

Female Sexualities under a Patriarchal Microscope: An Interrogation of Buchi Emecheta's *Double Yoke*

Lethabo Masha

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9409-9683>

University of Limpopo

lethabo_masha@yahoo.com

Mphoto Mogoboya

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4218-2215>

University of Limpopo

Abstract

This qualitative study amplifies the endemic policing of female bodies by patriarchal ideology whereby the sexual lives of African women are often suppressed whereas men receive little to no scrutiny. The paper thematically analyses Emecheta's purposively sampled novel *Double Yoke* (1983) to interrogate the aforementioned problem which is still relevant to the present collective African milieu. Stiwanism is employed as a theoretical lens particularly because of its advocacy for bodily autonomy and selfhood as part of the important freedoms that African women should be afforded in the realisation of social transformation. The main finding was that throughout African history, this prejudiced supervision has existed and consequences included psychological harm as well as ostracisation. Therefore, this study recommends that sexual rights bills be supplemented by sociopolitical will and that African societies be conscientised. To ensure the overall wellbeing of all members in society, biased beliefs about sexuality should be abolished.

Keywords: chastity; double standard; policing; purity myth; sexualities; Stiwanism



Introduction

As an African female author, Buchi Emecheta was greatly invested in various issues relating to the plight of black women in the African continent and diaspora. Among others, she is famous for her portrayal of the challenges of motherhood and mothering in colonial and postcolonial black society, depicted in her popular novels *Second Class Citizen* (1974) and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). This paper adopts a qualitative approach to thematically analyse the novelist's depiction of the regulation and control of female bodies through the gendered concept of sexual chastity and conduct in the novel *Double Yoke* (1983). In this novel, a young couple by the names of Ete Kamba and Nko encounter challenges in their relationship which arise from their varying perspectives on social issues, especially the biased control of female sexualities. Some of their main arguments include the question of Nko's virginity before they had sex, as well as a pregnancy resulting from Nko being cornered into sleeping with her professor to achieve a first class honours degree. Ete's creative writing lecturer, Miss Bulewao, appears as a Stiwanist figure who shows the young man that his thinking is largely influenced by traditional sexist ideology, and thus implores him to move from that misogynist stance.

This study was prompted by the crisis of recurrent sexist dogma existing even in the supposed contemporary and modern African continent whereby females are often privately and publicly shamed for their sexual lives while it is the opposite for their male counterparts (Macleod, Reynolds, and Delate 2024). Despite many African gender movements which campaign for the emancipation of females in all spheres, as well as policies on sexual rights that are also supported by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the policing of female sexualities continues to thrive. Thus, this is a sign that while the continent may be finding it easier to lessen female suppression by drafting non-sexist bills of rights and creating more educational and employment opportunities, Ibitoye and Ajagunna (2021) opine that it is still hard to afford women bodily autonomy and total freedom in making decisions concerning their sexual behaviour. This failure can be attributed to the fact that most African communities still consider sex matters to be private discussions to be held behind closed doors. Moreover, many people still regard females as sexual objects created primarily to serve the interests of males and to have their sexualities used for various forms of transactions (de Beauvoir 1953). Such beliefs have proven to lead to dire consequences which are incited by religious and cultural ideologies that are rooted in patriarchy, whereby some victims are killed for honour or even treated as social pariahs in their communities. Thus, this study seeks to amplify the problem of a one-sided focus on the sexual behaviour of women and their objectification.

Even though definitions of virginity are sometimes used to refer to both males and females, most traditional Western and African cultures as well as religions have throughout history put more emphasis on female virginity (Chisale 2017; Mohanty 1994). This may be because the etymology of the word "virgin" fundamentally

describes a female. Against this background, this study critiques the continued supervision and oppression of the African woman's physical body in conservative settings in which ideas of morality and modesty are popularly adopted to dictate females' choices of dress, overall physical looks, and sexual conduct. Women who do not conform to the traditional regulations of sexual behaviour thus become victims of social shame and marginalisation. This practice reflects a sexual double standard which Gómez-Berrocal et al. (2022) explain as a phenomenon in which "similar sexual conduct is judged differently depending on whether the subject is a man or woman." In addition to mystification and control, there is not much academic literature on black women's healthy sexuality and sexual experiences; instead, there is an abundance of studies on the risks of sex for women. Even in discourse concerning the sexual health of both men and women, females are centred as carriers and spreaders of infections. While it is important to create awareness regarding the risks of unsafe sex, negative narratives outweigh the positive. Following Ogundipe-Leslie's (1994) manifesto for gender parity guided by social transformation through the Stiwanist theory, this study critiques this partisan nature of the standards of socialisation as part of the impediments of gender parity. At the core of this socialisation is the constructions of hegemonic masculinities and femininities as binary opposites representing dominance and passivity, respectively. Stiwanism advocates for a collective activism which seeks to eradicate systems that hinder social transformation reflected by gender inequality, with African women as active members. Some of the principles embraced by this perspective and which are key to the current study include issues around women's bodies and their selfhood which are denied by the policing of their coition through systems such as oppressive traditional structures, external oppression in the form of colonial gender ideologies, and the African man as a benefactor of patriarchy (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994). Therefore, the current study uncovers this often neglected aspect of female subjugation as depicted in African fiction. Moreover, the urgency of total transformation which prioritises black women's bodily autonomy is highlighted herein.

