Chapter 2

The Colonial Saga and the Changing Face of the Ibo Women
"You are making us into monstrosities; your humanism claims that we are at par with the rest of humanity but your racist methods set us apart." Jean Paul Sartre

Decolonization which sets out to change the order of the world is, obviously, a programme of complete disorder. Frantz Fanon

Colonization is defined in no uncertain terms by Jean Paul Sartre. He sees it as entirely evil – a mechanism which makes slaves of half of mankind. In the Preface to the Wretched of the Earth he writes:

Not so very long ago, the earth numbered two thousand million inhabitants: five hundred million men and one thousand five hundred million natives. The former had the world; and the others the use of it. Between the two there were hired kinglets, overlords and bourgeoisie, sham from the beginning to the end, which served as go betweens. In the colonies the truth stood naked, but the citizens of the mother country preferred it with clothes on: the natives had to love them, something in the way mothers are loved. (8)

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 so that years after colonization, the Neo Colonial forces hold sway over the psyche of the erstwhile colonized nations. The legitimacy of colonialism has been a longstanding concern for political and moral philosophers in the Western tradition. Since the Crusades and the conquest of the Americas, political theorists have struggled with the difficulty of reconciling ideas about justice and natural law with the practice of European sovereignty over non-Western peoples. In the nineteenth century, the tension between liberal thought and colonial practice become particularly accute, as dominion of Europe over the rest of the world reaches its zenith. Ironically, in the same period, when most political philosophers began to defend the principles of universalism and equality, the same individuals still defended the legitimacy of colonialism and imperialism. One way of reconciling those apparently opposed principles was the
argument known as the “civilizing mission,” which suggested that a temporary period of political dependence or tutelage was necessary in order for “uncivilized” societies to advance to the point where they were capable of sustaining liberal institutions and self-government. The Spanish conquest of the Americas sparked a theological, political, and ethical debate about the legitimacy of using military force in order to acquire control over foreign lands. This debate took place within the framework of a religious discourse that legitimized military conquest as a way to facilitate the conversion and salvation of indigenous peoples. The idea of a “civilizing mission” was by no means the invention of the British in the nineteenth century. The Spanish conquistadores and colonists explicitly justified their activities in the Americas in terms of a religious mission to bring Christianity to the native peoples. The Crusades provided the initial impetus for developing a legal doctrine that rationalized the conquest and possession of infidel lands. Whereas the Crusades were initially framed as defensive wars to reclaim Christian lands that had been conquered by non-Christians, the resulting theoretical innovations played an important role in subsequent attempts to justify the conquest of the Americas.

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 entirely reversed as the Europeans perceive the “natives” as the “other”. In his path breaking study *Black Skin White Masks* Fanon points out that the White man perceived the Black man or the man of colour as a child, an imbecile and as an incomplete man who needed to be taught. A good native is one who learnt the European way in moderation and was able to say “Yes Sah”. He was happy to be treated as chattel by his European master. Colonialism succeeded by othering a large section of humanity. In the Ibo land, it bespoke 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’s easy to perceive the “other” as uncivilized and barbaric but it is opposed to the Christian theology to discriminate against
fellow humans. In the Bible which treats all humans as equals, it is difficult to locate terms like “monsters” and “barbarians”. Yet these terms are used with a fair amount of ease in the colonial discourse. The colour code of white as angelic and black as a symbol of evil comes to stay. The physical difference is stressed upon- the white man as tall and well built and the black man as puny. 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.

The difference between the colonized and the colonizer is immense- it is almost as if they inhabit two different worlds. At the crux of the colonizer’s world is his access to “word” which the colonized seeks to acquire. The Black man has a fully developed language and a culture of his own but his White master teaches him to be ashamed of his culture. He aspires to be White. He feels that the negation of his own cultural lineage and approximation to the white man’s language and culture will enable him in his upward mobility. As Frantz Fanon writes in *Black Skin white Masks*

> Every colonized people- in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality- finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is with a culture of the mother country the colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother countries cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle… (67)

The language problem in the usage of English in the writing of native literature can be best seen in the debate between Ngugi Wa Thiong’o and Chinua Achebe. The oft given example of the colonized using the language of the colonizer is that of Shakespeare’s Caliban who tells Prospero and Miranda,
You gave me language, and my profit on’t
Is, I know how to curse. The red – plague rid you
For learning me your language! (355)

Caliban can curse as he has been given this language by his captors. Homi Bhabha feels that it is the failure of colonial authority to reproduce itself that allows for the anti-colonial subversion. The question whether dominant language, literature, culture and philosophic ideas can be turned around and be used for subversive purposes has been central to the postcolonial, feminist and other oppositional discourses. Achebe feels that he has been given this language – English, and he will continue to use it to express his views and to right the wrongs imposed on his people by the erstwhile colonial masters. Ngugi, on the contrary, continues to write in Gikiyu as he feels that it is his language and he can reach out to the masses by using their mother tongue. Writing in English, he sees as an entrapment – a state where the mind has continued to remain colonized. In Decolonizing the Mind, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o discusses the importance of oral literature in his childhood. He writes:

I can vividly recall those evenings of storytelling around the fire side. It was mostly the grown ups telling the children but everybody was interested and involved. We children would retell the stories the following day to other children who worked in the fields. The stories main characters were usually animals. Hare being small, weak, but full of innovative wit, was our hero. We identified with him as he struggled against the brutes of prey like lion, leopard and hyena. His victories were our victories and we learnt that the apparently weak can outwit the strong. (78)

According to Ngugi, this blindness to the indigenous voice of Africans is a direct result of colonization. He explains that during colonization, missionaries and colonial administrators controlled publishing houses and the educational content of novels. This meant that only texts with religious stories or carefully selected stories which would not tempt young Africans to question their own condition were propagated. Africans were
controlled by forcing them to speak European languages—they attempted to teach the children - the future generation that speaking English is good and that native languages are bad, by using negative reinforcement. This is a process recognized by Franz Fanon as well. Language was twisted into a mechanism that separated children from their own history because their own heritage was shared only at home, relying on orature in their native language. At school, they were told that the only way to advance is to memorize the textbook history in the colonizer's language. By removing their native language from their education they were separated from their history which was replaced by European history in European languages. This put the lives of Africans more firmly in the control of the colonists.

