Representations of female experience in the novels of post-colonial West African writers: Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Ba

Jean Wilson

University of Wollongong

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

COPYRIGHT WARNING

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site. You are reminded of the following:

This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this work may be reproduced by any process, nor may any other exclusive right be exercised, without the permission of the author.

Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

Unless otherwise indicated, the views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the University of Wollongong.

Recommended Citation


Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au
Representations of Female Experience in the Novels of Post-Colonial West African Writers: Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Ba.

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

Honours Master of Arts

from

University of Wollongong

by

Jean Wilson, BA Hons, W'gong

Department of English
1997
Abstract

With the rise of nationalism, independence and the quest for a national identity, one phenomenon of postcolonialism has been the emergence of women writers portraying the role of indigenous women in societies where they had so long been denied an authorial voice.

The idea for my dissertation arose when reading of the appropriation by seventeenth-century European colonisers of the narratives of indigenous females living in oral cultures, and the systematic silencing of their voices in the annals of textual production for another two hundred years.

Using the institution of a traditionally male dominated literary field of production to voice the doubly colonised female, Black African women began to publish novels in European languages in the 1960's. In my dissertation I study some works of three of these authors; Nigeria's Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta, and for contrast French Senegalese, Mariama Ba.

Writing within the novel form they explore its various structures in fictionalising their own lives in autobiography, the lives and role of women in society, and the effects of Western colonisation with its humanistic ideas of individual development and progress on their cultures. Clitoridectomy is a metaphor for the surrender of a source of female sexual power in the interests of a mythical male superiority in gender politics. Infanticide is portrayed as a violent rejection of counter colonisation and racial integration and in association with multiple births is a refusal of reproduction and a counter discourse to fecundity as a cultural imperative.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Gender: Colonialism and Post-Colonialism</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Education in Nigeria</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Using the Coloniser's Language</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Traditional Igbo Society</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 National Identity and Nigerian Writing</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Flora Nwapa</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Buchi Emecheta</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Mariama Ba</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Conclusion</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Epilogue</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Representations of Female Experience in the Novels of Post-Colonial West African Writers: Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Ba.

1 Introduction

Rather than being an exploration of the racial Other\(^1\) the West's appropriation of the Pocahontas narrative as a colonialist discourse featuring John Smith\(^2\) adumbrated a tradition of constructing postcolonialism as 'his-story' while effectively marginalising a potentially liberating 'her-story' as irrelevant and subordinate. Such a tradition rests on binary oppositions,\(^3\) based primarily on racial difference but also entailing gender divisions.

The appropriation of Pocahontas's narrative demonstrates the colonialist imperative of subordinating any threat to the myth of white supremacy, including the voice of the female indigene, and in the West's interpretation of the Indian story\(^4\) Pocahontas's rescue of John Smith is politicised by transforming it from a humanistic gesture to a transferring of her allegiance from her own, marginalised race to the imperial centre. My dissertation takes a quantum leap from Pocahontas's seventeenth-century Virginia to women in twentieth-century post-colonial West Africa as they reclaim the indigenous female voice by appropriating the languages of colonial rule to write their own narratives from a feminine perspective.

The field of postcolonial literatures is characterised by a privileging of male-produced discourses and in my dissertation I attempt to analyse the movement towards greater equity with the emergence of post-colonial women writers as they articulate their own histories and cultures from a feminine perspective. My research methodology is based on a feminist analysis of a selection of secondary material, critical and theoretical texts, and a close reading of a selection of novels from among a growing field of black African women writers; Nigerian-born Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta and, for comparison, French-Senegalese, Mariama Ba. Unlike Nwapa and Emecheta, Ba was
very active in women's issues, deliberately writing from a feminist position, and even though she comes from a very different cultural background, and lived in a different part of Africa, colonised by the French rather than the English, her female characters experience similar kinds of oppression to those in Nwapa and Emecheta's novels. These are three women out of millions of people who have "had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism"⁵ and it is in their writing, evolving from day to day realities of this experience that the formerly male dominated literary scene has been opened up to include the traditionally silenced female voice narrating histories and contemporary stories from the woman's perspective. The slowness of female entry to the literary field can be partly attributed to a former privileging of males over females with respect to access to formal education.

The choice of three black African women writers as the focus for this dissertation is an attempt at a de-marginalising exercise; to analyse how women writers centralise their female characters from the peripheries of dominant male-constructed and male-promoting narratives. Depicting social relationships at their most basic level, that is, in the home and in the family, the novels give "ample consideration to the social forces that influence the success or failure of male-female emotional relationships. Consequently, because each story confronts a social issue directly, elements of social criticism can be found in the novels."⁶

Flora Nwapa's first novels, Efuru⁷ and Idu⁸ explore the role of women in traditional Igbo society under the influence of colonialism; their emotional and social experience and their attitudes to marriage which they view as a patriarchal institution. Nwapa's heroines are both beautiful and gifted and, contrary to patriarchal demands, refuse to accept arranged marriages and insist on marrying for love. Efuru and Idu provide the cultural background for both Nwapa's and Emecheta's later novels, showing to what degree Igbo tradition continues to influence society and what modifications have occurred through the changes in social practices, social orders and orders of discourse under modernising systems and political independence. In her later novels, where the heroines are both educated and mobile, Nwapa becomes more iconoclastic, rejecting
patriarchal moral standards that deny female selfhood. Her heroines are increasingly assertive and reject marriage but accept motherhood as the fulfilment of their destiny as female.

Buchi Emecheta is the first major African female novelist to articulate the perpetuation of gender inequities that privilege the male. Her novels question motherhood, woman's abdication of self in relation to sons and husbands, and patriarchal views of women as nothing but producers of children; she rejects a patriarchal sexual morality that imposes strict sanctions on women while allowing men sexual freedom. Her novels represent a changing world in which women negotiate on their own terms for greater gender equity within their culture and imposed modernising systems.

Mariama Ba was active in several women's organisations writing and speaking on feminist issues; women's legal rights in marriage and child custody, clitoridectomy, the need for women's education, and polygamy which is a major subject of her fiction and featured in her two novels, *So Long a Letter* and *Scarlet Song*.

Writing their cultures from historical research or personal experience, these women reflect in their narratives a view of society and gender roles with particular emphasis on the domestic scene. They write of the narrowness of women's lives, restricted by male imposed parameters, and marginalisation, because of their gender, from significant positions in areas of national political and economic decision-making. They show how culturally constructed 'woman's space' constrains, binding the female to motherhood, the home, providing food, either through farming or the market-place, and working in a limited range of paid employment, including petty trading or prostitution to support the family, or simply themselves.

The three writers raise issues of gender equity in their texts in the representation of both sexes as they bear on each other's lives. Rather than employ retaliatory discourses marginalising the male characters represented in their narratives, the three writers give them recognition. They show how central a role men play in patriarchal societies with their traditional power to dominate the community. The three writers were chosen for their reputation as postcolonial authors re-writing the subject of the
female role in society from a different, and previously silenced, perspective, writing from inside traditional cultures undergoing a process of syncretisation with modernising systems.

As writers of fiction all three women can be seen as icons of modernity or as privileged bearers of traditional cultural values who present changing portrayals of women as victims of social backwardness. Coming from traditionally marginalised positions in patriarchal societies, their narratives are grounded in the everyday lives of women caught up in a syncretising transition, from a traditional, indigenous, organic culture to post-colonialism's centralised government, corporate industrialisation and creation of an indigenous middle-class of teachers, doctors, lawyers and civil servants and blending them into a multi-ethnic group identifying with the emerging nation as much as with their tribal origins; all three women writers form a part of this middle-class group - Nwapa and Ba having been born into it and Emecheta's moving into it later in her life. This syncretising transition could be achieved only through a secularising modernisation of education systems although neither the Christian missions nor the secular schools gave immediate or radical emancipation to women.

While the three women writers come from different family backgrounds, they share a similar status as African women subjected to native culture, colonial rule, education in the European tradition, domestication as wives and mothers, also sharing the role of writer, focussing on the culturally constructed lives of women and tradition, producing a counter-discourse to the marginalisation and subordination of the female featured in colonialist literature.

It is through their personal experience of colonialism - as subjects of European colonial rule that the three women qualify as post-colonial writers. Relative to English studies the term 'post-colonial' is used to include "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression." The three women write out of a significant stage of post-colonial literary development - the early phase of post-
Independence linking the liberation from colonial rule with the dictates of self-governing regimes.

The formation of my own subjectivity accounts for the dissertation topic. An Anglo-Saxon coming from a lower socio-economic London background and now living in a former settler colony, I aim to satisfy my curiosity regarding British colonialism from the 'other' side of colonial experience - comparing life styles as these are culturally constructed, both at the centre and on the peripheries of Empire, and the influences brought to bear on the construction of what was to become the ubiquitous dichotomy of 'Self' and 'Other' and how this shapes subjectivities.
2 Gender: Colonialism and Post-Colonialism

Imagined places can evoke romantic notions with their avoidance of less attractive social realities and it is in this context that a dispassionate approach to the texts may foster an appreciation of the authors' realist intentions; Emecheta refers to her writings as "Social realities" giving the impression of recording or 'reflecting' faithfully an actual way of life. Objectivity is extended to an awareness of the danger of 'orientalising'; interpreting the texts as curiosities, containing foreign secrets and mysteries to be seen as entertainment only. Similarly there is a danger of anthropologising; using the narratives as studies into the nature of human beings. Theoretically, feminism, as the systematic study/practice of gender equity is a valid tool, but the cultural differences with regard to patriarchy give varied meanings to the term. The 'glass ceiling' cited by some white female feminists as a male constructed obstacle to women's access to top management positions in the corporate world differs from the oppression and deprivation of basic human rights experienced by many women culturally conditioned as subordinate to the dominant male, and less aware of an enlightening humanism which advocates the rights of the individual within the modern Western state and refuses the male/white ownership of these terms.

Gender inequities are culturally constructed and hegemonically institutionalised into even the most 'democratic' societies and Antonio Gramsci makes a distinction between:

civil and political society in which the former is made up of voluntary (or at least rational and noncoercive) affiliations like schools, families and unions, the latter of state institutions (the army, the police, the central bureaucracy) whose role in the polity is direct domination...  

Deniz Kandiyoti also comments on the 'civil' and 'political' as two sources of patriarchal oppression, with the civil or private zone, centred on the home and family, perceived as patriarchal with the greater sexual licence afforded men by men. But with the sexual politics involved the 'civil' zone is conceivably an area in which gender power is negotiable. The other source of patriarchal oppression, the political, or state, excludes
significant female representation and through its promotion of male constructed ideologies "seeks to repudiate the separate existence of civil society." It has the potential to divide masculine loyalties by keeping the male in a constant state of tension in his struggle for power in both areas. Kandiyoti also advocates a revising of institutionalised gender inequities with the rise of nationalism in post-colonial territories arguing that:

Since the emergence of women as citizens is also predicated upon the transformation of institutions and customs that keep them bound to particularistic traditions of their ethnic and religious communities, the modern state is assumed to intervene as a homogenising agent which acts as a possible resource for more progressive gender politics.

Post-colonial nationalism has its gendered meanings and with the syncretising of Nigerian and Western cultures men were "relatively free to adopt new styles of conduct" while women "had to be modern but modest." Licence for men to explore the political and economic opportunities offered with the colonising of Nigeria, together with their traditional freedom to explore their sexuality uninhibitedly while demanding feminine self-restraint, assured the continuation of male dominance. Men's expectations that women would limit their adoption of change presumed their continuing subservience and exclusion from positions of power in the wider community, in politics and commerce.

Before going on to discuss the work of Nwapa and Emecheta I wish to comment on conditions in Nigeria. I will provide the necessary background for these two writers, leaving comment on the situation in French Senegal when I come to write on Ba.

The area of modern Nigeria was brought under British rule by 1906 and became an independent state on October 1, 1960. Following a period of tension among its ethnic groups it was ruled by the military from 1966 to 1979. The most populous country of Africa, it was initially composed of a number of ethnically based kingdoms and states. Official estimates of the country's population in the late 1980's ranged well above 100 million and with more than 250 ethnic groups Nigeria is a complex linguistic, social and cultural mosaic. Much of the land consists of a low plateau cut by rivers and most of the country is suitable for agriculture. Its major economic resources are its massive
petroleum and natural-gas deposits and the bulk of Nigeria's foreign trade is with the former colonising powers. Revenues from oil exports, which exceeded $20 billion in 1980, declined to $10 billion in 1982 and the nation was unable to pay its short-term debts. Nigeria could no longer afford essential imports, and the economy, already weakened by mismanagement and corruption, sank into severe recession. In 1983 Alhaji Shehu Shagari, leading the democratically elected Nationalist Party of Nigeria, was deposed in a coup led by Major General Muhammad Buhari, the first of a succession of coups culminating in the stepping down of Babangida in 1993 and General Sani Abacha's overthrowing the transitional government in November 1993 and banning all political activity. Both Nwapa and Emecheta draw on twentieth-century Nigerian history and development into a modern state for their narratives showing the continuing marginalisation of women. They also show however women's political lack of opportunity for bringing greater equity into the areas of political and economic policies at government levels other than the traditional word of mouth.

Historically, women constitute a minority of the Nigerian literary community marginalised by male privileging institutions. Eldred Durosimi Jones evidences neglect of post-colonial African women writers in largely male-authored journals, critical studies and critical anthologies, openly acknowledging the lack of literary output by women. Marginalised in traditional patriarchal societies, the female voice is silenced, or nearly so, in the interest of male domination and is valued only for its story-telling abilities in oral cultures. Sylvia Leith-Ross notes that in Nigeria the marketplace is an accepted platform for the woman's voice, detailing this area of accepted social practice in her text, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria*. Held at different times of the day and on particular days of the month the markets vary in size taking the women the whole day in getting ready and walking varying distances to the nearest market-place, there they dispose of their wares and buy others before walking home to prepare the evening meal and attend to the children. Many of the goods could have been bought and sold locally but it is when the women need non-local goods such as pottery, tobacco, salt, dried fish, or small European goods that they really need to go to the market-place. More than a

shopping-centre it is a meeting-place and exchange of news of the whole Province and
the passing of messages from woman to woman and market-place to market-place;
Leith-Ross notes that "One hears over and over again the remark: 'I will speak of it in the
market'. (p. 87) Word of mouth, and specifically the female voice was the medium of
communicating, or networking across space and this women's oral tradition is a resource
women writers can draw on, a resource for writers like Nwapa and Emecheta.

The practice of marginalising and objectifying the female in patriarchal societies
means women lack identification or association with major political and economic
decision-making beyond the lower levels of bureaucratic service or local commerce,
which is limited in scope, with middlemen dominating access to the more influential and
lucrative city and international markets. While visible female input into major policy-
making was absent or minimal before Nigeria's Independence, women did have their own
networks. Operating as Womens' Councils their aims were to cultivate solidarity in the
common purpose of protecting their livelihood; Leith-Ross cites the Aba Riots of 192924
as an example of direct action by these Councils resulting from the women's fear that
they were to be taxed.

While European powers had traded with African societies for three or more
centuries, the 'scramble for Africa' in the late nineteenth-century made more permanent
relations imperative to ensure the supply of raw materials for manufacture in European
factories resulting in a series of invasions and colonisation. Initially the introduction of
Western culture brought little change to the over-domesticated, traditional Igbo female
preoccupied with child-bearing, family, farming and trading. Her role in the period of
invasion leading up to colonisation was of survival, in conditions of war, for herself and
the extended family. Resistance to British military forces and their allies was mixed as
"some communities resisted the invader fiercely, others did not."25 The campaign
comprised a series of wars with the Igbo defeat inevitable because of failure to overcome
their traditional disunity and the inferior quality of their arms and ammunition, sold to
them by the British who fought with rifles, machine guns, unlimited supplies of
ammunition and the resources of a colonial government and an empire.26 The Igbo
female had no effective means of defence, either for herself or for her family. As in other colonial wars in Africa much of the actual fighting on both sides was done by indigenous Africans.27

Despite the resistance to invasion by many Africans, for those dissatisfied with tribal tradition colonisation offered an alternative way of life and a share in the power of another form of civilisation. In some respects women and families benefited from colonisation, particularly with the introduction of Western medical practices and the Christian reverence for motherhood which allowed the African mother to keep children from multiple births - an abomination in Igbo culture requiring the infant's death. Nwapa notes the general hospital at Onicha in Efuru,(p.101) and Idu's pre-natal care at the Iyienu hospital and the local maternity home.(Idu,p.68) A colonial education system, complementing the missionary schools, promised universal education while welfare and medical services, based on Western scientific knowledge, provided an alternative to the local dibia, (a native doctor.)

In the world of English literature and postcolonial writing in English, evidence abounds of the paucity of female writers compared with the number of males. In his analysis of the imbalance Jones sees "writing and education [going] hand in hand and for all kinds of sociological and other reasons the education of women in Africa lagged far behind that of men."28 Among these reasons a hegemonic over-domestication of the female with its multiplicity of associated practices served to legitimise gender inequities and male domination of the culturally constructed 'public', or state sectors, as opposed to the civil or 'private/domestic' arenas.29
3 Education in Nigeria

The education system in Nigeria comprises secular state-run schools, Christian 'mission' schools, Islamic schools and schools operating within the context of ethnic culture and language. The first known Christian school was established in 1843 by Mr and Mrs de Graft of the Methodist Mission in Badagry. In 1846 the Church Missionary Society established a mission house, church and school at Igbehin under Samuel Ajayi Crowther who became the first African bishop and the first known Nigerian to receive higher education. Another mission house, church and school was established by the CMS at Ake under lay preacher Henry Townsend.30

Education departments were established with the founding of Nigeria as a British Protectorate in 1899, but education was still left largely to the missions and some private individuals. The 1922 American sponsored Phelps-Stokes Report on education in Africa prompted the British colonial government to do something to demonstrate its interest in African education. This resulted in the issuing of its first report on education in 1925 and the establishment of some government primary schools. The Phelps-Stoke Report promoted a policy of gender equity with its emphasis on the importance of the education of African women noting that "the future welfare of Africa and the education of men and women, of boys and girls, should be parallel and simultaneous."31 With the economic depression of the 1930's government funding for education was curtailed and by 1938 twenty of the fifty one government primary schools had been transferred to the missions and other administrators.32

Colonial development required a group of educated Africans to act as intermediaries assisting with the administration, infrastructure, promoting markets and providing consumers of goods manufactured in European factories from raw materials produced in the colonies. A colonial education became desirable to both the English and the African enabling the indigene to communicate more readily with the coloniser while enhancing his own social status in a developing, materialistic economy.
Each European power, in promoting its own culture as superior to that of the indigene saw its presence as a civilising influence worthy of mimetic cooperation. Early colonial education was largely in the hands of missionaries who saw the indigenes as objects deserving of a "reforming zeal." Education became desirable, but it was not compulsory by law. Because it was a fee-paying system offering possibilities for gaining employment and assimilation, boys were invariably given priority, favouring their progress over a minority of girls to gain the higher grades leading to scholarship awards. Attending school also provided pupils with social contacts outside the family circle in preparation for assimilation into the wider world of politics and commerce as sources of power. In his novel, *Ake*, Wole Soyinka describes the plight of a grandmother who is burdened with the "thirteen children from different wives" of her late son. Subsisting off the son's farm is precarious "...just a living, nothing more. Even the education of the children is stop and go. They can only go to school one at a time." School fees in 1935 were on a par with the taxation rate of 3s 6d a year for each able-bodied male.

The mission meant education and education meant a "miraculous ladder to fame and fortune, the renown of which spread to the remotest parts." With little knowledge or understanding of teaching standards, the indigenes' demand was "Give us school [making it] hard for the missions to resist the call as schools meant converts and new spheres of influence." In Joyce Cary's colonialist novel, *Mister Johnson*, Mr Rudbeck's flamboyant clerk, Mister Johnson, exemplifies the limitations of mission education and the lack of efficiency in some indigenous government employees. While Mister Johnson produces an acceptable 'school copperplate' hand, he is incapable of 'copying a report'. (p.5)

Although it was greatly valued, the 'user pays' system put an education beyond the means of many indigenes. Where choices had to be made, boys would invariably be favoured over girls. Indicative of this in Cary's novel was the enrolment of 270 boys as opposed to 51 girls at the Owerri government school in 1936. Tradition played a part in repressing the girls whose mothers "did not mind much about book only wanting their daughters to know how to manage their homes and how to look after their children."
In his text *Veronica My Daughter and Other Onitsha Plays and Stories*, a work set at a later period than Cary's *Mister Johnson*, Ogali's portrayal of a changing social order includes the role of higher education in social and economic development. Qualifying as a 'Pivotal Teacher' his heroine Caroline's ambitions include joining the "mass exodus of girls" leaving Nigeria for the United Kingdom showing a breaking down of the gender prejudice which had privileged boys since Nwapa's character Efuru proclaimed "We do not know book" as a bar to being allowed to go to Britain.
4 Using the Colonisers' Language

Access to education also means access to the means of communication in relation to printing and publishing - access controlled largely by men in a male-dominated society. But any ruling-class group, by definition, and because of its hierarchical structure, has the power to control literacy levels in communities and if 'literacy levels' is translated to 'voices', then to silence the female voice as subversive or oppositional means withholding access to literacy skills as keys to knowledge and communicable self-expression. With literature written by men in the ascendant, its promotion under patriarchy is in the interests of maintaining male authority whose continuing dominance is dependent upon the oppression and silencing of all opposition, including perceived feminist criticism and theories advocating gender equity in traditionally male-dominated spheres of influence.

