriarchal societies, as Molaria Ogundipe opines, “to educate the African woman is to equip her to redefine herself and her society” (41). Perhaps, in a postcolonial Nigerian context, education can also become a double-edged sword restricting women. While it promotes independence and self-worth, it also triggers societal backlash and personal vulnerability. Buchi Emecheta’s *Double Yoke* captures this paradox through the character of Nko, a university student whose desire for knowledge and accreditation leads her into conflict with the patriarchal expectations of her lover, Ete Kamba, and those around her on campus. Ete Kamba expects her to be both

an intellectual equal and a chaste traditional, submissive wife and ultimately rejects her after knowing their professor, Ikot, sexually exploited her in exchange for academic survival. Emecheta highlights the fear of abandonment that educated and modern women face in their attempts to reconcile love, societal acceptance, and personal growth in their pursuit of education and empowerment.

The novel holds a distinct, almost searing place within the canon of African women's writing for its acute portrayal of the gendered politics of the academy. While her earlier novels like *The Joys of Motherhood*, *Second-Class Citizen*, and *The Bride Price* foreground familial pressures placed upon African women within domestic space, *Double Yoke* transplanted the struggle for female autonomy to the modern and progressive space of higher education. Emecheta reveals the university, an environment ostensibly defined by enlightenment and meritocracy, which promises liberation, to be deeply invested in gatekeeping patriarchal norms. Emecheta exposes the contradictory expectations that regulate educated femininity through the trajectory of Nko and other women students. The narrative exposes the calculated paradox where women are encouraged to pursue learning, but only insofar as their intellectual and financial growth does not challenge established hierarchies of sexuality and cultural propriety.

The present study is built upon the foundation of this tension, interrogating how the pervasive stereotypes of the 'educated woman' shape the lived realities of female characters in *Double Yoke*. Within the novel, people often weaponise women's desire for knowledge against them by calling them 'arrogant' and 'rebellious'. These labels are designed to signify the failure of performing submissive domesticity required of 'ideal' femininity. These stereotypes do not merely reflect an opinion; instead, they actively function as a regulatory apparatus that structures women's behaviours, decisions, and sense of self as a whole. To analyse this dynamic, this study draws on two psychological frameworks, which include the self-fulfilling prophecy, which describes how individuals internalise expectations imposed upon them, and stereotype threat, which captures how fear of confirming a stereotype can impair performance or regulate one's behaviour. These frameworks illuminate how women in *Double Yoke* negotiate their academic roles in circumstances where their intellectual competence is continuously policed.

However, the stereotypes in the novel cannot be scrutinised in isolation under the psychological lens. It is necessary to understand their durability, ambivalence, and cultural authority as they echo broader structures of colonial discourse. For that, Homi K. Bhabha's essay "The Other Question" becomes quintessential, particularly his theorisation of the stereotype as a mode of colonial control that relies on repetition, fixity, and contradiction. Applying this concept to *Double Yoke* helps illuminate how postcolonial Nigerian society retains certain colonial modes of categorising differences, especially gender. The stereotype of the 'over-educated' or 'unfeminine' woman functions much like Bhabha's colonial stereotype. It is a repeated cultural script used to contain women who threaten patriarchal stability, even as modern institutions appear to welcome their participation.

In his "The Other Question", Bhabha posits,

The 'stereotype' requires, for its successful signification, a continually and repetitive chain of other stereotypes. The process by which the metaphoric- 'masking' is inscribed on a lack which must then be concealed gives the stereotype both its fixity and its phantasmic quality- the same old stories of the Negro's animality, the Coolie's inscrutability or the stupidity of the Irish must be told (compulsively) again and afresh, and are differently gratifying and terrifying each time. (29)

Similarly, the stereotypes of obedient and naive women are often repeated as virtuous kinds through a chain of images of sacrificing mothers, submissive wives, virgin beloveds and innocent daughters. All

these stereotypes are continuously circulated to regulate educated femininity and to limit them from threatening the established order of patriarchy. These stereotypes become embedded in women's social upbringing through cultural narratives and everyday socialisation, and she is pressured to fit in the frame to avoid deviance and delinquency.