Ngugi further argues in *Moving The Centre* that colonization was not simply a process of physical force. Rather, "the bullet was the means of physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation." (67) In Kenya, colonization propagated English as the language of education and as a result, orature in Kenyan indigenous languages withered away. This was devastating to African literature because, as Ngugi writes, "language carries culture and culture carries (particularly through orature and literature) the entire body of values by which we perceive ourselves and our place in the world." Therefore, how can the African experience be expressed properly in another language? (99)

Chinua Achebe, however, reacts very differently to the language issue. He feels that a good story can be told in any language as long as the purpose of the writer is good and honest and he is addressing pertinent issues. Achebe rejects the Western notion of art for its own sake. In *Morning Yet on Creation Day* he emphasizes the need for art in the service of mankind. He embraces the conception of art at the heart of African oral traditions and values: "Art is, and always was, at the service of man," he writes. "Our ancestors created their myths and told their stories with a human purpose; “hence, any good story, any good novel, should have a message, should have a purpose." (66) In response to Ngugi, when he says that African writers should boycott English and only write in African languages, Achebe comments: The British did not push language into my face while I was growing up.” (Gallagher 77) He chose to learn English and
eventually to write in English as a means of “infiltrating the ranks of the enemy and destroying him from within…..It doesn’t matter what language you write in, as long as what you write is good,” (Gallagher 78). Yet Achebe fully recognizes that English is symbolically and politically connected with the despoiler of traditional culture with intolerance and bigotry. “Language is a weapon, and we use it,” he argues. “There's no point in fighting a language”. (Gallagher 79).

Colonialism and imperialism together throw several issues into relief—there is a scramble for the goodies. Capitalism becomes the buzz word of the colonial enterprise. As capitalism advances, money and commodities displace human values. It is not to say that in the traditional Ibo societies money was not respected but here wealth was not meant merely to be accumulated. It belonged to one who was capable of labouring for it. Moreover a hard working man was respected in the society. A man was not known by his ancestry, it was his hard work that the society respected him for. In Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo’s father is a wastrel. Okonkwo does not inherit either land or a young wife from him but he, being a hard worker, is able to make a name for himself in the society. Capitalism, in the colonial saga works very differently. Here, there is a segregation of labour. In some jobs one works less and gets paid more and in some others, one does back breaking work and fails to earn a square meal a day. Thus, capitalism spawns class. Capitalism, therefore, introduces a vicious cycle. It creates a social imbalance. The Marxist discourse equates capitalism with the colonialist discourse. Some Marxist thinkers believe that capitalism spawned by Colonialism is exploitative, no doubt, but probably a necessary step towards bringing about a class struggle. Marx emphasizes that under capitalism money and commodities begin to stand in for human beings, objectifying them and robbing them of their human essence. Fanon carries the debate further and adds race as a precondition to the division of classes. He stresses that in the African context the division between classes was not merely about have and have-nots. The have invariably are white and the have-nots, blacks. Fanon writes in the *Wretched of the Earth*,

This world is cut into two and is inhabited by two different species. The originality of the colonial context is that Economic reality. Inequality and the
immense difference of ways of life never come to mask the human realities. When you examine at close quarters the colonial context, it is evident that what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race, a given species. In the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich… (9)

Colonialism, Christianity and Education

In medieval and early modern Europe, Christian identity was constructed in direct opposition to Islam/Judaism/Heathenism. Islam was the predominant binary opposite and main threat to Christianity. Religious difference became an index of cultural difference. As colonialism advanced, the missionary activities also advanced. The language of colonization became inextricably blended with language of commerce. The crusader for Christianity became “Blest Commerce”. As the European powers carved up Africa among themselves, they necessarily changed the nature of African missionaries and African Christianity at the same time. Between 1890 and 1914 missionaries became more closely related to the various European powers. African rulers were no longer the primary political powers. The colonial rulers did not hesitate to use missionaries to help them subdue and control the colonies.

European education became one of the key elements in the new political reality and the interplay between convert, missionary and colonial government. Colonization led to a great demand for education and the proliferation of schools. Protestants had stressed literacy, education and reading the Bible from the beginning of their missions, but the advent of colonial power meant that literacy gained social, political and economic and not merely religious importance. Missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant virtually monopolized the African school systems, and schools became a major conduit for new mission converts. These new converts, however, did not usually stay in school. They fanned out across Africa in search of work, and in the process converted others, sometimes in astonishing mass movements. The new generation of school educated Christians was quite different from the first generation of converts, who were largely
erstwhile slaves, refugees and social outcasts finding safe haven in mission villages. By the turn of the century, Christians tended to be young, educated and powerful, though still often outsiders — traders, clerks, or migrant workers.

The British, during colonial times, used education as a tool to further dominate and oppress Nigerians, a tool to cultivate a 'proper' style of thinking. The inculcation of this style of thinking came in the guise of Christianity. The British officials who were themselves Christians were representing, as Lord Lugard himself claimed, 'the most Christian nation' in the world. British occupation in Nigeria was therefore synonymous with Christian evangelism, and the concept of 'civilizing'—helping the benighted Africans to accept Christianity and Western civilization—became the order of the day (Fafunwa 71) Therefore, the first form of Western education in Nigeria was led by the missionaries, and they, without exception, used the schools as a means of converting the indigenous people to Christianity. During this time, the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) and the Methodist Missionary Society were the first British Christian organizations to set up schools in Nigeria. Most of their work was conducted in the southern half of Nigeria, where it was deemed 'safer.' Some of their achievements included the translation of the Bible into the local languages such as Yoruba, Ibo, Efik and Nupe, the introduction of vocational or industrial education, the use of English as the vernacular, and the establishment of a 'proper' code of conduct for the localities. Most of the schools set up by these missions were boarding schools, for they believed that "if children were to develop along civilized lines, their daily life must be supervised, controlled and directed along 'proper lines'. That is, if a 'raw' African is to be made a civilized, Christian black European, he must be isolated from the evil influences of his pagan past and present". (Fafunwa 99).

