

# Out of the silence: Igbo women writers and contemporary Nigeria

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# Out of the Silence: Igbo Women Writers and Contemporary Nigeria

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A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the degree Doctor of Philosophy.

February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

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Despite the substantive research on individual Nigerian Igbo women writers, little is known on the growth and transition of their writing from the first generation of writers to the present contemporary third-generation. The overall image that emerges from the literature is that Nigerian Igbo women's works redress stereotypical images of female characters in male writings. This thesis analyses the changing woman subject in family and the nation in the works of eight Nigerian Igbo women, from first generation Flora Nwapa, second generation Buchi Emecheta and Ifeoma Okoye, and third generation Akachi Ezeigbo, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Unoma Azuah, Chika Unigwe and Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani. An analysis of selected novels reveals the female subject in each generation changing within the family and nation to be more pronounced and strong-willed than in the writings of the generation before. Female characters are no longer depicted in archetypal images of victims but rather portrayed playing active roles within their family and nation. Womanist theory is applied to expound the female characters' quests for self-determination and agency within these spheres. In the domestic realm of the family a distinct progression can be detected in the concerns and themes of the novels; but in the representation of nationalism in the Biafran War, the corruption and criminality that followed the war, and the spread of sex trafficking, the three generations are in strong agreement. Since the publication of Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* the silenced and stereotyped Igbo woman has found a voice in women novelists that has impacted greatly on contemporary Nigerian life.

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# Abstract

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Despite the substantive research on individual Nigerian Igbo women writers, little is known on the growth and transition of their writing from the first generation of writers to the present contemporary third-generation. The overall image that emerges from the literature is that Nigerian Igbo women's works redress stereotypical images of female characters in male writings. This thesis analyses the changing woman subject in family and the nation in the works of eight Nigerian Igbo women, from first generation Flora Nwapa, second generation Buchi Emecheta and Ifeoma Okoye, and third generation Akachi Ezeigbo, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Unoma Azuah, Chika Unigwe and Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani. An analysis of selected novels reveals the female subject in each generation changing within the family and nation to be more pronounced and strong-willed than in the writings of the generation before. Female characters are no longer depicted in archetypal images of victims but rather portrayed playing active roles within their family and nation. Womanist theory is applied to expound the female characters' quests for self-determination and agency within these spheres. In the domestic realm of the family a distinct progression can be detected in the concerns and themes of the novels; but in the representation of nationalism in the Biafran War, the corruption and criminality that followed the war, and the spread of sex trafficking, the three generations are in strong agreement. Since the publication of Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* the silenced and stereotyped Igbo woman has found a voice in women novelists that has impacted greatly on contemporary Nigerian life.

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For my mums, Laisa Rajamalar Jebaratnam and Elizabeth Renjithamalar  
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# Introduction

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Since the 1950's and the 1960s, African literature has been dominated by male writers such as Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Elechi Amadi and Ngugi wa Thiong'o who have inevitably presented African culture and tradition from a male-oriented perspective. African women writers only began to be accorded a space in the African literary canon from 1966, with the publication of Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*. Therefore, representations of female characters in pioneering African novels like *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952), *Things Fall Apart* (1959), *Jagua Nana* (1961), *The Concubine* (1966) and *The River Between* (1965) were very constricted, portraying women mainly in submissive roles as wives and mothers. The positioning of women in traditional, domestic roles was possibly exacerbated by the absence of females as main protagonists in early African novels and the effect was to marginalize women as accessories to the masculine story.

The emergence of the African woman writer was important in re-representing and re-visioning women's journey towards autonomy and self-determination,<sup>1</sup> and their writing heralded a radical change in the perception of gender in African literature. Their representations "emphasize that the experience, identity, and role of a

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<sup>1</sup> See Ebele Eko "Changes in the Image of the African Woman: A Celebration." *Phylon*, 47, no. 3 (1986): 210-211. This critic explains how when African women writers began writing, they changed the early twentieth century image of the African woman.

woman are all distinguishable from an [African] man's" (Brown 1981: 211). Such a reconstruction created an avenue for "female writers [to] handle female characters more sympathetically than men ... [since] in Achebe's portrayal [a] subordinate woman is a good woman" (James 1990: 42). This meant that writers like Flora Nwapa (1966), Ama Ata Aidoo (1965), Bessie Head (1968) and Buchi Emecheta (1972) not only revised existing depictions of the African woman by male writers but also represented female characters as experiencing their strengths and weaknesses in more realistic, vivid ways. Such changing representations demonstrate the developing sense of agency for women, not merely in fiction but also in society. They celebrated the image of the African woman by using "women as protagonists...women-related themes in their works...[showing] concern for the psychological growth and liberation of women from all forces of oppression and limitation" (Eko 1986: 218). Novels like *Efuru* (1966), *A Woman Alone* (1990), *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *So Long a Letter* (1981) are examples of narratives that paved new ways of looking at African women in African Literature. By incorporating elements of oral tradition and myths into their writing, these writers created a space for women characters to be dynamic and complex, allowing them to express themselves freely, celebrating a sense of agency.

However, despite their active involvement in the African literary sphere, African women writers were not afforded the level of critical attention enjoyed by their male counterparts. For example, Bernth Lindfors' article *The Famous Authors Reputation Test* (1994), reports the findings of a test created to evaluate African writers, the ranking of a particular author based on the number of occasions the author's text was reviewed, analysed in a literary criticism article or made reference to in a bibliography. According to the results, from 1936 to 1986, all the writers on the chart were male. The African woman writer in Lindfors' test results only gained recognition in 1986. He states that "Head and Emecheta, for instance, moved up from virtually being unknown in BALE I to being serious contenders in BALE III [1986]" (Lindfors 139). Buchi Emecheta, Bessie Head, Ama Ata Aidoo, Flora Nwapa, Grace Ogot and Efua Sutherland found themselves among the lower half of the 37 writers on Lindfors' authors reputation test. This study clearly indicates that African women writers were not present before the 1960s and only began to be given critical attention in the latter half of the 1980s.

Nigerian women writers faced similar predicaments within the Nigerian literary sphere. Nigerian literature began with Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard* in 1952 but was made popular by Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1959), which not only represented Nigerian society but also offered a model for African people in the literary sphere as they spoke of Africa's predicament with the onset of colonialism. Nigerian literature, on the other hand, reflected the specific socio-political needs and way of life of the three dominant tribes – the Igbo, the Yoruba and the Hausa, which often reflected Nigeria's struggle for independence and its civil war arising from a political conflict between its nation's different ethnicities and religions. Given its high literacy level, Nigeria has produced prolific male and female writers. However, as in the larger corpus of African literature, Nigerian literature was "phallic dominated with male writers [Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe and Elechi Amadi] and critics dealing almost exclusively with male characters and concerns naturally aimed at a predominantly male audience" (Otokunefor, 1989: xi). The works of these male novelists treated Nigerian "female subjects ... with such gross levity that women's reactions... [were] hardly documented. Women are as muted as their men are made vocal" (Podis 2000: 122). Female characters were invariably stereotyped as muted beings, placed in subordinate roles, and this only changed in the 1960s when Nigerian women writers began publishing. Early works from first generation Nigerian woman writer Flora Nwapa included novels like *Efuru* (1966), *Idu* (1970), *Never Again* (1976) and *One is Enough* (1981) which identified Nigerian women in more authentic ways, representing them as more dynamic and complex characters than they had appeared in the work of male writers. Consequently, second generation Nigerian women writers like Buchi Emecheta, Zaynab Alkali, Simi Bedford, Ifeoma Okoye and Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo, in novels such as *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *Destination Biafra* (1981), *The Stillborn* (1984), *The Virtuous Woman* (1987), *The Yoruba Dancing Girl* (1992) and *Behind the Clouds* (1982) continued to address the Nigerian woman's general condition in the modern world, continuing on from their predecessors to "validate women's roles in Nigeria" (Ogunyemi 1996: 285). Third-generation women writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Sefi Atta, Sade Adeniran, Unoma Azuah, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, Sarah Ladipo Manyika and Abidemi Sanusi are some examples of women who not only continue to portray present day Nigeria through their fiction but also re-conceive more propitious images of Nigerian women.

Nigerian women writers suffered the lack of scholarly attention and were not accorded the critical attention their Nigerian male counterparts Chinua Achebe and Elechi Amadi received. Henrietta Otokunefor and Obiageli Wood in *Nigerian Female Writers: A Critical Perspective* (1989), write that there were only few readily available criticisms on Nigerian women writers, namely Lloyd Brown's *Women Writers in Black Africa* (1981). This suggests the importance of bringing together Nigerian women novelists, dramatists and poets in order to "throw some light on a number of relatively unknown female writers who... have contributed immensely in their various areas, to the development of Nigerian literature." Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi in *African Woman Palava: The Nigerian Novel by Women* (1996), argues in a similar vein that the Nigerian female voice has not only been absent from the literary scene, but states that women's stories need to be heard in order to "confront the socioeconomic questions and institutionalised injustices" against Nigerian women (Ogunyemi 1996: 3).

Drawing upon this background, this thesis contributes to the analysis of works on Nigerian women writers, in an attempt to ensure that criticism of Nigerian women's literature continues to grow. In acknowledging the depth of textual and cultural analysis needed to pay adequate homage to the various, distinct tribes in Nigeria<sup>2</sup>, the predominant being the Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa, this thesis will specifically focus on Nigerian Igbo women's writings to provide a fair, in depth and unhomogenized analysis of Igbo women's growth and contribution within the Nigerian literary sphere.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example, Bernth Lindfors's collection of essays *Critical Perspectives on Nigerian Literatures* (1976). In this volume, Lindfors brings together 14 articles that discuss the development of Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa culture, society and literature which gives an idea of the extensive knowledge required in understanding each social group.

## Why Igbo?

My first engagement with African women's literature began with Igbo writer Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). Inspired by Emecheta's life experiences, her resilience through an abusive marriage, her ability to single-handedly care for her five children, while being a janitor and attending night school to complete a doctoral degree and writing over 19 novels and plays, Emecheta excited my curiosity about the 'power' that women, specifically Igbo women possessed. This thesis came out of the experience of a young woman seeking answers for her own struggles, grappling with questions faced by a third generation postcolonial Malaysian Indian negotiating issues surrounding tradition and modernity, female subjectivity, agency and national identity. I found that a detailed investigation of Igbo female writers uncovered a legacy of women, beginning from Flora Nwapa, who actively represented female experiences of knowledge, power, subjectivity and agency against various forms of victimhood. This created a platform for me to discover an essential element in understanding feminine forms of power.

The Igbo people are among the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, the other two prominent ethnicities being the Hausa and the Yoruba. The Igbo heritage and ethnicity is varied. They are a synthesis of smaller groups that come from various parts of Eastern Nigeria. An example of this is seen in Ifi Amadiume's tracing early Igbo origins from the Umueri clan, the Igala people and the Nnobi people. The significance of the Igbo people is seen in their response to the colonizers, particularly in comparison to their Moslem counterparts the Hausas. Ernest Emenyonu in his article *Early Fiction in Igbo* (1973), points out that "towards the [end of the] nineteenth century ... the colonial system had been firmly established in the areas occupied by the Igbo in Nigeria" (9). He goes on to reveal that "many people had taken to the new Christian religion, which was one of the organs of the imperialist regime; Christianity was advertised as holding the key to the white man's "knowledge" and good jobs" (Emenyonu 1973: 9). This opinion is also advanced by F. K. Ekechi in *Colonialism and Christianity in West Africa: The Igbo Case, 1900-1915* (1971) who informs us that not only had it "become fashionable to be called a Christian, that church attendance became a new status symbol" (103-4). Ekechi sums up the Igbo astuteness by positing "for although it has been said that the Igbos are remarkably receptive to change, their positive response to innovation is indeed

determined by their uncanny sense of comparative advantage involved” (104). Therefore, while some Igbos chose to hold on to their traditional beliefs and practices, many chose to accept this advantageous aspect of the colonial situation. By comparison, David C.L Lim argues in his book *The Infinite Longing for Home: Desire and the Nation in Selected Writings of Ben Okri and K.S Maniam* (2005) that “the North [of Nigeria] was largely unmolested by British colonialists of the early twentieth century, who regarded its indigenous politico-religious institutions more as an expedient tool for the colonial enterprise than as a liability to be wiped out” (19). Thus the Hausa of Northern Nigeria were left to their devices, continuing to live agrarian lifestyles while the Igbo adopted Christianity and the politics of the colonial regime, which offered them tangible social opportunities. This form of tribal cleavage between the North and the South, Moslems and Christians, Hausa and Igbo, – a cleavage exacerbated by strategies of colonial preference – resulted in the Nigerian-Biafran war, its racial ferocity and tribal hatred creating a destructive spirit that still resonates in present day Nigerian society.

The Igbo people’s cultural dominance in Nigeria is seen in their receptiveness to education as a form of social mobility during the colonial regime, visible in their ability to acquire jobs that not only provided wealth but placed them in positions of power. One very good reason for focusing on the Igbo novel is that not only were the Igbo more educated and more familiar with English, but Nigerian literature as a whole – both male and female – is historically dominated by Igbo writing. Furthermore, the focus on a particular ethnic and language group, such as the Igbo, helps to identify the complex interrelation of ethnic identity and nationalism, an interrelation that led directly to the Biafran War. The fervour for self governance led to the most genocidal war in Nigeria’s history, one in which the United States, with its support for Gowon and wilful blindness to the genocide, remains deeply culpable. But the Biafran war also brings to light some forms of tribal nationalism, the masculinism of which has been contested and critiqued by women writers.

I believe that Igbo women have much to offer on the subject of their autonomy, self-definition, interpersonal relationships, national identity and patterns of change. Understanding the Igbo woman’s strength, resilience and power in Nigeria not only offers us a more invigorating, encouraging, aspirational image of the African

woman but it also forces us to acknowledge misrepresentations of Igbo women and the importance of replacing anachronistic models of African womanhood.

On the whole, critics concur that, “in the history of anthropological literature, Igbo women of eastern Nigeria were among the first to gain the attention of researchers as a group distinct from Igbo men” (Amadiume 1992: 13). Emma Mba’s *Nigerian Women Mobilised* (1982) is a foundational text into the vital role women played in pre-colonial economies and in the structures of power of traditional society. Extending largely on Mba’s ideas, Ife Amadiume states that this demarcation in Igbo women is seen with “both peaceful and violent mass demonstrations, riots, and finally open war with the British colonial government in 1929” (1992: 13). Historically, Igbo women were “universally recognised as the most militant of women ... cited and included in the most important contributions to feminist anthropology” (Amadiume, *Male Daughters* 13). The most well known study of Igbo women apart from Amadiume’s anthropological research was conducted by Sylvia Leith-Ross in her book *African Women: A Study of the Ibo in Nigeria* (1939). Despite her contradictory stance on her perceptions of the Igbo, which Ife Amadiume refers to as “an account by an inexperienced and untrained wife of a colonial officer,” Leith-Ross does highlight the perceptiveness of the Igbo (Amadiume, *Male Daughters* 14). She states

apart from their natural gifts, their cleverness in trade, their quickness in calculating where their interest lies, their memory, their easy grasp of some long, detailed story in the mazes ... they have intelligence as we understand it, the power of thought, and the power of reason. (Leith-Ross 1939: 112)

As well as recognising the Igbo people’s capabilities, Leith-Ross also specifically highlights, in the conclusion to her book, the importance, value and significance of Igbo women. She refers to them as

this rare and invaluable force, thousands upon thousands of ambitious, go-ahead, courageous, self-reliant, hardworking, independent women ... where openings must be made for them which give scope for their startling energy, their powers of organization and of leadership, their practical common sense and quick apprehension of reality. (337)

Leith-Ross’s work breaks new ground in conveying the Igbo woman’s capabilities. Yet we find that in Patrick Colm Hogan’s *How Sisters Behave to Sisters*: *Women’s*

*Culture and Igbo Society in Flora Nwapa's "Efuru"* (1999), that despite *Efuru* (1966) being such a landmark novel, it "lacks detailed textual and cultural analysis addressing its two central concerns – the nature of patriarchy and the existence of an alternative women's tradition within Igbo culture" (47). Certainly, Hogan's comment does not seem to take into account Marie Umeh's collection of critical perspectives in *Emerging Perspectives on Flora Nwapa: Critical and Theoretical Essays* (1998) and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's *Africa Wo/Man Palava: The Nigerian Novel by Women* (1996) which present various positive critiques of Nwapa's work, or more recent scholarship such as Wendy Griswold's *Bearing Witness: Readers, Writers, and the Novel in Nigeria* (2000), Elleke Boehmer's *Stories of Women and Mothers: Gender and Nationalism in the Early Fiction of Flora Nwapa* (2005) and the soon to be published, *Africa Literature Today 30: Retrospectives in African Literature Today* devoted to the memory of leading voices in African literature which includes Flora Nwapa. Despite the collection of recent critiques detailed here, Hogan does make a pertinent point on the neglect of female works prior to the past 15 or so years.

He argues strongly that as a novel *Efuru* (1966) "articulates an analysis of Igbo tradition which reveals, parallel to patriarchy, an almost equally strong tradition of women's solidarity and autonomy, an alternative tradition than can serve as a foil to patriarchy" (Hogan 1999: 47). Indeed in traditional Igbo society, "women had considerable economic, political and cultural autonomy" (47). They were industrious and actively involved in the subsistence economy. Although there was significant hindrance to, and diminution of, women's autonomy and mobility during colonialism, Igbo women still managed to establish their place in society, "far from the stereotype of the timid non-white woman, cowering before her all powerful husband" (Hogan 49). This was performed not only "against unjust acts by Igbo men, but against the British ... the greatest uprising against the British rule was the "Women's War" of 1929 in which Igbo women used the techniques of the *mikiri* to attack British courts, businesses etc," (Hogan 1999: 49) in an attempt to reinstate the Igbo traditional way of life against colonial domination This form of revolt and revolutionary action reflects some of the early seeds of what would be coined in the 1980's by Alice Walker and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi as "Womanism."

This thesis aims to explore texts that redress the male representations of Nigerian Igbo women, who are limited to archetypal roles as daughters, wives and

mothers. If historical examples cite Igbo women as industrious, autonomous and independent, the question remains as to why the construction of Igbo women in Igbo male literature – like the construction of women in the larger corpus of African male literature – remains stereotypical and narrow? Whether this question can be adequately answered or not, this thesis aims to correct these entrenched accounts by revealing the positive vision of women in the works of Igbo female writers. While there have been criticisms of individual Igbo women's writings, little has been known about the collective development of this literature. I argue that there is a clearly discernable shift in each generation of writers, beginning from the first generation, proceeding to the second and finally to the third generation of writers. This development is demonstrated by the change in the "woman subject" in two significant domains: the family and nation. In the preserve of the family, each of these generations – beginning with Flora Nwapa's emerging woman, to Buchi Emecheta and Ifeoma Okoye's representations of the changing roles of wife and mother, to the development of the identity of 'woman', and finally to the rethinking of family relationships by young female characters in third generation writings – has become more independent and assertive than in the writings of the generation before. This is no doubt a reflection of the changing position and increasing autonomy of women in Igbo society but it is certainly a development in the literary representation of women, culminating in the advent of an autonomous, self-determined female person. In the national sphere, there is not as great a generational transition between these writers, since each of them not only questions the subjugating nature of male nationalistic discourse but also reveals the ways in which hegemonic governance of Nigeria has led to corruption, poverty and the commodification of women.

A close study of these works reveals that there is a fundamental goal to which Igbo women writers are moving, which is to reverse the image of a timid, subdued female, and create a form of 'homecoming' for Igbo women in general. An analysis of the Igbo woman's novel in English reveals a dialogic, nuanced perception of Igbo life, an unwillingness to adapt to prescribed roles, and a refusal to relinquish women's freedom, self-determination and self-definition.

The first chapter discusses the emergence of the theory of Womanism and its enthusiastic adoption by African women writers. The term 'womanism' coined by Alice Walker as early as 1979 was eagerly embraced by African feminists who saw

that Western feminism was an inadequate response to the multiple and interrelated problems of colonized societies. Womanism provides the theoretical underpinning for this thesis as Igbo writers are constantly engaged in the dialectic between the struggle for female autonomy and the necessity for broader cultural transformation to resolve the related issues of racism and poverty.

The second chapter entitled 'Dispelling the Myth of the 'Silent Woman' examines 'first generation' Nigerian writer, Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) And *Women Are Different* (1986)' to trace the emerging voice of the Nigerian woman. The first female writer to publish in Nigeria, her novel *Efuru* launches the rewriting of female characters in Nigerian fiction. Nwapa's works dispel the myth of the 'silent woman' in Nigerian society, seen in the stereotypical representations of female characters in the works of Nigerian men. *Women are Different* gives a vivid account of the problems faced by women, highlighting their struggles as well as achievements, set against the background of developing Nigeria. An analysis of both these texts will show that Igbo women come from a strong self-reliant tradition, contrary to the stereotypical images in the 'Mother Africa' trope.

The third chapter entitled 'The Emerging Igbo 'Woman': Changing Concepts of 'Wife', 'Mother' and 'Woman' in Buchi Emecheta and Ifeoma Okoye, examines Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *Double Yoke* (1982), *Adah's Story* (1983), *Head Above Water* (1986), *The Family* (1990), *Kehinde* (1994) and Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds* (1982)' to reveal the changing role of 'woman', 'wife' and 'mother' in the works of second generation Nigerian Igbo writers. This chapter shows that the development of the autonomous 'woman' within Igbo female characters is only made possible by redefining their roles as 'wives' and 'mothers' and this re-focusing occurs in each of the novels. I demonstrate five different modes in which their 'identities' as 'women' are achieved: inscription as liberation; exposing the stereotype of motherhood; revealing the oppressive realities of polygamy; redefining barrenness and sterility; and finally through surviving rape and abuse.

The fourth chapter entitled 'Rethinking Family Relationships in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) and Unoma Azuah's *Sky-High Flames* (2005)' proposes third generation Igbo women writers as marking a further shift in Nigerian women's literature. This chapter uses a comparative analysis between Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), Unoma Azuah's *Sky-High*

*Flames* (2005), Sade Adeniran's *Imagine This* (2007) and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), to identify a distinct pattern: the young girl-child/woman character developing into a mature, strong womanist. Representations of female characters in this generation show that women empower themselves through the reconstruction of family relationships. In challenging patriarchal dominance, analysing the 'absent' mother and addressing the complex function and ambivalent struggles of tradition and modernity in their texts, these writers display the process of female empowerment, charting the metamorphosis of female characters and the ways in which young female protagonists claim agency and independence.

The fifth chapter entitled "The Biafran War and Igbo Women Writers: Deconstructing the Male Discourse of Nationalism" shows how Igbo women writers from all three generations deal with the problems of nationalism and the war. Flora Nwapa's *Never Again* (1975), Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) outline the experiences of the Biafran war from a female perspective. This chapter creates a model for reading the war novels of Nigerian Igbo women writers, to understand the critical attitude they had towards Igbo and Nigerian nationalism. The three novels offer a composite analysis of the effects of colonial rule in Nigeria, the prevalence of colonial influence, the greed of the neo-colonial elite and the tribal separatism that led to the Biafran war. In critiquing the male discourse of nationalism, Igbo female writers demonstrate their refusal to be appropriated into the discourse of ethno-tribalism, as well as the discourse of Nigerian nationalism both of which, under the guise of including marginal voices, continue to locate women in the inner domain of domesticity and tradition.

The final chapter is entitled 'Post-War Nigeria and the Modern Slave Trade' and examines Buchi Emecheta's *Naira Power* (1982), Ifeoma Okoye's *Men without Ears* (1984), Promise Okeke's *House of Chaos* (1996), Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's *I do not come to you by chance* (2009), Akachi Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008), Abidemi Sanusi's *Eyo* (2009) and Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sister's Street* (2009). After the Biafran war post-war Nigeria became a site of political chaos as successive military and civilian governments vied for power. In this chapter I argue that the effect of such mismanaged political leadership and the interference of foreign influences created a fundamental apparatus for the introduction of capitalism and neo-liberalism,

increasing corruption and widening the gap between the rich and the poor. Corruption and poverty are words that describe much of the Nigerian socio-economic reality, a theme explored through the amoral representations of male characters by Igbo women writers to demonstrate the desperate consequences of chasing after the power of the Nigerian currency, the naira.

This chapter will then proceed to show the way in which high levels of poverty, the influence of a neo-liberal state and the enormous collapse of morals have opened Nigeria and its women to sex trafficking, becoming market 'goods' in the global slave trade. The global magnitude and monstrosity of human trafficking has recently received much international attention. This section of the chapter explores the two broad categories that cause human trafficking in Nigeria: the country's poverty and consequent corruption and the pre-existing transnational business of trafficking. I will then proceed to discuss the oppositional responses of trafficked female characters towards their exploiters. Lastly, the final part of the chapter charts the way in which Akachi Ezeigbo, Abidemi Sanusi and Chika Unigwe, depict the important role played by faith workers in breaking the grotesque bonds of modern slavery.

More than anything else, a collective analysis of Igbo women's writings affirms the vital role women writers play in redefining and re-imaging the Igbo female quest for agency and power, emphasising the continuous struggle women still face from the constant domination of patriarchal discourse. Thus, Igbo women reveal the important role of literature in communicating a female voice to the world. With their ability to construct narratives that capture female interests, anxieties and ambivalences, these authors provide a sense of hope for the future of African women. While these novels may not necessarily offer satisfactory solutions, they indicate the ways in which women confront the persistent issues of female subjectivity, stereotyping and empowerment.

# Chapter 1

## Womanist Theory and Contemporary Nigerian Women Writers

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### **Feminism Critiqued in Postcolonial Feminist Theory**

Postcolonial feminism<sup>3</sup> has consistently criticized Western feminism's universalizing of women's issues. Despite the assumption of a shared identity, a common global sisterhood, it failed to postulate the specific conditions of the various races and classes of women, and the various material conditions of women's oppression. Postcolonial feminism, sometimes referred to as Third world feminism<sup>4</sup> or minority feminist criticism, addresses the race, class and colonial problems faced by Third World women. Postcolonial feminism overlaps theories of black feminism because they both argue that women are marginalized by race as well as gender.

The objection has been that western feminists<sup>5</sup> have habitually defined 'woman' from their own experience of womanhood without including the experiences of women of color. Women of color were therefore put in the position of 'other', their

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<sup>3</sup> Postcolonial feminist criticism is wide and changing. The field explores the representation of women in previously colonized countries and those living in Western countries.

<sup>4</sup> The phrase 'Third world feminism' is fraught with problems. It implies a peripheral subjection.

<sup>5</sup> When I refer to Western feminist or Western feminism, it is a reference to White feminists.

experiences incomprehensible to Western feminists and therefore left undefined. In *Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference* (2002) Audre Lorde argues that “white women ignore their built-in-privilege of whiteness and define ‘woman’ in terms of their own experience alone, then women of color become ‘other’, the outsider whose experience and tradition are too ‘alien’ to comprehend” (Lorde 2002: 376). Western feminists also placed women of color in the ‘other’ position by using them as foils to define their own experiences and to gauge their progress. Ania Loomba gives an example of this in her article “Dead Women Tell No Tales: Issues of Female Subjectivity, Subaltern Agency and Tradition in Colonial and Postcolonial Writings on Widow Immolation in India” (2003) asserting that “the silence of Indian women enabled British feminists to claim a speaking part for themselves” (Loomba 2003: 250). Drawing on ‘suttee,’ British feminist Josephine Butler compares the silence of the Indian woman about this ‘monstrous’ act to that of the resistance shown by Western women in their experiences of womanhood. Loomba argues that by British feminists “representing their mute sisters... legitimize themselves as ‘the imperial authorities on “Indian womanhood”” (Loomba 2003: 251). This attitude provoked strong criticism against feminism: the assumption of women’s shared oppression, of the idea that Third world women are a powerless group, and of the continual disregard of Western feminism in understanding ‘difference’ among women of color or Third world women.

The first criticism against Western feminism is the assumption of women’s shared oppression. Generalizing women’s oppression fails to account for the specific experiences, and the range of different experiences among various groups of women, neither does it account for assertive and self-affirming women. In *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse* (1991), Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues that “a homogenous notion of the oppression of women as a group is assumed...produc[ing] the image of an ‘average third world woman’. This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender...and being ‘third-world’ (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc)” (Mohanty 1991: 261). The image of the Third-world woman is one of oppression, and by extension, the Third world woman is seen in contrast to the “Western women as educated, modern, as having control over their bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions” (261). The

Western feminist representation of the Third world woman is fallacious because the Third world woman is not merely to be seen as oppressed and subjugated. Mohanty's article critiques this assumption of shared victimization, arguing against the notion that all women share similar oppression regardless of class, race location or ethnicity.

In *Sisterhood: Political Solidarity Between Women* (2002), bell hooks states that feminist bonding based on shared victimization does not create a space for assertive and self affirming women and perpetuates sexist ideology through feminist theory. She asserts that,

sexist ideology teaches women that to be female is to be a victim. Rather than to repudiate this equation...women's liberationists embraced it, making shared victimization the basis for woman-bonding. This meant that women had to conceive of themselves as 'victims' in order to feel that the feminist movement was relevant to their lives...assertive, self-affirming women were often seen as having no place in the feminist movement" (hooks 2002: 397).

Thus, according to hooks, feminist theory tended to create space only for women who were powerless against their circumstances.

The second criticism against Western feminism is that by bonding as victims, Western feminism places women in a stereotypical position of powerlessness. Mohanty argues that Western feminists have tried to find "a variety of cases of 'powerless' groups of women to prove a general point that women as a group are powerless" (Mohanty 1991: 262). This is a misconception that can be seen to be equivalent to colonial subjugation, an assumption that results in women being seen as "an always-already constituted group, one which has been labeled 'powerless', 'exploited', [and] 'sexually harassed'" mirroring sexist ideology of women as the weak, emotional gender" (262). Trinh T Minh-Ha echoes Mohanty's argument in *Woman, Native, Other* (1989), stating that Third World Women are often placed in the position of 'other' in First and Second World discourse, undefined and seen as "bat, dog, chick, mutton, tart...cow, vixen, bitch. Call girl, joy girl, working girl. Lady and whore are both bred to please...all under the form of the Other. All except herself" (Minh-ha 1989: 97). Rather than viewing Third world women as powerless, "exploited, looked down upon, and lumped together in a convenient term that denies

their individualities,” she argues that they should have the opportunity to express the authenticity of their struggle to empower themselves (97).

With the rising criticism of the stereotypical nature of Western feminist theory, Western feminist began inviting Third world women and women of color to educate them on their sisters’ specific predicaments. They were not included in discussions but brought in just to explain their oppression, and very often postcolonial feminist critics objected to the lack of interest in the West in understanding the differences experienced by Third world women and women of color. In *The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle in the Master’s House* (2003), Audre Lorde argues that it has become the “task of black and third world women to educate white women, in the face of tremendous resistance, as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival” (Lorde 2003: 27). The absorption of Third world women and women of color into world feminists theory is seen as a repetition of patriarchal subjugation, not only eliding difference but wasting energy where it can be better used to redefine women, devising realistic scenarios for altering present circumstances and constructing a future for Third world women and women of color. Thus, differences among women must not be merely tolerated, they have to be understood in order for significant change to happen through political solidarity among all women.

Another objection against Western feminists has been the assumption of the inauthentic native. In *Where Have All the Natives Gone* Rey Chow (2003) critiques the inability of Western feminism to comprehend Third world women and women of color’s experiences if they do not fit into the natives image stereotype: “what confronts the Western scholar is the discomfoting fact that the natives are no longer staying in their frames” (Chow 2003: 325). A Third world woman and woman of color’s story is only authentic if it fits the stereotypical notion of oppression set in the minds of Western feminists. Any account of independence, fluidity, change and dynamism is not accepted as authentic and therefore is not native. This raises the question among postcolonial critics of who defines native identity, and in doing so questions who is constructing this identity. This is contested in postcolonial feminism because it places Western feminists in a political position of power – the suthority to decide native representation of identity.

The inability of Western feminists to understand and theorize difference may even be seen to perpetuate racism. In “Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women,” (2002) bell hooks critiques how “white women shifted responsibility for calling attention to race onto others. They did not take the initiative in discussions of racism or race onto others...without changing in anyway the structure of the feminist movement, without losing hegemonic hold...They were not confronting racism.” (hooks 2002: 401). She argues that Western feminists have to take the initiative to understand racist socialization and forge a political commitment within feminist discourse to eliminate the racism experienced by women of color. hooks goes on to imply that women of color should neither passively accept ignorance of their difference within feminist discourse nor rely on White feminists to bring about political solidarity among women. Women of color should unite through their diversity and different experiences to create a meaningful sisterhood. These debates instituted an expansion of feminist theory to include theories voiced by Third world women and women of color.

Audre Lorde takes it further, arguing that Third world and colored women need to create a space within or apart from feminist discourse to define their specific experiences of womanhood. It is in this context that feminist theory expanded to include Black feminism, African feminism and the exegesis of African womanist theory. The latter is a theory created by and for women of African descent to express their experiences of race, class and gender. Emerging from identity politics and Black feminism, womanist theory creates a space for women of African descent to dialogue on and nurture a goal for social change.

### **African Feminism and African Womanist Theory**

African feminism and African womanism are both theories that address the racial, class, and sexist oppression faced by women of African descent, creating space for African women to air their discontent and confront these issues in all their cultural diversity and difference in a more inclusive manner. It is also important to understand that the involvement of Black women<sup>6</sup> internationally in feminist and womanist studies can be related to the involvement of African-American women in the 1980s

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Black women’ is used in my discussion to describe all women of African descent, those who live in Africa and those from outside Africa.

identity politics and Black women's studies in the United States of America which will be theorised further in the latter section of this chapter.

Distinguished African studies scholar Carole Boyce Davies reports, in *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature* (1986), the growing recognition of the necessity for a feminist consciousness to examine the position of women in African society following “an ever-growing corpus of literature by African women writers” (Davies 1986: 1). Davies argues that the progressive African woman witnessed the women's struggle in which “the social and historical realities of African women's lives must be considered” and finds a need to speak out against it (6). She defines African feminism as a theory that recognises a common struggle with African men to remove the bondage of foreign subjugation and exploitation. She states that African feminism acknowledges that African women come from an historically strong tradition and need to continue this legacy by continuing to stand up for themselves in order to make “visible the “invisible woman,” or audible, the mute, voiceless woman” (Davies 1986: 15). African feminism here is seen as a hybrid theory, combining feminist concerns with African concerns. Nigerian studies scholar and African feminist critic Susan Arndt in *The Dynamics of African Feminism* (2002) defines African feminism, on the other hand, as a theory that aims at “*complementarity*” (Arndt 2002: 74). Here she disputes existing relationships of African men and women put forward by African studies critics like Catherine Acholonu, arguing that African men and women need to complement each other and work together as they criticize patriarchy and find ways to help women overcome their discrimination and oppression.

Nigerian feminist-social critic Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie asserts that African feminism should include issues such as the woman's body, her person, her immediate family, her society, her nation, her continent and their locations within international economic order because those realities in the international economic order determine African politics and impact on the women (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994: 228). She stresses that African feminism is needed to address patterns of oppression and injustices against women. However, because of the problematic use of the term feminism, many Black women choose not to be aligned with this theory. She bluntly states that many African female writers do not call themselves feminists because of their fear of “male ridicule, aggression and backlash” (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994: 63-64). Arguments that

feminism is a foreign theory, a theory that masks power relations and espouses men hating are some of the varied reasons why Black women and African women writers are wary of associating themselves with feminist politics.

Many African women writers argue that stereotypes are created when they are linked to a certain theory or movement and they feel that they are unable to express their ideas freely. Among African women writers there are many differing viewpoints about whether these writers see themselves as feminist or womanist. Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta argues that she “is a feminist with a small ‘f’.” (Makuchi and Nfah-Abbenyi 1997: 7) She insists that she does not like to be attached to European definitions of feminist but rather “the African type of feminism. They call it womanism” (7). Highlighting the ambiguous situation of African feminism, Flora Nwapa rejects the appellation ‘feminist’ in her interviews, yet in a conference in Nsukka declares to the participants that because “feminism is about possibilities...Let us not be afraid to say we are feminists. We need one another, we really need one another. Globally, we need one another” (Nnaemeka 1998: 83). Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo states that

When people ask me rather bluntly every now and then whether I am a feminist, I not only answer yes, but I go on to insist that every woman and every man should be a feminist-especially if they believe that Africans should take charge of our land, its wealth, our lives and the burden of our own development.

(Allan 1996: 173-174)

She believes that feminism is an essential tool in women’s struggle everywhere, and extends this idea in her article “Literature, Feminism and the African Woman Today” where she encourages African women to not feel threatened by European feminists and African men who contend that feminism is a European ideology but instead to use feminism as a tool to speak of the racial and sexual oppression.

Molara Ogundipe-Leslie suggests the use of the word ‘Stiwanism’ an acronym for “Social Transformation Including Women in Africa” (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994: 229). Stiwanism discusses the needs of African women in the context of the traditional spaces of culture that they inhabit because “indigenous feminisms also existed in Africa and.... “STIWA” is about the inclusion of African women in the contemporary social and political transformation of Africa” (230). She argues that this

term will help better define women's active involvement in the socio-political transformation of their nation. Thus, despite counter arguments and debates, there are aspects of African feminist theory that remain important. It addresses concerns of patriarchy, women's oppression and discrimination, encouraging women and men to eradicate such biases by working together.

As a result of the extensive criticism of feminism, 'African Womanism' became the preferred theory to describe the African woman's circumstance in the 1980's. It is a theory developed by Black women, creating space for women to work towards methods of ending forms of social-political, economic and gender oppression without exhaustive debates on its viability. However, in order to understand African womanism, it is important to understand identity politics and Black women studies as the background from which this theory finds its development.

Identity politics emerged in the 1970's in America as a response to the injustices faced by particular groups of people. It stemmed out of need to end the stereotyping and marginalization of minority groups<sup>7</sup>. When African American women began to involve themselves in identity politics, it was to secure freedom and to end their social marginalisation by white people and African-American men. Some of the key players in Black women's identity politics were bell hooks, Patricia Bell Scott, Gloria T. Hull and Barbara Smith.<sup>8</sup> The discourse of these Black women echoed the cry of the early Black Activist, Sojourner Truth who in 1852 asked white men, women and Black men a significant question, 'and ain't I a woman?' (Phillips 2006: 38). Similarly, Maria Stewart, an early Black Activist, challenged Black women to reject negative images of Black womanhood and instead fight for their political independence.<sup>9</sup> She asks vehemently "How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be

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<sup>7</sup> Hill-Collins, Patricia. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 2000. In this book, Hill-Collins argues that the history of slavery not only placed African Americans as a minority group in society but also placed them in oppressive situations. Identity politics rose from a need to break away from the various race, class, gender and sexual oppressions, placing African American people beyond marginalized positions.

<sup>8</sup> Hull, Gloria T., Scott, Patricia Bell and Smith, Barbara. "A Black Feminist Statement: The Combahee River Collective." *Some of Us are Brave: Black Women's Studies*. Ed. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith. New York: The Feminist Press, 1982, pp. 14. This book argues that there have always been Black women activists who created an awareness of their sexual and racial identity against oppression. Even before this, Black women fought against their subjugation. Some of these early activists are Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frances E.W. Harper, Ida B. Wells Barnett, and Mary Church Terrell.

<sup>9</sup> Hill-Collins, Patricia. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 2000. This book highlights the fact that in 1831, Black women's

compelled to bury their minds, and talents beneath the load of iron pots and kettles?” (qtd in Hill-Collins 2000: 1). She urges Black women to seek their self-definition and stake claim to opportunities that are rightfully theirs.

In “A Black Feminist Statement: The Combahee River Collective” (Hull 1982), Gloria T. Hull et al argued that the politics of Black women studies emerged among Black women from the Black woman’s concern for herself, her sisters and her community. This essay was significant in the development of Black women’s studies as well as the field of identity politics because it demonstrated the capacity of oppressed women to empower themselves by giving voice to their oppressed conditions:

This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else’s oppression. In the case of Black women this is particularly repugnant, dangerous, threatening, and therefore revolutionary concept because it is obvious from looking at all the political movements that have preceded us that anyone is more worthy of liberation than ourselves. We reject pedestals, queenhood, and walking ten paces behind. To be recognized as human, levelly human, is enough. (Hull et al 1982: 16)

Although identity politics fell into disfavour in the 1990s it served its purpose as a means for Black women to address their oppression by racism and sexism. They argued that they should be recognized and identified as human beings and as women among white men, women and Black men who ignored their very existence.

The women’s movement and women’s studies before the 1980’s did not have a space for Black women so Black women’s studies emerged as an academic discourse to aid Black women in the quest to eradicate racism, sexism and attain personal freedom. In *But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women Studies* (1982), Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith note that “the birth of Black women’s studies is perhaps the day of revelation...Black feminism has made a space for Black women’s studies to exist and, through its commitment to all Black women, will provide the basis for its survival” (Hull 1982: xx). Through the *Black Feminist*

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activist Maria Stewart not only spoke out against the Black woman’s oppression but also urged women to be independent and self-reliant.

*Statement: The Combahee River Collection* (1982) Black women began to academically engage in Black feminism.

In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (2000) bell hooks argues that the significance of the feminist movement is derived from women everywhere rebelling against sexism when “women began to meet and talk together” (hooks 2000: x). She states that the feminist struggle takes place when women or men resist sexism, sexist oppression and exploitation as “groups of people come together with organized strategy to take action to eliminate patriarchy” (xi). Black men who believe that their freedom cannot be attained unless they attain patriarchal power and privilege in society will continue to be unable to comprehend the Black woman’s struggle for selfhood and the need for their participation in the feminist movement. If this prejudice continues to be perpetuated by Black men, white racism and patriarchy against Black people will never be dismantled.

Extending this idea, hooks asserts that for Black women to achieve self-determination and agency for themselves, they should never name themselves victim nor take on a victim’s identity: “to name oneself victim is to deny agency” (hooks 2000: 58). Naming oneself as victim denies a woman the capacity to change her situation and the situation of women in her society. This aspect of identity politics is a significant feature of the development of womanist ideas in African women’s literature. Similar conditions apply to African women, who have had to challenge their experience of oppression in African patriarchal society to gain a more authentic and self-determined position in society. Similarly, Nigerian Igbo women writers have had to struggle to create a sense of agency for themselves, repositioning themselves from marginal spaces within the traditional, social and political structures of society into positions of power and self-definition. To do this, the admonition to never take the position of victim is enthusiastically accepted, a sign of the historic strength of Igbo women as a group.

Alice Walker first used the word ‘womanist’ in her short story “Coming Apart,” published in 1979. Here, she refers to a wife, a common woman, who can never quite be a feminist and yet can perform acts of resistance against the injustices she faces in her everyday life. Walker further elaborates on this term in her review essay “Gift of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Jackson,” explaining that Rebecca Jacksons’ close knit relationship with her female companion Rebecca Perot was not

lesbianism, but women having close knit relationships that support each other, which she terms womanist. (Philips 2006: xix-19). Walker developed the term more fully in 1983 in her book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* to describe both the African-American and African women's struggle and resistance against sexist, racist oppression, addressing female traditions of culture, knowledge and survival. She defines a 'womanist' as "a black feminist or a feminist of color" (1983: xi). She adds that a womanist is

...outrageous, audacious, courageous or strong-willed behavior...being grown up...Responsible. In charge. Serious... A woman who loves other women... Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Traditionally universalist... Traditionally capable. Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender. (xi-xii)

In Walker's definition, womanism is a shade different from feminism. She argues that while womanism does draw its basic ideas from feminism, it builds on feminist ideas to create a theory that meets the needs of the whole Black community. Unlike feminism's focus on gender, womanism also addresses race and class issues from a socio-political perspective, involving both men and women in the struggle for race, class and gender equality.

The concept of womanism was also defined and expanded by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi who claims she coined the term womanism around the same time as Alice Walker in 1985. Ogunyemi asks "does feminism mean the same thing to either side? Are there overlapping areas between the feminisms? Should they keep their feminism and I start looking for mine?" She advocates a complementary theory 'Nigerian womanism', which etymologically identifies better with the Nigerian woman's culture and history (1996: 106-113). Ogunyemi insists that Black women writers are not limited "by issues defined by their femaleness, but attempt to tackle questions raised by humanity" (1996: 68). A womanist also writes to "generate public awareness and understanding" (68). This means that through her writings, she is not merely concerned with highlighting sexism but is committed to addressing concerns the whole community faces around questions of race and class. Thus a womanist's writing takes on a multi-dimensional awareness of the "different layers" of problems African men and women face (Arndt 2000: 217). Ogunyemi argues that only when the oppression and problems men face are also analyzed at the grass root levels, can

you actually get to the root cause of women's subjugation. It is by tackling these issues of racism, classism, sexism, of social and economic injustice within the community, that womanists hope to generate an understanding of the Black woman's plight. Like Walker who defines womanism in terms of being grown up, responsible and in charge, Ogunyemi believes that a young girl

inherits womanism after a traumatic event such as menarche or after an epiphany or as a result of the experience of racism, rape, death in the family, or sudden responsibility. Through coping with this experience she moves creatively beyond the concern of self to that concern for the needs of others characteristic of adult womanists. (72)

Ogunyemi is particularly interested in the development that women characters undergo in fiction. Womanists choose to highlight the process of transformation because it shows the progression of the woman in the context of the wider community. It is this issue of the wider community that provides the key to Womanism, because female liberation cannot occur without the involvement of all members of the community in transforming the wide range of issues that underpin sexual discrimination.

