Introduction

The Black Woman Speaks: A Study of Flora Nwana and Buchi Emecheta
"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 independent, and very, very industrious." Flora Nwapa

“I would tell any girl, you must get your education. That’s your freedom. That’s true anywhere in the world.” Buchi Emecheta.

“To know one another from inside is how we come to know the real person. To know one another we must know our stories and our histories hopes and dreams. To know each other we must move beyond the covering of the skin...” bell hooks

**Aims and Objectives**

The motivation for this study emanates from the persistent ignorance, misconceptions, and prejudice surrounding the literary portrayal of African women’s issues, particularly their statuses, roles, achievements, predicaments, and well-being. The factors underlying this deplorable situation of women’s misrepresentation are multifarious. Until recently, the business of literary production and critical evaluation of African literature was run exclusively by European men and their Western educated African surrogates.

Even though in the past males and females both participated actively in the creation of the oral literary tradition, it was the former who were promoted as the first writers in modern African literature. This was not by accident. Colonialism had hindered female education by the stress on the selection of male children for formal schooling. Moreover, owing to the sex role distinction in tradition, girls were kept away from school in the belief that education would become a hindrance to their ability to achieve “status” in society as wife and mother. So, both European colonialism and traditional African culture share the blame for keeping African women away from the type of education which makes the acquisition of skills for formal writing as a craft possible.

As Mineke Schipper says, women’s marginalization in the creation of literature is also a reflection of their role and status in European colonized African society:
Women in pre-colonial times were not entitled to own land in certain patriarchal relationships; yet neither were they powerless victims. Through colonization, capitalism violently intervened in the existing order. One of the consequences was that the value of traditional women’s labour was reduced considerably because the home and work place were separated under the new system: the state and the industrial concerns reserved most urban wage labour for men. From then on, women in rural areas were controlled in two ways...not only tradition but also colonial laws now determined that they had no rights to ownership of land or control over the produce they cultivated. The unpaid labour of women and children subsidized the colonial wage bill. Their traditional powers of healing and other functions (spirit mediums, midwives, brewers of ritual beer) were undermined by Church and State. Women received little or no education because neither African nor colonial patriarchs regarded it as important. (47)

Similar realities inform the history of African literary criticism. Although the early scholars and critics helped to popularize African literature worldwide and often offered sympathetic commentaries, their analyses were generally superficial and conclusions misleading—thanks to their inherent Eurocentric and sexist trappings. Even with the achievements of political independence in the 1960s which caused a shift in the location of the critical enterprise from Europe to the independent African nations, there was only a little change in perspective. This change was seen in the scaling down of the Eurocentric content of African literary criticism, but at the same time, it became spiced with an older tradition: patriarchy. The pioneer European critics of African literature such as Janheinz Jahn, Ulli Beier, and Gerald Moore and their African/Carribean disciples like Ezekiel Mphahlele, Eldred Jones, Eustace Palmer, O.R. Dathorne, and John Ramsaran fostered a Western derived critical approach of viewing literary texts largely from the perspective of the male. Ironically, when the pioneer female critics such as Lilyan Kesteloot, Molly Mahood, and later Omalara Ogundipe Leslie emerged on the scene, they continued this male reductionist critical approach which has ignored significant women configurations in the literature. Nor did the appearance of the African female writers, Ama Ata Aidoo (1965), Flora Nwapa (1966), and Grace Ogot (1966) lead to the creation of that kind of
affinity between creative writers and critics that had existed among the males. Owing to this lack of African centered/ womanist consciousness, there was hesitation among the critics to undertake a serious evaluation of female authored works.

Unfortunately, this conception of African literature as male-oriented and male created art has persisted into contemporary times. As Femi Ojo-Ade has observed:

The male writer, like the male social animal, is more fortunate than the female; his presence is taken for granted. The publisher seeks him out, unlike the woman whose silence is also taken for granted. Cultural misconceptions and taboos abound. It is believed that women must keep quiet when men are talking. Woman is woman, child bearer, supporter of man. If a woman talks too much, she is considered uncouth, uncivilized. If she is educated, she is classified as a weird specimen. (158)

These views of Ojo-Ade are complemented by those of Mineke Schipper, who says:

Male reactions to women’s liberation efforts in African society are often alarming, especially when the future of the society as a whole seems critical or hopeless. The image of women in the novel is also very much a male writer’s business, and often sadly stereotyped. (47)

Despite these considerable difficulties, African women, especially their writers, are becoming a force to reckon with in their societies. They have always played significant roles as storytellers, warriors, nurturers, and healers besides the obvious ones as wife, mother, daughter and sister. The fact that women writers like Flora Nwapa, Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta, Mariama Ba, Bessie Head and Tsitsi Dangarembga have been writing and reflecting women’s special concerns makes an evaluation of their works from a different perspective imperative. The works of these women offer insight into various dimensions of the African women’s perception of themselves, their roles, and communities. They are challenging the stereotypical image of African women depicted in old anthropological books, conservative critics’ works, and male-authored African fiction. They need to be paid adequate critical attention.
The major objectives of this study are therefore:

1. To expand our understanding of the images, roles, status, character, and activities of women as reflected in creative writing.
2. To offer a critical analysis of the rise in women's consciousness regarding their perceived image and place in society.
3. To analyze the fictive portrayal of women's interaction with themselves, their spouses and children, and other men and women, in the contexts of family, marriage, work, recreation, and community.
4. To review the network of support and services utilized by women and critique the various strategies adopted by them to deal with restrictions imposed by patriarchy, religion, colonialism, or neo-colonialism.
5. To delineate the lines along which women's images and roles are changing, societal responses to such perceived changes, and the implications of all this for the image of the African woman in the twenty-first century.

This study is concerned primarily with the evaluation of African women's images, roles, and experiences in response to cultural forces and social change as reflected in the lives of the major female characters in African literature. It is limited to the works, mostly fiction, produced by the following significant African female authors: Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta of Nigeria. This study does not, therefore, claim to offer a new definitive image of all African women but of only those women who reside in the various societies represented by the selected authors.

**Significance of Study**

The significance of this study lies in its literary demonstration of the tremendous difficulties African women face as they balance the demands of old, restrictive family/community oriented tradition with those of the liberal, materialistic, and individualistic modes of modern life. It also suggests how by reading the novels under study we gain an insight into not only new roles of women, but also the various sources, institutions, strategies, and actions that are enabling African women to successfully navigate the
turbulent cross cultural currents placed in their path to self identity and fulfillment. It highlights the new radical literary perspective that seems to be emerging from African female writing and suggests their authors' ideological affinity with their counterparts in the Diaspora, especially the United States of America. Above all, the study demonstrates the viability of using an African-centered/Africana Womanist critical approach to the study of African/Black female-authored texts.

Methodology
The conceptual framework for this study is Afrocentric which uses Africana womanism. The usage of the term womanism instead of the more popular term feminism will be discussed later in the chapter. Afrocentricism can be defined as the placement of African ideals and culture at the center of intellectual inquiries regarding phenomena from the African world. Afrocentricity presupposes the recognition of African peoples as subjects of their own historical and social experiences rather than objects in the margins of European thought. (Ogunyemi 34)

Since this methodological framework is inclusive, non-hegemonic, and non-sexist, it is appropriate for the study of African women’s literary creations. It recognizes both the female aesthetic and African ideals as viable concepts for explications of roles and experiences of women in African literature. While the African ideals are reflected in the significant roles assigned by the writers to their protagonists as mothers, nurturers, and custodians of community life, it is the female perspective, the womanist, utilized in these works, that accentuates the dynamic visions of women’s issues, including their changing roles in African societies. Although the female aesthetic is neither selfish nor culturally divisive, since it emanates from women’s genuine quest for Ma’at- human rights, justice, and harmony—it is important to pursue it under the umbrella of common African cultural ideals.

Selection of Authors
The authors selected for this study, Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta articulate the female perspective by making women's issues central to their works. These authors have been selected for study not only because they are among the better known African female
writers, but also because they have succeeded in using their art to effectively capture the dilemmas, roles, and experiences of women in their various societies. Their careers have been inspired by post-independence African social and political realities and the Women’s Rights Movement on the continent and other parts of the world. They have been sensitized to the social realities of women emanating from gender, class, sexism, religion, colonialism, and neo colonialism. Their works, therefore, probe social inequities of cultural or political origin that subjugate and marginalize women. Moreover, they record the ways in which women are becoming more assertive in the private/ domestic realms as well as in the public sphere. They are also breaking the myths surrounding the concept of womanhood and offering alternate choices for women by redefining traditional roles within the context of women’s identity and self fulfillment. What follows is a brief review of the background, professional achievements and critical status of each of these female authors.

Flora Nwapa

Nigerian writer, teacher, and administrator, a forerunner of a whole generation of African women writers, Flora Nwapa is best-known for re-creating Ibo life and traditions from a woman’s point of view. Florence Nwazarua Nwapa Nwakuche, popularly known as Flora Nwapa became Black Africa’s first internationally published Anglophone woman writer. She has been called the Mother of modern African literature. As a novelist Nwapa made her debut with Efuru, based on an old folktale of a woman chosen by gods challenging the traditional portrayal of women. Nwapa started writing Efuru in 1962. At that time women were seldom perceived as being capable enough to write. The subject matter she chose was also removed from what had hitherto been written about. Nwapa wrote about women – recreating a world where women were actors and decision makers. The story was set in a rural community. Efuru, the heroine, is a strong and beautiful woman. She loses her child and has two unhappy marriages, but struggles against all obstacles to become a successful businesswoman. At the end she goes to the lake goddess, Uhamiri, who is like a mirror of herself. Uhamiri gives her worshipers wealth and beauty but few children. Nwapa's second novel, Idu (1970), is also a story about a woman, whose life is
bound up with that of her husband. When he dies, she chooses to seek him out in the land of the dead rather than live without him or prefer motherhood to anything else.