The Purity Myth

According to Gupta (2000), traditional masculine construction dictates that a man's sexual role is to initiate and lead sexual activity in heterosexual relations. This idea is also evident through how some chaste males are mocked for not having had sex before marriage, which leads to more males ensuring that they are sexually active just to evade public mockery and to prove their masculinity. Rotundi (2020) adds that many men engage in unhealthy or risky sexual behaviour, which includes having multiple partners, in order to be socially validated as "real" men by those around them. Without a doubt, this quality which is revered as part of good masculinity is denounced as a form of good femininity because hegemonic models of femininity promote sexual passivity. Thus, to uphold the aforementioned gender roles, beliefs and restrictions such as the purity myth have been created especially for unmarried women. According to Valenti (2010), the "purity myth" is a social ideology that is used to associate morality with sexuality by normalising the fallacy that women's sexuality always determines their overall identity

and how good they are. At the centre of the purity myth is what virginity is and how it is employed to punish women who do not conform or fail to meet the set standards (Ojedoja and Abubakar 2018). This regulation is seen through the various ways in which women's bodies and sexual decisions are censored through patriarchal beliefs fortified by culture and religion, which also associate women's bodies with many taboos and constraints. Even in communities which preach sexual chastity for both men and women, when this standard is not met, women receive more backlash than men. Raihana and Ghufron (2023, 271) opine that the traditional society attaches limited value to whether or not men have had sex.

Another fable is that unmarried women who engage in sexual activity outside of marriage lack self-control and are therefore "loose." For instance, a study conducted by Bhana (2016) in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), South Africa, reveals that young men view girls who participate in virginity testing practices as virtuous and as portraying a sign of self-control. Seemingly, males are born into a system that teaches them to deduce good behaviour in young women based on their virginity and sexual passivity. Simultaneously, females move through life with the duty of proving their morality and self-discipline by ensuring that they remain virgins until a time stipulated by their societies. In this way, the purity myth is used as a tool to marginalise and discredit the probity of all women, including those who do not subscribe to values attached to the concept of virginity either because they have no religious affiliation or just through personal choice. Some critics go on to claim that male and female bodies are not the same, that a woman loses worth if she has sex before marriage or has multiple sexual partners whereas it is not so for their male counterparts. Such views do not care to realise that such a value is socially constructed and cannot be proven by scientific research; hence, the ideology results in social consequences dictated by societal beliefs. In contrast, unsafe sexual acts are scientifically proven to be risky and harm for the health of both men and women (Buxbaum 2020; Poudel et al. 2011).

Religion and Gendered Chastity

Many religious doctrines include approved sexual conduct across the two main sexes; however, as highlighted earlier, these instructions are often stressed for females because most religions are androcentric. In support, Olaoye and Zink (2021) explain that female bodies are subject to discipline and control in order to conform to religious norms. In Christianity, virginity and sexual modesty are fundamental in the definition of a righteous and honourable woman, with Mary the mother of Jesus being the embodiment of purity and holiness (de Beauvoir 1953; Monagan 2010). While this study does not necessarily criticise the purity teaching that sexual activity out of marriage is sinful according to Christian philosophy, it is the emphasis of this instruction and its consequences as primarily directed at females that is problematic because it reflects the institution's androcentrism. The Nazareth Church in South Africa, which has its roots in Zulu culture, is one of the religious groups that are known for stressing female virginity to this date. According to Sithole (2016), Shembe, the founder of the church, placed a great deal of significance on virgins and saw them as important in the life of

the community; hence, the church holds annual public virginity testing which usually takes place in July. The double standard aspect of the aforementioned practice is that, except for being tested for sexually transmitted diseases before they can marry, there has not been any known equivalent testing for the unmarried male members of the church. This disinterest in male virginity is the same across most traditional and Pentecostal churches around the world and is attributed to claims that there is no procedure to detect male virginity while female virginity can be tested through the tearing of a hymen. Contradictorily, scholars such as May (2003) and Moussaoui, Abdulcadir, and Yaron (2022) have shown that the intactness of a hymen is not always an indicator of female virginity.