Cleonora Hudson-Weems in 1989 and 1993 respectively, extended the theory of Womanism. For her it

identifies the participation and the role of Africana women in the struggle, but does not suggest that female subjugation is the most critical issue they face in their struggle for parity...acknowledges societal gender problems as critical issues to be resolved; however, it views feminism, the suggested alternative to these problems, as a sort of inverted White patriarchy. (Philips 2006: 40)

Weems argues that Africana Womanism is a theory that better explains and identifies with the Africana oppression, 'Africana' being a word that includes all men and women of African descent. Like Ogunyemi, Weems sees womanism as highlighting the race and class power relations that African women and men face. Weems strongly opposes the association of Africana women with feminism and instead calls all Africana women to embrace Africana Womanism. She argues that feminism is not able to create a space for Africana women because it was a theory that never had space from the beginning for the Africana women's agenda. Weems' argument is

useful because it highlights the importance of African people having a theory tailored to their concerns, and in this respect is in close agreement with Walker and Ogunyemi.

While the theory of African womanism has created space for women of African descent to develop culturally appropriate paths toward self-determination, it has also allowed African women to challenge the 'Mother Africa' trope by which they are stereotyped into the role of mothers. The 'Mother Africa' trope is critiqued by two scholars, Florence Stratton and Mineke Schipper, who argue that African women not only need to repudiate it formally but also refuse to continue legitimizing this debilitating trope in their actions.

Florence Stratton (1994) argues that the 'Mother Africa' trope has been perpetuated by the African male literary tradition. African male writers like Chinua Achebe, Leopold Senghor, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka, Ousmane Sembene, Mongo Beti, Cyprian Ekwensi and Nuruddin Farah through their reductive, stereotypical writings portrayed images of African women through the "pot of culture" and "sweep of history" strands (Stratton 1994: 50). Through the 'pot of culture' strand, male writers "[analogize women] to a bygone culture which is usually conceptualized as immutable, rendering the female figure as static, conservative" (50). In the 'sweep of history' strand, the African woman's body is "produced and constructed by the male writer as an embodiment of his literary/political vision" (51). This embodiment of African women in male writings, places them in limiting roles such as 'the good wife-mother figure', 'the prostitute' or 'the barren woman'. Stephanie Newell (1996) argues that Nigerian female characters who deviate from the norm in male writings are often punished and re-placed into their stereotypical roles, which, for her, reflects the need for masculine power and control of the women in their society.

On a similar note, Mineke Schipper writes that although women writers have been slow in coming into the African literary tradition, they too critique the 'Mother Africa' myth that shackles them. She cites revolutionary Senegalese writer Mariama Ba, who states through her protagonist Ramatoulaye in *So Long a Letter*

As women, we must work for our own future, we must overthrow the status quo which harms us and we must no longer submit to it. Like men, we must

use literature as a non-violent weapon. We no longer accept the nostalgic praise to the African mother whom, in his anxiety, man confuses with Mother Africa.  
(cited in Schipper 1987: 50)

Ba advocates that African women refuse to capitulate to the stereotypical roles placed upon them by patriarchal culture but rather fight to liberate themselves. It is on these grounds that African womanism is able to play a part to end the myth of 'Mother Africa' by encouraging women to achieve agency and self-determination. While the 'Mother Africa' myth places women in subjugated positions and stereotypical roles, African womanism offers women a theoretical foundation to see beyond their allotted role and lay claim to possibilities through agency and self-determination. This thesis will focus on selected works by Nigerian Igbo women writers, who depict Nigerian female characters rising against their subjugation, challenging stereotypical images.

### **African Feminism and African Womanism in Nigerian Igbo Women's Writings**

In speaking of feminism in an African and Nigerian context, it is important to recognize that Nigerian women not only face very different types of oppression compared to Euro-American women, but may well face different experiences from other African countries. In recognizing the complex cultural conditions from which Nigerian Igbo women writers come, this thesis will analyze their works using the theoretical framework of African feminism and African womanism. In using the term African Womanism I will incorporate the three slightly different interpretations: Alice Walkers 'Womanism'; Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's 'womanism;' and Cleonora Hudson-Weems 'Africana Womanism'. These theories take into account Nigeria's various particularities, especially the 1967 civil war and its impact on the people, and issues of agency and the search for self-definition by Nigerian women.

Igbo women's writings demonstrate the efforts of women trying to earn independence / freedom from society's traditional expectations. The womanist commitment to self-help through life experience and self education can be applied to works of Nigerian Igbo women writers reflected in female characters like Efuru (Nwapa's *Efuru*), Kehinde (Emecheta's *Kehinde*), Kambili (Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*) and Ofunne (Azuah's *Sky-High Flames*), examples of women who struggle to achieve independence and fulfillment. The female metamorphosis advocated in

womanist theory can be discovered in works by Nigerian Igbo women who create new images of female characters, liberated and actively seeking freedom from patriarchal family rule, gender bias, from role stereotyping and from the various damaging consequences of Nigeria's cataclysmic politics. This female metamorphosis is also reflected in the larger development of Nigerian Igbo women writers' works, from the first to the third generation of women writers. Change and growth are seen in the depiction and development of female characters from first generation writings, to that of the second and the third generation. Igbo female characters are resilient and empowered in face of their challenges, breaking away from the fetters of their patriarchal society.

In a round table discussion, third generation Nigerian women writers Chika Unigwe, Unoma Azuah and Sefi Atta state that they are wary of projecting their female characters as "objects of abuse" but would rather like to see them in empowered positions even "capable of victimizing others in the same way" (Azuah et al 2008: 110). Writings of third generation Igbo women mark a shift in agenda. The first and second generations largely focused on the position of Igbo women in society and the effects of colonialism on the Igbo woman. Third generation Igbo women writers reflect the disillusionment and challenges female characters have had to face from the Nigerian state – socially, economically and politically – dealing with the transition from Nigeria's 1970's-80's oil boom and doom, university closures due to economic or political upheaval, reflective of the military and civilian government failures since independence.

African feminism addresses the continued dominance of patriarchy, of women's oppression and discrimination and seeks to encourage women and men to eradicate such conditions by working together. Buchi Emecheta believes that men must be included in the struggle. She often refers to herself in her interviews as a feminist with a small 'f':

I am a feminist with a small "f". I love men and good men are the salt of the earth...I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African woman I know. I didn't know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist then I am an African feminist with a small f...*I do believe in an African type of feminism. They call it womanism...* That is my brand of feminism. (cited in Makuchi 1997: 7, emphasis added)

Womanism is a theory that she believes better represents the lives of African society, both its men and its women. Flora Nwapa on the other hand states that

I'm usually asked, "Are you a feminist?" I deny that I am a feminist. Please I am not a feminist, oh, please. But they say, all your works, everything is about feminism. And I say, "No, I am not a feminist."...Having heard Obioma on Monday, having heard Ama today, I think that I will go all out and say that I am a feminist with a big 'f' because Obioma' said on Monday that *feminism is about possibilities*; there are possibilities, there are choices. Let us not be afraid to say that we are feminists. *We need one another, we really need one another. Globally, we need one another.* (Cited in Nnamemeka, 83, emphasis added)

However, in another interview Marie Umeh, Nwapa states that, "I don't think I'm a radical feminist. I don't even accept that I'm a feminist. I accept that I'm an ordinary woman who is writing about what she knows. I try to project the images of women positively" (Umeh 1986: 27). Both of these two writers seem to be reluctant to refer to themselves as feminists, yet they do come to a conclusion that each theory addresses the ways women can come together within a discourse to redress imbalances within society in order to create a better future. Third generation Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie herself in a recent newspaper review says that she is a happy feminist and believes that "feminism is more than outrage; it is about being a woman who likes and stands up for other women" (Guest, 19). Unoma Azuah writes as an "attempt for [her] to bring balance or fairness into a world full of unfairness and chaos...as a warning sign for men and women" (Azuah 2008: 111). Chika Unigwe states that, "an African woman writer is twice marginalized, that is perhaps why it is important to [her] that [she] write here and now. And why it is important to [her] that [she] tell [their] story, and not be intimidated into telling stories that 'people' want to hear" (Azuah 2008: 109).

I apply African feminism and African womanism to my readings of Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Ifeoma Okoye, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo, Unoma Azuah, Chika Unigwe and Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's works because the concerns these writers address are similar to the concerns addressed in both these theories. African feminist and African womanist theory help contextualize the Nigerian Igbo woman writer's fight against women's patriarchal oppression and

discrimination, addressing issues of agency and self-determination that will be able to contribute to a commonweal in Nigeria.

Wanjira Muthoni's argument in an interview with Susan Arndt supports my use of these two theories. She states that, "names are not important...the name emphasizes the way I look at things. But what is more important than the names we choose – Western feminism, African feminism, whatever – is...the goal that we are aiming at...look for common ground. We have to find out the common issues" (Arndt 2002: 217-218). Kathleen Geathers in an African woman's conference held at Nsukka, Nigeria in July 1992 repudiates African women's fixation on the naming of theories that define them: "we pick on the terms, on semantics. She [Aidoo] talked about education...the need for employment...and we talk about feminism...don't overlook the basic, the profound things that Ama talked about" (Nnaemeka 1998: 83). Geathers argues that these women writers at the conference should have been focused on important issues such as female education and employment addressed by Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo which would contribute to women's mobility and social change rather than argue as to which theory or movement they fall under, diverting them from the purpose of the conference itself. Obioma Nnaemeka reiterates Geather's point when she remarks that focusing on naming loses the essence of Ama Ata Aidoo's or any other African women writer's address for African women. This thesis hinges on the womanist goal of eradicating racist, sexist and patriarchal oppression in the process of discovering self-definition and self-determination in Nigerian Igbo women's writings. The interaction of female characters with their husbands, fathers or brothers illustrates how they create agency for themselves by repositioning themselves in their family and political spheres.

In the course of my research, by placing these eight writers together, I hope to show a process of growth and change in Nigerian Igbo women. This thesis will analyze the changing location of the Igbo woman subject in family and nation. Each generation of Igbo women writers will show female characters breaking myths and stereotypical representations within the family and nation. The growth of Nigerian Igbo women writings will display women writers no longer focusing on narrow

definitions of women as victims but rather in liberated lights, taking steps towards self-definition and self-determination to change their lives and circumstances<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> It is however a salient point to remember that there are portrayals of female characters that still reflect women as victims and in subjugated positions. What should be recognized is that most female characters portrayed by these women writers mark a shift in representation in the on going battle Nigerian women face in struggling for change amidst the class, race and sexist oppression faced.

## CHAPTER 2

### Dispelling the Myth of the 'Silent Woman': The Igbo Woman In Flora Nwapa's Writing

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In this chapter, I will analyze the genesis of Nigerian Igbo women's writings in the works of Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and *Women Are Different* (1986), foundational novels in the African literary tradition. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated why African women saw a need for a theory to describe their culturally specific situation, and African feminism and African womanism suggest a way of reading Nigerian women's texts from a female perspective, exploring and emphasizing the specific dynamics of Nigerian society. Nwapa's writings were considered pioneering in reflecting African feminist-womanist concerns, the emerging voice of women in Nigerian society during the years of upheaval in the progress from colonial rule to independence and thereafter.

Flora Nwapa-Nwakuche, popularly known as Flora Nwapa was born in Oguta, Eastern Nigeria in 1931, the eldest of six daughters, and died on October 16, 1993 of pneumonia at the age of 62 in Enugu. Nwapa, unlike many girls in her time, was privileged to have an education, received a B.A in English, Geography and History in 1957 from the University of Ibadan and then went on to serve as an education officer. After the Biafran civil war, she took on the post of Minister of Health and Social Welfare. Later in life, she was awarded the highest chieftaincy title – Ogbuefi – by her Oguta people. This is significant because such a title was commonly reserved for men but sometimes allotted to women of great achievement. This reveals the Igbo

people's recognition of Nwapa's works, and illuminates the important place of women in Igbo culture,<sup>11</sup> contradicting representations of Igbo female characters in male writings.

Nwapa made her debut as the first English published African woman writer in 1966 through her book *Efuru*. This novel not only marks the emergence of African women's voice but that of Nigerian Igbo women in the African literary canon. In this novel, Nwapa challenged archetypal portrayals of women in traditional roles. *Efuru* is an industrious, independent woman who seeks a sense of agency for herself despite her childlessness, thus challenging patriarchal definitions of women as mothers. Nwapa's subsequent heroines, Idu and Amaka, similarly challenge traditional notions in *Idu* (1970) and *One is Enough* (1981). Having lived through the Biafran war, Nwapa wrote *Never Again* (1979) and *Wives at War and Other Stories* (1980) describing the harrowing civil war endured for thirty months, where women struggled to keep their families alive and then reconstructed their lives once the war was over. Her later novel, *Women are Different* (1986), illustrates the roles Igbo women have to negotiate between traditional and Western cultures in order to transform social values and attitudes in their roles as daughters, wives and mothers.

The significance of Nwapa's place in African women's writing has not always been recognized. Critics such as Chimalum Nwankwo, Oladele Taiwo, Bernth Lindfors and J.I Okonkwo criticized Nwapa's works as less mature, focusing frivolously on women's 'small talk.' Bernth Lindfors describes *Efuru* as a novel about "an Ibo woman in distress" but is less than complimentary about her style

...Nwapa tells this melancholic story in a lifeless monotone that robs it of all life and color...When her characters do act, they say and do things of little importance. Every chapter is littered with trivia, the detritus of an inexperienced novelist. (Lindfors 1967: 30-31)

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<sup>11</sup> Chuku, Gloria Ifeoma. "From Petty Traders to International Merchants: A Historical Account of Three IGBO Women in Nigerian in Trade and Commerce, 1886-1970." *African Economic History*, no. 27 (1999): 5-9. In this article, Gloria Chuku explains how Lady Mary Nzimiro, a successful Igbo international merchant, took on the title of Ogbuefi, the highest title for Oguta women who were successful and industrious. Their success conferred them with titles rather than being marginalized in society as portrayed in male writings.

Chimalum Nwankwo says that Nwapa's early writings, *Efuru* and *Idu*, "hold up a certain kind of experience limited by inadequate and thorough reflection" (Nwankwo 1995: 43). Early critics of Nwapa's works failed to recognize her intention to describe the Igbo woman's struggle. Rather than "[opening] texts up to possibilities by addressing the complex issues in them," (Nnaemeka 1994: 98), these critics saw them as trivial.

However, African women writers are indebted to Nwapa for opening the door to the possibility of women writers publishing their works and telling their stories. It is therefore the aim of this chapter to highlight the beginnings of this legacy, which broke the silence for Igbo women. I will examine Nwapa's work *Efuru* (1966) and *Women are Different* (1986), two novels written twenty years apart, which trace the development of female Igbo identity. I will conclude this chapter by briefly discussing the significance of Nwapa's work in introducing a female presence in the literary tradition. In my treatment of Nwapa's works, I follow in the footsteps of Obioma Nnaemeka, Marie Umeh, Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo and Susan Andrade who have acknowledged and appreciated Nwapa's fictional universe in presenting strong, industrious, articulate, self-defining and developing Igbo women.

### **Nwapa's Forerunners - African Male Writers**

The African literary tradition before this was dominated by male writing, which portrayed gender stereotypes, "not [presenting] a realistic portfolio of the [African] woman, both in traditional and modern settings in African society" (Nasser 1980: 28). In fact, Nwapa in an interview with Marie Umeh states that her works

try to project the image of women positively. I attempt to correct our menfolks...where they wrote little or less of women, where female characters are prostitutes and ne'er-do-wells. I started writing to tell them that this is not so. When I do write about women in Nigeria, in Africa, I try to paint a positive picture about women because there are many women who are very, very positive in their thinking, who are very, very industrious...the male writers have disappointed us a great deal by not painting the female character as they should paint them...[women] are not only mothers; they are not only palm

collectors; they are not only traders; but they are also wealthy people. Women can stand on their own. (Umeh 1995: 27)

It is within this framework that Nwapa's writing finds its roots. African male literature often presented African women stereotypically as wives, mothers or rebellious women and Flora Nwapa wrote to redress these and other negative stereotypes, portraying their ability to balance their domestic, social and economic roles, thus dispelling "suffocating male constructed myths" of Igbo women (Okereke 1997: 29). Nwapa's female characters function as agents of change, forcing society to acknowledge and accept their strength, debunking claims of silence and invisibility.

Nwapa's representation of African women's lives could be said to offer a perspective that laid the ground for what would become African Womanism in the 1980s. Her novels not only presented women characters very differently from the prevailing male stereotypes, but she reflected a sense of community and of the broader context of women's life that was to become crucial to womanism. To give an example of the habit of representation against which Nwapa was writing I will briefly analyse novels by three Igbo male writers, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966) and Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* (1961). Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) portrays female characters in subservient and docile positions. His female characters are beaten for their mistakes, silenced when they speak and are, to all intents and purposes, invisible. When they do appear, they are placed in subservient positions and rendered invisible again.

Okonkwo gives his second wife "a sound beating...[leaving] her weeping" while his other wives only "dared to interfere beyond an occasional and tentative, "it is enough, Okonkwo," [pleading] from a reasonable distance" (Achebe 1958: 34). He only stops when "his anger [was] satisfied" (34). Okonkwo is punished, eventually, for beating his wife on a holy day, not because he beat his wife. The assumption is that women can be beaten. Okonkwo's other wives do not speak up because they fear being beaten themselves, reinforcing their subjugated, silenced position. It is also important to note that Okonkwo's second wife is unnamed, referred to as 'second wife,' portrayed as an appendage to Okonkwo, her role as 'wife', with no name and identity. Another example of female silencing occurs when Nwoye's mother asks Okonkwo how long Ikemefuna will be staying with them. She is silenced with "do what you're told woman...when did you become one of the *ndiche* of Umofia"

(Achebe 1958: 14). Male characters like Okonkwo “ruled [their] household with a heavy hand” and female characters “lived in perpetual fear” (12). Clearly, in Achebe’s works, the depictions of female characters are “muted [while] their men are made vocal” (Opara 1998: 115). The silencing and forced subservience of female characters in the novel is “an imposition that takes away [their] power and agency” (Nnaemeka, 1998: 145).

The idea of barrenness is also raised in the novel. Barrenness is a stigmatised condition for an Igbo female character. Ekwefi lost nine children in infancy and although “the birth of children which should be a woman’s crowning glory, became for [her] a mere physical agony devoid of promise” (Achebe 1958: 67-8). In Achebe’s illustration, the Igbo female character is significant in society only if she produces children. She is identified by her biological function, and her inability to perform this function renders her worthless. Clearly, the argument could be made that Achebe is merely representing – in the realistic mode the novel has adopted – the actual treatment of women in Umuofia. The real genius of Achebe’s realism is to preclude any form of romanticising or exoticism in his depiction of Umuofia’s characters, and he could be seen to be creating, in the case of Ekwefi, an empathetic response in the reader as he works to reveal Okonkwo’s manifest hubris. However there are two problems with this: the role of Igbo women as inferior and subjugated does not correspond with Oyewumi’s reports of the leadership function of women in pre-colonial times, nor does the novel make room for the representation of powerful and respected women in the social structure of the Igbo village. As *representations* the women are shallow, silenced and subjugated.

Elechi Amadi’s character Iluhoma in *The Concubine* (1966) is the epitome of the good woman. Widowed, Ihuoma is pursued by Ekweme, a younger man whom she must refuse to marry because that is expected of her – widows do not remarry – for “even a fool would not let his [Wigwe] son take on a widow as a first wife” (Amadi 146). Ihuoma’s polite refusal is “play-acting... [because] Wigwe did not expect anything else” (Amadi 1966: 146). Amadi describes a good traditional Igbo woman in Ihuoma who upholds her traditional role, and understands her status as a widow. Also, Ihuoma can only be a concubine to men because according to the *dibia* she is the wife of the sea god, who jealously kills any man in her life. Ihuoma unwittingly brings destruction down on the men who desire her. Her husband

Emenike dies and even Ekweume dies prematurely before even marrying Ihuoma. Here Amadi portrays the female Igbo character as owned by the sea god, an ethereal being. However, the underlying concept is that he possesses Ihuoma, and she is unable to do anything about it. The woman is presented as an object to be owned. The objectification of women is also highlighted in the tradition of polygamy. Madume wants Ihuoma as his second wife after killing her husband Emenike, and his own wife remains silent and accepts this because most of “[his] age- group have two wives, others three” (Amadi 1966: 71). Igbo female characters like Madume’s wife and Ihuoma, are silent, unable to question male authority, who puppeteer their lives.

In Ekwensi’s *Jagua Nana* (1961), Jagua Nana is represented as a loose woman, indulging in fine clothes “a very tight skirt,” dancing and drinking (Ekwensi 1961: 58). She is a prostitute in Lagos, “ ‘free’ and ‘fast’ with [her] favors,” a woman of easy virtue, engaging in a series of casual sexual affairs, living on the gratuities of the men she sleeps with (167). Her real love is Freddie, who eventually leaves her because of her promiscuity. Ekwensi shows how a loose woman like Jagua can neither sustain, nor be accepted in, a committed relationship. In the end, “Freddie...[tries] to discipline her,” failing, he leaves her (56). Years later, at his funeral, Jagua can only mourn his loss in private because “Nancy was the woman they recognized as his wife” (153). Ekwensi implies that a loose woman like Jagua doesn’t deserve respect, because that is for virtuous women with husbands, not her. Ekwensi makes Jagua repent from her wayward ways. She loses a child born out of an affair with a taxi driver, denied motherhood, an implied punishment for her loose ways. At the end of the text, Jagua regrets being an embarrassment to her family,

her sins of her past and future life...she had been wayward and had come to Lagos to pursue the Tropicana lights and the glittering laughter of seductive men...she had forgotten that she had a father, a mother who needed her...husbandless, parentless, she roamed the Nigerian world, a woman among the sophisticates with hollowness for a background.

(173)

Loose female characters like Jagua, seeking their own independence and freedom, were seen as deviant for neglecting their family responsibility and their prescribed roles in Igbo society. It is therefore arguable that Achebe, Amadi and Ekwensi, whether consciously or not, perpetuated stereotypical images of Igbo female

characters in their writings, representing them in limited roles as wives, mothers or rebellious women, silenced and inconsequential. Nwapa's writings redress these biases in male writings, changing the image of the Nigerian Igbo female character.

## **Five Strategies for Dispelling the Myth of the Silent Woman**

Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) reflects the many facets of Igbo traditional society in the early twentieth century and demonstrates Igbo women with positions and rights that protected them in that society, showing them to be both independent and industrious. *Efuru* (1966) focuses on women, family and community life, and it is in this setting that Nwapa shows the industriousness and independence of Igbo women. In *Women are Different* (1986), Nwapa continues to develop Igbo women's potential for survival and self-restoration amidst challenges produced by their changing conditions in the transition period of Nigeria from colonial rule to independence. My analysis of *Efuru* (1966) and *Women are Different* (1986) will focus on the ways in which Nwapa uses these texts to dispel common stereotypical myths of women in silent, immobile and subservient positions. It will also reflect the liberatory, self-empowered positions that Igbo female characters occupy – a representation that can be regarded as the first green shoots of African womanism. While Nwapa presents a view of women's leadership and agency in Igbo society, her characters also reflect a paradoxical ambivalence in their negotiation with patriarchal tradition as they strive for independence.

### **Representation of Female Characters**

The first way Nwapa dispels the myth of the 'silent' woman in these texts is in her female characterization. First, female characters are presented as independent, industrious and strong-willed, vocal and actively seeking agency for themselves. Secondly, by portraying her female characters in this way, Nwapa breaks previous stereotypical representations such as Jagua Nana, and Iluhoma, thus inscribing the beginnings of a feminist consciousness that will blossom into a more communally aware womanism.

Traditional Igbo women did not hear about womanism before it became defined and theorized in the 1980s. However, they have always defended their rights, and Nwapa chooses to highlight this inner strength and resilience in her representation of female characters. Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo's *Traditional Women's Institution in Igbo Society: Implications for the Igbo Female Writer* (1990) makes the point that "Igbo women right from the pre-colonial days had always risen and fought to defend their rights or enforce decisions...in the history of Nigeria, there is no other ethnic group where women wielded such collective power" (Ezeigbo 1990: 150). Nwapa reiterates this in an interview with Marie Umeh when she says:

in Ugwuta, women have certain rights that women elsewhere, in other parts of the country, do not have. For instance, in Ugwuta, a woman can break the kola nut where men are. If she is old, or if she has achieved much or if she has paid the bride price for a male relation and that member of the family is there, she can break the kola nut. And everybody would eat the kola nut. (Umeh 1995: 26)

Similarly, Gloria Chuku states that "evidence suggests that women, in the past and present, have played a more important role in the economy of Igboland... they have also been responsive and receptive to a high degree of economic opportunities and innovations" (Chuku 1995: 37). Igbo women throughout history have distinguished themselves in the fields of trade and commerce. Igbo women like Lady Mary Nzirimo, Lady Martha Onyenma Nwapa and Mrs. Rosemary Inyama are examples of women of such dynamism. It is significant that Flora Nwapa's mother, Lady Onyenma Nwapa was a successful business woman herself, perhaps a compelling example of the female characters Nwapa portrays in her novels, strong, intelligent and resilient.

Considering the social strength of Igbo women, it is understandable that *Efuru* (1966) and *Women are Different* (1986) set out to redress stereotypical myths by portraying them as strong and industrious. In *Efuru* (1966) Nwapa describes Efuru as an independent woman. She has run away to be with Adizua and raises the money for her bride price with her husband through trading. She refuses to go to the farm with her husband and tells him "If you like...go to farm. I am not cut out for farm work. I am going out to trade.' That year [Adizua] went to the farm to work while his wife [Efuru] remained in the town" (Nwapa 1966: 10). Efuru decides what she wants to do, choosing a husband as well as a livelihood. In his critique of Nwapa's work, Oladele

Taiwo states that “Efuru is perhaps too good to be a convincing character” (Taiwo 1984: 55), an ironic response given that in reality Igbo women are as independent, industrious and self-expressive as demonstrated by Efuru in the novel.

Efuru’s strong-willed character is also seen in her relationship with the male characters in her life, Adizua and Eneberi. In her marriage to Adizua, Efuru is seen as the model of a traditional Igbo wife. She is hard working, able to profit from her trade and, although with a bit of difficulty, bears Adizua a daughter, Ogonim. However, Efuru finds out that Adizua has another woman and is “[rumored] that he is going to marry another woman soon” (Nwapa 1966: 57). Efuru’s first instinct is to leave Adizua and take her daughter with her because she felt that she should not “wait for a man to drive [her] out of his house. This is done to women who cannot stand by themselves, women who have no good homes, and not [her] the daughter of Nwashike Ogene” (63-4). Efuru is a woman who is able to stand on her own and refuses to take in infidelity as an inevitable fate, an early indication of the freedom of spirit Igbo women possessed within pre-colonial Igbo society.

Efuru is persuaded to stay on in her marriage by Ajanupu. However, when Ogonim falls ill and dies of convulsion, Efuru is beside herself with grief and Adizua does not return for Ogonim’s funeral. Efuru goes in search of Adizua, returning a month later “[vowing] that’s it was over with her and Adizua” (88). She tells her mother-in-law “I cannot wait indefinitely for Adizua, you can bear witness I have tried my best. I am still young and would wish to marry again” (88). Efuru does not give up on her husband immediately but only when the situation becomes impossible. Yet, she is also strong-willed, wanting to continue life with another person although Adizua has disappointed her. Efuru did not want “merely to exist. She wanted to live and use the world for her advantage” (78). Efuru’s independent decision-making and self-will challenges previous representations of female characters. Her refusal to accept such circumstances as her lot in life reflects the resilience that Nwapa wishes to convey in Igbo women, contrary to previous fictional depictions, her Igbo female characters displaying qualities potentially identical to 1980’s womanism.

Efuru’s second marriage to Eneberi begins happily. Her mother-in law and husband are pleased with her since “any trade she put her hand to was profitable” (136). However after four years of marriage, she does not conceive a child and is labeled barren by the village people. The older women of the village say “of what use

is it if your husband licks your body, worships you and buys everything in the market for you and you are not productive? ... A woman, a wife for that matter, should not look glamorous all the time, and not fulfill the important function she is made to fulfill” (137-8). It is apparent here that traditional Igbo society placed great importance on a woman’s biological function as child-bearer. Socialized in this manner, Efuru feels pressured and asks Eneberi to take a second wife to bear him a child. Efuru’s concession to polygamy here seems questionable when she herself left her marriage with Adizua for the same reason. However, in Efuru’s rationale, she was not able to give Eneberi children, whereas she had borne Ogonim with Adizua, so this decision ensured that Eneberi would have children. It is also about the time that Efuru discovers Eneberi has had a son with another woman and has kept this secret from her. Despite being angry with him, Efuru forgives him. Her patience and forgiving nature continues even when Eneberi disappears for months and does not attend her father’s funeral, only to find that he had been arrested and jailed for stealing. When Efuru is confronted with this, she is angry with Eneberi’s lies and his betrayal of her trust. She was “angry that her husband, with whom she lived for nearly six years, could, at that stage of their married life, hide something from her. Angry because she had again loved in vain. She had deceived herself when she was Adizua’s wife” (209). Yet again, Efuru chooses to forgive Eneberi. At the end of the novel, the dibia interprets Efuru’s illness as a punishment for infidelity, and when Eneberi accuses Efuru of being “guilty of [this] adultery” she finally leaves him (216).

Critics have interpreted Efuru’s inability to leave her husband when she discovers his vices as a form of weakness, the response of a conventional woman who foolishly allows herself to be mistreated and taken for granted. But Efuru is not forced into independence because of her circumstances but chooses independence. Her only “tragedy is that she gave her love to a worthless man” (Ezeigbo 1997: 658). The ambivalence in Efuru’s character is indicative of a traditional Igbo woman steeped in patriarchal tradition having to make a difficult decision to leave her husband. She does not leave her husband at the first sign of problems in her marriage, yet neither does she accept accusations of infidelity. Efuru leaves Eneberi because he chooses to trust the dibia and accuse her on baseless grounds rather than stand by her, as she had done for him in the past. Efuru’s conflicting emotions in her marriage reflects the duality, humanity and complexity of her character, the capacity to forgive and the

wisdom to come to a realization to leave her marriage when it has come to a dead end. Nwapa portrays in *Efuru* a complex female character who challenges stereotypical myths of subservience and docility. She describes Efuru as a radical woman but in a way that is reflective of a womanist. Efuru is not consumed with her own needs but in both her marriages considers the needs of her husband first. Her growth from early acceptance of societal expectations of female behaviour to a questioning and redefinition of her role as a woman indicates something of the womanist process. Efuru's moral fortitude, emotional strength and independence free her from gender oppression, marginalization and exploitation in her marriage.

Susan Andrade in *Rewriting History, Motherhood, and Rebellion: Naming an African Women's Literary Tradition* asserts that "Nwapa's creation of a feminist protagonist is an act of rebellion against an Igbo literary tradition dominated by male writers and by the figure of Jagua Nana" (Andrade 1990: 105). In *Jagua Nana*, Cyprian Ekwensi forces his heroine to submit to motherhood at the end of the novel, repenting of her wayward ways as a prostitute and living a life in the village as "housekeeper to the family" (Ekwensi 1961: 180). However Efuru, at the end of Nwapa's novel, happily lives a life independent of her husband, refusing to be defined only by her role as a wife and redefining her role as a woman, demonstrating her ability to live an independent life. Unlike Jagua Nana who moves from a free life to that confined by the strictures of society, Efuru's growth is outwards, breaking free from social norms.

The novel closes with Efuru as a worshipper of the lake goddess Uhamiri. In the end,

Efuru slept soundly that night. She dreamt of the woman of the lake, her beauty, her long hair and her riches. She had lived for ages at the bottom of the lake. She was old as the lake itself. She was happy, she was wealthy. She was beautiful. She gave women beauty and wealth but she had no child. She had never experienced the joy of motherhood. Why then did the women worship her? (Nwapa 1966: 221)

Nwapa uses the myth of Uhamiri, the lake goddess worshiped by the Igbo people of Ugwuta to symbolize the importance of female independence. The goddess is said to

bestow wealth on women but does not bless them with children, for she is happy without having the experience of motherhood. Despite this, Ugwuta women worshipped her. Nwapa here indicates, through Efuru's worship of Uhamiri, that there are possibilities of different types of joy in a woman's life. An Igbo woman can be happy in the wealth brought by her industry. She does not need to feel less significant or meaningless if she does not have children as expected by patriarchal society.

Nwapa, in her interview with Adeola James, states that "whatever happens in a woman's life...marriage is not the end of this world; childlessness is not the end of everything. You must survive one way or the other, and there are a hundred and one other things to make you happy apart from marriage and children" (James 1990: 114-15). Nwapa's opinion in this matter is clearly reflected in Efuru. Having tried her best to fulfill her role as an Igbo woman and wife Efuru looks towards a different type of happiness offered in the symbolic presence of the lake goddess Uhamiri. Unlike Ekwensi's Ihuoma, trapped as wife to the sea god to live a miserable life, Efuru in worshipping the Lake Goddess Uhamiri, receives freedom and happiness. The feminine principle in womanism is again reflected in Uhamiri, a female goddess who bestows on Efuru wealth, freedom, happiness and peace. By representing her as a strong, industrious, self-willed character in her relationships and in her decision-making, Nwapa begins to dispel the myth of the 'silent' woman.

In her later novel *Women Are Different* (1986), Nwapa continues to portray images of Igbo female characters seeking agency and independence for themselves, shattering the myth of the silent woman. *Women are Different* tells the story of four girls, Rose, Agnes, Dora and Comfort from the beginning of their journey together during their mission school days in the 1940's to their adulthood in the 1970's. Their journey begins at the Elelenwa train station, symbolically marking the beginning of these girls' intertwined lives – their initiation into a journey that will lead them to adulthood. In school, Agnes, Dora and Rose establish a close friendship and soon are called the "three musketeers" (Nwapa 1986: 19). In *Africa Wo/Man Palava: The Nigerian Novel By Women* (1996), Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi believes that the nickname these three characters are given is apt, foreshadowing the "battlefields...[and] gender struggle" they face in their later lives. Mary Kolawole refers to them as "foot soldiers -... [who encounter] one problem or another in the quest for a happy home and married life" (Kolawole 1998: 162). Nwapa shows

throughout the text, how these female characters struggle to adapt their traditional learning to what is learnt in the missionary school and to translate this into their lives in urbanizing Nigeria.

Agnes, Dora and Rose indulge themselves in “True Romances,” believing in an idealistic world, where their relationships and eventual marriage to their spouses would only involve perfection and happiness (Nwapa 1986: 11). Dora firmly believed that her relationship with Chris would not face the problem of him looking at other women, while Rose was convinced that Ernest would marry her after medical school (28). Comfort, contrary to the meaning of her name, tells them discomfoting truths about reality when she tells them “who told you, you are going to do all these things you are planning? Look, Rose, when Ernest goes to Yaba Higher College, he will meet students of his own age there, go out with them, and propose marriage. He will not remember you” (29). The girls leave school with their naïve ideals, and it is in the three sections of their stories titled, ‘Agnes’, ‘Dora’ and ‘Rose’ that we see them grapple with the struggles they encounter in their lives. Although their experiences shatter their initial idealistic dreams, Nwapa shows us how these girls grow into women who rise above their situations, and at certain times of their lives, come together, to support each other through their difficult times.

In *Women are Different* Nwapa uses Agnes, Rose and Dora as examples of strong Igbo women who actively protest against patriarchy and the narrow definitions of tradition. Agnes is forced into an arranged child marriage by her family to a man old enough to be her uncle. Her husband had paid for her when she was in school and since Agnes had passed her Cambridge School Certificate, “Agnes and the certificate were his for keeps” (Nwapa 1986: 55). However, Nwapa shows that although Agnes is ‘bartered’ to her husband, she does not give up on her dream of pursuing an education. She fulfills her role as a woman and wife, within the first year of her marriage has a baby boy.

Agnes had her plans...Agnes neighbors were surprised at the way she organized everything. They did not know when she had a bath, when she went to the toilet or when she cooked...She took care of her baby, and when her husband left home each morning, and the morning chores were over she read...she had registered with Wolsey Hall in England for the Advanced

General Certificate of Education Examination...[she] read her lessons at night while her husband [snored]. (57)

Agnes breaks the stereotype of women in Stratton's 'pot of culture' strand. Performing her duties in her marriage, but refusing to neglect her own development by letting her dream of pursuing an education die. Alongside her duties at home, Agnes makes certain that she allots time to study. When her husband refuses to allow her to attend night school, she responds by refusing to cook for him (58). Agnes finally gets a university education with the encouragement of Ayo Dele, a man whom she befriends at night class and for whom she leaves her husband.

Agnes finally returns to her husband, who in the beginning scorns her as a "wayward wife" (65), but she refuses to allow him to upset her because "she was proud of her achievements" (65). Agnes's return to her husband should not be read as defeat but interpreted as the act of a woman who from the beginning, even before her marriage, set out to gain an education and successfully achieved that dream. After all, in her absence her husband was living with her stepmother, a liaison that was established before Agnes's marriage to him. Nwapa here emphasizes the importance of a woman's education as a gateway to self-assertion and independence, because on returning to her husband in Lagos, she holds an executive position in a research bureau. Her ability to cope with the expectations of her role as wife and mother, receiving her bachelor's degree and her eventual return to the father of her children shows the Nigerian Igbo woman's capacity for perseverance, achievement and change.

Agnes is different from Ekwensi's Ihuoma. Although Agnes is 'bartered' into an arranged marriage, she breaks stereotypes by gaining an education for herself. Unlike Ihuoma who is never able to feel love with another man because she belongs to the sea god, Agnes breaks away from the husband she 'belongs' to, to pursue her dream of an education and her love for Ayo Dele. Nwapa breaks the conventional picture of the traditional good woman and wife, to instead place emphasis on the importance of the female character's pursuit of happiness. Womanist theory describes the African woman's quest for agency. By breaking conventional stereotypes, Agnes creates opportunities for freedom and mobility. But by returning to her husband, an act that appears paradoxical in the context of women's self determination, she demonstrates how important it is to include the marriage and indeed the entire

community in her liberation. This is a key feature of womanism – the positive achievements of personal liberation are returned to the marriage and the community. In this way, perhaps the weak male characters may also be strengthened.

Through Dora's character, Nwapa shows the Igbo woman's capacity for survival despite tragedy. Dora marries her high school sweetheart Chris who took bribes in order to live the good life he enjoyed, while "the only person who did not know was Dora, his wife" (67). She gullibly allows him to manage her finances as well as handle the affairs of her newly built house. Only with his departure to England does Dora realize his deceitful nature – Chris had sold the house she bought in Onitsha before he left for England, he "had betrayed her. He was a traitor...She believed him. She believed so much in Chris and now he betrayed her" (73).

Despite his deception and years of absence Dora still longs for Chris's return, and with Agnes's help she locates Chris in Germany. When she arrives in Hamburg, Chris asks Dora what she wants, pretending he doesn't know her (78). She returns to Nigeria, goes to "Chris's home, got hold of his old relatives and divorced him by native law and custom" (78). Even so, she tells Rose "if Chris comes back today and shows penitence, I'll go back to him," which she does when Chris eventually returns from Germany (101). In Florence Stratton's reading of *Women are Different* she claims that it reveals "stories of women unable to break out of the definitions of womanhood...they tell of defeat and humiliation" (Stratton 1994: 104). Stratton's analysis is valid in the instance of Dora's foolishness in blindly trusting Chris and accepting him back after his infidelity. Nwapa does depict the limitations within Dora, a paradox in her inability to detach herself from her husband despite hurt and betrayal. However, there are other aspects of Dora's character that indicate her strength. Here I chose to give a counter reading of Dora's character, emphasizing points which portray her as an intelligent woman of foresight despite the limitations of her disposition.

After Chris's departure Dora hears of a military coup. Unlike her marriage, Dora was not deceived, seeing the coup as symptomatic of something larger. She

had the foresight that soon the world she used to know would change beyond recognition...Before the war was declared on July of 1967, Dora had completed her four-roomed bungalow. When the war was declared, she had

furnished it and began to stock it with food. When Biafra over-ran the mid-west, she evacuated all her baking equipment from Aba, and set up bakery in Okporo. She had continued to work hard until Port Harcourt was evacuated and she could not find flour for her bakery...She [then] started making dry pack out of green plaintains which she sent to the fighting soldiers in the Front...She bought back her [Onishita] house, paid in Biafran currency and had the lease in her possession...So due to her foresight, she and her family did not suffer too much during the civil war. (Nwapa 1986: 71-5)

The lines above describe Dora's ability to cope with the challenge of saving her family and maintaining her business during the Biafran war. Her foresight allows her to make adequate provision of food for her family and bakery, and she shows acute perception when she saves her baking equipment, and ingeniously continues to make money by selling packed plaintains, buying her house back with the money thus saved. Nwapa shows us the Igbo woman's resourcefulness in maintaining her family's safety and business security, capable of greatness in the face of adversity. Nwapa depicts Dora's womanist qualities where she is "courageous ...responsible ...traditionally capable" (Walker 1983: xi-xii) in surviving and caring for her children during the war. She does not wallow in sadness over Chris, but cares for her family in time of need.

In Nwapa's representation of Rose, she reveals a more dynamic, versatile Igbo woman, showing the potential for happiness in professional fulfilment and singleness. After high school Rose (earnestly) pursues her love for Ernest. After two attempts, she gains entrance into the University College in Ibadan but misses Ernest "who had left Ibadan and gone abroad to continue his medical studies" (Nwapa 1986: 79). When she is in London for her Diploma in Education Rose tries unsuccessfully to find him. Years later Ernest reappears and begs her to marry him. He disappears again during the Biafran war and Rose hears of him next when he is arrested for smuggling cocaine with Agnes's daughter Elizabeth. In the meantime, Rose meets and falls in love with Mark who hoodwinks her into a fake marriage for the sole purpose of cheating her of her money. Believing that he loved her, "Rose withdrew all her savings, handed it over to him" for his tuition fees to Harvard. When she doesn't hear from him in months upon his initial letter stating he had arrived in the States, she realizes that "Mark had jilted her" (Nwapa 82). Rose feels sorrowful and humiliated.

Nwapa shows the limitations of Rose's character, nevertheless, she also portrays a flipside to Rose's character which needs to be analyzed.

Despite Rose's struggle with singlehood and being deceived by unscrupulous men like Mark, she picks herself up. She

worked hard and in eighteen months, she had become a high executive. She was sent abroad for training...She [then] moved to Okoyi, had a large office and a secretary. If that was not success, what then was success? She thought of her school, her lovely and caring teachers...At other times she thought of Ernest. Where was he? Why did she succumb to Mark? How on earth did Mark succeed in tricking her and depriving her of her good name and life savings? But again, like Dora, she had to look to the future and turn her back on the past. In so doing, she would make a success of her life again." (82)

In *Rose*, Nwapa shows the extent to which women are locked into traditional expectations and the vulnerability this causes. But she demonstrates also that success for a woman can be defined in different ways. Rose neither marries nor does she have a child, the closest being the miscarriage she has after an affair with Olu. Yet she finds happiness and success in her academic and career achievements. At the end of the novel she asks a rhetorical question "but Rose, what had she?" (Nwapa 138). Stratton suggests that, "the answer to the final question is 'nothing'" (Stratton, 1994: 105). This is a somewhat contentious reading. Certainly the book shows the extent to which women can become victims to circumstances, and the unrelenting pressure to adopt the role of wife, to frame one's very identity through the relationship with a man. But Nwapa implies that the quest for Rose has just begun, the quest for unconventional possibilities, and for women of Rose's generation, this offers a new definition of womanhood. In *Rose*, Nwapa reiterates the message "whatever happens in a woman's life...marriage is not the end of the world; childlessness is not the end of everything. You can survive one way or the other, and there are a hundred and one other things to make you happy apart from marriage and children" (James, 1990: 114-15). Rose like Jagua Nana, is single, husbandless and childless. Yet for Rose, the end of the novel signifies the beginning, a new understanding of possibilities beyond the prescriptions of patriarchal society. Her womanist process begins "at [the]event...[of her] menarche" at boarding school, the beginning of her discovery into womanhood, also symbolically reflects the beginning of Agnes and Dora's journey into adulthood.

In *Efuru*, Agnes, Dora and Rose, Nwapa breaks the myth of the 'silent' woman. They are examples of powerful, compelling Igbo female characters, neither reticent nor passive. Although her female characters are often ambivalent in their response to the men in their lives, they do not remain silent and immobilized when they are disappointed. They demonstrate a capacity for growth that reflects the growing womanist sophistication of the Igbo women novelists.

### **Male Characters**

The second way Nwapa breaks the myth of the 'silent' woman is in her representation of male characters, in particular undermining the stereotype of Igbo male characters as strong male protectors. Male characters like Adizua and Eneberi in *Efuru* (1966) and Chris and Ernest in *Women are Different* (1986) are presented as flawed, men consumed with their own needs rather than accepting responsibility for the women in their lives. They leave the female characters to fend for themselves, breaking the myth that Igbo women are helpless and 'silent', rendering them "feminized men" (Ogunyemi 1996: 148).