In the early stages of postcolonial literary development, writing meant using the language of the imperial centre and identifying with the colonising power. The politically restricted discourse, together with the material conditions of literary production - its printing, publishing and distribution - meant that anti-imperial sentiments were constrained. Silence cloaked the harsher realities of imperial oppression relating to genocide, penal systems, the denigration of native cultures, including alienated African slaves imported into the West Indies as forced labour. With the freeing of former colonies from imperial domination writers are filling in some of the earlier textual gaps of silence in a process of decolonisation and subversion of imperialism, appropriating the language of the centre as a means of accessing a broad and significant audience. But some post-colonial regimes still censor their writers, even persecuting or imprisoning them.47

The introduction of relatively widespread literacy with colonisation enabled the adaptation of the novel portraying African society and individuals in greater length and detail than the traditional oral story-telling with its demands on memory and the restrictive physical presence of a story-teller. Whereas the oral narrative addresses the
group, promoting a shared view and conformity, the novel is addressed to the individual, inviting debate with its prospect of challenging traditional values 48

Indigenous writers' appropriation and adaptation of the coloniser's language as a mode of expression is not necessarily an abrogation of their native tongues. Discussing post-colonial textual production Bill Ashcroft notes that:

Rather than being an ideologically contaminating influence, the colonial languages are vigorously adapted, their imperial assumptions abrogated and the language appropriated for the specific needs of post-colonial self-determination...the post-colonial writer may appropriate the language, but he or she must interpolate the text into the Western-dominated systems of publishing, distribution and readership for the strategy to have any effect. 49

As modes of communication and international languages of commerce, diplomacy and tourism, English and French both command a wide audience. To abrogate or deny the language of the centre is to abrogate or deny access to indigenous writing by non-African speaking readers except through translation. Chinua Achebe argues that

There are not many countries in Africa today where you could abolish the language of the erstwhile colonial powers and still retain the facility for mutual communication. Therefore those African writers who have chosen to write in English or French are not unpatriotic smart alecks with an eye on the main chance - outside their own countries. They are by-products of the same process that made the new nation-states of Africa. 50

Indigenous women writers were a phenomenon of the post-Independence emergence of 'new' writers and subject material from a source of unpublished authors, marginalised or "locked out by the hegemony of taste regulated by the old monopolies" and politics of colonialism. They demonstrate an aspect of cultural assimilation through colonial education policies and contact with imperialist ideology in their appropriation of literary forms and, in the case of former British colonies, the English language. Living in male-dominated indigenous societies, under patriarchal colonial rule they also articulate a history of female double-colonisation. Writing their cultures from a feminine perspective, they create a more balanced view of society with their narratives, traditionally a male-dominated, and male-promoting, area of postcolonial development.
Traditional Igbo Society

Both Nwapa and Emecheta portray traditional Igbo people in their writings, foregrounding the role of women in Igbo society. Of ancient lineage the Igbo is one of several pre-colonial societies inhabiting the belt of dense rain forest which runs along the coastal fringe of West Africa. These societies remained virtually undisturbed by outside influences long after the creation of more densely populated kingdoms and empires in the northern Sudanese zone. Of the six or more large groups of people living in the Eastern wooded region only the Igbo retained a form of social organisation at the level of headman and elders. In times of crisis some communities sought a single male ruler who would then revert to his former position once the crisis was resolved. The oldest man of the oldest surviving generation in a family or quarter would settle family disputes while a recognised group of these men would form the government in a community, but with varying rights to speak. A successful and prosperous man with a large family would take a series of titles, "to be taken in order, with an ascending scale of payments. The title system served as a substitute for social security, the man who acquired a title paid to do so, and shared in the payments of later entrants." Titles were social signifiers of their holders' wealth and social standing in the community.

Although women were disfranchised, they were also eligible to buy titles. Efiiru, in Nwapa's novel of that name, represents the successful female trader, her "hands make money...whatever she puts her hands to money flows in..." she was so rich she became the head of her age-group. "Then she took titles."

The age grade was a political institution in which each grade had definite obligations in serving the community. A single religious authority, an oracle, served to adjudicate inter-tribal disputes. In Chinua Achebe's novel, Things Fall Apart the description of Okwonko's father shows how he visits the priestess Chika, who spoke to the Oracle of the Hills, Agbala, "She was full of the power of her god, and she was greatly feared." A hierarchy of diviners interpreted the wishes of natural and spiritual forces with priests placating these with sacrificial offerings.
Every Igbo had a personal *chi*, a spirit from the benevolent force, *chukwu*, to whom the *chi* reverted on the recipient's death. A person's *chi* may be well or ill disposed. Telling the Company cashier of an overpayment for palm oil, Omirima's daughter is criticised by her people for rejecting a perceived gift from her *chi*, requiring the sacrifice of a white hen. Secret societies were another form of social control. The face-mask was an important feature of their activities lending anonymity to the wearers who would appear, "often at night, in the role of supernatural beings, and denounce and attack offenders."61

Economically the Igbo people were self-sufficient, deriving a subsistence from forest farming and trading any surplus of produce at the village markets. In addition the Igbo were skilled in iron smelting, brasswork, cotton weaving and other valuable handicrafts.62 Nkwerre was one of the many towns famous for its blacksmiths and traders with every man and woman a trader by birth. In pre-colonial days the chief articles of trade were slaves, fowls, tobacco, textiles and all that blacksmiths could manufacture.63

In his account of mid eighteenth-century Igboland, Equiano comments on the role of women in pre-colonial Igbo society: "When our women are not employed with the men in tillage, their usual occupation is spinning and weaving cotton, which they dye and make into garments."64 Salt was another item of trade and one source was the salt lake at Ubru where the salt was processed by an exclusive guild of women processors.65 The network of market places and a varied and abundant range of currencies ranging from cowrie shells to brass rods66 gave vitality to Igboland's economy. The names of individual markets combined a place and a day. Isichei notes that these were:

...carefully arranged in space and time...to avoid overlap. Since the four days of the Igbo week were insufficient to accommodate them they were fitted into an eightday cycle, *izu ukwu*, the big week. Some markets were purely local, but the larger ones combined local exchanges with the import of goods from further afield by professional and semi-professional merchants, who faced the greater risks, and reaped the greater profits, of long-distance exchange of commodities.67
Slave-trading within the Europe/Africa and West Indies triangle was a feature of both colonial and pre-colonial Africa and, since the trade was unregulated, it can only be estimated just how many African indigenes were transported from 1518, when the first shipload was taken directly from West Africa to the West Indies,\textsuperscript{68} to the 1850's when the last slaver called in at Nembe-Brass.\textsuperscript{69} Estimates of the number transported in the late eighteenth-century over a period of twenty years includes 370,000 Igbos.\textsuperscript{70} Females were enslaved along with men as commodities in what was a highly profitable and male-dominated enterprise, dependent upon the exploitation of African by African. Slaves were obtained by kidnapping, wars or sold as punishment by their local community.\textsuperscript{71} The trade reflected a cultural disregard for life shown in the traditional African practice of human sacrifice, including the live burial of slaves with the corpse of their master or mistress and decapitation of children by headhunters "looking for the head of a little boy for a burial ceremony of a great man."\textsuperscript{72} Slavery had been a part of Igbo culture long before the advent of European colonisation.

Some imports exchanged for slaves had a disempowering effect on Igbo women with the introduction of foreign textiles threatening local production and female employment. The trading of slaves for guns, ammunition and alcohol inferior to the locally produced palm-wine motivated different forms of anti-social masculine behaviour, further marginalising the Igbo women. The firing of cannons announcing the death of a great man remind Nwosu and the fishermen of their history, "the white slave dealers gave the people the cannons in exchange for slaves."\textsuperscript{73} From the micro-economics of market trading, with some importing and exporting, the profits from slave-trading caused an expansion in consumerism and a re-distribution of wealth stimulating political activity.

Traditionally, early Igbo societies were patriarchal with the basic unit being the compound, village or town. Females were disfranchised since decisions affecting a whole community would normally be put to the people, meaning specifically "to an assembly of free adult males."\textsuperscript{74} The accumulation of wealth was discouraged although an acceptable form of wealth was a well-stocked yam-barn.\textsuperscript{75} A strongroom or mud
wardrobe, built inside the house but well-hidden, was customary as a place to conceal family valuables.76

The role of women in pre-colonial Igbo society was subordinate to a culturally constructed male authority. Their value was measured primarily by their fertility and ability to bear children, particularly sons, to increase and strengthen the clan. In reality motherhood reduced women to the status of reproductive objects compounded by their responsibility for the primary care of children. Nnu Ego, the heroine in Emecheta's novel, The Joys of Motherhood77 has social status as the daughter of a chieftain before marriage but her inability to conceive following her marriage to Amatokwu leads to her migration to Lagos to live as the wife of his brother, Nnaife,78 a washerman working for white colonials.

A woman had very little power in the community although the female goddesses were believed to have great power over both males and females. The construction of female as both "secular and sacred - the natural and the supernatural"79 elevates the goddesses as objects of worship while legitimising the manipulation and exploitation of the majority of females in Igbo patriarchal society.

The goddesses were protectors of women whose lives were partly ordered by a calendar of festivals and disciplines offering some respite from male domination. The priesthood of the Lake Goddess, Uhamiri, was open to women. Children belonged to the tribe as a whole80 but multiple births were considered to come from the animal world, an abomination, to be left unceremoniously to die in a forest specifically designated as a dumping ground for culturally unacceptable objects or deeds such as suicides.

Beyond everyday discourse the female voice was restricted to story-telling and the market-place. As story-tellers to children women show the importance of stories as indicators of their culture and as educational tools instilling the clan's values and customs, upholding these for their continuation and the survival of Igbo society, its traditions and political power base. As modern story-tellers, Nwapa, Emecheta and Ba
perform a similar function, informing their audience of cultural changes as they fictionalise life in their societies.

As a social practice, polygamy was considered to be a way of cementing good relations with other communities, and extending the protecting bonds of kinship over a broad geographic area. It was a practice available only to a wealthy man. The 'bride price' reflected the value put on the bride by her family in the marital exchange. Women were seen as binding factors, "the string with which people were tied together."\(^{81}\)

It was important that a woman be married and to ensure this it was customary for a widow to marry one of her late husband's male relatives. It was not unknown for a woman to rebel against the custom. With the death of her husband, Adiewere, Idu, in Nwapa's novel of that name, prefers to die rather than marry her brother-in-law, Ishiodu.\(^{(p.217)}\) It was not unusual for a wife-beating husband to defy social law by beating his wife during certain festivals decreed by the goddesses when it was forbidden. Social laws decreed by the goddesses often served to give married people respite from customary marital duties and obligations.

The context and quality of pre-colonial Igbo life is consistent with Equianos's description of the thatched houses and how they are built. "The whole neighbourhood offered their unanimous assistance in building them and in return receive and expect no other recompense but a feast."\(^{82}\) Isichei also cites the observations of a British soldier invading Ezzaland: "The Ezza towns are models of cleanliness and good building and their farms are kept the same way."\(^{83}\) And a missionary's description of late nineteenth-century Awka, and the home of a titled man:

As we passed through the town we were struck by its clean, well-kept houses and roads. The people certainly take a great pride in having their houses nice...As [our host] was a chief of very high standing his house was an elaborate one. The walls were beautifully smooth, and painted over with all sorts of queer designs. The door, boxes, and other wooden articles were quaintly carved.\(^{84}\)

Nwapa's representation of the female in Igbo society reflects generally on a close, constraining relationship with the land and Eijke Boehmer picks up on "this grand trope"\(^{85}\) of allegorising female as land and land as female noting that:
Many male writers from Africa - Camara Laye, Kofi Awoonor and Wole Soyinka among them - speaking from various historical and geographical perspectives, have seen the image writ larger: Africa, the continent whole and full-bellied, is both the beloved land and mother.

Buchi Emecheta's novel, *The Rape of Shavi*, echoes this concept with the physical rape of Ayoko, the future queen of Shiva, identified with the rape of the land of Shiva itself. Flip alerts the rapist, Ronje; "Ayoko is the symbolic Mother of Shavi. If you rape her, you rape Shavi." (p. 104)
6 National Identity and Nigerian Writing

Nwapa and Emecheta write out of a rising Nigerian nationalism associated with the unification of former feudal states, ethnic-based kingdoms and discrete West African territories. Defining nationalism as the involvement of attitudinal and cultural changes geared towards a collective devotion to a particular nation-state, Franz Fanon discusses the patriarchal nature of the problem of legitimacy regarding the claims of a nation, arguing that:

It must be recognised that the political party which mobilises the people hardly touches on this problem of legitimacy. The political parties start living reality and it is in the name of this reality, in the name of stark facts which weigh down the present and the future of men and women, that they fix their line of action. The political party may well speak in moving terms of the nation but what it is concerned with is that the people who are listening understand the need to take part in the fight if, quite simply, they wish to continue to exist.  

Equal gender value is suggested in the phrase 'the future of men and women, that they fix their line of action.' But without direct female political representation the female voice is silenced, dependent upon the generosity of the male to act as intermediary on her behalf in any proposed line of action she may want to have promoted. Without this generosity and surrogate voice the woman must be prepared to accept or participate in masculine aggression or become a prospective victim of it. Political instability marked Nigeria's progress from colonial rule to Independence and self-government with a succession of military governments, assassinations and the Biafran Civil War which lasted from July 1967 to 1970 and forms the subject of Emecheta's novel Destination Biafra.  

The development of an identity peculiar to Nigeria and its culture formed part of a nationalist movement and, since politics and culture are closely linked, Ashcroft et al argue that "Ideas about new kinds of literature were part of the optimistic progression to nationhood because it seemed that this was one of the most potent areas in which to express difference from Britain." With its own literature and in common with other former British colonies, Nigeria could be discussed as a discrete national formation rather than as a branch of a tree. Its literature could be considered in relation to its social
and political history, and "could be read as a source of important images of national identity."

Decolonisation meant the reconstruction of Nigerian subjectivity - the indigenes' perception of self - liberated from colonial oppression. Space was found for Nigerian women writers to emerge from their traditional role as oral story-tellers and enter the literary world to fill the gaps left by male writers in their portrayal of Nigerian women. Liberated from Eurocentric and imperialist formats for social order and gender placement the women write outside the "confines imposed by romance" with its mandatory literary requirement that the hero and heroine live happily ever after in connubial bliss, following a series of impediments to their legal union. The women strive "to write beyond the ending" the romance format "imposes on their characters lives" choosing a counter discursive social realism genre for their narratives.

Nwapa and Emecheta write of gender inequities in the formation of subjectivity. They write of the privileged male, free of burdens borne by his womenfolk, and of the obstacles to female emancipation to be negotiated in the interests of greater gender equity. They show how the distribution and wielding of power are dependent upon mobility and knowledge, traditionally male privileges; of how restrictive family responsibilities are borne largely by women who negotiate a degree of respite by sharing the motherhood role and responsibilities among themselves.

Just as the search for self-identity is a recurring theme in male indigenous writings so a similar theme is reflected in women's works, but with a difference. The male seeks to recover what was lost in the colonising process - his dominant place in the social order. The female texts' comparative theme concerns the wider social implications of this perceived degradation, focussing on the extended family as the foundation of identity and ordered society. The feminine perspective acts as a counter-discourse to traditional concepts of patriarchy and phallocentrism that dominate English language postcolonial literature. Constructing women as the carers and nurturers in society, Nwapa, Emecheta and Ba can be seen to be negotiating tradition and empire, education and culture. They show how colonialism brought change to all four areas of social concern and how the indigene either responds or reacts to these changes. They identify
the priorities in the lives of their characters and, although they are marginalised in masculine texts, reflecting their place in Igbo society, they give their male characters space in their own narratives in the process of de-mystifying them as undeserving of their self-imposed patriarchal role/positions.

In colonising foreign territories, European imperialists were confronted with ancient cultures and civilisations incompatible with Western ideologies. In a discussion of colonialist literature as an "...exploration and a representation of a world at the boundaries of 'civilisation', a world that has not [yet] been domesticated by European signification or codified in detail by its ideology..." Griffiths et al note that:

Faced with an incomprehensible and multifaceted alterity, the European theoretically has the option of responding to the Other in terms of identity or difference...Instead of being an exploration of the racial Other, such literature merely affirms its own ethnocentric assumptions: instead of actually depicting the outer limits of 'civilisation' it simply codifies and preserves the structures of its own mentality.

During the period of British colonial occupation writing was "produced by a literate elite whose primary identification [was] with the colonising power". The work of this select group of indigenes was Eurocentric, frequently comparing the colonial landscape and indigenous culture to England as the imperial centre of political power and cultural desirability. Ashcroft et al suggest that the "study of English and the growth of Empire proceeded from a single ideological climate" bound together:

both at the level of simple utility (as propaganda for instance) and at the unconscious level, where it leads to the naturalising of constructed values (e.g. civilisation, humanity etc.) which conversely established 'savagery', 'native', 'primitive', as their antithesis and as the object of a reforming zeal.

The various influences of landscape and climate on local cultures were overlooked in the interest of a privileging Culture/Nature binary opposition. As signifying systems here, 'Culture' symbolises European civilisation with its complex and humanitarian forms of social integration, material resources and arts; including literature, while 'Nature' symbolises dependency and limitations as the source of life, sustenance and death to be subjugated through the intellect in the interests of male superiority.
Nigeria's evolution from a group of tribal confederations and feudal fiefdoms to a nation state offered little in the way of direct concessions to the achieving of gender equity, but with the rise of nationalism and its fostering of a unified national identity through multi-ethnic and relocated groups, such as the civil service, the way opened for the recognition of Nigeria's multi-cultural development from the Africans' perspective.

Liberation from colonial rule in 1960 brought with it the freedom to express formerly suppressed views in the search for lost individual and national identities. Leading the field, male textual production was characterised by its marginalisation and subordination of the female, consolidating a culturally constructed paternalism. With the acceptance of women writers as contributors to a national image of Nigeria, the way opened for a women's narrative and deconstruction of patriarchy. Adopting the genre of social realism women writers expressed a desire for greater gender equity and undertook deconstruction of assumptions supportive of male dominance.

In his essay, 'Polytropic Man: Tropes of Sexuality and Mobility in Early Colonial Discourse', Peter Hulme argues that the allegorical construction of woman as land; passive and vulnerable to management and control, fits the patriarchal imperative of prioritising a convincing idea of male supremacy. In his analysis of the discourse behind the early phase of modern European colonisation he states "The onomastics of colonial discourse seem, at first sight, relatively straightforward. Land is named as female in passive counterpoint to the masculine thrust of European technology." The sexual connotations in his statement make it a powerful and persuasive image in its simplicity and use of language by colonising entrepreneurs. In the Culture v Nature binary opposition, the coloniser's mobility and knowledge of advanced technology gave him the edge on indigenous peoples who, by comparison, were constrained by conservative cultural imperatives that kept them largely tied to the land and a life of subsistence, they could therefore be represented as 'other' in colonialis discours - as non-progressive, static, historyless and primitive.

The marginalisation of the female indigene can be seen as a cultural flow-on from colonialism. The colonial strategy of introducing European literary skills to traditionally
oral cultures brought new ideas while also promoting Western ideology's patriarchal attitudes. Boehmer comments that:

The British Empire, it is plain to see, was a man's world, much more emphatically so than was Victorian patriarchal society back in Britain. From the beginning of the Empire, the expanding colonies had offered the 'mother country' a practice and testing ground for its manhood...At every level, men ran the colonies.

As Marlow observes in *Heart of Darkness*, "women were 'out of it' " and a "young middle-class man in search of a colonial career could rest assured that whatever choice he made would land him in the ranks of an exclusively male hierarchy." The resulting image and English literary representation of colonial experience evolved as a white male, "free of domestic responsibilities and white women, free to rule as he pleased, scornful of values other than his own, [who] sought as companions those of his own kind." The homosocial image served to marginalise the feminine in what are invariably tales of adventure featuring the Englishman abroad as the principal character. Indigenous women writers had a further problem in that they wrote from within a patriarchal culture, but that culture had been reinforced by a whole range of colonial practices along with English colonialist fiction such as Buchan's and Kipling's.

Much colonialist literature was dependent upon themes of masculine liberty. This was represented in the freedom from responsibility relating to traditional family life and other constraining social values granted to literary characters. The way needed to be cleared for the promise of adventure with its uncertain outcome to dominate the text. In John Buchan's *Prester John* David Crawford's release from family responsibilities and a conventional life in the ministry is legitimised by the sudden death of his father; the need for him to earn a living becomes the catalyst for his adventures in South Africa. As an orphan, alone and free to roam India, Kipling's Kim is brought under the manipulative and masculine protection of a Tibetan lama followed by the British Secret Service. It is imperative that there should be no constraints on Lord Jim's mobility or loyalties in his search for self-identity in the ports and trading stations of the East. These heroes' adventures are closely associated with a work ethic; David Crawford's acceptance of an
assistant storekeeper's position, Kim's schooling and induction into the Secret Service and Lord Jim's vocation as a water-clerk provide ongoing, practical and masculine occupational backgrounds to their adventures.

The promotion of Western ideology's patriarchal attitudes encouraged the donning of a 'white mask of culture and privilege' by indigenes, forming part of their assimilation into Western culture. As an emulating process it worked in the interests of imperialism's demands for service and loyalty while placing constraints on the indigenous voice as a potential criticiser of the coloniser or the effects of colonisation on native culture. In their discussions on the development of postcolonial literatures the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* argue that:

> It is characteristic of these early post-colonial texts that the potential for subversion in their themes cannot be fully realised... Both the available discourse and the material conditions of production for literature in these early post-colonial societies restrain this possibility. The institution of 'Literature' in the colony is under the direct control of the imperial ruling class who alone licence the acceptable form and permit the publication and distribution of the resulting work. So, texts of this kind come into being within the constraints of a discourse and the institutional practice of a patronage system which limits and undercuts their assertion of a different perspective.

Colonialist discourse, as a patriarchal construct, shows the coloniser's early contact with the indigene marginalising the female, minimising her importance in patriarchal social orders and, through lack of access to political and economic power, constraining her field of social practices to survival and the servicing of male interests. Whether this is accomplished by coercive practices or female compliance, based on a lack of conscious awareness of her dormant power as a sexual being, the strategy served to exclude women from active participation in the colonising process beyond the lower levels of social order and service. The flow-on to literary representation sees indigenous male writers in colonial societies carrying on the tradition as they construct the female as subservient to masculine demands and manipulation. Gaps of silence signify perceived subversive 'woman's space' - women's spheres of influence and activity which threaten to subvert an established image of the male as dominant and privileged.

Lalage Brown's anthology, *Two Centuries of African English*, brings home to the reader the extent to which male Africans availed themselves of the literary skills and

With a two-hundred-year headstart in transposing a traditional orature to literature, male authors dominate the field of postcolonial writing\(^{112}\) thematically in search of individual or national identities in a range of nostalgic and quest narratives. These have been joined by a minority of female writers following Independence and the rise of nationalism in which men dominate in the drawing up, defining and directing of national boundaries and national affairs and the construction of a national identity.

With greater literacy levels in the former colonies, and wider access to the means of communication, nostalgic quests for ethnic histories by indigenous peoples themselves
created a demand for these post-colonial texts. The collapse of the former British Empire also excited interest among academics in the 'New Literatures in English' - texts from the formerly colonised expressing the views of the 'other' in the language of colonial rule.