Flora Nwapa was born in Oguta, Eastern Nigeria on January 13th, 1931. After her elementary education in Oguta, she attended CMS (Church Missionary Society) Girls’ School in Lagos and Queen’s College in Lagos for her post - high school education. From there she was admitted to University College (now University Of Ibadan) where she earned her Bachelor Of Arts degree in 1957. The following year she was awarded a Graduate Diploma in Education by the University of Edinburgh. On her return to Nigeria, she worked in the early 1960s as an Education Officer and English and Geography teacher in Calabar and Enugu respectively. She was later appointed as Assistant Registrar at the University of Lagos and while in that position she published her first novel Efuru. Nwapa sent the manuscript to Chinua Achebe whose Things Fall Apart had received critical fame internationally. Achebe sent it to Heinemann Educational Books for publication. Much later Nwapa started her own press called the Tana press.

Since the publication of Efuru, Nwapa has risen steadily to become a major twentieth century African writer. She has written and published several novels – Idu (1970), Never Again (1975), One Is Enough (1986) and Women Are Different (1986). Her published collection of short stories include: This Is Lagos And Other Stories (1971) and Wives At War And Other Stories (1975). With the publication of Cassava Song and Rice Song (1986), she made an impressive entry into the realm of African poetry. Her concern for the literary and cultural well being of the future generations of Africans led her to publish a series of children’s books: Emeka, the Driver’s Guard (1972), Mammy Water (1979), The Miracle Kittens (1980), The Adventures of Deke (1980), and Journey To Space (1980). When she saw the problems African women writers faced in the attempt to publish and distribute their works, she established her own publishing company, Tana Press in Enugu in 1977. And when she realized that Heinemann had virtually condemned her books to the literary back burner, leading to their obscurity and piracy, she travelled to the United States and established links with the Africa World Press of New Jersey for the republication and distribution of her works. Before her death in Enugu in 1993, she
had completed a manuscript for another novel, *The Lake Goddess* which was published posthumously.

Nwapa’s achievements were recognized by numerous invitations from local and foreign universities for her to serve as a visiting creative writer. In 1982, the Federal government of Nigeria awarded her the Officer Of The Order Of Nigeria. Three years later, The University of Ife gave her the Merit Award for Authorship and Publishing. She became a member of PEN International and the Commonwealth Writer’s Award Committee in 1991 and 1992 respectively. She had also served as the President of the Association of Nigerian Authors in 1989.

Nwapa was an exemplary woman. Writing at a time when women writers were unheard of, she set a unique precedent. Several authors who follow her footsteps in writing have acknowledged their debt to her. Nwapa’s storming of the male bastion saw several women taking up their pens to write. Nwapa’s writing shows women to be a force worth reckoning with. She stresses on the female principle. Her works merge the male and female principle and create a synthesis where both men and women need, love and respect each other. Where the patriarchal male fails to respect the woman, Nwapa’s criticism is loud and clear. She goes on to show that women constitute an indispensable force in the social and economic life of the society. But above all, her works as a whole reveals the confidence the author has in the ability of women to live a life of fulfillment within or outside marriage, unfettered by men, provided they are economically independent.

Though Nwapa’s life reads like a fascinating success story, her personal life was fraught with several problems. She dealt with her problems with immense dignity and writing became a cathartic mode for her. Though she refuses to acknowledge autobiographical leanings in her books, Marie Umeh lists them out as she interviews Nwapa’s mother, nieces and nephews. Umeh points out that it was not easy to find a suitable groom for a University graduate in Nwapa’s time. Nwapa went against the wishes of her parents and married Gogo Nwakuche like her fictional character Efuru who marries much beneath her. When Nwapa stopped having children after having a son and daughter, her husband
took another wife. In the Ibo tradition children are valued. Her mother in law arranged for
the second marriage like Amaka’s mother in law in One Is Enough. Like Dora of Never
Again Nwapa remained in the polygamous marriage as Nwakuche’s first wife. She did
not leave or divorce him as she wanted her children to have a father. At one point of time
Gogo Nwakuche abandoned Nwapa and her baby daughter. This is reminiscent of
Efuru’s suffering when Adiewere ill treats her. Nwapa’s works record her felt
experiences. It’s almost as if she were viewing her life from outside. She poses a
quintessential question to the society – why does the society ill treat its talented women?

In writing Ugwuta women’s lives, Flora Nwapa made a name for herself as
Nigeria’s first female novelist, and Africa’s first female publisher. What is not
known however, is that by putting the children of Ogbuide in print, Nwapa was
able to tell her own story and release her own anxieties and feelings of
disenchantment with a society that “destroys its gifted females”. (Umeh 2001: 17).

Buchi Emecheta

A fellow Nigerian like Flora Nwapa, she was born Florence Onyebuchi Emecheta on July
21st, 1944 in Lagos. Buchi Emecheta, as she is popularly known, enrolled at Methodist
Girls Secondary School in 1954 and four years later, got married to Sylvester Onwordi at
the age of sixteen. In 1962, she joined her husband in London. The stay in London was
fraught with immense hardships. Due to insurmountable difficulties including culture
shock, poverty and spousal abuse, she separated from her husband in 1966. He is alleged
to have discouraged her budding literary talent by burning her first book manuscript. She
was then left to raise her five children on public assistance and odd menial work. But she
persevered, and in 1972 and 1975, published her first and second novels, In The Ditch
and Second Class Citizen. Meanwhile, she earned a B.A. (Sociology) degree from the
University of London in 1974. Since then she has published nine novels in addition toive children’s books, making her the most prolific contemporary African female writer.
The Bride Price (1976), The Slave Girl (1977), The Joys of Motherhood (1979),
Destination Biafra (1982), Adah’s Story – a combination of her first two works (1983),
The Rape Of Shavi (1985), The Family (1990) and Kehinde (1994). In 1990 she became a member of PEN (poets, Essayists and Novelists). In the same year she also published The Family in the United States. In 1992 she received the Doctor Of Literature from Farleigh Dickinson University in Madison, New Jersey.

Largely autobiographical, Emecheta’s works reflect the sorrow, anguish and strengths with which women confront the strictures of traditional African life in a modern changing society. She focuses on the clash between the Western and traditional values through the portrayal of female protagonists who challenge their roles as beasts of burden and who strive for economic and social independence. Emecheta takes on the role of the griotte or the story teller. She got her inspiration to write from the stories told by women in the moonlight in her village. Her grandmother was a keen story teller. It was she who taught Emecheta the importance of story telling. The Ibo culture and traditions are at the core of Emecheta’s work. She views her world as a Diasporic entity, bringing her Ibo sensibilities to impact on her current home in London. She explores her self and reinvents herself as she grapples with the rampant racism which reduces her to a second class citizen. Race and gender permeate the core of her writing as she explores the sensibilities of Black woman in the dominant White and intolerable society of London in the 60s and 70s.

Buchi Emecheta fully supports the Africana Womanist ideals because of her belief in the individuality of everybody – man or woman. All citizens must be able to act in freedom and dignity. No gender should attempt to dominate the other. Women should be free to discuss every topic which concerns them namely exploitation and oppression, sex, class, race and gender. There should not be an attempt to gag them. Emecheta does not consider marriage or motherhood to be the centre of a woman’s universe. According to her these should be options available to her for her to choose from. According to Emecheta, it is through education a woman is emancipated and a world of choice opens out before her. In a rare study of the female body in her novels, Emecheta explores the issues of rape, fertility and motherhood. Her novels depict a range of women, traversing the spectrum from the female intellectual to the illiterate woman grappling with the demands of the
traditional tribal life. The female intellectual is often one who has access to global cosmopolitan education. However, these categories of the female intellectual and the ordinary female subject are not entities separated by geographic location, or class privilege. In fact in her autobiographical novels *In The Ditch* and *Second Class Citizen*, Emecheta depicts the transformation of an impoverished Ibo girl into a migrant intellectual. The boundaries of the intellectual and the female subaltern are far more fluid in Emecheta's oeuvre as compared to other Nigerian novelists. The experiences of sexual violation too are not restricted to the under privileged women in the novels. The most striking of these examples is Debbie Ogdembge in *Destination Biafra*, who at the beginning of the novel is a privileged transnational intellectual, but as she travels through Nigeria ravaged by a bloody civil war, undergoes a series of violations, which reduce her status to a war refugee, the gap of privilege separating her from her fellow female companions is rapidly bridged. After the immediate emergency of the war, however, Debbie reverts to her privileged status of a transnational anti war intellectual/activist. Although the experience of the brutality of war that she has personally faced has transformed her fundamentally, the novel can not imagine solidarity between intellectuals and communities as anything but sporadic and contingent. In a similar vein the transformation of the Ibo girl into an immigrant in Britain and a writer of fiction, is not an uncomplicated narrative of easy class mobility. If Adah in the autobiographical novel *In The Ditch* and *Second Class Citizen* feels a sense of solidarity and identifies with other poor white women on welfare, she retains a sense of class prejudice against an educated and under educated Nigerian immigrant in Britain.

Thus, deeply entrenched racial and class prejudices, which erupt across fissures in the text, cautions against a utopian reading of these novels as expressing an easy affiliation between the female intellectual and the female subaltern. Buchi Emecheta's novels recognize and acknowledge the complications introduced by class in the fashioning of a solidarity based on gender.

Emecheta lives and leads a fruitful life in Britain where she is the member of The Choir of Christ, Highgate in North London. She is invited to conferences and seminars in
various parts of the world and frequently enjoys the advantage of addressing teachers and students in schools where her novels have been adopted as text books. Some of her works have been translated into several European languages and have been adopted for undergraduate and graduate courses. Emecheta has won several awards among which are the Best Black Writer in Britain and the New Statesman Jock Campbell Award, both bestowed in 1978. Additionally the author is the member of the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Advisory committee to the Home secretary on Race and Equality. From a second class citizen in a cold and unfriendly country, Emecheta has come a long way. Commenting on her difficult yet determined progress, she writes.

As for my survival for the past twenty years in England, from when I was a little over twenty, dragging four cold and dripping babies with me and pregnant with a fifth one that is a miracle. And if for any reason you do not believe in miracles, please start believing, because my keeping my head above water in this indifferent society, which is probably succeeding in making me indifferent and private too, is a miracle. (Emecheta 1986 7)

Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta: Sisters in arms

She told Francis about The Bride Price in the evening.

Francis laughed, "Whatever was he going to hear next? A woman writer in his own house, in a White man’s country?"