*Efuru* is set in pre-colonial Nigeria, but the male characters begin to show signs of the corruption apparently brought on by colonialism, reflected in Adizua's irresponsibility and Eneberi's gaoling. Adizua is exactly like his father, an irresponsible man who left his mother for another woman. This "waywardness...in his blood" (Nwapa 1966: 61) is indicative of the presence of irresponsible Igbo men in society, contrary to prevalent depictions of Igbo male perfection, superiority and supremacy. Adizua leaves Efuru to care for herself and Ogonim, failing to return for Ogonim's funeral, and leaving Efuru to wash Ogonim's corpse and handle the burial herself (77). Nwapa's character Eneberi is equally weak, not having the courage to tell Efuru that he has a son born from an affair with another woman (Nwapa 1966: 190). He also avoids explaining his jail sentencing to Efuru for fear that she would desert him (210). Out of weakness he leaves Efuru to deal with the truth of his son and the death of her father on her own. The representation of weakness in the male characters not only contests the myth of Igbo male strength, nor is it only to allow a depiction of the strength of the women. Nwapa reveals that the men are as likely to benefit from the presence of strong, self-fulfilling and independent women as the

women themselves. Womanism looks beyond the gender contest to see that strong women mean a strong society, and the role of women novelists is partly to accentuate this strength.

Nevertheless, the weakness, selfishness and culpability of male characters appears with monotonous regularity, although this is often seen to be a symptom of a wider problem in Nigeria. In *Women are Different*, Chris and Ernest are depicted as unscrupulous, ruthless men consumed by greed and riches, a representation of the larger political dysfunction of postcolonial and post-war Nigeria. Chris takes bribes and is eventually transferred “to Enugu as a punitive measure for all the misdemeanor reported against him” (Nwapa 1986: 70). He leaves to England before he is jailed, selling Dora’s house without her knowledge, unremorseful of his actions of bribe-taking and its consequences to his family because “everybody does it and gets away with it” (71). He leaves Dora to bring up their five children and survive the Biafran war on her own. Ernest, who in the beginning is a prospective doctor, ends up going to prison for smuggling drugs. The reprehensible male characters are, in a sense, a metaphor of the corruption and political dysfunction in Nigerian society. Thus the self-determination of the women has a broader meaning than gender empowerment alone. Not only do strong women empower the local community, but the constant underlying theme of corruption reveals that their strength has much wider implications. Once again womanism looks beyond the gender contest to the broader social dysfunction – without a regaining of moral balance in the broader sphere, whether regional, cultural or national, gender empowerment has little point.

### **Gender Relations**

The third way Nwapa breaks the myth of ‘silence’ in Igbo female characters is to show the changing gender relations in Igbo society. Nwapa shows that women are no longer silent in the face of male subjugation and they actively struggle against male domination. An example of this can be seen in Ajanupu’s physical and verbal retaliation against Eneberi’s violence, and Chinwe’s assertion of freedom in leaving her wayward husband. When Efuru is accused of infidelity, she calls on Ajanupu for help. Nwapa’s treatment of Ajanupu not only reveals the female solidarity among Igbo women, but it also shows Igbo women standing up against Igbo men to defend

themselves. They are not passive. When Eneberi tells Ajanupu his accusations of Efuru's infidelity, Ajanupu in her anger curses him stating

Eneberi, nothing will be good for you henceforth... Our ancestors will punish you. Our Uhamiri will drown you in the lake. Our Okia will drown you in the Great River...That Efuru, the daughter of Nwashike Ogene, the good, is an adulterous woman...who are you? Who is your father, who is mother? What have you got to be proud of?...Eneberi what happened at Onicha? Tell me what happened at Onicha? You don't know that we know that you were jailed. And here you are accusing Efuru, the daughter of Nwashike Ogene of adultery. (Nwapa 1986: 217)

When Eneberi slaps Ajanupu for rebuking him in this way, she takes the "mortar pestle" and breaks it on his head, until blood fills his eyes (217). Unlike Okonkwo's docile wives in *Things Fall Apart*, Ajanupu is an Igbo woman who will not keep silent in the face of oppression. She not only dares to interfere when Eneberi mistreats Efuru, but when he asserts his authority by hitting her, she retaliates with a mortar pestle. The use of this domestic tool is significant. Susan Andrade observes that "the pestle is not only an important domestic tool, but the same instrument brandished by angry Igbo women during "sitting on" a man," used as a weapon for women to defend themselves (Andrade 1990: 100). Ajanupu's refusal to remain silent and defenceless against Eneberi's violence echoes the Women's War, the Aba Riots in 1929 when Igbo women rose up to protect themselves. It goes to show that gender relations in Igbo society have not always been one sided as portrayed in male writings, rather there exist "flexible relationships between men and women," where Igbo women expressed their dissatisfaction physically and verbally (Nwankwo 1995: 46). Obioma Nnaemeka states that Ajanupu's "greatest strength is... her tongue, her power of speech" (1994: 145). She embodies the power Igbo women have to stand up for their rights in the face of oppression and subjugation. Nwapa's situating of "women's verbal presence within the text" (Boehmer 2005: 96) denotes the existence of Igbo women's everyday life as an important aspect to be understood and accepted within African and Nigerian Igbo literature

Nwapa reiterates this quest within Igbo gender relations for identity and assertion in *Women are Different* through Chinwe, Dora's daughter. Like her mother Chinwe is a successful woman, "possessing a Mercedes Benz, big business associates

overseas, expense account paid credit cards and so on” (Nwapa 1986: 118). When her marriage to her husband fails due to his infidelity, she, unlike Dora, leaves her marriage. Her husband returns to her after two years telling her to “stop behaving as if [she] was a free woman,” reprimanding her for dating other men because she was “a mother, what [would her] children think of [her] behaving this way?” (118). Chinwe does not live by the definitions dictated by her husband. She divorces him, not wanting his money because all she wanted was her children and her peace of mind. “She won her case and was free” (118). In this novel, Nwapa suggest that women can unshackle themselves from the fetters of patriarchal tradition.

Chinwe had done the right thing. Her generation was doing better than her mother’s own. Her generation was telling men, that there are different ways of living one’s life fully and fruitfully...women have options. Their lives cannot be ruined because of a bad marriage. They have a choice, a choice to set up a business of their own, a choice to marry and have children, a choice to marry or divorce their husbands. Marriage is not THE only way. (119)

Chinwe represents a generation of women who take the options given to them. They neither allow themselves to be dictated by patriarchal tradition nor do they put themselves through a self-imposed suffering. Chinwe witnessed how “her mother was so good to her father, but ...her mother was treated [shabbily]” (117). She is determined not to suffer the same fate: “Mother I cannot take what you have taken from father. I am going to have my own back. No man is going to hold me ransom” (117). These female characters thus reject silence, expressing both verbally and in action their determination to free themselves from the constrictions of traditional gender relations. Ajanupu and Chinwe mirror Walker’s definition of a womanist being “audacious” in their response and actions towards Igbo male characters (Walker 1983: xi-xii). They clearly reflect womanism’s quest to create a space for women to speak, to express their opinions and to stand up for themselves.

## **Female Solidarity**

Another way Nwapa represents the breaking of women's 'silence' is in her emphasis on female solidarity. Nigerian Igbo society places emphasis upon co-identification and Igbo women have always drawn help and strength from each other. Their collective strength has always accommodated the needs of the women in their society, as we see in the aid Ajanupu and Rose offer their female counterparts. This idea is in keeping with the womanist principle of female kinship, women who have a healthy love for their sisters within their community. Throughout the text, Ajanupu is Efuru's confidante. Although she is the aunt of Efuru's first husband Adizua, Ajanupu is her comfort even in her marriage with Eneberi. While married to Adizua, it is Ajanupu who realizes that Efuru is pregnant. It is also Ajanupu who informs Efuru of Adizua's infidelity. In times of crisis, through Ogonim's sickness and death, Efuru's worries about her barrenness and grief over her father's death, it is Ajanupu who comforts Efuru. Ajanupu represents female wisdom and Efuru draws on this for support, demonstrating the collective importance of female communal voice in Igbo society.

In *Women are Different* female solidarity and co-identification are key features of the relationship between Agnes, Dora and Rose. An example of this occurs when Dora draws on Agnes's resourcefulness to help her follow a lead to find Chris. When Dora is unsure whether to accept Tunde's proposal of marriage following Chris's betrayal and infidelity, she seeks advice from Rose who tells her perceptively that she is confused because she does not love Tunde. When Dora is unable to accept her daughter leaving her husband because of his adulterous ways, it is Rose who advises her to let her daughter live her own life and make her own decisions. Nwapa shows how these women draw on each other's advice and help for strength, expressing love and concern for each other as "[women] who love other women" (Walker 1983: xi-xii).

## **Language**

Finally, Nwapa's use of language in the novels emphasises the emerging female presence in Nigerian Igbo literature. Clearly, the self-assertive words and phrases she puts in the mouths of her female characters are a key strategy in dispelling

the myth of the 'silent' woman. An example of this occurs when Efuru tells Difu of her experience with Eneberi: "I am absolved...I have nothing to say to Eneberi. He will forever regret his act" (Nwapa 1966: 220). It is interesting that Efuru uses 'I' to emphasize her position in this matter. In *Women are Different* Nwapa uses Rose, the character who challenges Igbo assumptions about womanhood by her singleness, to speak for 'women' as she articulates the difference between men and women. Igbo women are 'different' in their capacity for endurance, survival and change, in comparison to their male counterparts. It is also important to note that Nwapa endows her Igbo women characters with 'titles', 'Efuru', 'Agnes', 'Dora' and 'Rose', "[endowing] them with strength, voice and authority which challenges traditional gender roles" (Ezeigbo, *Writing African Women* 97). In *Efuru* (1966) and *Women are Different* (1986) Nwapa depicts female strength and agency, a beginning of the process of Igbo female self-assertion, and in this way reveals the significant place Igbo women have in Igbo society, dispelling previous stereotypical notions and expressing the seeds of womanism by her depiction of the necessary interrelation of women's empowerment and cultural transformation.

## Conclusion

Flora Nwapa's writings paved the way for 'silenced' Igbo women to gain a voice. She describes women who are "independent, strong, and admirable...whose presence gave dignity and meaning to precolonial and colonial African society...whose existence and relevance are such an important part of African reality *today*" (Nnaemekam 1994: 141). Nwapa saw the importance of highlighting the Igbo woman's position, opening the way for other African women writers to celebrate the strength of women in their communities. *Efuru* (1966) and *Women are Different* (1986) began to 'voice' the presence of Igbo women against their absence in the early African male literary tradition, since these women, despite ideas to the contrary, were definitely not 'silent.'

We can see the beginnings of a womanist philosophy in Nwapa by the refusal of her characters to be victims, by their independence and strength and a determination that had to be worked out within the exigencies of communal life. While some of the experiences of Nwapa's characters seem to involve them in a

continual gender contest, the importance of culture and community, of the interweaving of women's destiny with the whole community, is constantly apparent in Nwapa's work. Sometimes, as in the relation between personal male corruption and national dysfunction, womanist views of social reconstruction have very deep implications for national culture. Nwapa's female characters differ from previous images of women in Achebe, Amadi and Ekwensi's novels – stereotypical images of women as the 'good wife', the 'silenced woman', the 'stigmatized barren woman' and the 'loose woman'. In this respect her characters are revolutionary in redressing gendered stereotypes created in the African male literary tradition. They challenge conventional images of womanhood, supporting and comforting their female compatriots, but above all showing that the lot of women in African society cannot be separated from the lot of the community as a whole.

# CHAPTER 3

## The Emerging Igbo 'Woman': The Changing Concepts of 'Wife', 'Mother' and 'Woman' in Buchi Emecheta and Ifeoma Okoye

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While Nwapa dispelled the myth of the silent woman, this chapter will continue to analyse the emerging Igbo woman in writings of 'second generation' writers Buchi Emecheta and Ifeoma Okoye, focusing on the growing complexities faced by Igbo female characters in negotiating their changing roles as wives, mothers and women in both colonial and postcolonial periods and in local and international spaces. This womanist reading will argue that Emecheta's works, particularly *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *Double Yoke* (1982), *Adah's Story* (1983), *Head Above Water* (1986), *The Family* (1990), *Kehinde* (1994) develop a representation of Igbo women characters that highlights their strength and resilience in negotiating the challenge of their predetermined roles as wives and mothers. Okoye is interesting because her novel *Behind the Clouds* (1982) picks up the issue of barrenness and in stressing male impotence adds another dimension to the subversion of the traditional stereotypes of women.

Florence Onye Buchi Emecheta is one of Africa's and Nigeria's most acclaimed female writers. Born in Lagos, Nigeria in 1944 to Ibuza parents, she attended Christian mission schools and at the age of 16 married Sylvester Onwordi. As a young mother of two she followed her husband to England where he went to pursue his studies. Unable to tolerate her abusive marriage, she left her husband in

1966 after he burnt the manuscript of her first book *The Bride Price* because he was unable to accept her representation of Igbo men and the struggles faced by Igbo women within oppressive relationships. She consequently struggled to support herself and her five children while working, writing and pursuing a degree in sociology. Her early works *In the Ditch* (1972) and *Second Class Citizen* (1974) compiled later in one volume as *Adah's Story* (1983) reveal her private struggles in the marriage to Sylvester Onwordi, while depicting her resourcefulness and strength as an Igbo woman in supporting her family emotionally and economically. A writer whose inspiration comes from both her cultural and personal experiences, Emecheta's oeuvre covers numerous novels, plays and critical articles. A brief biography of her life confirms Ward's assertion that her writing examines "the experience of the African woman struggling to assert herself" (Ward 1990: 83). In confronting female subjugation, Emecheta's works introduce the reader to Igbo culture, uncovering some of its oppressive practices, and in so doing redefines the place of female characters in their roles as wives, mothers and women.

Drawing from the Igbo oral tradition that she learned as a child from her paternal grandmother, Emecheta's Igbo community is seen "through an African woman's eyes," giving her writings the status of modern folklore (Emecheta 1988: 174). In a similar vein, Ifeoma Okoye's works also demonstrate a gender activist approach as she speaks out against women's oppression in Nigerian society. While her early works reflected her interest in children's literature, Okoye's contemporary writing delivers a powerful political message against female injustice. Both Emecheta's and Okoye's works analyze the emerging identities of individual Igbo female characters who resist the traditional expectations of their roles as wife and mother. These novelists' writings continue Nwapa's challenge against "uneasy masculinity which desires sexual control and power within the parameters of gender stereotypes," postulating through the representation of their female characters how such prototypes are "no longer sustainable" (Newell 1996: 186).

Colonial invasion in the 1800's precipitated many changes in Africa as a whole and the Nigerian Igbo way of life in particular with its introduction of a "global capitalist economy dominated by European powers" as well as Christianity as the new and supreme religion (Gordon 2001: 276). These factors introduced different ideas about patriarchy and gender distinction within Igbo society, which further relegated

Igbo women to the periphery. Indigenous Igbo concepts which offered flexible gender relations in domains such as access to power, authority and land rights, were replaced, according to Amadiume, with Western notions of “sex and class inequalities supported by rigid gender ideology and constructions; [where] a woman was always female regardless of her social achievements or status” (Amadiume 1992: 119). The Igbo woman in pre-colonial society enjoyed her status in the Igbo community secured within “women’s courts, market authorities, secret societies and age-grade institutions” (Gordon 2001: 273). Successful Igbo women took honorific titles like the *agba ekwe*, which honoured them as powerful political figures within their community. During colonial rule, the grooming of women into domestic duty was encouraged: girls educated in the western school curriculum being taught how to support their husbands as good wives, thus reducing the independence cultivated within their culture. Indeed, as time passed, it became popular to send girls to school for a basic education as it increased their bride price. The western viewpoint encouraged women to remain in the home, further encouraging “the ideology of motherhood... suppression of self — self-sacrifice and for order and peace” within the family sphere (Amadiume 1992: 166). Igbo women experienced ‘double colonialism’ – racial and gender distinction from colonial rule and Nigerian men – inhabiting “the residual and unspecified category of the Other” (Oyewumi 1997: 122).

While colonialism brought about changes in Nigeria society, the Igbo woman’s role of providing sustenance for the family remained unchanged, though becoming more laborious and difficult to fulfill. Women were unable to maintain their dual function of producing food for their families as well as crops for market because the priority for cash crop land was given to the men in their society. Despite this, they were expected to organize the daily routine of the family, including childcare and cooking. Urban migration into cities like Lagos for wage employment brought new challenges since most women either ended up as “housewives, sellers of cooked food, prostitutes [or] brewers of illegal liquor” (White 64). In Emecheta’s *Joys of Motherhood* Nnu Ego becomes a peddler, and with these earnings takes care of the cost of housekeeping and educating her boys. Colonialism in Nigeria also eradicated pre-colonial traditional support systems that Nigerian women received from extended families in a tradition of communal nurture of children. Subsequently, this left them stranded with childcare, housekeeping and financial responsibilities. Polygamous

marriages in urban cities changed as women realised they could not depend on their co-wives but had to bear the responsibility for childcare. For example, Nnu Ego struggles to care for her eight children without help from either her co-wife Adaku or Nnaife her husband. Although it was obviously not a clear-cut reversal, Igbo women experienced drastic changes from pre-colonial to colonial Nigeria, and their traditional duties became impossible to perform because of their changing circumstances.

Similarly, Nigerian Igbo men also faced difficulties during the colonial era “effectively emasculated by colonialism, in contact culture, they [lost] the character and virtues as men” (Logan 2000: 173). Igbo men under colonialism “particularly the urbanized rather than the rural dwellers, [were] slaves and prisoners” as much as women were, “gradually feminized, while their white counterpart becomes progressively divinized” (Ogunyemi 1996: 257). Igbo men were placed in positions of servitude to their white masters, performing menial duties, referred derogatorily as *boy*, and placed in a second-class position in their own country. It logically follows that the counter effects of their emasculation fell on Igbo women, as Igbo men asserted authority over their wives, oppressing and subjugating them, in order to recover a semblance of the masculinity stolen by their colonial masters. This continued to influence the attitudes of postcolonial Nigerian men who expected their women to be unchanging, continuing their roles as wives and mothers. Emecheta’s *Head Above Water* (1986), *Adah’s story* (1983) and *Kehinde* (1994) each describe the struggles contemporary Igbo female characters face with their husbands who long to remain in authoritarian positions by forcing their wives into submission by keeping their roles limited to that of wife and mother and negating their identities as women.

### **Womanism, Motherhood and Polygamy**

Before examining Emecheta and Okoye’s texts, I will explore some theoretical parameters of African womanism’s perspective on motherhood and polygamy. The crucial element of womanist theory is its commitment to a “recuperation and celebration of women who have been “beaten down” by the system (Philips 2006: xxii). More importantly, it is to “fight and dismantle oppression in whatever ways ... womanism supports the liberation of all humankind from all forms or oppression.

Indeed, womanism seeks to enable people to transcend the relations of domination and oppression altogether” (xxiv). As such, the writings of Igbo women seek to dismantle oppressive habits of thought that maintain compliance. Ogunyemi illustrates this by positing that “Nigeria has conditioned women not to complain about the burden of mothering, lest they be considered unnatural or, worse still, lose their children because of a negative attitude about what should be considered a blessing” (1996: 76).

Such conservative and constraining views of motherhood are contested in womanist theory. Instead, the womanist views motherhood as a vehicle for social change and transformation. As we will witness in Emecheta and Okoye’s writings, Igbo women writers’ “preoccupation ... with mothering and motherhood is in consonance with a deeply felt need by Nigerian women” (Ogunyemi 1996: 78). However, they disassociate themselves from definitions of motherhood that are a “purely biological connotation and even strictly gendered connotation” (Philips 2006: xxix). Since the notion of

motherhood is a set of behaviors based on caretaking, management, nurturance, education, spiritual meditation, and dispute resolution. Anyone—whether female or male, old or young, with or without children, heterosexual or same-gender loving— can engage in these behaviors and, therefore, mother. In so doing, every individual has the ability to contribute to the ultimate goals of womanism: societal healing, reconciliation of the relationship between people and nature, and the achievement and maintenance of commonweal.

(Philips 2006: xxix)

In Emecheta and Okoye’s works, we find female characters who defy their prescribed roles as mothers. Often, women like Nnu Ego (*The Joys of Motherhood*), Kehinde (*Kehinde*) and Ije (*Behind the Clouds*) question the way in which the role of mothering has become synonymous with female responsibility. Through their actions and opinions they demonstrate the limitations of this perception of motherhood, questioning the lack of participation from their male counterparts. Likewise, because ‘motherhood’ according to Philips, includes persons with or without children, this immediately renders the stigma carried by barren women in Nigerian culture obsolete. This creates new definitions for women’s roles and their sense of worth as individuals.

Similarly, because womanist theory takes a firm stand against oppressive social strictures, it questions polygamous marriages in Nigerian society and their effect on Nigerian women. While polygamous marriages offered communal care and mothering in pre-colonial Nigerian society, it can be argued that this is no longer applicable in contemporary Nigeria which faces “neocolonialism, mismanaged independence, failed democracy, the civil war, the oil boom, military misrule, acquisition of instant wealth without accountability and the debt culture, with its inevitable economic depression, [all taking] their toll on women” (Ogunyemi 1996: 84). Each woman had to take care of her own family, which left no time to care for her co-wives’ family. Also, womanists argue that contemporary Nigerian women view polygamy as an insult to their individuality, serving merely to gratify the male ego. In Emecheta and Okoye’s works, characters like Adaku (*The Joys of Motherhood*), Kehinde (*Kehinde*) and Ije (*Men Without Ears*) refuse to indulge their husband’s male pride and superiority traditionally demonstrated through engagement in polygamy.

The approach to such issues in second generation Igbo women’s writings heralds a radical change in attitude: “the new novel marks a shift to the self, and at the center is a new woman (or man) whose agenda corresponds with the writer’s: mainly, to engage in controversy by exposing social inequities with the hope that they will be openly discussed for progress” (Ogunyemi 1996: 91). The emphasis on the ‘self’ or the ‘woman’ in this writing is cathartic, as writers take on the task

to tell, directly, the fictional and autobiographical stories ... the authorial voice is gradually becoming a cultural determinant in palavering [discourse] ... In guardedly breaking her mother’s silence to delineate some of the horrors that were tolerated, she has broken the boundaries of so-called decency, transforming herself into a spokeswoman, to the chagrin and consternation of Nigerian conservatives. (Ogunyemi 1996: 120)

Thus the role of the female writer as a ‘spokeswoman’ allows her novels to depict a release from the Igbo patriarchal tradition, which was further exacerbated by colonialism. The anachronistic idea “that woman, etymologically, is the wife of man, prefaced by her daughterhood, which prepares her for motherhood, a grand finale” becomes replaced by a renewed sense of liberation in which the novel becomes a metaphorical conveyor of self-renewal.

This is particularly resonant for Buchi Emecheta. Her autobiographical novel *Head Above Water* (1986) and semi-autobiographical novel *Adah's story* (1983) draw from first hand knowledge in battling an oppressive marriage and struggling to raise her children single-handedly even before leaving her marriage. Her fictional texts like *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Kehinde* (1994) are a direct “criticism of the way in which men point to the symbol of Mother Africa as an ideal for ordinary African wives and mothers to follow” (Schipper 1987: 50). Okoye's Ije redefines the boundaries of motherhood and marriage in her refusal to accept polygamy as a result of her barrenness. Thus as Molar Ogundipe-Leslie points out, Emecheta and Okoye reflect “the female [writer's] ... [commitment] ... as a writer, as a woman ... committed to her art, seeking to do justice to it at the highest levels ... committed to her vision ... [tells] her own truth, and [writes] what she [wishes] to write” (1994: 63).

This chapter will show how the development of the 'woman' within Igbo female characters is only made possible by redefining women's roles as 'wives' and 'mothers'. In each of the texts *Adah's Story* (1983), *The Joys of Motherhood*, *Kehinde* (1994), *Head Above Water* (1986), *Double Yoke* (1982), *The Family* (1990) and *Behind the Clouds* (1982) by Emecheta and Okoye, the characters' identity as 'woman' is established by re-focusing their perception of themselves as wives and mothers. I will demonstrate five different modes in which their 'identities' as 'women' are achieved: through inscription as liberation; by revealing the stereotyping of motherhood; by exposing the oppressive realities of polygamy; by redefining barrenness and sterility; and finally through surviving rape and abuse.

### **Inscription as Liberation**

Writing for African women writers was a way of claiming authority for their growing resistance to subjugation. Female critics of African women's writings like Carol Boyce Davies, Anne Adams, Molar Ogundipe-Leslie and Ebele Eko to name a few, describe the important role female writers played in entering the canon of African literature. Their roles are not merely aesthetic; they are “pathfinders for new relations between men, women and children” (Davies 1993: 311). Emecheta's writings, according to Carole Boyce Davies, aimed to tell “what happened, to be

understood, to make sense ... to tell readers what it is like to grow up female in a society that favors boys, and also of the struggle to make personal choice or the husband who failed us" (1993: 321). Thus, through her works Emecheta "[prepares] us for the account of her eventual triumph over adversity" (321). The nature of women's victory described in Emecheta's work also emphasizes the Nigerian womanist's declaration through inscription "Ndi b'anyi, KWENU, for the women will now speak through their texts" (Ogunyemi 1996: 127).

Liberation through inscription is one of the methods Emecheta employs in her writings to depict the development of the identity of a 'woman'. Through writing, female characters reveal their sufferings and initiate a process of self-empowerment. Mary Kolawole informs us that Emecheta's "Adah's story is a reiteration of a self-made woman struggling against ethnic, gender, and race bigotry. What is so spectacular about Adah's story is the close affinity between the heroine's experience and Emecheta's own background, life and experience" (1997: 171). *Adah's Story* (1983) is a semi-autobiographical novel that narrates Adah's difficulties with her abusive husband Francis, her eventual separation from him after he burns her first book, and her struggles in raising her children as a single parent. Likewise, *Head Above Water* (1986) follows Emecheta's autobiographical account of her turbulent marriage to Sylvester Onwordi and his heartless act of burning her first novel *The Bride Price*. Hence, in recounting her journey of personal discovery, Emecheta repositions the "woman's life script [which was] a non story, a silent space," as a re-inscription (Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* 50).

In both *Head Above Water* (1986) and part one of *Adah's Story* (1983) "Second-Class Citizen," the female character's first novel is referred to as a brain-child. Mary Kolawole explains: "to Emecheta and to several African women writers, writing as the brainchild of the author entails self-inscription as well as writing the collective identity for self-fulfillment" (1997: 173). Building on this idea of writing as inscription and self-fulfillment, Emecheta also reveals how the relationship between the writer and her works also parallels the relationship of a mother and child, introducing another conceptualisation of womanhood and motherhood. Sylvester (*Head Above Water*) and Francis (*Adah's Story*) in both texts burn the manuscripts of their wives' works.

I showed my "brainchild" to my husband. He at first did not want to read the manuscript because, he said, "You don't know much, so how can you write a story? Nonetheless, I pleaded with him to read it. He did so secretly and his reaction was to burn it. He was still burning the last pages when I came into the room from Queen's Crescent where I had been shopping ... I had by then learnt that one happy parent is better for the children than two warring ones ... the burning of my *Bride Price* decided me. (*Head Above Water* 1986: 34)

In the novel the same event occurs:

It was Francis standing there by the stove, burning the paper ... I was afraid you'd dig them out of the bin. So I had to burn them ... Reality crashed into her mind. Francis was burning her story, he had burned it all. The story that she was basing her dream of becoming a writer upon. The story that she was going to show [her children] when they grew up ... Bill called that story my brainchild. Do you hate me so much, that you could kill my child? ... That to Adah was the last straw. Francis could kill her child. She could forgive him all he had done before, but not this. (*Adah's Story* 1983:139-40)

This act of burning is a traumatic event in the female characters' lives, motivating an instant decision to sever their relationship with their husbands. Emecheta shows how they recognize that their writing is an extension of their identity as 'women,' and the act of burning by the men an attempt to ensure subjugation, to destroy their desire for wholeness and freedom. Ogunyemi suggests that a female subject becomes a womanist after experiencing a traumatic event "rape, death in the family, or sudden responsibility" (2006: 28). The burning of the wife's book is such an event, invoking the sudden recognition of the woman's need for independence and the separate identity represented by the brainchild manuscript. This not only reveals the female character's choice of identity as a 'woman' rather than her prescribed role as a 'wife', but it also illustrates the importance of *inscribing* subjectivity through narrative. The role of a woman as writer emphasizes the importance of freeing the female from the domestic arena, releasing her to embrace her full potential.

It is interesting that in *Head Above Water* (1986), the sentence "the burning of my *Bride Price* decided me" could have multiple connotations. The obvious meaning is that the burning of the novel sealed her decision to leave her husband. However,

another reading of this could suggest that it is the burning of the woman's bride price, the destruction of her self-worth, that makes her leave her husband. The bride price in African society compensates the family for the loss of the prized possession of their daughter. Along these lines, the burning of the manuscript reveals to the woman/writer the destruction and devaluing of her very identity. She chooses to leave her abusive marriage rather than continue to be a 'second-class citizen' who has no identity but remains oppressed and subjugated. Since a comparison has been made earlier between the relationship between the writer and the manuscript as akin to the relationship between mother and child, this inextricable link between the two is like a placenta that feeds the female character her sense of identity and self-worth. This traumatic severance can be seen in Adah's accusing Francis of such extreme hatred that he would kill her child. Adah's desire to become a writer is also a legacy she longs to leave her children and grandchildren. The legacy of words bears witness to truth, which is an inheritance as well as an intervention that Emecheta as a writer chooses to leave for women and the Igbo community. Hence, the importance placed on the act of writing emphasizes how "writing [is] a weapon to (re)inscribe African women in such ways that transgress and shatter hegemonic (male) representations ... [as] they demand their place at the pulpit, they demand that their voice continue to be heard ... no longer be blatantly ignore, erased, forgotten" (Makuchi 1997: 148-9). Thus, the inspiring aspect of Emecheta's declaration of the importance of writing is her own decision to follow such a prescription in her own life, not merely in her fictional characters like Kehinde (*Kehinde*), Gwendolen (*The Family*) and Nko (*Double Yoke*).

In many discussions of the epistolary form in African women's literature, Senegalese writer Mariamma Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1981) is referred to as the foundational text. Ba's text reveals, through a series of letters between Ramatoulaye, the protagonist and her friend Aissatou, the pain she faces "growing from girlhood to womanhood ... the letter novel ... becomes a truly intimate medium for the woman who wants to tell the story of her inner life ... particularly suited to the African woman writer who wants to adjust to revelation through the written word" (Davies 1993: 323). Similarly, in the development of her later work *Kehinde* (1994), Emecheta exploits the use of the letter to capture the female character's self-actualization. Kehinde decides to leave her husband Albert after she finds out that he

has married a second wife and she has to participate in a polygamous marriage. By leaving Nigeria to return to England she chooses freedom. Just as the burning of Adah's brainchild in *Adah's Story* marks the reason for her decision, Kehinde's forced debasement in a polygamous marriage where she no longer has any rights or self-identity, where she is forced to prostrate before Albert to receive her housekeeping money, leads her to seek help from her friend Moriammo.

The letter in which Kehinde asks for her friend Moriammo's assistance exposes the cultural biases that hinder her development. Her dialogue echoes Ba's Ramatoulaye in *So Long a Letter* (1981) who writes to her female friend Aissatou relating her woes of polygamous marriages which benefit men but negates female identity. Although she may underestimate the use of the epistolary form in male writers such as Isidore Okpewho, Ogunyemi theorizes in *Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English* (1985) that writings of African and African American women like Ama Ata Aidoo, Mariama Ba and Alice Walker use the epistolary form of the novel inherited from eighteenth century women writers to

[enable] them to exploit its qualities of simplicity, relative intimacy, and candor ... the letter pretends to be authentic and, like oral narration, gives the impression that the storyteller is not lying ... an oral performance in book form ... As a literary form that pretends to be private while it is made public, it ensures an open inquiry into those matters that affect one's material, well-being, one's spiritual disposition, one's destiny, and one's relationship both to other people and to the environment. Letters in black female writing finally ensure illumination of the black predicament that precedes black integrity.

(Ogunyemi 1985: 79)

Similarly, Kehinde's letter explores the human predicament faced by women who are oppressed in polygamous marriages. She reveals how intimacy is a foreign concept in a polygamous setting and it was a husband's place to "demand his marital rights" (93). With the absence of female 'rights', Kehinde had to "depend on [Albert] financially" (94). Her 'spiritual disposition' is dismissed when she is forced "to say 'Joshua's father' or 'our father' or 'our husband'" (93). The dismissal of the singular 'I' in her role as 'wife' and 'mother' which is then substituted with the plural 'our' further ingests the tactical ideology of polygamous marriages which removes any

sense of personal agency in the women. Recognizing this, Kehinde chooses to lean towards the friendship she shared with her friend Moriammo. While she writes to Moriammo about her present circumstances in Nigeria, Kehinde also reminds herself of “my house? I now call it my house, because that is exactly what it’s going to be: my house, not our house” (92). Recognizing her right to ownership of the home she had built for her family, and requesting assistance from her friend, Kehinde is led to develop her individuality and independence as a woman. Thus, Kehinde’s ‘private’ memories are made ‘public’ through her letter to Moriammo expressing some of the difficulties of feminine resilience amidst insistence of subjugation.

The epistolary form, the act of writing to a fellow female friend also serves to further solidify the womanist solidarity of female friendships and “women’s emotional flexibility ... women’s strength” (Walker 1983: xi). This is apparent in Kehinde’s ability to pour out her feelings to Moriammo and in return receive the financial, emotional and moral support that she requires in her struggles. Hence, “the communal function of the call-and-response” depicted through the epistolary form is fulfilled in the novel as women come together to help each other (Ogunyemi, 1985: 78). Likewise, the letter also “[emphasizes] climactic points in the narration,” which reveal Kehinde’s request for help as her step towards gaining personhood (Ogunyemi, 1985: 79). There is something both greatly cathartic and restorative in the process of verbalizing one’s story of suppression – “when Kehinde posted this letter, she felt lighter, as if she had confessed” (Emecheta 1994: 95). Clearly the implications of this for the African woman writer are immense: like postcolonial writing in general, the act of taking the language and communicating her own personal and cultural story is a profound act of transformation. Emecheta indicates that recording her circumstances becomes the foundation on which Kehinde restores her life and develops her agency.

By employing the metaphor of writing, Emecheta shows her “willingness to seek new ways to subvert what she sees as the unjust subjugation of women in the name of tradition” (Ross, *International Literature in English* 283). Clearly, “a woman’s personal achievement through hard work becomes the central value in Emecheta’s universe” (283). In giving us a deeper insight into her universe, Emecheta’s fictionalized self Adah and her more developed character Kehinde, reveal that through the rethinking of their roles as ‘wives’ they can establish a framework whereby they are able to develop their individual sensibilities.

## Contesting the Stereotype of Motherhood

Motherhood is an important dimension of a woman's life in African society. Women who gave birth to children were considered to be 'reproducers' of security and wealth for old age. In many African societies "motherhood" defined "womanhood" (Davies 1986: 243). Evidence of this is apparent when a woman who has a child is referred to as 'Mother of \_\_\_\_\_. Yet Emecheta suggests that such limited understanding of the woman subject needs redefining. Womanist theory proposes a wider definition of motherhood that involves mothering beyond biological definitions

anyone— whether female or male, old or young, with or without children, heterosexual or same-gender loving — can engage in these behaviors [caretaking, management, nurturance, education, spiritual meditation, and dispute resolution] and, therefore, mother. (Philips 2006: xxix)

Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *Kehinde* (1994), *Head Above Water* (1986) and *Adah's Story* (1983) explore the various challenges women face when subjected to culturally based definitions of motherhood. While Emecheta's texts suggest a sense of fulfillment for women who reject biased representations of motherhood, there is also a paradoxical representation of motherhood in which female characters who reject their roles as 'wives' become more involved in their roles as 'mothers' and this facilitates the development of their identities as 'women'.

The perception of motherhood solely through a biological lens is critiqued by Florence Stratton in the Mother Africa trope. Stratton's 'pot of culture' strand perpetuates the subjugation of women through culturally inherited assumptions of their role. Stratton argues that the ubiquity of the trope can be "found in the works of most major men writers," a framework she derives from Senghor's works, which "analogizes woman to the heritage of African values, an unchanging African essence" (Stratton 1994: 41). This trope reveals women "conceptualized as immutable, rendering the female figure static, conservative" (1994: 50). In emphasizing the role of 'mother', the female subject is constrained by traditionalist ideology and devoid of identity and mobility.

This follows Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie's explanation of the 'six mountains' on the back of African women that render them immobile. Mountain number two, the

heritage of tradition “weighed down by superstructural forms” as well as mountain five, the role of the man who is immersed in advantageous patriarchal supremacy are two compounding factors that continue the subjugation of women (1994: 34). In her assertion of the non-existent humanity of the Nigerian woman, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie states that the “conception of her as a *person* first” is absent while “she is often an appendage to someone else — a man ... a man’s daughter, sister, wife and mother” is stressed” (1994: 140). The position of Nigerian women as ‘mothers’ is highly contentious. Scholars concede that ‘motherhood’ is a central focus in African and Nigerian women’s writings and Florence Stratton states that Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* criticizes the “romanticization and the status accorded to [motherhood] as the soul route to female fulfillment” (1994: 116). In her book *Womanism and African Consciousness* (1997), Mary E. Modupe Kolawole asserts that “motherhood, and the joy and woes of it, usually still constitutes a central dilemma” in the second phase or second generation of African women’s writings (84).

Emecheta explores the idea of Igbo motherhood and the changing role of the wife and mother in different ways. While in some narratives she chooses to emphasise individual self-fulfilment by condemning deeply rooted patriarchal practices, in others she indicates that prioritizing motherhood above wifedom develops individuality as well. In *The Joys of Motherhood* she is disdainful of the lack of population control in Nigeria, observing that “having so many children does not make you a better human being” (Ogundele 1996: 453). Tragically, despite having eight children and dedicating her life to providing for them, “Nnu Ego lay down by the roadside, thinking that she had arrived home. She died quietly there, with no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to her. She had never really made many friends, so busy had she been building up her joys as a mother” (Emecheta 1979: 224). Gloria Chineze Chukukere observes that in the case of Nnu Ego, “motherhood does not always guarantee social and financial security” (1995: 193). Thus, Nnu Ego’s selfless dedication to her family fails to provide any of the joys, happiness and fulfilment she needs as a woman. In an interview with Feroza Jussawalla, Emecheta explains that through the story of Nnu Ego she addresses the fact that “raising a child is not enough,” and that “if you don’t keep something for yourself, you just become entangled with that child...you’ll be cheating yourself and cheating that child” (1992: 93). Leading such a life is not only empty and lonely but also unfulfilling. In Nnu Ego’s desperate desire to fulfill her role

as a good wife and mother, she becomes a 'slave' to these roles. Nnu Ego pleads to her *Chi*, her spirit double in the ethereal world, a former slave to grant her children. However, ironically, it is this very fervor that entraps her in a lifetime of self-sacrifice. Yet, towards the end of the text, there is a sense of realisation in Nnu Ego as she declares

God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage? she prayed desperately ...What have I gained from all of this? Yes, I have many children, but what do I feed them on? On my life ... I am a prisoner of my own flesh and blood.

(Emecheta 1979: 186-7)

The female character's proclamation of the female as 'appendage' echoes Ogundipe-Leslie's analysis of women's identities as tied closely to their feminine familial roles. Here Emecheta suggests that the identity of a woman in Igbo society has for too long lain in her attachment, as an 'appendage' to the male figures, inhibiting her from becoming a complete, 'full' human being, and rendering her 'desperate' and a 'prisoner'. In this, as Teresa Derrickson points out, "the title of Emecheta's novel is patently ironic, for it would seem that there are few joys associated with motherhood" if all women are expected to be is sacrificial mothers (2005: 42). The woman leads a 'prisoner's' life, acquiring nothing but hopelessness, loneliness, resignation and surrender to a life of beaten down by subjugation and poverty.

The multiple questions in the above extract serve to intensify Nnu Ego's interrogation of Igbo gender inequalities. This 'accessorizing' of the female is challenged by Nnu Ego's co-wife Adaku, who refuses to accept the submissive position in which she is placed when she is inherited by Nnaife after her husband dies. Like Nnu Ego, Adaku reframes the prioritizing of male children with a greater appreciation of daughters, choosing to offer them "a good start in life ... stop going to the market ... enrolled in a good school ... that will benefit them in the future" (Emecheta 1979: 168). Interestingly, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi observes that in defying Igbo practices "it is Adaku who experiences the joy of motherhood" in choosing to act according to her own personal desires (1996: 259). Adaku's 'joy' comes from her refusal to remain a prisoner to the dictates of her community but to "set [her] own [standards]," rejecting the definition of her role by her duties to her inherited husband or her inability to produce a son (Emecheta 1979: 169). By allotting

equal privilege to daughters and declaring the importance of women, the mother gains an independent identity for herself, and bequeaths a legacy of pride and independence to her female heirs. This confirms the paradoxical nature of the role of 'motherhood' in developing 'womanhood'. In *Nnu Ego*, Emecheta implies that the absolute focus on 'motherhood' negates the 'self'. Yet Emecheta argues in *Adaku* that her prioritization of mothering her daughters leads women a step closer toward defining their individuality.

*Adaku's* decision to choose freedom is echoed by *Nnu Ego* in a haunting question: "who made the law that we should not hope in our daughters? We women subscribe to that law more than anyone. Until we change all this, it is still a man's world, which women will always help to build" (Emecheta 1979: 187). Here, Emecheta places the responsibility of inequality into the hands of women themselves who choose to continue the subjugation of their daughters. However unfair this may seem it is clear from her writing that the perpetuation of oppression is institutionalized in the society. Clearly the alternative legacy is the conferral of a sense of independence. *Nnu Ego's* tragedy lies in her failure to prioritize her identity as a woman and negotiate the changes in her role as wife and mother. Her mechanical, methodical way of completing her prescribed role as wife and mother keeps her from either allowing change in her life or building strong emotional and spiritual ties with her female companions – "she never really made many friends, so busy had she been building her joys as a mother" (224). Alternatively, the representation of *Adaku's* character can be seen to foreshadow the womanist Igbo female character that is independent, resilient, "courageous [and]...strong-willed," paving the way for Emecheta other womanist female characters like *Nko* (*Double Yoke*), *Gwendolen* (*The Family*) and *Kehinde* (*Kehinde*) (Walker 1983: xi-xii).

Emecheta implies in *Adah's Story* (1983) and *Head Above Water* (1986) that the female protagonists, like *Adaku* in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), learn to place their roles as 'mothers' first before their roles as 'wives'. In *Head Above Water* Emecheta describes the exhaustion she experiences in raising her children while singlehandedly supporting her family financially, since her husband remained a perpetual student. However, after having four children and living with a husband who refused to support the family, Emecheta decided that she "was no longer prepared to

go on working with four young children while he sat at home, an eternal student who could afford to hop in and out of bed with the women in the house" (1986: 33).

In part one of *Adah's Story* (1983) titled 'Second Class Citizen' which depicts a close affinity between Emecheta and its main character Adah, one of the first steps Adah takes towards developing her individuality comes from asserting a degree of financial autonomy, by keeping her pay packets instead of giving them to Francis to "dole out the two pounds for housekeeping to her," an Igbo practice she decides is no longer applicable because "she [wanted] [to] buy everything the doctors and the midwives told her to eat ... Francis raised many rows, but Adah had a more important thing to worry about - the unborn child. It was so small she could hardly feel it. Her figure did not get big like it did when she was with the [other] [three]" (Emecheta 1983: 132). Adah declares to Francis, "from now on, fend for yourself. I know these children are mine because they need to be fed. You must go out and work. If not, I shall only cater for my children" (132).

A comparative analysis can be made of these texts to show that female characters gain a sense of agency and autonomy for themselves by reevaluating their expected 'functions' as wives, placing instead their roles as mothers as a priority. In *Head Above Water* (1986), Emecheta refuses to support a husband who is not only incompetent in caring for his family but is also unfaithful in his marriage. The value of her womanhood is apparent where she chooses to care for her children instead of remaining dormant and submissive. On the other hand, in *Adah's Story* Emecheta gives a detailed account of the female character's placing increasing importance on her children, specifically the child she carries in her womb. Abioseh Michael Porter in *Second-Class Citizen: The Point of Departure for Understanding Buchi Emecheta's Major Fiction* (1996) suggests that in diverging from readings of *Second Class Citizen* as a feminist text by scholars like Katherine Frank and Eustace Palmer or as a text with an inconsistently developed heroine as seen by Lloyd Brown, *Adah's Story* can be "read as a novel of personal development (*Bildungsroman*) ... a novel dealing with a young African women's gradual acquisition of knowledge about herself as a potential artist and about the themes of love and marriage" (1981: 268). Concurring with Porter, we can see that the image of the unborn child stirs a fierce sense of maternal protection that marks the emergence of Adah's identity as a woman. But this is motherhood with a difference. Far from the traditional role of motherhood as family

wealth, as the bearer of sons, this is a motherhood defined by a fierce protection of the child against the dissolution of the father, a protection that begins by her withholding her pay packet. The adoption of the phrase 'my children' in *Adah's Story* emphasizes this newly conceived role of motherhood as one based on the self of the mother rather than subjection to the husband.