One of the features of the Post-World War Two era, with the gaining of political independence by some former colonies of European imperialist powers was this emergence of indigenous writers. Liberated from colonialist constraints of loyalty and service to the centre, a vanguard of authors wrote of the effects of colonisation on their traditional cultures and of the sense of loss in the colonising process of both national and individual identities as these were connected to a pre-colonial time.

Appropriation of Western literary forms and languages demonstrated the degree of indigenous cultural assimilation through colonial education policies and contact with imperialist ideologies. A later phenomenon of the movement was the emergence of the female voice articulating an 'her-story' of feminine double-colonisation, living in male-dominated societies superimposed by patriarchal colonial rule. Their texts show constraints placed on the female in male-dominated societies and also reveal ways in which women attempt to negotiate their way to greater gender equity both within the narratives themselves as a reflection of society and as texts in a male-dominated field of literature.

Coming from a traditional Igbo oral culture both Nwapa and Emecheta's appropriation of the novel form offers scope for an essentially social and dialogic content in which the characters are brought fully into being through a multiplicity of self-expressions, albeit derived from the writers imagination. Susan Z. Andrade suggests that:

This notion of dialogue derives from Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism. For Bakhtin, the novel is the ideal manifestation of dialogism, containing a multiplicity of discourse(s) within and between texts.113

Andrade also comments on dialogism's encompassing intertextuality with its response of one text to another, and heteroglossia with the free play of contradictions within a text:
Dialogism's focus on the interplay of discourse thus provides a critical lens through which to read the fictions of literature, the "real" of history, and the gestures of resistance inscribed in African women's writing... [citing Hermann who asserts] that the interplay within a female literary history is "between history in which it has been virtually impossible for women to write and be read and the texts produced as a form of resistance against particular historical conditions..." (ibid p.95)

Andrade applies this to her observations from her:

Reading Nwapa's *Efuru* and Emecheta's revision of that narrative in *The Joys of Motherhood* [that] reveals one such example of a female literary history, illustrating the bridges between texts as well as the discursive chasms within history. The historical inter-text to *Efuru* and *The Joys of Motherhood* is the 1929 Igbo Women'War, in Igbo, *Ogu Umunwanyi*, which is archivally recorded by the British as the "Aba Riots."
7 Flora Nwapa

Flora Nwapa comes from a background of experience as public servant, publisher, short-story writer and writer of children's literature. She was "Nigeria's first woman novelist and the first black African woman to gain an international reputation." Her parents were both teachers, though her mother retired from teaching to be a housewife. She was born in 1931 in Oguto, Nigeria and educated at Archdeacon Crowther's Memorial Girls' School, near Port Harcourt, the Church Missionary Girls' School, Enugu and the University of Ibadan, gaining her BA in 1957 and later attending Edinburgh University. She married Gogo Nwakuche, an industrialist, in 1977, and has three children. Her first two novels; *Efuru* (1966) and *Idu* (1970):

recreate the experience of Igbo women in traditional society - their social and economic activities and, above all their preoccupations with the problems of procreation, infertility and child-rearing. The two novels reveal evocatively the pain and misery which child-less or barren women suffered in Igbo traditional society. We are also made to realise the resourcefulness and industry of women in that society, which often made them successful, respected and influential women in their community.

The texts show to what extent women contribute to Igbo culture in their acceptance of the responsibility for the family, their resourcefulness in the generating and distribution of wealth in the local economy while in the division of labour the men are liberated from family responsibility by women's services as familial nurturers, carers and providers.

Chidi Ikonne believes that Nwapa never intended to write feminist tracts arguing that as:

A sociologist almost to a fault, Flora Nwapa is only trying to document, albeit in a fictional form, the way it was in a particular Igbo community at a particular point in time.. The rebellion of women who dare go against the norms of society is not meant to be a feminist ploy. It is merely used to highlight the impact of socialization on the woman's selfhood.

Taking a literary view of *Efuru* and *Idu* Lauretta Ngeobo argues that they

...belong to the anthropological genre, but with the difference that they restrict themselves to the village women's universe which is considerably smaller than the totality of life in the village. True to the genre the focus of the story is not on an individual but on the village as such.
Both Nwapa and Emecheta are iconoclasts in their subversion of the myth of motherhood as the sole source of fulfilment for the Igbo woman. In her first novel Efuru, Nwapa shows the possibilities for personal development open to women, both within and without motherhood, as the character Efuru subscribes to a traditional construction of female subjectivity. Deserted by her first husband, Adizua, for another woman (p.63), followed by the death of their daughter, Oginim (p.68), she re-marries and is again deserted, but temporarily, unable to enforce a woman's ambiguous, traditional moral authority with either husband in Igbo's male privileging society. Nwapa represents her as a woman who loves willingly within the constraints of marriage, but in losing the objects of her affection she reconstructs her life outside marriage and motherhood.

Represented by Nwapa as "self-willed,"(p.78) Efuru, as a young woman, is the headstrong heroine challenging the dominant representation of the male in Igbo culture. In traditional Igbo society women cannot aspire to equal power with men, however Efuru's success as a business woman and philanthropist is acknowledged by the community and, liberated from the traditional role of wife and mother, she becomes a notable force for good in the community, earning praise for doing "what only men are capable of..."(p.132)

Nwapa's fictional recreation of traditional Igbo society, with its own social orders and practices takes the reader into a world of rural industry, the extended family and the intimate lives of women in a male-dominated society. She represents how female development is founded on self-discipline, order, tolerance of male egocentricity and male self-privilege free of the burdens women carry for their men. Constraints are imposed by the woman's time and energy-demanding role as nurturer, carer and sometimes sole support of the family, not only of her own children but those of the wider community, the aged and the sick. Efuru takes on the burden of caring for her mother-in-law, Ossai (p.136), later getting a maid for her and going every day "to see and console her" (p.159). She re-decorates her father's house in the traditional style (pp.88/9) and regularly feeds a "troop of children" (p.100).
As an Igbo, Efuru's subjectivity is shaped from childhood to anticipate and prioritise motherhood as her major purpose and goal in life, together with the importance of bearing sons. She complies, but without lasting success. As a child, living with a family in which the mother was "among the handful of girls who went to school when fathers frowned at sending their daughter to school " (p.96) Efuru " learnt cooking, baking and sewing" (p.96). After growing up with the family's son, Difu, they meet again on his return from College as a doctor and Efuru's influence with him in prescribing for her friends enhances her status in the community for doing good. Knowing Difu gives Efuru direct access to Western medicine complementing the dibia, or native doctors with their alternative prescriptions and beliefs in charms and spells as cures.

Efuru "did not go to school" (p.127) proclaiming "We do not know book" (p.164) as a bar to being allowed to go to England - "the country of the white people."(p.164) Ajanupa's daughter "who was about fourteen" (p.44) attends school showing a breaking down of gender prejudice in education. But prejudice still lingers with Nkoyem Eneke's education threatening to be a hindrance to her being a suitable second wife for Efuru's second husband, Eneberi (pp.179/80). Eneberi went to school when he was sixteen years old reading "Up to standard five" (p.85) but going no further for lack of funds. Nwapa's introduction of Sunday and Eneberi as returned soldiers places the narrative in the post World War Two/Independence period. While the two men blame their education for being inducted into the Army (p.186) Sunday plans to send his younger sister to College if she does well at school (p.187). Eneberi views education for girls as "a waste"(p.191) but Sunday disagrees, blaming men for not allowing girls to "finish their schooling"(p.192). Primarily a girl's status and economic value is raised if she is educated, however the cultural imperative demanding that women be married means delay and a higher bride price, to be offset by the working wife's potential income. Discussing marriage Eneberi questions Sunday:

'And you? When are you getting married?'"As soon as I can pay the dowry. Ex-servicemen have made things difficult for us. Now a man who has four daughters counts himself a very wealthy man. Each daughter will bring to the father at least a hundred pounds in cash, in raw cash." (p.191)
The educated woman's raised consciousness of her own worth subverts the tradition of male dependence on the subordination of the female for the maintenance of his dominant image, but theoretically it is a move towards greater gender equity. Efuru's lack of formal education qualifies her as a traditional Igbo and consequently she presents no threat to the male ego.

Constructed as "a remarkable woman...from a distinguished family"(p.7) Efuru represents the rebellious daughter anticipating marriage outside accepted social practices. Her story evolves out of her resisting the convention of an arranged marriage in choosing to marry Adizua, a poor man and unknown for any outstanding qualities that would make him acceptable by the community as her husband. Characteristically their meeting is also outside accepted custom as, within a fortnight of meeting each other, "after the festival in which young men and young women looked for wives and husbands" (p.53), the couple agree to live together in a de facto relationship since Adizua has no money to pay the customary 'bride price' to Efuru's father, Nwashike Ogene. While Efuru is aware of the constraints such customs impose on youthful impatience and the shame she brings to her family (p.9), she is sensitive to cultural constraints as she voices her determination that the 'bride price' must and will be paid (p.10). Later, when Adizua leaves the farm and joins Efuru in trading, they prosper from the start. Making a huge profit from crayfish enables them to pay Efuru's 'bride price' to Nwashike,(p.21) with Efuru paradoxically helping to pay Adizua's debt that commodifies her by making her his possession.

The local community's concern for Efuru's well-being is shown in the reporting of her courting routine and subsequent move to Adizua's home in her father's absence. As a widower (p.25), Nwashike fears for Efuru's future should she become pregnant and have no woman to take care of her. Nwashike's voice is that of traditional patriarchal power with the authority to muster groups of men to represent him. Sending two successive groups of men to fetch Efuru home meets with negative responses. Nwashike's later offers of escorts or representatives, to find Adizua following the death of their two-year old daughter, Ogimin (pp.78/9), are also rejected. Efuru's refusal to return to the family
home, and Nwashike's failure to confront Efuru and Adizua are seen as a breakdown in communication and local patriarchal authority, subverted by the imposition of colonial laws which override local custom and tradition. (p. 11) In the narrative Nwapa expresses these sentiments through local opinion and concern:

The amazing thing is that the father has done nothing about it. He has sent some young men to fetch his daughter, but she did not go with them. And since then he has done nothing about it. If it were in his youthful days, Nwashike would have taught that fool a lesson. Things are changing fast these days. These white people have imposed so much strain on our people. The least thing you do nowadays you are put in prison. (pp. 11/12)

Nwashike's diminished patriarchal authority here is family oriented and grounded in a universal type of male domination characterised by the rule of fathers (or father figures) over women and children. Chastity did not necessarily imply virginity. It meant that if a woman was unmarried she was under the control of her father, who could use her labour power and exchange her in marriage. 121

Nwapa describes Efuru's community as a "little town" (p. 216) and within reach of the arm of colonial law. The people find the outlawing of the tradition of distilling home-made gin particularly oppressive because of its popularity with men and older women, although it is an acquired taste for some as Nwapa demonstrates with Nwashike attempting to pacify a young visitor:

'Please give us a bottle of gin and a ganashi,' Efuru's father addressed somebody within. The gin and the ganashi were brought. 'You drink some, my son, it will steady your nerves. It has a way of steadying one's nerves.' The young man refused to have it. 'I don't drink gin,' he said. 'This is unheard of. What does a young man like you drink if he does not drink gin. Are you a woman? Only women don't drink. A man drinks palm wine, and gin. So drink my son. Drink, for drink has a way of drowning one's sorrows. Drink, my son, it will do you good.' The man could no longer refuse. It would have been an insult if he had said no again. So he took the ganashi from Efuru's father and drank it all in one gulp. (p. 144)

One character, playing a cat and mouse game with investigating policemen, (p. 86) finds no "difference between it [home-made gin] and the gin sold in special bottles in the shop" (p. 13). Adiberi is jailed for stealing a fowl (p. 211), of value as a source of food and in sacrificial rituals. With the loss of his yam crop Nwosu, unable to pay his tax, fears a jail sentence and its effect on his five children. Elizabeth Isichei notes that the Court
Messengers, who had the duty of serving summonses, built up a "grim record of exploitation and corruption" similar to the Court Clerks and Warrant Chiefs. The day after thieves broke into Nwosu's house Ajanupa compares traditional law with colonial law and the churches' influence:

In my youth there was no stealing. If you stole you were sold as a slave. If your property was stolen, you simply went to one of the idols and prayed him to visit the thief. Before two or three days, you recovered your property. But these churchgoers have spoilt everything. They tell us our gods have no power, so our people continue to steal. (p. 176)

Endowed with a sense of power as "the daughter of Nwashike Ogene, the mighty man of valour..."(p.11) Efuru's personal power is further enhanced with the community's acknowledgment of her as a "very beautiful woman" (p.11). Constructed as an object of the male sexual gaze, she is openly coveted by the husbands of other local women who lose favour by comparison (p.12) in an unwinnable, male-empowering contest. Feminine beauty however is incidental in traditional Igbo society where the bearing of children, and preferably sons, is paramount to the maintaining of the myth of motherhood as the sole source of a woman's fulfilment.

Efuru's failure to produce more than one child makes it imperative that her husband marry a second or even third wife; an imperative Eneberi comes to accept. After the death of Oginim any further joy of motherhood for Efuru must come from sharing other women's children. With Eneberi's accusation of Efuru's adultery, and her contracting a disease requiring prolonged treatment (p.220) Efuru leaves Eneberi with his other wives and returns to her father's house closing the narrative on an enigmatic note with Efuru dreaming of the Lake Goddess, Uhamiri, who "had never experienced the joy of motherhood [so] Why then did the women worship her?" (p.221)

In Efuru, Nwapa refers to the cultural practice of female circumcision, a euphemism for the practice of clitoridectomy and infibulation, more accurately described as female genital mutilation. Prefacing the description of Efuru's circumcision, Nwapa shows her counselled by her mother-in-law who uses the colloquial and euphemistic 'taking a bath' with its connotations of cleansing for the act of circumcision; "A young
woman must have her bath before she has a baby." (p.11). Efuru is compliant, only insisting that Adizua "must be told and he will come from the farm before it is done."(p.11) Alien to Western culture, female circumcision is one of the more oppressive cultural practices confronting the Western enquirer into some societies. The use of the more acceptable term 'circumcision' equates the practice with the excising of the male prepuce, a practice having no deleterious effect on the physical appearance, sexual pleasure or any other penile function. Female 'circumcision' on the other hand involves the irreversible excision of part or whole of the clitoris or the more drastic removal of all genitalia followed by the sewing up of the female "leaving only a small hole for the passage of menstrual blood and urine. She must be cut open to allow intercourse with her husband or for childbirth."123 The practice is deeply entrenched in some Islamic and African cultures affecting millions of girls and women and Caroline Ramazanoglu notes that:

Circumcision is practised and insisted on by women as well as men, in spite of the many physical and psychological injuries that can follow. This is not to underestimate the extent of the mutilation of women that does in fact take place or the resistance of young women to circumcision.124

Dismissing cultural imperatives for continuing these practices Ramazanoglu advocates an enlightened and humane world view with her opinion that "There is no doubt that female circumcision causes loss of sexual pleasure, mental distress, and ill health to women and that it enforces man's control of women's sexuality."125 In her survey of the world-wide economic, political and physical suppression of women; The War Against Women,126 Marilyn French cites female genital mutilation as an example of African female oppression relevant to a study of black African women's writing. She writes:

Tied to religion and the notion that women bear the burden of human sexual morals is a practice promoted under the aegis of many religions, genital mutilation of women, which an estimated twenty million women in the world today have undergone.127
The subject is cloaked in secrecy prompting the comment that because "researchers are seen as intruders, infidels or Westerners bent on converting the world to their own vision" learning more about the practice in Africa and Asia is a frustrating experience.

Nwapa neither apologises for nor explains why she includes mention of the practice in the narrative. As a custom endured by the traditional Igbo female Nwapa may feel there is no need to give an explanation of the cultural reasons for the practice, leaving the uninitiated to fill in any gaps she leaves in the text with their imagination or personal research, with all its difficulties indicated by French. In her discussion of 'The Society and Woman's Quest for Selfhood in Flora Nwapa's Early Novels' Chidi Ikonne argues that:

The apparent reason for this inhumane operation is that it will enhance child-bearing (E p10). It is however, known that in the society reflected in the novel, people are aware of the fact that while circumcision increases a man's coital ability, clitoridectomy reduces female sexuality. It is safe, therefore, to suspect that in encouraging the operation, the male-centric society is only trying to bring the woman to the level at which the man, with his inferior sexual disposition, can cope with his wife. The use of the metaphor 'having a bath' for the ritual 'castration' of the woman encapsulates the usual tendency in a patriarchy to denigrate the woman in order to justifiably dominate and re-create her in accordance with men's taste.

As a rite of passage, Efuru's circumcision is a prelude to her public recognition as a fully encultured member of Igbo society. A period of pampering and feasting follows the circumcision with Ossai, Efuru's mother-in-law seeing to it that she was very well looked after:

She was to eat the best food and she was to do no work. She was simply to eat and grow fat. And above all she was to look beautiful. The camwood was used in dyeing her cloth. She also rubbed it all over her body and the izziziani was used for her face.

Ossai rubbed some camwood on her own hands and feet to let people know that her daughter had been circumcised, (p.15) and once the wound was healed Efuru went out with other circumcised women and as objects of attraction people stopped to watch and admire them (p.17). Nwapa creates a gap of silence for the Western or uninitiated reader unfamiliar with this aspect of Igbo culture, an aspect every Igbo female is subjected to
and commented on by Ajanupu on a visit to the recuperating Efuru "...it is what every woman undergoes. So don't worry" (p.15). Efuru meets with all the conventions associated with her circumcision, guided by the older women. Overhearing them in the market vying for compliments of their care of her Efuru questions "Who can please the world?" (p.19) A gap of silence surrounds any effect circumcision may have on Efuru's subjectivity or whether in fact it causes any diminution or enhancement of sexual pleasure for either or both partners. Efuru's anticipation of marriage with Adizua before her circumcision suggests a complete, fulfilling and pleasurable sexual relationship and while the cited critics comment on the deleterious effect the practice has on a woman's libido so Nwapa may be implying this in revealing Efuru's thoughts. Although everything went well with her debut at the market as a circumcised woman and "Many people came to the house to congratulate her and her mother-in-law...something weighed Efuru down" (p.19).

Refusing to be constrained by custom which says she should join Adizua in working on his farm Efuru chooses to stay in town to work as a trader,(p.7) an acceptable and customary occupation for women in Igbo society, although it is common practice for women to entirely support their families by combining the two occupations in order to do so. Despite Nwashike's demoralisation, Efuru's privileged position as his daughter, together with her good standing in the community, allow her to choose between economic dependence on Adizua and the physically demanding and isolated life on a farm or independence as a sole trader. Efuru's "hands make money" a hereditary trait Nwashike attributes to her mother who:

...was so good that whatever she put her hand to money flowed in, when she sold pepper, she made huge profits, when she sold yams or fish she made profits also. She was so rich that she became the head of her age-group. She spent a lot of money for her age-group. Then she took titles.

The narrative reveals how economic power can be a liberating force, as it offers choices. Efuru and Adizua work together earning enough money for her 'bride price' - traditionally a man's burden - to pay her father(p.24) and freeing Adizua from the debt.
Later, as a successful business woman, she uses her wealth and influence to help members of the local community, giving and lending money to people interest free. Efiiru sends her maid's father, Nwosu, (p.101) followed by Nnona, (p.129) to Onicha for medical treatment at her own expense enhancing her reputation for doing good in the community and earning praise for doing "what only men are capable of..." (p.152).

Nwapa shows how the introduction of Christianity into indigenous cultures conflicted with local, traditional beliefs and practices, particularly as these affected women and their families. The birth of twins in Igbo culture was considered an abomination, and the babies were abandoned to die so one of the reasons for the popularity of Christianity as another way of life by indigenous females was that they could keep their children. Efiuru's worship of the Lake Goddess Uhamiri is at odds with the patriarchal dictates of a single Christian God and the exclusion of women from the Christian priesthood. In contrast, the totally female world of Uhamiri is 'woman's space', a retreat closed to men and void of children. It is part of Igbo traditional religion with its ancestor worship, sacrificial rituals and prayers to a multiplicity of gods, goddesses and the spirits of the dead keeping the past closely linked and relevant to the present.

With the death of her only child, Oginim, (p.68) and her failure to produce any more children with either Adizua or her second husband Eneberi, Efiuru is considered to be barren, a pre-requisite for her acceptance into the priesthood of Uhamiri's order. Men are not completely barred from Uhamiri's world however as Nwapa shows Nwosu and Igwe, a fisherman, giving thanks to her for their safe trip on the Great River on their way to attend Nwashike Ogene's funeral, "we are grateful." (p.201) Eneberi is unconstrained by the conflict inherent in traditional beliefs superimposed by Christianity as he recounts being nearly robbed of all his money in Onicha market, while his mother sacrificed to their ancestors Eneberi was to "give the pastor some money to thank God for it." (p.112) showing his partial assimilation into Western culture.

As a postcolonial discourse, Efiuru shows how the diminished authority of the indigenous father and husband is blamed on the influence of the imperialist whose laws
constrain and disempower the indigenous male in some cultural practices. The colonialist strategy of 'divide and rule' at the local level serves to erode the male indigene's traditional pride and domination in indigenous society constructing him as 'other' and inferior in opposition to the coloniser's self-appointed and superior 'Self'. Nwashike's reduced sense of self-worth is a liberating force for Efuru. No longer is it imperative that she live in the shadow of her father's heroic image. By asserting herself she subverts the myth of motherhood as the sole source of fulfilment for the Igbo woman and reclaims her own narrative, to be told from a feminine perspective although still from within a male-dominated society.

Nwapa confronts the dominant representation of the Igbo woman as the eternal mother in her second novel, *Idu*[^134] in which the heroine goes against tradition as she prioritises love for her husband, Adiewere, before mother love. The lives of both Efuru and Idu are motivated by cultural imperatives that prioritise marriage and motherhood for the Igbo woman and while both women comply with tradition both are eventually left alone; Efuru as the twice deserted wife who continues a quest for selfhood, and Idu in her brief period of widowhood which leaves her so bereaved she chooses to die. Although not actively rebellious against the system, each woman chooses to defy it at a crucial point in her life.