Additionally, according to Bhabha, "the stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (that the negation through the Other permits), constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations" (27). The problem of stereotype lies not within the limits of representation of a particular subject but within the restriction of signification of its meaning. It limits the play and tries to fix the aspiring meaning as reality to label the subject under the threat of the subject's potential of change to assert their own agency. The patriarchal expectations to fix femininity under its own terms and delimit the women's agency could be witnessed through the character Ete Kamba by focusing on his expectations on his beloved.

Review of Literature

Established scholarship on Buchi Emecheta regards her as one of the most influential voices in African women's writing, notably for probing the intersection between gender, modernity, and cultural tradition in her writing. Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo accounts, "Emecheta is first and foremost an African Feminist" (6). Ernest Emenyounu in "Technique and Language in Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*, *The Slave Girl*, and *The Joys of Motherhood*" records that "many of the reflections in Emecheta's novels are of her own life and the lives of people close to and around her ... and the themes of liberation, feminism, and African womanhood are favourite topics of critics and scholars of Buchi Emecheta's fictions" (252). This insight is particularly relevant to *Double Yoke*, where women's pursuit of education is simultaneously a marker of progress and a source of conflict dealing with women's empowerment.

Beyond existing scholarship on Emecheta, broader feminist and postcolonial theorists offer conceptual tools for interpreting the cultural politics of educated femininity. Chandra Talpade Mohanty critiques the homogenization of 'Third World women' in Western academic discourse and emphasizes the need to contextualize their experiences within local histories and power structures (Mohanty 338). This perspective underscores why *Double Yoke* must be read not through a universal feminist lens but through a postcolonial African framework where education, sexuality, and gender roles are deeply interconnected. As critics have long noted, her fiction complicates Western feminist narratives by situating women's struggles within African social structures rather than framing them within universalised models of oppression. Emecheta herself acknowledged the significance of education stating, "I want very much to further the education in Africa, because I know that education really helps the women" (175) and the hardships women face in attaining education are discussed in "Feminism with a small 'f' as such,

Working and achieving to great heights is nothing new to the woman of Africa, but there are still many obstacles in her way. Her family still prefers to educate the boy, while she stays at home to do the important jobs called 'women's duties'. And we accept the tag, knowing full well that the boy, however clever he is, would not be where he is today without the sacrifices made by his mother, his sweetheart, his wife or even his sister. The African woman has always been a woman who achieves. (181)

In "Tradition and the African Female Writer", Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo agrees that "[Emecheta] does not simply condemn our male-dominated society for its oppression of women; more than anything else,

she exposes the injustices lined up against women so that society could be restructured in a more equitable manner” (6). In *Double Yoke*, the constraints surface in the form of social rumors, gendered insults, and institutionalized academic expectations that restrict women’s choices. Additionally, Subhakara Rao and Karuna notes that “although Emecheta consistently champions education, she avoids presenting it in an idealized manner. She acknowledges the paradoxes and sacrifices that come with pursuing knowledge within systems of oppression” (3). Similarly in the novel, Nko’s journey is shaped not by dramatic acts of defiance but by continuous negotiation of personal and academic autonomy.

Research Gap

Although Buchi Emecheta’s *Double Yoke* is widely recognised for its commentary on gender, education, and social change in postcolonial Nigeria, there is limited critical attention given to the psychological and performative mechanisms regulating educated femininity. Educated Black women navigate these social structures with the constant threat of ostracization for their nonconformity to traditional values. Existing scholarship often focuses on external oppression such as patriarchy, cultural tradition, or institutional discrimination without addressing the internal conflicts, self-surveillance, and self-regulation that emerge from stereotypes about educated African women.