Gender Divide in the Colonial Education

In the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, Church Missionary Society Missionaries, both of African and European descent, became interested in gaining converts among Ibo speaking women in south eastern Nigeria. Schooling was an integral part of the conversion process. One could see that separate body/mind disciplines of Ibo
youth were not only based in European gender categories but helped to develop a separate category of personhood amongst the Ibos themselves. Ibo men were seen as the deepest pillars of the Anglican Church. They were trained to be catechists or lay readers by the CMS missionaries. Girls were trained to become ideal ‘helpmeets’ for their educated husbands. There was an immense fear of the men being corrupted by women who believe and put faith in ‘pagan’ beliefs. This revulsion and fear is seen in the words of Rev. J. Wilson who wrote in a letter:

When African children of both sexes roam about at will indoors and out of doors without clothing of any kind, until in some cases 18 years of age and when Christian mothers allow the same unclothed condition to prevail among their own young ones, the innocence of infancy is lost at birth, and how is it possible for the young people to be either pure in thought or chaste in deed? When the older girls and women are unclothed to the waist, and when even among Christian mothers an upper covering is considered a “fad”, the young men fall an easy prey to the enticements of the girls? The African Christian woman has yet to learn her responsibility in this direction, and we trust that the Missions of women held during this year in this district and elsewhere – to be followed by a Conference of women on social and other subjects next year at Onitsha – may lead women to see their duty in this matter of social purity. (Fester 55)

The young converts were called ndi kris, the Christian people. This was a group that was largely youthful but lived on the periphery of the mainstream Ibo culture. The Niger mission’s great success in Onitsha came through the early decision to educate local boys. The male and female elders of the clan continued to shun the church throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. The sight of small boys reading and writing proved to be enticing for the trading community of Onitsha who realized that these boys could keep books for them in the English style. One of these young men, Issac Mba became one of the best students of the CMS. He was also involved in translating the Bible. However, Mba was in trouble with the Church later as he was accused of polygamy. Very soon the need was felt to procure good Christian wives for boys who passed out from the CMS. It
was much later that women training centres were started. The curriculum for the women was very different from the men. Misty L. Bastian says:

Female separatism was not only encoded in women's missionised space in the 1900s but in the very mode of girls' education. Where the boys' school curriculum included such coursework as Old and New Testament classes, English poetry, arithmetic, geography, physiology, hygiene and first aid, all taught in English after the elementary forms, using English textbooks, girls were instead taught to read enough Ibo to understand their Bibles and hymnbooks. Indeed they were rarely introduced to the English language prior to 1920s. (Isichei 1995 45)

By the 1910s the converted Christian girls were sent to these establishments not only by their parents but by their prospective Christian suitors, who were expected to pay all their fees as part of the bridewealth. This new educated class was fast becoming aspirational for several Ibo families. At the risk of distancing their girls from the traditional Ibo beliefs, families were sending their daughters to these missions. The reason for this was that the parents were hoping to be connected with rich and influential Christian families. Flora Nwapa's *Women Are Different* is a deep insight into the colonial education and its gender bias. The education became a cauldron for new fangled ideas which were at odds with the traditional ways of life. The girls were seen to be craving for marriage and romance, albeit the Western romance kinds. They were clear that they did not want to live their lives as nuns unlike their educators. According to Adeline Apena, "Although Christianity and Western education liberated women from some of the constraints of traditional societies; modern women had no desire of giving up all their cultural values especially those pertaining to wifehood and motherhood. (Umeh 1998 279) The Christian missionaries had different set of rules for the boys and girls they were educating. While the boys' education comprised of learning arts and sciences enabling them to have careers, the girls were schooled into learning good behaviour and being good Christian wives to their husbands. There was almost no interaction between the boys and girls. It was this forced separation that resulted in quick romances as seen in *Women Are Different*. Most of the schools were single sex institutions until after the civil war of 1970. The women lacked the emotional support of their families when they chose to live
in the cities. Thus, a cloud of disbelief and mistrust seemed to prevail in the new man –
woman relationships. Modern men acquired the arrogance of a male dominated Western
society. The combination of both traditional and modern patriarchal values seemed to
intimidate modern women." (Umeh 1998 282) Ifi Amadiume in *Male Daughters Female
Husbands* documents this gender-biased access with statistics regarding Nigeria’s
Province schools. In 1906, the ratio of boys to girls in this nation’s Eastern Province
schools was greater than 5:1, and an astounding 20:1 in the schools located in Nigeria’s
Central Province. These sex-based disproportions in student registration become further
evident when considering progressing levels of study. Nakanyike Musisi, author of
“Colonial and Missionary Education: Women and Domesticity in Uganda, 1900-1945,”
notes that in 1963, “girls received only the first three years of formal education making
up 39.4 percent of the Primary 1 enrollment, but only 24.1 percent of the Primary VI
enrollment” (Gallagher 87). Thus, colonial education sowed the seed of an irrevocable
gender divide. Education and the war of sexes become the prime theme of Emecheta’s
*The Bride Price* and *The Slave Girl* which have been discussed at length in the latter half
of this chapter.

**Gender in the Colonial Discourse**

Feminist and critical race theorists alike have long acknowledged the "intersection" of
gender and race difference; it is by now a truism that the ways that one becomes a boy or
a girl, man and woman, cannot be disentangled from the ways in which one becomes
white or black man and woman, Asian or Latino boy and girl. Feminist theoretical
analyses have contributed in important ways to discussions of how gender is raced and
race is gendered. And yet, there has been little in the way of comparative analysis of the
specific mechanisms that are at work in the production of each, that is, the ways that they
come to make sense or are intelligible as categories, together with the ways these
categories come to make sense of people as raced and gendered human beings.