Religious customs of the proclamation of female virginity include Western Christian wedding proceedings which, since the advent of colonialism, have been adopted by African Christians. During traditional “white weddings,” the bride wears a white dress and a veil that covers her face to symbolise sexual purity (Froschauer 2016; He 2009). This is because the colour white is predominantly associated with cleanliness and innocence. To show that these symbols are essentially used to police female sexual behaviour, some pastors and parents embarrass non-virgin brides by refusing to let them wear veils or white dresses. For a conformist woman who engaged in sexual activity before the wedding, being seen without a face-covering veil is shameful to her and her family, to be judged by the wedding attendees. In contrast to these markers of a bride’s virginity, to date there have been no pronouncements on what a virgin groom should wear to mark his purity. Evidently, this shows that like many other measures of conduct, virginity is perceived and held at different standards depending on whether it is femininity or masculinity that is in question. When it comes to femininity, sexuality is filled with regulatory practices (Mohanty 1994, 199). Stiwanism is therefore justified in attributing the external influence of colonial religious systems as a contributing factor in the delay of the realisation of gender transformation concerning sex in Africa.

African Customs and Female Chastity

Throughout Africa, many rites of passage and rituals have been put in place to prohibit and discourage unmarried women from engaging in sexual activity for various reasons which includes guarding against unwanted pregnancies. The female-centredness of the customs is part of the oppressive traditional systems which impede black women’s bodily selfhood and encourage biased sex socialisation (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994). In Southern Africa, the Nguni nations are among the leading groups who up to this day uphold measures that monitor the sexual behaviour of females. Nxumalo (2014) intimates that in the past, individual mothers in the Zulu communities tested their daughter’s virginity in the privacy of their homes, with the aim of preventing unwanted pregnancies so that their fathers would receive cattle as part of their *lobola*. With time, the Zulu nation, particularly those in KZN, established an annual ceremony called *uMkhosi woMhlanga* (popularly known as the reed dance), which was re-established by King Zwelithini after it was halted during King Shaka’s reign. The Zulu reed dance has its origins as part of the Nomkhulwane Festival which runs for three days and is a

form of plea for rain and other things that the community needs. Some of the rituals that are performed during this festival are said to strictly require virgin maidens (*izintombi*) usually between the ages of 10 and 25 (Adeyemi 2012). In the present context, Mhlongo (2009) opines that the practice of virginity testing has mainly been revived with the intention of preventing young girls from becoming sexually active outside of marriage.

In Swaziland, the Swati nation has a similar practice called *umchwasho*, which is a chastity rite of passage in which young women dance and celebrate their sexual abstinence in front of the king and the whole community. This custom is mainly for young Swazi girls who are also referred to as maidens (Dlamini 2007; Melodious 2022; Ngwenya 1995). Similar to the reed dance, there is no known equivalent to this rite of passage for young Swati men, proving how biased sexual chastity is in traditional Swaziland. Despite this clear imbalance, staunch promoters of female virginity testing maintain that this practice invokes cultural pride and a sense of belonging for the maidens who take part (Nkosi 2019).

Female virginity testing echoes the underlying normalisation of equating masculinity with sexual prowess and virility while femininity is associated with sexual restraint and inactivity (Bhana 2016, 474). Prior to or after a wedding ceremony, certain cultures such as the Digo of the Mijikenda (between southern Kenya and northern Tanzania), test a new bride's virginity by putting a white bed sheet where the newlyweds will be sleeping so as to see the blood resulting from the deflowering. Chakraborty (2018) says that after the first night, the sheet is then inspected by the family and groom who publicly declare that their bride was a virgin before marriage. Confirmation of the presence of blood is cause for huge celebrations as it demonstrates the "virtue" and "honour" of the bride. The jubilation around this supports Naula, Owor, and Gulere's (2018, 26) observation that virginity is an important value that is treasured in a bride. The gendered nature of the practices discussed above is also depicted in some fictional work by African female authors as discussed below.

Gendered Purity in *Double Yoke*

In most parts of the African continent, children are raised to be the pride of their parents by abiding by the laws that they are taught at home and behaving appropriately in public. Some of the teachings that are particularly emphasised for girl children include "preserving" themselves by not engaging in sexual activity before marriage for various reasons mentioned above. Emecheta's *Double Yoke* (hereafter *DY*) (1983) depicts how the communitarianism of African societies results in a girl child or young woman's sexuality being the interest of the larger community. Nkohla-Ramunenyiwa (2020) explains that in many African regions, the whole community is responsible for ensuring that all the children in that given grouping abide by the set rules and standards. Moreover, even males feel justified to interrogate their female partners about their sexual lives especially in previous relationships. After pinning Nko against the wall of a deserted building after a party, Ete finds it difficult to sleep as a result of being

bothered by the question of whether Nko was a virgin before their sexual encounter (*DY*, 54). He then decides to inspect the wall for blood and when he does not see any, he confronts Nko when they meet at the university. When Nko shows disinterest in the conversation and highlights that Ete seems to care more about her chastity while saying nothing about his, the young man starts insulting Nko and making sexist accusations. One of his concerns is the fact that his parents would be disappointed to know that the girl he was planning to marry is not a virgin. This attests to the huge reverence for female virginity before marriage in terms of which a young woman risks losing a prospective husband, even when it is that prospect who “deflowered” her (Baloyi 2016).