This problem emerges from several critical gaps, which include a lack of integrated theoretical analysis. Most studies use feminist or sociological approaches but do not combine psychological concepts of stereotype formation and behavioural response with postcolonial theory, leaving the interplay between external constraints and internalised anxieties unexplored. Similarly, a lack of a unified focus on educated women’s psychological burden prioritising the emotional and cognitive dimensions of being an educated woman in a patriarchal environment necessitates the study. Furthermore, the double burden which is the necessity to perform culturally appropriate femininity while pursuing modern education and autonomy is least explored.

Methodology/Analytical Approach

This study employs a multidisciplinary theoretical framework that combines psychological perspectives on stereotype formation and behavioural response with postcolonial discourse theory. Integrating these concepts makes it possible to examine how stereotypes surrounding educated women in *Double Yoke* influence both external social treatment and the internal self-perception of female characters. The intersection of psychology and postcolonialism frameworks facilitates one’s understanding of how the novel stages the construction and consequences of stereotype-laden gender identities in regulating postcolonial femininity. Educated women face subtle expectations of patriarchy in the name of normalcy, and they try to remain modest, soft-spoken, and deferential, as they know display of too much intellectual confidence risks social sanction within academic space. Similarly, within intimate relationships, educated women must perform femininity in ways that soothe male insecurity and not blister their ego. This results in a complex negotiation of identity in which women are compelled to balance personal ambition against community demands, often at the cost of self-expression. Thus, Emecheta’s narrative becomes a lens through which broader questions of gender, power, and cultural continuity in postcolonial Africa can be examined.

The paper also explores African higher education environments, particularly to examine gendered expectations, and provides context for understanding the institutionalised patriarchy. Scholars often noted that universities in postcolonial Africa frequently reproduce patriarchal hierarchies despite their

modernising ethos. By positioning educated women in contradictory roles, educational institutions restrict their progress. Educated women are celebrated as symbols of national progress for their modernity yet penalised for deviating from traditional gender norms. This dynamic forms the foundation of the novel's central conflict and highlights the portrayal of educated femininity under the cultural tension.

Discussion

Stereotype Threat and Educated Women

The concept of the self-fulfilling prophecy was first theorised by the American sociologist Robert Merton, who defines it as "a false definition of the situation evoking a new behaviour which makes the originally false conception come true." He primarily focused on how it impacted discrimination based on race and related social concerns. Tamra Orr states, "[Merton] theorised that self-fulfilling prophecies would have a strong impact on people's stereotypes and biases about racial qualities". So, it becomes important for the current research paper to rely on it for explaining the impact and influences of gendered stereotypes can play on a female character's educational pursuit. In *Double Yoke*, repeated claims that educated women are 'arrogant' or 'disrespectful' pressure female students to modify their behaviour, often by over-compensating or suppressing assertiveness. These adaptations then reinforce the very stereotype the society claims to observe on sexual difference.

Additionally, Claude Steele's stereotype threat examines how awareness of a negative stereotype can hinder an individual's performance and self-expression (Steele 59). Furthermore, Toni Schmander and William M. Hall informs, "the theory of stereotype threat was originally proposed as an explanation for differences in academic performance between White and African American college students. It has since been expanded to explain performance differences for a number of different groups across a variety of domains" (9). Similarly in the novel, academic anxiety, silence, and selective participation illustrate the psychological strain imposed on women who fear confirming negative cultural assumptions about educated femininity.

Steele's concept helps to explain why intellectual competence alone does not guarantee agency in the novel's academic settings. When Professor Ikot announced he is going to supervise Nko's project, the first response from Colin was, "I wonder how beautiful female students always manage to come up with projects so interesting, that they require the dean of a faculty to supervise" (134). This made Nko feel demeaned and she knows soon the word is going to reach everyone in the campus. She claimed, "she had wanted her degree, she could work hard for her degree, but now everybody seemed to be insinuating that she would get it without having to work for it, simply because the head of the department would be supervising her work" (134). In addition, Homi Bhabha argues that stereotypes operate as mechanisms of power that depend on both fixity and repetition, producing subjects who are simultaneously known and continually reinscribed through social anxieties. The stereotype of the educated woman in the novel parallels this colonial model. Women are celebrated for contributing to national development but simultaneously constrained to preserve patriarchal stability. Their identities are continually policed, reflecting both cultural ambivalence and institutionalized hierarchy.