Colonial studies fail to acknowledge that women’s position to men deteriorated under the
constraints of European rule. The partial loss of the women’s economic, political, and
social agency remains unaddressed by the Western feminist theory. Furthermore, the
public and private spaces of pre-colonial Africa are juxtaposed according to gender
despite women’s actual participation in both arenas. In Re-creating Ourselves: African
Women and Critical Transformations, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie challenges the notion of
African tradition being inherently restrictive to women and supports the claim that these
patriarchal structures were actually Western imports. She argues, “The British simply
swept aside previous female political structure in society, replacing them with completely
male structures and positions.” (29)

Although colonization is largely defined by economic exploitation and political
dominance, Chandra Talpade Mohanty in “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship
and Colonial Discourses,” suggests that it is also characterized by the creation and
homogenization of “the other,” and alludes to the “production of a particular cultural
discourse about what is coined the third world” (110). Mohanty asserts that cultural
colonization pervades Western feminist theory- an example of which being the
construction of a singular “Third World” woman. She is the personification of every
woman residing in a Third World nation, and is depicted as an amateur with regards to
political mobilization. This “Third World woman”, and the billions of other women she is
made to represent, is considered as a powerless subject that requires “schooling in the
ethos of Western feminism” (99). The Third World women’s so called dependence on
men renders them as victims within the Western feminist discourse, and Mohanty
compares this to the sexist discourse that suggests all “women are weak, emotional,
having math anxiety, etc.” (87).

Third world women are typically considered in terms of how they are affected by certain
social institutions and systems, not in terms of their own agency, and certainly not with
regards to the specific cultural/historical contexts in which they live. “Male violence, the
economic development process, the colonial process, the Islamic code,” and particularly
the sexist ideology which is believed to be inherent in these “undeveloped societies” are
all depicted as aspects of the equal oppression of the Third World woman (Mohanty 87).
Unfortunately, Western feminists typically don’t acknowledge their position in the global
distribution of power, the relationship between “First” and “Third World” economies,
and how these factors affect the women of the Third world. Mohanty not only urges
Western feminists to consider these issues, she also demands that they acknowledge their privileged status in scholarship. She argues that the "production, publication, distribution, and consumption of information and ideas in the West", marginalizes Third World scholarship just as mainstream U.S. literature peripheralizes feminist theory in the States.

Mohanty claims that there are three basic problems that exist within Western feminist discourses- the first being the assumption that women constitute a coherent group with identical interests... regardless of class, ethnic, or racial location. Secondly, she identifies the unsubstantiated universality placed on these women's experiences. Mohanty's third and final claim addresses the binaries that exist within these discourses. She discusses the juxtaposition of men and women, as well as the polarization of the Third World woman who is represented as "ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, and family oriented," with the white, Western feminist who is depicted as "educated, modern, having control over her own body, sexuality." (76).

The impact of colonialism left an indelible mark on the lives of the African women. The early theorists of Colonization have tended to overlook the factor of gender. The colonial process is seen in terms of the male colonizer versus the male colonized. The white male perception of the colonial process is extremely male centric. Women are relegated to the peripheries- the White woman as the spoilt mistress and the Black woman as her slave. Their roles in the society especially the Black Woman's is perceived in sexual terms. The Victorian male perceived the Black woman as slavishly meek, kneeling before her husband and living to do his bidding. Colonialism was therefore perceived as a means of liberating these women. However, this is an erroneous view. The picture of the subservient African woman is created just as the entire colonial Discourse is constructed. The Colonial process brought about a systematic disintegration in the woman's role in the society. As pointed out in the Introduction, the pre-colonial Ibo woman was a force to reckon with. Though she functioned within the confines of patriarchy, she had a distinct role to play in the social, economic and administrative structures of the society. The Ibo women worked side by side with the men in the fields. There were some crops earmarked as women's crops which they alone tended to. Moreover, the Ibo women were great traders. On market days she would travel miles to buy and sell her wares. Her prowess in
trade was respected by the society so much so that she could even take titles like the men. She played an active role in her age-group meetings where important decisions were made. She also administered the clan as the Omu and her band of women as they would look at all the issues pertaining to the women.

Gender in the colonial discourse merits a close examination. The early post colonial critics talk about Racism. Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* talks of what it feels to be a black man. According to him the colour black is superimposed on a Negro’s personality so much so that he thinks of himself a black man first and later as a human being. Several Feminist critics have pointed out that given the socio political situation the black woman was at the lowest rung of the society. If the black man was discriminated against because of race, the black woman was further discriminated against because of her sex. As Florence Stratton points out:

As a result of assimilation of gender into other categories, the African / post colonial subject (including the writing subject) is constructed as male in these models. For, as feminist scholars in various fields have argued, colonialism is not neutral as to gender. Rather it is a patriarchal order; sexist as well as racist in its ideology and practices. What these studies indicate is that women’s position relative to men deteriorated under colonialism. They also show that, while pre-colonial women had more freedom than their colonial descendants, male domination was nonetheless an integral part of the societies they lived in. Under Colonialism then African women were subject to interlocking forms of oppression: to the racism of colonialism and to indigenous and foreign structures of male domination. (45)

Racist patriarchal master narratives reduced the African woman to a mere sexual being. She is voiceless. She seldom appears on the colonial canvas and her rare appearance is marked by her reduction to the level of biological sex. In the colonial literature and travelogues, the woman’s body is fetishised. From the beginning of the colonial period till its end, the woman’s body symbolized conquered land. The images of America and Africa are inevitably nude. Seemingly innocent and inward looking writing, dealing with
private spaces rather than public too reflect the contemporary Geographical expansion. The female body is described in terms of the new Geography as seen in John Donne’s Love’s Progress’.

The Nose (Like to the first Meridian) runs
Not ‘twixt an East and West, but ‘twixt two suns:
It leaves a Cheek, a rosie Hemisphere
On either side, and then directs us where
Upon islands fortunate we fall,
Not faynte Canaries, but Ambrosiall,
Her swelling lips… and the straight Hellespont betweene
The sestos and Abydos of her breasts
And sailing towards her India, in that way
Shall At her fair Atlantick Navell stay. (181)

The lovers’ relationship is worked out in terms of the colonialists’ interaction with the lands they ‘discover’, as in “To His Mistress Going to Bed”:

Licence my roving hands, and let them go,
Before, behind, between, above, below.
O my America! my new- found- land,
My kingdome, safeliest when with one man man’d,
My Myne of precious stones: My Emperie,
How blest am I in this discovering thee. (184)

The African woman’s image is twofold – either she is represented as a nude virgin or as an Amazon – a figure of deviant sexuality. According to Ania Loomba,

The non European woman also appears in an intractable version, as Amazonian or deviant femininity. The Amazons are located by early colonial writings in virtually every part of the non-European world, and provide images of insatiable
sexuality and brutality. Thus female volition, desire and agency are literally pushed to the margins of the civilized world. But not all margins are equally removed from the center: skins colour and female behavior come together in establishing a cultural hierarchy with the white Europe at the apex and black Africa at the bottom. (70)

The non European is often seen to covet a white skinned partner. It is a way of approximation to the white culture. In *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon writes of the attraction of the man of colour and the white woman. For the coloured man, he feels he has arrived when he has been with a white woman.