While critics have applauded the representation of female characters like Adaku and Adah, generally, readings of Nnu Ego in *Joys of Motherhood* (1979) have always highlighted her shortcomings as a female character, unable to make suitable changes for her life as an independent Nigerian woman in colonial Lagos. While having seen that Adaku and Adah are characters who develop their womanhood through motherhood, Nnu Ego, a more compliant character, appears to gain a sense of agency through death. Florence Stratton suggests that "Emecheta punishes her conservative heroine [Nnu Ego]" for conforming to the roles of 'wife' and 'mother' defined by Igbo society (1979: 117). This may be somewhat harsh. Although Emecheta may be critical of Nnu Ego's inability to cope with the changes in society, her portrayal of female characters in the novel is generally sympathetic to their struggle against misogynist cultural pressures.

What 'womanist' traits may be found in Nnu Ego's character? Nnu Ego, like other representations of female Igbo characters in Nwapa's novels such as Efurū, Agnes, Dora and Rose, does show strength and resilience. Despite the difficulties of adjusting to colonial Lagos, Nnu Ego single-handedly raised her eight children, clothing, feeding, "[scraping] and [saving] to pay the ... school fees for Oshia and Adim" from her income as a peddler (Emecheta 1979: 171). In fact, her sacrificial nature is also reflected when she could not and would not allow herself to "afford another outfit [*lappa*]" because she put the cares of her children first in her life (Emecheta, 80). Constantly reminding herself that her children were her priority, Nnu Ego lived her life as a sacrificial mother "responsible ... [and] serious" in nurturing her children and her husband (Walker 1983: xi-xii). Her inability to adjust to the changes in her role as 'wife' and 'mother' in colonial Lagos does not stop Nnu Ego from being a good 'wife' and 'mother' to Nnaife and her children.

Moreover, Nnu Ego does defy the dictates of Igbo culture in her death, an indication of her refusal to be subjugated, taking stock of her life and the lives of future women. Consequently:

stories afterwards, however, said that Nnu Ego was a wicked women even in death because, however many people appealed to her to make women fertile, she never did. Poor Nnu Ego, even in death she had no peace!...the joy of being a mother was the joy of giving all to your children, they said...people failed to understand why she did not answer their prayers, for what else could a woman want but to have sons who would give her a decent burial? Nnu Ego had it all, yet she still did not answer the prayers of her children.

(Emecheta 1979: 224)

The concept of the female *Chi* in *The Joys of Motherhood* is used by Emecheta to reveal the development of Nnu Ego's identity as a 'woman'. In Igbo cosmology, the word *Chi* is often understood as "god, guardian angel, personal spirit, soul, spirit-double" (Achebe 1975: 93). A person's *chi* is his [or her] other identity in the spirit land – a *spirit being* complementing a terrestrial *human being*; for "nothing can stand alone, there must always be another thing standing beside it" (93). In her death, Nnu Ego herself becomes her descendants' *Chi*. Here Emecheta inverts Nnu Ego's former situation to one of power. Nnu Ego's refusal to grant children to her worshipers is the beginning of "her means of self-expression," an independent decision of a 'woman' who has suffered the consequences of having numerous children without having any 'joys' for herself (Daymond 1996: 279). Nnu Ego's rebellion in death despite being labeled a 'wicked' woman marks the shedding of her old traditional Igbo ways. In death, Nnu Ego is not a defeated heroine but like now symbolizes the possibilities for women that may exist beyond motherhood.

The ending of Nwapa's *Efuru* where Efuru is said to have "never experienced the joy of motherhood" (Nwapa 1966: 221) recapitulates the title of Emecheta's novel. Susan Andrade reads Emecheta's Nnu Ego as "blatantly [criticizing] her precursor's privileging of motherhood through *her* last lines" (Andrade 1990: 104). In my opinion Emecheta echoes Nwapa's stand in implying at the end of the text that there are options for women apart from motherhood. As Efuru decides to live her life as a worshiper of Uhamiri, Nnu Ego in death, refuses to grant her worshipers children, a clear indication of her refusal to burden her worshipers with children. In fact, Emecheta takes this a step further to place Nnu Ego in a position of power as a *chi*, to grant or refuse children to her worshippers. Hence the reference to 'fertility' of a woman in the above extract is not equated to biological functions but indicates that a

woman's joy comes from various sources. In this way, Emecheta's Nnu Ego and Adaku are clear indications of the early representations of womanist characters, who, like Nwapa's, create a platform for later representations of womanist characters, such as Ije (*Behind the Clouds*), Kehinde (*Kehinde*), Nko (*Double Yoke*) and Gwendolen (*The Family*), who are more assertive in their declaration of their importance as 'woman'. Thus, although "deviant," less conformist characters [Adaku and Nnu Ego] remain marginal figures" in early novels, they signify that the second generation writer is beginning to move towards the possibility of change within female characters, reflecting the cultural changes within postcolonial Nigeria with which Nigerian men and women have to contend (Nnaemeka 1994: 153).

It is arguable that Kehinde is Emecheta's Nnu Ego fully realized. Obioma Nnaemeka suggests in *From Orality to Writing: African Women Writers and the (Re) Inscription of Womanhood* (1994) that in order to understand women's silenced position, we need to "reexamine the site where women are silenced and where they break their silence. Can one speak from the locus of silence? What kind of speech can emanate from it?" (141). Kehinde's choice to leave her husband Albert in Nigeria and return to England after he enters into a polygamous marriage, is also a choice to reexamine her expected role. However, her full 'metamorphosis' – according to Ogunyemi (1985) – into her identity as a woman is apparent in her firm confrontation of her son Joshua. Clearly, by the end of *Kehinde* the female character no longer sees her identity linked to her prescribed role as wife and mother. Her response rebukes the 'silent' space of gendered structures when she challenges her son

my whole life was wound around your needs, but now you're a grown man!  
Mothers are people too, you know ... It seemed to [Joshua] that Kehinde was not only depriving him of his rights, but ducking her responsibilities as a wife and mother ... I [Kehinde] just don't have the energy to be the carrier of everybody's burden anymore. I sometimes need help too. (1994: 139)

The emphasis on female independence is apparent as Kehinde reiterates to Joshua that mothers are not merely there to serve the needs of their family, but they are also people with emotions and needs of their own. While Kehinde confesses that her earlier existence had been dedicated to meeting the needs and desires of her family, she no longer chooses to be the 'cultural hump' for them. By this, Kehinde debunks

the 'pot of culture' strand theorized by Stratton in the mother Africa trope, refusing to limit herself to the roles and representations defined by her cultural heritage.

The phrase 'carrier of everybody's burdens' parallels Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie's reference to the multiple mountains of patriarchal authority women must carry on their backs. In resisting this male domination, Kehinde seeks other opportunities and experiences for herself. In using the first person 'I', she recognizes her dignity and her need to be recognized as a person and as an individual, not just "a laborer married to provide a source of descendents" (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994: 141). Clearly, the inability to view the female person's humanity as "a person in herself, with individual fundamental rights, claimable by herself and without reference to anybody else," is the very thing that places limitations on the Nigerian woman, whose identity exists in her as wife and mother (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994: 140). Kehinde's confession of her inability to carry the Herculean task placed on her by society echoes the struggle faced by Nigerian women. This does not put the female character in a negative light, rather it reflects the pressures placed by patriarchal societies that view women as "primarily a man's daughter, sister, wife and mother" with predefined roles and functions (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994: 140). Kehinde's concluding lines approach a fully realized portrait of an Igbo woman when she declares: "Claiming my right does not make me less of a mother, not less of a woman. If anything it makes me more human," she murmured to her Taiwo ... 'Now we are one,' the living Kehinde said to the spirit of her long dead Taiwo." (141) Kehinde's transformation in redefining her role as a woman is linked to the encouragement she receives from her female *chi*, finding strength to stand up against social conventions, revealing a pertinent message that "things cannot go on as they used to" (Okeke 2001: 247).

The self-healing and self-determination achieved by the female character probes "the impact of tradition on women" (Muoneke 2006: 68). According to Muoneke, Emecheta exposes and condemns the injustices of Igbo tradition, "specifically, the way it serves men and oppresses women" (68). In Kehinde's response to her son, we find that the inheritance of patriarchy is a distinctive theme in the text, as Joshua's relentless questioning and arguing with his mother reveals his need to exert authority and power. It was "a very hard truth for Joshua" when he learns that he cannot combat his mother legally for the house because not only was she the owner, but she was also servicing its mortgage payments (Emecheta 1994:

140). When the lawyer tells Joshua “you need to go and sort out your own life, rather than interfere in your mother’s,” the male character – and by extension, male expectations in the society – is placed under interrogation by the author. Rather than focusing on Kehinde’s limitations as a wife and mother in Joshua’s question, “so what kind of mother are you then?” (Emecheta 1994: 141) the novel exposes the cross-generational dynamic of patriarchy and Kehinde’s strength in resisting it.

Joshua’s selfishness, like his father Albert’s, is made apparent, “he had hoped his mother would retire gracefully, giving him to run the house. The grant and the money collected from the house rent would have made his life comfortable as a student (Emecheta 1994: 140). The idea of wresting authority from the female person and the ‘graceful’ complacency expected of the woman reveals the “selfish interests in power, when [men] claim “culture and heritage” as if human societies are not constructed by human beings” (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994: 82). Unlike Nnu Ego who sacrificed her entire life for the sake of her children, Kehinde rejects Joshua’s self-serving insistence: “I thought you were supposed to live for your children” (139) by defining the role of the ‘mother’ and ‘child’

Let me tell you something. When your Dad and I first started out, we didn't inherit any houses. We worked to pay for our education, miles away from anybody who cared for us. You're much luckier. You have a good education, and a British passport, so you can make choices we didn't have. (138)

Female authority is repositioned by Kehinde confronting the young male Igbo character with a “few home truths”. As well as reminding him of his fortunate upbringing she debunks the practice of ‘inheritance’ either in the form of property or values as a means of perpetuating male power and authority. In this way Emecheta reveals the important role women play in rewriting “patriarchal establishment’s predetermined hierarchies” and practices (Makuchi 1997: 148). The recognition of the role of ‘woman’ and the changing roles of ‘mother’ and ‘wife’ reveal that female subjectivity can no longer remain in “a static site of oppression” (Makuchi 1997: 151).

Unlike Emecheta’s previous heroines Nnu Ego and Akuuna (*The Bride Price*), who struggled to stand up against social pressure, Kehinde is Emecheta’s fully realized portrait of an Igbo woman who shrugs off the weight of tradition. She is able

to say: “I have a degree and a job at the Department of Social Services. I’m enjoying meeting people and leading my own life” (Emecheta 1994: 139). In Kehinde, Emecheta says she intended to “depict the black woman survivor just like her ancestors [who] survived slavery ... try to make the best of a bad situation” (Ogundele 1996: 455). Armed with a determined spirit inspired by her female heritage (*chi*), her journey to self-awareness and agency, Kehinde reveals the possibility of Nigerian women everywhere claiming their individuality and their rightful place in society, moving beyond the limited definitions of their roles as ‘wives’ and ‘mothers’.

Emecheta’s *Adah*, *Nnu Ego*, *Adaku* and *Kehinde* are women who redefine the stereotypes attached to motherhood and their identities as ‘wives’. In her summation of *The Joys of Motherhood* Florence Stratton sees this text as the female writer’s attempt “to valorize the emergence of a female literary tradition and to refute conventional images of women” (1994: 119). Susan Arndt reiterates this idea that “the story of *Nnu Ego*, also offers some insights into Emecheta’s poetics of “writing back” (2000: 48). Similarly, the intertextual thematic relevance of *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *Adah’s Story* (1983), *Head Above Water* (1986) and *Kehinde* (1994) is apparent as these texts collectively depict the development of the ‘woman’ by reconstructing notions of motherhood. Emecheta neither privileges nor entirely rejects motherhood, because motherhood, when it is performed as an act of freedom and love can be seen to facilitate female agency.

## **Polygamy**

The practice of polygamous marriage in contemporary Nigeria “has become dated” according to Ogunyemi (1996: 82), as women become more conscious of the trials of remaining in a polygamous household. The belief that polygamy assists women with childcare, while providing autonomy and mobility in pre-colonial society, is no longer relevant. Nigerian women recognize that “not only has [polygamy] lost the spirit that previously made it work, women’s growing discontent with its incongruities and male anxiety about controlling wives will ultimately destroy it” (Ogunyemi 1996: 83).

The discrimination caused by polygamy owes a great deal to the inheritance of the Mother Africa trope. The direct connotation of this trope is that a woman’s

purpose is to be a mother, and it effectively uses motherhood as a means of binding women's freedom. It also perpetuates patriarchal representations of female chastity and long suffering morality in the role of women as wives. Consequently, second generation women writers Buchi Emecheta and Ifeoma Okoye in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *Kehinde* (1994) and *Behind the Clouds* (1982) reveal the evils of polygamous marriages, depicting the way in which characters' realization of the discriminatory practices of polygamy contribute to their individual development.

In each of the texts, a polygamous marriage undermines the female character, leaving her devoid of voice or individuality. In *The Joys of Motherhood* Emecheta divulges the impracticality of polygamous marriages in colonial Nigeria. While she highlights the sufferings her main character Nnu Ego faces when her husband Nnaife chooses to inherit his brother's wife Adaku, Emecheta is also quick to emphasize the way changes experienced in colonial Lagos made the practice of polygamous relationships impossible. In the text, Emecheta shows how the dynamics of the relationship between husbands and wives in the colonial period began to alter from pre-colonial times as exemplified in Nnu Ego and Nnaife's marriage. The novel highlights the dramatic change in the relationships between husbands and wives in colonial society because

Each was in a different world. There was no time for petting or talking to each other about love. That type of family awareness which the illiterate farmer was able to show his wives, his households, his compound, had been lost in Lagos, for the job of the white man, for the joy of buying expensive lappas, and for feel of shiny trinkets. Few men in Lagos would have the time to sit and admire their wives tattoos, let alone tell them tales of animals nestling in the forests.

(Emecheta 1979: 52)

Colonial Nigeria led Igbo men out of their homes, further away from their families and despite her initial distress about the lack of communication between her and Nnaife, Nnu Ego eventually falls into the pattern of life in colonial Nigeria, accepting that her husband had no time "to ask [her] if [she] wished to eat rice or drink corn pap with honey," caught up "being [the] white men's servant" (Emecheta 1979: 51). An example of this distance occurs when Nnu Ego delivers her son in silence, "[stifling] her labour cries" with the assistance of the cook's wife, without waking Nnaife. If Nnu Ego had delivered a son in pre-colonial Nigeria she would have been surrounded

by men folk from the moment she awoke (Murray 1981: 35). Conversely in Lagos, women had to learn how to care for their children by themselves. The solitary childbirth thus also foreshadows the lone journey Nnu Ego has in caring for her children, facing a failed marriage to Nnaife. It also prefigures the problems Nnu Ego faces in having to support her family and that of her co-wife Adaku. Nnaife does not contribute to his polygamous marriage and Nnu Ego is left with the responsibility of sustaining the entire family. As a dutiful senior wife and sacrificial mother, all Nnu Ego had “inherited from the agrarian background was the responsibility and none of the booty” (Emecheta 1979: 137). Emecheta professes to “describe Nigerian males as I see them” in her works and most readers realize “how weak [Nigerian men] are” (Ogundele 1996: 452). Nigerian men “don’t realize that they are weak because they hide behind the women and at the same time, they put the women down by not acknowledging the type of addition the women make to our daily living” (Ogundele 1996: 452).

In comparison to Nnu Ego who strives to be a good wife, Adaku’s choice to break away from her polygamous marriage is ultimately fulfilling. In her study *Traditional Women’s Institutions in Igbo Society: Implications for the Igbo Female Writer* (1990) Akachi Ezeigbo states that in *The Joys of Motherhood* Emecheta “explores the evil of polygamy in a modern context in the household of Nnaife where he has to share a one-room apartment with Nnu-Ego and Adaku, his other wife, together with their children” (1990: 161). After Adaku left Nnaife, she “dressed better ... She laughed a lot now; Nnu Ego had never known her to have such a sense of humour. Adaku said she had a separate room of her own, much bigger than the one they had all shared before” (171). Adaku leads a much better life as “a dignified single woman,” no longer confined in a polygamous marriage (170). The space she has for herself in her own room is a concrete symbol of the freedom she has gained as a single woman. Rather than “[rendering herself a] helpless victim of greedy and incompetent men wielding social and political power,” Adaku chooses freedom despite the possibility of being scorned within Igbo society as acting immorally and improperly (Ezeigbo 1990: 162). Adaku’s initial declaration that she may even become “a prostitute” in order to sustain an independent life clearly challenges the Mother Africa ideal of virtue that wives are expected to preserve (Emecheta 1979: 168).

This rebellious attitude is developed by Emecheta and Okoye in *Kehinde* (1994) and *Behind the Clouds* (1982). In *Kehinde* (1994), Emecheta's position on Igbo polygamy is clear – it is a practice that benefits the Igbo male, existing to gratify male sexuality. Emecheta uses Albert's power struggle in his marriage to Kehinde to demonstrate the selfish nature of polygamy. Viewing his wife's achievements as a threat to his ego, Albert "pined for sunshine, freedom, easy friendship, warmth ... to go home and show off his new life style, his material success ... build houses, to be someone. Nigerian was booming, and he wanted to join the party" (Emecheta, 1994: 6). His egocentrism is displayed when he decides that Kehinde should abort their unborn child because it proved to be barrier to achieving his dream to return to Nigeria.

The critical aspect of this abortion is the termination of the life of a man-child whom Kehinde feels was "[her] father's *chi*, visiting her again" (32). Emecheta reiterates this in an interview that

coming from Africa where life is sacred and where we believe in the reincarnation of our ancestors ... the *chi* of a child is already formed ... I think that [abortion] should be left to the woman. She should have a chance to make that decision ... In *Kehinde*, her husband forced her to have an abortion against her will, only for her to find out on her arrival back home that his new wife was having babies. That is the dilemma a woman faces. In a situation like that, he should have allowed her to make the decision herself. (Ogundele 1996: 455)

The representation of the Igbo male prioritizing his own selfish desires over his children – even a male child – is striking. This form of self-absorption is reinforced in the text with Albert returning to Nigeria and taking on a second wife with whom he has a male child, unbeknownst to Kehinde. The sacrificing of a child, his return home to polygamy and the birth of another child from his second wife, clearly portrays Albert's heartlessness, his desire for affluence amongst his countrymen revealed by his decision to engage in polygamy.

In this text, the termination of the unborn child begins the female character's metamorphosis into an autonomous woman. Kehinde placed great importance on her role as 'wife' but her unquestioning acceptance of the role is destabilized when she

realizes Albert controls her life without a single thought for her well-being. Her inability to decide to keep the child indicates the total suppression of her personality, a fact that she slowly begins to realize with his departure to Nigeria.

The image of the female double, a woman's *chi* as feminine strength and guidance is particularly strong in *Kehinde* Like Adah and Emecheta herself in *Adah's Story* and *Head Above Water* who draw strength from their *chi*, Kehinde draws female resilience from Taiwo who is not only her dead twin sister but also her *chi*. Taiwo helps her develop her identity as an autonomous woman, by making her realize the limitations of viewing herself as merely Albert's wife and Joshua and Bimpe's mother. Taiwo's voice is strong in Kehinde, having a "special hold over [her] such as no other powers can muster," reminding her of her individuality and ability to make choices (Achebe 1975: 96). An example of this occurs when Kehinde returns to Nigeria after Albert's silence. Taiwo urges Kehinde to question Albert's secrecy

Why do Albert's letters say nothing? What is he hiding? ... Do you think your Alby can live alone all this time? Who do you imagine is giving him the attention he needs to survive? ... Why don't you go to Nigeria and find out what is happening, before it's too late? Have you forgotten that in Nigeria it's considered manly for men to be unfaithful? Even if he didn't want women they would come to him. (46)

Emecheta's use of the female voice as an indicator of male misconduct raises themes such as unfaithfulness, polygamy, manhood and female ignorance. The stylistic device of multiple question marks exemplifies the process of enlightenment initiated by the female *chi*. For Emecheta women's solidarity transcends the borders of time and space. Taiwo is Kehinde's companion from conception, a bond in which they "managed to survive for months, touching and kissing, making the best of the space available" (18). Ana Marie Sanchez's *Changing States: Exile & Syncretism in Buchi Emecheta's Kehinde* (2000) argues that Taiwo and Kehinde's relationship is likened to the relationship of biblical characters Jacob and Esau. Yet unlike Jacob and Esau, Kehinde and Taiwo do not fight with each other but rather "share the mother's legacy, even when scarce" (Sanchez 2000: 83). Drawing from this idea of a 'mother's' legacy, which also suggests womanist nuances, uniting with her *Chi* encourages Kehinde to no longer view herself in wake of the Mother Africa martyrdom but to grow into a complete individual who finds her strength from a positive, female

heritage. Taiwo's voice encourages Kehinde to return to Nigeria and she accompanies her when Kehinde eventually returns to London. Thus, it is the voice of her twin *Chi* that invokes the curiosity in Kehinde to begin questioning Albert's silence, foreshadowing his polygamous marriage.

The consequences of a polygamous marriage for Kehinde involve her relinquishing her right to call her husband by name, "Albert was now 'our husband, or 'Joshua's father,'" and she now shared with her children a total subservience to her husband (Emecheta 89). She realizes that she no longer has an identity as a wife and mother in a polygamous marriage. With these roles altered, her identity as a woman virtually disappears and she suffers further degradation when for the first time in her marriage she is forced to kneel and receive her housekeeping money. Subsequently, "when [she] refused to kneel to take it, his sisters levied a fine of one cock" (Emecheta 94). Kehinde realizes that "it is a man's world [in Nigeria]. No wonder so many of them like to come home, despite their successes abroad" (94). As in many African womens' novels this demonstrates the extent to which women are not only complicit in, but actually perpetuate female oppression. However, this humiliation incites Kehinde to action. Just as the burning of Adah's brainchild marks a decisive turning point, for Kehinde, "polygamy contributes to her final initiative to search for independence and a new beginning" (Muoneke 68).

As with Adaku in *The Joys of Motherhood* whose implied choice of prostitution gives her freedom, Kehinde learns to appreciate her female counterpart Mary Elikwu, a single woman with six children who has left her husband because he beat her. In the beginning of the text, Kehinde is repelled by Mary Elikwu's education, dressing and her reference to Kehinde by her first name and not Mrs Okolo. Yet, in her return to England, Kehinde is drawn to this 'rebellious' female character realizing that married women believe they have an advantage over a woman who is living by herself, "even if the latter [was] a million times happier" (Emecheta 1994: 101). Muoneke notes that because Emecheta's works focus on women oppressing other women, the implication in *Kehinde* is that "Kehinde's late recognition that Mary has chosen the better path is the beginning of wisdom, the beginning of her quest for independence and self-reliance, indeed, the beginning of her salvation and freedom" (69). In *Kehinde* and *Adaku*, Emecheta indicates the changing gender relations in Igbo society through which women are increasingly

critical of polygamous marriages which are seem to inhibit autonomy and self-fulfillment.

Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds* (1982) echoes Emecheta's texts in the main character's rejection of polygamous marriage. The novel follows the progress of Ije and Dozie, who are plagued with childlessness in their marriage, until Dozie's infidelity with Virginia results in a pregnancy, and changes the dynamics of Ije and Dozie's marriage. In her introduction to Okoye's works Ogunyemi states that Ije's name means "journey," [reiterating] the point that life and marriage are difficult undertakings" (1996: 304), and the name becomes symbolic of the journey Ije takes to develop her identity. Although Ije is initially devastated by the discovery of Dozie's infidelity, she rejects both him and polygamy to carve a new life for herself. Like Adaku in *The Joys of Motherhood* who tires of vying for Nnaife's attention, Ije does not bother to compete with Virginia for Dozie's attention but allows him to be "under [Virginia's] thumb, so she can start over (Okoye 1982: 105). Ije's reflection in the hospital is symbolic of her journey towards independence.

a period of meditation; a period of taking stock of events of the past couple of months. While in hospital she took a decision which was to change the pattern of her life but not even Ugo Ushie, her best friend, was to know about it lest she talked her out of it. (1982: 104)

Okoye's choice of words to illustrate the development of the Igbo woman emphasizes the growing representation of "women as independent actors" (Griswold 2000: 179). Phrases like 'a period of taking stock,' 'decision' and 'pattern of her life' accentuate the rejection of colonial/patriarchal subjugation. The refusal to share her resolve with her friend indicates a further development of independence and the growth of self-sufficiency. In addressing polygamy, Okoye simultaneously introduces ideas of sexual promiscuity and deceit. When Ije leaves, Okoye here answers the fundamental questions proposed by Mineke Schipper in *Unheard Voices* (1984): "Who is speaking? Who is seeing? And Who is acting? ... What kind of action is [she] taking? ... What kind of opinion is expressed ... What are the characters doing? Are they acting alone or together? (1984: 15-6). By her actions Okoye's Ije is a model for women who are not only victims of polygamy but also of men's sexual promiscuity and deceit. Her actions show that women have the capacity to change their circumstances and they draw this strength for change from within themselves.

Clearly, second generation Igbo women writers appear resolved to abolish polygamy in Igbo society. The collective representations of their female characters' search for agency expose polygamy as another variant of female confinement and oppression. In redefining their roles as wives, particularly wives in polygamous relationships, Adaku, Kehinde and Ije release themselves from their degradation by refusing to succumb to societal dictates, drawing on their individual courage and strength. Recognizing the limitations of polygamy leads these female characters towards discovering their individualities.

### **Barrenness and Sterility**

An inverse to the challenges women face in motherhood is the stigma of barrenness. Igbo women are raised to aspire to motherhood, an ideology prefigured in the image of the ideal sacrificial mother and deeply rooted in the values of Igbo society. Clearly in Emecheta's representation of Nnu Ego and Adaku in *The Joys of Motherhood* and later Kehinde in *Kehinde*, we find the reality of motherhood to be an idealized, mythologized disappointment. However for women in Igbo society who are unable to conceive a child, the stigma of barrenness is an unbearable weight to carry. Although womanist theory reconstructs the notion of mothering beyond biological connections, Emecheta and Okoye respectively indicate the pressure to conceive in Igbo society and the trauma this creates in Igbo female characters.

Nnu Ego's first marriage to Amatokuwu breaks down because of her alleged barrenness, for which he condemns her with the retort: "I have no time to waste my precious male seed on a woman who is infertile. I have to raise children for my line" (Emecheta 1979: 32). Nnu Ego's first marriage is often glossed over in critical commentary to focus on the dynamics of her 'child-filled' marriage to Nnaife. However, Emecheta offers a revealing description of the first marriage and the stigma of barrenness. The traditional ritualistic process Nnu Ego undergoes to "take an egg, symbol of fertility, and pray to this woman [her *Chi*] to change her mind" describes her desperate desire to conceive (32). When Amatokuwu's new wife becomes pregnant, Nnu Ego

shrank more and more into herself. In the privacy of the hut, she would look at herself all over. She would feel her body; young firm and like that of any other

young woman. She knew that the soft liquid feeling of motherhood was lacking. “O my chi, why do you have to bring me so low? Why must I be so punished? ... Many a night she cried tears of frustrations and hopelessness.

(32)

This emphasises the confusion she feels at the apparent contradiction of her young, healthy body being infertile, confusion that invokes feelings of ‘frustration’, ‘hopelessness’ and ‘lack’ of self-worth. The birth pains of Amatokwu’s second wife “hit Nnu Ego with such force that she could stand it no longer” (34). She tries to find comfort in the second wife’s first baby by putting “the child to her breasts” (35). Here, Nnu Ego seems to draw on a shared vision of mothering to comfort herself but she is beaten by Amatokwu and sent back to her father’s house. Nnu Ego does not return to Amatokwu’s compound but marries Nnaife, hoping he may remove her stigma of barrenness. Although her decision not to return to Amatokwu’s compound may not signify revolutionary behavior, it does inform us of the female character’s limits to the threshold of humiliation. Moreover, Nnu Ego’s character helps us better identify with Okoye’s interesting reconstruction of barrenness through sterility in Igbo society.

Unlike Nnu Ego’s tentative decision-making, Ifeoma Okoye’s *Behind the Clouds* (1982) offers a unique approach to the issue of barrenness because Okoye concurrently introduces the subject of sterility. Wendy Griswold describes this text as “a rational, scientific approach to life” (2000: 178). Okoye’s introduction of male sterility in Igbo women’s literature not only re-inscribes the female voice, it also redresses the misconception that barrenness is solely the responsibility of the woman. In *Behind the Clouds* Ije is plagued with barrenness. Unable to conceive after five years of marriage, she desperately undergoes numerous medical treatments, a modern, scientific process that mirrors Nnu Ego’s ritualistic methods with eggs and prayers. Despite being insulted by her mother in law and her husband Dozie’s paternal family members who advise him that “it was high time he took a second wife to give him an heir,” Ije remains faithful, standing by her husband (Okoye 1982: 43) and supporting Dozie morally and financially by “[working] at two jobs at a time in order to help him to pay his way through university” and invest in his business (37). Yet, her role as a good wife is undermined by her assumed barrenness. Dozie’s affair with Virginia

leaves her devastated as she realizes all her sacrifices in her marriage are meaningless, since traditionally, the primarily goal in an Igbo woman's life was to produce an heir.

Interestingly, as the female character leaves to carve a new life as an independent woman, we note the way in which the male patriarchs' lives begin to unravel and 'fall apart'. It is through this ascent and descent of the narrative's climax that Okoye replaces the concept of female barrenness with male sterility; an act which is both daring and revelatory, because the exposure of male impotence displaces the authoritarian power the males have over women's lives. An example of this is clearly seen when Virginia threatens to reveal Dozie's sexual incompetence "a derogatory vernacular word to accuse him of sterility" (Okoye 1982: 111). It does not seem to be Okoye's intention to emasculate the male figure, rather to enlighten the reader with the knowledge that infertility in a marriage can be either caused by the woman or a man. As Ogunyemi concedes, "the ingredients in Okoye's palava sauce are obvious for a purpose; men must be able to see them and cook them up" (1996: 303). This releases the female character from the stigma of barrenness. As a second generation writer, Okoye goes beyond her precursor Nwapa, who details the physical and emotional difficulties faced by barren women (Efuru, Idu, Amaka), to reflect on the larger implications and possibilities for the causes of infertility. This emphasizes the female writer's role ensuring "Nigerian recovery must be based on a cooperative effort across gender lines; men must examine themselves, for they cannot go it alone" (1996: 303). This also testifies to womanism's ultimate goals, which are to ensure "societal healing, reconciliation of the relationship between people and nature, and the achievement and maintenance of commonweal" (Philips 1983: xxix).

Ogunyemi states rather unfairly that in *Behind the Clouds* (1982) "when [Ije] is vindicated by Dozie's painful stumbling into self-knowledge, she is reunited with her husband, now made whole in a fairy-tale ending" (1996: 304). On the contrary, Okoye may well be seen to be propagating a womanist vision, foreseeing what it may be like if men and women work through their challenges together. The image of the penitent husband coincides with the female character's development as a 'woman' separate from her role as 'wife' and 'mother'. Hence the unborn child or the absence of motherhood not only develops female independence but also causes a change in the male character. In Ije's absence, Dozie "felt as if a part of him had been violently cut off. Ije had been a part of him and now she was gone" (Okoye 1982: 110). This

severance is at the same time a freeing of the female character from the traditional and potentially confining role of motherhood. According to Layli Philips, womanist activism involves

“the shaping of thought processes and relationships. For the womanist, entrenched social and environmental problems originate from a psychological and / or spiritual first cause, only later manifesting in the material or institutional realm” (Philips 2006: xxx).

Through the penitent husband, Okoye reconstructs the psyche of the individual male as well as Igbo society’s perspective on barrenness. Dozie’s confession that “I have all along been the cause of our childlessness” (1982: 118) ensures that the “two-way standard” where “when the children were good they belonged to the father; when the children were bad, they belonged to the mother” will cease, involving instead the shared burden and mutual pride in raising children (Emecheta 1979: 206).

By addressing the stigma attached to barrenness and raising awareness of male sterility, second generation writers question entrenched social norms surrounding the roles of wife and mother. They contend that the female character’s worth is not limited to biological function and the choice to leave such an entrenched prejudice develops the female’s independent personality. The movement from individual motherhood towards the shared responsibility of parenthood restructures impositions engendered by predefined stereotypes.

## **Rape**

Another way in which the role of ‘woman’ is explored more fully is in Emecheta’s representation of young female characters. In *Double Yoke* (1982) and *The Family* (1990) young women mature into an understanding of their personhood as ‘women’ through experiencing the trauma of rape. Tuzyline Jita Allan posits that African women writers “[turning] the discourse of rape from the embodied figure of Africa to the bodies of women constitutes an urgent and mammoth challenge for African women writers given their dual sense of loyalty to woman and nation” (2001: 209). Allan argues that African women writers are committed to what Molara Ogudipe-Leslie refers to as “the reality of the African woman” that was formerly twisted or erased from the African literary discourse (1987: 8). Buchi Emecheta

addresses the realities of rape, but instead of allowing rape to be an incapacitating experience, Emecheta uses the violence of rape as a vehicle for young female characters' metamorphosis into womanhood. This rape, resulting in motherhood, teaches them to grow into a maturity that enables them to protect themselves and their unborn children. Instead of being crippled by their experiences, 'the child' they each carry strengthens them, offering yet another approach to motherhood, which despite the horrific trauma of rape, helps them move towards a more positive and mature perception of themselves.

Emecheta's crusade as a writer echoes Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo who hopes that "being a woman writer, I have been faithful to the image of women as I see them around, strong women, who are viable in their own right" (James 1990: 12). In her reading of Buchi Emecheta's *Double Yoke* (1982) Ogunyemi declares that, "instead of the double yoke with its changing standards" between tradition and modernity, "we have a double yolk in which a feminized man and a virilised woman come together to produce a better society" (Ogunyemi 1996: 270). This foregrounds the importance womanism places upon men and women working together to create a harmonious, coherent and effective community. The image of the virilized 'woman' after rape is found in Emecheta's Gwendolen (*The Family*) and Nko (*Double Yoke*) as representations of women who are courageous and resilient despite their experiences.

In her interview with Oladipo Joseph Ogundele, Buchi Emecheta states that "rape is something that is taboo in our area of Nigeria and the fact that our people don't talk about it doesn't mean that it doesn't happen" (1996: 454). Rape is primarily an abuse of power and male authority and is intended to keep the woman subjugated, particularly in *Double Yoke* (1982) and *The Family* (1990). In both these narratives, Emecheta describes the physical usurpation of the female body and the way in which the extreme act of objectifying women is subverted when this act leads to the development of a virile female character.

*The Family* (1990) explores the theme of incest, "[venturing] into the forbidden terrain of familial rape" (Allan 2001: 221). Gwendolen experiences 'double rape', the first time with Uncle Johnny, a trusted neighbor and then with her father Winston, her emotional security shattered by the male figures in her life who were meant to protect her. Instead of developing her sense of identity and security, Uncle Johnny forces himself on Gwendolen, "the iron grip over her mouth," threatening her

to keep “this our secret,” making her believe that people will think she was “a bad gal” (Emecheta 1990: 22). Winston commits incest with Gwendolen in Sonia’s absence. He discards his paternal responsibility when he rationalizes “Gwendolen was only a biological [daughter] and he never really felt socially responsible for her” (144). He accuses Gwendolen of not standing up to him, justifying his emotional sexual blackmail

he remembered vaguely that when he was overcome by desire he had begged her to give him herself, because he was her Daddy, and if she loved him she would not deny him the little favour. He did not expect Gwendolen to believe him. Men say all kinds of nonsense when roused. No woman with her head rightly screwed on believed such rubbish. But Gwendolen did. The girl was stupid. (144)

Winston justifies his action by claiming that Gwendolen’s flimsy slips and young body taunted him, using as Shivaji Sengupta argues “the classical male excuse: women should ward off men” (1996: 243).

In her novel *Changes* (1993) Ama Ata Aidoo raises the issue of marital rape, in Esi Sekyi’s rape by her husband. Likewise, in *The Family* when Winston rapes Gwendolen, he uses her to replace his wife Sonia, thus moving Gwendolen’s role of ‘daughter’ to ‘wife’, ‘girl’ to ‘woman’. Emecheta traces the monstrous self-delusion that allows him to rape his own daughter. When he refers to Gwendolen as a ‘stupid girl’, attempting to transfer his guilt to Gwendolen, incapable of taking responsibility for his actions. Although Gwendolen is initially distraught by Winston calling her vile names like ‘bitch’ and ‘wicked girl’, Gwendolen begins to question “when her father Winston started to preach about the sins of the world, she wondered if her father did not know that what he did to her last night was a grave sin” (Emecheta 1990: 145). Instead of internalizing the guilt her father attempts to impose on her, Gwendolen chooses to question Winston’s hypocritical moral preaching. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi theorizes that

the young girl inherits womanism after a traumatic event ... after an epiphany or as a result of the experience of racism, rape, death in the family or sudden responsibility. Through coping with the experience she moves creatively

beyond the self to a concern for the needs of others, characteristic of the adult womanist. (Ogunyemi 2006: 72)

In this second experience of rape, Gwendolen reaches an epiphany when she refuses to take on her father's guilt. She develops into a womanist character who not only refuses to accept the status of victim but also begins to move beyond her personal concerns to a concern for her family and for the child she conceives from the rape. Although she longs to reveal the father of her baby, she restrains herself because "if they put him [Winston] away, who would pay their rent and bring the food money? (190). The rage welling up in her because of the mother's ignorance and father's denial, leads to Gwendolen's decision that "they had left her in a loony-bin. All right, she would have the baby, she would not tell on Daddy unless it was absolutely necessary and she was going out of here into a place of her own ... because if she stayed under the same roof only God knew what she could do to him" (192). Space is an important feature of women's independence in Emecheta's works. Like Adah who moves out of her abusive marriage and Kehinde who lays claim to her house as a part of her tangible identity, Gwendolen's choice to have her child while living by herself is the beginning of independent growth and maturity. The space she craves is not just a physical space but a mental space in which to garner the strength for survival.

The technique of a narrative within a narrative is exploited by Emecheta when Gwendolen draws on the wisdom she receives from a book (*A Black Person's Story*)

this woman told all her life's story in her book. It was like seeing a whole life's span rolling out before you, you follow her going to places she's been, experiencing the agony she went through in a bad marriage, and her coming out of it, to raise her children and open a new life for herself.

(Emecheta 1990: 213)

Presumably, Emecheta successfully inserts her own story into Gwendolen's narrative as a source of encouragement. This book provides the strength, and nurturing needed to fortify Gwendolen as she takes on the new role as mother, and the metaphor of the novel as a brainchild is repeated in *The Family* (1990) – a means for Gwendolen to begin a new life for her 'self'.

Gwendolen's tie to her child Iyamide symbolically forges her development as a womanist character. She chooses the Yoruba name Iyamide, which means "my

mother is here ... it means everything I ever wanted, warmth, security, comfort, is all here in a female form” (237). As Ogunyemi says,

naming is power. If you are experiencing something, you are the one who names your child. You name your idea ... if you name your child in Igbo or Yoruba, it has a meaning and that child will have to live up to its name. Take for example my name [Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi] — “My Chi is in consonance with me” — which has a psychological purpose: When I am in difficulties, I try to remember this name that my parents have gave me. Its takes care of my needs. (Ardnt 2000: 721)

The child in this context is used as a metaphor of womanist qualities embodying “warmth, security [and] comfort,” fortifying the relationship between mother and daughter (Emecheta 1990: 237). This child replaces the sense of abandonment Gwendolen had felt from her own mother who had left her institutionalized, and presumably mad. It is in this ‘madness’ that Gwendolen decides to keep her child, a process Liz Gunner refers to as “a new symbolic order” representing Gwendolen’s ability to re-shape her future despite the traumatic event that has happened to her (Gunner 1994: 149). She develops internal control and evolves into a mature individual (Sengupta 1996: 245). In this, Gwendolen recognizes her identity as a ‘woman’, moving away from the events of her past, to fully embrace her role as a ‘mother’ to her daughter. Like Kehinde who has Taiwo as her *chi*, Gwendolen’s relationship with her daughter symbolizes the feminine bond between mother and daughter, her daughter inspiring her to rise to her full potential as a ‘woman’.

Like other Igbo female characters Kehinde, Adah and Ije, Gwendolen’s metamorphosis is complete by the end of the text, “a grown woman in a white running suit, carrying a tray full of tea-things” (Emecheta 1990: 237). This is reiterated in the text, “[Gwendolen and Iyamide] are the future now ... She can take care of herself. She’ll find her own identity (238). Unlike Emecheta’s previous characters, forced into an idealized role of motherhood to live their lives dedicated to their children, Gwendolen seems absolved of this responsibility due to her father’s incest. Yet, instead of living under her mother’s shadow, Gwendolen chooses to reinvent her life and live an independent life.

Sonia, Gwendolen's mother, captures a poignant aspect of the development of the independent 'woman' in the final pages of the text. Previously portrayed as the physically and emotionally absent mother who wants Gwendolen to follow in her footsteps, to be a good, obedient daughter and eventually subservient wife, Sonia reclaims her identity and that of her daughter by repeatedly and violently stabbing the bin.

she took out the kitchen knife she was carrying. She plunged it fiercely several times into the rubbish bin, with all her might and with as much anger and frustration ... At the same time she was muttering to herself ... What were you burying, Sonia? ... Winston Brillianton ... Sonia's voice had the finality of a closed door.

(239)

Layli Philips theorizes the use of the kitchen table metaphor in womanist theory to denote a neutral space where "relations of domination and subordination break down in favor of more egalitarian interpersonal processes" (2006: xxvii). In this context, Sonia uses a kitchen knife, a utensil from the kitchen space to claim freedom and severance from Winston for Gwendolen and herself. The violent 'plunging' and 'burying' of Winston's action's replaces the pain and humiliation Gwendolen had to experience and Sonia has to confront when she realizes Iyamide was fathered by Winston. While she does not defend Gwendolen during her pregnancy and institutionalization, her acknowledgment of Winston's actions and her expression of anger through plunging the knife, reinstates authority and self-determination in the female figure.

The development of the virilised woman in *Double Yoke* (1982) occurs in the grappling with the double burden of tradition and modernity. Although Nko desires "to have both worlds ... [to be] an academician and ... to be a quiet nice and obedient wife," she finds herself struggling with these two roles (Emecheta 1982: 94). The core focus of Nko's need for success is that she could be of more use to her mother and brothers if she had these two worlds (94). The challenge of negotiating these two variants for the modern Nigerian woman requires "a stronger shoulder with which to carry" in comparison to the generation of women before her who "[kept] quiet ... did not know many of the things [their men] knew ... happy and contented in [their] ignorance" (95). This reiterates Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie's argument about the six

mountains on women's back. In negotiating the challenge between tradition and modernity Nko has to contend with three different types of Ogundipe-Leslie's mountains. The first mountain is the heritage of tradition, which propagates "notions of control of woman's body and its products ... [Woman] is but a beast that produces the man's children on his behalf" (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994: 34-5). This struggle is further exacerbated by her relationship with Ete Kamba who is another 'mountain' that she has to "throw off ... a man who is steeped in his centuries-old patriarchal attitudes of which he does not wish to abandon because male domination is advantageous to him" (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994: 36). The final mountain Nko has to contend with is "herself ... women are shackled by their own negative self-image, by centuries of the interiorization of the ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy. Their own reactions to objective problems therefore are often self-defeating and self-crippling" (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994: 36). As in *Kehinde* Emecheta shows the importance of education as a means of developing a sense of identity for one's self despite the role of wife and mother, "will you ever forgive yourself if you do not take the chance? ... You have to have both, my daughter, to get that inner fulfillment you want," she says in *Double Yoke* (95). The reference to 'inner fulfillment' throws a deeper light on the importance of achievement in finding an identity freed from preordered cultural obligations. To acquire this achievement, like Gwendolen, Nko develops into a virile woman who subverts male abuse and expectations to her benefit. In Nko's case, paradoxically, her experience of rape and eventual motherhood from the trauma begins her transformation to self-assurance as a means of caring for her unborn child. She does not 'internalize' self-defeat nor is she self-crippling, but rather stands up against patriarchal and gender ideologies.

Although rape is used to describe the power men use against women, Emecheta reverses the disempowerment of rape by developing a female character who chooses to use this circumstance to her advantage. In exchange for what he robs from her, Nko demands that Professor Ikot makes sure she receives "a First Class honours degree" (Emecheta 1982: 137). Despite losing her relationship with Ete Kamba and being violated, Nko does not remain a victim but instead chooses to resort to 'bottom power' to her advantage. Her response to both these male characters is "if I am a whore, you two made me one. Always remember that" (145). Again like Okoye who gives us a different perspective on the situation of barrenness in *Behind*

*the Clouds* Emecheta subverts the stereotype of women who use sex as a tool for achieving success. Instead, we recognize the manipulation and blackmail Nko experiences with these two men, who impede her attempts to negotiate her dreams. Hence, it is Professor Ikot's desire to possess Nko sexually and Ete Kamba's similar desire to possess and subjugate Nko that pushes her to make the decisions that she does. Nko refuses to take on the 'psychology of victimization' (bell hooks) since claiming victimization gives power to the perpetrator. Her "head was held high...without begging for mercy or wallowing in self-pity" (Emecheta 1982: 143). She "debunks the myth that women must be virtuous but not men" (Ogunyemi 1996: 269).