Another aspect of female sexual exploitation is depicted by Nko’s dilemma when her male professor, who is supposed to supervise her school work, makes sexual advances towards her. Professor Ikot lured the young Nko to a getaway which she was made to believe would be for his whole family only to find that it was for the two of them. On their way to the Kwa Falls, Nko had a clear picture of what the professor would ask her. To put it crudely, it was going to be “if you don’t let me sleep with you at any time I feel like it, you don’t get your degree” (*DY*, 139). Throughout their drive to the Falls, Nko’s hate for her professor grows because of the looks he keeps giving her in the car. Upon their arrival, the young woman let the elder have his way with her, while she lay still. When Ete finds out about this, his insults for Nko continue and he seeks to make both his girlfriend and the professor pay. Ete’s outrage is worsened by Nko’s pregnancy and he swears not to raise another man’s child. The young man’s revenge is fuelled by his desire to assert his masculinity which dictates that his girlfriend having sex with another man emasculates him and he has to fight for his honour (*DY*, 150).

Chastity and Morality

As a result of the normalisation of monitoring female sexualities, Ete Kamba feels justified to interrogate Nko about her previous sexual encounters and hurls insults at her for sleeping with her professor without establishing the circumstances under which the latter occurred. Confirming Nko’s virginity that fateful night was important to Ete because he had previously “imagined himself the first of all men, taking possession, hurting, conquering his bleeding partner whose blood would have washed them both like a living sacrifice” (*DY*, 61). Thus, the absence of blood robs him of the gratification of possessing Nko and it feels like his supposed masculine role of conquering is stolen from him. According to Mulumeoderhwa (2018) and Mehrolhassani et al. (2020), men like Ete who interpret female virginity as a valuable gift to be given to them run the risk of being disappointed if their wife does not bleed at the consummation of the marriage. This is an entitlement afforded to them by the patriarchal socialisation of men as possessors of their female partners.

Without disputing that unsafe sexual activity can be risky, this study emphasises the dangers of having different standards regarding virginity for men and women, especially when they are used as a tool to devalue women who are not virgins. According to the International Rescue Committee (IRC) (2018), for females, virginity is often tied to

moral character and honour as well as social and religious values. In a heated argument in Ete's room at the university, he angrily blurts out to Nko that she was not a virgin and when she confidently asks whether it was important, Ete starts to insult her for not being ashamed or apologetic for not having been a virgin. In Ete's view, Nko's lack of shame is a sign that she was probably an expert in sexual matters whereas respectable traditional femininity is linked with sexual passivity (*DY*, 57). Therefore, Ete's question and insults are intended to humiliate and guilt-trip his girlfriend because in patriarchal societies, a good woman is supposed to know as little as possible when it comes to sex.

As indicated above, one of the ways to manipulate and control members of society is by webbing sexuality by creating religious laws and taboos (Ikpe 2004, 3). Although virginity is a Christian value that encourages self-control and curbs unwanted pregnancies and sexual infections, Curry (2004, 40) avers that Ete uses it as an instrument to devalue and slander Nko. When Nko refuses to vow that she was a virgin because swearing is unchristian, Ete judges her for being selective with her Christian values.

“Unchristian! Unchristian! Just hear her. Unchristian.” Ete Kamba mocked as he released her. “What do you say to a girl who is not married and yet not a virgin? Is that Christian? What Christian girl would let herself be disvirgined by the wall? If you were a virgin, which I'm quite sure you were not,—I went to check—you see, so I know. There was not a drop of blood. You are a prostitute, a whore, and you keep putting on this air of innocence as if you were something else. A whore, a shameless prostitute!” (*DY*, 57)

Ete cites Christianity to shame Nko for sleeping with him or any other man before marriage and further insults her by calling her a shameless prostitute. By saying that Nko pretends to be innocent, Ete reinforces the practice of measuring a female's morality by her chastity status. Therefore, for a girl who carries herself innocently and nun-like, Nko had to be sexually “pure” because the Igbo regard a virgin girl as one who is pure both in body and character (Agbogou and Igbokwe 2015, 7). Wagner (2009, 14) and Chisale (2020) assert that it is time that societies accept that morality should be based on ethics and not on women's bodies as well as how sexually active they may or may not be. The ability of daughters and wives in general to be good people does not depend on their sexual activity in and outside of marriage.

Ete falls victim to the possibility that his parents may not approve of his marriage to a non-virgin woman.

“Oh my God, to think my parents were even entertaining the hope of my marrying you?” Ete Kamba lamented. Nko smiled. “And now that you think I am not a virgin; they will not approve of me?” “I wonder what they will think of a girl who allowed any man to sleep with her by the wall of a half-finished house.” (*DY*, 58).