One of the blackest part of my soul, across the zebra striping of my mind, surges desire to be suddenly white. I wish to be acknowledged not on black but as white. Now and this is not a form of recognition Hegel had not envisaged who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man…(45)

Racism is woven into the colonial discourse. More often than not the black man or the colonized subject is likened to a child. In some writings, the black man is feminized. The black woman’s role is erased in most colonial literature. She exists in the margins where she is seen but not heard. Her sexuality is discussed more than her social roles. If at all her role in the society is mentioned, she is seen to be at the receiving end of the patriarchal order where she is seen as the property of the man. As a sexual being she is seen as deviant, leading the white man astray. Sander Gilman shows how the 19th century medical and popular discourses progressively increased the linkages between blackness, sexuality and femininity by using one to describe the other. The sexuality of black men and especially that of black women becomes an icon for deviant sexuality in general. Thus black women are constructed in terms of animals, lesbians and prostitutes; conversely the deviant sexuality of white women is understood by analogies with blackness. The African woman’s humanity is corroded. This intelligent, resilient, receptive and accommodative woman is denied intelligence, emotions and sensitivity to remain a “happy” “primitive being”, in the perpetual primal state of sexuality. Carole
Boyce Davies calls this stereotype a "lobotomized idiot" who is seen to be happy in her perpetual subjugation. (89) Ifi Amadume writes, "To early anthropologists, evolutionists... 'primitive' women stood at the lowest end of the scale, described as no better than beasts or slaves, while the Victorian lady stood at the apex." (89)

The need for liberating the women from the stereotyping she has been subjected to in the colonial literature has been felt very strongly. Esther Y. Smith says:

Studies of inequality in colonial Africa rarely focus on the status of women. Studies of women in African literature rarely focus on the colonial period and when they do, tend to show either strong mother figures in traditional society, or rootless young women pursuing individualistic and materialistic goals in the modern society. (Stratton 98)

Repackaging and recycling of anti-women ideologies and theories with apparent scientific justification has remained the common denominator of each patriarchal era. Darwin in his Descent of Man (1871) writes: "Extinction follows chiefly from the competition of tribe with tribe, and race with race... When civilized nations come into contact with barbarians the struggle is short." (Loomba 63) Hence, races and nations were concepts that developed in connection with each other. Dominant scientific ideologies about race and gender have historically supported each other. When African men began to be treated for schizophrenia and were confined to lunatic asylums, African women were said to have not achieved that sense of self awareness as to be able to go mad. Even madness is seen to be an attribute of a complex mind which an African woman was not supposed to have possessed. Perhaps in response to this oversimplification of the African woman’s mind, Emecheta’s women characters embody a sense of dislocation which very often results in their madness. Nnu Ego in The Joys of Motherhood lives and dies crazed with grief raging against the injustices meted out to her. Aku Nna, Gwendolyn, Kehinde – all stand in the grey zone between madness and sanity as they wage their lonely battles against the social norms.

Race, gender and sexuality work together and develop in each other’s crucible. Colonial women are not simply objectified in colonial discourses but their labour – sexual as well
as economic feeds the cannibalistic colonial machine. And the brutal legacy continues. If female slaves were the backbone of plantation economies, the third world women remain the poorest of poor in the post colonial world. From the polygenetic sub – human status to the monogenetic primal state of zero ratiocination, from being the perpetually available vessel of biological release for the overworked colonial anthropologist – administrator at the lonely outpost to an effective tool for neo – colonial black democrat/ dictator empire building, the black woman remains black, ravaged, mutilated, raped and grossly violated. She is thus consumed by racism, colonialism and patriarchy and literally by racist colonial patriarchal power discourses.

Colonial discourse homogenizes black women into a single “all inclusive” category. Colonial blindness to the wide range of cultural, racial and locational differences complicates the relationship between black women and colonial – racist ideologies. . Gertrude Fester in “Women writing for their rights” writes:

“Women are not a homogeneous group. In South Africa and in many parts of the third world, the majority of the women do not have the luxury of education, let alone the ability and time to write. Moreover even though it is difficult and challenging for the average woman to write, it is even more challenging to publish in a mainly male and white dominated publishing world.” (6)

Fester blames the socialisation of the African woman which does not encourage her to think of writing as an option. Given the gender race segregation, a “good” girl is expected to marry well and nurture a family. If at all she chooses a career, it is advised that she becomes either a teacher or a nurse. A career in television or writing is frowned upon. Fester also talks of how the white woman journalist or writer would interview her black sister. While the white women thrived, the black woman’s condition continued to remain pitiable. Mildred Holo, a women’s struggles activist and a veteran from the 1950s, once commented about her white interviewer. “She always interviews me and every time I go to her house she has more and more pillows and I live in this hovel.” (Fester 56) Fester comments on this double bind the Black woman faces – on the one hand there is a craving to be written about and on the other hand, the sense of exploitation is
overbearing. Fester compares it with the exploitation her mother’s and grandmother’s generation faced as domestic workers in the white homes. In the 80s and 90s the face of exploitation had changed but racial and gender based exploitation is not a thing of the past, it is an everyday reality. As Sarah Penny writes:

Is the colour of a writer still significant in a rainbow nation? Yes it is. Race still permeates many aspects of our lives and there are often many strong sentiments expressed by black women when white women write from the perspective of black women. As long as there is inequality and it is the rich and privileged (and mostly white) who can write full time about poor and / or black women, there may be anger and the feeling of being exploited by these black / poor women who would like to write more often. (11)