Nwapa gives her heroines physical beauty and although not actively rebellious against the system, each woman chooses to defy it at a crucial point in her life with Efuru finding a source of selfhood beyond conventional marriage and motherhood and Idu choosing to align herself with Adiewere in death rather than follow custom by marrying her brother-in-law, Oshiudo (p.216). Both women negotiate their gendered positions as subordinates in a male-dominated society with Efuru demonstrating the possibility for greater gender equity through economic independence. As a role model for female negotiation towards greater gender equity Idu is the more conventional, and dramatic. For Idu, accepting her role as wife and mother entails mutual promises, not to be broken, and Adiewere's death constitutes a breach of their joint plans. Urged to weep following his death Idu answers with:

[^134]: p.216
"Weep for what?" she asked. "Weep for Adiewere? That is not what we agreed on. He has cheated me. We did not agree this would happen. We did not agree on what to do if this sort of thing happened. We did not think of it. Why do you want me to weep. I am going with him. Leave me alone, I am going with him (p.210).

The meaning of gender equity for Idu lies in a compatible marriage and she constantly aims for this in her relationship with Adiewere who, for the most part, responds.

A Bakhtinian dialogism brings life and individuality to the characters of Idu's narrative with dialogue opening and sustaining Nwapa's creating an image of communal life with its interdependency and mutual interest in the local economy, politics, the environment and Igbo tradition. Nwapa portrays the marketplace as primarily woman's domain with days set aside in the Lake Goddess Uhamiri's calendar, permitting or prohibiting trading. But it is Adiewere's "Hands that make money" (p.3) rather than Idu's and working in partnership they prosper and plan to finish building their house with each to "take a title" (p.206).

When Idu fails to conceive in three years of marriage (p.16) their contentment with each other is threatened by community pressure for Adiewere to take another wife (pp.33/4). The objectification of the Igbo female is contained in Onyemuru's remarking "There are many girls around" (p.33) meaning available for marriage. Giving in to tradition Adiewere and Idu choose a second wife for him (p.49) but Adiewere concluded that "...he was not at heart a polygamist. All he wanted was one good wife and children" (p.51) Teased by his age-group and not wanting trouble, Adiewere is at a loss with what to do with his second wife in the initial stages (p.51) although the custom is to "pet a newly-married wife. Then, after a month or so, [you] leave her to fend for herself." (pp.55/6) Idu's pregnancy and the second wife's desertion of Adiewere for her lover solves Idu's problem of sharing her husband with another wife and also frees her from the accusation of being a 'bad woman' for wanting to monopolise Adiewere's attentions.

Like Efuru, Idu is representative of women who do good in the community. She is supportive of Onyemuru who, "throughout the town has a reputation as a bringer of bad news causing people to worry when approached by her" (p.128) Referred to as a
"witch" (p.31) Onyemuru regards Idu "like a sister" since she does not have a "sister, brother, or a friend" (p.30). As the local ferry woman Onyemuru sometimes hires out her canoe and when it is not returned she turns to Idu for help. A search party is arranged and Idu cooks for them and gives Onyemuru "a little money" (p.28).

Idu and Adiewere are the mainstay of Adiewere's only brother, Ishiodu, his wife Obeyanu and their three children (p.71). Ishiodu is portrayed as 'lazy' (p.29) and 'a ne'er-do-well' (p.14); it is Obenyanu who "works the vegetable farm alone" (p.29). Nwapa reveals the state of their marriage through local gossip and Idu and Adiewere's support. Ogbenyanu's inability to trade successfully brands her as a 'senseless woman':

'No, she does not know how to trade. That is why we say that she has no sense. A woman who does not know how to trade in our town is a senseless woman. She is not a woman at all. You know that when she had just married Ishiodu, Adiewere and Idu gave them some money to start trading. In no time they were in debt, and Idu and Adiewere had to pay off their debts for them.' (p.29)

When Idu's business friend is murdered she takes care of his schoolboy son. (p.173) But not everyone recognises this as an act of kindness and there is speculation as to "what more was between the boy's father and Idu " (p.174) The gossip is a blow to Adiewere's pride. He initiates a quarrel with Idu who meets with his demands for an apology in the form of "a whole piece of eight yards of gorge" (p.175) restoring Adiewere's pride and ending their quarrel.

While it is Idu who appears to make the concessions in her aims for an harmonious relationship with Adiewere, she is not averse to letting him know of his failings. Adiewere, following tradition, has a great deal of freedom within the marriage relationship. He socialises with his age-group to a greater extent than Idu, joining them for drinking and dancing (p.201). Idu reveals her knowledge of his adultery with Izukanane(p.206) shaming him into promising future fidelity (p.207). As the moral authority for the traditional Igbo woman Uhamiri:

... hated prostitution, she forbade it. If any of the women ignored the Woman of the Lake she gave them two or three years in which to repent, that is, to come home and get married like any respectable woman. If after this period the person did not repent, something dreadful would happen to her. She would either become mad or contract a very bad disease of which she would die (p.120).
A woman's compliance with the commodifying 'bride price' and its enriching of the bride's family extends to prostituting herself for personal gain or survival in a patriarchal society. Under Uhamiri's law however prostitutes are offered redemption by marrying and having children within a marriage relationship. Nwapa introduces prostitutes into the narrative, exemplified in Idu's comment to Ojiugo, "When I see people like Nwakuma, Anedi, Onyeazo and many others in their group I shake my head. These are the women who misused themselves, who were prostitutes, and now God has blessed them with children... (p.38)

Ogbenyanu Azaka's quest for selfhood and economic independence are met when she becomes a prostitute. Described as 'That broken one' (p.195) she leaves her husband returning six months later simply to pay back her bride price. Going away again she is rumoured to be living in Abonema as a prostitute of the worst kind, "She was going with white people" (p.195). A model of Uhamiri's prodigal creed, or simply pragmatic, "She came back quickly when she had enough money, started trading in cloth, and then she married" (p.195). As a product of the marriage eight lively children erase the local collective memory of her past reputation - "Nobody remembers her past life now" (p.195) comments Uzoechi. Nwapa also describes the unsuccessful prostitute in the character of Obiaku through the voice of Ojiugo:

She was naked and she smelt like a corpse. Flies were all over her. I wept. Children were watching her and some were even throwing stones at her. I drove the children away, and gave her my top wrapper to cover herself. She thanked me and began to weep... (p.39)

In a culture which restricts feminine creativity primarily to motherhood there is a tremendous amount of ritual regarding the preparation and serving of food woven into the narratives, tasks traditionally allocated to the woman from the fetching of water, the splitting of firewood, shopping at the marketplace to the cooking itself. Uzoechi finds food for gossip when a husband breaks with tradition by cooking for his pregnant wife after splitting the wood and fetching the water thus reversing traditional social practices.(p.197) Nwasobi prepares some cassava in the stream. His houseboy cooks chicken and pounds yam for Amarajeme (p.149), his last meal before hanging himself.
Feeding children before they go to sleep is a ritual "so witches don't give them food in their dreams." (p.184) Anamadi cooks what is to be Idu's final meal. Slicing the yam and putting it over the fire she then "...cut ugu in bits, pounded the pepper and washed the dried fish. Soon the yam was ready. It was ready quickly and this was because she put a small slice of yam on top of the cover of the pot..." (p.217)

As an icon of Igbo culture the kola nut serves a variety of purposes. The seed of West Africa's native kola tree it is used as a condiment, a tonic, an antidote to alcoholism and as an offering to guests. Deserted by his wife, Ojiugu, Amarajeme treasures a kola dish as the only thing she left with him. Visited by Idu and Adiewere he insists on the ritual of blessing the kola before breaking it (p.107).

In her narrative Nwapa merges colonial influences with the day to day lives of the indigenes bringing oppositional and institutionalised law to localised traditional justice. Adiewere feels obliged to go to Abonema to help his brother Ishiodu who is having "difficulty with the police" (p.91) over some missing kernels. Acceptance of colonial law is shown in the reporting of Okeke's murder by a group of thieves to "the police at Oweke" (p.169) As a modern story teller, Nwapa's 'good versus evil' theme continues the oral tradition of instructing while entertaining her audience.

Other colonial influences impinging on the narrative includes the indigenes' materialistic view of the imperial centre. When Adiewere goes to Ibonema to clear a consignment of wet kernels with the customs, he sends his son, Ijoma, "some clothes...sewn in the land of the white people" (p.132/3). Colonial influences are introduced into the traditional story-telling with the tale of "a king and his ten wives." (p.151) Some of the wives served their food on golden plates brought from the land of the white people" (p.153) and the king's favourite wife was given "clothes seen only in the land of the white people." (p.153)

The colonial education system is not universally accepted by the indigene as Nwapa shows in Amarajeme and Idu's discourse with Idu arguing against sending Ijoma to school believing he will be flogged to death by the teachers. While Adiewere agrees
that children are flogged he argues in favour of a colonial education if only as a defence against cheating clerks:

"but children learn a lot from school. Your son will be able to speak the language of the white people if he goes to school. You could take him along to the beach, and he would be an interpreter between you and the white man on the beach. Those clerks would not be able to cheat you any more (p.134).

Colonial influences in Idu's community are marginalised having their central authority located at a distance and, while Nigerian Independence is still in the future, Amarajeme's argument does suggest a favouring of an educated indigenous population equipped to govern a former colony with its implemented syncretisation of Western and indigenous cultures.

Nwapa constructs both Efuru and Idu as post-colonial subjects dominated by Igbo tradition which is subverted by colonial influences. Coming from the same cultural background both women show their individuality in a society of stereotyped women, constrained by marriage and motherhood. While both women do marry and have children after an agonising interval of childlessness, the reality of conforming to tradition in a male-dominated society raises their consciousness and they turn away from custom and what is expected of them. Assessing their options they decide as individuals what they will do with their lives - Efuru as an abandoned wife and Idu as a widow.

Their narratives are characterised by a town community of voices at the heart of a hinterland of towns, villages, the Great River and Uhamiri's Lake. Dialogue is exchanged at the local stream over bathing, swimming, washing clothes and fetching water, the marketplace and compound, all recognised places of assembly producing the 'parish pump' and 'well' images of other cultures and their narratives.

As nationalist texts both novels are metaphors for a quest into new terrain, no longer subjected to colonialism but a return to indigenous rule and a patriarchy dominated by the damaged egos of men, and a question mark over the position of the female in the new order and a greatly changed economy.

Extending the image further Efuru is a metaphor for the decolonised Igbo woman who appropriates self-reliance as a defence against dependency on the patriarchal male
for survival as his subordinate. She foreshadows the struggle ahead for her sex in the prolonged political and civil strife to come with Independence. Idu, on the other hand is a metaphor for the victim of unacceptable change.

In *One is Enough* (1981) assumptions of male supremacy are questioned as Nwapa draws on social realism and subverts traditional social structures designed to empower the male and subordinate the female in the process. Amaka, the principal character, is 30 and a successful businesswoman, but after 6 years of marriage to Obiora is obsessed with her failure to produce a child. Shy and unassertive initially she is shocked to learn from her mother-in-law of her husband's secret marriage to a second wife who has borne him two sons. Subjected to the conflicting beliefs of an aunt, her mother and mother-in-law, as bearers of traditional wisdom and pragmatism, she must decide her own independent course of action.

Representative of the past, the three older women share a belief in the primacy of motherhood as the outlet for feminine creativity and fulfilment, only differing in their ways of accomplishing this. Speaking from personal experience the aunt advocates economic independence and motherhood outside marriage rather than a loveless union citing her own betrothal to a man she disliked. Having borne him seven children in seven years of marriage she negotiated her freedom to concentrate on her business and the education of their children by marrying a sixteen year-old girl for her husband. She warns Amaka never to depend on a husband nor slave for him or leave him and to "have her own business no matter how small." She suggests Amaka adopt a more positive attitude in telling her she is "too simple and too trusting" and seeming not to know what she wants in life. Amaka's mother also believes in the importance of a woman's economic independence, cultivating men friends and having children with or without marriage.

Nwapa constructs Amaka's mother-in-law as antagonistic, clinging to an outmoded power. Contemptuous of Obiora and his father she is full of contradictions and by her actions causes the breakdown of the family. Her advocating of polygamy, although an option, is abhorrent to Amaka "because of the changes
and pattern of life in that society" (p. 17) a society in which "A husband was content if his wife got rich by dint of hard work or good fortune." (p. 17) Remembering the teachings of the missionaries with their emphasis on "chastity, marriage and the home" (p. 11) Amaka questions the incompatibility of her own culture and that of the coloniser since both cultures had been recognised in her and Obiora's marrying "in church in Onitsha after completing the traditional marriage ceremonies." (p. 12) Amaka works for gender equity in her marriage, materially "complementing the food budget" (p. 19) and using her savings to replace Obiora's Volkswagon car with a Peugeot 504. (p. 16) After a beating from Obiora, Amaka "tried to avoid any argument that could lead to a show of strength..." (p. 28) but with the threat of a second beating Amaka's striking of Obiora first precipitates her leaving him for Lagos (p. 31) with its greater opportunities for enterprising women.

By dismissing the power of tradition and mythology to determine the course of her life Amaka finds the end justifies the means with her acceptance, as a player, into a corrupt post-Biafran War business world in which she meets and takes as her lover, Father McLaid. Her material success is complemented by twins bringing her fulfilment as a woman in the Igbo tradition and expressed in the novel's closing words; "...that I shall forever remain grateful to him for proving to the world that I am a mother as well as a woman." (p. 154)

By making her mark as Nigeria's first woman novelist, and first black African woman writer to gain an international reputation, Nwapa is assured of her place in the development of an African national literature. Her texts are characterised by authentic representations of a culture familiar to her as a native of Nigeria and, continuing the tradition of story-telling - exemplified in her texts - she uses her voice to fill gaps of silence regarding the lives of women in a predominantly male produced, and male controlled, canon.
8 Buchi Emecheta

Born in 1944, Buchi Emecheta is a contemporary of both Mariama Ba, who was born in 1929 and Flora Nwapa, born in 1931. The three writers share the experience of living in a significant period of history; the closing years of colonial rule which led to Independence and self-rule. Although an Igbo too, Buchi Emecheta has chosen a different range of subject matter from Nwapa. While both women write African-centred texts, Emecheta extends this to write of Nigerians living in the United Kingdom and members of the African diaspora living in the West Indies and moving to Britain. She continues to write as a permanent resident of London. Nwapa also visited Britain, to attend Edinburgh University, but returned to Nigeria to write. Issues of colonialism such as racial and cultural differences and their effects on women are more prominent in Emecheta's works than Nwapa's where female characters are shown as compliant, or adapting to their traditional role as subordinates in male-dominated societies. Emecheta is more critical of the institutions of traditional Igbo society because of their lack of opportunities for female education, economic independence and development beyond the domestic sphere.

Significant differences in Emecheta's and Nwapa's narratives include Emecheta's greater criticism of female oppression in traditional Igbo society - she is more concerned with the injustices that women suffer than Nwapa. Nwapa shows what it is like to be a woman in traditional Igbo society leaving any judgment on the question of justice to her audience.

A full-time writer, Emecheta has been novelist, scriptwriter, writer for children and publisher. The youngest of the three writers discussed in this thesis, she is also the most prolific producing a large body of work. Of her works selected for this study some are highly autobiographical and deal with the experiences of a young Nigerian woman living in London, others are set in the past depicting traditional Igbo society. The final novel chosen, The Family, (1990) deals with the theme of expatriates, descendants of slaves taken from Africa to the Caribbean, it looks at the situation of members of the
African diaspora living in the West Indies, but the heroine of the novel travels to London, that former imperial centre.

In her autobiography *Head Above Water* (1986), Emecheta writes of her assimilation into Western culture from early childhood and the wider range of choices this offered a young woman through education, compared with living a traditional, Igbo existence under threat from introduced modernising systems, a major theme in her novel *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). Writing *Head Above Water*\(^{137}\) after the publication of "more than ten books" *(HAW p.1)* Emecheta refers to incidents from some of these, "touching lightly here and there on... incidents dealt with in depth in *Second-Class Citizen*, (1974), *In the Ditch*,(1972), *The Bride Price*,(1976), *The Slave Girl*,(1977), *The Joys of Motherhood*,(1979) and *Double Yoke*. (1983)"*(HAW p.1)*

While Emecheta draws thematically on the important role of motherhood in traditional Igbo culture there is an implied criticism of the indigenous mothers lack of guidance and control over their sons in *The Rape of Shavi*,(1983), one of her works "based on ideas and ideals" *(HAW p.1)*. Emecheta's criticism is conveyed in her message of hope for the future of humanity through the united efforts of all women of all races "to try to salvage what is left of our world" from what she describes as "the mess the sons we have brought into it have made."*(HAW p1). As an autobiography *Head Above Water* throws some light on how Emecheta survived and managed to make a living from writing in England.

In common with other writers from former colonies now narrating their experiences both as colonial subjects and as liberated citizens, Emecheta writes for herself as an established author and for a European and African audience interested in the lives of formerly colonised peoples living under oppressive regimes. Traditional Igbo culture is an important subject in her writing, with themes of motherhood, the bride price and female economic independence prominent.\(^ {138}\) Her autobiographical novels about growing up in Lagos and living as an immigrant in London's poorer districts can be seen as inspirational with their messages of hope for other immigrants attempting to assimilate into multi-cultural societies and modernising systems. As a group these novels are
constructed along the lines of quest narratives as they trace the various protagonists' journeys towards self-discovery and liberation through access to education, or tragedy because they have been denied the requisite knowledge to survive in societies in transition from an indigenous, traditional culture to Western economic systems of production and social orders.

Emecheta was born in Lagos of Igbo parents, \((HAW\ p.9)\) and her father, a railway worker, died when she was young. His death meant the loss of a husband, father and source of family income. Because of the Igbo tradition that boys should have priority with access to education over their sisters, Emecheta's education was in jeopardy.\((p.12)\) She secretly sat for, and won, a scholarship examination to the Methodist Girls' High School.\((p.25)\) The scholarship included full board and accommodation. The alternative would have been an arranged marriage at the age of twelve.\((p.25)\) Following the death of her husband, Emecheta's mother, a "Christian woman", \((p.17)\) followed Igbo tradition and "had gone back to being a native in [her] village town, Ibusa, for the sake of survival,"\((p.17)\) working as a seamstress, \((p.24)\) despite her literacy skills \((p.8)\) and familiarity with urban living. For Emecheta, further education meant that she "was to be brought up in the new way...instead of being in the village and claying the mud floors of [her] ancestors."\((p.16)\) At the Methodist Girls High School the girls were taught by the white missionaries to "value their own importance" since "they were going to be the new women of the new Africa."\((p.15)\) Choosing her own husband, and against her family's wishes, she married immediately after completing her studies, had her first child by the time she was seventeen and then accompanied her student husband to London in 1962, where they lived in council housing and had three more children.\(^{139}\) Following the breakdown of their marriage, Emecheta reared their children, with the help of social security support, while reading for a degree in sociology and writing her first autobiographical novel, \textit{In the Ditch}, in which she fictionalises her own life in the character of Adah.
Commenting on the challenges of writing, and particularly the writing of 'That First Novel'\textsuperscript{140} from a woman's perspective, Emecheta notes among these the gender inequities in male-dominated spheres stating:

The world, especially the African world, still regards the premise of serious writing as a masculine preserve. We all know this and accept this cultural lag, for unfortunately it is very true. (p.115)

On a more personal level Emecheta shows how she was conditioned to fail in her ambition to become a writer, first by the derision of Miss Humble, one of her teachers in Lagos (\textit{HAW} p.21) and then with the burning by her husband of what would have been her first work, \textit{The Bride Price}, (p.32), But she discovers the cultivation of the art of laughing at herself (116) an empowering survival strategy.

Since Nigerian writers in English have been predominantly male, Emecheta's and Nwapa's contributions help create greater awareness of gender issues. This can be seen in their choice of motherhood as a major theme in some of their narratives - generally a neglected theme in male-produced texts. While parenthood is an experience shared by both men and women, women writers show how patriarchal ideologies and tradition place the primary responsibility for the time and energy-consuming care and nurturing of children onto women - the mother in the first instance and, by extension, the other women in the family.

In the wider community, both Nwapa and Emecheta show that, with parenting and family support as a full-time occupation for the majority of women, they must negotiate for time and resources to follow other needs and desires. Where a network of support exists order is brought into play in an area of potential chaos and disaster for the infant, family, and the community as a whole. At the local level Carol, the social worker allocated to the Pussy Cat Mansions community in Emecheta's first novel, \textit{In the Ditch},(1972)\textsuperscript{141} succeeds only partially in creating such a network of support.

Emecheta brings her knowledge and experience of Igbo culture to her writings exposing the myth of the sanctity of motherhood in her ironically titled novel \textit{The Joys of Motherhood}.(1979)\textsuperscript{142} The major theme of motherhood is introduced in her first novel,
In the Ditch, and the two texts exemplify the diversity of settings chosen for her narratives. While those set in postcolonial Nigeria emphasise Igbo culture at its source In the Ditch reflects on the syncretisation of this with a dominant Western culture in post-World War Two Britain.

Publication of Emecheta's first novel, In the Ditch, began as a series of essays in The New Statesman (p.121) under the successive titles of 'Observations of the London Poor' and 'Life in the Ditch'.¹⁴³ The reputation of The New Statesman as a publication read by sections of the intelligentsia with left-wing views gives an indication as to Emecheta's reading public. Her choice of title; In the Ditch, draws on the image of a common feature of landscape, a long narrow hollow made in the earth by digging and used for draining and irrigating land. In the course of attracting run-off water from the land any flotsam and jetsam in its path is carried along, to end up in the ditch. It is in this context that Emecheta positions the novel's heroine, Adah. As a metaphor In the Ditch describes her adventures as an immigrant Nigerian woman, and her young family's survival in post World-War 11 Britain. Cast adrift following the breakdown of her marriage, she becomes part of London's flotsam and jetsam, dependent upon charity and government welfare policies to keep afloat. Determined not to be defeated by her situation, she manages to combine studying for a degree and raising her five children.