The metamorphosis of the female subject into womanhood is seen in relation to her unexpected pregnancy. Although Nko realizes that she was "going to have the beast's [Professor Ikot's] baby," she decides that she was "not going to abort" her child (153), and this decision spurs her to become a better, self-confident woman. The unborn child in this story helps the female character grow "because she [was] going to be a sure academician and a mother" (153). Like Gwendolen, her strength is formed by her realization of the collective responsibility of caring for her unborn child and family. *Double Yoke* (1982) ends with a womanist vision, in which the male and female characters bear the weight of the burden of tradition and modernity and ambition and family together. Unlike other representations of male characters in Emecheta's works such as Nnaife (*Joys of Motherhood*), Albert (*Kehinde*), Joshua (*Kehinde*) and Winston (*The Family*) who are either too self-consumed with their needs or unable to accept the changes within their female counterparts, Emecheta's Ete Kamba reflects the makings of a modern Igbo man who supports his woman. Although there may be some contention as to the full development of Ete Kamba as a modern man, he is persuaded by Miss Bulewao, his English lecturer to "reverse his double standard by accepting Nko, impregnated by Professor Ikot ... his decision to unite with [Nko] demonstrates enlightenment" (Ogunyemi 1996: 270).

The role Miss Bulewao plays (inspired by Emecheta when she was herself a guest lecturer at the University of Calabar in 1981) is not limited to her position as a writing instructor but involves the task of communicating the changing gender relations in Igbo society and the importance of the Igbo man in understanding and coping with these changes. The thrust of Emecheta's argument lies in the final pages

of the text. In Miss Bulewao's conversation with Ete Kamba she urges change because "Nko [was] already a modern African lady, but [Ete Kamba/Igbo men] were still lagging...oh, so far, far behind" (Emecheta 1982: 156). Emecheta reiterates the double standards surrounding female morality and the overt attachment of virginity to female purity. The reprimand that "having children out of wedlock is another masculine preserve?" is the author's way of signaling the changes Igbo men must accept without prejudice (155). The experience of pregnancy as a result of rape is not a shameful experience that demeans the female subject but it is one that requires the burying of the "burden of individualism — that of knowing that we are happier in somebody's company, however tainted we may think he or she is" (157). Notions of virtue, 'purity' or being 'tainted' are redefined by Emecheta to dismantle the gender power structure. Ete Kamba returns to Nko's village to support her during her father's funeral, indicative of the early changes in modern Igbo men who support their women in any circumstance. His early aim to marry "a very quiet and submissive woman, a good cook, a good listener, a good worker, a good mother with a good education" is transformed by his relationship with Nko (31).

Interestingly, Emecheta forces the male character to discover this for himself through writing. Double Yoke is written by Ete Kamba for his class assignment, reliving, understanding and renegotiating his expectations in his relationship with Nko. In her reading of the novel, Ogunyemi expresses her disappointment with Emecheta's writing style "unfortunately, Emecheta's ingenuity surprisingly fails her in this novel" (1996: 268). Ogunyemi vacillates between various reasons, the most acceptable of which is that "Emecheta did not commit a flaw, but acted deliberately ... [it] demonstrates Emecheta's anxiety about gender relationships in contemporary Nigeria" (269). The sense of narrative ineptness is deliberate as it describes the male character's difficulty in addressing his expectations on issues of wifehood, womanhood and motherhood. In Nko, he faces a challenge to his concept of an ideal woman particularly when she chooses to resort to 'bottom power'. Unlike her earlier heroines, Emecheta seems to deliberately cause this female character to violate a cultural taboo through using her body as a means of achieving success, in many ways simultaneously revealing the double burdens modern Nigerian women experience. Ete Kamba is forced to accept Nko's definition of a 'woman' who is neither quiet nor submissive, a 'tainted' woman who becomes a mother through rape. Mineke Schipper

who refers to the 'pedestal' on which the society places motherhood, indignantly argues that in Nigerian society, "men were free to have illegitimate children, but it was a disgrace for a woman to have a child out of wedlock" (Schipper 1984: 46). It is this very form of un-idealized motherhood that Ete Kamba is guided to affirm and accept. Drawing a connecting thread through exploitation, female identity and motherhood, Emecheta conceives of a more progressive attitude for young men and women to grow and carry their challenges together.

In her reading of Emecheta's early works *In the Ditch* (1972) and *Second Class Citizen* (1974) Ebele Eko views sees Emecheta as "an irate gardener, holding up her bruised roses and pointing accusing fingers at arrogant insensitive men and their equally insensitive traditions. Emecheta's philosophy is built on her conviction that all women suffer oppression and need to be liberated" (1986: 216). Emecheta's role as a female writer and her use of her text as a craft for justice is never more present than it is when she addresses the issue of rape in her texts *The Family* and *Double Yoke*. If we view Emecheta as a metaphoric gardener with her responsibility as a female writer, we then need to analyze her treatment or 'weeding' out of male characters. Florence Stratton's work on the Mother Africa Trope analyses "the frequency of the trope's occurrence in the African male tradition" (1994: 39). Emecheta's analysis of male characters, particularly of Winston and Professor Ikot begins to develop a prevalent, refreshing depiction of perspectives that do not excuse male conduct of masculine superiority.

Emecheta's treatment of both male rapists is severe. Winston's incest with Gwendolen can only be atoned for by death: "to offend the land or Earth was to offend something greater than one's soul. And a father who had any sexual urge towards his daughter had offended the Earth" (143). Thus he is, in effect, sentenced to death by Emecheta – "there was an accident at work. There was a gas explosion and he fell into a drum of tar...he stood no chance" (198). In fact, Winston's death is also described as a form of suicide as Mr Ilochina declares "they had told him to wait ... just as if he wanted to die" (198). The fate of the male character in the hands of the female writer defies the social limitations that normally exist in society when women experience rape or incest, since it is often a silenced taboo. In her treatment of Winston, rape is presented as dehumanizing, vile and immoral. Men who participate in it need to be treated with little or no sympathy. This shift also marks the female

writer's "personal commitment and a sharper vision," one lacking in early representations of male characters in male writings who viewed women through stereotypical lenses instead of demonstrating a balanced perception (Eko 1986: 218).

Professor Ikot in *Double Yoke* does not suffer Winston's fate, yet his punishment in the text is a direct attack upon his masculinity – an attack on his genitals. Emecheta has the student Ete Kamba attack Professor Ikot, unleashing his anger on a man who has used his position of power to manipulate vulnerable female students: "why did you keep punching his balls? So that he can never perform again, the stupid bastard" (146). Professor Ikot's response during his attack, being "stark naked; he was bleeding; he was peeing; he was dribbling" reverses his former position of brute power when he rapes Nko (144). While her novels describe the young female character's ability to overcome victimization and develop agency, Emecheta's treatment of male characters testifies to her womanist commitment of "everyday activism that involves confronting violence and oppression wherever and whenever they appear across the course of a day" (Philips, 2006: xxx).

## Conclusion

Second generation Nigerian Igbo women writers' reveal a predominant interest in portraying womens' quest for agency through their changing perceptions of woman's roles as 'woman', 'wife' and 'mother'. In Emecheta and Okoye's works this occurs by prioritizing a woman's individuality over her role as wife and mother. Yet motherhood is viewed both as means to keep a woman in subjection, and as a means of gaining independence. In self-sacrificial representations like Nnu Ego (*The Joys of Motherhood*), the feminine subject is non-existent. On the other hand, characters like Ije (*Behind the Clouds*), Adaku (*The Joys of Motherhood*) and Kehinde (*Kehinde*) do not allow themselves to be merely defined by motherhood or wifehood. They reject polygamy, revealing its purpose in masculine gratification and refusing this practice as it demeans their personhood. Yet, in young female characters like Gwendolen and Nko we find the traumatic experience of rape as paradoxically triggering a process that leads them to self-awareness and self-determination. In this way, Emecheta's Gwendolen and Nko pave the way for representations of female characters in third

generation Nigerian women's writings who achieve agency at an earlier age as we will examine in the next chapter of this thesis.

# CHAPTER 4

## Rethinking Family Relationships: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Unoma Azuah

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The ‘third generation’ of Igbo women writers, with particular reference to Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2005) and Azuah’s *Sky-High Flames* (2005), reveals a further progression in the ways in which female protagonists in traditional situations grow into agency and independence. The writings of third generation Igbo women writers provide a composite portrait of Igbo women who are educated, career-oriented and strong-willed, while being wives, mothers and daughters, a combination that replaces the idea of domesticity that has long governed the stereotype of Igbo women in Nigerian literature. Third generation Igbo female characters signify a change from the second generation inasmuch as their metamorphosis and self-actualization begins from adolescence and they assert themselves by rethinking family relationships.

Both male and female ‘third generation’ writers have continued to garner international critical attention, as they deal with an array of pressing Nigerian issues. Segun Afolabi’s *A Life Elsewhere* (2006), Chris Abani’s *Graceland* (2004), Helon Habila’s *Waiting for An Angel* (2002), Uzondinma Iweala’s *Beast of No Nation* (2006), Uwem Akpan’s *Say You’re One of Them* (2008), Sefi Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), Sade Adeniran’s *Imagine This* (2007), Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani’s *I do not come to you by chance* (2009) and Chika Unigwe’s *The Phoenix* (2005), are

some examples of texts that address issues of individual displacement within a disillusioned Nigeria. These novels also explore the civil war; the failures of the military and civil governments; the effect of such failures on children; the state of Nigeria's economy and the lack of commitment shown by Nigeria's government to comprehensive education. Some of these writers like Segun Afolabi, Chris Abani and Chika Unigwe also attempt to address the dilemma of Nigerian immigrants and their expectations in living abroad. In chronicling the pitfalls of the nation and its people, third generation writers attempt to point the way towards a better future by representing its possibilities.

The role of third generation Nigerian female writers is particularly strategic as they continue questioning the myths fed to their mothers under oppressive Nigerian patriarchal strictures. They continue to transform assumptions about women's allotted role within the domestic sphere, encouraging women to see beyond the roles as 'wives', 'mothers' and 'daughters' and build a career for themselves. Interestingly, young female characters like Lola Ogundele (*Imagine This*), Enitan (*Everything Good Will Come*), Kambili (*Purple Hibiscus*) and Ofunne (*Sky-High Flames*) depict the growth of Nigerian women towards agency and self-determination from an early age asserting their independence in life and family relationships much younger than former generations. These writers explore taboo topics such as sex, female sexuality and rape, unmasking the socio-cultural strictures of Nigerian society and creating new directions for young Nigerian women.

In this way writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Unoma Azuah, Chika Unigwe and Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani have picked up the baton from first and second generations. Flora Nwapa's works were the genesis of Igbo women's writings, representing Igbo female characters who refused to remain silent; Buchi Emecheta and Ifeoma Okoye continuing Nwapa's legacy in the depiction of changing roles as wives and mothers; and the third generation shows a further shift as their characters develop an early sense of independence. Adichie's Kambili and Azuah's Ofunne are young girls who grow into independent, spirited and self-assertive women and the focus on young protagonists is a common technique in third generation Nigerian women's writings, as we see in Sade Adeniran's *Imagine This* (2007) and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) which we will examine in relation to Ngozi Adichie and Unoma Azuah. In looking at Nigeria's post-independent history and

colonial legacy, the larger question is: how do young modern Igbo female characters face the challenges of present modern Nigeria, namely, the rethinking of their family relationships? This chapter will address this question, comparing the novels of Sade Adeniran and Sefi Atta and Adichie and Azuah, analyzing the 'absent' mother syndrome and addressing the complex function and ambivalent struggles of tradition and modernity in their texts.

### **Third Generation Igbo Female Characters' Process of Self Assertion**

While this thesis focuses on precursors like Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta, womanist theory is a reminder of the ground laid by pioneering women of African descent like Rebecca Cox Jackson, Sojourner Truth and Zilpha Elaw, who fought for the recognition of the individuality of African women. This line of theorizing is also seen in Nigerian critic Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie who argues the need for the Nigerian woman's 'personhood' to be recognized, "a concept of her as a person first, and a person herself...is not taken for granted...an appendage to someone else- a man...claimable by herself and without a reference to anybody else" (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994: 140). The concept of 'personhood' seems to sit uncomfortably alongside contemporary theories of subjectivity, but it captures the African woman's desire to achieve recognition as an individual in a particular cultural context rather than a social cypher, to be recognised as someone other than an appendage to a husband or son, or a function of wife and mother. In *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) and *Sky-High Flames* (2005), Adichie and Azuah's Kambili and Ofunne model the development of the Igbo female 'personhood' from the early years of adolescence.

Although it has been argued by critics that these writers seem to rehash the stories of Nwapa and Emecheta, making their works look like cheap copies of the original, the writers themselves, understandably, disagree. In a roundtable discussion, Unoma Azuah, Chika Unigwe and Sefi Atta refute the idea that the works of "(young Nigerian women writers) are writing a la Nwapa and Co...[Rather] [their] themes may cross, but that is because [they] share similar experiences being Nigerian women...[Besides] there is nothing new under the sun. Every story has been told. Should we stop writing then?" (Azuah 2008: 111). Limited readings of third generation women's writings may view the works of Adichie and Azuah as repetitive

in nature, but this chapter argues for their significance in the African literary canon, and the contemporary importance of their account of the growth and transformation of women in Igbo society.

Jane Bryce asserts that in “the new directions that fictional accounts of women’s identities are taking in Nigeria... the feminine is neither essentialized and mythologized nor marginalized, but unapologetically central to the realist representation of a recognizable social world” (Bryce 2008: 49). Like Bryce, my work in this chapter will be in dialogue with the ideas presented by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie and Alice Walker. Four aspects of the Igbo female character’s process of empowerment are discussed in this chapter: the renewed challenge to patriarchal dominance; the theme of the ‘absent mother’; the complex relation between tradition and modernity; and the process of female metamorphosis and self-actualization.

### **Challenging Patriarchal Dominance**

As we have seen in previous chapters the Nigerian family structure is deeply entrenched in patriarchy. While the argument has been that this was exacerbated by colonialism, it is a feature of life with which women in all three generations have had to deal. Daughters are often viewed as commodities rather than persons, and need to be taken under their father’s authoritative wing until the time comes to pass on that responsibility to their husbands. While previous generations have entered this battle, the works of third generation Nigerian women writers depict female characters as challenging two forms of patriarchy, one perpetuated by the father figure and the other by the husband. The challenge involves a process of metamorphosis in their search for individual ‘personhood.’ Ogunyemi argues that the philosophy that distinguishes womanist theory is “the dynamism of wholeness and self-healing that one sees in the positive integrative endings of womanist novels” (Ogunyemi 2006: 28). Womanist theory in this chapter helps us understand the process of empowerment and growth that female characters experience from adolescence.

The representation of the dominant father has long governed the Nigerian literary canon. In *Things Fall Apart* (1958) Okonkwo reflects patriarchal dominance in his belief that a man’s power and manhood lay in his ability to rule his women and

children. This is the way he treats his family. This recurring dominance is also reflected in Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* (1961), where Jagua Nana was not only a woman who was forced to live according to her father's rules but later suffers the stigma of barrenness in her marriage. Ekwensi punishes Jagua in his text for her defiance against her father's and husband's instructions, by portraying the decadent life she leads as a prostitute when she leaves her village. Another good example of patriarchal dominance can be also seen in Ben Okri's masterpiece trilogy *The Famished Road* (1991), *Songs of Enchantment* (1993) and *Infinite Riches* (1998), where the *abiku* spirit child Azaro's father, is the patriarch of the family who decides on the family's daily actions and holds the power to influence their thoughts as well as decide for them their political affiliations towards the party he supports.

In the texts of the third generation woman writers, power is shown to be a tool to manipulate female characters into actions and decisions desirable to the father figure. The young female character's response to the father figure/patriarch in the family usually begins with unalloyed admiration. It is through the experience of some act of violence, or recognition of unfair treatment that the female character begins to evolve. In *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie highlights the god-like admiration Kambili holds of her father, Eugene Achike. She vies for her father's admiration, longing to taste the love-sips of his tea, which her father shares with her and her brother Jaja. Kambili's almost obsessive desire to please her father leads to her feeling 'stained by failure' when she comes out second place in her class exams (Adichie 2004: 39). However, there is a complex correlation in the novel between Kambili's need to please her father and the fear she has of displeasing him – a tension of fearful obedience and complete admiration.

This pattern can also be seen in Sade Adeniran's Lola who constantly waits for her father's attention and Sefi Atta's Enitan who cannot see the flaws in her father because of her unconditional love for him. The psychological power held by the patriarch of the family is also seen in Unoma Azuah's *Sky-High Flames* (2005) when Ofunne follows her father's command to be married off, so that her bride-prize might absolve her family from debt. Although Ofunne very much desires to continue her education, become an independent woman and eventually find a man that she likes, her obligation towards her father, the patriarch of her family, as dictated by her Igbo culture, forces her to comply with her father's decision about a marriage partner. She

is asked whether “school [had] blinded her priorities,” and is reminded that “it’s not just [her] choice” that is important with regard to her marriage (Azuah 2005: 76).

The Igbo female’s journey towards empowerment can be understood in the terms of the “Black Feminist Statement: The Combahee River Collective” (Hull: 1982), where the quest for independence is the inevitable consequence of oppression. Black women theorists like Gloria T. Hull who wrote the feminist statement reject both ‘pedestals’ and subjugation and suggests that women should create their own identities instead of “working to end somebody else’s oppression” (Hull 1982: 16). In *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) Kambili challenges her father’s domination after her exposure to the lifestyle led by her Auntie Ifeoma and Amaka, who are audacious, strong-willed and courageous. They are not fearful and cannot be intimidated, unlike Kambili who trembles at the mention of her father. Kambili is Alice Walker’s Celie in *The Color Purple* (1983), who needs to develop an independent spirit. Kambili, like Celie, “[explores] the difficult path of someone who starts out in life already a spiritual captive, but who, through her own courage and the help of others, breaks free into the realization that she, like Nature itself, is a radiant expression” (Walker 1983: ix). Kambili’s brutal beating after trying to salvage her grandfather’s painting begins what Ogunyemi describes as the female characters’ metamorphosis into a womanist “after a traumatic event” (Ogunyemi 1996: 72). Although she understands her father’s obsessive ways stems from his Catholic missionary upbringing, she refuses to let him control her life any longer. Instead she chooses to embrace the freedom she experiences at her Auntie Ifeoma’s home as well as the discovery of her female sexuality and love for Father Amadi. It is at this point that Kambili’s undue admiration for her father is transferred to Father Amadi, a Catholic priest who embodies all of her father’s values and yet does not impose these values on her.

Kambili recognises her father’s brutality as she remembers the beatings she, Jaja and Beatrice, her mother have experienced as well as her mother’s miscarriages. Kambili’s acknowledgement of her father’s weaknesses challenges his dominance over her and begins her escape. Similarly, Sade Adeniran’s Lola, who after receiving a brutal beating from her father after her brother’s Adebola’s death, begins to see her father’s lack of paternal responsibility. An interesting parallel can be drawn by the way in which both these female characters curl up into foetal positions on the floor when they receive beatings from the fathers: Kambili “lay on the floor, curled tight

like the picture of a child in the uterus” (Adichie 2004: 210); Lola “rolled up into a ball on the floor while the strokes kept on landing” (Adeniran 2007: 122-123). Adichie and Adeniran clearly imply that the act of returning to their childlike state and rising from such a traumatic event is a phoenix like experience that gives them strength to break away from the patriarchal hold and discover their separate identities, taking power and decision-making into their hands.

The second form of patriarchal dominance challenged is the husband-wife relationship. In Nigerian society, the father’s assumed responsibility for his daughter is transferred to her husband who becomes her new figure of authority. This is a binding theme in Unoma Azuah’s *Sky-High Flames* (2005) and Sefi Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come* (2005). However, unlike most of Nwapa and Emecheta’s heroines, Azuah’s Ofunne and Atta’s Enitan do not accept their subjugated and silenced positions. They do not allow their lives to be governed by their husbands but instead break away from their marital ties in pursuit of their ambition. Their stand echoes Black activists like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Ida B. Wells who fought for their identities against oppression. Ofunne and Enitan are Emecheta’s Nnu Ego and Kehinde magnified because of their outrageous, courageous and strong-willed behavior. Where Emecheta’s heroines entered a relatively long struggle towards a redefinition of their roles as wives and mothers, Adichie and Azuah’s women assert themselves at a much younger age. Unlike Nnu Ego who lives her life devoted to her husband and children, only to die alone on the wayside, Ofunne and Enitan do not allow themselves to be governed by the dictates of their tradition. Although Ofunne marries Oko Okolo out of her obligation to her parents, when she loses her baby to the syphilis she contracts from her promiscuous husband, she chooses not to return to Oko or to remarry. Similarly, Enitan chooses to leave her husband when he forbids her from getting entangled with Nigerian politics. Ofunne and Enitan reposition the Nigerian husband-wife relationship in their stand against their husbands. They refuse to allow decisions to be made on their behalf. Although these characters become young wives, they are no longer depicted as passive and submissive. Instead they are presented as ambitious, educated and articulate, shifting the dynamics of power within their marital relationship.

The rethinking of the Nigerian husband-wife relationship in this generation’s writing continues to challenge the mother Africa trope. Mineke Schipper and Florence

Stratton respectively argue that placing women on pedestals to embody images of nation and tradition is dictated by masculine desire. By challenging the male figures of authority in their lives Ofunne and Enitan reject the traditional roles dictated by patriarchy and create spaces of independence for themselves. Although both Ofunne and Enitan are wives and mothers, they do not base their identity on their motherhood, but participate in the public realm beyond their cultural and social circle as a demonstration of individual mobility and agency.

Kambili, Ofunne, Lola and Enitan challenge masculinist conceptualization of female identity in their relationships with their fathers and husbands. Although the challenging of these family ties involves the severing of particular relationships, third generation female characters do not willingly accept the private domain of domesticity allotted to them. Standing against patriarchal dominance is seen clearly in the texts as one of the key factors that lead towards the empowerment of young female characters.

### **The 'Absent' Mother**

The 'absent' mother is a key element in third generation women's writings. Representations of the mother-daughter relationship are complex in nature. While the Alice Walker and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's womanist theory highlights the importance of female presence in helping young women achieve their sense of self, the figure of the mother in third generation writings is 'absent' – not necessarily physically absent, but emotionally absent and spiritually unconnected to their daughters.

The absence that affects the mother-daughter relationship, can, in many cases, be seen as a protective measure established by the mothers against abuse, as they emotionally detach themselves from their family. Kambili's mother Beatrice, throughout most of the text, is physically and emotionally crippled by her husband's treatment. She spends her days polishing her *étagère*, symbolically attempting to live in an idealized world while avoiding the reality around her. Lola's mother Constance leaves her father because of his abusive ways, abandoning her children to regain some semblance of dignity for herself. Ofunne's mother Mama Ofunne, parrots her husband's wishes for Ofunne's marriage using the excuse of traditional Igbo family

obligation. Enitan's mother Victoria is unable to show her daughter the love of a mother because she is consumed with grief for her deceased son. These mothers are 'second generation' women, very much like those in Emecheta's novels, who find themselves immobile and shackled within patriarchal dominance propagated by tradition and culture. They are a generation of women who have internalized this form of living as norm.

However, not all these women remain suppressed. Beatrice poisons her husband when she awakens to the reality of her family's abuse, symbolized by the smashing of the *étagère* in the text. Although Constance abandons her children, she finds the strength to leave her abusive relationship, rather than remain, as would many women in her culture. Despite the fact that these actions seem extreme, they do demonstrate a growing capacity in the women to make some form of resistance to liberate themselves, yet this is done at expense of their relationship with their daughters.

Alice Walker's 'In Search of Our Mothers Gardens' argues that young women, daughters, should draw strength and courage from their mothers. In the case of third generation female characters, it is other maternal figures, either female members in their family or other women figures in their community who fill in the gap left void by the 'absent' mother. Auntie Ifeoma and Amaka take on the role of 'mothering' Kambili into the young womanist she develops into at the end of the text. As for Ofunne, Sister Dolan steps into the role of the 'Igbo' mother when Mama Ofunne is unable to afford Ofunne mobility but rather shackles her with her traditional obligation. Sheri Bakare, Enitan's best friend, fills the void of Victoria's absence with her friendship. Unlike their mothers, young third generation female characters have instead had to "fearlessly pull of [themselves] and look at and identify with...the living creativity" despite the lack of support received from their mother (Walker 1983: 237).

The lack of maternal interaction between mothers and daughters is a key motivator for this generation of writers, and the recognition of their mother's inability to act, coupled with their own desire for change, stirs them to action. In each of these texts, there are defining moments in the mother-daughter relationship that act as trigger points for change. Kambili's beating by her father is the traumatic event that begins her metamorphosis but when she regains consciousness in the hospital, she

resents her mother for her inability to stop her father's abuse, and even more for the excuses she creates for him afterwards. With contradicting emotions Kambili "wished [she] could get up and hug her, and yet [she] wanted to push her away, to shove her so hard that she would topple over the chair...it was hard to turn [her] head, but [she] did it and looked away" (Adichie 2004: 213-214). When Kambili finally turns her head away she seems to sever her ties to her mother and her mother's emotional entrapment to begin a process of growth into independence.

A similar pattern can be traced in Unoma Azuah's *Sky-High Flames*. The novel opens with Ofunne's ambition: "couldn't wait to leave home and attend high school...be well educated with a high school certificate...become a teacher and get married to the man of [her] dreams" (Azuah 2005: 7). However, as discussed earlier, Ofunne's dreams are shattered when she is forced to marry Oko to absolve her father's debt and her baby dies from the syphilis she contracted from Oko. Although her mother tells her in the hospital that her marital problems with Oko can be settled through a communal discussion between both their families, Ofunne "[resolves] in the hospital to leave Oko for good and never to set [her] eyes on him and his parents" (Azuah 2007: 160). Like Kambili, Ofunne's trigger point is the impact of her dysfunctional marriage. She refuses to let her mother persist with the idea that she may still be able to have another child with Oko, saying "there is no child, and if there is, it might as well die. I want nothing of that man" (160). As Kambili physically turns her head away from Beatrice, Ofunne walks ahead of her mother, leaving behind the shackling cultural inheritance she represents. A pattern in third generation female writings is that this moment of realization, the trigger to her metamorphosis, usually happens towards the end of the novel where the female character has an encounter with her 'self'.

The binary construct in the mother-daughter relationship sets one generation of women apart from the other. The 'absent' mother leaves a vacuum not only with regard to her children but also within the textual reading of the works, as the reader is made aware of the gaps, or, more accurately, the non-existent presence of the 'absent' mother within the narrative. The question remains open as to why third generation women writers depict the image of the mother in this way. However, a clear indication of this absence spurs young third generation female characters towards emotional and intellectual independence.

## **The Complex Relation between Tradition and Modernity**

Tradition and modernity are set up as a binary opposition in the writings of third generation Nigerian women and play a pivotal role in the young female character's self discovery. One example of the dichotomy between tradition and modernity is that which exists between the missionary education and the spirituality of traditional culture. While traditional culture has been forced to evolve and change with the introduction of western education, it is the availability of education for women that affords them mobility and independence. Interestingly, although Nigerian culture is patriarchal in nature, it is the spirituality of the tradition from which its women often draw strength. The process of adapting aspects of tradition and modernity involves discovering and harmonizing the fine balance between both.

A prevailing pattern can be detected in the works of third generation writings to suggest that education is a key factor in the search independence. Education not only broadens the female character's mind but it also provides a sense of self-worth and achievement that builds self-confidence. In *Imagine This* (2007), Lola passes her University entrance exams, giving her the opportunity to leave Nigeria and finally begin her life all over again. In *Sky-High Flames* Ofunne's education at boarding school is the trigger for her growing desire for independence and mobility, largely due to the encouragement and example of Sister Dolan, an embodiment of modernity. She is the one who helps Ofunne find a job so she can remain in school and pay her tuition fees when her father is unable to pay for her education anymore. It is also Sister Dolan who inspires Ofunne, advising Oko to allow her to finish her studies and "nurture her talents...[because] she's very promising" (Azuah 2005: 87). This encouragement plants an awareness of her own abilities that encourages her to continue her education towards the end of the novel. In *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), Enitan Taiwo's overseas education transforms her into a fiercely intelligent, strong woman who defies the feminine submission imposed by her husband, thus showing education to be the key to unlocking feminine strength in a culture that insists on female subjugation.

We see the importance of tradition to the modern woman in *Purple Hibiscus* where Kambili's feminine strength matures as she learns to tap into the creativity of her traditional Igbo culture, in defiance of her father. The text tells us that Eugene Achike forbade Kambili and Jaja from using their Igbo language in public because

“[they] had to sound civilized in public, he told [them]; [they] had to speak English” (Adichie 2004: 13). When Kambili visits her grandfather Eugene gives her strict orders not to mingle with Papa-Nnukwu’s ungodliness

You will go this afternoon to your grandfather’s house and greet him. Kevin will take you. Remember, don’t touch any food, don’t drink any thing. And, as usual, you will stay no longer than fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes...I don’t like to send you to the home of a heathen, but God will protect you,” Papa said. (Adichie 2004: 61-62)

Although Kambili’s father keeps her away from her Igbo tradition, its language, practices and extended family relationships, she discovers two forms of spiritual creativity: a deeper understanding of her grandfather’s Igbo religion; and the freedom and fortitude of her female relatives. Kambili realizes that her father’s interpretation of the Igbo belief system as pagan is questionable as she watches Papa-Nnukwu invoke the elements of nature to bless her father “with the same earnestness that he prayed for himself and Aunty Ifeoma” despite the strained relationship between father and son (168). In living with Papa-Nnukwu during the last days of his life, Kambili feels “a longing for something [she] knew [she] would never have” (165). Observing that her grandfather’s “dialect was ancient; his speech has none of the anglicized inflections that [hers] had,” Kambili realizes the Igbo tradition she had been cut away from for so long. Papa-Nnukwe reminds Kambili of the importance of extended family for the Igbo people, something which is disappearing in modern Nigeria and even more so under her father’s fanatical dictates.

Adichie also depicts Aunty Ifeoma and Amaka as examples of strong Igbo female characters to invoke the importance of traditional Igbo culture, and in associating with these two women, Kambili develops a sense of womanhood and cultural identity. This development is seen in the section of the novel that can be linked to the ‘kitchen table’ metaphor in womanist theory where women gather on equal footing to engage in dialogue and have problem-solving conversations that eradicate domination and subordination. For Layli Philips

The kitchen table is a key metaphor for understanding the womanist perspective on dialogue...an informal woman-centred space where all are welcome and all can participate...people share the truths of their lives on

equal footing and learn through face-to-face conversation. When the kitchen table metaphor is applied to problem-solving situations, the relations of domination and subordination break down in favour of more egalitarian, interpersonal process. (Philips 2006: xxvii)

The 'kitchen table' creates a space for women to converse and learn from their counterparts and these face-to-face encounters act as guides to female social reality. In learning how to cook *orah* soup in Auntie Ifeoma's kitchen, Kambili also learns an important lesson about freedom as she speaks up to her cousin Amaka. Auntie Ifeoma offers Kambili an important gift, the Igbo woman's freedom of voice, when she challenges Kambili to stand up for herself. "*O ginidi*, Kambili, have you no mouth? Talk back to her!" (Adichie 2004: 170). Kambili's response to Amaka is calm and polite: "You don't have to shout Amaka" I said finally, "I don't know how to do the *orah* leaves, but you can show me. I did not know where the calm words had come from" (170). The use of the word 'I' is significant in this speech because it marks the first instance in which Kambili stands up for herself. The idea of a voice plays a significant part in the development of Kambili's personality, which eventually leads towards her sense of 'personhood.' The traditional setting of the kitchen and the coming together of Igbo family relationships emphasizes the importance of tradition and culture which contributes towards the female character's development and strength.

In *Sky-High Flames* (2005), Ofunne also turns to the spirituality of her Igbo tradition to gain inner strength. She pleads with the goddess Onishe "to cure [her] of the illness Oko gave [her], complete [her] education and become a teacher" (Azuah, 161). Azuah's adaptation of Igbo spirituality is interesting as Ofunne encounters an apparition of Onishe in the form of an Igbo woman who tells her to return home. In her third component of womanist theory, Walker describes womanist spirituality as "Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*" (Walker xii). This love for the spirit is tied in to "the great respect Afro-American women have always shown for the presence and the work of the spirit" in the black church community (Williams 2006: 123). This love of the spirit allows Black women to "identify and reflect upon those biblical stories in which poor oppressed women had a special encounter with divine emissaries of God, like the spirit" (123). This is similar

to the encounter Ofunne has with the apparition of Onishe, which eventually builds her emotional strength. Thus, Ofunne turns towards the goddess Onishe for physical and emotional healing as well as strength after her tumultuous relationship with her husband.

The duality of tradition and modernity in the lives of young Nigerian female characters is a crucial element in repositioning their perspectives on family relationships and their roles within their family circle. The independence of thought offered by education frees female characters from the submission expected from the dominant male characters in their , while Igbo tradition opens up avenues of creativity and fluidity previously hampered by male authority. Interestingly, Kambili and Ofunne seem to be at opposite ends of the spectrum. Although Ofunne draws on the strength of Onishe at the end of her text, her main form of inspiration comes from her western education. For Kambili, it is in learning about the richness of her Igbo culture that she able to develop into a mature Igbo womanist. Thus, the fundamental approach proposed in third generation Nigerian women's writing is the balance between tradition and modernity, drawing on both to enhance the process of female self-actualization.

### **Metamorphosis and Self-Actualization**

The traumatic events experienced within patriarchal relationships and the trigger points experienced within the 'absent' mother-daughter relationships lead female characters into a metamorphosis to independent womanhood, a paradigm shift from obedient daughters or submissive wives to 'personhood' (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994: 140). Kambili discovers something approaching womanist independence in making her own choices, in her love for Father Amadi and her silent memory of her father:

I no longer wonder if I have a right to love Father Amadi; I simply go ahead and love him. I no longer wonder if the checks I have been writing to the Missionary Fathers of the Blessed Way are bribes to God; I just go ahead and write them. I no longer wonder if I chose St. Andrew's church in Enugu as my new church because the priest there is a Blessed Way Missionary Father as Father Amadi is; I just go...I have not told Jaja that I offer Mass for Papa every Sunday”

(Adichie 2004: 303-306)

The multiple use of the first person 'I' not only emphasizes independence of voice but also independent decision-making. Kambili is no longer the scared young girl under her father's tyrannical rule but a young Igbo woman who has learnt to tap into the fullness of her emotional flexibility and feminine strength. The young Igbo female character here does not allow herself to be overcome by guilt but instead embraces the consequences of her decisions. Kambili also does not harbour resentment against her father, but instead chooses to remember him through mass offerings, the way he would have wanted to be remembered. In the choices that Kambili makes, preserving her love for Father Amadi and Papa, the goal is her own happiness and fulfillment.

A similar motive can be traced in the development of Lola Ogunwole, Enitan Taiwo and Ofunne. Lola Ogunwole decides to leave her extended family in Nigeria after the death of her father to carve a new life for herself in London. Enitan Taiwo explains that her decision to leave her husband is very much tied to the lesson she learned from her mother's own submissive life. She reasons, "I was lucky to have survived...One life was gone and I could either mourn it or begin it again. How terrifying and how sublime to behave like a god with the power to revive myself. This was the option I chose" (Atta 2010: 333). This passage indicates the intensity of the metamorphosis each woman undergoes as she 'revives' her sense of her own agency. At the end of the novel Ofunne wants to "complete [her] education and become a teacher (Azuah 2005: 161). Each of the decisions made by the female characters involves a separation from patriarchal obligations in family relationships and an assumption of personal responsibility.

The structure of these novels is important because each ending signifies a beginning. In normal circumstances a reader would assume the end of a text should produce closure, concluding a prevailing theme or idea, which, in the case of third generation writings, should mean the full development of the Nigerian womanist character. Although this can be argued for later writings of second generation Buchi Emecheta's *The Family* (1990) and *Kehinde* (1994), third generation women writers seem to structure their narratives differently, suggesting that the female character's metamorphosis towards independent womanhood is only the beginning of their journey. This ties in closely with Ogundipe-Leslie's argument about the Nigerian woman's personhood and Gloria T Hull's ideas about creating an identity unlocked from patriarchal subjugation. Each of these novels ends on a positive note, reflecting a

new beginning, the female characters portrayed as beginning independent, self-actualised lives at an early age, so that Lola, Kambili, Ofunne and Enitan transform previous depictions of Nigerian female characters.

*Purple Hibiscus* ends on a promising note with Kambili deciding

...I'll plant ixora so we can suck the juices of the flowers." I am laughing. I reach out and place my arm around Mama's shoulder and she leans towards me and smiles. Above, cloud like dyed cotton wool hang low, so low I feel I can reach out and squeeze the moisture from them. The new rains will come down soon. (Adichie 2004: 307)

The novel closes with imagery of flowers and gardening, so important to womanist theory, "traditionally universalist...the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every flower represented...womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender" (Walker 2006: xi-xii). The fourth component of Walker's womanism associates the theory with the colour purple, an image of vibrancy, strength and creativity. In Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* the flower blooms metaphorically during the progress of the narrative as Kambili grows into a self-confident character. Not only does the text end with Kambili planting a multi-coloured ixora plant, it ends with new rains, a symbol of growth and regeneration.

*Sky-High Flames* ends with Ofunne's desire and ambition:

"No, no!" I shouted. "You and father have had a good part of my life, whatever is now left of me is mine."

"We wanted the best for you, Ofunne," she [Mama Ofunne] said and followed me into the house. *I was going to start all over again. I would go back to school*". (Azuah 2005: 162-163)

The italics emphasise the beginning of Ofunne's independence as she lays claim to the rest of her life. The loss of a baby and a failed marriage are not the end, but a beginning of self-reconstruction. In this way the concept of 'beginning' becomes important as the writers create new spaces for changes in Igbo female characters lives. It is significant that Azuah places the mother's voice at the end of the text with Ofunne. Although Azuah does not seem to directly discount the fact that Ofunne's parents had her best interest in mind when they persuaded her to marry, she does seem to be suggesting that parents' actions may not necessarily reflect the best

outcomes for their daughters. Adichie and Azuah's texts create a new direction in Igbo women's writings. They offer the female character the opportunity to begin their lives again, rewrite previous mistakes without the feeling of a missed opportunity.

Atta and Adeniran's texts make identical suggestions. Lola writes in her diary:

I don't know what the future holds; all I do know is that when it is the turn of a man to become the head of a village, he does not need a diviner to tell him he is destined to rule. The time has come for me to start my life.

THE BEGINNING (Adeniran 2007: 331)

Enitan dances for joy and liberation:

"Tell him," I said. "Tell him, *a ada*. It will be good. Everything good will come to me."... "Nothing could take my joy away from me. The sun sent her blessings. My sweat baptized me". (Atta 2010: 335-336)

Like Kambili and Ofunne, Lola and Enitan's narratives end on a note of affirmation. Images of nature like the sun, rain and flowers are used to capture the potential and abundance that lies ahead in these female characters futures. The female quest for empowerment, agency and self-realization is achieved at the end of the text allowing the newly developed female person to lead a life with filled with new opportunities.

The young Nigerian female character's process of empowerment is educative in nature, reflecting the compelling role young Nigerians play in society. Madeline Hron pictures this best when she concludes her article by stating that the old Igbo saying "Ora na-azu nwa," loosely translated as "It takes a village to raise a child" is redressed in young third generation Nigerian female characters to mean "Nwa ndi na na-azu uwa": it is the children who are educating the global village" (Hron 2008: 40). Indeed, this generation of Nigerian Igbo female characters suggests a new form of strong-willed and courageous feminine presence, their stories of empowerment commenting on the state of Nigerian family structures. Thus the figure of the young girl child / woman is a womanist character that at the early stages of her life resists the binary dualism of power between men and women, her actions firmly against the idea of male patriarchal domination.

## Conclusion

Writings of third generation Igbo women writers create models for modern Igbo women to reconstruct their lives. In using young female characters, Adichie and Azuah show that *Purple Hibiscus* and *Sky-High Flames* are far from despondent texts, portraying female characters resisting prescribed roles and interested in their own development. In a comparison between Sade Adeniran's *Imagine This* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*, a distinct pattern is drawn from the use of the young girl-child / woman character developing into a mature, strong womanist, indicating a change within the Nigerian woman. This process of transformation is the most recent development in Nigerian fiction. As female characters challenge their familial relationships, they develop their sense of personhood, reclaiming wholeness, authority and female subjectivity. Both texts suggest that changing prescribed roles and structures. Their womanist metamorphosis happens after traumatic events, leaving the characters to decide to change.

# CHAPTER 5

## The Biafran War and Igbo Women Writers: Deconstructing the Male Discourse of Nationalism:

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While nationalist discourse in all colonies has been a critical factor in the fight for independence, the consequences of the ‘scramble for Africa’ in which African states were divided among the European nations in the Berlin conference of 1884-5, have meant that the idea of the independent nation was often undermined by the differences between tribes and language groups who constituted the nation. This was the case in Nigeria, where the independent post-colonial state was riven with varieties of ethno-nationalisms that bred feelings of injustice and enmity leading directly to the 1967-70 Biafran War. In most colonies nationalism was seen to be a discourse that brought different groups together in a common cause, but as Fanon warned, nationalism threatens to reproduce the hegemony of the colonial state and in situations of great ethnic diversity can lead directly to violence.

Literary works from the Nigerian civil war have been male-dominated, with little critical reception paid to the body of Biafran war literature written by Nigerian female writers, because, as Chatterjee says “the discourse of anti-colonial nationalism – was in its core a male discourse” (Chatterjee 1993: 136). It has been a tradition in which “women [are] usually ‘hidden’ in the various theorizations of the nationalist phenomena” (Yuval-Davis 1989: 23). Nigerian literature has therefore, “either ignored or underestimated the literary efforts of female writers” (Porter 1996: 313).

This chapter will analyse the works of three generations of Igbo women writers, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, drawing attention to the ways in which they deconstruct the male discourse of nationalism so prevalent in writings on the Biafran war. The fascinating thing about this is that the genocidal violence and famine meted out to the Igbo people – men, women and children – during this war meant that Igbo people had every reason to draw together in a proto-nationalist sense of ethnic destiny. The fact that Igbo women writers looked with a critical eye at all forms of masculinist nation building, whether Igbo or Yoruba or Hausa, suggests that they operated from a position of detachment from the discourse of nationalism itself. This may be why their writings on the war have been overlooked. The war haunts the Nigerian consciousness even today and there appears little room for a detached sense of the futility (and neo-colonial character) of African nationalism.

The other important feature of these novelists is that while the three generations have demonstrated a gradual transformation in the representation of the Igbo woman's role in society, – Nwapa's destruction of the image of the silent woman; Emecheta's and Okoye's revised image of women's roles as wives and mothers; and Adichie's and Azuah's transformed view of the young woman's relationship to family – in regard to the nation, particularly their attitude to nationalism and the Biafran war, and the immense corruption that followed the war, they are in remarkable agreement. Flora Nwapa's *Never Again* (1975), Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) describe the effects of colonial rule in Nigeria, the continued prevalence of colonial influence, the greed of the neo-colonial elite and the tribal separatism that led to the Biafran war. Igbo women writers refuse to be appropriated by the discourse of nationalism, which continues to exclude women and exile them to the traditional domestic domain. Womanist theory in this chapter will be used to draw attention to Igbo female writers' commitment to the "survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female," revealing the womanist interest in understanding the intricacies of gender positioning within the nation (Walker 1983: xi).

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Like other federations created by the British, Nigeria was a country arbitrarily formed and divided. The British placed together people who were greatly dissimilar in

culture, religion and tribal affiliation, failing to take into account that this haphazard union as a political entity only heightened their long-held animosity. The creation of Nigeria as an attempt by the British to bring together the various Nigerian tribes was bound to fail because these tribes functioned as micro-nations, and to make them put aside their various ethnic differences to become a nation, was an almost impossible task. Nigeria was rather a patchwork of autonomous micro-nations, who viewed each other with considerable fear and suspicion. Thus, despite its independence in 1960, Nigeria can only be regarded as a nation in a territorial and geographical sense.

In the wake of its independence, Nigeria under Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was “boiling pot of unbridled corruption, irrational tribalism, vaunting ambition, pent-up resentment, suspicion, fear of ethnic domination, misguided ancestral glories, political intolerance, religious bigotry and administrative irresponsibility” (Nwanko 1969: 2). In an attempt to rescue the country from its social and political difficulties, a military coup in January 15, 1966 was staged to free Nigeria from the corruption of its politicians. The Northern and Western premiers, the Federal Prime Minister, and a number of top military officers were assassinated by the coup-plotters. Although the military regime was praised for its tactical and political intervention, it was soon suspected that the coup was in essence an Igbo plot to dominate Nigeria. This was because the Eastern political leaders, who were Igbo, were spared during the *coup d'état*. At this time, General J.T.U Aguiyi-Ironsi became the head of the National Military Government. Although Nigerian unity was at the heart of his administrative focus, Ironsi was kidnapped and murdered, his leadership overthrown by Northern soldiers under the leadership of General Gowon. Consequently, General Gowon and his northern counterparts launched a counter coup called Operation Araba in July 1966, which resulted in the death of eighty to hundred thousand easterners.