Andre Brink terms this “appropriation”. He says, “It would seem that where power acquires a stake in representation, an invisible boundary is crossed, and the adoption of another’s voice comes to be perceived as an act of appropriation. Such a situation can all too easily become just another instance of the powerful exploiting the weak.” (119)

As Colonialism sank its fangs deeper, the women’s position worsened significantly. She lost her erstwhile position where she had been accorded respect as an eldest wife, a titled woman and a mother. In the Capitalist Colonial society, the woman is used and abused. While Christianity sought to end polygamy, the societies were introduced to prostitution. A man if he could afford the bride price was free to marry as many times as he chose. Now he married only once but he was free to look for pleasure in the fast mushrooming brothels. The colonization process in Africa can be seen at several different levels, such as a) administrative, b) educational, c) religious, d) economic and e) legal systems. The women were systematically excluded from all these areas. In the Administrative field, the British governed through the Warrant Chiefs. They were immensely corrupt and sought to fill their coffers while they were still in power. The women’s administrative wing- the Omu and her band of women were totally disbanded. There was an effort to put the woman safely within the confines of hearth and home. It is usually argued that pre-
colonial Nigeria had a sexual division of labor. However, the nature and implication of such sexual division of labor is often misinterpreted. While male dominance was built into the social system of some Nigerian ethnic groups, women played a significant and vital role in all aspects of the lives of their community. For some scholars, this is due to the complementarity of male and female roles and functions. The effect of complementarity was to give women a great deal of autonomy in their own affairs to a degree unmatched to date. Since some women became leaders in politics, religion, and the economy, discrimination was on the basis of both class and gender. Women who by virtue of their acquired or ascribed status became decision makers were by no means treated in the same way as other women in terms of their rights. Elements of structural inequality could be observed in unequal access to the means of production and control thereof as well as inequality in the ability to control reproduction. Most of the administrative practices which prevent the equal treatment of men and women in Nigeria are products of colonial laws and government. Second, when these societies are examined more carefully, it becomes obvious that there are clear distinctions among them as to the customary treatment of men and women.

In feminist literature, discrimination against women is taken to manifest itself in the forms of gender, class and personal discrimination that arises from women being discriminated against as women. In some perspectives, discrimination is caused by structural factors. Some scholars contend that the most important structural sources of discrimination are social formations such as the family, which conditions its members to conform to socially acceptable norms in terms of male and female roles in the division of labor from childhood. Although the traditional division of labor in Nigeria was one within which there were distinctions made between men's and women's work, social expectations on what constituted men's or women's work varied by community/society. Men generally speaking had a higher status than women within the family but women have been active in producing, decision-making, trading and food processing as well as in child-rearing and bearing. In addition, elders were more privileged than the young and husbands more privileged vis-à-vis wives. The significance of social difference becomes obvious when one realizes that among the Yoruba and Ibo for instance, not only men are
husbands, all the members of the patrilineage into which a woman marries, male and female, stand as husbands in relationship to her. Relationships such as these are however, not sexual. These relationships cannot always be conceptualized in terms of gender. There is also ample evidence of women's activism politically, socially and economically which calls to question this assumption of automatic male superiority.

The ideological dimension of discrimination becomes evident in the Colonial discourse when the positive contributions made by women remain unacknowledged while negative stereotypes on the role of women in pre-colonial society are stressed, even by scholars who claim to be pro-feminist. An example of the negative portrayal of Nigerian women and their role in society is that the implication of a sexual division of labor is often taken as excluding the majority of women from decision-making roles in society. Evidence exists of opportunities for women to participate in decision making as leaders of institutions paralleling those of men. Other opportunities to participate in general existed through the representatives chosen by women's indigenous organizations. Women within the family had to combine productive work with reproductive labor but were able to take advantage of help from the extended family, including the polygynous family unit, which reduced the burden of a double workload.

The polygynous system, which is often condemned as disadvantageous to women, was an aspect of social arrangement which enabled women to make concrete contributions to society. However, with the imposition of colonialism and the influx of Islam, there was a contraction of opportunities available for women to play leadership roles. With regard to Islam, recent research maintains that neither the teachings of the prophet Mohammed nor the precepts of the Koran recommend polygyny as a matter of course. There are responsibilities which accompany the decision to marry more than one wife. Even though a good argument could be made for the privileging of males over females in Islam, as in Christianity, in terms of education, equal opportunity is the norm recommended by the prophet Mohammed as well as Unman Dan Fodio, leader of the Fulani Jihad. In traditional Nigerian societies, polygynous relationships were likewise not unregulated. In contemporary times, some women choose to be part of these structures voluntarily and argue that the benefits outweigh the costs.
Provisions were also made in pre-colonial Nigerian societies for conflict resolution in which all members of society could participate. One of the deleterious effects of colonialism is that there was a contraction of opportunities available for women to play leadership roles after its imposition. However, women drew upon their pre-colonial forms of organization to organize the mode and content of their political participation.

In contemporary society, some of the political and civil rights of women are affected negatively. Such negative effects may not be as obvious in law as in the administrative practices which affect the de facto position of women in society. There are also ideological elements leading to stereotypes that deny the significance of the contribution of women to Nigerian development. This is illustrated in the report of the Federal Government of Nigeria to the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination which stated in the introduction that the traditional conception of the role of women in society is as domestic drudges, wives and mothers. This report reinforces erroneous perceptions of the role of women in society which have no basis. On the contrary, traditionally, women were valued as powerful by virtue of their being the bearers of fertility. A traditional Yoruba song, "Iya ni wura" (Mother is gold) reinforces the importance of women in the Yoruba society. A traditional Yoruba proverb says: Iya ni wura, baba ni jigi, which translates, Mother is gold, father is a mirror. This emphasizes not only the value of a mother to her child/children but says something about the role of women in the Yoruba society. Compared to a fragile, breakable relationship to a father, the relationship of mother to child/children is durable. Similar reverence of the mother is found among other Nigerian ethnic groups. In addition, opportunities existed for women in pre-colonial Nigerian society to take leadership roles in politics, religion, social and economic life. Some of these opportunities remain in evidence, although much circumscribed by colonial and post-colonial impositions of Western culture. (Fester 89)

