

Annotation of Omar Sougou's *Writing Across Cultures: Gender Politics and Difference in the Fiction of Buchi Emecheta* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2002).

Daria Tunca, University of Liège

This monograph examines ten selected novels by the British-based Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta. Highlighting the social significance of literature, the study adopts a theoretical framework chiefly relying on the feminist and postcolonial approaches and combines these with Marxist and Bakhtinian analytical models. The book's main hypothesis, outlined in the opening chapter and pursued throughout the volume, is that Emecheta's fiction may be considered "double-voiced" in a number of respects. For instance, from a feminist perspective, the novelist is regarded as an heir to a patriarchal tradition, yet she challenges phallogocentric discourse by addressing the predicament of women; from a postcolonial viewpoint, Emecheta's work is said to be influenced by both African and European aesthetic conventions and ideologies.

The ten novels under examination are considered in chronological order of publication, and they are fittingly grouped in pairs by virtue of their common thematic or formal characteristics. This structure, combined with Omar Sougou's perceptive analyses of Emecheta's texts, allows for a clear overview of the recurring features of the novelist's fiction on the one hand and of the evolution of her standpoint on the other. Thus, the semi-autobiographical *In the Ditch* (1972) and *Second-Class Citizen* (1974), which depict the hardships of an African woman in London, are understood in terms of their heroine's quest for self-definition; *The Bride Price* (1976) and *The Slave Girl* (1977) are construed as comments on the status of women under patriarchal domestic rule and on the negative facets

of traditional Nigerian society; *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Destination Biafra* (1982) are presented as continuations of Emecheta's exploration of female subjection, with respective emphasis on motherhood and war-torn postcolonial Nigeria; *Naira Power* (1982) and *Double Yoke* (1982) are revealed to be re-articulations of the writer's feminist concerns in the mode of popular fiction and finally, *The Rape of Shavi* (1983) and *Gwendolen* (1989), unlike Emecheta's early work, seem to testify to her growing sympathy for black cultures.

The strong cohesion displayed by the different chapters of the book and the well-structured critical readings of the chosen novels undeniably feature among the study's main assets. Slightly less convincing are Sougou's somewhat cluttered theoretical introduction and his tendency to catalogue the many ambiguities – or indeed inconsistencies – that he detects in Emecheta's work as instances of "double-voicedness". Another minor reservation may be formulated on the grounds that, of all the primary and secondary sources cited in this 2002 book, only a handful were published after 1990. Nevertheless, *Writing Across Cultures* may be considered a most valuable source for scholars interested in the work of Buchi Emecheta in particular and in feminist readings of African literature in general.