As highlighted in the introduction, in traditional societies, an unmarried woman's sexuality is the business of her male relatives and, upon marriage, of her husband and in-laws. Emecheta illustrates this when Ete tells Nko that his parents may not approve of their marriage because she was not a virgin. Moreover, Ete's emphasis of "any man" seems to remove him from the picture but he forgets that even if Nko was a virgin before they slept together, she was not going to be a virgin on their wedding night because of their act.

Ete's regressive view is similar to that of the young South African men who, in a study conducted by Bhana (2016), revealed that they prefer marrying virgin women because their chastity demonstrates decency while religiously, chastity signifies sexual morality. In addition, the anticipated disapproval of Ete's parents may be a result of their sexist mentality which views virginity as an indicator of the intactness of a woman's honour (Izugbara 2007), and thus they would not want a non-honourable and unvirtuous daughter-in-law. This is a misconception driven by the chastity myth held in many African societies, through the belief that a woman's virginity before marriage signifies that she will be faithful to her husband (Naula et al. 2018, 25). Contradictorily, statistics report high numbers of unfaithful husbands in comparison with wives, which raises the question of why a man's virginity is not stressed to ensure that he is also faithful in marriage (Muñoz García, Gil-Gómez de Liaño, and Pascual-Ezama 2021). This double standard adds to the unfair treatment of wives because they are not held to the same standards as their husbands by associating loyalty in marriage with wives only.

Masculinity and Chastity

Since hegemonic masculinities also promote sexual conquest and revere multiple sexual partners, men rarely have their sexual lives monitored. Ete himself is a Christian but does not question his own commitment to God nor does he see himself as a whore after having sex with Nko; however, he reserves the name-calling for his girlfriend. He did not see a problem in initiating sexual advances towards a woman he had not married. Evidently, it is because of male privilege that Ete could dare ridicule Nko for not waiting until marriage to have sex because when he pursued her sexually, he had not even asked for her hand in marriage. Be that as it may, Ete's insult spree is not surprising because in patriarchal societies, women are often called derogatory names when they freely express any form of sexual freedom. In support of this, Tseëlon (1995, 29) opines that any deviation from the requirement of feminine modesty threatens to put her in the category of prostitute. Historically, a prostitute was thought of as a woman who is both in touch with and in charge of her sexuality; such a woman was both desirable and dangerous.

Besides insulting and condemning Nko, Ete takes no accountability for an act that they both consented to and were active participants in. Nko's moral standing is brought into disrepute for an act which she did not engage in alone, by her boyfriend who makes it seem that her chastity is more important than his. Having heard enough and being deeply hurt by Ete's words, Nko turned to leave, and

at the door she turned and added, “you called me a prostitute because of that, but you forgot that it takes two people at least to make any woman a prostitute, by your definition. You seem to be forgetting the men who slept with the woman. So if I am one, then what are you?” (*DY*, 58)

In response, Ete cries and tells her that “men are never prostitutes” and that he has never heard of men being called prostitutes (*DY*, 59). This is an indication that if the roles were reversed and Ete’s virginity was in question, he was unlikely to be chastened for possibly not being a virgin, because part of displaying traditional masculinity is being revered for sexual conquest, whereas in normative femininity, such conquest is generally stigmatised as being promiscuous (Monagan 2009, 85). The lack of labels for promiscuous male behaviour or sex before marriage is an indication that male sexual activity is rarely regulated and controlled. The only label used to define promiscuous men is “male prostitute.” The sex qualification implies that prostitution is fundamentally associated with females; hence, young men grow up to know that they can never be shamed for their “unlawful” sexual activity. Therefore, as part of controlling female sexualities and bodies, derogatory labels are important tools for shaming individuals into complying with the societal expectations of what it means to be a woman (Thabede 2020, 1). Ete’s conversation with Nko shows that he was brought up to know that he can never be a prostitute no matter how many sexual partners he has, demonstrating how even though virginity is applicable to both males and females, greater value is placed on female virginity (IRC 2018). Moreover, his lack of acceptance of possibly being a prostitute proves that the idea of gender roles is deeply embedded and regrettably very difficult to unlearn (Adichie 2017, 10).