In view of the violence towards the Easterners, Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu urged the Easterners residing in the various parts of Nigeria to return home to the safety of the eastern region, and some two million Eastern Nigerians returned to the East. On May 29, 1967, General Gowon announced his decision to divide Nigeria into twelve states without consulting the other political leaders. At this juncture, the people of Eastern Nigeria found their survival threatened and saw no other possibility for their future existence than to secede. Colonel Ojukwu declared on May 30, 1967 the sovereign Republic of Biafra. Following the declaration of Biafra and his refusal

to recognise the sovereignty of Biafra, General Gowon declared war on Biafra on July 6, 1967, inciting vicious anti-Igbo pogroms, which led to the massacre, maiming and starvation of thousands of Igbos. What commenced in the next 30 months was a military offensive against Biafra by Nigeria, including air raids on civilian targets, land and sea blockades. Food supply was cut from Biafra, leading to the starvation and death of the Igbo. Approximately two million Igbos had died in the war when it ended on January 12, 1970. The Biafran war was a genocidal war, where males above the age of ten were killed, women were subjected to appalling mutilations, and children were found dead “scattered like dolls in the long grass” (Forsyth, *The Biafra Story* 261). It was a war “born in massacre and bred in starvation” (Perham 1970: 234).

### **The postcolonial nation and the critique of neo-colonialism in Nigeria**

The struggle for independence amongst colonised nations was also a fight for a sense of identity that contested colonial representations. The identity of the native was created by the coloniser to ensure ‘otherness’ and dominance, to guarantee subservience on the part of the native and power in the hands of the coloniser. The consequences of independence were ambivalent to say the least. While postcolonial societies attempt to inhabit the spaces drawn up by European imperialism, they ultimately produce local elites within their society who mimic imperial power. This appeared to be the case in Nigeria as political élites moved in to occupy the positions vacated by the colonial authorities. As Fanon says “National consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being the immediate and most obvious result of the mobilization of the people, will be in any case only an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been” (Fanon 1967: 119). Fanon describes the premature intellectual development of young independent nations, where “nation is passed over for race, and the tribe is preferred to the state” (119). This is clearly evident in Nigeria where tribe was a preferred form of identification, leading towards “a process of retrogression that [was] so harmful and prejudicial” (119). Fanon however offers an interesting perspective in arguing that the status of formerly colonised peoples was not solely the result of the colonial regimes. The “under-developed middle class” who take over in former colonised states such as Nigeria are a class that is “not engaged in production,

not in invention, nor building, nor labour [...] [a] psychology of the national bourgeoisie is that of the businessman, not that of a captain of industry” (120). The lack of necessary skills and knowledge for running a nation produces a society in which individuals fall through the cracks of corruption and poverty.

Fanon is scathing about the role of leaders in the newly independent state, declaring that the leader

embodies the aspirations of the people for independence, political liberty and national dignity. But as soon as independence is declared, far from embodying in concrete form the needs of the people in what touches bread, land and the restoration of the country to the sacred hands of the people, the leader reveals his inner purpose: to become the general president of that company of profiteers impatient for their returns which constitutes the national bourgeoisie...his honesty, which is his soul's true bent, crumbles away little by little...every day that passes ranges himself a little more resolutely on the side of the exploiters. He therefore knowingly becomes the aider and abettor of the young bourgeoisie which is plunging into the mire of corruption and pleasure.

(133-34)

Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982) makes a critical comment on the state of Nigeria and Biafra's leadership. Instead of seeing to the well-being of their people, the Nigerian political leadership chose “to see to the well-being of all members of [their] extended family” (Emecheta 1982: 49). Kwame Nkrumah describes elitism in Africa as “an ideology tailor-made to fit capitalism and bourgeois de facto domination in the capitalist society...it intensifies racism, since it can be used to subscribe to the myth of racial superiority and inferiority” (Nkrumah 1965: 30). It represents a new form of domination that allows the neo-colonialists, who are the elite of the country, as well as the imperialist whose tentacles of power still exist within independent nations, to seek their own interest, “prolonging their dominance by preserving the fundamental features of the colonial state apparatus” (60).

Liah Greenfeld and Daniel Chirot in *Nationalism and Aggression* (1994) argue that there are two predominant forms of nationalism, one that is individualistic and more civic while the other is collectivistic and ethnic. Collective nationalism

would be more likely to engage in aggressive warfare...[focussing on] forms of particularism...the borderline between “us” and “them” is relatively clear...collective nationalisms are articulated by small elite groups...such status-anxious elites define their community – the sphere of their potential influence and membership/leadership, which may be political, linguistic, religious, racial, or what not – as a “nation,” and tend to present their grievances as the grievances of the nation and themselves as representatives of the nation...thus from their perspective the nation is, from the start, united in common hatred. (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994: 86-7)

The birth of Nigerian and Igbo nationalism respectively during the Nigerian-Biafran war was decidedly a demarcation of ‘us’ and ‘them’. The rage emanating from such nationalisms meant that opposing sides did not view their counterparts with humanity but rather through the lens of “*ressentiment*” (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994: 88). While understanding the dynamics of various forms and representations of nationalism, war being a key element, the focus of tribal resentments in the Nigerian-Biafran war was exacerbated by a masculinism in which the respective leaders of Nigeria and Biafra “[demonised]” the enemy population” (87).

In trying to understand the dynamics of power and inter-tribal relationships which worked against a Nigerian identity, this chapter argues that Igbo women writers can be said to reflect an inclination towards pan-Africanism. With its origins in African-American oppression and need for a Black communal identity, Ghanaian Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah saw pan-Africanism as a way to achieve unity and wealth in Africa where resources could be used collectively to build the continent’s potential. Although Nkrumah’s dream died with him, a reading of Nwapa, Emecheta and Adichie’s texts suggests that a pan-African identity may be the most exciting utopian dream of a post-independence Africa.

## Nwapa, Emecheta, Adichie and Igbo nationalism

In *Never Again* (1975), *Destination Biafra* (1982) and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) Nwapa, Emecheta, and Adichie unmask the ways in which the discourse of nationalism marginalises women, while at the same time condemning the selfish motivations of Nigeria's former coloniser and the Nigerian elite. Their attack on nationalism takes three major forms: a critique of pan-Igbo ideology and advocacy of pan-Africanism; the representation of the masculinist political leadership; and an exposure of the ways in which the feminine voice is virtually silenced during war as women and children become its chief victims.

Before discussing these writers' representation of the war and of the nationalism that it unleashed, it is first vital to understand the exclusion or limited representation of women within national literature and in this context their omission within the Biafran war narratives. The representation of female characters in male war writings is not particularly favourable, some depictions tending to focus on "women's moral laxity" (Ezeigbo 1996: 483). Correspondingly, women's sacrifice in war, their struggle for family survival and caring for their children has not been paid adequate attention in male writings. In fact, the first half of Achebe's short story *Girls at War* (1972), Elechi Amadi's *Sunset in Biafra* (1973), Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn* (1976), Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* (1985), Charles Ndubueze Akuneme's *I Saw Biafra* (2004), Uzondinma Iweala's *Beast of No Nation* (2005) and Uwem Akpan's *Luxurious Hearses* (2008) portray women as sexual objects, being morally loose, less patriotic in comparison to their male counterparts, frivolous beings more interested in their material possessions than the real sufferings of war.

Two examples of such representations can be seen in Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn* (1976), when a grieving wife's anguish at her son's death "you hear what a husband is saying? ... An assignment to H.E is more important than his dead son!" is juxtaposed with her husband's patriotism when he states "in spite of my grief I have to carry out an assignment for His Excellency tonight" (29). This passage demonstrates the clichéd way in which male writers often treated patriotism, but it also reveals the ways in which women were often closer to the wider circle of human suffering generated by the war. An example of the more egregious stereotyping can

be found in Charles Ndubueze's *I saw Biafra* (2004) when he comments that during the war "women too, had a field day, insofar as they stayed closer to soldiers and note-worthy officials at the Directorate" (51). Nigerian female characters in male writings are often portrayed as weak, subordinate, inhabiting a space outside the affairs of the nation. This skewed perspective upon Nigerian women's position, placement and participation in war necessitates a discussion of Igbo female writers' works, which reveal their view of Nigerian nationalism.

The question arising in this discussion is: "where are women to be placed in the male discourse of nationalism?" There seem to be many arguments about this. Yuval-Davis argues that women should be placed within the public-realm of national discourse instead of relegation to the domestic realm. She asks, "why, then, are women usually 'hidden' in the various theorizations of the nationalist phenomena? Her answer is that classical theories of the social contract divide the sphere of civil society into the public and private domains. "Women (and the family) are located in the private domain, which is not seen as politically relevant... as nationalism and nations have usually been discussed as part of the public political sphere, the exclusion of women from that arena has affected their exclusion from that discourse as well" (Yuval-Davis 1989: 23-4).

Elleke Boehmer echoes Yuval-Davis's argument that in order to redress the imbalance, women "through claiming a text – or a narrative territory – women sign into and at the same time subvert nationalist narrative that excluded them as negative, as corporeal and unclean" (2005: 10). Enticing and liberating as this idea may be, the idea of women 'signing into' the nationalist narrative is questionable. This is because as Partha Chatterjee reveals in his discussion of Indian nationalism, "the discourse of anti-colonial nationalism – was in its core a male discourse," and points out the capacity of this discourse to appropriate discordant, marginal and critical voices (Chatterjee 1993: 136). He goes on to shed light on the nature of this inclusion of marginal voices, which within national theory proceeds to marginalise women into inhabiting 'private sphere's' within the 'public sphere'.

Chatterjee explains that while Indian nationalism encourages Indian women to have an education to be better than the common woman, the ideology also urges them to uphold their traditional roles and values, which supposedly places them in better standing than the modern Western woman. He reveals that women's participation in

nationalist discourse conspires to relegate women to the private domain. Hence “nationalism’s success in situating the “woman question” in an inner domain, far removed from the arena of political contest with the colonial state. In this arrangement, the woman is forced to accept that “masculine identity is normative, and where the female is addressed in the main as the idealised bearer of nationalist sons, woman as such, in herself, has no valuable place” (Boehmer 2005: 80). Thus, Boehmer’s concept of ‘signing into’ nationalism, in attempting to place women within the discourse of nationalism, is to ignore the critical perspective women bring to the discourse. In short: why should women want to sign into the heavily male-oriented discourse of nationalism? This reticence characterises the work of Igbo women writers as they bring a very critical eye to bear upon all forms of nationalism.

Yet, Boehmer makes an interesting point in suggesting that women’s attempt to write may be an avenue to redress the exclusion of their point of view within the national discourse. She believes that “writing holds out fruitful possibilities of redress. If African literature in the past has constituted a nationalist and patriarchal preserve, then, simply by writing, women may begin directly to challenge the male prerogative. In writing, women express their own reality and so question received notions of national character and experience” (9). The question this chapter attempts to answer is: “How do Nigerian Igbo women’s Biafran war novels fit within this male-discourse of nationalism?” Acknowledging the discourse’s capacity for marginalisation, it does not however necessarily have to exclude the participation of women in the national dialogue. Thus, with the case of Nwapa, Emecheta and Adichie’s writings, their works are a compilation of three generations of women’s attempt to deconstruct this longstanding, prevalent male discourse of nationalism in Nigerian literature with the hope of “fruitful possibilities of redress” where “[Igbo] women express their own reality” and unveil the hidden masculine agenda that has led to genocide, tribalism and pan-Igbo ideology perpetuated during the Biafran war (Boehmer 2005: 9).

### **Pan-Igbo ideology, tribal separatism and Pan-Africanism**

The critique of nationalism in the Igbo women’s novels can be placed in the broader discourse of pan-Africanism, which is both intimated and stated in the novels and in other statements by these writers. Although in many respects this idea,

imported from the US by Kwame Nkrumah, appears to be a utopian dream, it provides the kind of larger vision of Africa within which women writers could critique the ethno-tribal nationalism that led to the Biafran war. In their discussions and interviews these three novelists appear to be growing stronger, if anything, in their vision of a pan-Africa.

Ezi Ogueri II in *African Nationalism and Military Ascendancy* (1976) offers an interesting perspective on the formation of national governments in Africa through political independence and national sovereignty. Ogueri asserts that African nationalism was “a reaction to, and an antidote of, colonial imperialism [...] a declaration of ideological war against colonial imperialism and neo-colonialism” (2-3). This being the case, national construction lacked the political infrastructure and economic independence to make the antidote work. Ogueri suggests that one of the key failures by the leaders of African nations was to allow traditionalism, regionalism and tribalism to influence their political judgement and decision-making. These three elements, “traditionalism, regionalism and tribalism are chief among the forces of demobilization in Africa” (29). While part of the initial thrust of the African nationalist movement, tribalism hindered integration, bred competitiveness and jealousy, and eventually, in Nigeria, saw the disintegration of national unity.

In *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1983), Chinua Achebe comments that although tribal associations reinforce positive images of identity, in the context of Nigerian national identity it breeds prejudice which leads to the “discrimination against a citizen because of his place of birth” (7). He goes on to point out how in the wake of Nigeria’s independence, the national anthem written by the British further encouraged tribal separatism: “Though tribe and tongue may differ / In brotherhood we stand! It was a most ominous beginning. And not surprisingly we did not stand too long in brotherhood. Within six years we were standing or sprawling on a soil soaked in fratricidal blood” (Achebe 1983: 6).

In contrast, Nwapa, Emecheta and Adichie develop an interest in the pan-African vision of the future. Pan-Africanism found its origin in the 1930s, an intellectual movement championed by African American scholars W.E.B. Du Bois and Alexander Crummel to promote the emancipation of African-American people. It stemmed from “the humiliating and discriminatory experiences of the African diaspora, the racism that accompanied the campaign for the suppression of the

Atlantic slave trade...European imperialism, all [representing] the main sources of and conditions giving rise to Pan-African consciousness and ideas” (Esedebe 1994: 20). The general principles of pan-Africanism are:

Africa as the homeland of Africans and persons of African origin, solidarity among people of African descent, belief in a distinct African personality, rehabilitation of Africa’s past, pride in African culture, Africa for Africans in church and state, the hope for a united and glorious future Africa. (Esedebe 1994: 4)

The idea of the inherent unity of Africa captured the imagination of Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah when he was studying in America, as did the idea of a communal identity stemming from the Black people’s oppression. The vision Nkrumah had for Africa was a collective identity rooted in a systematic continental economic-planning, a unified defence and military system as well as a united foreign policy. By doing this, Nkrumah foresaw a progressive African mobilization away from “dangers of returning colonialism in disguised forms” (Nkrumah 1963: 217). Unification would ensure the cessation of “imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism in Africa,” where the continent’s resources will be used to build Africa to its full potential. Although open to the criticism that it marginalizes tribal distinctiveness Nkrumah’s proposition was that

We are first and last, and as Africans our best interests can only be served by uniting within an African Community...To us Africa with its islands is just one Africa. We reject the idea of any kind of partition...Africa is one and indivisible. I know when we speak of political union, our critics are quick to observe an attempt to impose leadership and to abrogate sovereignty...There are differences in the powers allotted to the central government and those retained by the states, as well as in the functions of the executive, legislature and judiciary...We in Africa who are pressing now for unity are deeply conscious of the validity of our purpose...We need it to secure total African liberation. (Nkrumah 1963: 217)

Nkrumah’s plan for continental unification was not only meant to secure Africa’s socio-economic and political future but also to ensure freedom from “sectional interests... personal greed and ambition among leaders and contesting aspirants to

power” fanned and manipulated by the former colonial powers would not corrupt this staging of Africa’s future. Although the first Conference of Independent African States held in Accra in April 1958 gathered eight states – Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, and the United Arab Republic – Nkrumah’s vision for a pan-African identity did not survive his assassination.

Sectional interests as well as the personal greed and ambition of political leaders lead to the Nigerian-Biafran war. Nwapa, Emecheta and Adichie’s narratives focus extensively on tribal separatism as a barrier to Nigerian national unity. Adichie, in particular, is interesting in her vision of the dissolution of borders

The rally was held in Freedom Square, in the centre of the campus, lecturers and students shouting and singing, an endless sheet of heads and placards held high.

We shall not, we shall never move.

Just like a tree that’s planted by the water,

We shall not be moved.

*Ojukwu is behind us*, we shall never move.

*God is behind us*, we shall never move.

They were *Biafrans*. She [Olanna] was Biafran... ‘*Biafra is born!* We will lead Black Africa! We will live in security! Nobody will ever again attack us! Never again! *Odenigbo raise his arm* as he spoke, and Olanna thought how awkwardly twisted Auntie Ifeka’s arm had looked, as she lay [massacred] on the ground, how blood had pooled so thick that it looked like glue, not red but close to black. (Adichie 2007: 162-3) (Emphasis added)

The use of “the pronominal deixis” of We/They and Us/Them reveals the exclusionary methods propagated within separatism (Oha 1998: 432). The desire for partition and separation is further induced by spatial demarcation and boundary setting through Your Land/ Our Land and Nigeria/Biafra, reaffirming Nigeria’s tripartite antagonism. Adichie uses the flashback technique to critique pan-Igbo ideology as a predesigned massacre opportunity. The tragic, downward spiral of Odenigbo’s character in *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) is indicative of Adichie’s method of deconstructing pan-Igbo essentialism. The symbol of half of a yellow sun on the Biafran flag which was to stand for a glorious future was an empty dream

leaving Odenigbo by the end of the text “old...a crumpled defeat in his face” (Adichie 2006: 392).

Interestingly however, Adichie shows the possibility of dissolving tribal boundaries through her Hausa male character Mohammed and Igbo female Olanna, when Mohammed safely sneaks Olanna away to the train station when the racial riots break out in Sabon Gari. Against the racial rage of his Hausa tribesmen he regards the acts of murder and desecration of human bodies, of people who had lived with them in harmony, as unforgivable. Adichie advocates identifying beyond ones tribe<sup>12</sup> to develop a consciousness for the community. Although she suggests a cessation of exclusive tribal identification, the quest for a Nigerian identity is left ambivalent. Even after four decades, the possibility of developing a Nigerian identity remains unsettled.

In her foreword, Buchi Emecheta states that, “I developed my heroine “Debbie Ogedemgbe” who is neither Igbo nor Yoruba nor Hausa, but simply a Nigerian” (Emecheta 1982: viii). Her description of Debbie reveals a “pan-African character... representative of the African woman, and by extension of all women in the situation of war” (Siclar 1995: 78). Emecheta concurs with Nkrumah’s plan for unification, as Debbie says:

do you think Nkrumah really wants to rule the whole of Africa? Why do you ask? It’s true that he wants to unite the continent, and somebody would have to be at the head. Well I don’t mind if it is Nkrumah. At least we would have someone who is really doing something, unlike all these corrupt politicians” (1982: 40).

The fact that Emecheta wrote *Destination Biafra* from London may indicate that distance allowed her the breadth of perspective to acknowledge Pan-Africanism in her writing. At the end of the text, Debbie vehemently declares “I am a woman and a woman of Africa...I didn’t mind your being my male concubine, but Africa will never again stoop to being your wife; to meet you on an equal basis, like companions, yes, but never again to be your slave” (258).

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<sup>12</sup> Adichie seems to suggest a similar argument in her short story *A Private Experience*, where a Hausa woman and a young Igbo woman Chika hide and keep each other safe during an air raid. They cross the borders of culture and identity, finding unity as women during the civil war. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. *The Thing Around Your Neck*. London: Fourth Estate, 2009.

Similarly, the way in which Adichie chooses to end *Half of a Yellow Sun* with the reality of a defunct Biafra, Olanna burning Biafran banknotes, leaves us with the possibility that perhaps the best form of identification for Nigerians is a broader African one. Nwapa on the other hand, possibly indicative of an older generation, ends *Never Again* (1975) on a spiritual note, with middle-aged women in white and a little boy dragging a white ram as a sacrifice for the Goddess Uhamiri. Nwapa says in an interview with Sabine Jell-Bahlse that during the Nigerian-Biafran civil war

there was so much about the deliverance of Uhamiri...when the war ended, Ugwuta people were full of praise for the Woman of the Lake. They said that the Woman of the Lake was responsible for their coming back to their homes...You see, Ugwuta people attributed this to the powers of Uhamiri. Because to them, it is Uhamiri that protects them. Not only women and children. She protects everybody” (Jell-Bahlse 1996: 645).

Although she doesn't mention pan-Africanism, Nwapa ends the novel drawing on the spiritual core of Du Bois' definition of pan-Africanism, which emphasises the return to African roots, culture and spirituality to gain a form of collective and dialectical nationalism.

The reality of a pan-African identity may be utopian but the function of utopias is to critique the present, in particular the fractured tribal condition of African states. The question remains open as to which specific form of identification is preferred by Igbo women writers. Yet, it is clear that Nwapa, Emecheta and Adichie refuse to be appropriated within a hegemonic discourse of nationalism but rather seek after a global, African womanist identification that eradicates marginalisation and subordination.

### **Neo-colonial Influence and the Biafran War**

Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982) examines the extent to which the war was a consequence of imperial interference. The imperial war over Africa's resources is a continual socio-economic reality for the African continent. Contemporary Zambian prose writer Mashingaidze Gomo in *A Fine Madness* (2010) addresses the state of foreign influences that continue to dictate Africa's future. Closer to home, executed Nigerian Ogoni activist Ken-Saro Wiwa in *Genocide in*

*Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy* (1992), describes the environmental devastation caused by Shell and Chevron as it plundered the north-eastern fringes of the Niger Delta for oil, unchecked by the Federal Government. One of the factors that allowed such an activity is the imperial influence within Nigeria's politics. Kwame Nkrumah in *Africa Must Unite* (1963), states vehemently

we have to free ourselves from the grip of economic imperialism, and protect our freedom...imperialism is still a most powerful force to be reckoned with in Africa. It controls our economies. It operates on a world-wide scale in combinations of many different kinds: economic, political, cultural, educational, military...It will as it is already doing, fan the fires of sectional interests, of personal greed and ambitions among leaders and contesting aspirants of power. These and many other will be the devious ways of neo-colonialism by which imperialist hope to keep their stranglehold on Africa's resources for their continued enrichment. To ensure they have continued hegemony over this continent. (xvi)

The imperial legacy within Nigeria shortly after its independence is scrutinised by Emecheta, echoing Nkrumah's insight into the continued hegemony of the West through the phenomenon he called neo-colonialism. Emecheta exposes the conscious decisions made by the former colonial administrators in fanning 'sectional interest', tribalism and separatism.

The characters Alan Grey and Governor Macdonald are targets of Emecheta's critique, as she highlights their exploitation of Nigeria's resources, implying that the handing over of power to the Hausa's after independence was to continue to serve imperial interests. In their discussion Alan Grey and Governor Macdonald state enthusiastically that

But nine-tenths of the country is still to be thoroughly mapped, to say nothing of being tapped..."Look," he expanded, indicating excitedly the whole of the eastern region and the regions around Benin. "These vast areas are full of oil, pure crude oil, which is untouched and still needs thorough prospecting. Now we are to hand it over to these people, who've had all these minerals since Adam and not known what to do with them. Now they are beginning to be aware of their monetary value. And after Independence they may sign it all

over to the Soviets for all we know... I don't want Nigeria to go to the Communists...These people have not real experience of democracy. We shall have to introduce proportional representation. (Emecheta 1982: 6-8)

This passage suggests the extent to which Cold-War politics as well as the greed for oil conspired in the lead up to the tragedy of the war. The reference to mapping is a direct acknowledgement of the importance of imperial cartography in shaping the modern world, while the 'proportional representation' referred to suggests the ways in which the colonialist distorted concepts of freedom to subtly disguise their continuous exploitation. Alan Grey, by assisting Momoh with firearms during the war against Biafra for a percentage of Nigeria's oil, exposes himself as an opportunist who "fans the fires of sectional interests, of personal greed and ambitions among leaders and contesting aspirants of power." (Nkrumah 1963: xvi) He advises Momoh to win the war quickly with the least amount of collateral damage by "signing percentages of the oil revenue over to people who would help win the war" (Emecheta 1982: 153). The manipulation is subtle but convincing, "Momoh signed away the greater percentage of the oilwells to some Western powers, on condition that they settled the Biafran question quickly" (154).

The desire for power and authority corrupting Nigeria's political leadership is further fuelled by the presence of oil in the country and the way in which oil implicates Nigeria even further in a network of corruption. Emecheta seems to be echoing Nkrumah in acknowledging the part played by the former colonizers in fomenting conflict, and while doing so, imperialists like Alan Grey enjoyed Nigeria's rich resources: "buying up the bronzes, carved elephant tusks and moulded animal figures which Western culture had dubbed with the name 'primitive art.' By the time Nigerians came to appreciate the worth of their own products, irreplaceable valuables would have been sold to adorn the home of English aristocrats or rich Americans" (Emecheta 1982: 4). While the Nigerian-Biafran war stemmed from the failure of its leaders to govern its newly found country, the subtler influence of imperialist influence is very clearly revealed in Emecheta's works. Emecheta's female character Debbie Ogedemgbe's spurning of her lover Alan Grey at the end of the text is a response that symbolizes to a large extent the damage done to the country by neo-colonial courtship:

Why, why should you want to take me along with you? To start patronizing me with your charity all over again?... I see now that Abosi and his like are still colonized. They need to be decolonized...No, I am not ready to yet to become the wife of an exploiter of my nation. (258)

She sees that the reality of neo-colonialism requires the continued efforts of decolonization.

The scrutiny of Abosi and his counterparts is an examination of Nigeria's male political leadership's need to decolonise itself from being further influenced by its former colonizers. Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986) urges the need to dismantle the encrustations of colonial hegemony, recognising that

the most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others. (16)

As such, victims of colonization and imperialism need to be liberated from their "inherited slave consciousness" which dominates their mental universe (Ngugi 1986: 102). Political leaders like Abosi and Momoh need to recognise that they are regressing into "neo-colonial puppets" (Gomo 2010: 39). Through the voice of her female protagonist, Emecheta indicates how Nigeria's independence was sold back to imperialism by the local elite put in power to rule Nigeria, 'loyal' to the imperialist. Their blind submission to imperialist rule, is rebutted scathingly by Emecheta, comparing this to the early patriots who fought against the colonialist, such as 'Matigari' (Ngugi) who fought for the justice and humanity of their people unlike Abosi and Momoh who were driven by their masculine desire for power.

Arundhati Roy articulates the idea of anti-colonialism best in her essay *Confronting Empire* (2004) where she proposes a purging of imperialist hegemony through various methods, that

our strategy should be not only to confront Empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance our sheer relentlessness —

and our ability to tell our own stories. Stories that are different from the ones we're being brainwashed to believe. The corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they're selling — their ideas, their version of history, their wars, their weapons, their notion of inevitability. Remember this: We be many and they be few. They need us more than we need them. (77)

Emecheta's characterisation of Debbie reflects Roy's argument as she shames Alan Grey in her refusal. Only when Abosi and his counterparts rid themselves of imperialist hegemony will they be able to recognise the mutilation of their nation's humanity and civilisation. In her novel's diatribe against the war Emecheta exposes the extent to which Nigeria's dispossession and its continuous vicious cycle of anarchy, poverty and disunity was a function of a lingering colonial legacy.

### **The representation of 'masculinist' political leadership**

Often, war is regarded as synonymous with masculinity, in its expression of violence and in the ability to wield power. While Nwapa, Emecheta and Adichie address the political economy of the Nigerian-Biafran war, that is to say the complex underlining structures involving patriarchal politics and economic gain, they also provide a glimpse into some of the inherent Nigerian social and cultural values that predispose the desire for masculine authority. One contention is that "war is invariably fought on two fronts: one against the enemy soldiers, the other against all women [and children] subjected to the combat" (Farrar 1985: 60). The victims of war are women and children. They unwittingly become the target of mutilation and rape, the object of aggression through "explicit sexual references and representations which permeate combat training" (60).

In *Never Again* (1975) and *Destination Biafra* (1982), Nwapa and Emecheta reveal the weaknesses of the Nigerian-Biafran political leaders as they unmask the savagery unleashed by their failed leadership, no longer embodying "the aspirations of the people for independence, political liberty and national dignity" (Fanon 1967: 133). In *Never Again* (1975), Kal grows increasingly distant from Kate and her husband, Chudi. Although he was once their close friend, he seems to be becoming an "aider and abettor of the young bourgeoisie which is plunging into the mire of corruption and pleasure," (Fanon 1967: 133-34) as he becomes an active participant in

the Biafran war. The excerpt below gives us an idea of Nwapa's critical perception of nationalism, the masculine intimidation Kal uses against Kate and Chudi after he joins the army. To her sarcasm he responds

Kate! People like you should go into detention and remain there until the end of the war, and the State of Biafra fully established. You are too dangerous.' He meant what he said. I was afraid, genuinely afraid. He believed in Biafra. I had believed too. But that was too long ago...The good news. Our gallant mercenary who was supposed dead was alive. We had just received sophisticated weapons from Europe. The name of the donor was top secret. 'But that was not news,' I thought, but I controlled myself. I had my children to look after so I didn't want to be detained. Kal meant every word he said.

(Nwapa 1975: 2-3)

The woman in the novel takes the position of sceptic because she is no longer caught up in the patriotism that generated the war. This allows her a degree of perceptiveness that Kal could never have but she holds her tongue because she has children to protect. The idea that Kal would have his friends thrown in gaol emphasizes the dehumanizing power of war and of the nationalism that instigates it. The fear Kate and Chudi have of their former friend shows the depressing consequences of nationalist fervour. Although he was one of Chudi's best friends, "we began to be afraid of him and to see less of him." (Nwapa 1975: 20) because "When you eventually cornered him, he became very angry and threatened to hand you over to the Army or detain you. (Nwapa 1975: 21) The relationship deteriorates, as the prospect of victory gets dimmer. But the worse the prospects, the more fanatical Kal becomes. He will brook no thought of defeat and will not help to evacuate women and children. (31-2). Finally Kal becomes a major, but when was Kal trained? "His shoulders showed he was a major. Wonders would never cease. Kal, a major. A lot could happen in one short week. Anything was possible in Biafra..." (80) The promotion of a civilian to major shows just how badly the war was going. Fanaticism was all that was required to be in Ojukwu's inner circle.

In the depiction of Kal, Nwapa critiques the cronyism that existed during Ojukwu's rule and the Nigerian-Biafran war in general. Although Ojukwu's regime had claimed to provide refuge for the Igbo people through the declaration of Biafra, the reality was far from the promised free nation. Ojukwu's regime stooped to the

same level of corruption, favouritism, greed and desire for power as the Nigerians. The portrayal of Kal's comfort and power in his newly acquired title as major in Ojukwu's army is juxtaposed with Kate's cynical appraisal of collective misfortune, such as the senseless deaths of Biafran men who were called to fight without arms. One of the main factors in the failure of both the Nigerian and Biafran governments was the greed of their political leaders. *Never Again* thus depicts the folly of General Ojukwu's and General Gowon's war, through the depiction of one soldier's deterioration under the influence of power and authority.

Buchi Emecheta in *Destination Biafra* (1982) echoes Nwapa's contempt for Nigeria's political leadership. The political leaders are given different names – General Gowon is referred to as Saka Momoh and General Ojukwu is renamed Chijioke Abosi, and she suggests that the military government's takeover to cleanse Nigeria of its corrupt civilian leaders fell into the same trap from which it claimed to free Nigeria. Emecheta deftly describes the rationalization by which the generals, faced with civil disturbance, see that calm can only be restored by a coup, and how quickly this rationalization can lead to murder

The only sure solution must be for all politicians, the ministers including Dr Ozimba himself and Nguru Kano, to be killed — instantly and without pain if possible, but it had to be done. All that remained was to organise the details... It was agreed that the Yoruba soldiers were to take care of the corrupt Eastern Ibo politicians, while the Ibo soldiers would see to the Yoruba West. That way, there was no danger of any of the politicians being spared or escaping.

(Emecheta 1982: 61)

Although not a single top Igbo politician was killed in the actual coup, creating the suspicion that it was an Igbo plot to take over Nigeria's governance, Emecheta invents a scenario in which Abosi and Momoh, who were fighting on the same side to create a just and peaceful Nigeria, end up on opposite sides because each believes that he is the better candidate to rule Nigeria. The noble and commendable desire for a One Nigeria ends disastrously in Momoh and Abosi's power struggle.

For Emecheta the civil war is a competition of manhood, the struggle for the nation reduced to a virtual fist-fight between two men struggling for dominance, the dream of a new, unified Nigeria abandoned. Momoh states "that stupid man [Abosi]

probably thinks I am a coward, that I am too frightened to fight” (153). He proceeds “to starve [Biafra] into surrendering” (184). Emecheta notes that although Momoh knew that “its not a nice thought, fighting people through their bellies” he rationalizes that the goal was to “make their leader give up the struggle” (155). Emecheta portrays Abosi<sup>13</sup> with equal contempt as she depicts his need to fight the Biafran war despite the starvation he was inflicting on his people. His stand was “if [they] ever [gave] in at all...[they] must do so with weapons in [their] hands, honourably — not begging to be spared. [They] [had] pride, [they] [had] dignity” (244). Abosi “would rather the enemy took Biafra in ashes [than] in slavery” (183). The Nigerian-Biafran war was the reflection of a feud between two men who could not find a peaceful solution but instead chose to demarcate geographical boundaries in a masculine desire for domination: “this so-called civil war was costing the country dear money and manpower, yet the two warring leaders seemed to be blind to see” (155).

Through the death of Abosi’s baby, Emecheta symbolizes the premature conception and end of the Biafran nation. The baby’s death also foreshadows the death of innocent children during the war, as a result of Abosi’s arrogance and insistence of fighting. The experience of Abosi and his wife watching their unborn baby’s life slip away without being able to do anything mirrors the eventual defeat Biafra faces. It is uncertain if General Ojukwu experienced a loss of a child during the Biafran war, but Emecheta uses miscarriage as a symbol of Ojukwu’s distorted desires for Biafra – prematurely taking the life of his ‘fictional’ child just as the lives of innocent children were taken away.

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<sup>13</sup> <sup>13</sup> Colonel Chuwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu’s *The Ahiara Declaration: The Principles of the Biafran Revolution* (1969) is a good example of the failure of the Nigerian-Biafran elite leaders. In this manifesto, Ojukwu justifies his reasons for secession that “in 1966, some 50,000 of us [Igbo] were slaughtered like cattle in Nigeria. In the course of this war, well over one million of us have been killed. Last year, some bloodthirsty Nigerian troops for sport murdered the entire male population of a village,” living in disillusionment that Biafra was a success, “today, as I look back over our two years as a sovereign and independent nation, I am overwhelmed with the feeling of pride and satisfaction in our performance and achievement as a people. Our indomitable will, our courage, our endurance of the severest privations, our resourcefulness and inventiveness in the face of tremendous odds and dangers” (Ojukwu, 2). If the pogroms described by Ojukwu were bad, it was nothing in comparison to the fatalities of the Nigerian-Biafran war, the death and starvation of millions due to Ojukwu’s relentless pride (which incidentally he mentions in the opening lines of the manifesto) and pursuit of power skilfully caricatured by Emecheta through the representation of Abosi.

Emecheta is no less damning of Saka Momoh. Although Momoh's wife Elizabeth has the best facilities to deliver her baby, "[their] child did not survive" (203). Momoh is

shown the monstrosity that had been inhabiting his wife's body. It resembled a giant frog more than any human he had ever seen, he thought. It must be a curse. He could not have been responsible for this thing. The deformed piece of humanity was wrapped with its afterbirth and quietly destroyed. (203)

There is an obvious parallel between Momoh's refusal to accept responsibility for his deformed child and his inability to recognise the devastation he has created in Biafra. Momoh's dead baby is also an embodiment of the many lives sacrificed in the Biafran war, a massacre that remains a grim mockery of Momoh's initial enthusiastic "A new Nigeria, where there would be no corruption, no fighting in the streets." (60).

### **Rape: The War on Women**

There are many practical reasons why women became less and less attracted to the war of independence. Women and children suffered most from the war – from both sides. While women had to contend with the starvation of their families and the enormous toll on children from famine, they suffered the constant threat of rape, even from their own armies. Jane Bryce's analysis of Nwapa's *Never Again* (1975) and Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982) in her article, *Conflict and Contradictions in Women's Writing on the Nigerian Civil War* (1991), declares somewhat inadequately: "the frontline for women, now as then, is still the domestic" (41). Clearly, Nwapa and Emecheta do not merely concentrate on the survival aspects of the war but also address central factors such the masculine desire motivating the conflict as well as the casualties resulting from this desire for power and domination. One of the more horrific outcomes of war, for women, is the threat of rape, a violent, calculated act meant to humiliate and dominate, a distortion of masculinity, male desire and power.

Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern in *Why Do Soldiers Rape? Masculinity, Violence, and Sexuality in the Armed Forces in the Congo (DRC)* (2009) theorise two categories for rape; lust rape as a result of male biological desire and rage rape also known as evil rape which stems from an intense hate and aversion meant to humiliate the dignity of a particular group of people. Women are most at risk because they are

not only objectified as war pickings but also seen as carriers and reproducers of national and cultural identity. Humiliating and torturing women through rape during war represents domination not only of enemy women but also of enemy men. War rape is a representation of militarized masculinity, a 'feminization' and shaming of the enemy on many levels, the family, the society and the nation at large. It

stems from a sense of moral disengagement that accompanies the climate of warring and violence in which they have been living; previously unthinkable behaviour becomes conceivable and even neutralized through the dehumanization and "normalization" of violence and killing... violence seems to create its own momentum and constructs its own moral economy [or lack of thereof]... "Evil" rapes are the particularly brutal acts of sexual violence, involving mutilations and sometimes the subsequent killing of victims... a need to destroy, to destroy the dignity, the human dignity of a person... to sully them" (Baaz 2009: 510-11).

*Destination Biafra* (1982) and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) depict the mutilation, murder and humiliation endured by women who suffered war rape during the Nigerian-Biafran civil war, as when Debbie Ogedemgbe and the women she is with are raped by Nigerian soldiers. Although Debbie tries to explain to the soldiers that she herself was a Nigerian soldier, they sneer at the idea of a female soldier, convinced that she was a Biafran, and subject her and the women with her to horrifying brutality and violence. This scene in the text is grotesque and terrifying, as they rape and murder a pregnant woman cutting her open and killing her unborn baby. (Emecheta 1982: 133-36)

In *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007), Ugwu recollects raping a bar girl when he was a child soldier during the war and soon after the war is over, discovers his sister's experience of war rape when he returns to his village as the horror of his own bestiality returns to haunt him. In *Destination Biafra* war rape is used as an ethnic cleansing tool, to annihilate as well as humiliate the enemy. There is a clear 'moral disengagement' from what is wrong or right in this sexualised violence. Clearly, Momoh and Abosi's (Gowon and Ojukwu's) rage against each other's desire for power is seen filtering down through their respective military regimes, where an innocent pregnant woman, young boy child and unborn baby are victims of this undulated masculine rage, the passion to mutilate those who pose a threat to them. In

*Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007), the women are victims of soldiers who embody “the sexually potent fighter” who proves his masculinity through his sexual ability through dominating female victims. As much as the women writers write about the pain, suffering and sheer horror of war, they also represent an awakening of the female perspective, the questioning of the male discourse of nationalism that brought about the bitter series of battles and disasters that destroyed millions of people.

### **Womanism, Women and War**

Womanist theory encompasses the racist, sexist and class issues faced by women of African descent and other women of color. Layli Philips explains that

To be a womanist, one must identify one’s cultural roots and experience oneself as a cultural or ethnic being rather than a racial being, but one must also be able to see oneself and one’s people as a part of a larger global body defined by common humanness. Such identification preserves valuable streams of difference for the benefit of all humanity, while simultaneously detaching these streams of difference from particular bodies and identities. From this ground, people can begin the process of struggling for commonweal at the successive levels of community as defined by the womanist— from one’s own group, to all humanity, to livingkind, to Earth, to the universe, to all the realms of creation.... “Who can be a womanist?” is anybody and everybody,

(Philips 2006: xxxvi)

While Philips communicates the need to recognise one’s cultural, ethnic or in the case of Nigeria, its tribal roots, she emphasises the need for common human identification, a refusal to essentialize. To Alice Walker, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi and Cleonora Hudson-Weems, women of African descent need to take concrete social, economic, and political steps to ensure the enforcement of human rights. While they acknowledge the sexist oppression women have faced, womanist theory sees this in the context of the economic and racial oppression both men and women face.

The military regimes of the Nigerian-Biafran war were an extension of their political leaders General Gowon and General Ojukwu. Gowon and Ojukwu’s militarism had led to Nigeria’s bloodbath and Nigeria’s women and children were its principal victims, innocently murdered to feed their disillusioned leaders’ desire for

power. Consequently, Nwapa's Kate and Emecheta's Debbie interrogate the fallacy of the tribal patriotism flourishing during the civil war. Kate questions the war with a fiercely determined view of the future:

Why we are all brothers, we were all colleagues, all friends, all contemporaries, then, without warning, they began to shoot, without warning, they began to plunder and to loot and to rape and to desecrate and more, to lie, to lie against one another. What a secret was proclaimed on the house tops. What holy was desecrated and abused. NEVER AGAIN. (Nwapa1975: 73)

Kate rejects Kal's propaganda about the war and the myth of Biafra's success in the battlefield. She prepares her family to evacuate, disregarding any implications that she and her family are saboteurs. It is in experiencing the brutality and wickedness surrounding the war that she declares that 'never again' – the point and title of the novel – should such a travesty occur. Kate's questioning of this collapse shows the emerging womanist no longer misled by the dream of Biafra, but struggling to conceptualise a scenario where "Africana men and Africana women are and should be allies, struggling as they have since the days of slavery for equal social, economic, and political rights as fellow human beings in the world," free of division (Hudson-Weems in Phillips 2006: 43).

While Kate challenges the patriarchal, bureaucratic structure of the military's leadership in her rebuttal of Kal's enthusiasm, Emecheta challenges this masculine discourse in a slightly different way. *Destination Biafra* (1982) has been viewed as "an intervention in the masculine tradition of records of the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970) [...] [Emecheta's] intervention concentrates on recording the women's war, rescuing such experience from oblivion" (Wisker 2000: 150). She places Debbie Ogedemgbe as the central character of her narrative, a woman who joins the army to contribute constructively to her nation's growth, only to later rebuff its regime and political leadership when she realises its corruption. Unlike other educated been-to<sup>14</sup> women that are often placed within the domestic sphere of the national discourse, Debbie refuses to be subjected to such a situation:

If her parents thought they could advertise her like a fatted cow, they had another think coming. She would never agree to a marriage like theirs, in

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<sup>14</sup> 'Been-to' is a colloquial expression used to call Nigerians who have had the opportunity to study and live abroad.

which two were never equal... Yes, she would join the army. If intelligent people and graduates were beginning to join the ranks of the Nigerian Own Queen's Regiment, she intended to be one of them. It would be more difficult for a woman, she knew, and the daughter of a minister at that, but she was going to fight. She was going to help the Nigerian army — not as a cook or a nurse, but as a true officer! (Emecheta 1982: 45)

Emecheta uses this paradoxical idea of Debbie joining the military as a rebellion against the traditional expectation of her duty as daughter and wife. Her strength is emphasized when she is raped – she leaves the army and refuses to bear the stigma of the attack.

The repercussions of rape for the woman are shame, humiliation and condemnation. Yet, Emecheta reformulates the concepts of womanhood /motherhood through Debbie's refusal to be labelled as tainted because it was "through no fault of her own [that] she was a tarnished woman" (159). She refuses to marry for protection and wait in vain hope that people will forget that she "the Ogedemgbe girl was raped" but chooses to go "to Abosi, to warn him not to let himself be carried away by personal ambition to such a degree that he forgets his original aim...before he allows outside influences to get the better of him" (159). Debbie rejects her mother's plans "to build a new image ... and wait for the right man" (159). Here, the woman not only reclaims autonomy for herself but also rejects being bound to the home front since the home was "the original site on which the hegemonic project of nationalism was launched" (Chatterjee 1993: 147).

In fact, it is through this horrendous experience of rape that Debbie decides to reveal the fallacy of Abosi and Momoh's rule. In her attempt to bring peace talks to both Nigerian and Biafran leaders, Debbie "was no longer wearing her uniform, it hadn't done her much good so far anyway" (Emecheta 1982: 161). Removing her uniform is Debbie's rejection of the male regime and the beginning of her attempts to take matters into her own hands. It signifies the stripping away of hegemonic strategies that construct and rule women's lives during war, the dissented female perspectives movement towards emancipation, an emancipation that encompasses the well-being of an entire society.

Emecheta is particularly interested in the women's capacity to overcome the traumatic event of rape to take control of their lives. Debbie in *Destination Biafra*, Gwendolen in *The Family* and Nko in *Double Yoke* all demonstrate truly remarkable resilience in overcoming the experience of rape to develop strong virilised and self-affirming lives. The prevalence of rape in war makes Debbie's experience particularly resonant – she demonstrates the potential for a raped country to rise up and confirm its ability to overcome the adversity of war. This is an interesting perspective on the myth of the fatherland – the country that is raped by war is more woman than father, and like a woman demonstrates a unique capacity to re-orient and recuperate her dignity and strength.

Just as Kate chooses to reject's Kal's fanaticism, Debbie's emancipation is evident in her actions to thwart Abosi from smuggling arms into Biafra and his eventual escape. Rage is a common emotion exhibited by the female characters in Igbo women's writings when they observe the colossal damage of the civil war. As Kate raged in *Never Again* (1975) about the atrocities and destruction that enveloped the lives of the people of Ugwuta, Debbie's similar rage is seen in her attempt to stop Abosi as

she saw the white Mercedes being hurried into the plane, followed by the other Abosi cars and several hurriedly tied packages and bundles.