"Well, Flora Nwapa is Black and she writes," Adah challenged. "I have seen her books in all the libraries in which I have worked".

Francis did not reply to this. He was not going to read Adah’s rubbish and that was that. Adah was hurt badly but she said nothing. Her books might not be published until she was forty, but her first story had been completed. She could not go back now. (Emecheta 1974 56)
Flora Nwapa has a visible influence in the writings of her more prolific sister, Buchi Emecheta. In *Second Class Citizen*, Adah, who is Emecheta’s alter ego tells her husband about the book that she has written. Commenting on Nwapa’s influence on her fellow African woman authors, Margaret Busby writes: “The honour of being the first Black African writer to gain international reputation goes to Nigeria’s late Flora Nwapa, whose unexpected death in 1993 we still mourn. It was Nwapa who inspired Buchi Emecheta to follow in her footsteps.” (Umeh 1996 8) Emecheta did not follow her sister blindly. She carried forward the themes discussed by Nwapa, enriching it with her Diasporic or (been-to) vision. Unlike the Ibos, the Yorubas revere twins. Ibeji, (twins), and iyabeji, (mother of twins) are regarded with awe. In the Yoruba cosmic thinking, Taiwo is considered to be the pathfinder, sent ahead by Kehinde to explore the world. “Nwapa as Igbo Onyeisi, “leader”, or Yoruba Taiwo, that is “first “ of twins, generated a supportive ambiance particularly for her sisters Ulasi and Emecheta. She opened international publishing doors for these and other women because of her feat in keeping up her writing with the production of two more novels, *Idu* and *Never Again*, within the next nine years... Thus, Nwapa has been as fertile as Onyeisi in leadership, and primal mother, consistently using the water deity as the model.” (Ogunyemi 1996 78)

The last lines of *Efuru* inspire Emecheta’s title for her magnum opus *The Joys of Motherhood*. The thematic links are very close as both novels discuss the importance of the concept of motherhood in the Ibo society. Motherhood or mother culture is integral to the Ibo culture. Both *Efuru* and *The Joys of Motherhood* argue for obligatory motherhood for women. A woman is complete in herself. Children are aspirational but should not subsume a woman’s entire persona. There are several discourses on Motherhood. The concept will be studied at length in Chapter 1. Interestingly, the Ibo concept of mothering is very different from its Western counterpart. Motherhood keeps Western women powerless in that they merely control small children (Lilianfield 1981 159). Nigerian motherhood differs as it empowers women to control people privately and publicly. Uhamiri, the water goddess and the reigning source of inspiration in Nwapa’s novels, exercises this authority vested in social motherhood. Talking about the comprehensive power of Nwapa’s Womanism which influences Emecheta, Chikwenye Ogunyemi writes:
With her Womanist endings, Nwapa makes her women escape obnoxious traditions to establish their independence. Efuru, Uhamirian to the core, ends as an ex, a single woman who tells her story to a man, who happens to be a doctor; her story is meant to heal. Idu, through death by anorexia, rejects the Ibo idea of a woman as movable property in extended family. Kate, as a therapeutic agent, rehabilitates the society by narrating their experiences in Never Again. Amaka functions effectively as a single parent to twin sons in One Is Enough. Rose, Dora and Agnes take pot shots at the educated elite in Women Are Different. These women grapple with the status quo. (144)

Flora Nwapa’s role has been seen to be that of the mother figure. She was equally encouraging of her Black counterparts – men and women alike. Her Womanism encompasses all men, women and children. She argues for a comprehensive and fruitful existence for all. She has been said to be as fertile as Onyeisi in leadership. Her first manuscript was read and recommended by her good friend Chinua Achebe. She ended her illustrious career by entrusting her last manuscript to yet another man, the Jamaican Chester Mills. Although Nwapa died before she saw the typed manuscript, Mills, like a dutiful son typed it. A copy of it is still lodged in his computer. Her faith in Black men, nationally and internationally, is demonstrated by this fruitful circular journey, which defines her Womanist politics. Its defiant spirit is tempered by conciliatory moves and a need to work together in production process.

Nwapa and Emecheta capture the evolution of Nigeria through the status of women in the society. The political awakening in the 1930s following the South Eastern Women’s struggle is manifested through the spirited Efuru; Nigeria’s misguided participation in World War II, resulting in the subdued rebelliousness of the 1940s and 1950s is mirrored in Idu. The saga of the civil war is seen through the eyes of Kate in Never Again. The economically self sufficient woman of the 1970s and 1980s is seen in the depiction of Amaka in One Is Enough, and Agnes, Dora and Rose in Women Are Different. Similarly, Emecheta’s women characters become the face of changing Nigeria. Her writing is richly endowed encompassing within it the Ibo, Yoruba and British traditions. She has been
called the “Ogbanje of all writers” – journeying across three worlds and traditions. Her popularity is greater in the West than in Nigeria. However, her contribution to Nigerian literature can not go unnoticed. It is Emecheta who first spoke of treating her writing as her baby. She claimed her writing as her own – a concept hitherto foreign to Nigerians. In *The Second Class Citizen* she writes: “I felt so fulfilled when I finished it, just as if I had just made another baby.” she had told Bill and he had replied: “But that is how writers feel. Their work is their brainchild...Books tell a great deal about the writers. It is like your own particular child. (87)

Emecheta’s fiction needs to be contextualized. As she travels between the worlds of Ibuza, Lagos and London, her characters too seem to be in a metaphoric journey. They are traveling across temporal, geographical and mental space. The journey or the quest for betterment is fraught with pain and anguish. Madness and rape are recurrent metaphors in Emecheta’s novels. Ogunyemi sees her as a true palava woman who is forever at war with herself, her mother and her traditions. Yet, at heart she is rooted to her Nigerian ancestry. She writes:

Like an outsider looking with critical eyes, this been – to is the prototype of the palava woman; in an unprecedented fashion, she holds up for scrutiny different forms and loci of oppression: motherhood; child power and child abuse; rape, incest and sexual harassment; militarism; sexism; slavery; imperialism; post colonialism; classism; elitism; ethnicism and more. Her range is encyclopaedic, yet this sociologist–story teller does not appear silent. Her writing career shows courage and doggedness of purpose to expose as many aspects of human interaction as possible to generate controversy, thereby fuelling the debate. She addresses the issue of oppression metaphorically. Slavery, second class citizenship, shallow graves, ditches, childlessness, madness and motherhood typically approximate the victim’s untenable position in the society. In this milieu, victims include women, men, children, peoples, and/or countries. (156)
‘Horror of Isms’

“These version of available isms have been used as sticks with which to beat people, to stifle intellectual growth and inquiry, to frighten people from thinking things out for themselves, to bully them into blindly accepting formula – ridden politics and repeating meaningless mantras, and to subject them to slander if they resist.” Madhu Kishwar

Both Nwapa and Emecheta are uncomfortable when they are labeled as Feminists. Though their books are definitely about women and seek to address the issues of women, both Nwapa and Emecheta have refused to be slotted as feminists. Flora Nwapa on several occasions has refused the tag of feminism. She has argued that she writes about people she knows and her works should not be labeled as feminist in nature. However, on certain occasions, she has called herself a “feminist with a big F” as opposed to Emecheta’s famous claim of being a “feminist with a small f”. Obioma Nnaemeka analyses the reason for Nwapa’s distrust of the term. She argues that the theoretical tool of Western feminism must definitely be learnt and used. However, bandying the term endlessly and equating it with male bashing is definitely against the African ethos. While acknowledging that feminist scholarship is one of the most powerful critical and analytical tools, Nnaemeka cautions against an indiscriminate use of feminism where texts are distorted and meanings imputed to them which might not be true given the cultural ethos of the author. She writes:

I am aware that Western Feminism as a tool of imperialism is aligned with Western ideologies and analytical categories that are embedded in fashionable discourses from Marxism and structuralism to deconstruction and postmodernism. I must also point out that the men bashing and cultural imperialism and intolerance that pervades much of the so called feminist criticism of African literature has more to do with individual idiosyncrasies and posturing than feminist theory (23).
This sentiment is echoed by most Africanists who feel that the Western feminists tend to oversimplify by talking of all African women or all Third World women in the same breath. Jessica Powers writes:

One of the aspects of Western society that has long disturbed me is the distinct division in gender identities. When any of my students states something along the lines of "Well, men always..." or "Well, that's because you're a woman...," I call them on it. I call them on it because I frequently fit into the male category. (Example: I'm terrible at decorating my home.) I argue that men and women alike should be treated as individuals and not relegated to categories although they aren't unique. (45)

Gender roles in Africa are generally even more circumscribed than what one finds in the Western world. Although colonialism and modernity changed many of the traditions in different African societies, including puberty rites, sexual division of labor and resources, the roles have remained fairly consistent. However, time and again, scholars find women who break out of those roles and are thus considered "wicked." Among the Ibo society in southeastern Nigeria, gender division is usually strict, but there are some unique exceptions to this rule that suggest more fluidity between gender roles. Ifi Amadiume explores this in her path breaking book *Male Daughters, and Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*. Amadiume's analysis of pre-colonial Igbo society focuses on the flexibility of gender roles, which were not associated with sex. Linguistically, Igbo language has a non-distinctive subject pronoun, which allows for fewer linguistic distinctions between sexes. In general, however, this "flexibility" is applied to women. Thus, daughters could assume male roles and become sons or husbands. Amadiume gives an example of gender flexibility wherein a man takes on a female role -- the case of Eze Agba, the priest of the goddess Idemili's shrine-"a 'female man' in the sense that he had to tie his wrapper like women and not wear it loincloth fashion, like men." (Amadiume 76).