A conversation between Ete and his creative writing lecturer, Miss Bulewao, further reveals how males are exempted from hostile responses resulting from unapproved sexual activity. However, as a university student, the lecturer expects Ete to be a critical thinker who intellectually expresses and thinks differently from non-university students or graduates (Khumalo et al. 2023). As a symbol of a Stiwanism, Miss Bulewao forces Ete to think about society’s biases which suppress women by highlighting how his concerns regarding Nko not being a virgin are sexist. Further, Miss Bulewao shows him how men constantly benefit from the privileges which stem from the construction of masculinity, in this case, being pardoned from the consequences of certain behaviours which may be seen as bad in women. Instead of recognising his prejudice, Ete thinks that Miss Bulewao stayed too long overseas, resulting in her loss of touch with the African reality and that she is Westernised because there is no need for a man to be a virgin (*DY*, 161). The young man’s belief, which is also shared by patriarchal proponents, may have a justification behind it because the etymology of the word “virgin” fundamentally refers to “maiden” and this can only be a female (Ndebele 2020). On the other hand, this is a reflection of the sexist nature of some linguistic terms. According to Addison (2010, 72), the word “westernised” has become a catch-all label for non-Western conservatives who attempt to claim any personal freedom for themselves or others. Ogunyemi (1996) labels them “been-tos” who travel across

geographical and social planes. According to Ogunyemi, when these individuals return or visit their birth home, they are different from those they left behind because they have a new been-to mentality and attitude which makes them think that they know more and are better than those with limited exposure to the world. While there may be some truth to the aforementioned, it is also true that sometimes the “been-tos” come back with different insights and world-views that may possibly be beneficial for the development of the local society. Thus, while Ete views it as being Westernised, Miss Bulewao invites Ete into the struggle for female liberation and gender equality by showing him how their indigenous culture and patriarchal religious beliefs suppress females.

Following Adichie’s view (2017, 27) that “the criticising of X in women and not in men, implies that the problem is not X but the women,” *Double Yoke* depicts the double standards applied to male and female sexuality through Nko and Ete’s relationship. Through this theme, Emecheta points out that the sexual lives of African women continue to be policed even in a contemporary society abundant with social and political transformations. *Double Yoke* reveals how encouraging males to lead in heterosexual relationships and sexual activity while teaching females to remain passive participants and sexual objects contributes to the shunning of sexual activity in unmarried females. Curry (2004, 40) states that although Emecheta does not question the value of virginity, she does, however, point out that women are judged according to standards that are very different from those applied to men. Similarly, Bhana (2016, 472) explains that in this way, men normalise their own masculine sexual entitlement while regulating women’s sexuality, which in turn reproduces sexual standards. This is achieved by their alignment of ideas and understandings of cultural definitions that give status to virgin women. Emecheta succeeds in using this plot to bring into question the bias that women’s virtue is dependent on their sexual purity while their male counterparts are exempted from this standard. Further, Miss Bulewao’s Stiwanist stance acts as a voice of transformation concerning women’s bodies by showing Ete the suppressive mentality that society and traditional African men possess.

Conclusion

While this study agrees that there may be some sensible reasons to promote chastity in unmarried women, such as protection from sexual diseases or pregnancy without the support of the baby’s father, it should also be noted that it is possible to not be a victim of either. Studies have shown that husbands can abandon their children or infect their wives with sexual diseases contracted from extramarital affairs. Thus, emphasis on virginity should be on safe and responsible sex for both men and women. In the context of similar religious and cultural beliefs, sexual chastity should be held at the same standard for both sexes. Apart from the fact that many forms of virginity testing are centred around women, majority of the measures put into place to supervise women’s sexuality do not have positive considerations regarding women’s physical and psychological well-being. Thus, the purity myth is fundamentally employed as one of the tools to manipulate even non-Christian females by controlling their sexuality and

policing their sexual freedom. Nko's character reveals how most African cultures and religions associate sexual purity with good morality and many conclusions are drawn about an unmarried non-virgin woman. Therefore, the belief of expecting sexual purity from unmarried women and not men shows the questionable standards of feminine and masculine ideals in cultural and religious settings, especially in the twenty-first century.

References

- Addison, C. 2010. Enlightenment and Virginity." *Inkanyiso: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2 (2): 71–77. <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC112675>
- Adeyemi, S. 2012. "Performing Myths, Ritualising Modernity: Dancing for Nomkhubulwana and the Reinvention of Zulu Tradition." In *A Gazelle of Savannal Sunday Ododo and the Framing of Techno- Cultural Performance in Nigeria: Theatre, Culture, Literature, Art*, edited by O. S. Omoera, S. Adeyemi, and B. Bineba, 435–445. Rochester, UK: Alpha Crownes Publishers. <https://core.ac.uk/reader/19206990>
- Adichie, C. N. 2017. *Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*. London: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Agbogu, A. E., and B. Igbokwe. 2015. "Gender Profiling in Nigeria: The Case of the Igbos of Southeastern Nigeria." *International Journal of African Society Cultures and Traditions* 2 (2): 1–10. <http://www.eajournals.org/wp-content/uploads/Gender-Profiling-In-Nigeria-The-Case-of-the-Igbos-of-Southeastern-Nigeria.pdf>
- Baloyi, M. E. 2016. "The 'Vat-en-Sit' Unions as a Threat to the Stability of African Marriage in South Africa: African Theological Pastoral Perspective." *Phronimon* 17 (2): 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2413-3086/2016/1955>
- Bhana, D. 2016. "Virginity and Virtue: African Masculinities and Femininities in the Making of Teenage Sexual Cultures." *Sexualities* 19 (4): 465–481. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460715613298>
- Buxbaum, L. 2020. "Risking Intimacy in Contemporary South African Fiction." In *Fiction in the Age of Risk*, edited by T. Hughes-d'Aeth, and G. Nabizadeh, 85–98. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351026420-7>
- Chakraborty, R. 2018. "This 400-Year-Old Custom Still Forces Virginity Testing to Brides in India." *Business Standard*, 21 February 2018. https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/this-400-year-old-custom-still-forces-virginity-tests-on-brides-in-india-118022100133_1.html
- Chisale, S. S. 2017. "Patriarchy and Resistance: A Feminist Symbolic Interactionist Perspective of Highly Educated Married Black Women." MA diss., University of South Africa.