Adah's expectations of marriage as a permanent union are unfulfilled with her husband, Francis,' desertion, leaving her to raise their five children on whatever support she can negotiate. Adah dismisses the option of having the children adopted or of returning to Nigeria to live with Francis' family in the Igbo tradition as retrograde steps in her quest for selfhood through writing. She finds that man's parental responsibilities, relegated to the extended family, primarily the women, in indigenous societies, are taken over by the wider community, through State welfare systems, in Britain's "indifferent society."(HAW p.5)

Established class divisions, so pronounced a part of Britain's social structure, influence Adah's life with her change of status from civil servant and the wife of an overseas tertiary student to sole parent, initially trying to support a family on her salary.
She finds fulfilment and success in rearing her children and in writing, describing *In the Ditch* as:

... a documentary novel of the daily happenings of my life when I was living in this place officially known as Montague Tibbles in the Prince of Wales Road in London. Many people in Africa have since asked me why such a place I described happened to be in a street belonging to the handsome Prince of Wales? Well I still do not know the answer, but by the time I moved in there, that particular block of flats was known as The Pussy Cat Mansions, a place which, by accident or design, looked as if it was set apart for problem families. (p. 120)

Pussy Cat Mansions has its share of problem families, misfits to be accommodated in a highly structured, industrialised society. These families provide employment opportunities for social workers, such as Carol, in this instance a white woman, whose job is to make their lives 'in the ditch' bearable. Such Social Welfare Officers are substitutes for elders in the traditional extended family, acting as advisers in decision making of mutual benefit in maintaining a local, dominant ideology based on a white majority and the assimilation of unprecedented numbers of black immigrants from former colonies.

Adah finds living 'in the ditch', with its dependency on social welfare, analogous to colonisation since "the position she was in reminded her of young nations seeking independence," (*ID* p. 95) while at the same time acknowledging the equity in a social security system that gives economic independence to women by supporting those on their own. (p. 22) Conscious of Carol's largesse, power and ability to get grants, seen as 'Carol's bounty' (p. 126) Adah finds in her a friend and useful intermediary, allowing herself to be used as Carol's clown in exchange (*ID* p. 125). Carol is the only female authority figure Adah is confronted with and dependent upon for the welfare of herself and her children. Carol is also the signifier of colonialism, the 'Self' in the colonial dichotomy, dependent upon welfare recipients for her own economic survival living in an industrialised society.

Emecheta's use of African beliefs in her construction of Adah's exploitative and corrupt Nigerian 'juju' landlord illustrates how far Adah is from her roots and 'juju's' power to intimidate her. Powerless to legally evict her following her reporting to the
housing authorities the slum conditions of the accommodation she is renting, in his frustration:

   The poor man, instead of sleeping like everybody else, would wake up very early in the morning, round three or four, drape himself in colourful African material, just like juju masqueraders in Lagos, and start moving to and fro to the music of his low-toned mournful songs. When Adah had first seen this figure she could not believe her eyes. She was on the verge of screaming, but when she looked closer and saw it was only her landlord, she could feel only pity and contempt for him. (p. 3)

Geographically distanced from its source juju loses its power to terrifyse Adah. While there is no negotiating with her landlord, Adah finds the manager of the local council housing department amenable (pp. 12/13) and applying for part-time work at a local factory she negotiates successfully with the manager on her own terms (pp. 82/83).

Adah is representative of the traditional Igbo woman with her reputation for feistiness in the face of adversity, hard work and an independent spirit but with a need for communal living. The wider range of choices open to her in London finds her rejecting Francis' plea to resume their marriage and confronting her 'juju' landlord, once she realises the impossibility of negotiating with either for greater gender equity in their respective relationships as husband/wife and landlord/tenant. Adah is faced with a choice between capitulation which involves subjugating her own needs and desires and the continuation of her quest for selfhood and economic independence, personal objectives she reaches eventually through her writing.

As a prelude to the events portrayed in In the Ditch, Emecheta's second autobiographical novel, Second Class Citizen, sets about representing traditional Igbo society with its belief systems of male superiority and the legal exploitation and domination of women. Where In the Ditch opens with Adah's attempts to survive in London as a sole parent, Second-Class Citizen returns to her early childhood and growing up in post World War II Lagos, her marriage to Francis, motherhood and migration to England. Going to the United Kingdom is a childhood dream of Adah's, (p. 21) but its realisation is shattered when, instead of the freedom she had anticipated, she is threatened by Francis' physical violence and his acceptance of a 'second-class' status as black Africans living in a white society - a classification Adah is
well aware of but refuses to subscribe to. Critical of the slum conditions Francis expects them to live in as a family, Adah is perceived as a threat by Francis to his new-found freedom. In England he was "free at last from his parents, he was free to do what he liked, and not even hundreds of Adahs were going to curtail that new freedom."(p.37) Giving in to racial prejudice, Francis argues with Adah that, despite her middle-class status in Lagos, "the day you land in England, you are a second-class citizen. So you can't discriminate against your own people, because we are all second-class."(p.37)

Adah's second-class status is established much earlier with her birth into a culture with a preference for boys. Her early consciousness of what this inequity means follows the death of her father, which endangers her chance of an education in favour of her brother, Boy. (p.12) Rather than subjugating her into complying with the traditional and passive female role, the episode sharpens her sense of gender inequities in Igbo culture. Adah pragmatically learns "to be very useful very early in life...She had to survive." (p.13)

A major theme in the novel is Adah's stoicism in the face of Francis' growing opposition to her quest for selfhood. While their marriage does not give her the freedom from family supervision she anticipates, it does lead to the fulfilment of her childhood 'vow' to go to the United Kingdom. (p.11) When Adah's time at the Methodist Girl' School comes to an end, as a single teenager she is not allowed to live by herself in Lagos. Wanting to study further at Abadan University "to read Classics" and then teach (p.19) she negotiates marriage to Frances, a "very quiet young man who was reading to be an accountant" even though he "was too poor to pay the five hundred pounds bride-price Ma and the other members of her family were asking."(p.19)

The arrival of their first child, Titi, and Adah's salary as a librarian in the American Consulate Library (p.20) in Lagos enhances her value in the eyes of Francis and his family. Francis is enthusiastic about Adah's suggestion that they save to go to the United Kingdom - he would qualify as an accountant and Adah as a librarian. (p.21)
He would go first, and Adah would send him twenty pounds every month; she was to save for her fare and that of the children, she was to feed herself and the children whilst they were still in Lagos and pay the rent and help in paying the school fees for some of Francis's seven sisters... (p. 21)

But for the present:

...her dreams were all coming true. Her marriage was less than eighteen months old, yet she already had four maids; two were paid three pounds each, the other two were paid their school fees for secondary schools. These two, Cecilia and Angelina, were Francis's sisters. These four girls did all the work in the house. All Adah had to do was go to the American Library, work till two-thirty, come home to be waited on hand and foot, and in the evening be made love to. She did not disappoint her parents-in-law on that score. For, apart from the fact that she earned enough money to keep them all going, she was very prolific which, among the Igbos, is still the greatest asset a woman can have... (p. 22)

For a time Adah becomes the economic mainstay of Francis' family in exchange for her freedom to stay in Lagos. Later, paying her own and now two children's first-class fares to the United Kingdom, Adah joins Francis only to find him changed; he kisses her in public and jokes about death (p. 33), both taboos in Igbo culture.

With the change of setting from Nigeria to London, Second-Class Citizen becomes a saga of intimidation and domestic violence; a rite of passage Adah is forced to confront in her quest. She finds strength and support in the African belief of a personal chi, or guide and her dream of a 'Presence' (p. 158) sustains her. Aware of her own volatile nature she constantly reminds herself of the biblical exhortation to be "as cunning as a serpent and as harmless as a dove" (p. 31) in her dealings with others if she is to survive.

Within three months of arriving in the United Kingdom Adah starts work as a librarian (p. 141) and is beset with problems of child care and racial discrimination. (p. 69) The birth of Bubu (p. 113) followed by that of Dada (p. 170) is followed by the writing of the "manuscript of a book she was going to call The Bride Price (p. 172) taking it " to her friends at the Chalk Farm Library" (p. 175) to read. Francis' burning of the manuscript (p. 179) is followed by Adah's working at the British Museum as a library officer. Taking the children with her Adah leaves Francis (p. 181) and is given custody of the children.

While married to Francis, she is trapped, not so much by her biology but by Francis'
culturally approved exploitation of her in the Igbo tradition as a source of income as a skilled and educated worker.

Writing of Emecheta's experience as an African woman living in Britain Omar Sougou shows how *Second-Class Citizen* raises fundamental questions on issues central to the narrative; these include Adah's protest against the "cultural assumptions and male domination which constrict her and check her quest for selfhood. The other issue is the situation of Black people in London as seen by Adah."\(^{147}\)

Adah's protest against a suffocating patriarchy, embodied in the character of Francis, is expressed through her thoughts and active determination to succeed, not simply as a female in a male-dominated society but as an individual. Constructed initially as "a very quiet young man who was reading to be an accountant," (p.19) Frances later becomes violent towards Adah, challenged by her growing self-assertion. As a child her awareness of the patriarchal extremes of gender inequities, rather than serving their purpose of subjugating her, simply makes her determined to succeed, with schooling as her first test. (pp.4/8) Displays of anger and rebellion arising from her frustration bring opposition from conformists and approval from more progressive figures who admire her determined spirit and will to succeed as a female in a male-dominated environment.

Sougou comments:

> The dogged resolution of the Igbo girl enables her to force her way through school. In doing so, she challenges the priority allotted to male children in this respect. At the time a common practice among parents was to send only boys to school. Education was not free. They had rather invest in male children, who were likely to support them in old age than in girls bound to marry and join other households.\(^ {148}\)

This cultural myth is shattered in Emecheta's later novel, *The Joys of Motherhood*, with Nnu Ego's lonely death "by the roadside...with no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to her." *(JM p.224)* "whilst her children were still abroad, still working to become modern people."\(^ {149}\)

Varieties of class distinction exist in all social orders, and Adah realises that Francis' comfort zone is associated with living in one of London's Nigerian ghettos signifying his desire for a continuation of his lower socio-economic background in
Lagos, and his intimidation by Adah's awareness of "her new freedom" as the family's main source of support. (p. 64) As a scholar he fails examinations, (p. 49) he regards Adah's income as a librarian as his own (126) and performs his duties as a casual postman with great reluctance. (pp. 133/4)

With Adah's growing consciousness of her material importance to Francis comes the realisation that combining the role of the traditional Igbo wife and mother with her dreams to become a writer is impossible and that she must make a choice. Francis' egocentricity challenges her powers of negotiating for greater gender equity between them. In the same ward as a woman who had given birth to her first child after seventeen years of marriage, Adah ponders on being in such a position as a Nigerian wife:

Suppose she had had to wait seventeen years for all that? She would have either died of psychological pressures or another wife would have been brought in for Francis. He would have declared himself a Moslem, for he was once a Moslem when he was younger. Francis was like the Vicar of Bray. He changed his religion to suit his whims. When he realised that equipping Adah with birth-control gear would release her from the bondage of child-bearing, Francis went Catholic. When he started failing his examinations and was feeling very inferior to his fellow Nigerians, he became a Jehovah's Witness. (pp. 116/7)

Emecheta compares Adah's 'second-class' status as a patient following the birth of her fourth child, Bubu, (p. 121) with the other mothers receiving gifts and flowers from their visitors, and Francis neglect of her. This neglect effectively silences Adah, marginalising her from the other patients in the ward. She withdraws from joining in "any kind of gossip or conversation" since she might be lured into talking about her family life and "She did not want to do that any more. There was nothing to talk about." (p. 128)

Francis' rejection or disregard of Adah's desire to be absorbed into the maternity ward culture is an enlightening step for her and while "She would not harm him, because he was the father of her babies" she realises "he was a dangerous man to live with. Like all such men, he needed victims. Adah was not going to be a willing victim." (p. 127)

Pregnant with her fifth child Adah asserts herself. She spends her maternity grant on baby needs and post-maternity clothes for herself, arranging to have flowers and "twenty greetings cards" delivered to her following the birth. (p. 169) With her refusal to feed
Francis (p.170) Adah flies in the face of Igbo tradition and hunger drives him to work as a "clerical officer in the post office." (p.171) The strength to negotiate for greater gender equity between them comes from Adah's appreciation of her own needs and desires in relation to her role and responsibilities as a wife and mother (p.19).

Hospitalisation is an empowering experience for Adah, "it had opened her eyes a great deal." (p.125) With the money from the Finchley Borough, "a lump sum for the holidays she had not taken" (p.125) and appropriated by Francis for his own use, Adah realises she is alone and that "she had to act for herself" and resolves to leave him (p.127). Emecheta shows how the power of Igbo tradition in relation to motherhood dominates as Adah, like Amaka, the heroine in Nwapa's novel, One is Enough, thanks God for giving her Francis "as a tool with which it was possible to have her children." (p.127) Emecheta's metonymic use of the word 'tool' metaphorically describes Francis as an instrument for performing mechanical operations, and in the context of the narrative suggests that, for Adah, his usefulness lay in his ability to regularly impregnate her, an imperative in Igbo culture with its emphasis on child-bearing as a woman's primary function.

One of the most significant figures to come into Adah's life is Irene, a "West Indies girl who has had a baby girl by a Nigerian... It was this girl who showed Adah that you could live on what was called Assistance until your child grew up and you could get a job." (p.169) Learning that there was less likelihood of becoming pregnant if she breastfed the baby she did so (p.172) since Francis refused to give his consent to any form of birth control (p.149) other than coitus interruptus, (p.155) a method under the control of the male.

Working as a librarian at the Chalk Farm Library Adah is empowered as a writer through her Canadian colleague, Bill, who introduces her to a range of black writers apart from "the few Nigerian ones, like Chinua Achebe and Flora Nwapa" (p.160) she already knew of.

Commenting on "the situation of Black people in London as seen by Adah" 150 Sougou cites Adah's disillusionment at the sight of the single room Francis and
she have to share with their two children. Of greater disappointment to Adah is the fact that the landlord and neighbours are working-class Nigerians, "A microcosm of the community she meant to rid herself of." (p.513) Her sense of conflict between her Nigerian past and British present is due to her loyalties as an expatriate - despite the cultural restrictions placed on her freedom when she was a young woman living in Nigeria's male-dominated society. The working-class status of the Nigerian immigrants she is confronted with on her arrival in the United Kingdom is predicated on their lack of higher education and as unquestioning carriers of Igbo cultural assumptions. Distanced from its source and hegemonic practise, Igbo culture nevertheless threatens to control her life as a Nigerian woman living in a community of Nigerian expatriates in London.

Adah's reluctance to accept the other tenants is based not so much on snobbery as resentment of their acceptance of the concept of their second-class citizenship in British society; "in other words their internalizing the lower status implicitly assigned to them."(p.514) Sougou argues that Adah "loses sight of the fact that they do not have her assets"(p.514) but Adah is an individual living with communal conformism and apathy and, while she resents aspects of the culture that both she and Francis come from, she resents even more his refusal to accept his share of responsibility in the making of his own personality and as a husband and father.

Mr Okpara is an exception among the Africans portrayed in Second-Class Citizen. He is all that Francis should have been. Recognising Adah as a fellow Igbo, sitting alone in the park and in obvious distress, he introduces himself unceremoniously and persuades her to take him home to Francis and "beg his forgiveness". (p.164) To Adah Mr Okpara is a model of 'the mimic man' of black skin and white mask, a model for Francis to emulate:

...darker than Francis; he was not too tall, about five foot eight, the same height as Francis, but he was immaculate. His white shirt was dazzling, and the fact that he was very black pronounced the whiteness still further. He was wearing a black three-piece suit, and his black shoes shone. His black briefcase added to his dignity somehow and the black rolled umbrella he was carrying completed the image - a black clerk in London coming home from the city.(SCC 166)
But "Underneath his three-piece suit lies the genuine African" (Sougou p.514) adopting the role of elder in his decision to take "Adah back to her husband, and to rebuke the latter for his negative attitude."(Sougou p.514) His life was orderly and stable with a wife and a baby boy. He had read Law and while he and his family had been in England for some time they were getting ready to go home in about four months.

His wife was a secretary, and he worked in the Civil Service here. He had now finished his studies. But, he told Adah, they still quarrelled, though he would never beat his wife. He had outgrown that, but they still quarrelled. These quarrels did not mean the end of the marriage...(SCC p.164)

In Second-Class Citizen Emecheta draws the attention of her readers to the colonial issue relating to opportunities in the United Kingdom open to Africans, both before and after Independence; (pp.81/3) opportunities that were to auger well or ill for the Nigerian people and some aspects of which she brings into her later novel, Destination Biafra.151 Second-Class Citizen criticises Britain's colonial policy of educating prospective African politicians at the imperial centre, necessitating their living in the United Kingdom for long periods and often separated from their families left behind in Africa (p.82) The gender inequities later involved in the distribution of political power were inherent in the preparation of the Nigerian people for independence. Emecheta notes that most of the first generation of Nigerian politicians were from a group of men who came to England in the late forties, when Nigeria was still a colony (p.81) They were men in the middle-class stratum of Nigeria, well educated and conversant with the intricacies involved in world politics. These men calculated that with independence would come prosperity, the opportunity for self-rule and money. One had only to be eligible for these jobs and that eligibility was to be found in a Law degree, oratorical glibness and the mastery of "enough political terms to turn the basic proposition of having enough food for everybody into beautiful jargon...One must be well-versed in rhetoric, whether it made sense or not."(SCC pp.81/3) Emecheta includes among her definition of 'second-class' citizens the drop-outs from this group of men. With the opportunities offered for both career and social advancement, assuring a secure
future as an elite group in an independent Nigeria, culturally entrenched gender inequities, privileging the male, were exploited with the abandonment of wives and children waiting for the men's return to Africa and a secure family future as 'been-tos'. (p.24) Emecheta cites those men who:

...failed to gain a foothold in England, sought consolation in the pubs, got themselves involved with the type of women who frequented the pubs - because it was just after the war, when many such unattached women were around - and that, of course, meant goodbye to their Law studies and a happy welcome to a house full of half-caste children! (SCC p. 83)

The conclusion of Second-Class Citizen shows Adah alone with the children, rejected by Francis and free from his domination and exploitation, ready to launch into the next phase of her life as she has portrayed it in In the Ditch.

For her novel, The Bride Price,152 published in 1976, Emecheta draws thematically on the psychological power of tribal lore particularly in association with the custom of the arranged marriage in which the bride is bought by the bridegroom or his family in a form of slavery. She shows how the practice controls and commodifies the female, often from birth - its coercive commercialism disguised in a complicated system of sexual mores and contradictions privileging the male. The socially accepted practice of masculine promiscuity (p.83) is in opposition to the cultural imperative that the female remain a virgin until she is married, since virginity connotes innocence and purity, adding value to the bride price and it is on this premise that the young heroine, Aku-nna, contrives to escape from being married against her will. (138)

Set in colonial, post World War Two Nigeria, the novel comments on the syncretising of Western and traditional Igbo culture and the impact this has on the female indigene's experience. The story focuses on the early teenage years of the heroine, Aku-nna. Born in Lagos of Igbo parents Aku-nna lives with her mother, Ma Blackie, father Ezekiel Odi, a railway worker, and younger brother, Nna-nndo. With the death of Ezekiel from injuries received fighting for the British in Burma, Ma Blackie and the children return to the parents' native Ibuza, a rural town and stronghold of Igbo tradition
and customs. Following a mourning period of nine months Ma marries her brother-in-law thereby forfeiting any claim to Aku-nna's bride price, other than through European law. (p. 77)

Aku-nna and her teacher, Chike, fall in love, but because he comes from an "oshu" family, a slave family, (p. 83) and therefore ranks low in the Igbo social order such a relationship is forbidden. Lineage and acquired social ties determined the place of the individual in traditional Igbo social orders, but because slave status entailed forfeiting links with the past and any claim to an individual identity slaves were considered to be 'non-persons'. Carried over from a former slave culture this is a discriminatory practice predicated on a slave's unknown ancestry. While the introduction of Christianity with its belief in the equality "of all in the sight of the Lord" (p. 83) displaced some traditional African beliefs, others were retained for social or political reasons. Chike's father was a former slave and although "he was a member of the Native Administration the people had never allowed him to become a chief for, they reasoned, the day a slave becomes a chief in this town, then we know our end is near." (p. 84) And while "Chike had all the university entrance requirements...yet some reason or other had been found to refuse him a Federal Scholarship." (p. 85)

Kidnapped by Okoboshi, a rival suitor, (p. 133) Aku-nna is rescued by Chike. (p. 145) Aku-nna and Chike elope (p. 147) and marry at the "local registry office" (p. 156). The offer of Aku-nna's bride price is twice refused by her family (p. 157&162) and, believing herself to be cursed under Igbo law, (p. 163) she dies in childbirth. (p. 167) Emecheta juxtaposes traditional African beliefs, rooted in superstition, with those of Western rationalism attributing the cause of her heroine's death to her youth and malnourished state. (p. 160)

Aku-nna, only ever having lived in Lagos is assimilated into Western culture learning something of Igbo culture early with the meaning of her name, 'father's wealth'. (p. 10) It was Ezekiel's choice:
...knowing that the only consolation he could count on from her would be her bride price. To him this was something to look forward to. Aku-nna on her part was determined not to let her father down. She was going to marry well, a rich man of whom her father would approve and who would be able to afford an expensive bride price. She would have her marriage first of all solemnised by the beautiful goddess of Ibuza, then the Christians would sing her a wedding march - "Here comes the bride" - then her father Nna would call up the spirits of his great, great-grandparents to guide her, then after all that, and only after all that, she would leave her father's house.(p.10)

With Ezekiel's death, Aku-nna's response to the cultural imperative of joining in the traditional crying brings her grudging praise, with people remarking later that "for a girl not born in Ibuza she did not do too badly."(p.30)

The expectation in Igbo traditional culture that women will, from an early age, prioritise the desires of the male and accept a subordinate role subject to male domination influences Aku-nna, first in relation to her father and, following his death, to Chike, her teacher in Ibuza, the son of a prosperous slave. Chike's drawing attention to Aku-nna's bloodied dress as a sign of the onset of menstruation makes it a public event soon to be acknowledged in the community signifying she is of marriageable age (p.109) and consolidating her second class status for being born a girl. All uncertainty about her future autonomy fades with the first signs of her menstruating; "she could be married away, she could be kidnapped, a lock of her hair could be cut by any man to make her his wife forever."(p.92) Her mobility would be restricted:

...she must not go to the stream, she must not enter a household where the man of the family had either the"Eze" or "Alo" title - her uncle Okwonko had the latter, if she went into such a house the head of the family would die and the oracle would discover who the culprit was. She might not be killed in broad daylight but Ibuza people had ways, psychological measures, to eliminate those who committed the abominable alu. (p.93)

The objectification of the female from adolescence manifests itself in the boys socially accepted practice of painful breast squeezing:

Their custom allowed this. Boys would come into your mother's hut and play at squeezing a girl's breasts until they hurt; the girl was supposed to try as much as possible to ward them off and not be bad-tempered about it. So long as it was done inside the hut where an adult was near, and so long as the girl did not let the boy go too far, it was not frowned on (p.97)
Complying with Igbo tradition that a female must be attached to a male after puberty Aku-nna chooses Chike knowing that as the son of a slave such a relationship is forbidden and can have no future within their community. With her kidnapping by a rival suitor, Okoboshi, her method of escaping an unwanted marriage and rape by fabricating a story of her deflowering by Chike not only reduces her bride price value but degrades her socially (pp.138/9).