By incorporating both psychological and postcolonial perspectives, this study demonstrates how stereotypes in *Double Yoke* function across multiple levels: culturally, socially, and psychologically. Emecheta's depiction of educated women shows that gendered expectations are internalised, enforced, and negotiated simultaneously, shaping both their actions and self-conception. She critiques the plight of educated women as follows, "These been-tos had learnt to pretend to be ignorant, as this was the only way

they could get husbands, the only way they could survive in their romanticised ideas of femaleness. They spent so much of their time being women, that they lost sight of what their education was all about” (2).

Psychological Internalisation of Stereotypes

Set in post-colonial Nigeria, Double Yoke presents a university environment that is, in theory, progressive but remains steeped in traditional gender roles. While education is a stepping stone to social mobility for both men and women, it does not equally transform expectations placed upon them. For male characters like Ete Kamba, education is a means to power and control. For female characters like Nko, it often results in suffocation and anxiety. This could be noticed in Ete Kamba’s expectations of a wife as such,

Not as poor perhaps, but with a woman who would be like his mother, but with this difference; she must be well educated. Yes, that was the type he would like. A very quiet and submissive woman, a good cook, a good listener, a good worker, a good mother with a good education to match. But her education must be a little less than his own, otherwise they would start talking on the same level. (26)

Nko’s pursuit of education brings her into a new social class, but her modern identity becomes a source of anxiety. Her anguished cry was “Oh mother, I want to have both worlds, I want to be an academician and I want to be a quiet nice and obedient wife, the type you all want me to be. I want the two mother. Oh please mother, help me. I know I can be of more use to you and my brothers if I had these two worlds” (94). She wanted to be financially stable to support her family especially with her brothers’ education for better social status. These cultural assumptions generate chronic psychological pressure which could impact both behaviours and emotions.

The behavioural effects of stereotype threat are visible in Nko as she often modifies her speech, conceals her opinions, and even deliberately understates her abilities to avoid being viewed as unfeminine or disrespectful. Her uncertainty in academic settings is linked not to incompetence but to her acute awareness of being judged through gendered stereotypes. Stereotype threat produces emotional turmoil such as guilt, shame, and anxiety. Nko’s self-doubt gets intensified by cultural narratives suggesting that educated women are abandoning their proper roles. Out of self-doubt, she often questions “whether she had been right in coming to the university” (110). This conflict creates a double bind in which the pursuit of intellectual agency feels like a betrayal of cultural femininity.

Perhaps her education is an inevitable tool for that upgrade, she is forced to feel guilty for not following the traditional ways of living by the patriarchal upbringing. Her femininity is scrutinized, her sexuality is policed, and her intelligence is seen as threatening. These factors contribute to a broader emotional conflict of Nko’s growing fear that her education and independence might ultimately cost her love and companionship. Bhabha’s theory clarifies the function of these stereotypes as they rely on repetition and ambivalence, producing women who are simultaneously celebrated and feared (Bhabha 30–32). The self-fulfilling prophecy explains how repeated warnings about ‘arrogance’ pressure women to modify their behaviour, often making them appear timid or socially constrained, which in turn validates societal expectations. Emecheta thus highlights the cultural mechanisms through which educated femininity is scrutinised, showing that even modern institutions such as universities can reinforce traditional gender hierarchies.