Male daughters were instituted as part of the patrilineage and inheritance rights associated with land. If men did not have sons, they could pass land and trees to
daughters if their daughters were recognized, through ritual, as having the rights of "sons." Likewise, wealthy and influential females could obtain wives. The children borne by these wives, or to their "female husbands" belonged to the patrilineal obi and had inheritance rights accordingly. Women also had power through women's organizations like the Women's Council. It was an important pro-female organization that created female solidarity. Women could collectively choose to go on "strike," walking out of the village or refusing to perform traditional duties, including sexual services, cooking, and childcare. This collective form of power allowed women to make changes in customs they felt were detrimental. Amadiume argues that "their demands were never unreasonable," usually consisted of things like protecting young girls from lewd behavior. They also had power through religious ritual to the goddess Idemili, a goddess associated with the river. (67)

Hazel Carby, a noted Marxist Feminist critic argues along similar lines. Carby critiques the work of contemporary white feminist critics, who nostalgically and erroneously discover a "lost sisterhood" between black and white women. The suffrage and temperance movements, she reminds us, were far from racially inclusive, and white women of the period largely "allied themselves not with black women but with a racist patriarchal order against all black people." (78)

The First International Conference on "Women in Africa and the African Diaspora: Bridges across Activism and the Academy" was held in Nsukka, Nigeria from the 13th to the 18th of July 1992. The conference addressed the debate on feminism and African women. Flora Nwapa, Rose Acholonu, Clenora Hudson Weems, Ama Ata Aidoo and other writers and scholars were present. Ama Ata Aidoo presented a paper where she said that long before the advent of feminism; her grandmother and her mother were feminists. Reacting to the debate, Nwapa, who had always denied being called a feminist, spoke strongly in defense of feminism. She says:

I want to say something about feminism. Years back, when I go on my tours to America and Europe, 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." Buchi Emecheta is another one that said; "I am a feminist with a small 'f'" (whatever Buchi means). 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. (Nnaemeka 90)

Nnaemeka points out that while the debate on feminism was on-- this war of terminology raged between the feminists, the Womanists, and the Africana Womanists, the majority of the hundreds of African women who were present maintained a respectable distance from it all. The bewildered and disinterested look on their faces seemed to plead, let’s just be human beings and move ahead! Furthermore, while the Western feminist participants complained about the presence of too many male (mostly African) participants, the African women demanded that the conference agenda include a serious debate on hierarchies among women and the woman-on-woman violence and abuses that result from these inequalities! (Nnaemeka 90).

Later in an interview with Marie Umeh in 1993, Nwapa refuses to be called a feminist. She was never comfortable with the term and that showed in her rather contradictory statements.

Umeh: The critic Katherine Frank, in an article entitled "Women without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa," describes you as a radical feminist. What is your opinion of this assessment?

Nwapa: I don't think that 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 image of women positively. (Umeh 1993 230)

Many, including Rose Acholonu at the Nsukka conference, have taken Flora Nwapa to task regarding this "apparent" inconsistency vis-a-vis her "feminist identity. However,
what has been inconsistent is the way questions of "feminist identity" have been framed and posed; what is inconsistent is the location (physical and ideological) from where she is hounded for an answer. She stated clearly that she was "an ordinary woman who is writing about what she knows." (Umeh 1993 230) The radical feminist label is Katherine Frank's idea and Nwapa did not have to claim it simply because Katherine Frank said so.

The problem with much of the so-called feminist analysis of Nwapa's works is that it is out of step with "what she (Nwapa) knows." In the interview with Marie Umeh, Nwapa had this advice for women who wish to write: "I would advise them to read and listen." I might add that the same advice goes to the "all-knowing, all-talking, and never-listening" feminist critic of African literature". (Umeh 1993 234) Obioma Nnaemeka has a word of caution for the feminist critic of Nwapa’s works who in their overzealousness impute erroneous meanings to the text. Nnaemeka writes: “As far as Nwapa's works are concerned, the feminist critic should pay less attention to Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and ecriture feminine and listen more to the rhythm and heartbeat of Igboland. Chinua Achebe is right in identifying the unequal power relations between the West and Africa, between the strong and the weak, as what produces the deaf and speaking subject.” (Nnaemeka 234).

Buchi Emecheta, too, has time and again contradicted her feminist stance. Her contradiction might be the result of her strong tie with her motherland. The umbilical cord is never severed as all her writing stems from her Ibo – Yoruba lineage. It is because of her strong link with Nigeria and her claim to sisterhood with Nigerian women authors which occasions her rather ambiguous stance regarding feminism. Ezenwa – Ohaeto in “Replacing Myth with Myth: The Feminist Streak in Buchi Emecheta’s Double yoke” argues that Emecheta, in order to counter the myth of male chauvinism in African literature, fashions her own myths of female superiority. Emecheta seems to rise to the call of combating patriarchy. (Umeh 1996 234) Yet, her feminism is moderate and all inclusive. In her very famous and much debated interview, Emecheta comments on her feminism:
I am a feminist with a small “f”. I love men and good men are the salt of the earth... Personally, I’d like to see an ideal happy marriage. But if it doesn’t work for goodness sake, call it off. (Umeh 1996 345)

Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi contends that Emecheta’s dubiousness about her feminist stance comes from her “been-to” status. She contends that Emecheta observes her culture from the wise eyes of someone who is far away and can therefore have an objective view of the culture she has grown up in. Emecheta, however, refuses to comment. According to her, she is a storyteller and all she is doing is telling stories. She does not consider herself to be a feminist or otherwise. In an interview in 1994, Emecheta says:

Apart from telling stories, I don’t have a particular mission. I like to tell the world our part of the story while using the voices of women. Women in our area are silenced a lot. Even amongst writers, you will notice that there is a bias towards male writers. My hope is that in the future, people will start reading more books by female writers and realize that African women do have a voice. (Umeh 1996 449)

Emecheta has time and again contradicted her feminist stance either through her writing or through her interviews. Ogunyemi correctly observes: “Emecheta plunges into Oboshi’s Womanist watery terrain, saying one thing one moment only to contradict it in the next through some speech, her way of life, or her writing. In the palaver, this unpredictability is a fascinating strategy that makes room for flexibility and compromise.” (222)

In her interviews, Emecheta pleads for a more wholesome growth for both men and women of Nigeria. In an autobiographical essay in 1982 she writes:

I did not start as a feminist. I do not think I am one now. Most of my readers would take this to be a statement of a coward. But it is not. I thought before that I would like to be one but after my recent visit to the United States, when I talked to the real “Feminists” with a capital “F”, I think we women of African background still have a long way to go before we can really rub shoulders
with such women... So, my sisters in America, I am not shunning your advanced help, I still think women of Africa still need your contribution, and at the same time we need our men. (116-17)

This desire to consolidate, however, does not prevent Emecheta from harshly criticizing society as is the privilege of the daughter of the soil. Though in her interviews Emecheta pleads solidarity with men, yet her texts show men in a harsh light. Several critics have expressed their discomfort at Emecheta’s depiction of men. None of the male characters in Emecheta’s novels provide for a positive role model. While Nnaife is accused of raping his newly wedded wife in The Joys of Motherhood; Francis, Adah’s husband burns her first manuscript in The Second Class Citizen. In The Slave Girl, Ojebeta’s brother sells his trusting sister to a market woman. Emecheta has often been taken to task for over simplifying her characters where her male characters seem more caricatures than real. Her work is said to reflect a certain kind of male bashing which in her interviews she tends to refute. Lloyd Brown is extremely critical of her generalizations. He observes: “… even more self defeatingly, her criticism of African men are often marred by generalizations that are too shrill and transparently overstated to be altogether convincing.”(89). Shivaji Sengupta relates an interesting anecdote of his conversation with a Nigerian taxi driver in Washington DC. The taxi driver waxed eloquent on Chinua Achebe, calling him “A national Hero”. He took immense pride in the fact that he hailed from the same village as Chinua Achebe. When asked about Emecheta his face fell.

“And how about Buchi Emecheta?” I asked, though a suspicion lurked inside me that my taxi driver friend would not have heard of her. I was wrong. In a trice the jovial happy look was gone. Nostrils flared in anger. Eyes showed disgust. “Ah, shame man!” he shouted, suddenly with an exaggerated American accent. “Buchi Emecheta is no writer! The woman is a troublemaker!” Upon further interrogation, he declared that the only thing Emecheta wants is to “turn all women against men”. “We turned her out of Nigeria! She writes nothing but sex, sex, sex.” (Umeh 1996 186)
Sengupta analyses this rather impassioned outburst of the taxi driver. He observes that Emecheta’s texts revolve around the female body and sexuality because they bring to light a kind of reality most societies are keen to hide. He writes: “Emecheta’s texts serve as discussion points on female body and sexuality. It is perhaps not a coincidence that Buchi Emecheta’s novels are reflections of hard concrete realities. The plots are unidirectional, moving energetically headlong towards the denouement. But they also denude, uncovering the female body, baring men’s lust for power. Little wonder that most Nigerian men do not like Emecheta! To them, she’s too vivid, too appealing, and ultimately too controversial.”(Umeh 1996 186) Emecheta realizes that she shows the men in a weak light. But she says she paints the men as she sees them. Commenting on her controversial portrayal of men Emecheta says in an interview with Ogundele in 1994:

Ogundele: What about your male characters, do they possess the particular strengths or weaknesses? For example, Nnaife in The Joys of Motherhood?

Emecheta: No they do not possess any type of weakness. I describe Nigerian males as we see them but once they are read outside the culture people realize how weak they are. But our 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. By so doing, their weaknesses don’t show in real life until you put them down in paper then they become visible. When you see these characters in black and white you will realize that our men need to reeducate themselves or reexamine their actions because it is overflowing from individual families to our government. You can see their weaknesses in the way they run our government. The funniest thing about it is that everybody is talking about it and there is nothing they can do to change it. (Umeh 1996 455)

Emecheta makes it clear that it is against patriarchy that she raises her voice. It is definitely not a tirade against men. Controversy seems to be Emecheta’s middle name as in an interview in 1983, she speaks favorably of polygamy. Emecheta, though a
committed feminist in her writings, does not view polygamy as a negative system. "In many cases polygamy can be liberating to the woman, rather than inhibiting her, especially if she is educated," she told the audience assembled at the Second African Writers Conference. "The husband has no reason for stopping her from attending international conferences like this one, from going back to university and updating her career or even getting another degree. Polygamy encourages her to value herself as a person and look outside her family for friends." (Umeh 1996 67). As a Sociologist, Emecheta can not help but realize that polygamy has some good sides to it – it can mean a sharing of duties and a certain kind of freedom for the woman, who then, does not have to bear the entire responsibility of managing a husband and home. However, as a Nigerian living in London, wife sharing is abhorrent to her. Her texts, The Joys of Motherhood and Kehinde depict the mistrust and the ill will shared by the co-wives.