- Chisale, S. S. 2020. "The Purity Myth: A Feminist Disability Theology of Women's Sexuality and Implications for Pastoral Care." *Scriptura: Journal for Biblical, Theological and Contextual Hermeneutics* 119 (1): 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.7833/119-1-1606>
- Curry, G. 2004. *Awakening African Women: The Dynamics of Change*. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Press.
- de Beauvoir, S. 1953. *The Second Sex*. London: Lowe and Brydone Ltd.
- Dlamini, S. R. 2007. "Distance Education as One of the Collaborative Measures Against HIV and AIDS in Swaziland." *Malaysian Journal of Distance Education* 9 (1): 103–115. http://mjde.usm.my/vol9_1_2007/mjde9_1_8.pdf
- Emecheta, B. 1974. *Second Class Citizen*. New York: George Braziller.
- Emecheta, B. 1979. *The Joys of Motherhood*. New York: Braziller
- Emecheta, B. 1983. *Double Yoke*. New York: George Braziller.
- Froschauer, U. M. 2016. "The Wedding Performance: Gender Inequality and System Justification in the White Wedding." PhD diss., University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Gómez-Berrocal, C., N. Moyano, A. Álvarez-Muelas, and J. C. Sierra. 2022. "Sexual Double Standard: A Gender-Based Prejudice Referring to Sexual Freedom and Sexual Shyness." *Frontiers in Psychology* 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1006675>
- Gupta, R. 2000. "Modeling Sexual Activity among School Girls in Zambia." *Journal of Family Issues* 21 (2): 170–190. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019251300021002002>
- He, G. 2009. "English and Chinese Cultural Connotation of Color Words in Comparison." *Asian Social Science* 5 (7): 160–163. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v5n7p160>
- Ibitoye, T. R., and F. Ajagunna. 2021. "Sexual Autonomy and Violence Against Women in Nigeria: Assessing the Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic." *De Jure Law Journal* 54 (1): 141–159. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2225-7160/2021/v54a9>
- Ikpe, E. B. 2004. "Human Sexuality in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective." Understanding Human Sexuality Seminar Series. Lagos: Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Center.
- International Rescue Committee. 2018. *International Rescue Committee Annual Report 2018*. International Rescue Committee, 4 July 2019. <https://www.rescue.org/resource/international-rescue-committee-annual-report-2018>
- Izugbara, C. O. 2007. "Constituting the Unsafe: Nigerian Sex Workers' Notions of Unsafe Sexual Conduct." *African Studies Review* 50 (3): 29–49. <https://doi.org/10.1353/arw.2008.0025>

- Khumalo, S., M. Mabaso, T. Makusha, and M. Taylor. 2021. "Intersections between Masculinities and Sexual Behaviors among Young Men at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa." *SAGE Open* 11 (3): 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211040114>
- Macleod, C. I., J. H. Reynolds, and R. Delate. 2024. "Violence Against Women Who Sell Sex in Eastern and Southern Africa: A Scoping Review." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 25 (1): 691–703. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380231160847>
- May, E. R. 2003. "Virginity Testing: Towards Outlawing the Cultural Practical Practice that Violates Our Daughters." PhD diss., University of the Western Cape.
- Mehrolohasani, M. H., V. Yazdi-Feyzabadi, S. Mirzaei, F. Zolala, A. A. Haghdoost, and N. Oroomiei. 2020. "The Concept of Virginity from the Perspective of Iranian Adolescents: A Qualitative Study." *BMC Public Health* 20 (717): 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-08873-5>
- Melodious, M. M. 2022. "Gender Inequality in South African Nguni Cultures, as Portrayed in Selected Nguni Literary Texts." MA diss., University of Pretoria.
- Mhlongo, S. P. 2009. "Reasons for Undergoing Virginity Testing: A Study of Young People in Rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa." PhD diss., University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Mohanty, C. T. 1994. *The Slate of Life: More Contemporary Stories by Women Writers of India*. Edited by Kali For Women. New York: Feminist Press at CUNY.
- Monagan, S. L. 2010. "Patriarchy: Perpetuating the Practice of Female Genital Mutilation." ResearchGate, May 2010. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/44199729_Patriarchy_Perpetuating_the_Practice_of_Female_Genital_Mutilation
- Moussaoui, D., J. Abdulcadir, and M. Yaron. 2022. "Hymen and Virginity: What Every Paediatrician Should Know." *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health* 58 (3): 382–387. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpc.15887>
- Mulumeoderhwa, M. 2018. "Virginity Requirement Versus Sexually-Active Young People: What Girls and Boys Think About Virginity in South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 47: 565–575. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-017-1038-x>
- Muñoz García, A., B. Gil-Gómez de Liaño, and D. Pascual-Ezama. 2021. "Gender Differences in Individual Dishonesty Profiles." *Frontiers in Psychology* 12: 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.728115>
- Naula, M., J. J. Owor, and C. W. Gulere. 2018. "A Study of the Portrayal of Virginity in Ugandan Novels." *International Journal of English and Literature* 9 (4): 25–30. <https://doi.org/10.5897/IJEL2018.1170>