Academic Institutions as Patriarchal Spaces

Academic spaces in Double Yoke guard the patriarchal standards and the novel illustrates how they regu-

late the psychological impact of stereotype threat. Steele observes that fear of confirming a negative stereotype consumes cognitive resources and impairs performance (Steele 59). Nko hesitates to speak freely both to her lover and her professor, worrying that her agency will provoke hostility and experiencing anxiety in their relationship and examinations. Ngozi Nwosu points out that "cultural and social factors such as the values they place on children and marriage, their reverence for family ties, their fear of shame and social ostracism, fear of documentation and of misinterpretation of facts" torment Nigerian women (5). These pressures demonstrate that intellectual capability alone does not guarantee freedom, but dictates that women must simultaneously navigate social and psychological expectations.

Even professors and peers often reinforce these pressures, questioning women's ability to balance intellectual pursuits with relational roles. The following lines express the Ete Kamba's feeling about a commonly circulated stereotype: "He had heard that Nigerian university girls don't usually find husbands and would jump at any male student who showed interest in their direction" (42). Such beliefs drive him to suspect Nko at every level and he keeps restricting her from external interaction. Stereotype threat, coupled with institutional bias, positions women's education as a precarious negotiation, where failure or success can both carry social repercussions. Emecheta's portrayal underscores the broader structural conditions that amplify psychological strain and restrict female agency. A kind of confined liberation could be noticed when Esther observes Dr. Edet as one who is "more proud of her title as 'Mrs' than Dr. And as for her religious title she breathes on it" (102).

Notably, Nko's character illustrates the challenges African women face in participating fully in social transformation while being emotionally and socially penalised for doing so. She is not simply a victim of male betrayal but a symbol of the tension between tradition and progress. Her silence after being sexually exploited by a professor is not an act of weakness but one of survival within a society that offers little sympathy to women, particularly those who deviate from prescribed moral standards. Her remarks after the rape, "I'll tell you sir that most girls here come to read for their degrees. If they become what you think, which is 'prostitutes Nigerian style', it is because people like you made them so" (141). Professor Ikot functions as the primary architect of the regulatory environment, transforming the classroom from a site of intellectual grooming into a space of sexual transaction.

When Nko is confronted with the choice between academic failure and sexual compromise, Emecheta demonstrates that education is not merely a matter of passing exams but of navigating a predatory social contract. This instance dismantles the myth of the university as a neutral institution and reveals it to be a microcosm of the broader socio-political structures that seek to domesticate female ambition. Professor Ikot serves as a gatekeeper of patriarchy, exploiting his institutional power to coerce women into sexual compliance. Nko's academic progression is conditioned upon her bodily autonomy, exposing the transactional nature of the university.

Romantic Relationships and Gendered Control

The romantic relationship between Nko and Ete Kamba, a fellow student, becomes central to the novel. When Nko is raped by a professor, she chooses to remain silent in fear of being blamed, and later judged harshly by her boyfriend for it. Ete Kamba, though educated, adheres to traditional notions of purity and female submission. He is unable to reconcile Nko's victimhood with his idea of a 'proper' woman and ultimately rejects her. The intent of the rejection is to blame Nko for choosing her degree over her traditional femininity. This rejection deeply impacts Nko, who had hoped that education would earn her both dignity and love. Instead, her modern sensibilities become liabilities in the romantic sphere. The fear

of abandonment becomes literal and symbolic as it represents the threat that modern women face when they deviate from expected norms. Despite being articulate and intelligent, Nko is rendered emotionally vulnerable, not because of her weakness but because of the incompatibility between her aspirations and society's acceptance. At the end of the novel, she chose to bring up the child conceived out of the rape without anybody's support. Even though she decided not to reveal the biological father's name, she made sure it wasn't Ete Kamba's child.