Pre-colonial Nigerian societies were structured around the centrality of kinship as the determinant of the productive and reproductive role of the individual in society. Childbearing was considered central to the worth of a woman. Since children were regarded as economic assets, polygyny was encouraged and a childless woman was considered incomplete. As a general rule, the more children an individual had, the more
was their power within the society. There were however opportunities for women to surmount problems arising from childlessness, and to avoid divorce. Amadiume points to the phenomenon of gender-flexibility among the Nnobi in the East of Nigeria as a tool for women both to increase their material base by acquiring "wives". The institutions of female husbands and male daughters among the Igbo of Nnobi in the East of Nigeria allowed women not to marry other women, in fact, but to claim the children borne by these women and in effect have access to power and exert their control over resources, including children, who in the predominantly agricultural societies, were an asset that enhanced an individual's ability to produce for economic gain. This enabled them to surmount the social stigma attached to childlessness as well as enhance their productive capabilities. Fostering of children with women who were childless, also enabled women to adjust their position within the society. Among the Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani, fostering of the children of relatives provided opportunities for childless women to play mothering roles. (Amadiume 77)

With colonialism, most elements of the kinship support system disappeared or were considered outdated. Discrimination against women who are childless continues under customary law in cases where a man may claim the full dowry paid for a childless woman while deductions are allowed if a woman has children. The right of women to work was affected by both the social relations within the family as well as in the larger society. Women in general had access to land which they could cultivate. However, the right to dispose of land was vested in the male head of the patrilineage. Therefore, access to the means of production was open to both sexes but control was usually vested in men. It was more possible however, for women to take advantage of customary loopholes such as the flexible gender system among the Ibo in order to gain power within a social system which confers more power on males than females. Among the Yoruba, some women became wealthy and could participate in the government and dispose of property on an equal footing with men. There was a general acceptance of the idea that women should be active as producers and distributors and as decision makers in female institutions. Women were also better able to manipulate the rules of the game within the traditional social structure that they were members of, and thus, more familiar with. Pre-colonial
Nigerian societies were, thus, not populated with structures within which women were automatically more disadvantaged in terms of their access to positions of authority than in the contemporary society.

Colonialism diminished more than it enhanced the position of women in the society. Women lost a great deal of authority and the opportunity to participate in decision making due to their exclusion from all levels of administration. They also lost a lot of the maneuverability which they had in the pre-colonial era during the imposition of colonialism because the male-dominant elements of society were stressed above all others and applied in social, economic and political life. Education was generally considered a boon to women, who were able to emancipate themselves from oppression as a result of Westernization. The liberatory effects of Western education have been overrated because the emphasis of the colonial government was to prepare women for domestic rather than for leadership roles within the society.

Concrete, unequivocal evidence exists about the effect of education, which became the most important requirement for upward mobility during colonial rule. Since fewer women than men were educated, there was consequently less opportunity for women to gain access to positions of authority than for men. In the educational sphere, the Black males were prioritized over the women. It was the men who became the first Catechists, primary school teachers and clerks.

In the religious sector, the denigration of women was done in a systematic fashion. The primal human societies seem to have been matriarchal in nature. Powerful goddesses dominate the creation myths of almost all ancient cultures. Interestingly these goddesses are capable of procreating by themselves without the help of a male coadjutor. Flora Nwapa’s Uhamiri is one such example. The River goddess is known for her beauty and her wealth. She is the goddess of plenty. The Lake goddess is also invincible. In Never Again when Ugwuta is attacked, the villagers are convinced that Uhamiri is bound to save them. She will never allow infidels to enter Ugwuta. Achebe, in his depiction of the traditional Ibo society, speaks of the Earth Mother or the Goddess of fertility, who forbids bloodshed and encourages communal harmony. She is Idemeli, the daughter of Chukwu,
the Creator who is invoked when men take their titles. About Idemili Achebe writes in Things Fall Apart, “She was the ultimate judge of morality and conduct.” (33) The powerful oracle of the hills and the caves is Agbala. “The oracle was called Agbala, and people from far and near came to consult... No one had ever beheld Agbala, except his priestess.”(15)The women, in the traditional Ibo society offered their own sacrifices to appease their personal God or Chi. However Christianity redefined religion where men were at the helm of affairs. It is an extremely male dominated religion and it had its effect on the Ibo psyche. Achebe, in Anthills of The Savannah presents very interesting parallels between Ibo and Biblical creation myths as far as the ousting of the goddess and the dual treatment meted out to women are concerned.

The original oppression of woman was based on crude denigration. She caused man to fall. So she became a scapegoat...a culprit richly deserving of whatever suffering Man chose thereafter to heap on her...Woman in the Book of Genesis...our ancestors... made the same story differing only in local colour... the Sky was very close to the Earth. But every evening Woman cut off a piece of the Sky to put in her soup pot...repeatedly banged the top of her pestle carelessly against the Sky whenever she pounded the millet... wiped her kitchen hands on the Sky’s face... the Sky finally moved away in anger, and God with it.(89)

The New Testament, “more enlightened, more refined, more loving” transforms woman into “the very mother of God” and places her on a pedestal to be worshipped while she remains irrelevant to “the practical decisions of running the world”. The Ibos too “have a parallel subterfuge while proclaiming Nneka or Mother is supreme. Woman is nevertheless kept in “reserve until some ultimate crisis arises and the waist is broken and hung over the fire” and then she is expected to “descend and put the shards together”.

(Achebe 1975 98)

In the economic sphere the women were the worst suffers. The Colonial regime did not encourage petty trading. Trading started becoming more organized where the raw materials would be shipped to Britain and the finished products would be sold to the
natives. The nature of cultivation also changed as cassava, hitherto known as a woman’s crop, threatened to displace yam as the staple food. The cassava sale caught on and the men started harvesting cassava. Slowly the cassava trading too went out of the hands of the women. The Ibo women, however, continued to carry on with the now ‘illegal’ manufacturing of the palm wine. However, more often than not they got into trouble with the police and the warrant chiefs. The Aba Riots saw the women taking up cudgels against the British colonial regime. They were protesting against the levy of a tax. The women’s war had far reaching effects. It was after this war that the Iboland was governed directly by was British Queen. The Aba Riots or the women’s war will be studied in detail in the chapter titled ‘Women and Resistance’.