Emecheta’s novels reveal a paradox, a dual vision, one insistently feminist and the other consistently denying feminism. Part of this dualism stems from her fear of rejection in Nigeria. The subsequent tension in her works results in mixed reception, particularly in Nigeria where she is not as popular as she is in Europe and America. Chicwenye Ogunyemi is critical of Emecheta’s early works. She observes:

“Her ambivalence reveals an English strain in her attitude towards life, a strain in constant conflict with her innate Africanness. Consequently the works are pulled apart by tensions of the opposing forces. One could say, indeed, that Emecheta’s works tend to get pulled apart by the tension of those opposing forces that “try” to make her “speak” clearly and unambiguously for them.” (Ogunyemi 56) In her defense of the African culture, Ogunyemi problematizes Adah’s taking up a pen to write after Francis, her husband burns her manuscript. According to her, most Nigerian women would not do that. She feels Adah “retaliates in typical western fashion with a Freudian weapon – the pen.” (67) While orality is seen as being more West African, writing is perceived to be more European. Emecheta’s ambivalence should be seen more positively than otherwise. It reflects her growth as a writer and a person who is trying to create a semblance between her craft and her dual identity. Her integrated vision has been lauded by Ogunyemi who observes:
What finally emerges in Emecheta as been-to is the replacing of a parochial outlook with a cosmopolitan vision that allows her to command an international space for her and Nigeria. Such visibility has its political responsibility, hence her controversial stances and her paradoxical compromises arouse ire in the palaver....In the loneliness and comfort of exile, she laments and protests against oppression and powerlessness and the myriad ways in which they are manifested in the lives of women, the poor, the black and the alphabetic. (227)

Situating herself at a distance from the feminist debate, Emecheta writes:

Women authors are frequently still being ignored by male critics or put into a separate category as "feminist" which means that their works are not evaluated in the same way as those of male authors. My novels are not feminist; they are part of the corpus of African literature and should be discussed as such. I deal with a variety of topics in my novels which are certainly not feminist: war, colonialism and the exploitation of Africa by the West, and many others.... I have not been relating well with Western feminists and have found myself at loggerheads with them from time to time. They are only concerned with issues that are related to themselves and transplant these onto Africa.... Western feminists are often concerned with peripheral topics and do not focus their attention on major concerns.... They think that by focusing on exotic issues in the "third world" they have internationalized their feminism. (Umeh 1996 150)

Reason for foregrounding the female voice

Women writers from Africa have suffered from the general neglect that has been accorded to the second sex. Though women have been writing and publishing from the 1960s, the literary criticism from Africa chose to ignore women writers for almost twenty years. In the Introduction to Women writers In Black Africa, Lloyd Brown writes: "There is every reason to believe that the voice of the African writer will be heard and studied for a long time to come, as artist, social analyst and literary critic. But in all of this, African literature has to be understood as literature by African men, for instance, of male
oriented modes of evaluating literatures” (23). In the literary milieu there was a cold shoudering of the women completely ignoring their literary status. Both in literary anthologies and in courses of studies, practically no women writers were included. It was difficult for women writers to find publishers for their books. According to Flora Nwapa, “Some male critics do not even acknowledge female writers...so you are killing the writer if you don’t even talk about her. To be ignored is worse than when you are writing about her”. (James 67). Carole Boyce Davies argues: “Even as the first major African writer appears – Aidoo (1965), Nwapa and Grace Ogot (1966) – the same type of alliance which was created by male critics and writers was not formed between women critics and women writers. Instead, without the benefit of a feminist focus, there was a reluctance to bring the works of women writers under serious but sensitive critical evaluation.” (Davies 76). The first critical work which focuses on women’s writing from the continent is Lloyd Brown’s seminal work titled Women Writers in Black Africa (1981). Commenting on the exclusionary practices he writes:

The women writers of Africa are the other voices, the unheard voices, rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in the repetitive anthologies and the predictably male oriented studies in the field. Relatively few literary magazines and scholarly journals, in the West and in Africa itself, have found significant space and time for African women writers. The ignoring of women writers in the continent has become a tradition, implicit rather than formally stated but a tradition nevertheless – and a rather unfortunate one at that. (23)

Ama Ata Aidoo, speaking from the margins of the canon bitterly complains about the lack of critical attention given to women authors: “It is especially pathetic to keep on writing without having any consistent, active, critical intelligence that is interested in you as an artist....” (James 158)

The resistance to feminist studies was at the core of this disregard shown to women authors. Because of the inherently male- oriented nature of African critical discourse and its politics, women oriented studies were considered repetitive and lacking in critical
content. Carole Boyce Davies points out that feminism was treated as inferior to other kinds of literary criticism. In the preface to Ogundipe’s *Re-Creating Ourselves*, she cites examples of this kind of prejudice that existed among certain Africanists.

The academic backdrop against which work of this nature is produced is represented by two signifying sketches which follow:

1. A well known Africanist meets one of his former students whom he had not seen since graduate school and who was now a scholar in his own right. Meeting anew as professionals in the corridors of an African Studies meeting, he discovers that her field of research was women, and says privately to her “Oh no, you are too bright to just work on women!”

2. Another even more well known Africanist in response to a perceived challenge to his “manifest destiny” and right to write on women, without seriously studying the field, says publicly in a central forum, that the study of women is too important to be left to women. (8)

Ama Ata Aidoo, echoing the need for feminist studies says in an interview to Adeola James:

The women’s movement has definitely reinforced one’s conviction about the need for us to push in whatever way we can for the development of women. But I don’t think that one woke up in the morning and found out that they were talking the development of women, and one should also join the bandwagon – no. What it has done is that it has actually confirmed one’s belief and one’s conviction. Our people say that if you take up a drum to beat and nobody joins then you become a fool. The women’s movement has helped in that it is like other people taking up the drum and beating along with you. (174)

This is, however, not to imply that the writing of the female authors in Africa is a homogenized whole. There is diversity of cultures, heritages, and personal experiences. Despite the diverse forms, the literature produced by the women provides for some broad bases of similarity. There is a similarity of experiencing what it is to be a woman in a patriarchal set up where education has been the prerogative of the male offspring. Writing
by African women seeks a redefinition of the woman trying to free herself from the stereotyping she has been subjected to. The prominent female voices from the continent belong to Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Zaynab Alkali, Bessie Head, Efua Sutherland, Grace Ogot and Tsitsi Dangarembga. All these authors discuss the uniqueness of the black woman’s position in the rather complex colonial and neo colonial societies. Though the texts are definitely feminist in nature, there is a certain discomfort on the part of the authors, to call themselves feminists. The term has been much contested and henceforth deserves to be looked at closely in the African context.

Feminism

There are many definitions of what a feminist is--the simplest and probably the best is what is listed in most dictionaries—"a person who believes in the full equality of women and men." This means anyone--male or female--who supports this idea can be a feminist. Filomena Steady defines African Feminism as a humanistic feminism. Filomena Steady in her introduction to *Black Women Cross-Culturally* says that the African feminism includes female autonomy and cooperation: an emphasis on nature and culture—the centrality of children, multiple mothering and kinship, and number of traditional rights and responsibilities which ties the women down. According to her, “True feminism is an abnegation of male protection and a determination to be resourceful and reliant. The majority of the black women in Africa and the diaspora have developed these characteristics, though not by choice . . . “ (45) Steady’s definition is founded upon the principles of traditional African values that view gender roles as complimentary, parallel, asymmetrical and autonomously linked in the continuity of human life. As such African feminism recognizes the inherent, multiple roles of women and men in reproduction, production and the distribution of wealth, power, and responsibility for sustaining human life. African feminism embraces femininity, beauty, power, serenity, inner harmony, and a complex matrix of power. It is always poised and centered in womanness. It demonstrates that power and femininity are intertwined rather than antithetical. African femininity compliments African masculinity, while simultaneously seeking male defense of both as critical, demonstrable and mutually obligatory. African feminism is active and
essential to the social, political, economic, cultural, and evolutionary aspects of human
order.

In the introduction to her work, *Francophone African Women Writers: Destroying the emptiness of Silence*, Irene Assiba D’Almeida argues that silence is a representation of the “historical muting of women under the formidable institution known as patriarchy, that form the social organization in which males assume power and create for females an inferior status.” Quoting Nawal Al Sadaawi, D’Almeida likens writing to killing, “because it takes a lot of courage, the same courage as when you kill, because you are killing ideas, you are killing injustices, you are killing systems that oppress you. Sometimes it’s better to kill the outside world and not kill yourself.”(67)

The noted African feminists are Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, Marie Umeh, Chimalum Nwankwo, Brenda Berrian, Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Obioma Nnaemeka, bell hooks, Anthonia Kalu, Molara Ogundipe, Carol Boyce Davies, Florence Stratton and Nawal El Saadawi.

**White Feminism/ Black Feminism**

Black Feminism is not a unified whole. There is no one definition of Black Feminism. Just as the women living in the continent are vastly different from each other, there are several definitions of Feminism. While there is a large corpus of texts on feminism, the Black feminists have tried to redefine feminism as it applies to them. While there are certain broad commonalities, there is a very definite class difference which calls for different definitions based on class realities. Molara Ogundipe in *Recreating Ourselves* argues that all women living in contemporary Nigeria are under the stress of living in a Third World, neo colonial nation ruled by an indifferent, oppressive and wasteful black bourgeoisie. The market woman’s reality differs from that of the middle class educated woman. While middle class women show their resentment for polygamy, the market women look at it as a source of getting extra hands to do their numerous chores. At a symposium organized by the Nigerian Association of University Women in 1974, the market women on the panel were contemptuous of the middle class women’s abhorrence of polygamy. They felt that men could not be expected to be loyal to one woman while
some out rightly felt they needed helpmates in the form of co-wives to share or preferably take over, the chores of kitchen and bed, so they, the older wives could concentrate on their trading. Black feminist scholars have made it their mission to name intersections of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and religion as points of interrogation, resistance, and social activism. Black feminism developed out of a need to fill a void that was missing in mainstream or second wave feminism, which primarily focused on gender oppression with little regard for race, class, or sexual orientation. In *Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory*, bell hooks narrates her arduous encounters with White women feminists at conferences, classrooms, and supposedly “safe” living room spaces. hooks asserts that White women’s attempts at silencing Black women is an act of racist violence. She observes:

When I participated in feminist groups, I found that white women adopted a condescending attitude towards me and other non-white participants. The condescending attitude they directed at black women was one of the means they employed to remind us that the women’s movement was “theirs”- that we were able to participate because they allowed it, even encouraged it; after all, we were needed to legitimate the process. They did not see us as equals. And though they expected us to provide firsthand accounts of black experience, they felt it was their role to decide if these experiences were authentic. Frequently, college-educated black women (even those from poor and working-class backgrounds) were dismissed as mere imitators.