Meanwhile, Nko's and her partner's conflicts highlight tension between intellectual agency and culturally prescribed obedience. Women are expected to be submissive regardless of education level. Ete Kamba refers to his mother as an ideal woman for adhering to traditional gender roles and expects the very same submission from Nko too, irrespective of the divide in their educational qualifications. Emecheta uses Nko's experiences to expose the patriarchal double standards at play, showing how Ete Kamba enjoys the privileges of being an educated youngster and makes Nko feel humiliated often for being educated by making her feel guilty for forgetting her roots. This highlights the emotional labour women have to endure throughout their lives for having aspirations and dreams of their own.

Men like Ete are sanctioned for both moral flexibility and public power, while women are constantly judged on the narrowest margins for their agency. He becomes furious after being physically intimate with Nko and blames her for allowing him to make advances. He even goes to an extent to torment Nko by saying he couldn't find a drop of blood to prove her virginity as he was fiercely searching around the broken house (54). Without thinking twice, he calls her a prostitute and fears her moral transgression of allowing him to love her, but he fails to understand that he is also part of the very same sin he is talking about and is least bothered about taking any responsibility.

Moreover, Ete Kamba's rejection of Nko is emblematic of the ingrained patriarchy that persists in postcolonial African societies. Though both are university students, Ete is permitted emotional detachment and moral flexibility for being a male, while Nko is expected to embody purity and submissiveness. The postcolonial lens helps to uncover the ways in which Ete internalises colonial ideals of masculinity such as assertiveness, ownership, and control while demanding traditional ideals of femininity from Nko. Nko's fear of rejection is not simply about losing romantic love, but it reflects a deeper anxiety about being cast out of her cultural community for refusing to conform to its dictum. Nko bears the 'double yoke' between being modern and being acceptable and underscores how even educational empowerment cannot protect African women from emotional marginalisation.

Therefore, Nko's anxiety is a psychological consequence of these layered pressures. Her trajectory illustrates how the journey of empowerment is not just intervened with external obstacles but also with internalised fears of being too modern and educated for social acceptance. Romantic relationships in the novel provide another arena where stereotypes constrain female autonomy. Self-fulfilling prophecy operates here as well, as men's suspicion generates relational conflict that confirms their expectations of educated women as 'difficult' or 'unsuitable'. It is significant to record how male partners fear women's intellectual independence, interpreting educational ambition as a threat to traditional power dynamics.

The Double Yoke of Modern Womanhood

The novel's title, *Double Yoke*, captures the central irony of the modern African woman's experience, especially the educated ones. Women like Nko and her professor, Dr Edet, must bear both the yoke of traditional expectations and the burdens that follow education and modern identity. They are expected to offer financial assistance to the family through their qualification and intellectual labour without

compromising their traditional roles. Emecheta registers this burden through Mrs Nwaizu's words like, "These women are our pioneers; you must not forget that. They worked hard to achieve their academic positions, and they still would like to be seen as the pillars of tradition. What a burden!" (102).

Consequently, educated femininity becomes a site of cultural anxiety, reflecting the tension between modern aspirations and entrenched patriarchal norms. Gossip, rumour, and stereotypical characterisations form a social script through which female students are understood and constrained in the novel. Male peers, professors, and sometimes female elders reinforce stereotypes to categorise the educated women as 'arrogant' or 'unnatural', policing behaviour in both academic and social settings. Ete Kamba wished his professor (Miss Bulewao) were a man! (2), expecting a man implies the stereotype of gendered intellectual potential. He thinks that only men have potential to become writers with high intellectual competence out of his patriarchal mindset.

It is important to note that education makes Nko visible and powerful but also, at the same time, subjects her to punishment for transgressing unspoken gender boundaries for her choice of education over feminine responsibilities. Ete's abandonment of Nko cannot be viewed simply as a personal betrayal, but it is a societal verdict to validate the patriarchal inscriptions. It reinforces the message that a woman's worth is still primarily judged by her compliance with traditional roles, not her intellectual contributions to society. Nko's fear of rejection is rooted not only in emotional attachment but also in the realisation that educated women are often coerced to choose between love and liberty.