- Ndebele, N. 2020. "Do the Children Act Provisions Which Legalize Virginity Testing Violate any of the Constitutional Rights of Girls?" PhD diss., University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Ngwenya, M. 1995. "The Custom of Chastity and Sexual Restraint." MA diss., University of Pretoria.
- Nkohla-Ramunenyiwa, T. 2020. "Virtuality and Subjective Realities: A Freedom-Based Ergon for the Modern African Parent." *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* 20 (1): 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20797222.2021.1887572>
- Nkosi, G. S. 2019. "The Role of uMkhosi WoMhlanga (Reed Dance) and Indoni Cultural Events Through the Eyes of Young Women in KwaZulu-Natal: A Cultural Tourism Approach." *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure* 8 (2): 1–12. https://www.ajhtl.com/uploads/7/1/6/3/7163688/article_17_vol_8_2_2019.pdf
- Nxumalo, N. 2014. "An Examination of the Dynamism Between Church Growth and a Vibrant Sunday-School Programme: A Case Study of Nine Protestant Churches in Manzini, Swaziland." DTh diss., South African Theological Seminary.
- Ogundipe-Leslie, M. 1994. *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women & Critical Transformations*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Ogunyemi, C. O. 1996. *Africa Wo/Man Palava: The Nigerian Novel by Women*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ojedoja, S., and A. S. Abubakar. 2018. "Tradition and Modernity in Adebowale's *The Virgin and Out of His Mind*." *African Research Review* 12 (4): 116–127. <https://doi.org/10.4314/afrr.v12i4.12>
- Olaoye, E., and A. Zink. 2021. "The Muslim Woman's Body as a Speakerly Text: The Gendered Embodiment of Religion, Trauma and Shame in Abubakar Adam Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms*." ResearchGate, September 2021. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354522762_THE_MUSLIM_WOMAN%27S_BODY_AS_A_SPEAKERLY_TEXT_THE_GENDERED_EMBODIMENT_OF_RELIGION_TRAUMA_AND_SHAME_IN_ABUBAKAR_ADAM_IBRAHIM%27S_SEASON_OF_CRIMSON_BLOSSOMS
- Poudel, K. C., K. P. Tandukar, S. Nakahara, J. Yasuoka, and M. Jimba. 2011. "Knowing the Consequences of Unprotected Sex with Seroconcordant Partner is Associated with Increased Safer Sex Intentions Among HIV-Positive Men in Kathmandu, Nepal." *Journal of Health, Population, and Nutrition* 29 (3): 191–199. <https://doi.org/10.3329/jhpn.v29i3.7866>
- Raihana, S. N., and S. N. Ghufron. 2023. "The Concept of Virginity from the Perspective of Islam and Muslim Women." *An-Nisa: Journal of Gender Studies* 16 (2): 269–288. <https://doi.org/10.35719/annisa.v16i2.183>

- Rotundi, L. 2020. *The Issue of Toxic Masculinity*. Libera Universita' Internazionale Degli Studi Sociali.
- Sithole, N. 2016. *Isaiah Shembe's Hymns and the Sacred Dance in Ibandla lamaNazaretha*. Leiden: Brill. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004320628>
- Thabede, H. N. 2020. "Rituals as Cultural Coffins? Towards Reintegrating Divorced Women into Society: A Pastoral Theological Study." MA diss., Stellenbosch University.
- Tseëlon, E. 1995. *The Masque of Femininity: The Presentation of Woman in Everyday Life*. London: Sage.
- Valenti, J. 2010. *The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Virginity is Hurting Young Women*. London: Hatchette UK.
- Wagner, B. 2009. "Book Review: *The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession With Virginity Is Hurting Young Women* by Jessica Valenti." *Spaces for Difference: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 2 (1): 56–58. <https://escholarship.org/content/qt5fj9g4xx/qt5fj9g4xx.pdf>