According to Donna Langston, Black women were marginalized within mainstream feminist discourse of the 1960s and responded to this positioning by producing scholarship that spoke directly to Black women’s experiences of systemic, interlocking oppressions. Langston argues:

The visions and strategies of liberal feminism and radical feminism were flawed in that they were based on an analysis that reduced all oppressions to the dimension of gender, and more narrowly, gender as defined by white middle class
heterosexual experience...The complexity of multiple identities was not consistently present in any of these movements, although African American women were addressing concepts concerning multifaceted oppressions during this time period, providing an important body of critical writing. (65)

Obioma Nnaemeka in "Bringing African Women into the Classroom? Rethinking Pedagogy and Epistemology" argues: “We African women have witnessed repeatedly the activities of our overzealous foreign sisters, mostly feminists, who appropriate our wars in the name of fighting the oppression of women in the so-called Third World. We watch with chagrin and in painful sisterhood these avatars of the proverbial mourner "who wails more than the owners of the corpse." (309)

Patricia Hill Collins argues that some of the core themes of Black Feminism are self definition, self valuation, and the centralization of black women’s voices in theoretical discourse, and the recognition of interlocking oppressions of race, gender, and class. Collins is particularly interested in how each act of oppression acts simultaneously to affect black women. (98) Deborah King has argued that factors such as race, class, and feminist consciousness cannot be set in opposition to one another because each interacts concurrently to create multiple realities in Black women’s lives. (34) African American critic, Clenora Hudson-Weems rejects feminism and states that black, or what she terms “Africana” women who embrace feminism “are near assimilations or sell-outs who in the final analysis have no true commitment to their culture or their people” (25-26).

**Third World Feminism**

One can argue that western feminist discourse is not monolithic. There is, in Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s words, “a coherence of effects” resulting from the assumption of Europe/ Euro- America as “a primary referent in theory and praxis”. (56) This, for example, is the summation of Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak’s critique of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s The Madwoman in the Attic, a text that takes for its radical trope the figure of a white Caribbean woman whose insanity results from geographic/ racial contamination. Spivak argues that Gilbert and Gubar see Bertha Mason “only in psychological terms as Jane’s dark double” (267). She argues further that it “is the active
ideology of Imperialism that provides the discursive field of Bertha Mason’s characterization” (266).

Julia Kristeva’s About Chinese Women, a travel narrative written after a three week stay in the People’s Republic of China offers another example of how the Third World is reduced to a metonymic function. As Susan Andrade observes “The semiotique, her category of opposition to the phallocentric symbolique is strategically fragmented, locatable in the interstices of European hysterical and avant-garde discourse” (92) but appears to permeate all aspects of Chinese culture, which she constructs as monolithic. Gross generalizations about feminism (constructed as White) and the Third World (constructed as Male) are not restricted to theorists who focus on Europe or Euro-America. Africanist Katherine Frank is unable to reconcile feminism with a monolithic Africa:

Feminism, by definition, is a profoundly individualistic philosophy: it values personal growth and individual fulfillment over any larger communal needs or goals. African society, of course, even in its most westernized forms, places the values of the group over those of the individual with the result that the notion of an African feminism almost seems a contradiction in terms. (56)

In an attempt to detach themselves from what is viewed as the negative implications of feminism, primarily its association with white, middle class women, and to ward off accusations such as those of Hudson-Weems, some African-American women used different terminology to articulate their feminist consciousness. The term Womanism is most widely used among African and African-American women, who either feel uncomfortable being labeled feminist, or prefer terminology more related to Black women’s experience.

Womanism

Alice Walker, a noted African-American writer and critic defines her brand of feminism as womanism. In her celebrated book In Our Mother’s Garden she defines womanism as:
From womanish. (opp. of “girlish”, i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or any feminist of colour. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, “you acting womanish,” i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behaviour... also: a woman who loves other women sexually and/ or non sexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance to laughter) and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or non sexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of an entire people, male and female... womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender. (45)

Nigerian scholars Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi and Mary E. Modupe Kolawole are womanists though their definition of womanism is different from Alice Walker’s. Kolawole defines womanism as “the totality of feminine self retrieval and self assertion in positive cultural ways. She believes that “any African woman who has the consciousness to situate the struggle within African cultural realities by working for a total and robust self retrieval of the African woman is an African or Africana Womanist.” (98) Ogunyemi distinguishes the womanist from the feminist as the former having a consciousness of sexual issues that are incorporated into racial, cultural, national, and political considerations. Hudson-Weems prefers Africana womanism as a more Afro centric term that includes all women of African descent.

Redefining or revisioning feminism is an interest shared by African-American and African women. African and Africanist women scholars and activists are talking about gender difference and similar dialogues that are taking place by Third World women in and outside of Africa, Asia and Latin America. The inter-relatedness of race, class, gender, colonialism, imperialism, capitalism and patriarchy and questions of definition, history, culture, language, and nationality are all inter woven into what Chandra Talpade Mohanty calls “cartography of black feminism cross culturally” (75). This sort of revisionary thinking is significant because it is the uncertainty of meaning, the “anything goes” (hooks 23) approach to feminism that makes black women reluctant to advocate it.
Carol Boyce Davies and Guy-Sheftall provide definitions of feminism which better illustrates this change in thinking. Davies states:

In short, feminism questions and seeks to transform what it is to be a woman in society, to understand how the categories women and the feminine are defined, structured and produced... feminist politics, in my understanding, is the resistance to the objectification of women in society, in literature, art and culture. It is also the articulation of a critical and an intellectual practice which challenges all patriarchal assumptions and norms (27-28).

Irene D'Almeida suggests a reconceptualisation of feminism in an African context and argues that "feminism has to be recast in the African mould to fit the contours of issues faced by women on the African continent and within specific countries" (19). African-American, Caribbean and African women writers are challenging patriarchy, confronting systems of domination that oppress women and articulating a clear understanding of the multiple nature of black women's oppression. One of the earliest articulations of a specifically African feminist theory comes from Filomena Steady in her introduction to The Black Woman Cross Culturally (1981). She argued that African women are the true and original feminists because of their ability to survive oppression and that "true feminism is an abnegation of male protection and a determination to be resourceful and self reliant" (35). According to Carol Boyce Davies "African Feminism recognizes a common struggle with African men for the removal of foreign exploitation and domination yet acknowledges affinities with international feminism in its attempt to correct the marginal status of women. It does not simply import western women's agendas but delineates the realities of the lives of African women. (8-10).

Contemporary African feminist discourse- the complimentary and divergent views expressed by African and Africanist women show the complexity of feminism in relation to women in Africa. In "African women culture and another development", Molara Ogundipe describes the predicament of the African woman as having six mountains on her back. Her theory is based on Mao Tse Tung who said the Chinese man had three mountains on his back. According to Ogundipe, the African woman has oppression from
the outside due to colonialism and neo-colonialism, traditional structures derived from a
pre-colonial past, her backwardness that is a product of poverty and ignorance, her race
and finally herself.(65)

Stiwanism

In response to charges of imitating white European and African feminists, Molara
Ogundipe coins the term Stiwanism, to describe her agenda for women in Africa. She
writes:

“Stiwa” is my acronym for Social Transformation Including Women in Africa.
This new term describes my agenda for women in Africa without having to
answer charges of imitativeness or having to constantly define our agenda on the
African continent in relation to other feminisms, in particular, White Euro-
American feminisms which are unfortunately under siege by everyone. The new
term “Stiwa” allows me to discuss the needs of the African women today in
tradition of the spaces and strategies provided in our indigenous cultures for the
social being of women. My thesis has always been that indigenous feminisms also
existed in Africa and we are busy researching them and bringing them to the fore
now. “Stiwa” is about the inclusion of African women in the contemporary social
and political transformation of Africa. Be a Stiwanist. (230)

There are various Feminist organizations. One of the early associations AAWORD
(Association of African Women for Research and Development) was instrumental in
bringing several feminist writers together. The French version is AFARD (Association
des femmes Africaines pour les Researches et Development). This Pan African
organization came into being as early as 1975. Sensing that the problems of women in the
Third world countries had a lot in common there was an effort to see the problems of
women in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Inspite of the fact that several years have
passed since then, the women’s problems have continued to remain. Women in Asia,
Africa and Latin America still grapple with Racism, Casteism and are expected to remain
subservient to their men. WIN or Women In Nigeria became yet another mouthpiece for
women when it came into existence in 1985. The organizations provided for a much
needed forum to the women to collectively view their situation vis-à-vis the societies they live in. African feminist criticism engages in a number of critical activities namely developing the canon of African women writers, examining stereotypical images of women in African literature, studying African women writers and the development of an African female aesthetic. It is difficult to have one definition of African Feminism but Carole Boyce Davies attempts at a comprehensive definition:

Firstly, African feminism recognizes a common struggle with African men for the removal of the yokes of foreign domination and European/ American exploitation. It is not antagonistic to men but it challenges them to be aware of women’s subjugation which differs from the subjugation of all African people.

Secondly, striving for an African feminist consciousness that certain inequities existed in the traditional societies and colonialism reinforced them and introduced others. While acknowledging its affinities with international feminism, it seeks a space of its own.