A hot uncontrollable anger enveloped her, making her sweat and shiver at the same time. To do so betrayed, by the very symbol of Biafra! She remembered the image of the young mother raped and then pounded to a pulp by those inhumane soldiers; she recalled the death of Ngbechi and his little brother Ogo, who wanted plantain and chicken stew and could take no more... Abosi must not escape! He must not be allowed to escape and leave all the believers of his dream... Like a good captain, Abosi should die honourably defending his ship. Her mind was made up. No man, not even Abosi, was going to make a fool of her, a fool of all those unfortunate mothers who had lost their sons, the hopes of their families. (Emecheta 1982: 257)

Emecheta likens Abosi's escape to Ojukwu's, to comment on the appalling abandonment by Biafra's leader. In many ways, Debbie's attempt to stop Abosi indicates the assertion of female independence and power, the refusal to accept the

man's disregard for the sufferings of the people. Her assertiveness shifts power towards the female as the weakness of leadership is revealed. The 'female' emancipation of characters like Debbie Ogedemgbe is "part and parcel of true decolonization, and as a prerequisite for the growth and success of the nation" (Adams 2001: 294).

In line with this idea, Igbo women writers challenge the male discourse of nationalism in their representation of female characters as patriots. Kate (*Never Again*), Debbie (*Destination Biafra*), Olanna (*Half of a Yellow Sun*) and Kainene (*Half of a Yellow Sun*) are represented as patriots who form their individual 'ideologies' of life and survival during the war. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Matigari* (1989) reflects the fervour, pride and commitment the patriots of old had for their people, land and culture. These patriots were resistance fighters who defended their land against the colonialist, individuals who fought battles for freedom, not enticed by the 'rewards' meted by their oppressors. Kate, Debbie, Olanna and Kainene are female patriots who fight for justice and survival. Their patriotism reflects a commitment to an "affirmed connectedness to the entire community and the world, rather than separation" which seems to be advocated by the masculine political leadership (Phillips 2006: 18). These female characters fight to keep their families and communities together, battling various forms of danger during the civil war to ensure survival.

In *Destination Biafra* (1982), despite rape and her observation of death and starvation, Debbie takes on a mission to save Nigeria from the hands of its two leaders bent on tearing the nation to pieces. Buchi Emecheta states in her conversation with Oladipo Joseph Ogundele that, "if there is a character that I like in my books, it is Debbie Ogedemgbe in *Destination Biafra*. I think that she is still my best character and the one that I would like to identify with...In *Destination Biafra*, she is a woman who could handle guns and she protected all those women and trekked on the long journey from Agbor to Ibuza in the Asaba area...I admire women like Debbie" (Ogundele 1996: 448). In fact, Debbie resembles Ngugi's *Matigari*, her patriotic nature evident in her refusal to leave with her colonial lover Alan Grey, choosing instead to "stay and mourn with [Nigeria] in shame" (258). The desire to put the needs of her country and people first is also seen in her decision to care for the children orphaned by the war, to "help bring up with my share of Father's money.

And there is my manuscript to publish” (258). It is pertinent that Debbie’s choice to use her father’s money to raise the orphans, is an act of atonement for Samuel Ogedemgbe’s embezzlement, thus suggesting the role to be played by women in the necessary restructuring of Nigeria.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Adichie uses the metaphor of twins to explore female heroism in the war. Woven into the fabric of the Nigerian-Biafran war story, Olanna and Kainene are enigmatic female characters who show great strength and courage in the war-wracked nation. While very different physically and temperamentally, their biological attachment and loyalty to each other despite betrayal and mistrust is contrasted with post-colonial Nigeria’s fractious attempts at unity. For Olanna, although she is initially captivated by her partner Odenigbo’s charisma and revolutionary zeal, her first hand experience of the ethnic tension and violence of the war changes her attitude, yet makes her resilient. She quickly adapts to the poverty in Biafra, queuing up in relief centres to get food, practicing runs to the underground bunkers in the event of an air-raid, learning how to make soap out of ash and even teaching children in school. Unlike her mother, who chooses to leave Nigeria at the first sign of trouble, Olanna refuses the ticket to London her mother offers but chooses to stay with Odenigbo and Baby. Unlike their parents’ marriage based on wealth and prestige, Olanna and Kainene rejects the notion of being “meat ... so that suitable bachelors will make the kill” (Adichie 2006: 59). The twins refusal to leave Nigeria during the war with money and gold, unlike their parents, signifies a deep attachment to land and heritage. It reveals the female hero as a person striving for ways to keep ones dignity and humanity intact.

On the other hand, Adichie’s Kainene resembles Emecheta’s Debbie in regard to her fighting spirit. Her foresight is seen in her wisdom to set up a refugee camp for the people:

A van delivered bags of *garri* to the house, and Kainene asked Harrison not to touch them because they were for the refugee camp. She was the new food supplier.

‘I’ll distribute the food to the refugees myself and I’m going to ask the Agricultural Research Centre for some shit,’ she told Richard.

‘Shit?’

‘Manure. We can start a farm at the camp. We’ll grow our own protein, soya beans, and *akidi*.’

‘Oh.’

‘There’s a man from Enugu who has fantastic talent for making baskets and lamps. I’ll have him teach others. We can create income here. We can make a difference! And I’ll ask the Red Cross to send us a doctor every week.  
(Adichie 2006: 318)

Kainene shifts her focus from making business deals for her own gain to looking for ways to develop economic sustenance for the people in her refugee camp. The development of her character in the novel does not merely focus on her enterprise but also emphasises her patriotic spirit when she boldly decides to trade with the people across the border. Despite being aware of the dangers surrounding her mission, Kainene makes a conscious choice to put the needs of the people in her refugee camp first, a great contrast to the deficiency of political leaders like Ojukwu and Gowon. To drive home this point, Kainene does not return from trading, but disappears, leaving an impasse at the end of the novel. This ‘impasse’ frames the questions Adichie seems to be formulating throughout her narrative. One reading of Kainene’s disappearance is the confirmation that loss was a common thing during war. Yet it also reminds the reader of the predicament of Nigeria’s unmapped future. Olanna’s manic pursuit of Kainene is perhaps Adichie’s way of representing present day Nigerians as still scrambling to find a footing after Biafra.

The Igbo female character is inextricably linked to the nation. Yet it is clear through the representation of womanist characters like Kate, Debbie, Olanna and Kainene that while they refuse to be placed in the private, domestic realm, they have no desire to be appropriated by the discourse of nationalism. What then, is the position taken by Igbo women writers? A comment made by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi in her article *Women in Nigerian Literature* (1988) may perhaps help sum up the female position in nationalistic discourse. She states that

Nigeria is male, a fact that is daily thrust in myriad ways on the Nigerian woman. An example of this cultural aspect is the national anthem with its incredibly divisive call on compatriots to serve their fatherland in the tradition of past heroes. The belligerent tone with its macho-masculinity excludes more

than half the population of the country— women and all the children, the country's future. Is it a wonder then that the country is a shambles when “he” has failed to solicit the help of its “better half” and his offspring for pacific pursuits, for the betterment of the country?...what allegiance does father — Nigeria expect from his daughters?” (Ogunyemi 1988: 60)

Evidently, this “macho-masculinity” has culminated in Nigeria's continuing chaos. Nwapa, Emecheta and Adichie are in accord with Ogunyemi in questioning this masculinist picture of the fatherland. The contempt with which this is expressed leaves us with the impression that Igbo women question the role thrust unto them to pick up the shattered pieces of their nation. Igbo women writers reject the definition of Nigeria as fatherland on one hand and their place on the pedestal of ‘Mother Africa’ on the other moving towards the concept of a pan-African identity.

## **Conclusion**

These three novels indicate that Igbo women writers have an important but little recognised role in commenting on the masculinist nature of nationalism and the historic failure of pan-Igbo tribalism. They expose the ways in which male desire for power and autonomy has resulted in the dereliction of humanity and the civil war. By refusing to be swallowed up by nationalism they display a different kind of heroism, one that is essentially womanist in that it is not limited to critiquing the oppression of women but rather sees the role of women in restoring the nation for the benefit of all. The representation of the weaknesses of the male characters and the violence meted out on women and children can be seen to emerge from, and consolidate a vision of pan-Africanism, however utopian, a sense that African futures lie beyond the fixation on colonial borders and a cooperation between men and women in building a viable nation.

# CHAPTER 6

## Post-War Nigeria: Corruption and the Modern Slave Trade

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After the Biafran war post-war Nigeria became a site of political chaos as successive military and civilian governments vied for power. This chapter will argue that the effect of such mismanaged political leadership and the encroachment of foreign influences created a space for the introduction of capitalism and neo-liberalism, increasing corruption and widening the socio-economical gap between the rich and the poor. ‘Corruption’ and ‘poverty’ describe much of the Nigerian socio-economic reality, a theme explored through the representation of male characters by Igbo writers to demonstrate the devastating effects of chasing after the power of the Nigerian currency, the naira. Buchi Emecheta’s *Naira Power* (1982), Ifeoma Okoye’s *Men without Ears* (1984), Promise’s Okekwe’s *House of Chaos* (1996), Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani’s *I do not come to you by chance* (2009), all expose the deep levels of corruption and criminality in present-day Nigeria. By an analysis of Akachi Ezeigbo’s *Trafficked* (2008), Abidemi Sanusi’s *Eyo* (2009) and Chika Unigwe’s *On Black Sister’s Street* (2009) this chapter will then show the way in which high levels of poverty and the influence of a neo-liberal state have both opened Nigeria and its women to the global slave trade of sex trafficking.

In the previous chapter, we located our discussion within the framework of Fanon and Nkrumah's respective analyses on neo-colonialism. Pertinent to our discussion here is Nkrumah's assertion that

neo-colonialism is also the worst form of imperialism. For those who practise it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress ... neo-colonial States derive their authority to govern, not from the will of the people, but from the support which they obtain from their neo-colonialist masters. They have little interest in developing education. (Nkrumah 1965: xi-xv)

While Nkrumah coined the term to refer to the 'neo-colonial' dominance of Africa by the West, this quote reveals the way in which newly independent African states became neo-colonial in their turn, simply occupying the colonial infrastructure of their departing masters. Nkrumah's book is a damning indictment of the failed nationalism of newly independent colonies. This is particularly so in Nigeria where in both the civilian and military governments' "intense competition for the control of political power and the attendant material benefits, and corruption, [are] the bane of the democratic experiments" (Dibua 2006: 89). It is this combination of greed, lust for power and external former colonial influence that exposed Nigeria to global economic policies. Such policies favored those occupying decision-making positions within the ruling government while the public suffered from scarcity and impoverishment. Unquestionably, Nigeria's most profitable natural resource is its oil, yet paradoxically its population remains deprived, even facing fuel shortages, as its leaders line their pockets with the country's oil profits. One could go as far as to say that Nigeria's numerous military coups are just one of the many ways in which control is gained over the lucrative oil resources, raising the personal wealth of those in power while decreasing the welfare of the people.

Nigeria's global economic policies, particularly its Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPS) established during the Babangida administration, are a clear example of Nigeria's enthusiastic participation in the free market economy, and its endorsement of an authoritarian model of neo-liberal capitalism. The central component of the Structural Adjustment Programs introduced was "the deregulation of the Nigerian economy through the peripheralization of the state and the ascendancy of market forces" and

a cardinal aspect of this deregulation is the massive devaluation of the naira through the agency of market forces ... monetary contraction and interest reform, budget restraint and tax adjustment ... a credit squeeze and economic liberalization that will grant ascendancy to market forces. (Dibua 2006: 253-4)

Babangida claimed that the SAPs would create economic productivity, lessening the reliance on oil, while privatization and the commercialization of the public sector would increase productive investments to benefit the people in the long run. Yet, the actual consequence of unregulated markets was rampant social inequality. As Harrison puts it

Africa/globalization is centrally a story of neoliberal global social engineering: a project to envision, compel, encourage and socialize African states into a trajectory of marketisation, ... neo-liberalism might be thought of as an academic synonym of more straightforward terms such as laissez-faire, marketisation, or rolling back the state. (Harrison 2008: 18-9)

In this view, economic globalization has been the source of rampant poverty. This was particularly true for Nigeria, where free markets led to destitution and deprivation. While the implementation of neo-liberal policies in Nigeria aimed to achieve economic improvement through an increase and diversification of the manufacturing sector, the reality was the continuation of the “long tradition of imperialism, an imperialism defined by a projection of the political good — whether called ‘civilisation’, ‘development’ or ‘good governance’” (Harrison 2008: 22), through the interference of the IMF and World Bank, generated by Nigeria’s failed military dictatorship. Therefore “in order to receive more loans and development aid, [Nigeria] [was] required to drastically cut back government expenditure, privatize state-owned companies, reduce inflation, charge fees for services like health care and education, and endeavor to create export-oriented economies rather than focus on the immediate needs of their people for food and essential services” (Maathai 2009: 50).

The cruelest military regime in Nigeria was the Sani Abacha regime. Taking over from Babangida, Abacha claimed to have shelved the Structural Adjustment Programs following protestations from Nigerians. In reality, this regime used “guided deregulation” as a euphemism for the continued misappropriation of profits. In sum, the introduction of SAP’s in Nigeria was “based on irrationality, mismanagement, and

corruption that characterized the indigenous rentier capitalist class who control the Nigerian state,” (Dibua 2006: 254), what Nigerian writers have called the pursuit of ‘naira power’. Nigerian male writers Helon Habila, Kachi A. Ozumba and Chris Abani give us a blistering demonstration of the extent of Nigeria’s decline into this ‘naira’ dereliction.

In the afterword of his award-winning novel *Waiting for an Angel* (2002) set in Lagos during the Abacha regime (in which the activist Ken Saro-Wiwa was killed), Helon Habila comments that

it was a terrible time to be alive, especially if you are young, talented and ambitious — and patriotic ... Every day came with new limitations, new prisons ... the only mission the military rulers had was systematically to loot the national treasury; their only morality was a vicious survivalist agenda in which any hint of disloyalty was ruthlessly crushed ... But the funny thing is that the military first entered Nigerian politics as messiahs, to save the people from the squandermania and blatant ethnic rivalries of the civilians (or so they claimed) ... Babaginda used bribery and corruption to rule, Abacha used plain, old-fashioned terror. There were more ‘official’ killings, arrests, and kidnappings in those five years than in all the other military years put together. Traditional rulers were deposed, newspapers were shut down and their publishers and editors arrested ... Most intellectuals had only three options: exile, complicity or dissent ... But with the killing of Saro-Wiwa, the world was scandalized ... What this story tries to do is to capture the mood of those year, especially the Abacha years: the despair, the frenzy, the stubborn hope, but above all the airless prison-like atmosphere that characterized them.

(223-9)

Through the reports of the journalist Lomba, Habila depicts the numerous individual arrests in Nigeria, while revealing the military regime’s<sup>15</sup> continuous deception as it loots the nation’s wealth and expatriates it to foreign banks. The conclusion to be

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<sup>15</sup> Habila’s attempt to account for this persecution faced under Nigeria’s military regime resembles Nuruddin’s Farah’s dictatorship trilogy *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979), *Sardines* (1981) and *Close Sesame* (1983) also known as “Variations of the Theme of African Dictatorship,” which witnesses the struggle amongst the people in Somalia under persecution and oppressive totalitarian rule. Loyaan, Soyaan, Median, Deeriye and their families’ experience of authoritarianism and governmental oppression under the Generalissimo mirrors Habila’s depiction of Nigeria under Abacha’s rule.

made from Habila's text is that the Nigerian experience is one of continuous repression where Nigeria "is a land of pygmies. We are like crabs in a basket; we pull down whoever dares to stand up for what is right," a nation of people whose attempts at growth is stunted, trapped and ultimately self-defeating (186). The journey 'up' and 'down' to the top of the 'crab basket' has become the stratagem of Nigerians negating horizontal, communal relationships. In Habila's *Measuring Time* (2007), Mamo's experiences in the village of Ketu also reveal the state of melancholy caused by the repression of corrupt neo-liberal Nigeria. As Wangari Maathai posits in *The Challenge for Africa* (2009), one feature of a neo-liberal system is the withdrawal of government-funded services like education. Mamo's career as a history teacher is short-lived as there aren't enough funds to keep the community school open, much less pay the teachers. Corruption is clearly manifested in the text as a way of life much to Mamo's dismay:

"[Mamo] realized what was going on. There were a bundle of cards on the mat before the youths, and when he looked closer he saw that they were ballot cards ... "We are voting already," Asabar said with a laugh. The three echoed the laughter as they dipped their thumbs into a blotter of ink before pressing them on the white square space next to the rooster logo on the ballot cards ... Mamo furiously turned on his cousin and said, "You could go to jail for that, do you know that? ... We have the police in our pockets ... "Yes, but so does the other party, which happens to be the ruling party and so has more clout than you. (Habila 2007: 202-3)

In combining the use of Mamo's biographical notes, letters and storytelling, Habila's novel is saturated with scathing insights on Nigerian politics, demonstrating the corruption from all spheres beginning with Mamo's wealthy politician father, to his work as a palace biographer where he is asked to twist the history of Ketu by the Waziri, and the demand to falsify vote counting<sup>16</sup> by opposing political parties.

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<sup>16</sup> Ben Okri's famous abiku trilogy *Famished Road* (1991), *Songs of Enchantment* (1994) and *Infinite Riches* (1998) also depicts the struggles of Nigerians with poverty and corruption. Particularly interesting is the competition between opposing political parties attempting to gain votes. One such incident occurs when the milk given out to the people in the squatters by one political party causes poisoning and diarrhea. The party's claim was that the opposition contaminated the milk so that the people would vote for the opposition instead. Yet, to Azaro's thinking the party might have done it themselves to implicate their opponents. In either case, the ones that suffer are the people as they face political leaders who want to be elected for their own gain, regardless of the effects on the people they are commissioned to look after.

Chris Abani's *Graceland* (2004) conveys the social framework of bleak, putrid poverty and deprivation in the slums of Lagos through Elvis Oke's life. Elvis sings and dances for money near hotels and beaches in Lagos, which cater to a western holidaying crowd. His derelict living conditions seen through his threadbare and empty room serves as a reminder of the despair, dirt and decay of life in the hands of the military regime, "the smell of garbage from refuse dumps, unflushed toilets ... stained walls that had not seen a coat of paint in years ... the bare cement floor was a cracked and pitied lunar landscape ... a folding metal chair, brown and crisp with rust ... the wafer-thin mattress offered as much comfort as raffia mat" (4-5).

Kachi A. Ozumba's *The Shadow of a Smile* (2009) continues in the same vein, depicting corruption and bureaucratic injustice as Zuba is sent to jail for a crime he did not commit. Writing the early stages of his novel with a pencil and small notebook smuggled into prison when he was awaiting trial for a trumped up offence, Ozumba draws on his personal experience of the Nigerian justice, or rather 'injustice' system. Extortion is experienced at all levels, especially when Zumba is in prison. Bribery is the only means to survival and Mr and Mrs Egbetuyi who bribe the police to imprison Zuba represent the newly condoned unscrupulous behavior in Nigerian society where achieving one's selfish satisfactions is the ultimate aim: "there was neither anger nor hate in Mr Egbetuyi's face. There was a glow of triumph, and a muted grin of multiple meanings" (149). This spread of unexamined moral and unethical behavior is also condemned by Nigerian Igbo women writers, who see that the disastrous effects of neo-liberal policies and the criminal activities of successive governments have impoverished a country that could have been a world leader.

### **The Nigerian Male Character and Corruption**

The representation of exploitative, corrupt and amoral male characters by women writers is situated in a socioeconomic and political environment where poverty, the lack of basic needs and resources like food and education, inflation and devaluation of the naira due to corruption, are seen in every sphere of Nigerian life. Buchi Emecheta's *Naira Power* (1982), Ifeoma Okoye's *Men without Ears* (1984) and Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's *I do not come to you by chance* (2009) are attempts to explore "the turbulent course that the country has taken and the need for a spiritual

revolution” during the postwar era (Ogunyemi 1996: 289). In Ogunyemi’s reading these Igbo writers “have heard and heeded Nigeria’s call to duty, responding in their own way,” (293) exhibiting a collective “belief in the corrigibility of man [which] binds them together in a truly womanist vision” (292).

An intriguing stylistic device is that of placing the male characters in central roles while placing female characters on the periphery of the narrative, allowing them to critically comment on the intersections of politics and economics in postcolonial Nigeria from this marginal position, exposing the reality of the Nigerian experience of poverty, corruption, and greed for ‘naira’ power. This is exemplified in Buchi Emecheta’s *Naira Power* (1982), which employs the conversation between two female characters to communicate the repercussions of the unscrupulous methods of the government. Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani builds on this approach, as the docile figure of the mother is used to reprimand unethical and dishonorable behaviour. Thus, Emecheta, Okoye and Nwaubani’s fiction illustrates the paramount importance that Igbo women writers place upon questioning the masculinist legacy of neo-colonialism, exposing socio-economic and political marginalization. This endorses their womanist ambition, which will lead to a “declaration that they too are legitimate heirs in the household, that they are daughters-of-the-soil. They have no intention of letting man deprive them of their heritage” (Ogunyemi 1996: 293).

Igbo women writers suggest that one of the circumstances breeding the amoral Nigerian character is Nigeria’s immense levels of corruption initiated by its leadership and emulated by the rest of society. This is played out by Okoye’s *Men without Ears* (1984) and Nwaubani’s *I do not come to you by chance* (2009), through the dichotomy of the figures of the ‘accumulationist’ and the ‘developmentalist.’ By this, Okoye and Nwaubani not only attempt “to generate public awareness and understanding” but also offer an alternative remedy for social ills through the developmentalist philosophy (Ogunyemi 2006: 25). In *Men without Ears* Uloko’s race to accumulate money and power leads him rapidly to self-destruction. The unaffordable extravagant party he throws for Chigo’s return, the six thousand naira he ‘humbly’ promises for the church fund-raising ceremony, his father’s unnecessarily elaborate funeral, the insincere donation he makes to charity, and the expensive lace he dons for social events, are all publicity stunts meant to increase his fame and fortune because in “[Nigeria] what you wear matters a lot ... [it] will certainly earn

you immediate attention in offices and firms” (Okoye 1984: 83). Uloko’s actions reflect how “materialism, ostentation, and conformity” (140) had come to permeate Nigerian lives. Uloko is so preoccupied with getting ahead that he “was always borrowing money so as to keep up with the rich” (57). In fact, nicknames such as Young Millionaire, Chief Dr Engineer, Accountant and the Sea that Never Dies (Uloko) in the text indicate in a mildly allegorical way the dimension of corruption in the country. Through Uloko, Okoye depicts a degenerate society, fast depleting its ethical account.

The height of his depravity, despite remonstrance from his father and brother, occurs when Chigo attempts to enhance his business’s success by performing a ritual killing to harvest Nweke’s heart (a not uncommon practice in Nigeria). An interesting parallel can be made between Amos Tutola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) and Okoye’s text with regard to the use of body parts and materialism in Nigeria. The ‘complete gentleman’ in Tutuola’s text is a vitriolic satire of the development of western consumerism in the country. The ‘gentleman’ in reality is merely a skull, “every part of this complete gentleman in the market was spared or hired and he was returning them to the owners” while “paying them the rentage money” (20). In Okoye’s view this has evolved in present day Nigeria into an obsession with economic power that uses body parts for profit. Uloko is driven even to murder, doing anything to get money, relinquishing all moral accountability (Okoye 1984: 157).

Nwaubani’s ‘Cash Daddy’ gives us an idea of the corruption and disorder in Nigeria perpetrated through the ‘419’, a term used to describe internet fraud, after the number of the article in the Nigerian Criminal code referring to criminal activities dealing with fraud. While this form of crime began in the early eighties, with the decline of the Nigeria’s ‘booming’ oil economy, scamming<sup>17</sup> became a prime mode of defrauding innocent people across the globe from the 1990’s to early 2000. Nwaubani shows how this form of criminal behavior has developed in contemporary Nigeria, spreading from petty theft internally to international robbery. The expository nature of Nwaubani’s text has received attention from “security agencies, such as the FBI, Interpol, Scotland Yard and others ... are researching [her] book ... outside the

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<sup>17</sup> The nature of scamming has evolved from emails of lucrative business deals, rich individuals who need advanced payments to help access their money to hoodwinking ladies through internet dating as a means of receiving money. While most people have become more aware of such scams, there are those around the world who still remain ignorant to 419 devices and become easy prey.

realms of literature [which] gladdens [Nwaubani]” (Akubuiro 2011: 2). Her skillful depiction of Cash Daddy’s 419 empire, its cyber crimes and intricate inner workings is the reason the text has received international fame.<sup>18</sup> Nwaubani’s position as a writer is particularly interesting for the structural development of this discussion as she is also the niece of first generation Igbo woman writer Flora Nwapa. Nwaubani’s text serves to support my argument of the growth of literary awareness from one generation of women writers to another and the growth of a womanist philosophy that prioritizes female development as well as issues surrounding gender solidarity, political and socioeconomic reconstruction.

The concept of the *nouveau riche* in Nigeria is critiqued by Nwaubani, particularly the source of income for the newly wealthy in. Cash Daddy is described as a “boy who didn’t finish secondary school,” yet “he was moving up and down with the security guards as if he’s the head of state” (Nwaubani 2009: 86). The reality was that the educated only had “big grammar,” Cash Daddy owns the “big money” (86). Cash Daddy like Uloko is undeterred by scruples. Instead he condones his corrupt ways to Kingsley telling him proudly

I’ve been in this business [419] for many years now and I can tell you there are two things I will never do. I will never take another person’s life and I will never follow another man’s wife ... after all this your education ... what have you gained from it? ... Please don’t close my ears with all this rubbish talk about education ... I believe in real, live action. (126-7)

Cash Daddy’s twisted moral sensibility is paradoxical: while he thinks killing and adultery are wrong, stealing is not. Nwaubani seems to imply that his twisted values reflect the attitude of many Nigerians who justify their corruption as a lesser evil. The fact that Cash Daddy attempts to run for Abia State confirms Nwaubani’s view of Nigeria’s corrupt leadership. In fact, Cash Daddy’s venture into politics despite his lack of education echoes Chinua Achebe’s analysis of Nigeria’s inept, unscrupulous leadership. In *The University and the Leadership Factor in Nigerian Politics* (1988):

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<sup>18</sup> While Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani’s *I do not come to you by chance* (2009) is the first novel to concentrate on the crimes of ‘419’ internet scammers, we cannot overlook Unoma Azuah’s short story “Obtained by Trick” published in *The Length of Light: A Collection of Short Stories* (2008) recording similar 419 experiences in Nigeria. Zimbabwean female writer Petina Gappah’s short story *Our Man in Geneva Wins a Million Euros* (2009) also deals with a Zimbabwean man living in Geneva being conned into advance fee fraud by West African internet scamming syndicates who not only siphon him out of his merge life savings, but leave him with a debt of twenty-five thousand euros from fraudulent American bank cheques.

if we cannot compel greatness in our leaders, we can at least demand basic competence. We can insist on good, educated leaders while we wait and pray for great one ... One remarkable feature of Nigeria used to be that no one who ruled it in its first quarter century had been to university. Did that say anything about our national preoccupations and values? ... I do not suggest that the university is the only fountain of enlightenment and excellence ... But not to have had one university man in eight, and not in twenty-six years! (146-8)

Cash Daddy for example is corrupt, uneducated and incompetent. For Nwaubani, like Achebe, this says much about “our national preoccupations and values.” Similarly, Uloko’s “mad chase for naira and ostentation” drives his ambition to be one of the members of the Igwe’s cabinet (Okoye 43). Being part of the cabinet would be “financially profitable as it is prestigious” (Okoye 42). Therefore Okoye’s *Men without Ears* (1984) reveals that “disorder is so widespread that it has stretched its tentacles into the rural areas” (Ogunyemi 1996: 306).

Interestingly, both the texts (*Men without Ears* and *I do not come to you by chance*) refer to ears. In *Men without Ears* (1984), Uloko’s father tells Chigo that Uloko’s “type of life will bring him a premature death ... Uloko has come to the land of people without ears and is bent on cutting off his ears too” (Okoye, *Men Without Ears* 48-9). Both these amoral male characters turn a deaf ear to the reprobation of their actions and instead pursue a life of greed that inevitably leads to self-destruction and premature death. Uloko dies out of a guilty conscience for attempting to murder Nweke. On the other hand, Cash Daddy dies from eating poisoned meat, allegedly placed by the opposition party he was running against for governor.

Igbo writer Promise Okekwe’s character ‘Soul A’ in the short story “Nightmare Soul-Journey” (1996) is a replica of Uloko and Cash Daddy, “a business man who was very notable for floating six reliable airlines. He later became a famous politician ... [with] an insatiable libido ... he died of a heart attack” (85-6). Yet Okekwe takes her allegorical story a step further, highlighting Soul A’s agony in the afterlife. Despite his many attempts in “[calling] to Isaac and Jacob ... [and] the Saints ... [and] the mother of God,” his life ends with “a deafening scream as the fire caught up with him and the men dragged him away from the golden gate” (90). The

message is that while criminal, immoral acts may go unchecked in life, the price will be paid in their afterlife where there is no escape, bribery or corruptibility.

Okoye's *Men without Ears* (1984) champions the role of the developmentalists who are foils to accumulationists like Uloko and Cash Daddy driven by ambition, greed and power. In the opening pages of the narrative, Chigo professes a Pan-African identity declaring "during my first year at university, I listened to a moving lecture on Pan-Africanism and after that I saw myself as a Pan-African and no longer as a Nigerian," (Okoye 1984: 8). The voice of his conscience runs through the text, "guided by certain [moral and ethical] principles" that display his Pan-African convictions (108). He finds it "an insult to his integrity" being asked to falsify Young Millionaire's accounts declaring, "I'd be the last person to help anybody, even my own brother, to cheat the government ... it is against my principles ... My salary is enough for me" (109-110). This is based on Chigo's belief in the source of real happiness

does the accumulation of money and material wealth signify *success*? [...] Is money the only yardstick for *measuring success*? And is it always a *guarantee of happiness*? ... I think that you're successful only when you've achieved happiness and peace of mind. You can have money without being happy and without having peace of mind, can't *you*? [...] 'I maintain that a lot of money is not essential to happiness. You don't become happy merely because you have enough to gratify your desires. (emphasis added 63-4)

Chigo's principles do not fit with Uloko's because the race for naira power is not a tangible way of 'measuring' and 'guaranteeing' happiness. Thus, "Okoye's contribution to the palaver is straightforward: pinpoint the trouble spots without quibbling and set about writing (righting) them" (Ogunyemi 1996: 306). In the previous chapter, I allude to Nigerian Igbo women writers suggesting a Pan African identity as a form of unification for all Africans, an approach that Ogunyemi would call 'developmentalist.' In her efforts at 'righting' Nigeria's corrupt moral imbalance, Okoye suggests that this identity has a better chance of creating socioeconomic and political wellbeing than a framework of individualism.

Yet, Okoye's writing does betray some form of cynicism at the end of her novel with regard to Chigo's moral actions. In his endeavor to cover his brother's

attempt at murder, Chigo lies to the police and makes Nweke swear never to repeat his experience to anyone else. He realizes “a year before I could not have tried to hide the truth. To my dismay, I realized I was fast changing and must continue to do so as long as I remained with my people ... Luckily I still had enough for the air passage to Tanzania; I had made up my mind to leave my country for good” (158-9). While Okoye optimistically proposes action to be taken to redress corruption and greed in Nigeria, she also alerts the reader to the strong attraction of an amoral lifestyle. Whether the novel proposes detachment as a solution it is certainly the easy out for Chigo, who hastily departs.

Poverty and unemployment are two causes of corruption, a reflection of the state to which Nigeria’s corrupt leadership has brought the country. Buchi Emecheta’s *Naira Power* (1982) and Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani *I do not come to you by chance* (2009) explore the various conditions that lead their young male characters Ramonu and Kingsley into a life of crime. In her examination of Emecheta’s works, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi observes that

polygamous men who commit psychological violence on women are similar to uncaring and uncommitted military governments who play deadly games with the people they govern. Nigerian cultural politics must address this aspect of life to avert fierce confrontations between the sexes and/or the peoples and to ensure stability of the Nigerian family and nation. (1996: 224-5)

This leads us to understand the connection between behaviour in domestic environments and the problems of the nation. Likewise, Emecheta implies through Ramonu’s decline into criminal conduct, that “he was a victim of circumstances,” its root being the polygamous nature of his father Lemonu (Emecheta 1982: 43).

Lemonu takes on multiple wives, using the money he receives from his “promotion ... not by buying more food for his children, but by having [a] third wife,” a selfish man who “never even enquired after [his] children” (60-1). While Ramonu sleeps with his father’s second wife because he accidentally eats the love meat intended for Lemonu, the real cause of his moral backslide was Lemonu’s negligence, his constant “going on at [Ramonu] for wasting his money ... threatening

to remove him from school” because “he was not doing well at school” (63). Ramonu disappears from his family and reappears after five years as an affluent ‘business’ man, having “all the naira power a woman could ever want in this world” (81). Characteristically, Lemonu does not question his son’s display of wealth like Amina’s father (*Naira Power*) or Uloko’s father (*Men without Ears*), but rather enjoys his son’s riches especially when Ramonu pays the bride price for his fourth wife. Emecheta is reproving of Lemonu’s unquestioning behavior of the source of his son’s money, self-absorbed with his own lust and affluence through his multiple marriages.

Emecheta addresses two vital issues with regard to polygamous marriages and its effects on social behaviour – the effect on women and the effect on population. The establishment of polygamy as a status symbol for the *nouveau riche*, and the need to support large families as a result, are partly to blame for driving men into illegal businesses: “Nigerian men, the rich ones, never have enough children. They keep wanting more and more ... when they die, they want to show the world that they left thirty children” (40-2), which leads Auntie Bintu to exclaim “you see I think that if our men could have, or long for fewer children, this country would be so nice” (40). The argument is that “if the country had only to cope with, say, sixty or seventy million people, don’t you think the quality of life would be improved? That there would be fewer people on the streets, and most houses would be owned by just one family and not just be the type you lived in at Isalegangan where many families had to share one house?” (40-1). This implies better socioeconomic conditions with better distribution of resources among Nigerians decreasing the participation of men in illegal businesses such as Auntie Bintu’s own brother: “how could [Nurudeen] afford it [three wives] from one income ... He did all sorts of things he called ‘business’ ... something illegal. And all for what? Simply to maintain two other families” (59).

Building on the idea of improving quality of life through population control, Emecheta suggests that this also effects how family units are able to spend more time inculcating good moral behavior amongst their immediate members, particularly children. Since this area has been left unattended, the effects of this are the Ramonus of Nigeria who participate in any form of illicit business to gain material wealth. Emecheta drives home this point through Nurudeen’s indignation that “now, some stupid psychologist are claiming that we have more armed robbers in this part of the world just because they came from unhappy homes. Unhappy homes in most

cases meaning where there is more than one wife” (106). While there are other factors that drive men into illegal activities, Emecheta is quick to point out that this aspect of family life is often neglected as a source of moral misdirection.

The consequence of Ramonu’s illegality is extreme – a public torching – a common occurrence in neo-colonial Nigeria, although Ramonu was falsely accused of pick pocketing, “they have lynched the wrong man. I tried stopping them but they pushed me aside. You should have seen the crowd. They were so desperate to lynch the man they caught” (107). The ‘desperation’ of the crowd to lynch Ramonu connotes the wretchedness of the Nigerian socio-economic state. The torching of one individual who commits a crime seems to have an atoning effect for the crowd who are scuffling for some form of justice in a period where their political leadership and law enforcements are corrupt and unjust.

Ironically, justice does seem to be served when Ramonu’s body is burnt, much like the people he murdered for their body parts. Interestingly as well, unlike Okekwe’s Soul A whose body is consumed by the fires of hell after death, Ramonu “body [became] a blazing torch lighting up the greying day” while he was alive (14). Like Okoye and Nwaubani, Emecheta shows through Amina’s declaration “today, Auntie, is the day of the owner [God] who cannot be bought or bribed with naira. The Owner who sees and judges all things” (108), sending the message that amoral mortal actions have spiritual repercussions.

Emecheta’s use of two female characters to describe Ramonu’s torching and his past actions is a subtle method to communicate the gender inequality caused by placing naira power in men’s hands. Emecheta argues that the ‘naira power’ attained by men has further pushed women to the periphery of society. Amina, for instance, is silenced by her husband with: “why don’t you keep your mouth shut, Amina. You don’t have time to read the papers or listen to the news, so how do you think you can have any opinion about anything ... This is current affairs, and you are too busy with the children to have time to indulge in things like that” (106). Auntie Bintu, on the other hand, offers a very different possibility, vehemently exhorting Amina “I am a woman first ... I can afford to be myself ... I don’t have to pretend to be a nun or a mindless slave just because I bear a man’s name, and am his wife” (52).

While *Naira Power* (1982) addresses some of the domestic instabilities that lead Ramonu to his criminal lifestyle, Nwaubani's novel, *I do not come to you by chance* (2009) exposes the moral plight of her main character Kingsley who becomes a 419 criminal to escape poverty and unemployment. Plagued with his role as *opara* to provide for his family, Kingsley does not stumble upon the 419 criminal activities 'by chance' but adopts them intentionally. The title of the novel is a sentence in a scam email and Nwaubani suggests why men of full of potential like Kingsley find themselves in illicit activities – not by chance but by poverty.

'*Opara*' is an Igbo adjective used to define the position of the son, usually the first born son or the senior son within the Igbo family unit and Nwaubani uses the concept of the *opara* as a partial explanation of Kingsley's actions. There are two significant moments where Kingsley refers to himself as *opara*, at the beginning and the end of the novel. Significantly, both these scenes occur at the kitchen table where he has his meals. In Chapter 4 I argue that third generation Igbo woman writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's female character Kambili's development into a womanist character happens around the 'kitchen table' (Layli Philips), a neutral space for problem-solving situations resulting in social transformation. Likewise, a womanist reading can be applied to Nwaubani's use of the 'kitchen table' in *I do not come to you by chance* (2009) in which the essence of this chapter's moral argument lies. Layli Philips states

Dialogue permits negotiation, reveals standpoint ... shapes social reality.

Dialogue is the locale where both tension and connection can be present simultaneously; it is the site for both struggle and love. (Philips 2006: xxvii)

Nwaubani uses this woman-centered space to explain the provenance and development of Kingsley's involvement in the 419. It is also around the narrative scenes in the novel, which revolve around the kitchen table that we find Kingsley's moral dialogue leading him to challenge and redefine his role as *opara*.

Nwaubani shapes Kingsley's 'social reality' of poverty and unemployment, from the *egusi* soup he consumes. In the beginning, Kingsley describes his rightful claim as *opara* of the family, having "certain privileges ... as first son, [he] sat at the dining table and waited" for his mother to serve him his meal (Nwaubani 13). Instead of plunging into an immediate illustration of poverty, our

taste buds are teased through a detail description of *egusi* soup, “the soup should have been a thick concoction of *ukazi leaves*, chunks of dried fish and boiled meat, red palm oil, maggi cubes – all boiled together until they formed a juicy paste” (13). Instead, “what I had in front of me were a midget-sized piece of meat, bits of vegetable, and random specks of *egusi*, floating around in a thin fluid that looked like a polluted stream” (13). The meaning is clear, “this pitiful presentation was a reflection of the circumstances in our home. Life was hard. Times were bad” (13).

The description of food at the ‘kitchen table’ is cleverly employed by Nwaubani, indicating that hunger was just one of the many different ways Kingsley and his family suffered. While his father Paulinus had great aspirations for Nigeria at the wake of its independence, foreseeing that his children would become “engineers and doctors and lawyers and scientists,” the backbone of the nation, yet this turned out differently (10). Despite being an engineer himself, Paulinus “today, retired and wasted, he had nothing to show for it” (65). The reference to the educated in Nigeria as ‘wasted’ is significant as Nwaubani emphasises that it is the uneducated corrupt leadership that has squandered, exhausted and consumed Nigeria resources. Paulinus’s life of diabetes and high blood pressure, finally dying from the lack of proper medical care, is symbolic of the wasted body politic of Nigeria.

Thus, there is something both understandable and yet deplorable in Kingsley’s pursuit of a career as a scam artist. The struggle for emergency medical assistance for his father in a Nigerian government hospital due to financial constraints, his unemployment<sup>19</sup>, the eventual death of his father and the grief from losing his girlfriend to a richer man, lead Kingsley to join his relative Cash Daddy in internet fraud because he begins to believe that “the only power to change anything that needed changing was the power of cash” (183). At his father’s grave Kingsley assumes the full role of the *opara*, he realizes he has to provide for his family through any means possible as he was unable to get a job as an engineer, “right there and then, a switch flipped inside my head. Indeed my father was no more. And it was my responsibility to start caring for the people who were still here. There was nothing stopping me now” (147). In this decision Kingsley, like Okoye and Emecheta’s Uloko

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<sup>19</sup> Third generation Moroccan writer Laila Lalami’s *The Secret Son* (2009) reveals similar struggles to those faced by Kingsley in her young graduate male character Youssef El Mekki whose attempt to find a decent government job for himself proves unfruitful and impossible. This is because his penury does not afford him the ability to bribe someone to get a job.

and Ramonu, loses all sense of moral value, laundering money from gullible people, having casual sex rather than committing to a stable relationship and lying to keep continuing his illicit ventures. However the ambivalence accompanying this amoral lifestyle is telling.

The rage depicted at the kitchen table against his brother Godfrey who demands to be allowed to quit school and go into business to make his own money reveals some of the moral dilemmas Kingsley experiences as a 419 criminal. He is shocked that “[his] brother had the guts to spew this breed of rubbish after everything [he] had been through for them? Was [he] being hypocritical when [he] put their welfare and comfort ahead of mine?” (322). It is through his anger that Nwaubani reveals an element of sacrifice despite the nature of his amorality,

do you think this is the sort of life I wanted to live?! Do you think I had much choice?! ... Don't you realize that I made the sacrifice for you people?! ... I am the *opara*! I did it for you people! Do you understand me?! ... I was angry with my mother, angry with my father, angry with myself ... I was tired of trying to please everyone, of making sacrifices that no one seemed to appreciate. (322-5)

In this way Nwaubani exposes the complex motivations for Kingsley's moral deviance showing that the struggle against poverty can be all-consuming: “he [would] not face poverty again. Never again,” experience a life with no means to provide or survive (328).

While Nwaubani seems to suggest that the reader not to be too quick to judge Kingsley for his actions, she also does not absolve him, nor does Kingsley's mother Augustina

I [Augustina] told you long time ago that I don't want any of your dirty money. If your father were alive, none of this would have happened. Your father is there turning in his grave and wondering how his son, his own flesh and blood, can be living this sort of despicable life. This is not the way we brought you up. As far as I am concerned, your're a disgrace to your father's memory ... landed two slaps on my right cheek ... your father and I did not raise you to be a conman. You hear me? Enough is enough. You have to stop this 419. If not I will never mention your name again as my son. As far as I'm

concerned, you no longer exist.’ ... Since this fast money has given you the guts to talk about your father in this manner, you might as well forget about me. Until you stop this 419, I will never, ever set foot in your house again. And I don’t want you to come and visit me. If you ever see me here in your house again, that is the day I will drop dead. You had better not think for a second that I’m joking. I mean every single word I say. (327)

Both Walker and Ogunyemi observe that the role of “mothering [is] meant to prepare people for growth and change ... [and] bring up controversial issues in the palaver with men” (Ogunyemi 1996: 119). Augustina’s role in refusing to remain silent and severing ties with her son if he chooses to continue to be a ‘conman’ suggests the role of women in the broader political scene. Augustina’s presence in the early sections of the text is peripheral. However, her firm condemnation of the unethical conduct of the *opara* brings the female character to the forefront, replacing the central importance of the son (*opara*) with the role of the Igbo mother. Like Okoye who reveals the ambivalence in Chigo’s character at the end of *Men without Ears* (1984) as he begins to adopt deceitful ways, Nwaubani’s Kingsley does not stop his criminal activities but hides it behind a charade of running an internet café to appease his mother. This conclusion leaves the reader with a sense of hopelessness and despair at the continuous cycle of unprincipled and unscrupulous behavior. Even in his seemingly penitent state, Kingsley becomes another Cash Daddy, repeating the same sentence Cash Daddy does in the early sections of the text (page 127) “me, I don’t believe in film tricks, I believe in real, live action” (Nwaubani 2009: 328). The repetition of the sentence emphasizes Kingsley’s journey towards moral deterioration. “Real live ‘action’ is real live lawlessness.

## Sex Trafficking in Nigerian Women's Writings

While Nigerian Igbo women writers have exposed the unstable economic and political situation leading to the moral vacuum of post-war Nigeria, it is clear that corrupt political leadership and escalating criminal activities have only driven the country further into extreme poverty. A direct consequence of poverty, criminality and the lure of a better life working abroad has been the proliferation of human trafficking and sex slavery. Representations of trafficked women in Abidemi Sanusi's *Eyo* (2009), Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008) and Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sister's Street* (2009) indicate some of the causes of trafficking while acknowledging women's opposition to this menace. Yet, they also reveal the desperate plight of many women returning to Nigeria only to enter the cycle of poverty and slavery once again.