Subsequently, the novel demonstrates that stereotype threat is not merely psychological but structural. Institutions like family, school, religious bodies, and romantic relationships often reproduce stereotypes that shape women's expectations of themselves. Thus, stereotype threat is embedded in the postcolonial state's contradictions of valuing development through education while demanding rigid gender conformity. When one of Nko's friends, Missy, told her peers that she would not accept the dictates of society and remain the same as herself. She was immediately questioned by Mrs. Nwaizu as, "and where will you find the courage? Here in Nigeria? If you do that, they'll say you are independent, that you are a feminist, then men will run away from you" (104). She adds, "even the educated ones who are classical feminist and liberated in their attitudes and behaviour, will come round and say to you, 'but I am gentle and not the pushful type'" (104). The fear of exclusion is reinstated through this kind of policing among female peers to warn them against transgressing the traditional gender boundaries.

Findings

The study's key findings include, firstly, performativity often emerges as a coping mechanism for stereotype threat. As a result, women perform submissiveness to minimize threat. Conversely, constant performance of expected femininity increases vigilance and anxiety, deepening stereotype threat instead of limiting. Secondly, the 'double yoke' metaphor stands for the tension between intellectual ambition of modernity and cultural expectations of submissive femininity. Nko must continually negotiate between these two contradictory identities for social acceptance. But in reality, neither of which she can fully embody without any social penalty. Thirdly, regardless of the restrictions, the novel contains moments of resistance where women assert their academic competence by subverting patriarchal demands and actively forging modern conceptions of femininity by breaking from the traditional ones. These counter-performances reveal Emecheta's feminist commitment in depicting women as agents within and not merely victims of patriarchal systems. Finally, by portraying women who navigate interlocking pressures of patriarchy, colonial legacies, and modern academic life, Emecheta extends African feminist discourse

beyond binary readings of oppression and liberation as polar opposites. Her characters embody the contradictions of postcolonial subjectivity to present the paradoxes of enlightenment and enslavement among educated women for a synthesised understanding.

Conclusion

The study concludes that *Double Yoke* reveals educated femininity as a contested site where modern aspirations collide with traditional norms and where stereotypes exert real material and psychological effects. By reading the novel through the lens of self-fulfilling prophecy, stereotype threat, and Bhabha's theory of the colonial stereotype, the analysis demonstrates how patriarchal expectations infiltrate both institutional and interpersonal relationships. These expectations actively shape, mostly restrict women's opportunities and choices to make them remain under the clutches of patriarchy. Women are made to internalise relational stereotypes and obligated to negotiate their behaviour for maintaining harmony while preserving personal ambitions. Emecheta demonstrates that education alone does not guarantee liberation and women must continually navigate institutional, social, and intimate pressures. This highlights the pervasive influence of stereotype-driven expectations on educated women which constantly 'others' them. Through Nko's fear of rejection, Emecheta presents a nuanced critique of post-colonial Nigerian society by exposing how educated women face emotional marginalisation. She encapsulates a deeper societal contradiction in the postcolonial scenario where liberal institutions preserve traditional constraints. While women are encouraged to pursue education, they are punished for the very independence it fosters. Nko's story is symbolic of the broader tensions African educated women undergo as they navigate love, identity, and societal acceptance. Emecheta calls for a reevaluation of both romantic and social standards that allow women to be modern, educated, and loved without fear.

Ultimately, the study highlights that the impediments encountered by the female characters such as Nko can transcend beyond individual hardship. They reflect a systemic struggle against the restriction of the right to intellectual authority in a society while navigating one's own postcolonial identity. Collectively, this paper lays the groundwork for a reading of *Double Yoke* that places Emecheta's narrative within African feminist discourses and scrutinises postcolonial identity politics and the sociocultural complexities surrounding women's access to education. It further extends this body of work by introducing psychological theories of internalized stereotypes and performance anxiety to demonstrate how cultural narratives of femininity exert not only social but cognitive and emotional influence on women's lived experiences.

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