Chike, cast in the role of hero in coming to Aku-nna's rescue organises their elopement to Ughelli in the mid-west region of Nigeria and "their marriage at the registry office." (p.156) Aku-nna's pregnancy and death reinforces the Igbo superstition that if the bride price is unpaid the bride will die with the birth of her first child:

Every girl born in Ibuza after Aku-nna's death was told her story, to reinforce the old taboos of the land. If a girl wished to live long and see her children's children, she must accept the husband chosen for her by her people, and the bride price must be paid. If the bride price was not paid, she would never survive the birth of her first child. It was a psychological hold over every young girl that would continue to exist, even in the face of every modernisation, until the present day (p.68).

Emecheta revives a cautionary tale which disadvantages women since it overlooks the high mortality rate among young and physically immature women in childbirth. She is an iconoclast who draws attention to the medical services colonialism has made available to counteract the neglect of indigenous women's health in their local communities. In presenting aspects of traditional Igbo beliefs at their source, challenged by Western rationalism and beliefs in scientific discovery, the novel shows how traditional psychological power is an ongoing force in social control. Emecheta's personal experience as an Igbo wife (whose bride price was never paid) and mother of five children, exposes the bride price as an exploitative practice, dependent upon the vulnerability, commodification of and control of women.

Set in early twentieth-century Nigeria, *The Slave Girl* is a story of the disintegration of a traditional Igbo family living "when colonialism was at its height, and Nigeria was being taken over by Great Britain" (p.7) from the Portuguese. Orphaned as a young child, the heroine, Obanje Ojebeta, despite the abolition of slavery, is sold by her
brother, Okolie, 16, to Ma Palagada, a distant relative and wealthy Onitsha trader. As one of Ma's seven slaves (p.55) Ojebeta is taught to sew and attends the local mission school. After she has nine years with the Palagadas, Ma dies and Ojebeta, now sixteen, returns to her native Ibuza. There she meets and marries Jacob Okongi, a "fellow townsman", (p.181) lay preacher and an Igbo like herself.

As the heroine of the narrative any negotiations for gender equity, or more importantly a reclaiming of selfhood, can come only from the way Emecheta demonstrates Obanje Ojebeta's powerless social position as a child slave whose identity as an individual was forfeited the day money was paid for her. (p.68) Ojebeta was not born a slave and in a culture which gives prominence to the extended family as a caring social unit, her story is the author's criticism of patriarchy in illustrating the culturally constructed gender inequity showing her older brother Okolie's power to sell her for personal gain. In commodifying her, Okolie absolves himself of any responsibility for her welfare. Emecheta comments on the institution of slavery in Nigerian society through Okolie:

Another thought crossed his mind then. Suppose his sister was sold into slavery to the Potokis, and they took her away across the seas and he never saw her again? He deadened his conscience and reminded himself that the new white men who were now penetrating into their small towns and villages were trying hard to abolish that type of trade. People were not going missing as before. Okolie recollected how in his childhood many young women had been kidnapped in the middle of the night when they went out to their toilet. He could still remember his grandfather coming home with strings of captives after raiding neighbouring villages; some of the captives - the lucky ones - were kept as house slaves, but most of them were either taken down to Bonny or sold to people going to Idu. Those were the times when the human market was at its height. Not now...(p.31)

Emecheta comments on the institution of slavery in Nigerian society as a form of social control or source of wealth from the selling of slaves and the free labour they provided citing how a slave who attempted to run away could be tortured or used for a live burial to accompany the corpse of their owner to the land of the dead. (p.57) One of Ma Palagada's slaves, Chiago, recalls watching "One such horrible burial when she had been about twelve years old and travelling with Ma Palagada in the Igbo interior..." (pp.57/8)
Emecheta draws on the African belief in an active spirit world constructing Ojebeta as an *obanje*, a spirit child who recurringly takes on human form but dies in infancy each time taking on visitor status rather than becoming a permanent family member. She is especially valued as the first girl child in fifteen years to be born to Okwuekwu Oda and his wife Umeadi who survives beyond a few hours. Needing special care if she is to be protected from her spirit friends who would take her back to their land of the dead, the dibia, or native doctor, advises:

> Your child will stay this time if you tie her with safety charms. These must consist of cowries, tops of tins brought here by the Potokis, and real bells made from metal. You see she has an agreement with her friends in the land of the dead, to keep coming and mocking you. But this time she seems impressed by your hospitality and wants to remain here as long as possible, until she is grown enough to reject her friends. Then they will no longer have any effect on her. (p. 10)

Family devotion is exemplified in Okwuekwu's taking the dangerous journey to "Idu, the mythological name for the old Benin empire." (p. 12) to bring back charms professing to ward off evil spirits who would take Ojebeta back to the land of the dead. (p. 12) The charms, made from copper pieces and cowries were:

> ...strung like beads and tied round each small arm of baby Obanje Ojebeta. so whenever she cried and moved her arms about, the metal bells would ring, the cowries would rumble, and her friends from the other world would run, for they had never seen anything like it before. (p. 14)

Abandoned by Okolie and left in the care of strangers Ojebeta experiences a loss of social identity as a sister and family member, "For days she had cried silently, since the joy of letting others know your sorrows was denied slaves like her." (p. 84) Later with the painful (p. 68) removal of charms that symbolise in part Ojebeta's selfhood, her sense of identity, she manages to keep them as a guide and reminder of her home in Ibuza (p. 152) by hiding them in her npe, (p. 68) a type of garment. As material symbols of her self-identity, they link her with her past and early childhood, with their removal she becomes aware of her non-person status as a slave, stripped of her former identity as an individual with recourse to family - but the facial tattoos identifying her as an Igbo are not so easily removed. At the Palagada's Ojebeta learns that:
All her life a woman always belonged to some male. At birth you were owned by your people, and when you were sold you belonged to a new master, when you grew up your new master who had paid something for you would control you. It was a known fact that although Ma Palagada was the one who bought them, they ultimately belonged to Pa Palagada and whatever he said or ordered would hold. (p. 113)

Back in Ibuza after nine years as one of the Palagada's slaves, Ojebeta learns that her two brothers, Enehu and Okoli are in Lagos (p. 161). She adapts to Ibuza's subsistence culture taking up palm-oil selling as one of "a class apart: the very young and the independent, who did not need to make much profit to survive." (p. 155) Two years after returning to Ibuza (p. 169), while attending a Church Missionary Service (p. 156), she meets Jacob Okongi, a lay preacher representative of the colonised indigene of 'black skin and white mask' and known as 'Jacob the Whiteman'. (pp. 164/5) He is "an apprentice moulder in the new railway foundry" (p. 166) in Lagos and belongs to an "elite among his people because he could read and write... and the Bishop's glowing recommendation was enough to convince the colonial masters who ran the railways of Nigeria that this was a young person of a new breed. He had not disappointed them." (p. 166) When Ojebeta accepts his proposal of marriage, they are married in the Christian church and also according to Igbo custom. (p. 177) After the birth of two children in three years of marriage and with her bride price still unpaid "it seemed that so far she had escaped the doom forecast for unredeemed slaves" (p. 179) A series of miscarriages follows but with the eventual repayment of the money Okolie had received for her as a slave Ojebeta feels liberated, "free in belonging to a new master" (p. 184) from her very own town of Ibuza.

Emecheta draws on the background history of colonial Nigeria, linking events with their impact on the lives of the characters in the narrative. Okwuekwu recalls the widespread trading in slaves before slavery was abolished and the unsettling effect of the Benin massacre of 1897 when the king was sent into exile (p. 14) Although a farmer, he is given the lucrative job of 'Kortu-ma' a court messenger "in remembrance of his past services" (pp. 6/7) to the colonial administration in 1909. Okwuekwu and his wife, Umeadi, as victims of the influenza epidemic of 1916 (pp. 19/23) leave their two sons and Ojebeta orphans, and this results in Ojebeta's life as a slave in Ma Palagada's service. The Aba Riots in the 1920's coincide with Ma Palagada's death and Ojebeta's release
from slavery. (p161) A few months after arriving back in Ibuza, Ojebeta and some of her friends decide to cross over to the Otu market to see her former friends:

...but they had been driven back by people who said there was a really big riot going on in Aba, that most of the cloth stalls in Otu Onitsha had been looted, that many white people had been killed and that those Onitsha market women who had been secretly supporting the white people had been brought to justice and their stalls demolished...(pp.161/2)

While Ojebeta, as the heroine of The Slave Girl, innocently moves towards her own form of liberation with her return to Ibuza, marriage and motherhood, Ma Palagada is constructed as a blend of earth mother and wealthy trader, treating her slaves equally and ensuring they are fed and clothed in return for their labour and loyalty. She "was not as strict a mistress as others, and even seemed to try as much as possible to treat her girl slaves like her own daughters."(p.87) She finds collaborating with the colonisers empowering, particularly her association with the missionaries and her willingness to have her slaves attend their school (p103) The novel endorses the association of slave and missionary for its humanistic positivism especially when this is set against the aspects of slavery Emecheta refers to in the narrative.

Anthony Barthelemy draws attention in his discussion of the novel to Emecheta's attitude to the value of Western education at the turn of the century noting that:

As a slave, she [Ojebeta], is forced to endure the humiliation and rigor that accompanies that condition. Ironically, the encroachment of Christianity provides Ojebeta and the other slaves with their only relief from forced labor. The wife of the new head of the United Africa Company requires students for her Church Missionary Society school. Ma Palagada, the owner of Ojebeta and other domestic slaves, agrees for political reasons to allow her slaves to attend. (p.564) 153

While education was considered suitable only for slaves (pp.91/2) Emecheta notes that "in these changing times an Igbo woman who could sew, cook and serve civilised food, even read and write her name, was going to be an asset to her husband."(p.117) Ojebeta exchanges one form of slavery, as one of Ma Palagada's girls, for another form with marriage to Jacob with his paying of her bride price.(p.184) But her sense of liberation comes from having a husband of her own choosing and living among her own people again.
Caught between her traditional Igbo culture and the influences of colonialism in Nigeria the heroine of Emecheta's novel, *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego, becomes a victim of both. Her life is dominated by her compliance with the Igbo dictum that motherhood is a woman's primary purpose in life, and the subversion by colonial influences of its complementary social structure and subsistence economy.

The story opens in Lagos in 1934. Nnu Ego, as we learn later has discovered her month old baby boy dead (JM p.55) She flees intending to drown herself. In a flashback Emecheta continues the narrative with Nnu Ego's birth twenty-five years earlier in Ibuza, a distant Igbo town. Her father is a very wealthy local chief, Nwokocha Agbadi and her mother, Ona, one of his two mistresses. Ona dies in childbirth when Nnu Ego is still a child. Marriage at sixteen secures Nnu Ego's future, providing she can produce children, preferably boys. With her failure to conceive a child by her husband she is rejected by him and sent to Lagos to be the wife of Nnaife Owulum. It is here that Nnu Ego is confronted with colonial influences detrimental to her sense of society and selfhood. She bears a son, Ngosi, by Nnaife but he dies when he is four weeks old. Her attempt to commit suicide is prevented and, counselled by her age-mate, Ato, she returns to Nnaife bearing him another eight children but after a life of poverty and hardship, she dies alone at the side of a road.

The daughter of Chief Obi Umunna, Ona's experience of motherhood is short-lived and controversial. With her father's approval, she shows her independence by refusing to marry her lover, Chief Nwokocha Agbadi, sometimes sending him away at night saying "she did not feel like having anything to do with him, even though Agbadi was not supposed to be the kind of man women should say such things to." (p.11) Despite her father having several wives none had produced a son by him. (p.11) Igbo custom holds that in these circumstances a daughter can be a surrogate son, a role filled by Ona whose father Umunna "maintained that she must never marry...she was free to have men, however, and if she bore a son, he would take her father's name, thereby rectifying the omission nature had made." (p.12) But for her show of independence and indifference to Agbadi she is branded as a 'bad woman'.(p.21)
Emecheta draws her readers' attention to an aspect of Africa's internal slave culture with the women's experience of attending the funeral of Agbadi's senior wife. The women stand back finding the custom of burying her slave alive to accompany her to the land of the dead 'revolting'. But the slave, a young and beautiful woman did not wish to die yet. "She kept begging for her life, much to the annoyance of many of the men standing around."(23) Struggling out of the grave only to be pushed back in she appeals to her owner Agbadi whose son, in anger, struck her on the head with a cutlass. Agbadi intervenes but it is too late and before dying the slave thanks him for his kindness, promising to "come back to his household, but as a legitimate daughter..." As one of the group of women Ona needs to be held up. (p.23)

Pregnant to Agbadi Ona promises that if she has a son he will be given to her father but if it is a daughter then it will be given to Agbadi (p.25) keeping her promise with the birth of Nnu Ego, a name meaning 'twenty bags of cowries' signifying her high exchange value. (p.26) After her birth Ona returns to her own people but before she can produce a son for Umunna, he dies. (p.27) Nnu Ego experiences a strong headache diagnosed by the dibia as her reincarnation as the slave woman buried with Agbadi's senior wife. (p.27)

Ona is persuaded to return to Agbadi's compound where Nnu Ego will be closer to her 'chi' until all the sacrifices to the former slave have been made according to custom. There Nnu Ego recovered and the "slave woman was properly buried in a separate grave, and an image of her was made for Nnu Ego to carry with her." (p.28) There is an implied criticism of Igbo culture relative to the position of women and male domination in Ona's asking Agbadi to let Nnu Ego have her independence allowing her to "have a life of her own, a husband if she wants one. Allow her to be a woman." (p.28) Ona's episode closes with her death followed by that of her new-born son. (p.28) Emecheta shows in the characters of Ona, and Nnu Ego as a child, how a female's needs are met when she is associated with a powerful, caring man.

While Nnu Ego is destined to be consumed by the demands of parenting and becomes a victim of the syncretising of Igbo culture and Western colonialism later in life,
as the daughter of Agbadi her childhood is one of security and privilege. He arranges her marriage to Amatokwu's son and the night his family came to fetch her Agbadi excelled himself:

He accepted the normal bride price, to show that he gave his blessing to the marriage. But he sent his daughter away with seven hefty men and seven young girls carrying her personal possessions. There were seven goats, baskets and baskets of yams, yards and yards of white man's cloth, twenty-four home-spun lappas, rows and rows of Hausa trinkets and coral beads. Her ornamented cooking-pots and gaudy calabashes were attractively arranged round crates of clearest oils. A new and more beautiful effigy of the slave woman who was her chi was made and placed on top of all Nnu Ego's possessions, to guard her against any evil eye. (p.30)

Agbadi's generosity was to become a benchmark for all fathers of daughters available for marriage (p.30) With Nnu Ego's failure to conceive a child Emecheta draws on African beliefs to account for her perceived infertility. Going from one dibia to another in secret she is told the same thing:

...that the slave woman who was her chi would not give her a child because she had been dedicated to a river goddess before Agbadi took her away in slavery. When at home, Nnu Ego would take an egg, symbol of fertility, and kneel and pray to this woman to change her mind. "Please pity me, I feel that my husband's people are already looking for a new wife for him. They cannot wait for me forever. He is the first son of the family and his people want an heir for him as soon as possible. Please help me." The story would repeat itself again the following month. (pp.31/2)

Later Nnu Ego's father makes expensive sacrifices to her chi begging her forgiveness and telling her that he had stopped "dealing in slaves and had offered freedom to the ones in his household. He had even joined a group of leaders who encouraged slaves to return to their places of origin, if they could remember where they came from" as a penance. (p.35) Nnu Ego experiences the humiliation of being discarded as a wife when she is asked to move to the "nearby hut kept for older wives" because Amatokwu's people had found him a new wife." (p.32) Instead she returned to her father. Discussing Nnu Ego's future, Agbadi and his friend Idayi compare earlier times in relation to her position in a colonised society:

...my friend, she was not born then; she was born in her own time. Things have changed a lot. This is the age of the white man. Nowadays every young man wants to cement his mud hut and cover it with corrugated-iron sheets instead of the palm-leaves we are used to. You'll just have to accept a man of today, Agbadi. (p.37)
It is a generational comment reflecting on changes in men's lives with the expectation of women's lives staying the same.

Young, married but childless, Nnu Ego's anticipated joys of motherhood turn to the pain of infertility expressed in a rhetorical "when one grows old, one needs children to look after one. If you have no children, and after parents are gone, who can you call your own?" (p.38) Her bride price is returned to Omatokwu and she is willingly sold to Nnaife Owulum who had been living in Lagos for five years. He is the son of an Ibuza family with a reputation for hard work. (p.38)

Nnu Ego experiences shock and disappointment on meeting Nnaife for the first time. Used to tall, wiry farmers with long, lean legs and very dark skin he was quite the opposite; short and fat with a protruding belly. Finding him insatiable Nnu Ego is humiliated by his demands throughout the night, within a few yards of where his brother was sleeping, but she is prepared to tolerate his "crude ways and ugly appearance" (p.45) if he can give her a child. She also experiences humiliation with learning of Nnaife's job as a washerman for white people living in Lagos. When she saw him hanging out the white woman's smalls "she would wince in pain and this would deepen with her realisation that he was actually proud of his work." (p.47) Working for the white man meant economic and social independence, away from the farm and extended family obligations.

Nnu Ego gains new insights into Nigeria's changing society influenced by colonialism through Cordelia, the cook and wife of her neighbour, Ubani. Cordelia sees the migration of the rural population to the urban centres as detrimental, to the men particularly, commenting "Men here are too busy being white men's servants to be men...Their manhood has been taken away from them...All they see is the money, shining white man's money." (p.51) Likening all indigenes who work for the white man as slaves, she suggests the only difference from those bought and sold before the abolition of slavery was that they received some pay for their work. (p.51)

Igbo culture holds that the gods legalise a marriage with the conceiving of a first child. With her first pregnancy by Nnaife Nnu Ego learns how to start her own business
at the monthly meetings of her fellow Ibuza wives. (p.52) The profits from selling cigarettes and matches gives her a taste of economic independence. Adapting to urban life she finds that in Lagos a wife:

...had to work. She provided the food from her husband's meagre housekeeping money, but finding the money for clothes, for any kind of comforts, in some cases for the children's school fees, was on her shoulders. Nnu Ego soon slipped into this pattern of living, so much so that on the night she came into labour she made sure she had her evening market first. (pp.53/4)

Emecheta draws on the journey motif with Nnu Ego thanking the Owerri women who helped deliver her son and the women's reply, "We are like sisters on a pilgrimage. Why should we not help one another?" (p.53) Going away to wake the men so that they may "begin their labour pains by drinking palm wine...The men duly started celebrating with palm wine and cigarettes from Nnu Ego's stock, and the celebrations went on till dawn." (p.53)

Settling into a routine of family woman and petty trader, Nnu Ego experiences a sense of fulfilment for the first time in her life, now sure that her "old age would be happy, that when she died there would be somebody left behind to refer to her as "mother". (p.54) Her contentment is short-lived however. When Nnu Ego finds her son dead, Emecheta returns her audience to the novel's opening episode. (p.54)

Nnu Ego's intention to drown herself is "not permitted in Nigeria: you are simply not allowed to commit suicide in peace, because everyone is responsible for the other person... [and] an individual's life belongs to the community and not just to him or her." (p.60) While the belief carries socially restrictive connotations, it serves to save Nnu Ego. A fellow Igbo, on his way home from work, caused her to pause giving him, and the crowd that had gathered the opportunity to stop her leaping into the waters below Carter Bridge. Counselling by her age-mate, Otu, (p.75) Nnu Ego comes to terms with her grief. Pregnant again she is reassured by Agbadi's reply to her news "that the oracle foretold it would be a boy, who would go far in modern learning but who in so doing would attract a lot of jealousy."(p.79) He sends her "charms to wear as a kind of protection around her neck and special soap for bathing as part of the ritual."(p.79)
The birth of a boy is cause for general celebration and personal relief for Nnu Ego. Naming the baby Oshiaju, meaning "the bush has refused this" as appropriate, since their first baby was thrown into "the bush" - the term for a burying place. (p.80) They were poorer than when Nnu Ego was trading. But she had given that up early in her pregnancy to avoid any risk of losing the child and now rationalised her position as a wife living in Lagos; "were they not in a white man's world where it was the duty of the father to provide for his family?" (p.81) Trying to be "traditional in a modern urban setting" (p.81) had caused the loss of Ngosi. With this realisation she understands the need to "play it according to the new rules" (p.81) if she is to survive in Lagos.

In July 1939, anticipating the outbreak of the Second World War, Nnaife's white employer's, the Meers, plan to return to the United Kingdom. Nnaife is paid off with their other servants and he is given an excellent reference (p.84) but is unable to find paid employment. After five years of living together and faced with the threat of extreme poverty, Nnu Ego starts to trade again, against Nnaife's wishes. (p.88)

Nnaife accepts a job on the ships at Fernando Po offered him by some European golfers. They give him enough loose change to buy some food and leave with Nnu Ego, now pregnant, and Oshia, to tide them over until trading improves.(p.94) Nnu Ego's eviction from their home by the British Army compounds her problems and, although she is unable to read the signs advertising premises available to let they are so "rampant she could recognise them for what they were" (p.97) resulting in her renting a small room for "four shillings a month." (p.97) With the help of neighbours Nnu Ego and her two sons, Oshia and Adim survive until Nnaife's return eleven months later (p.113) when they were able to live comfortably for a few months by selling the spoils Nnaife had acquired working on the ships. (p.112)

Nnu Ego starts trading again to make sure of another term's school fees for Oshia.(p.113) Her joys of motherhood are threatened by the custom of a man inheriting his brother's wives with the death of Nnaife's older brother. (p.115) But Nnu Ego has lived in Lagos for more than seven years, long enough to have learned the importance of education if children are to survive in modern Nigeria. Polygamy complicates her life
but, sharing Nnaife with his other wives, she bears him another five children, including twins. (p.126)

Forcibly enlisted into the army, Nnaife disappears bringing more hardship into Nnu Ego's life. In retrospect the distress she suffers is caused as much by her illiteracy and unawareness of the money she is entitled to from Nnaife's army pay as his disappearance. In the fight to survive she resolves to continue educating her children. (p.179) Nnaife's paternal authority is challenged with his daughter, Kehinde's refusing an arranged marriage with an Ibuza man and choosing instead a Yoruba butcher, Ladipo, a traditional rival of the Igbo people. Nnaife's attack on Ladipo's family with a cutlass (p.209) leads to his arrest and sentencing to "five years imprisonment." (p.218)

Now forty, Nnu Ego, having shared Nnaife with his three other wives and borne him nine children (p.194) returns to Ibuza with her younger children. Her attachment to Oshia, now in the United States of America and Adim, who later goes to Canada, is unrequited until after her death. (p.224) Emecheta's criticism of the exploitation of women in patriarchal societies is brought to a close with her representation of Nnu Ego's experiences, including those of rejection and dementia, ending with her lonely death by the roadside.