Slavery itself is quite ancient, the earliest use of incarcerated human beings as profitable commodities, occurring during "the Nile cultures ... in the First Dynasty, around 7000 BC, slaves were sacrificed in the burials of nobles ... ancient Sumerians, tied, whipped, and forced to work ... between 320AD and 1453AD, slavery was a large part of the Byzantine Empire's economy" and the Atlantic slave trade (Bales 2009: 2-4). But slavery saw an exponential growth with the rise of colonial exploitation of the New World. Sugar plantations in the Caribbean and later cotton and tobacco plantations in Virginia required robust workers whom the colonists and plantation owners transported across the Middle Passage to the Caribbean. The modern sex slavery of African nations therefore has a long and gloomy prehistory. While Asia has seen a great 'mining' of sex slaves, we can regard the prevalence of sex trafficking in Africa as a sombre revival of slavery and a continuation of Africa's exploitation by the West.

Nevertheless, Igbo writers Unigwe and Ezeigbo along with Yoruba writer Sanusi perform a collective womanist critique of the systematic and regulated business of sex trafficking in Nigeria. Sex trafficking has become a growing social issue in Nigeria generally as well as globally. In a neo-liberal state where economic freedom and liberalization are systems set in place to create a society of ostensibly equal resources and opportunities, sex trafficking has lured impoverished women with promises of a better life abroad. In Nigeria, the introduction of the Structural

Adjustment Programs (SAPs) during the Babaginda regime, which were inherited from the Obasanjo regime, increased the country's international debt rather than contribute to the country's economic growth. This has led to internal corruption, overvaluation of the naira (the Nigerian currency), and decline into poverty. The political optimism and hope for economic growth that flourished during the initial years of independence and after the civil war, dissipated after nearly thirty years of military dictatorship, indifferent political leaders and financial misgovernment, making everyday living hard for most Nigerians. Estimated economic figures from 2005 showed that 91 percent of Nigerians live on less than two dollars per day (Kara 2009: 2009). On the other hand, research shows that approximately "40,000 to 50,000 Nigerian women have become victims of trafficking [sexual exploitation, forced labor, the removal of organs or servitude] over the past 15 years [1990-2005]," yet specific figures on Nigerian women forced into sex trafficking are unobtainable given the complex organizational infrastructure, migration routes and transit stays used to traffic victims (Carling 2006: 45).

David Batstone reveals that "in the 1970's traffickers targeted girls from Southeast Asia ... After ten years or so of mining in Asia, traffickers shifted their focus to Africa – girls from Nigeria, Uganda, and Ghana flooded in the international bazaars" (2007: 172). This wave of 'mining' from Nigeria corresponds to the decline of Nigeria's economy in the 1980's during the rule of its various regimes. This section of the chapter will argue that the effect of Nigeria's descent into a neo-liberal economic structure and its internal corruption and poverty have left its women vulnerable to a lucrative transnational sex trafficking network. This is commonly referred to as modern day slavery. A comparative analysis of Abidemi Sanusi's *Eyo* (2009), Akachi Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008) and Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* (2009) give a firsthand account of the business of trafficking women and the networks that allow the conditions for such trafficking. Subsequently, attention will be given to the opposition displayed by female characters who challenge the complex relations of power with their traffickers.

Before analyzing these Nigerian examples we need to acknowledge the global scale of sex trafficking and the sheer immensity as well as the intricate transnational network of organized crime that facilitates the smuggling, coercion, intimidation and violence against women and children (Ezeigbo 2008: 99). Professional traffickers

prey on the destitution of women who long to provide better living conditions for their families. These women are hoodwinked either by family friends or lured by false job advertisements that offer lucrative opportunities. The magnitude of sex trafficking worldwide is staggering, and the perversity of selling women for immense profits is shocking as it leaves a destructive trail in its path. Siddharth Kara's *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery* (2009) argues

profit numbers ... indicate that trafficked sex slaves are by far the most lucrative slaves in the world. Only 4.2 percent of the world's slaves are trafficked sex slaves, but they generate 39.1 percent of slaveholders' profits ... By comparison, Google's net profit margin in 2006 was 29.0 percent, and it is one of the most profitable companies in the United States. The same figure for Microsoft was 28.5 percent; for Intel, 14.3 percent. General Electric posted 12.8 percent profit margin; AT&T, 11.7 percent; and Exxon Mobil, 10.8 percent. It may seem like a stretch to make direct comparisons between multinational corporations and ramshackle brothel, but the superficial point should be clear: Slave labor makes profits soar. (19-22)

For this reason, the economics of sex trafficking have attracted crime syndicates all over the world. Kara's analysis places the senseless disregard for human dignity in perspective and the tragedy that is reflected in Nigerian women's writings.

As we have seen, poverty, corruption, violence and criminal activities are some of the factors that hamper Nigeria's development. Victor Opara places the business of sex trafficking in perspective when he states "as a result of Nigeria's oil resources, it is more economically viable than most African countries. Since poverty is a major reason why African women fall prey to trafficking, if an oil-rich country like Nigeria is unable to fend for its residents, it logically follows that most African countries would not be able to stop trafficking on their own" (Opara 2007: 170). Statistics reveal, according to Opara, that against the backdrop of deported, dead and maimed trafficking victims, "it appears that the estimates of the U.S Diplomatic Mission to Nigeria that as of May 2003, as many as 300,000 Nigerian women have been trafficked since 1997" (172). Most Nigerians are trafficked to various destinations in Europe and the United Kingdom. Many are often trafficked and re-trafficked to various owners as many as five times before escaping or returning home, an issue depicted in the lives of Eyo (*Eyo*), Nneoma (*Trafficked*) and Efe (*Trafficked*).

Similarly, like many other women across the globe, Nigerian women are motivated by the opportunity to support their families with income from abroad, making connections through informal networks such as friends and relatives who eventually facilitate their trafficking. Once they arrive at their destination, these women are raped, beaten and humiliated into submission, acts that ensure that they never try to escape. Their vulnerability is compounded by the fact that their passports and papers are taken away and kept by their traffickers, sealing their fate to a life of slavery. Through the representations of Eyo in *Eyo*, Sisi, Efe, Joyce and Ama in *On Black Sisters' Street*, and Nneoma and Efe's experience in *Trafficked*, Nigerian women writers create for us an intricate web to understand the alarmingly systematic, highly regulated movement and exploitation of modern slavery.

### **The Dynamics of Trafficking in Nigerian Women's Writings**

Ezeigbo, Sanusi and Unigwe expose the violent coercion traffickers use to ensure the submission and subjugation of their victims. *Trafficked* (2008), *Eyo* (2009) and *On Black Sisters' Street* (2009) reveal the economic, social and political factors that facilitate the oppression of women who are trafficked, but also show the way in which Nigerian female characters challenge the conditions of their lives as trafficked women, sometimes subverting existing relations of power. The female struggle from enslavement to freedom mirrors Ogunyemi's and Walker's theories of womanist progression, where victims of sex trafficking find ways to speak out and find a voice for themselves from liminal spaces, emerging with repertoires of skills that reflect tangible signs of personal freedom. Having said this, it is also vital to remember that the female process of empowerment is also fraught with ambivalence since female characters face similar challenges of poverty and disillusionment in their homecoming to Nigeria, which can lead them back into a cycle of victimization.

Collectively, Ezeigbo, Sanusi and Unigwe's depiction of Nigerian economic and political conditions, which trap its women in the sex trade, testifies to their womanist commitment by pointing out that

governmental mismanagement is deeply entrenched and even accepted by its victims, the ultimate goal is ... to effect, gradually, a progressive attitude about human relationships and drill it into the oppressed and oppressor that

oppression in any form is offensive, counterproductive , and must be transformed. Thus, womanism, Nigerian style, is a weaving of three different strands in the ideology: contributing to the national discourse by writing ... the controversy generated in stating the challenges, especially from the female viewpoint ... and the attempt to make it accessible textually.

(Ogunyemi 1996: 118)

In her forward to *Eyo* (2009), Abidemi Sanusi states that: “Eyo is my attempt to draw attention to twin issues of ... trafficking and sex slavery in the United Kingdom. While it is true that this is a work of fiction, any African child trafficked to the UK will encounter, at some point or other, some or all of Eyo’s experiences ... Do something. Keep an eye out” (1). Chika Unigwe’s acknowledgements credit “the nameless Nigerian sex workers who allowed [her] into their lives, [answered] [her] questions and [laughed] at [her] ignorance” (297). Through their characters’ stories, Nigerian women writers critique their nation’s unscrupulous, impoverished state, and the consequent spread of sex slavery, in the hope of engendering change.

Womanist theory is useful for seeing the individual plights of enslaved yet defiant female characters as requiring a collective voice for women. Given the ‘silent’ nature of this crime, the depiction of the individual as a representative of the collective, can be viewed as a political strategy by the writers. While sex trafficking involves the dehumanization of individual women, on a larger scale it reflects the sufferings of a much wider community. By extension, it also shows the location of sex slavery at “the intersection of the socioeconomic bedlam promoted by economic globalization and a historic, deeply rooted bias against females” through “socioeconomic disenfranchisement” (Kara 2009: 30). Ezeigbo, Sanusi and Unigwe demonstrate how women are used as a form of commodity to gain personal wealth, but more chillingly, how power over victims is sustained because enslaved women internalize the effects of slavery, submission and abuse. In each of the texts, female characters are like pawns whose lives are orchestrated by brokers. Yet out of these volatile and tragic experiences, the novelists suggest, the female womanist may emerge and develop through action and opposition.

Nigeria’s neo-liberal policies, poverty, corruption and crime as well as the transnational business of sex trafficking, are principal causes of Nigerian women’s enslavement. In fact it is arguable that “the increase in trafficking in human beings

has been linked to the implementation of [the structural adjustment] program” in Nigeria (Asiwaju 2008: 181). This economic hardship is seen starkly in the struggles experienced by Ezeigbo’s Nneoma, Sanusi’s Eyo and Unigwe’s Sisi, Efe, Joyce and Ama. In Nneoma and Sisi’s case, their inability to find jobs after they finish their education leads them into trafficking. Nneoma becomes hoodwinked by a false advertisement for a teaching job in the United Kingdom. Ezeigbo highlights the scheming ways of traffickers who showed Nneoma and the other women intending to travel with her “pictures of the schools where [they’ll] be teaching and [gave them] appointment letters signed with people with English names” (127).

Another technique used by Nigerian traffickers involves making women swear on the Bible and on a picture of *arusi* that they would finish paying their debt, a unique way of instilling fear of future misfortune. Siddharth Kara reveals, “when Nigerian victims are rescued and asked to discuss their ordeals, some enter into trances or suffer fits. Testifying in court is out of question. Nigerian sex slaves live in constant fear that they and their families are in imminent danger due to [these forms of] juju rites” (91). Likewise Nneoma’s friend Efe a former trafficked slave whom she meets at the Oasis Youth Centre, narrates similar accounts of being taken “to a shrine somewhere between Lagos and Ibadan” to conduct an initiation ritual before leaving Nigeria (Ezeigbo 2008: 128). In most cases, the ritual can involve “the marking of [victims] faces and hands on a “*juju*” (statue), and the drinking of blood. Their hair and nail clippings are often placed in a magical pouch that gives the slaveholder control over their soul” (Bales 2009: 102). Hence, the entrapment in a life of slavery is further aided by using Nigerian women’s superstitions as a tool of manipulation. This ceremonial practice allows captors to remain invisible despite their crimes because these female sufferers are made to swear to “work hard for their employers, ... never mention their real names, run away, or contact the police” (Bales 2009: 102). Ezeigbo’s novel accounts similar experiences for Efe and Nneoma. Efe, along with ten other girls, “took an oath to work for the agency until [they] have paid [their] debts” (99). Ezeigbo’s Nneoma reinforces Efe’s experience: “[she] [had] to take an oath and they [told] [them] the consequences will be severe if they disregarded the terms of the agreement, [disobeyed] them or cut links without settling [their] debts” (127-8). Thus, in their attempt to find suitable employment these female characters had instead “been force to sell their bodies to all comers” (100).

Sisi's character in *On Black Sisters' Street* (2007) clearly demonstrates the various factors that subject a promising, intelligent graduate to a life of sex slavery. Despite graduating and "looking forward to a realization of everything dreamed ... a life different from her parents' ... get a house for herself," Sisi remained after two years "mainly unemployed" (Unigwe 2007: 18-21). Desperate to alleviate her family's poverty, Sisi finds herself in Antwerp's red light district,

she pursed her lips and smeared on lipstick. Red. Red. Like her thoughts. Murderous thoughts that made her wish she could smash things. She had a degree for heaven's sake ... Dark kohl under her eyes masking the sadness that she was scared to see. Obasanjo's own children, were they being forced to do *things* just to survive? She had heard that they were at Ivy League universities in the US. (201-2)

Unigwe uses the colors red and black as emotive descriptions of anger, fear, sadness and humiliation, elucidating the plight of the female victims, which are often unrecognized. These sentiments are not only directed at Nigeria's military dictatorship but also at the organized crime networks. Her 'murderous' thoughts are only significant in expressing her emotional state to the reader because she faces the prospect of being murdered by her traffickers Madam Kate and Dele. The excerpt refers to the big questions that operate at a national and global level with regard to sex trafficking. It also reflects Unigwe's womanist enquiry into Nigeria's lack of economic sustainability and inability to supply the basic needs of the population as a direct result of Obasanjo's corrupt political leadership. In this sense Sisi's narrative represents the collective narratives of women who have been disempowered by violent subjugation and by local and international exploitation.

Sisi's story reasserts the tragedy of a neo-colonial Nigerian state, where its leaders and their well connected companions "[plunge] into the mire of corruption and pleasure" (Fanon 1967: 134). Hence, "for those who practise [neo-colonialism], it [meant] power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it, it [meant] exploitation without redress," (Nkrumah 1965: xi), the epitome of Sisi's life. Unigwe unashamedly describes the abject poverty and exploitation faced by the average Nigerian attempting to make a meager living, juxtaposing this reality with that of Dele's, her trafficker's 'good' intentions of providing 'goods' to supply a constant demand. The novel targets the Obasanjo regime's multiple forms of self-serving

hypocrisy depicted by the prestigious and sophisticated lifestyles led by his family members, “Obasanjo’s own children, were they being forced to do *things* just to survive? She had heard that they were at Ivy League universities in the US” (202). This confirms the argument that “the linchpin of slavery in many countries is government complicity or indifference” (Bales 2009: 59).

While we looked at the inability of the educated women in Nigeria to obtain jobs to sustain their families, Sanusi’s *Eyo* (2009) reflects the poverty faced by the people in the slums of Jungle city who are too poor to afford a decent meal, much less an education. While Eyo’s narrative begins with her hawking iced water to support her family, her father willingly sends her to work as a house girl for a Nigerian family in London because

she [had] to go. [They could not] continue living live this. The rent [was] due ... She [would] be taking care of small children ... She would have a better life, one where she wouldn’t be watched by a perverted landlord when she’s bathing. She would sleep on a bed, not a sleeping mat ... She would get an education and support her family (20-4).

Eyo is ‘sold’ by her father for labor work to assist her family to attain a better life, her story is like that of many other young girls from all over the world who are “slot machines to [their] families” (Kara 2009: 8).<sup>20</sup> Yet, Eyo’s experience is that of abuse from her employer Mama Tolu, rape from Mama Tolu’s husband Sam and enslavement when she is owned by Big Madam and Johnny, powerless and virtually used “like an old rag” (229).

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<sup>20</sup> Patricia McCormick’s *Sold* (2006) depicts the similar fate of a young Nepalese daughter Lakshmi who is sold into prostitution by her stepfather. Duped that she would have a job as a maid in the city, Lakshmi finds herself in a brothel in India, owned by an old, cruel and sly woman called Mumtaz.

It is also useful for us to keep in mind Buchi Emecheta’s *The Slave Girl* (1977), which focuses on the practices of slavery in pre-colonial times, where Ogbanje Ojebeta is sold into slavery to Ma Palagada by her brother Okolie.

Apart from sexual exploitation, humans are also trafficked for domestic service, organ harvesting as well as labor work in agricultural and manufacturing industries. In this case, Eyo’s journey begins as a domestic slave. Such occurrences are common in African societies, where daughters are either sold willingly or unconsciously to be domestic slaves to families in much better financial circumstances, locally or abroad. However, in some instances, they are kidnapped and sold into domestic slavery. Eyo’s tortured life as a domestic slave under Mama Tolu is like Sudanist human right activists Mende Nazer’s autobiographical novel *Slave: My True Story* (2003), which recounts her eight year domestic slavery in Khartoum and London, kidnapped from her Nuba village in Sudan, physically and mentally abused.

Impoverishment as a result of displacement caused by war and violence also facilitates the movement of vulnerable targets into slavery. Chike Unigwe's approach to this takes a comprehensive view of the fate of African women, in this case her Sudanese character Joyce who is first a victim of genocide and then sex slavery (190-1). Joyce falls in love with Polycarp, a Nigerian soldier in a refugee camp who brings her back to Nigeria but is unable to marry her because of his mother's disapproval. Instead, he approaches Dele to get her a job overseas. Unclear whether Polycarp consciously sent her into the sex trade, Joyce constantly wonders, "if he knew all along what Dele had in mind for [her]. [She] [didn't] want to believe that [he] [was] that heartless" (241). Unigwe's revelation of sex trafficking demonstrates a general understanding of the global circumstances instrumental in the trade. These include: the constant demand for commercial sex providing lucrative return for traders; the acquisition of their 'assets' at minimum or no cost allows slavery to continue soaring; the readily available supply (and demand) for this trade increases the global spread of trafficking. In the same way, traffickers in these texts are proud of their "connections" and their ability to 'dispense' women, "Every month [they] send gals to Europe. Antwerp. Milan. Madrid... Every month, four gals. Sometimes five or more" (Unigwe 2009: 42).

Nigerian women writers condemn male figures who are involved in the brokering and pimping of women to the global sex trade, commenting on the moral depravity of their commodification of women. Dele, in *On Black Sisters' Street* leeringly tells Sisi "You be fine gal now. *Abi*, see your backside, *kai*! Who talk say na dat Jennifer Lopez get the finest yansh? Make dem come here come see your assets! As for those melons wey you carry your chest, *omo*, how you no go fin' work? He fixed his eyes, moist and greedy, on her breast (Unigwe 2009: 42-3). His treatment of Ama is characteristic: "he pulled Ama close and she could feel his penis harden through his trousers. 'I shall sample you before you go!' he laughed" (168). His unashamed arrogance in facilitating Sisi's murder is seen in his response to Kate "I trust say you go take the necessary steps ... I warn all da gals, nobody dey mess with Senghor Dele" (295). Johnny (*Eyo*) is no better as he "[breaks] his fists and particular brand of sexual gratification" on his girls (199).

His perversity is unrestrained as he makes Eyo "have sex with two men and an animal, filmed it and later, made her watch it to punish her" (Sanusi 2009: 254).

Ezeigbo's Baron "is a sadist. He rapes and beats [Nneoma] ... locks [her] up in the flat, and does not allow [her] to go out except when he takes [her] with him" (132). Dele, Baron and Johnny's extreme abuse, torture, rape, enslavement or murder of these Nigerian female characters serves to emphasize the women writers' critique of this callous disregard of female existence. Sex trafficking has become an urgent issue for women writers. The constant theme of release from patriarchal dominance in the Igbo novel – the subversion of the 'silent woman' motif; a more assertive identity for women; reconfigured roles as wives and mothers; and a transformed place in the family – that characterised the first generations has now become a more urgent fight against a global virus. It is only in recognizing and narrating (in a womanist fashion) the blatant, horrendous crimes perpetrated by traffickers that a framework for abolition can be conceptualized.

Not only the men in Nigeria are involved in the trafficking of its women. Often, the syndicate involves former prostitutes who trap innocent women into a life of slavery. Furthermore, when trafficked, women find themselves in brothels overseas, which are often run by an African Madam who was once a prostitute herself. This occurs in Sanusi's *Eyo* (2009), Unigwe's *On Black Sister's Street* (2009) and Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008). Eyo's Big Madame Stella was herself a prostitute in Italy who paid off her debt to the man who brought her to Europe and eventually moved to the United Kingdom to set up her brothel 'business'. The novel informs us that she saw herself as "a successful business woman — she had no patience for people who refused to see the wealth of opportunities sex offered to those who were willing to use it to their advantage" (2009: 146-147). Sisi's Madam Kate also ran her brothel with an iron fist receiving her orders from Dele, Sisi's initial trafficker in Nigeria. Interestingly, Efe in *On Black Sisters' Street*, who begins a life at Madam Kate's brothel, after paying her debt becomes a 'madam' herself, having "police officers on her payroll to ensure the security of her girls and of her business. She would do well in the business, buying more girls to add to her fleet" (Unigwe 2007 279). Nneoma finds herself walking "the streets of Rome for Madam Dollar for three years" before she is bought over by Baron (131). Similarly, Efe's (*Trafficked*) "Madam Gold sold [her] to a pimp — a white man — after four years of slaving for her" (2008: 100).

It is clear that Sanusi, Unigwe and Ezeigbo attempt to come to terms with the involvement of women in entrapping other women in the business of trafficking, of women oppressing other women. The message implied is that these women have internalized the corrupt values of the sex trade and choose instead to profit from it. This also gives us an idea of the general socioeconomic and political construction of such a woman's consciousness, capturing her refusal to return to a life of poverty and her choice to take monetary advantage of the trade that had enslaved her. Yet, this 'survival of the fittest' can be contrasted with other characters like Ezeigbo's Nneoma, Efe, Unigwe's Joyce, Ama, Sisi and Sanusi's Eyo who struggle to free themselves from further entrapment. However, we find that Eyo returns to the sex trade at the end of the text, faced with similar conditions of poverty and destitution in her homecoming to Nigeria. The ambivalence of this subject matter points us back to Nigeria's everyday living conditions as well as the structure and role played by organized crime in providing financial means amidst economic desperation.

Like Sanusi and Unigwe to whom I refer in the early sections of this chapter, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo quotes Louisa Waugh's *Selling Olga* at the beginning of her book where she states that "chronic poverty, violence against women and girls, lack of decent work opportunities, coupled with restrictive migration and immigration policies have all played their roles in creating multinational trafficking industries" (iv). Added to this, submissiveness and the resigned acceptance of incarceration by most Nigerian sex slaves means that "only the tiniest fraction muster the courage to escape" (Kara 2009: 16). Nevertheless, the accounts of courage in Eyo, Nneoma, Efe and Sisi's narratives signify the possibility of opposition through verbal, physical and psychological action. In narrating these accounts of resistance, we recognize the female characters' central objective lies in sustaining their families economically. Their attempts to free themselves arise from the need to return home and find other means of providing for their families. Their escape is not merely focused on self-determination but on the collectivist value of caring for the well-being of their families.

Indeed, the reason Sisi, in *On Black Sisters's Street*, leaves Dele and Madam is her need for financial security to provide a better life for her parents. She realizes that she "had barely enough money left over after paying off Dele. And paying her part of the rent on the Zwarte Zusterstraat. And paying rent on the Vingerlingstraat

room she was subletting from Madam. Five hundred and fifty euros a week she paid. She did not see how she could do this job long enough to save anything” (252). Also, a life with Luc would offer her

a proper relationship. No more strange men in her bed. She could get another job, maybe a cleaning job. Cleaners were always in demand. And Luc had generously offered her a monthly allowance she could send to her parents. She might even be able to invite them to visit her in Belgium. She would show them the wonders of her new home. There would be no need to lie anymore” (271-2).

Sisi’s first act of resistance comes after she realizes that she is not giving her family a better life. This leads to her speak out against Dele’s exploitation and refuse to participate in her victimization any longer, “the man was fleecing them. How much would it cost him to get a passport? Get a visa. She was aware that he was bringing in girls almost on a monthly basis. There was no reason why she should work to line the pockets of a man whose pockets were already bulging” (274). The final stage of her struggle for freedom occurs in an in-between space of life and death, a space that allows her to execute freedom as well as vengeance: Sisi’s “soul ... escaped her body and flew to Lagos” to reclaim her life, refusing to be subjected to authority; cursing Dele in death through his children

may your lives be bad. May you never enjoy love. May your father suffer as much as mine will when he hears I am gone. May you ruin him. For Sisi was not the sort to forgive. Not even in death. Sisi’s soul flew down the stairs and began its journey to another world” (293-6).

Even in death, Sisi’s vengeance and anger stems from the memory of her father and by extension, her mother’s suffering “what have [we] done in this life to deserve this? Whom have [we] erred? Onye? <sup>21</sup>” (294). This pertains not just to the emotional loss but also an economic loss they experience through her death since she is the only

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<sup>21</sup> The Igbo word ‘Onye’ means ‘who.’ When the Igbo’s use ‘Onye’ it’s implicit meaning refers to the unexplainable questions of life, society and the paranormal. In her sorrow, Sisi’s mother questions the emotional as well as social misfortune that has befallen them. “O1 names”. *Kwenu*, 15 October 2011. Web. 15 October 2011. <[http://www.kwenu.com/afamefune/O1\\_names.htm](http://www.kwenu.com/afamefune/O1_names.htm)>

child for her parents. This daunting future for her parents without having a child to provide for them in old age makes Sisi's death even more tragic.

The earlier section of this chapter identified the key component in ensuring obedience from sex slaves as the breaking of their spirits, something accomplished through torture, rape and humiliation. Particularly with the girl-child/ woman Eyo, we find resilience towards torture because her aim is to have *endured* for her family. Each attempt she makes to escape (either with Mama Tolu, Sam, Big Madam and Johnny) is motivated by freeing herself so that she may be able to free her family from poverty: "what if she made it back to Nigeria? ... the fighting hope of freedom" (187). In her escape from Big Madam's 'prison', "Eyo ran, not knowing where she was running to, but the fact seemingly not as important as whom she was running from ... She hated that voice ... The voice wanted to consume and brand her and make her bend to its will, but she refused" (150). Giving a name to her defiance, Eyo renames herself 'Jungle.' She swore "she would pay [Johnny] back for this and every beating ... She wasn't Eyo. Eyo was the ignoramus who came to this country five years ago, full of expectant hope. That girl was dead" (209-12). As Jungle, she attacks Johnny, "[bringing] the bat down hard on [his] face (238). Yet, she begins to refer to herself as Eyo again when she is rescued by Father Stephen and Sister Mary: "My name is Eyo, Jungle is dead" (255).

Here Unigwe's treatment of the interchanging Eyo/Jungle character defies easy representations of female agency but rather serves to highlight the complex experience of the female survivor of sex slavery. It is in the progression from 'Eyo' to 'Jungle' and back to 'Eyo' again that we see the full progression of a womanist character. Despite her exposure and vulnerability, Eyo does not submit. Instead she chooses to ignore the voices of authority in her life and listen to her own voice, resisting the pressure on her to see her identity as synonymous with 'slave.' Despite the saturation of images of suffering in the text, the transition made from 'Eyo' to 'Jungle' only serves to further emphasize spiritual growth and integration within the female character. In either identity, the hatred for her oppressors and longing for freedom is prevalent. However, it is when she refers to herself as 'Jungle' that she develops characteristics spurring her to action. To refer to Jungle's experience as a traumatic event seems inadequate, yet its intended implied message is clear – it is the epiphany she experiences and acts on which eventuates in the reemergence of Eyo.

Clearly, the systems in place have failed to protect the girl-child Eyo and subsequently the teenage Jungle attacking Johnny is an act of recovery of feminine, womanist subjectivity in the wake of shame and breached dignity.

Eyo is single-mindedly gripped with the reality of having '*endured*', a concept her mother imparts to her before she leaves Nigeria: "your uncle paid a lot of money to do this for you; money that we will never have or hope to repay. You understand? You must *endure*" (Sanusi 2009: 30). The notion of endurance is one she holds on to despite the brutality she faces with Johnny, servicing numerous North African men in her attempt to save some money to take with her in her eventual escape, "[Jungle] had £2000 in that plastic bag ... It had taken her two years to save up that money ... She thought that if she had £5000, she would have enough to get away ... having *endured*, and not bring shame on her family's head" (235). The question that follows is, having '*endured*' what, for whom? Again, the point driven home by Sanusi is clear; the sex trafficking victim neither possesses an identity nor any possession to call her own, "[Eyo] hated the power they'd all had over her life and she still did. She did not own an item of clothing she paid for herself" (229). This is further compounded by the need to return to Nigeria with money so that the cycle of poverty within its neo-liberal economy may be broken for them.

The conclusion of the text is perhaps the most poignant section of Eyo's journey as she consciously returns to the sex trade when her family is once again confronted with "homelessness and faced with starvation" (337). The decision she makes in placing her family's needs before hers, coupled with taking the responsibility of caring for her family's needs, indicates the womanist's disposition of "[ensuring] larger horizons for herself and her people" (Ogunyemi 1996: 34). Thus, "she had tears in her eyes, but she refused to let them fall. She didn't look back as she made her way to the man's house ... Eyo started walking. THE END" (338). The conclusion of the text resonates as we see Eyo determinately heading towards the Nigerian trafficking agents' house, not allowing herself to become emotional. One cannot but be in awe at Sanusi's representation of the Nigerian female womanist character who despite being faced with the horrendous reality of returning to sex slavery, does so for the betterment of her family members who only through her have a fighting chance of survival.

However, the particularly troubling aspect of Eyo's return to the sex trade is the role played by her mother who makes her feel guilty for returning to Nigeria and "[lumbering] [them] with an extra mouth to feed" (332). She is unsympathetic with Eyo's traumatic experiences, rather that she "should have endured in London" and encourages her to see "a guy [who] ... sends people to London" (333). Her fear of homelessness and starvation precedes her maternal instincts to protect Eyo. This was because for many Nigerian households "having a daughter travel to Europe [was] the only way to escape extreme poverty" (Carling 2006: 30). Thus, Olunfunmi places the responsibility of caring for the family on Eyo's shoulders, so that they may have a better life. Her lack of awareness of the horrendous realities of trafficking reflects her preoccupation with her own difficult experiences of poverty.

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's Nneoma and Efe's attempt to re-establish their place in society highlights another form of vulnerability experienced by victims of sex trafficking. Nneoma and Efe are both deported back to Nigeria when they eventually escape their pimps. As they attempt to rebuild their lives at the Oasis centre, they face the threat of being re-trafficked by the very syndicate Nneoma's had escaped. The possibility of being re-trafficked is a very real fear for women who return to Nigeria. Syndicates prey on the loneliness and emotional scars of victims by deceiving them into conjugal relationships. Efe experiences this when she meets Baron in Nigeria – renamed Fyeface. However discovering his deception, she chooses instead to confront her prospective oppressor and Nneoma's former exploiter in an open bar,

is your name truly Fyeface, or is it Baron ... Baron's face twitched and fear filled his eyes. He thought Efe might be a detective or a member of the Secret Security Service ... "You're a liar. You have lied to me all this while. You're Baron and a bloody trafficker. Her voice was loud and heads were beginning to turn ... This man is a cheat and an exploiter. He is here to traffick women abroad. (186-7)

Here, Nneoma combats the threat of being re-trafficked by 'objectifying' Baron, rejecting his authority and subverting his power. In unmasking the trafficker as a 'cheat' and 'exploiter' Ezeigbo not only reveals to us the continuous cycle of trafficking syndicates, but creates a fictional space to say what is rarely said said directly to these exploiters and in this establishes her own authoritative voice.

## Rescue Agencies

One important theme in the depiction of the Nigerian female characters is the role played by religious agencies in helping break the bonds of slavery. On a global scale, there are many faith-based agencies, projects and individuals who are actively involved with attempts to eradicate slavery. To name a few; the Polaris Project as well as the Faith and Freedom project run by the National Underground Railroad Freedom Centre are ongoing projects that facilitate the freedom of others by creating modern Underground Railroad networks. In helping raise such awareness, these projects attempt to take steps to eradicate human trafficking. One such individual we read about in David Batstone's *Not for Sale* (2007) is Padre Cesare of San Foca whose acts of extraordinary kindness in helping trafficked women into freedom has created a positive space for these women to reintegrate in society without shame, by providing a temporary half way home called Regina Pacis and jobs in local restaurants, fruit shops and bakeries. Similarly, in *Eyo* (2009) and *Trafficked* (2008), we see the vital role played by networks that assist trafficked women to freedom as well as creating avenues to smooth reintegration. Characters like Father Stephen (*Eyo*), Nike (*Eyo*), Sister Mary (*Eyo*) and Mrs Nike Oderine (*Trafficked*) "have declared a war against slavery ... [and] the international sex trade ... [They] want to stamp out prostitution from [their] society; [they] want international prostitution to stop. The trafficking of [Nigerian] girls is despicable and this evil trade must be eliminated" (Ezeigbo 2008: 55). By depicting how these people not only assist the female characters' journey towards agency but also assist their reintegration into society, Sanusi and Ezeigbo subtly draw the audience out of complacency, since the "the best defense against modern-day slavery is a vigilant public" (Bales 2009: 255).

In each text, different individuals assist the women to escape slavery. Their efforts form an alternative coalition geared towards eradicating trafficking in contrast to government tactics, which have failed to effect change. Also, while sex trafficking largely involves the betrayal of trust, the assistance offered by other people slowly restores the confidence of those who have been trafficked. Eyo and Nneoma are skeptical and distrustful of the help rendered to them. Given Eyo's extensive experience of abuse with "so many men, so many faces" it takes her some time to realize that unlike other men who have hurt her, Father Stephen "hadn't asked her for anything" and his motives were genuine (*Eyo* 2009: 272). In *Eyo* Father Stephen,

Sister Mary and social worker Nike's<sup>22</sup> resolve to free trafficked victims and safeguard them from their traffickers, partially compensates for the severe shortage of political and economic will on a local as well as global level. Their availability to help provides an avenue for Eyo to turn to after she attacks her victimizer Johnny which "protects her" (270). In fact, their refusal to fear Johnny, in addition to their encouragement of her abilities to live a life as an autonomous individual, allows her to shed her perverse dependency on him, "thinking she had to go back to Johnny. [That] she needed him [and] he was the only one that understood her (252). This is highlighted in her realization that "Father Stephen had understood her life, yet hadn't flinched away from her. He didn't join her in her filth, but had stretched his arm to steady her and even haul her out, should she so desire. Johnny had wanted her to stay in the filth, because it would have been more lucrative for him. Johnny didn't love her. He had owned her and used her as he saw fit" (Sanusi 2009: 273). In addition, the legal action taken against individuals like Mama Tolu, her husband Sam and Big Madam Stella spear-headed by Father Stephens and Nike destabilizes the networks of oppression, where 'opposition' here is not merely an aesthetic word to describe this collective social reality. Rather, it places at the forefront the possibility of a collective cure for a better future. Sanusi thus advances the idea that the eradication of persons trapped within slavery is contingent on the critical involvement of individuals who uncover this heinous crime. This entails ensuring publicising the existence of modern day slavery to those ignorant of its significance as well as impact.

Akachi Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* focuses on the strategies required to successfully reorient trafficked women back into society. While this builds on the idea of the oppressed being freed from their traffickers, it also shows us the vital role that needs to be assumed by local Nigerian agencies in order to assist with the rehabilitation of victims. While it seems almost impossible to tip global and local governmental policy towards ending sex slavery, efforts need to be made by society to offer deported victims sanctuary to assist the complex process of homecoming. *Trafficked* highlights the role played by NGOs in easing the process experienced by Nneoma, Efe and other trafficked female characters. The facilities and opportunities provided at the Oasis Centre serve to equip women who had internalized the self-perception of 'slave,' to

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<sup>22</sup> The role played by individuals who aid trafficked women can be linked to historically inspired individuals like Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth and Harriet Beecher Stowe, American abolitionist who dedicated their energies, patience and passion to see an end to slavery.

see themselves as autonomous individuals. The message is clear: while the female characters' initial acts of opposition initiate their process of change and metamorphosis, this can only be sustained if they receive the necessary help needed to complete their journey towards self-restoration, actualization and reintegration. This form of assistance, support and rehabilitation has the long term effect of promoting "community-based freedom," because former trafficked women are given an option of "[becoming] agents of change, helping their [communities] to become slave-proof" rather than being enslavers of future, unsuspecting women (Bales 2009: 153).

Although *Trafficked* seems to project a sense of optimism about the homecoming of trafficked women, Abidemi Sanusi's *Eyo* presents us with the antithesis. As Eyo turns to Father Ignatius to help her survive in Jungle City he regretfully tells her "I'd hoped to get you on one of our training programmes – sewing classes, hairdressing – but there are no openings just now ... we're bursting at the seams ... We're taking in more and more girls from abroad who've suffered just like you." He sighed. It's an evil thing. This trading in flesh. Truly evil" (2009: 322). Eyo's story is merely one of numerous women who suffer similar circumstances. The role of faith workers is more than needed in this circumstance as Sanusi communicates the reality that most trafficked women still fall through the cracks. The 'business' of modern slavery today is very much like that which dominated the Atlantic slave trade 350 years ago. Yet, while the Underground Railroad of freedom assisted the abolition of slavery then, it is today replaced by a network of people dedicated to freeing the victims of this global trade.

## **Conclusion**

Confronting neo-colonial Nigeria through the female writer's lens uncovers the effects of corrupt, irresponsible leadership and devastating social conditions. The possibility of eradicating corrupt leadership, implementing fair policies in Nigeria's economy, and abolishing sex slavery seems remote. But the exposure of corruption, criminality and oppression by Igbo women writers goes hand in hand with an affirmation of the agency of women to effect change. These writers are themselves part of this process of change as their critique of economic corruption and sex trafficking bases itself on the belief in a better future for Nigeria.

# Conclusion

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The ‘silence’ from which Igbo women writers have emerged in the last fifty years has been the silence represented by the stereotyped depiction of women in male writings. It has certainly not been the silence of Igbo women themselves, who have historically been strong and self-affirming, even to the point of instigating resistance. As Amadiume recognised, “Igbo women of eastern Nigeria were among the first to gain the attention of researchers as a group distinct from Igbo men” (Amadiume 1992: 13). This strength, along with the highly educated and literate tradition of the Igbo in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria, and their prominent place in Nigerian writing in English, has provided the reason for the focus of this analysis. This thesis has examined the intervention of women writers in the area of family and nation. In both contexts their writing has represented change, a change in the ways in which Igbo women are represented and a transformation of the ways in which the nation has been observed and critiqued. While the three generations have demonstrated a gradual transformation in the representation of the Igbo woman’s role in society, – Nwapa’s reversal of the image of the ‘silent woman’ in Nigerian writing; Emecheta’s and Okoye’s revised image of women’s roles as wives and mothers; and Adichie’s and Azuah’s transformed view of the young woman’s relationship to family – in regard to the nation, particularly their attitude to nationalism and the Biafran war, and the

immense corruption that followed the war, all three generations have been in strong agreement.

An analysis of the writing from the three generations of Igbo women writers has revealed the vital role they have played in representing the female Igbo quest for agency and power, emphasising the ongoing struggle against patriarchal power in the society. These writers have demonstrated the important role that women's writing has played, not only in communicating a female voice, but more pertinently, in speaking from a position of detachment from the essentially masculine discourses of nationalism and neo-liberal globalization. The underlying energy of this writing has been womanist in the way in which it perceives the lot of women in the society as inextricable from the joint participation of men and women, and the protest about the various forms of oppression – patriarchal, colonial, racial, economic and cultural – that both share. In applying womanist theory, we also come to understand how the African experience, and particularly the experience communicated so forcefully by Igbo women, has provided the seeds for womanist theory itself, a theory that sees the need to place feminist concerns in the wider context of colonial oppression.

For this reason the first chapter provided the foundation for the thesis by examining the emergence of the theory of Womanism and its enthusiastic adoption by African women writers. The term 'womanism' coined by Alice Walker as early as 1979 was eagerly embraced by African feminists who saw that Western feminism was an inadequate response to the multiple and interrelated problems of colonized societies. Womanism has provided the theoretical underpinning for this thesis as we have seen the extent to which Igbo writers are engaged in the dialectic between the struggle for female autonomy and the necessity for broader cultural transformation to resolve the related issues of racism and poverty.

To begin my discussion on Igbo women writers the second chapter entitled 'Dispelling the Myth of the 'Silent Woman', examined 'first generation' Nigerian writer, Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) And *Women Are Different* (1986)' to trace the emerging voice of the Nigerian woman. The first female writer to publish in Nigeria, Nwapa's novel *Efuru* precipitated the rewriting of female characters in Nigerian fiction. Nwapa's works dispel the myth of the 'silent woman' in Nigerian society, seen through the stereotypical representations of female characters in the works of Nigerian men. This text, combined with *Women are Different*, provides a vivid

account of the problems faced by women, highlighting their struggles as well as achievements. Set against the background of developing Nigeria, this text depicted Igbo women as originating from a strong self-reliant tradition, contrary to the stereotypical images in the 'Mother Africa' trope.

Continuing the discussion on the gradual but significant transformation of Igbo women in society, the following chapter examined the emerging Igbo woman through the changing concepts of wife, mother and woman. Here I argued that the development of the autonomous woman in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *Double Yoke* (1982), *Adah's Story* (1983), *Head Above Water* (1986), *The Family* (1990), *Kehinde* (1994) and Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds* (1982) was only made possible by redefining their roles as 'wives' and 'mothers', a re-focussing which is evident in each of the novels. Subsequent to this, I explored through my analysis of third generation Igbo women's writings, a distinct pattern of the young girl-child/ woman character who develops into a mature, strong womanist.

In the fourth chapter 'Rethinking Family Relationships in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) and Unoma Azuah's *Sky-High Flames* (2005), I compared these novels with Sade Adeniran's *Imagine This* (2007) and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) which present a new framework within which third generation writers are operating. At a young age, female characters showed an early desire for empowerment through their reconstruction of family relationships. In challenging patriarchal dominance, analysing the 'absent' mother and addressing the complex function and ambivalent struggles of tradition and modernity in their texts, these writers display the process of female empowerment, charting the metamorphosis of female characters and the ways in which young female protagonists claim agency and independence. This reflects the idea that while the struggle for female autonomy is still a contemporary reality for Igbo women, their determination to break the yoke of 'silence' from an early age reflects changing patterns in Igbo society.

The Biafran war was an integral part of the Igbo experience. In my fifth chapter entitled "The Biafran War and Igbo Women Writers: Deconstructing the Male Discourse of Nationalism" I illustrated the way in which Igbo women writers from all three generations deal with the problems of nationalism and the Biafran war. Flora Nwapa's *Never Again* (1975), Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) outline the experiences of

the Biafran war from a female perspective. This created a vital model for reading the war novels of Nigerian Igbo women writers, and understanding the critical attitude they had towards Igbo and Nigerian nationalism, a composite analysis of the effects of colonial rule in Nigeria, the prevalence of colonial influence, the greed of the neo-colonial elite and the tribal separatism that led to the Biafran war. In critiquing the male discourse of nationalism, Igbo female writers demonstrated their refusal to be appropriated by the discourse of ethno-tribalism, as well as being appropriated by the discourse of Nigerian nationalism. Under the guise of including marginal voices, both discourses, continued to locate women in the inner domain of domesticity and tradition.

I concluded my examination on Igbo women writers by canvassing the site of post-war Nigeria, and the political and economic corruption that opened the doors to the modern day slave trade in Nigeria. After the Biafran war, post-war Nigeria became a site of political chaos, with mismanaged political leadership and foreign interference. The effects of this were rampant capitalism and neo-liberalism, which increased corruption and poverty levels. In a state of collapsed morals, the issue of human rights, in this case the existence and the ethics of modern day slavery, is a central question that occupies the literature of Nigerian women writers. The issue of modern slavery and the economics of this incarceration have received substantial attention the past decade. The function of Nigerian literature as a vehicle to raise awareness, as well as to demonstrate the need to break the grotesque bonds of modern slavery, is an important development, a form of political intervention that necessitates close attention. The task of abolishing sex slavery is Herculean. Yet the intervention of these women novelists attests to the determination of women to take up the task, and perhaps more interestingly, of the political function of literature in contemporary Nigeria.

The analysis of Igbo women's literature as a body of academic work, and the tracing of its development over the last fifty years, testifies to the continuous, invigorating and aspirational character of Igbo women – their quest for autonomy, self-definition, interpersonal relationships and national location amidst patterns of global change. In correcting entrenched stereotypical representations of Igbo women, this thesis has simultaneously shown how the novels have re-presented new models of

Igbo womanhood, testifying to a new form of 'homecoming' of self-retrieval, self-expression and self-assertion for the Igbo woman.

As discussions of contemporary Nigeria grow more complicated, spanning issues of gender equality, national disintegration, political corruption, social hardship and economic crisis, the role of the Igbo woman writer, and Nigerian writers of all kinds for that matter, in engaging these various issues has become increasingly strategic. Women's texts, existing as they do outside the dominant male discourses of nationalism, 'development' and neo-liberal globalization have been well placed to address the challenges continuing to plague Nigeria. In particular the concept of Womanism, which refuses to separate gender issues from the broader social issues that affect both men and women has represented an important theoretical foundation for this writing. Although this 'speaking out' may raise issues of ambiguity and ambivalence in relation to class, it does demonstrate the responsibility that women writers have accepted: to confront the pressing issues of Nigerian society and politics. The Igbo women's novel represents a surprisingly coherent and extensive body of work that offers a model of women writers speaking out against injustice and oppression of all kinds. The chorus of Igbo female voices has produced a rousing celebration of the female spirit, one that is both clear and uncompromising, and a literature that offers the world an insight into a gender struggle that has had many ramifications in the larger story of contemporary Nigeria.

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