Thirdly, it should recognize that African societies are ancient societies so it must look at the pre colonial woman and her life as she negotiated and very often triumphed over the inequities of the society she lived in.

Fourthly, African feminism examines African societies for institutions which are of value to women and rejects those which work to their detriment and does not simply import Western women’s agendas. Thus, it respects African women’s status as mother but questions obligatory motherhood.

Fifthly, it respects the African woman’s self reliance and the penchant to cooperative work and social organization and the fact that African women are seldom financially dependent but instead accept income generating work as a way of life.

Sixthly, an African feminist approach has to look objectively at women’s situation which has undergone a war of women’s liberation.

Finally, African feminism looks at traditional and contemporary avenues of choice for women encouraging the work of women sociologists and anthropologists. (98)
**Womanism/Motherism**

African feminist debate is characterized by the use of different terms to define a feminist rubric best suited to the African woman. While Alice Walker has used the term womanism, Chicwenye Ogunyemi has further qualified the term trying to make it more relevant in the African scenario. Ogunyemi distinguishes the womanist from the feminist as the former having a consciousness of sexual issues that are incorporated into racial, cultural, national, and political considerations. (56) Clenora Hudson-Weems has coined the term Africana Womanism. There’s a slight shift of focus in Alice Walker’s Womanism and womanism as used by scholars like Chicwenye Ogunyemi and Mary kolawole. Kohrs- Amissah in “Aspects of Feminism and Gender in the Novels of Three West African Women Writers (Aidoo, Emecheta, Darko)” analyses African/a feminism and explains that those who choose to use these terms view global oppression as important as the oppressions Africans face. She argues: “In using the term, they show that they do not want to lose touch with the global feminist debate. They find it satisfactory to broaden the Western definition of feminism in order to make it relevant to the struggle of African and other ‘Third World’ women”. (34) Molara Ogundipe defines the parameters of Africana Womanism. She charts them as:

1) Feminism need not be in opposition to men.
2) Feminism need not entail women to neglect their biological roles.
3) Motherhood is idealized and claimed as strength by African women and seen as having a special manifestation in Africa.
4) The total configuration of the conditions of women should be addressed rather than obsessing with sexual issues.
5) Certain aspects of women’s reproductive rights take priority over others.
6) Women’s conditions in Africa need to be addressed in the context of the total production and reproduction of their society and the scenario involves men and children.
7) The ideology of women has to be cast in the context of the race and class struggles which bedevil the continent of Africa today. (67)
Clenora Hudson-Weems defines Africana Womanism as a theoretical concept and methodology which defines a new paradigm. “It offers an alternative to all forms of feminism. It is a terminology and a concept that consider both ethnicity (Africana) and gender (Womanism), which I coined and defined in the mid-1980's...It was later established that the concept is neither an outgrowth nor an addendum to feminism...Black feminism, African feminism, or Walker's womanism that some Africana women have come to embrace...It critically addresses the dynamics of the conflict between the mainstream feminist, the Black feminist, the African feminist, and the Africana Womanist.” (78)

In her seminal work, “Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves”, Hudson-Weems, the innovative theorist/scholar/activist identifies eighteen "descriptors," which should serve to guide informed analysis of the Africana woman's existence. The Africana womanist is 1) a self-namer, 2) a self-definer, 3) family-centered, 4) genuine in sisterhood, 5) strong, 6) in concert with the Africana man in struggle, 7) whole, 8) authentic, 9) a flexible role player, 10) respected, 11) recognized, 12) spiritual, 13) male compatible, 14) respectful of elders, 15) adaptable, 16) ambitious, 17) mothering, and 18) nurturing. As she simply states, "Africana womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture and, therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women" (102)

When womanism is taken to its limits, it promotes essentialism and patriarchal dominance is often either denied or ignored. Utopianism and idealizations resonate with a gendered version of nativism; pre-colonial societies are idealized, so that men’s and women’s roles are seen as having complemented each other, without oppressive or dominating qualities. Women’s roles are elevated to visionary heights, as in Catherine Acholonu’s concept of "motherism," a term employed in her work Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism. Here Acholonu finds in motherhood an elemental tie to the earth, to the spiritual center of African life and society, the organic space wherein goddesses and earth-mothers lend fertility and life to human existence. Acholonu’s vision is seen as an as expression of an urban woman’s speculations about the lives of rural women. (90)
Commenting on the difference of perception between Africanists and Afro—American Feminists, Emecheta says:

"We have lots of links. For instance Their Eyes Were Watching God is one of the very first African—American books I picked up to read and I quite liked the language. But of course Toni Morrison is my champion.... The link is that theirs is the next stage. We deal with the pan African situation that we experienced while theirs are the interpretations over generations. They get the secondary ideas from the Africans who have lived in the States for a long time or through books written by Africans.... As far as I’m concerned, we are all doing the same thing but they use the digested African—American language which I find very interesting. (Umeh 1996 451)

The thesis presented here, on the study of Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta, is written from a Third World Feminist perspective. It seeks to integrate the several discourses on Feminism, Motherism, Womanism and Stiwanism which constructs Africana Womanism. The discourses are examined politically and situated in their respective social constructs. In the current scenario, it is politically necessary to recognize the plurality of women’s lives rather than privileging only one aspect of their womanhood. It is also essential to read the works of the male feminists like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, Cyprian Ekwensi and others. Anthonia Kalu looks at the African problem critically. She argues that though the Western tools of feminism are integral to women’s studies, yet Africa should not be subsumed in Western thought. To know and understand African womanhood, one has to delve in its histories and know its past. She writes:

For the African development agenda to be redefined, it must ensure that no individual or group, living or dead, is left at the periphery of existence or analysis or remains at risk. The major problem lies not in the coming of the white man and the subsequent destructive agenda but in the African's acceptance, without question, of the nature of the new irrelevance attributed to African female discourses that result from the ultimate repudiation of the woman as essential to African existence. Okonkwo’s death represents the marker for the inception of the
untenable new duality within which the West is male and Africa is feminized. This is not the same as the engagement of Africa by the West in a discussion of the nature and structure of African discursive formations. A feminized Africa is not the same as the Africa within the duality discourse explored here. Instead, it is an Africa that has been brought to her knees and is seeking a place within Western thought. Such a place does not yet exist. Given the flexibility that already exists within African ways of knowing, however, a reconstruction of the male complement in this particular duality discourse will result from a rearticulation of the male complement within traditional African thought. Ultimately, the goal is a systematic rearticulation of the female principle whose agenda for continued advancement and progress is unequivocally mapped on Africa's cultural landscape. (23)

Review of Literature

Chickwenye Ogunyemi points out in *African Wo/man Palava*, Wole Soyinka and Naguib Mahfuz have brought international acclaim to African literature, yet “Their sisters’ stories must also be recognized for women writers, overshadowed by literary giants such as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o and Sembene Ousmane are infrequently read and rarely taught in African schools.” (89) The 90’s saw an increased importance of critical theory and the rise of Third World feminist studies which have contributed to a burgeoning number of theoretically informed books written in the past few years. In a special issue of African Literature Today which was entirely devoted to African women writers and the representation of women in African literature, the editors acknowledge the scantiness of the literary output of African women up to the end of 1960s. European colonialism which privileged male education, they argue, is mainly responsible for the disparity since writing and education go hand in hand. The editors assert the “tremendous blossoming of highly accomplished works by African women writers” (25) since the 70s. What they deplore is the neglect of the women writers in the largely male authored journals, critical studies and critical anthologies. Llyod Brown in *Women Writers in Black Africa* studies five major African women authors. Oladele Taiwo’s *Female Novelist in Modern Africa* is another significant work towards the study of women
writers from Africa. Taiwo places a greater importance on Emecheta but though his work is more comprehensive than Brown’s, most reviewers have identified several lapses in the analysis. Maria Kilson’s *Women and African literature* is a study of short stories of Ama Ata Aidoo and Grace Ogot. Yinka Shoga’s “Women Writers and African Literature” attempts to study the African women as child bearers and child rearers. Obioma Nnaemeka edited *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora* and *The Politics of (M)othering: Womanhood, Identity and Resistance* in African literature are seminal books in the study of women writers from Africa. Nnaemeka deconstructs the existing notion of motherhood and places it in context with the African woman. Sturdy Black Bridges edited by Rosanne P. Bell, Parker and Shetfall examines black women’s images in literature. Irene Assiba D’Almeida in *Francophone African Women writers* analyses the writings of Mariama Ba, Nafissatou Diallo, Ken Bugul, Calixthe Beyala and other Francophone writers. Sushila Nasta’s *Motherlands: Black Women’s writing From Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia* explores the concept of motherhood bringing together authors as diverse as Nawal El saadawi, Flora Nwapa and Nayantara Sehgal.

Two seminal books on African Feminism are *Ngambika: Studies Of Women in African Literature* edited by Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves and *Recreating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformation* by Molara Ogundipe. *Ngambika* is a collection of critical essays on African women authors. It is divided into three segments – Part one defining the female portraiture in African literature. The second part deals with the critical self definition of the African woman. The third part discusses the social and political themes analyzing the women’s issues in African literary criticism. Molara Ogundipe’s *Recreating Ourselves* is a selection of writings in which she has critically examined issues on gender and social transformation for the past three decades. She discusses the burdens on the woman’s back, hindering her progress. She also discusses Stiwanism and the role of the women’s organizations and their activities in Nigeria today.

Marie Linton Umeh has made significant contribution to the study of both Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta. Her critical volumes entitled *Emerging Perspectives On Buchi*
Emerging Perspectives On Flora Nwapa are comprehensive studies on both the authors. Umeh’s volumes include critical essays on the authors, interviews and a study of the author’s persona – her life and her times. In the volume on Nwapa which was published several years after her death, Nwapa is mourned by her colleagues and friends, for the person she was, and for her literary genius. The exhaustive volume on Emecheta is divided into several subheadings: Ibo women and culture, (Re) visions of female empowerment, Female sexuality: The Body as text, reading Emecheta: the poetic voices and (Re) constructing gender relations. The volume on Flora Nwapa has the following subheadings: Tribute(S) to Flora Nwapa, Ibo Women: Culture And Literary Enterprise, (Re) casting Gender relation: Nigerian women in the Colonial and Post- Colonial Experience, Aesthetics and Poetics in Nwapa’s canon, The body politic: Locating Female S, Configurations of Sexuality and (Re) configurations of Child Symbolism. Eminent critics and writers like Molara Ogundipe, Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Chimalum Nwankwo, Florence Stratton, Gay Willentz, Brenda Berrian, Kolawole, Ada Azodo and others have contributed to these volumes.