In her novel *The Family*, Emecheta extends her representation of the black diaspora to the West Indies, completing a literary circuit of the historical slave-trading triangle linking Africa to Europe and the Caribbean. The story's characters come from a background of the West Indies "variety of racial groups all more or less in ancestral exile, and all still subject to the hegemonic pressures of their former European owners, and, more recently, to that exercise in the region by the USA" Setting her novel in the post-World War Two period Emecheta tells a story of modern slavery with the exploitation of a young Jamaican girl, Gwendolen, the illegitimate daughter of Sonia and Winston Brillianton. The story opens when Gwendolen is five years old and living in Granville, Jamaica. Winston works and lives with his family in Kingston visiting Sonia and Gwendolen occasionally. Winston's acceptance of work in the United Kingdom necessitates his marrying Sonia who joins him later, leaving Gwendolen in the care of
Granny Naomi, Sonia's mother. Uncle Johnny, a close companion of Granny Naomi and a regular visitor to her hut rapes Gwendolen. While the community does not condone Johnny's behavior it is Gwendolen who is ostracised. Joining her parents and their growing family in England, Gwendolen attends school. When Sonia returns to Granville to nurse Granny Naomi Gwendolen takes care of the family. Raped by her father, Winston, she falls pregnant and finds a friend in Emmanuel, a young Greek. Returning from nearly two years in Jamaica Sonia rejects Gwendolen. After the death of Winston in an industrial accident, the birth of Gwendolen's daughter, Iyamide, heals the breach between Gwendolen and Sonia.

Drawing thematically on the conflict between paedophilia, with its sexual attraction in an adult towards children, and the concept of the family as a close-knit and caring social unit, the narrative focuses on the value of the pre-pubescent girl and the secrecy, shame and isolation attached to her abuse in a patriarchal society. An advocate of gender equity through availability and access to education, Emecheta constructs her heroine's reclamation of her voice and selfhood through literacy as a means of communicating thoughts and the gaining of economic independence.

Gwendolen is taught to show her love, together with the necessity to love everyone in Granville the way they are. (p.17) Her objectification is established when she is five years old with seemingly innocent touching by family members and friends gathered together for Daddy Winston and Sonia's wedding, a condition of Winston's entry to work in the United Kingdom. The gathering is also to farewell him on his way to England from Jamaica; they'd touch Gwendolen's cheeks, "or pull her hair. But Johnny always touched her thighs." (p.9) As a friend of the family and a regular evening visitor to Granny Naomi's shack (p.13) he is a substitute father figure for Daddy Winston, initially working in Kingston and then in England; the "Moder Kontry".

Daddy Winston's departure forms Gwendolen's earliest memory; he was somebody she felt safe with. (p.11). Absentee fathers were not unusual in Granville (p.12) and his visits when he worked in Kingston were special. In the same way his letters arriving from England were special. (pp.12/3) Uncle Johnny would read these to
Sonia since she was illiterate but she would also take them to a local Indian scribe to have them read to her again and to whom she would dictate her replies. (pp. 13/4)

With Daddy Winston's absence in England, Gwendolen has her mother Sonia's undivided attention (p. 19) living together with Granny Naomi in her shack. For Gwendolen her mother's leaving Granville later to join Daddy Winston is the "final act of rejection." (p. 18) Faith in the concept of family is demonstrated in Sonia's leaving Gwendolen in the care of Granny Naomi and Uncle Johnny who is trusted implicitly as "a God-bless soul church broder." (p. 20)

Uncle Johnny's rape of Gwendolen when she is seven years old is significant not only for its sexual violence but as a metaphor for the silencing of a female voice capable of subverting male dominance. One night Gwendolen was:

...woken by Uncle Johnny. He was kneeling on the bamboo bed. He was now touching her face and mouth, telling her not to cry, that he was here to take care of her. She struggled to get up, but he shushed her, telling her not to wake Granny who was very tired and now sleeping. Gwendolen could hear the rise and fall of Granny's snores. He hadUncle Johnny kept on her mouth was firm, but his other hand touched all her body...What was the matter with Uncle Johnny tonight? She wanted very much to ask him what he was doing, but she could not; His hand was firmly over her mouth and she could not struggle because her body was frozen. Only her eyes roamed and it was dark. He was on top of her...but he soon rolled to one side (pp. 21/2)

Because of his good standing in the community, Gwendolen is fearful of not being believed if she tells anyone of Uncle Johnny's abuse of her:

Looking back at that time as an adult, Gwendolen could not really pinpoint on which day and at what hour Uncle Johnny had started to make her feel guilty. All she knew was that as she grew older, she began to entertain the irrational fear that everybody would blame her if they knew her secret. (p. 25)

Gwendolen's objectification is compounded by Uncle Johnny's ongoing sexual demands followed by those of Daddy Winston after she joins her family in England.

Her value as a source of cheap labour is exploited by both Granny Naomi and Sonia. In Granville Gwendolen helps maintain the shack and takes part in Granny Naomi's bee-keeping and honey enterprise. Sonia wants her to join the growing family in London, when Gwendolen is twelve years old, mainly to help with the children.
While attending school is compulsory, in Granville many parents pay "no mind to the law." (p.26) Excuses for not sending children to school include the cost of "uniforms, books and the parents losing all the help the children give at home and on the farm." (p.26) Illiterate herself Sonia knows the value of education and to ensure Gwendolen attends school she sends money to pay for her to attend the Marcus Garvey School but because Granny Naomi takes a cheaper option, Gwendolen's approved education is delayed. Sent instead to the Sunday School teacher Miss Peters for private lessons, Gwendolen is schooled in "the catechism and some church hymns." (p.26) When Sonia did not send the next fees "Gwendolen soon stopped going to, Miss Peters, but Uncle Johnny did not stop coming to her on some nights." (p.26)

When Gwendolen starts to wet the bed again Naomi proposes taking her to the obeah woman, a local sorceress, to find the cause. Gwendolen is fearful of what the woman will ask her (p.27) and her running away to Winston's relatives in Kingston culminates in her telling Naomi what Uncle Johnny had been doing to her. (p.33) Communal reaction to the news changes from shock and anger to doubt with Uncle Johnny's public denial and his good standing in the community. It was Gwendolen's word against that of Uncle Johnny who had stopped molesting her but had robbed her of her innocence. This latest development in their relationship, open for debate among the Granville population, raises her consciousness of a world in which "adults could tell lies and wriggle out of tricky situations, simply because they were respected members of their community." (p.35) It is Gwendolen who is made to feel guilty and ashamed, not Uncle Johnny, and with this realisation her isolation within the community begins.

Sonia and Winston are kept in ignorance of Uncle Johnny's exploitation of Gwendolen but the delay in sending for her to join them in London is a factor in her growing rebelliousness particularly regarding attending school in London. Attendance is compulsory and strictly monitored in the United Kingdom. At twelve years of age Gwendolen is conscious of her illiteracy and ashamed of having to attend remedial classes, compounding her now self-imposed isolation at school. With Sonia's two year
absence in Jamaica following the death of Granny Naomi, Gwendolen takes over the running of the Brillianton household as 'little mother'.

Winston is constructed as 'taciturn,' (p.141) illiterate and lacking in communication skills, but intelligent enough to realise his inadequacies living in an industrialised society. Communication with Sonia is limited as both are ashamed to ask literate friends to write for them. When Winston goes to Gwendolen's room there is no negotiating for gender equity on the grounds of Gwendolen's humanistic right to reject him - Uncle Johnny had effectively silenced her with his hand over her mouth, making her his silent victim unable to cry out for help or in protest. Similarly Winston "covered her mouth with that strong hand of his." (p. 145) Winston expects her to ward him off but he is not prepared for the look of resignation on her face.(p.144) He justifies his objectification and sexual exploitation of Gwendolen on her looking so much like her mother and her maturation from the time he last saw her in Jamaica when she was five years old to the time she joined the family in England seven years later. (p.144) Aware of his predicament, Winston questions Ilochina, his polygamous friend, on the legality of a man marrying his own daughter. Emecheta draws on African beliefs and the custom of story-telling to form Ilochina's reply:

...he remembered a moonlight story which his mother told him when he was a boy. The man in the story had committed an incest with his daughter and, according to the culture of the land, the women of the village executed the man.... And when the women took hold of his penis and were about to chop it off, he burst into a song of agony: 'Na me born am. nsa me fuc am, na me giam belleoooo. Please forgive me, na me ting do it ooo.' But the women were merciless, because it was a sin against the earth. They pounded him into a pulp with their cooking utensils. Every woman in the village was expected to give at least seven blows with her odo handle. It was so terrible that such stories remained what they were, stories and legends.(p.143)

Ilochina warns Winston that if the man was not discovered by his daughter telling the other women, he would be "killed by an Earth force like thunder." (p.144)

While Winston is prepared to sacrifice Gwendolen's presumed virginity and the value it adds to her bride price for his own gratification he is not prepared for her passive reception of him, and the look of resignation on her face indicating previous
sexual experience and her loss of innocence. Gwendolen senses the loss of a friend and protector with his betrayal of her. Pregnant with Winston's child and with Sonia still in Jamaica Gwendolen's befriending of Emmanuel brings her out of her isolation. Emecheta's introducing of Emmanuel into the narrative brings a clash of cultures as against the extended family's expectations and demands on Gwendolen he brings a positivism into her life. Once he teaches her to read using the evening newspapers as texts Gwendolen reads a "whole book written by a black woman" and determines to "read a lot more." (p.212) Literacy becomes a means of escape from a life of ignorance and exploitation. The trauma of childbirth brings a new kind of awareness into Gwendolen's life:

In Granville, one had to love all the uncles, cousins and aunties, because they were all related. She had tried to continue that kind of loving here. But for the past five months, she had been making new kinds of friends, friends who were not related to her at all. Friends she could like or even love, without her wanting to live their lives for them and them wanting to do the same to her. It was a kind of relationship that did not choke. (p.207)

With the help of the State Gwendolen moves into her own flat and a new economic independence separated from her siblings and Sonia, now widowed and whose roots are still in Jamaica and a different culture marked by a history of lost identities, slavery and male domination.

Emecheta's voluntary exile to England from Nigeria as a young wife and mother can be seen as a turning point in her life and a stimulant to her ambition to become a writer. For her texts she juxtaposes her knowledge and experiences of Africa, and specifically Igbo, culture and her 'book' knowledge of the United Kingdom superimposed by her personal impressions of living there as a permanent resident and signifier of a former Empire in a predominantly 'white' society. The fictionalising of her own life in her autobiographical novels foregrounds a comparative indigenous social system of communal welfare, with its self-help philosophy, relationship ties and mutual responsibilities at the local level with an impersonal, bureaucratic system assuring a minimal material standard of living for all its citizens. In drawing thematically on economic individualism, defined as the ability of the individual to access material
resources, in both her Nigerian and London-based narratives Emecheta shows to what extent patriarchy affects the lives of women primarily, and society as a whole, through a gendered imbalance of power in matters of politics, the ownership and purpose in the distribution of natural and manufactured resources.
9 Mariama Ba

Like Nwapa and Emecheta Mariama Ba writes from a site of European colonisation and its aftermath. Coming from Senegal with its background of French colonial influence she is one of a group of sub-Saharan women who began to publish novels in French in the mid-1970's. A feminist, she was born in 1929 in Dakar, French Senegal, of prominent Moslem parents. Against family opposition her father insisted that she have a good French education, which he gave her himself. She then attended the Berthe Maubert elementary school, Dakar, and in 1943 was "first among the West African students in the entrance examination to the Rafistique Ecole Normale. Two of the essays she wrote there were published." She married a prominent Senegalese politician and had nine children. Later divorced, she worked as a secretary and primary school teacher. She died in 1981. Ba was active in several womens' organisations, writing and speaking on familial issues: womens' legal rights in marriage and child custody, clitoridectomy, polygamy and the need for women's education. Her legacy to post-colonial literature comprises two novels, So Long a Letter and the one novel in this study that deals with inter-racial marriage, Scarlet Song, both of which address the issue of polygamy and its effect on women's lives. Of her two heroines Ba said, "The fate of these two women can be summed up in one word: suffering - having to keep quiet, suffering to the very last." In So Long a Letter Ba confronts the issue of polygamy in a society in transition from colonial rule to independence from the perspective of the protagonist Ramatoulaye Fall. The narrative is both a retrospective and introspective account of Ramatoulaye's life, from enclosure through disclosure to self-discovery, in a series of letters addressed to her close friend Assatou following the death of Ramatoulaye's husband Modou Fall. (p.4)

Ba's use of the epistolary form reflects on the intimate tone associated with a sharing of private thoughts between two confidantes, and the suitability of Assatou as the reader of Ramatoulaye's letters lies in their long friendship as well as their shared experience of polygamy and return to single status following Assatou's divorce and the
death of Modou three years later. While both women have experienced polygamous marriages, as enlightened subjects in matters of gender equity through their Western education both resent their subordinate position in a culturally constructed institution they perceive as demeaning to women.

Ramatoulaye is a Senegalese wife whose husband abandons her and their twelve children after he takes his daughter's best friend, Binetou, as a second wife. Ramatoulaye chooses not to divorce Modou and after five years of his second marriage, after having fathered two sons with Binetou, he dies. The novel comprises a series of letters written during the required period of isolation for Muslim widows, analogously expressed by Ramatoulaye as "The walls that limit my horizon for four months and ten days..." (p.8) an image of enclosure characteristic of the place and limited space of the female in patriarchal Muslim societies.

Ramatoulaye perceives Modou's taking a second wife as a betrayal of her trust in him to maintain their monogamous relationship in a polygamous culture - a trust established over the twenty five years of their marriage. With Modou's betrayal comes the reality of her own displacement and lack of redress. The result of his taking a second wife is Ramatoulaye's raised consciousness of polygamy's gender inequities that effectively divide and silence women by their enclosure, minimising opportunities for collective feminine opposition to patriarchy.

Both Ramatoulaye and Assatou's expectations of marriage are influenced by a clash of cultures with their early Muslim indoctrination (p.8) coupled with their assimilation into Western culture and the romantic notions of love and marriage in its literature. Ramatoulaye completes teacher's college and her acquisition of Western ideas and values modify her world view as a devout Muslim. In a critique of African women writers, including Ba, Yakini Kemp argues:

Although the belief in monogamy is common among the urban middle classes, the fact that Ramatoulaye (and Assatou) actually expect their husbands to remain completely "faithful" to them, mentally and sexually, indicates the degree to which they have accepted ideas other than those taught by Islam. Ramatoulaye views polygamy as a question of morality; she attacks polygamy as morally wrong because men take wives only because of physical desire.
For Ramatoulaye selfhood is bound up in her full commitment to a long marriage with Modou, and motherhood, a commitment in which individuality becomes blurred in a conglomerate of family relationships. She finds fulfilment living with "the idealized notion of male-female relationships that romantic love supports" \(^\text{162}\) despite its origins in patriarchy which "neither demands nor inspires equality of the sexes." \(^\text{163}\)

Ba criticises polygamy for its gender inequities and male-centredness privileging the man and marginalising women who are commodified by the custom of dowry and bride price, objectified as sexual beings for male gratification and dependent upon one man for sexual fulfilment. While Ramatoulaye and Modou are living harmoniously in a monogamous marriage they are living both by the spirit and letter of the law of Islam, a fulfilling state for Ramatoulaye. In taking a second wife Modou is still operating within Islamic culture but in favouring Binetou over Ramatoulaye he breaks the law decreeing that a husband must divide his attention equally among his wives. (p.58)

Following Modou and Binetou's marriage, Ramatoulaye elects to stay but is subjected to Modou's neglect. (pp.45/6) Having prepared herself for equal sharing "according to the precepts of Islam concerning polygamic life" Ramatoulaye is "left with empty hands" (p.46) and, living in a vacuum, Modou avoids her:

Attempts by friends and family to bring him back to the fold proved futile. One of the new couple's neighbour's explained to me that the 'child' would go 'all a-quiver' each time Modou said my name or showed any desire to see his children. He never came again; his new found happiness gradually swallowed up his memory of us. He forgot about us. (p.46)

Ramatoulaye uses the solitude to look back and inward in a retrospective and introspective review of her life, much of it associated with Assatou to whom she discloses her thoughts in what becomes a journey of self-discovery.

Ba introduces a journey motif into the narrative with Ramatoulaye's inner journey taking her into an aspect of enclosure connected to her new position as co-wife. One of the changes polygamy has brought into her life is associated with the traditional division of domestic labour. In addition to her former duties she takes over Modou's as well:
The purchase of basic foodstuffs kept me occupied at the end of every month: I made sure that I was never short of tomatoes or of oil, potatoes or onions during those periods when they became rare in the markets; I stored bags of 'Siam' rice, much loved by the Senegalese. My brain was taxed by new financial gymnastics. The last date for payment of electricity bills and of water rates demanded my attention. I was often the only woman in the queue. Replacing the locks and latches of broken doors, replacing broken windows was a bother, as well as looking for a plumber to deal with blocked sinks. My son Mawdo Fall complained about burnt-out bulbs that needed replacement. (p.51)

Thrown back on her own resources, Ramatoulaye finds herself on an outward journey of self-discovery in overcoming her shyness and going alone to cinemas taking a seat:

...with less and less embarrassment as the months went by. People stared at the middle-aged lady without a partner. I would feign indifference, while anger hammered against my nerves and tears I held back welled up behind my eyes. From the surprised looks, I gauged the slender liberty granted to women...What a great distraction from distress is the cinema! Intellectual films, those with a message, sentimental films, detective films, comedies, thrillers, all these were my companions. I learned from them lessons of greatness, courage and perseverance. They deepened and widened my vision of the world, thanks to their cultural value. (pp.51/2)

The gift of a "cream-coloured Fiat 125" (p.54) from Assatou and learning to drive symbolises Ramatoulaye's further progress into a wider world.

While the two women's shared experience of polygamy is similar in its effects on their lives, each resolves the breakdown of her marriage differently with a compliant Ramatoulaye preparing herself for the experience of co-wife in opposition to Assatou's assertive divorcing of Mawdo rather than share him with another wife. Renting a house and setting up a home for herself and the four sons of her marriage to Mawdo, Assatou turns to the outside world. Further successful study leads her to the School of Interpreters in France followed by her "appointment into the Senegalese Embassy in the United States." (p.32)

Unable to negotiate greater gender equity within their marriage relationships both women choose to remain single. Following her divorce, Assatou, "an innocent victim of an unjust cause and the courageous pioneer of a new life" (p.34) finds a measure of fulfilment in the "power of books". (p.32) Following Islamic custom Ramatoulaye becomes part of Modou's estate, to be claimed by one of his brothers, Mawdo or Tamsir. The tone of Tamsir's proposal of marriage objectifying Ramatoulaye is the catalyst for
her breaking "thirty years of silence, thirty years of harassment" (pp.57/8) in a criticism of the gender inequities in his practice of polygamy:

"What of your wives, Tamsir? Your income can meet neither their needs nor those of your numerous children. To help you out with your financial obligations, one of your wives dyes, another sells fruit, the third untiringly turns the handle of her sewing machine. You, the revered lord, you take it easy, obeyed at the crook of a finger."

(p.58)

Ba's inclusion in the narrative of Ramatoulaye's second suitor is an opportunity for her authorial voice to articulate the cause for greater gender equity in public life. As a former candidate for Ramatoulaye's hand, Daouda Dieng, now a deputy in the National Assembly, was her mother's favourite. Ramatoulaye takes "refuge in banalities" (p.60) to avoid the question of marriage, banalities leading into a "political discussion" (p.62) and criticism of the gender inequities in the legislature in which only four of the hundred deputies are women. Gendered perspectives emerge with Daouda rationalising and comparing women to 'mortar shells' with the potential to demolish and inflame. Ramatoulaye draws on history and recent legislature to support her argument against Daouda's violent imagery:

"But we are not incendiaries: rather, we are stimulants...In many fields, and without skirmishes, we have taken advantage of the notable achievements that have reached us from elsewhere, the gains wrested from the lessons of history. We have a right, just as you have, to education, which we ought to be able to pursue to the furthest limits of our intellectual capacities. We have a right to equal, well-paid employment, to equal opportunities. The right to vote is an important weapon. And now the Family Code has been passed, restoring to the most humble of women the dignity that has so often been trampled upon....Nearly twenty years of independence! When will we have the first female minister involved in the decisions concerning the development of our country...'(pp.60/61)

Daouda counters Ramatoulaye's argument with women's choosing to dedicate themselves to the private world of 'husband, class and children,' enabling men to dominate public life with its access to power and resources and opportunities to grasp "the larger portion of the cake when you are sharing it out." (p.62)

Ba rises above the harsher realities of life depicted in her narratives and draws on her imagination to create an alternative society, one in which men and women have
greater mutual understanding and appreciation of each others needs in family relationships. Delivered through the voice of Ramatoulaye Ba suggests that:

The success of the family is born of a couple's harmony, as the harmony of multiple instruments creates a pleasant symphony. The nation is made up of all the families, rich or poor, united or separated, aware or unaware. The success of a nation therefore depends inevitably on the family. (p.89)

In drawing on a musical metaphor Ba implies that the role of the composer in the creation of an harmonious (social) orchestration should be shared. But Ramatoulaye's romantic idealism overlooks the reality of an incumbent patriarchy bent on maintaining a culturally constructed power/gender dichotomy. The cathartic effect of Ramatoulaye's series of letters to Assatou is revealed in the novel's closure with their anticipated meeting, a signifier of Ramatoulaye's continuation of her journey towards self-discovery and her search for 'happiness'. (p.89)

Cultural differences dominate Ba's second, and final novel, Scarlet Song, as it draws thematically on polygamy in a criticism of its gender inequities as a patriarchal construct privileging the male. The narrative takes the reader beyond the intimacy of Ramatoulaye's and Asatou's enclosed world of shared confidences and experiences of polygamy to a post-modern cutting across traditional values that restrict women politically, economically and socially.

Set primarily in post-independent Senegal and France from the late 1960's the novel's conflict arises from the French heroine's reaction to her Senegalese husband's secret marriage to a second wife. By basing the novel on the subject of mixed marriage and the optimism of youth Ba shows how this optimism changes to disappointment and tragedy with cross-cultural pressures, infanticide and the hero's rejection of monogamy and return to his African cultural roots.

As signifiers of the colonial dichotomy and central figures in the romantic tragedy, Ousmane Gueye and Mireille de La Vallee meet on common ground as school students, (14) later attending the same University in Dakar as undergraduates (p.17) of equal ability and from supportive family backgrounds. Ousmane's father, Djibril Gueye's
evaluation of a Western education as the "best possible character-training" turns out to be "Ousmane's opportunity." (p.9) Coming from a poor but devout Muslim family background he accepts aspects of Western culture that will bring him comparative wealth and prestige among his own people.

As the daughter of a French diplomat and his wife, Mireille represents modernity as a liberated woman free to choose between the comparative protection of traditional patriarchal domination, or the risks associated with independence. The neutrality of campus life offers space for the development of her and Ousmane's friendship and love unknown to their families. But the discovery of their relationship, together with Ousmane's colour by Mireille's father (p.25), introduces the theme of racial prejudice. Mireille's subsequent exile to France by her father to complete her studies and separate her and Ousmane divides her loyalties between Vallee, whom she brands an "old coloniser," (p.28) and Ousmane, signifier of the 'other' as a formerly colonised subject, despite his assimilation into Western culture.

After qualifying as teachers and a testing five years' separation Mireille and Ousmane marry. Rejection of each by the other's family is a further test of their love and determination to subvert traditional racial prejudices. Mireille's conversion to Islamic traditions and beliefs proves to be incomplete with her later fatal resistance to its more extreme patriarchal imperatives governing proprietary male attitudes to domestic privacy, joint finances and polygamy. Living with Ousmane's parents Mireille finds she is under the "continual and annoying surveillance" of Yaye Khady, her mother-in-law. While the offer of a post with the Ministry of Education making her eligible for a flat (p.81) promises longed for privacy the promise is short-lived. With the move Yaye "developed the habit of dropping in on them whenever Ousmane deprived her of his presence for one or two days...her Sunday visit was a ritual. She would burst into their bedroom, finding them still in their night attire." On her visits "She would pick her teeth and spit on the carpet," widening the cultural gap between herself and Mireille. Ousmane encouraged an open house, welcoming his 'cronies' who were always dropping in and insisting they stay for dinner. (p.85) With Ousmane's neglect of her and their son,
Mireille's suspicions about his second marriage (p.155) are realised in checking their joint bank account, "One glance sufficed to measure the extent of the financial disaster...The massive withdrawals transformed her doubts to certainty." (p.156) Ousmane had depleted their bank account financing his marriage to Ouleymatou and installing...his new family in a house large enough to make a home for his mother-in-law and Ouleymatou's brothers and sisters which hid from the neighbours the identity of the real mistress of the house. (p.138)

Ba is critical of the secrecy associated with the marrying of second and subsequent wives in some marriages causing existing wives humiliation. Mireille's tragedy is her becoming a co-wife unknowingly. While unaware of Ousmane's second marriage Mireille finds herself isolated, alone and on discovering Ousmane's secret she suffers deep shame, humiliated by his rejection. Her killing of their son, (p.164) symbol of their former devotion and optimism, is a radical statement of rejection obliterating their lives together. Ba's closure of the narrative, with Mireille's return to France for trial, also signifies the closure of an episode in Ousmane's life, now a signifier of decolonisation and the indigene's return to a dominant pre-colonial culture with its own ideological customs and beliefs.

While women and their lives are central to Nwapa, Emecheta's and Ba's texts as signifiers of the subordinate in culturally constructed patriarchies, influenced by colonisation, they are portrayed in wide variety. All three writers show the power of the myth of male superiority in their female characters' passive acceptance of male domination as natural in both organic and civilised societies. But while this is most pronounced in the texts of Nwapa and Emecheta set in colonial Nigeria male domination in Ba's novels is qualified by a coercive, and male-constructed, system of social control confining the majority of women to the home and family environment under institutionalised Islamic law.
10 Conclusion

For their narratives Nwapa, Emecheta and Ba all draw on the main issues of importance to women including motherhood, childlessness, polygamy, widowhood, education and economic independence, focusing on postcolonial societies. Writing on the importance of motherhood as the principle demand made on women in some cultures they draw attention to the pressures placed on women to bear as many children as possible, and often from too early an age to the detriment of their health. Of equal importance is the shame and humiliation the childless woman is made to suffer for failing to fulfil a particular culture's expectations of her in the role of mother with its ongoing social obligations as provider through farming, trade or prostitution, and nurturer and carer in the traditional extended family. Polygamy is shown to marginalise women, allowing a man to have several wives concurrently while restricting a woman to one husband who must, in theory, distribute his favours equally among his wives. The hierarchical system is shown to give rise to competition among the wives for the man's attention in the confines of the home and family. The necessity for placing women within a confining role is displayed in cultural attitudes to widowhood in which a woman, and any assets she may have, become the property of a male relative of her late husband.

The main issues of importance to women with the introduction of European colonisation arose from changes in political and economic structures and the necessity for a literate sector of the indigenous population to assist in the administration of a colonial government and move towards a modern consumer society. The introduction of literacy into oral cultures as a means of communication not requiring the personal presence of a speaker brought a range of new ideas and the erosion of traditional values. While boys were given priority over girls with access to education under colonial rule initially, the value of a literate population was appreciated with the moves towards nationalism and independence. Wider education meant the development of self-identity, negotiable skills and economic independence for both men and women in the drift of
populations from rural subsistence economies to urban production and consumerism - but for the illiterate city life could be harsh.

While all three writers draw on these as some of the main issues of importance to women their perspectives vary regarding the role of women in both traditional and modern societies together with their views on the benefits of colonialism and its disruptive effects on indigenous cultures.

In her recreation of traditional Igbo society Nwapa is far less critical of the subordinate role of women than Emecheta. In portraying women sympathetically Nwapa shows to what extent they contribute to maintaining cultural traditions by accepting their marginalisation in a male-dominated society, but not without some reservations. Nwapa and Emecheta alike question the cultural myth of motherhood as the only fulfilling role for women with both writers constructing their heroines as individuals with interests which go beyond parenting. Nwapa deals with childlessness pragmatically, her heroines either accepting their fate and diverting their creative energies elsewhere or seeking out a productive male to father their children.

Nwapa is the iconoclast in having her heroines reject polygamy, refusing to accept the role of one of several wives to the same man and choosing rather to live alone, making a life for themselves without a husband, or alternatively choosing to die in preference to following tradition by re-marrying within the family. She also shows how, within the parameters of cultural constraints, women's initiative and resourcefulness contribute to the generating and distribution of wealth within the local economy giving women a degree of economic independence. Her criticisms of colonialism include the coloniser's 'user pays' system of education since it legally promoted cultural gender inequities allowing the traditional privileging of boys over girls in preparing them for survival in a modern state.

Unlike Nwapa, with her concerns for the traditional Igbo women and their successors in post-colonial urban settings, Emecheta has her heroines either forced out of or escaping from traditional society - from rural to urban settings or significantly overseas to the former imperial centre or 'Mother Country'. Where Nwapa confines the
settings for her narratives to Nigeria, Emecheta is much more adventurous in drawing on the widespread effects of colonisation by having her characters travelling to and living in England. She draws on the main issues of importance to women, primarily the black diaspora, living in the Caribbean and England, reflecting on her own desire to escape from traditional Igbo life. Like Nwapa she is critical of traditional Igbo attitudes to motherhood, but where Nwapa endows her heroines with a quiet, almost passive self-determination Emecheta takes a more negative view of women in Igbo society. Although her women characters are generally overburdened with family responsibilities, she endows them with survival skills to partly compensate them for their lack of education as a key to economic independence and as a self-liberating force to combat oppression.

Emecheta makes her readers aware of slavery's pre-colonial existence as a traditional cultural practice in Africa and open to exploitation by the West. Rather than condemning European imperialism and its impact on African cultures she commends some aspects of colonisation of particular benefit to women citing health care and education and drawing attention to the availability and state's supervision of these in England, recognisable in former colonial policies.

Writing from the former French colony of Senegal, and urban rather than rural settings, the main issues of importance to women in Mariama Ba's texts are similar to those of Nwapa and Emecheta. The same terms of reference to motherhood apply in all three writer's stories, but Ba is particularly critical of the cultural practice of polygamy as a source of misery and suffering to many women, a state shared by her three heroines. She treats the practice differently from either Nwapa or Emecheta, writing in an Islamic theocracy in which polygamy is traditional and associated with the enclosure of women, restricting their freedom to socialise within a circle of family and friends. Divorce is an option for both husbands and wives and Ba uses this as a liberating force for one of her heroines, enabling her to seek further education and economic independence. As a theme polygamy binds her heroines through its wide-ranging effects on women. Her other heroines, while rejecting the idea of being superseded by a second wife choose
either to stay in the family home, but only as a housekeeper or, more drastically, commit infanticide and face trial for murder rather than share her husband with his second wife.

Like Emecheta, Ba also has her characters travelling to a former imperial centre and by linking the two territories with their different cultures Ba is seen to treat polygamy differently to Nwapa and Emecheta through introducing a theme of mixed marriage involving both race and colour.

Similarities shared by Nwapa, Emecheta and Ba include their drawing on their personal experience of being both the 'other' in the colonial dichotomy and as liberated subjects following Independence with its restructuring of political and economic systems. Ba uses Ramatoulaye's voice to criticise the lack of women representatives in the legislature after 20 years of Independence ($LAL$, p. 60) signifying an awareness of the subordination of women and gender inequities in the distribution of authority and accountability in public arenas.

Coming out of a previously male-dominated literary scene that consistently marginalised the female in both its texts and access to the means of writing and publishing, Emecheta, together with Nwapa and Ba, are among a small minority of indigenous female writers to break through the culturally constructed barriers that silence the female voice beyond the local arena and therefore limiting its power to promote social change through a broad exchange of ideas. The narratives are representative of the indigenous female experience told by the women themselves offering authentic material for the exploration of the racial 'Other' to compare with their Western construction as subordinate to the colonisers' self-imposed 'Self'.
Man's historical appropriation of the role of explorer, in both a physical and epistemological sense, demanded mobility and the freedom to develop ideas to enforce his power and his perceived mastery of the world and nature. Male-produced narratives, reflecting the marginalising of women in these ventures are deeply entrenched and accepted as traditional social practice across cultures. By appropriating Pocahontas's narrative, the early colonisers arrested a primary source of social history as a gender-balanced narrative and since a Western construction of Pocahontas was called upon to introduce my dissertation it would seem appropriate to comment on the view of her embodied in North American indigenes' legend.

Pocahontas did meet and fall in love with John Smith when she was 12 or 13 and a woman by Indian standards of the day, adopting him as a brother, a custom open to her, forming a connection between the two nations that had so far been mutually rewarding. Following Smith's leaving for England, Pocahontas and her father Wahunsonacock left the Jamestown settlement and went home from where Pocahontas was sent on varying missions to other Indian Nations by him. Serving as a spokeswoman for the Algonquian Confederacy she arranged new trade agreements, cemented old friendships and built new ones.(p.104)

Re-visiting Jamestown both Pocahontas and her father were taken prisoner and, although they were not free to leave the settlement they could wander among the people and the houses (p.104) where they met a missionary who was also teaching people to read. Pocahontas negotiated with the British, arranging to have her father sent home while she stayed in Jamestown to learn how to read and write and to learn more about Christianity. The accounts given at the time show Pocahontas to be an eager convert to literacy with the Bible as her primary text. As one of her teachers, John Rolfe became an admirer and then her husband.

At the time of their meeting Pocahontas was a powerful voice in Jamestown, her father was a great landowner and she knew the secrets of growing tobacco successfully.
With Pocahontas's and Rolfe's forthcoming marriage the saga enters a phase of deceit since John Smith had written to England about having his life saved by a princess of the realm whereas royalty did not exist among Indian cultures. The court of St James was adamant in discouraging contact between the races and the issue of class was an equal barrier to the marriage (p.106) which nevertheless took place producing a son, Thomas, in 1615.

Pocahontas and Rolfe were invited to England to be presented to King James and Queen Anne. The tobacco industry was a profitable one to the British monarch. He wished to thank the Rolfe's in person, but more than that, he wished to meet Pocahontas, the "princess" of the Indians. (p.107)

Pocahontas met the King and Queen. It was reported that they were impressed. Illness began making inroads on Pocahontas's family and Rolfe was given permission to take them to the country where the air and water was cleaner (p.108)

Pocahontas became ill. She had already lost some of her people in England and had spent her time in the country in mourning. The Rolfe's prepared to take their leave and return to Virginia. Thomas was ill also. They set sail, but in Gravesend the ship was stopped to allow Pocahontas to go ashore for medical care. "The consensus is that she had tuberculosis."(p.108) She died there and Wahunsonacock died within a short time of receiving the news. Thomas stayed in England and was reared by his father's uncle. John Rolfe went back to Virginia and died shortly after the Indian uprising that took place. With Pocahontas and her father both dead, the so-called Peace of Pocahontas was at an end. Thomas Rolfe returned to Virginia in his teens to meet his mother's people and see the place where he was born. Later he was commissioned a lieutenant in the colonial militia and took up duty as a colonist against the Indians. (pp.108/9) In conclusion, Beth Brant, a North American indigenous poet, comments on the irony of Pocahontas becoming the...

...grandmother to an estimated two million people who lay claim to being her descendants. It is ironic to me because a Virginian who would recoil in horror at having a Black ancestor, points with pride at the Indian blood in his body. The British did their job well, anointing Pocahontas a princess while excising her Indianess. We are left with a story of a woman who was made into an "incidental" Indian...There was nothing incidental about her. She fought for her people and for the future of her people... (p.109)
In the context of the novel as art, and consequently a source of inspiration, the novels of Nwapa, Emecheta and Ba show what is possible as they offer alternatives to an ongoing male domination across cultures.
Notes

4 Hulme, p.19
5 Ashcroft, p.1
7 Flora Nwapa, Efuru, (USA: Heinemann, 1966)
8 Flora Nwapa, Idu, (USA: Heinemann, 1987) All quotations are from this edition and page references will be indicated in brackets within the text.
9 Mariama Ba, So Long a Letter, (USA: Heinemann, 1989)
12 ibid p.2
14 Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisman, Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory, (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994) p.134
15 ibid
16 ibid p.378
17 ibid p.376
18 ibid p.379
19 ibid
20 Microsoft, Encarta '95, Nigeria.'
21 More recently the lack of women writers cited in Two Centuries of African English, Lalage Brown, Ed., (London: Heinemann, 1982) points to the dependence of women writers on male patronage for recognition and signifies the extent of male generosity and need for negotiation. Similarly, publishers such as Heinemann, Malthouse Press and New Horn Press show a predominance of male authors in their publication lists.
24 ibid pp.22/9
26 ibid p.121
27 The Royal Niger Company's forces consisted of five European and 416 Africans while the British forces, in the ARO expedition, consisted of 74 white officers, and 3464 African soldiers and carriers. ibid p.123
28 Eldred Durosimi Jones, p.1
31 ibid p.123
32 ibid p.130
33 Ashcroft et al, The Empire Writes Back, p.3
35 ibid p.201
When Kenyan novelist Ngugi Wa Thiong’O took to writing in his own language, Gikuyu, his government arrested him in 1977, and he wrote his first Gikuyu novel largely in prison; it was translated as Devil on the Cross (1982), after being published in Nairobi in 1980 in its original version. Detained: A Prison Writer’s Diary (1981) was, however written in English. Several extracts from works banned in Kenya have appeared in Index on Censorship, a periodical founded in 1972 by Writers and Scholars International, a group of writers, scholars, artists and intellectuals concerned with the promotion of intellectual freedom. Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka was also imprisoned for pro-Biafran activity during 1967/9 (Drabble OCEL) and in April 1997 was tried, in absentia, for treason. In 1996 the Nigerian writer Saro-Wiwa was arrested and hanged for championing the rights of people about to be forcefully dispossessed from their land.

The period of establishing Igbo territory in South Eastern Nigeria can only be surmised although archaeological finds, including a rock shelter, a variety of stone tools and pottery 4,500 years old which suggest an early nucleus of settlement in northern Igboland, is confirmed by Igbo tradition. (Isichei pp.3/4) Settlement in the sparsely populated sandy uplands, with their limited fertility and frequent water shortages, rather than on the well-watered alluvial soils of the river valleys, offered a number of positive advantages to agriculturalists with limited technical resources; the land was more easily cleared and the well-drained soil favoured yam cultivation, the staple crop. The pre-colonial Igbo believed the streams and rivers to be the preserve of divinities and other spiritual beings. More pragmatically the uplands were less susceptible to canoe-borne attack and water-borne diseases. (ibid pp4/6) The migration could have been typical of a localised population explosion and the necessity to find more land, or the result of an exodus from traditional lands following an invasion. Further development as an ethnic-based society followed the classical model. From early settlement the Igbo heartland repeatedly built up levels of population pressure which the ecological environment was unable to sustain, and which from time to time gave rise to migration to other parts of Igboland. (ibid p.6) The clannish character of pre-colonial Igbo peoples was assisted by their physical isolation flanked by dense tropical swamp and rain forest along the West Coast, wooded savannah and the Sahara Desert in the north. Added to these obstacles to regular communication with other communities was the tsetse fly making the use of horses and oxen as a means of transport impractical. The intensely local character of agriculture was dictated by the challenge of the forest coupled with the absence of animals. Clearing the forest for farming fell to labour-intensive methods and communal efforts involving family groups. (Coleman, Nigeria, pp.12/13) The role of the Igbo female in the subsistence farming economy was equal to that of the male with some divisions of labour in the stages of land clearing, sowing, weeding and harvesting. Recognition of the input of female labour in yam cultivation was marginal with the successful male farmer being singled out for the award of Yam King. (Isichei p.28) The discovery and development of the yam formed the economic basis of Igbo civilisation. Held to be of great importance it was given ritual and symbolic expression in many areas of Igbo life. As the Yam Spirit it was known by a variety of names in different parts of Igboland. (Isichei, ibid)
The Women's War was the violent culmination of traditional manifestations of Igbo women's power, called "making war on" or "sitting on a man." Such power usually took the form of raucous and destructive behavior and was directed at men who were perceived to threaten their personal or economic security. In November-December 1929, tens of thousands of Igbo (and Ibibio) women "made war on" the corrupt male Warrant Chiefs who comprised the Native Courts, the British juridical system for the natives of Calabar and Owerri provinces. Although the women originally mobilized around the issue of women's taxation, their demands soon included abolition of the Native Courts (or the inclusion of women on them) and the return of all white men to their own country. Information was conveyed through the elaborate system of women's market networks. Significantly these uprisings were conducted in a manner consonant with women's traditional power in the villages... However, the war ended violently; more than fifty women were killed and fifty were wounded from the gunfire of police and soldiers... It is essential to understand that the women did not believe they would be hurt, so culturally appropriate were their actions." ibid pp.95/6


ibid pp.147


ibid p.43

ibid p.69


In traditional Igbo culture when a wife no longer wants to sleep with her husband she may marry another woman to take her place as his sexual partner while retaining her own position in the order of his wives. (pp.8/9)

Buchi Emecheta, *Head Above Water*, (Oxford: Heinemann, 1986) All quotations are from this edition and page references will be indicated in brackets within the text.


Buchi Emecheta, *In the Ditch,* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1994) All quotations are from this edition and the page references will be indicated in brackets within the text.

Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood,* (New York: George Braziller, 1979) All quotations are from this edition and page references will be indicated in brackets within the text.

Buchi Emecheta, 'That First Novel' pp. 119/20

An object of any kind superstitiously venerated by West African indigenes and used as a charm or amulet; a fetish; the supernatural power attributed to such objects.


Emecheta, Buchi *Second-Class Citizen,* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1974) All quotations are from this edition and the page references will be indicated in brackets within the text.

Sougou, Omar 'The Experience of an African Woman in Britain: A Reading of Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*' in Geoffrey Davis & Hena Maes-Joliner, Eds., *Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English,* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990) p. 511

ibid p. 512

Buchi Emecheta, 'A Nigerian Writer Living in London' 121.

Sougou, Omar 511

Buchi Emecheta, *Destination Biafra,* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1994) First published in 1982 it is a story in which Emecheta articulates her gender interests within the parameters of a civil war in which politicians jockey for power while ordinary people fight the real battle. Set in the late 1960's in Nigeria the heroine, Debbie, the daughter of a corrupt Nigerian government minister, defies her parents by joining the army. She is torn between the traditional, passive role of a Nigerian woman and her desire to take an active part in the struggle. Her English lover, who is supposedly in Nigeria as a military adviser is there simply to protect British interests. (DB p. 245)

Emechea, Buchi. *The Bride Price,* (USA: George Braziller, Inc., 1976) All quotations are from this edition and page references will be indicated in brackets within the text.


Emechea, Buchi. *The Family,* (USA: George Braziller, Inc. 1990) All quotations are from this edition and page references will be indicated in brackets within the text.


Blain et al p. 47

ibid

Ba, Mariama. *So Long a Letter,* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989) All quotations are from this edition and page references will be indicated in brackets within the text.

Ba, Mariama, *Scarlet Song,* (UK: Longman, 1989) All quotations are from this edition and page references will be indicated in brackets within the text.

ibid

Kemp, Yakini, 'Romantic Love and the Individual in the Novels by Mariama Ba, Buchi Emecheta and Bessie Head' in *Obsidian 11: Black Literature in Review,* Winter 1988, Vol 3 Part 3 pp. 3/4

ibid p. 2

ibid

Bibliography


Coleman, James S. *Nigeria - Background to Nationalism*, USA: Berkeley, (Reprint).


Hulme, Peter. 'Polytropic Man: Tropes of Sexuality and Mobility in Early Colonial Discourse'. Frances Baker et al., *Europe and its Others*, 2 Vols The Essex Sociology of Literature Conference, 1984


Sougou, Omar. "The Experience of an African Woman in Britain: A Reading of Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*"