Kenneth Harrow in an essay entitled, “I’m not a western feminist… - A Review of Recent Critical Writings on African Women’s Literature” says the load of African women’s writing is now considerable, and it would be a mistake to attempt to continue the argument earlier made by Aidoo that African Women’s writing has suffered from a paucity of critical attention. Harrow’s contention may not be entirely true as in the earlier days the women writers did suffer a great deal of critical neglect. However, at present, there is a great deal of critical interest in the African women authors which has seen the transformation of Flora Nwapa to a cult figure where she is regarded as the Mother of African women’s writing. Chimalum Nwankwo argues: “As for Flora Nwapa, a limited success when she was alive, she has exploded into a wider reconsideration and posthumous acceptance”.

(77)
Chapter Plan

This thesis aims to analyze the works of the two literary giants from Nigeria -- Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta. Through their works, they have created an incredible picture of the Nigerian woman freeing her image from the stereotyping she had been subjected to earlier. Nwapa and Emecheta trace the saga of African womanhood from the Pre Colonial to the modern times. Nwapa and her very able literary sister Emecheta are griottes or storytellers who have reinvented the age old tradition of Orature and given it a unique written form. Tracing her literary lineage to Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta writes:

"You looked at my face, I looked back at you and I was rewarded with that famous Flora’s special laughter – with your tongue sticking out a little, head thrown back, one hand adjusting your head tie, and this beautiful uninhabited sound coming from your mouth like someone singing. That moment you disarmed me with your naturalness. I think I became one of your friends. I knew you became my big sister in the literary field. You followed me everywhere and I followed you too.” (Umeh 1998 30)

Chapter 1 is titled “Our Mothers: A study of motherhood and its relevance in the Ibo society”. Motherhood has been interpreted severally in the Ibo culture. There has been a constant engagement by both male and female authors to discuss the importance and relevance of the mother in the society. The concept of motherhood is far more complex than mere female reproductivity. It takes on much larger dimensions where it translates into the determining factor of the woman’s position in the society. Motherhood and mothering are also woven into the emerging feminist rubric of Black Africa as the African woman is said to be what she is because of her children and not in spite of them. The mother enjoys a privileged social position particularly if she is the mother of sons. Though discriminated against both as a daughter and a wife, as a mother she gains a certain privileging and therefore motherhood becomes aspirational.

In the queer reverse sexism that afflicts all patrilineal societies, the woman who is neglected and abused all her life is suddenly accorded some value when she begets sons. So much so that she is known by her son’s patronym. The woman’s position is very complex- she is said to be complete only when she performs the holiest of her marital
duties by begetting the heir to her husband. In spite of its strong patrilineal base, the mother culture of the Ibos is seen in every walk of life. The mother tells stories which are the base of the parallel oral culture which has existed since time immemorial. Even Achebe, in his otherwise masculine discourse in *Things Fall Apart* mentions the stories told by the women though he does not develop the theme further. Flora Nwapa in *Efuru* concentrates on what Achebe leaves out and therefore hers is a story of the women, told in their own voices.

Motherhood therefore takes on much larger dimensions where it has often been collated with the Mother Africa image. In the process of nation building and instilling pride in one’s nation, the poets and writers have often created a picture of the earth as mother. It is the very essence of the Negritude movement. The embodiment of Africa as a female and a mother is seen in male authored writing. She is often stereotyped as a beautiful and strong woman ready to sacrifice her all for her children. This trope has been used by writers of Leopold Sedar Senghor and Wole Soyinka’s stature and it features in prose and poetry alike. This chapter analyses and looks critically at the Mother Culture of the Ibos. The novels analyzed closely are Flora Nwapa’s *Idu* and *Efuru* and Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood*.

**Chapter 2** is titled “The Colonial Saga and the changing face of the lbo Women”. Colonialism is a complex phenomenon. It is not merely about a foreign power taking over the “natives”, its tentacles go much deeper. It is a phenomenon which makes slaves of fellow human beings- physically and mentally. The mental shackles leave an everlasting damage so much that years after colonization, the Neo Colonial forces hold sway over the psyche of the erstwhile colonized nations. Interestingly Colonialism and Christianity operate as twin forces, though their standpoints are vastly opposed to each other. The Christian worldview of loving all humans as equals is subverted entirely as the Europeans perceive the “natives” as the “other”. The white man perceives the black man as a child, and imbecile and as an incomplete man who needs to be taught. Colonialism succeeds by “othering” a large section of humanity. In the Ibo land, it bespeaks of a clear racial discrimination. Abdul Jan Mohamed calls it the “Manichean Allegory”. The
constructing of the Blacks as the “other” is essential for creating the insider- read the White European male.

Racial stereotyping is not the product of colonialism alone, it goes back to the Greeks and Romans who coined terms like “barbarians”. It is easy to perceive the “other” as uncivilized and barbaric but it is opposed to the Christian theology to discriminate against fellow humans. The sinister thing about colonialism is its close link with Christianity. Colonialism and Christianity came hand in hand to the Iboland as in several other places. In the Bible which treats all humans as equals, it is difficult to locate terms like “monsters” and “barbarians”. Yet these terms have been used with a fair amount of ease in the colonial discourse. The colour codes of white as angelic and black as a symbol of evil have come to stay. The white man represents Reason and scientific enquiry whereas the black man needs to be rescued from the shackles of ignorance. This metaphor is oft repeated- in Joyce Cary and E.M. Foster’s novels and in Conrad’s The Heart of Darkness. Despite the enormous differences between the colonial enterprises of various European nations, they generate similar stereotypes of the colonized. The natives are categorized as lazy, violent, aggressive, sexually promiscuous and primitive. This chapter analyses the links between race, gender and colonization. Race and gender are seen as constructs mapping their imposition onto entire continents – landscapes, cultures and the female body. The texts analyzed closely are Buchi Emecheta’s The Rape Of Shavi, The Slave Girl and The Bride Price.

Chapter 3 is titled “Women coming into their own: The construction of the new Ibo women”. The post independence, western educated working woman of Africa has been a site of study for many African writers. As the city eats into the traditional lifestyle of the village, the women are forced to eke out a lifestyle that is suitable to the changes in the society. The post independence Nigerian society is in a constant state of upheaval. The coups and the Biafran war sees the Ibos going through hell and back. The women suffer the most as not only do they see the world around them collapse; they are also forced to pay with their bodies. A new term is coined where a woman is said to use her “bottom power”- a form of sophisticated prostitution.
The transition from the old value system to her new role as a career person is not easy for most women. She is torn between the older value system and the fast changing face of the Nigerian society. Emecheta terms the woman’s load as “the double yoke”. She has to bear the traditions of her own cultural and social past and adapt to the new teachings her missionary teachers impose on her. Very often, the woman feels trapped.

Western civilization has demarcated the public from the private. According to masculinist agreement, jobs, politics, business belong to the public domain. Love, family and children belong to the private. The domains of public and private have been allotted according to sex roles. While males dominate the public arena, women are given the personal and private roles. Challenging the socially demarcated roles, the women enter the public space while trying to retain their traditional roles in the society. The novels analyzed closely in this chapter are Flora Nwapa’s *One Is Enough* and *Women Are Different* and Buchi Emecheta’s *Kehinde*.

**Chapter 4** is titled “Women and War”. Nigeria saw sixty women shot dead in the famous 1929 Women’s war which has been trivialized by colonial historians as the Aba Riots. Women and war have been regarded as being totally opposed to each other. The phenomenon of war has always been considered to be a strictly male preserve. In fact a woman writer’s depiction of warfare is considered to be an anomaly as the traditional space of the woman is supposed to be the hearth and the home. The woman is also seen as the angel of peace. Therefore in most war novels, it is the man who goes into combat while the woman aids from the periphery by taking care of the family.

*Destination Biafra* is a unique novel which has a woman pitted in the grim civil war of Nigeria. Emecheta’s novel is a reminder of the unique contribution of the women in the war torn Nigeria. Flora Nwapa’s *Never Again* is a depiction of the Nigerian Civil War in which she echoes strong anti war sentiments. Both novels make bold political statements. Nwapa and Emecheta have strongly denounced the war and it is their personal and
emotional involvement with the war and the government which is reflected in their writing. This chapter studies the politics of war and its effect on the Nigerian women.

**Conclusion:** This chapter compares the two authors, their personal lives and their writings. It is a study of Womanism as practiced by Nwapa, the “insider” and Emecheta, the “outsider”, as perceived by certain Nigerian critics. Their role as storytellers in the Racist politics of Nigeria from the colonial to the present times is presented as a linear study.

The year 1966 can therefore be considered the beginning of the female "oraliterature" renaissance in African letters, with Flora Nwapa as the first Nigerian female novelist as its primary exponent. With Nwapa's picture of the community of Ugwuta women, a positive, multi-dimensional, complex, and realistic vocabulary describing women was introduced into African letters. For example, in Nwapa's path-breaking novel Efuru, the word "female" represents a wealthy trader, a sharp business entrepreneur, a decision-maker, an independent thinker, a powerful, respected priestess, and a deity, Ogbuide. The idea of women as femmes fatales and ne'er-do-wells is nonexistent in Nwapa's texts. Efuru, the main character in the novel, is deliberately drawn as a character noted for her business acumen, wealth, and resilience. (Ogunyemi 2)

The progress of the Ibo women is traced from the pre-colonial to the contemporary times based on the writings of Nwapa and Emecheta. The struggle to be heard and in the modern times, the struggle to sustain their uniqueness and not be assimilated continues to be the subject matter of most female writers which is discussed in this chapter.

---

**Works Cited:**

Acholonu, Catherine O. *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism* Owerri, Nigeria:Afa, 1995


_____________.* Second Class Citizen.* Allison & Busby, 1974