The legal system too underwent a serious change and contributed its share in the marginalisation of the women. From the participatory system of the Ibo justice, where all adult men and women would be present when a case was settled, now a new system of dispensing justice was introduced. It was immensely impersonal. The legal courts were dominated entirely by the white men. The black male natives played the role of the ‘Kotmas’ or the court messengers. So once again the black women were pushed to the margins.

Apart from these there were several other areas where women were discriminated against. As Christianity became popular, all Christian converts were advised to practice monogamy. A Yoruba chief in order to win favour with his white masters left all his wives but one. While his “sacrifice” won him a warrant Chieftaincy, his wives were forced to live in abject penury without any form of economic sustenance at their disposal. (Isichei 1995 78)

The greatest loss to the women, however, was the prioritization of the written word. The oral culture was forced to take a back seat. The women were master orators. They would weave stories and pepper them with proverbs. The same stories were retold but each time it took on a new hue as the storyteller would add her district style to the art of storytelling. The stories and songs were passed down from one generation to the next. Colonization struck the death knell to the woman’s art by privileging the written word.
Thus we see that woman was twice colonized. The effect of colonization was doubly harsh on them. What was particularly demeaning was the fact that she lost her economic independence and she was forced to being confined to the home and be dependent on the man for her subsistence. She was trapped from both ends. The age old taboos of the society remained just as strong. That coupled with her new role as a dependent contributed further to her marginalisation.

Both Nwapa and Emecheta attempt at setting the record straight by commenting on the women caught in the crossfire of a new religion and an alien culture thrust upon them. Bereft of her traditional rights, her position is lamentable yet her spirit remains indomitable. It is a saga of the twice colonized and twice marginalized woman trying to find a foothold in the complex and chaotic world of colonialism.

The Bride Price

_The Bride Price_ written in 1976 is Emecheta’s reflection on the changing times of the Colonial Iboland. It is set five years after the Second World War. The African men have been forced to fight a war which has little relevance to them. The scars of the war affect their lives and change them irrevocably. The society too is turbulent. A new fangled and fashionable European world view is seen jostling for space with the traditional way of life. Most Ibos do what seems most sensible to them – adopt Christianity as it assures them a white man’s job but in their heart of heart they remain just as traditional. In this world men have forgotten to be men. Gone is the erstwhile pride of Okonkwo in _Things Fall Apart_. Here, men copy their European masters. While they perform domestic labour at the White man’s house, in their own houses they seek to lord it over their women. In the village too it is a story of extremes. The families who have not converted to Christianity, bend backwards to preserve their traditionalism. There is a degree of savageness about it as they know they are fighting a losing battle. In this world of confusion women lose out on their erstwhile status of being a good trader and sometimes even a title holder. Schooled in the European world view they are taught to be like their
Victorian sister - shy, reticent and entirely dependent on their men for all decisions of their lives.

_The Bride Price_ is the story of a young girl of thirteen called Aku-Nna. Caught in the crossfire of culture she is seen to epitomize the passivity expected out of women of her time. It is not as if she has no feelings but she has been schooled to please her father and her husband and she puts her life into it. Unable to negotiate between the Christian values she learns at school and the taboos of the land she breathes her last in the hope that her daughter might have a better life than her. What is ironic is the fact that she also proves correct the age old taboo of the land that if the bride price is not accepted by the bride’s parent the marriage remains unblessed and therefore cursed. _The Bride Price_, by depicting many realities of lived traditional customary law of the Ibo people, reveals the need for social changes which are already in the need for being enacted in modern law, whether customary law or received British law.

_The Bride Price_ is not an exotic story of modern folk lore, despite its modern folk tale style. Emecheta is primarily true to her stated purpose in her fiction: “Every good novel must depict the society. The society is the bone of the story.” (Umeh 1996 25) Economical and geographical sources, in addition to the laws of the land, support many details of Emecheta’s cultural milieu in Iboland at an important period of time in Nigerian history in the early 1950s near the apex of British colonialism in Nigeria just prior to National independence in 1960.

In this novel Emecheta explores the changes in the society and its effect on the women. Christianity as a religion has come to stay. The traditional values have not only stayed on - they have developed a kind of barbaric brutality which was missing earlier. The women’s role is limited to the home and the hearth. Her child bearing and rearing roles are prioritized over all her other roles. The women in _The Bride Price_ do not have the daring and courage of Ona in _The Joys of Motherhood_, nor do they struggle to find their foothold in an alien world like Nnu Ego. It is almost as if these women have come to terms with their fate. Aku-Nna is Ona’s and Nnu Ego’s very patient sister. She knows
that she can be of no joy to her parents as she’s only a girl but she aspires to marry rich so that her loving father may enjoy a large bride price. “Aku- Nna knew that she was too insignificant to be regarded as a blessing to this unfortunate marriage. Not only was she a girl but she was much too thin for the approval of her parents, who would rather have a strong and plump girl for a daughter”. (3)

Although she failed to please her parents with her physical being, Aku- Nna’s father named her “Her father’s wealth”. He knew his shy daughter would marry well and bring him pride the only way a daughter could. She would fetch him a handsome bride price. “He had named her Aku- Nna, meaning literally ‘father’s wealth’, knowing that the only consolation he could count on from her would be her bride price. To him this was something to look forward to”. (4)

The world of Lagos painted by Emecheta depicts the changing face of Iboland which is reflected, among several things, in the twin legal system that was followed. In Nigeria in the early fifties there were two legal systems – the British judicial system and the customary judicial system. (Emecheta 1996 58) The dual system of courts seen in The Bride Price had been evolving through the colonial period and had evolved even further into a converted dual system after nationalism. According to Robert and Mann:

Law was central to colonialism in Africa as conceived and implemented by Europeans and as understood, experienced and used by Africans. Law and courts, police and prisons formed essential elements in European efforts to establish and maintain political domination. They were instrumental as well in reshaping local economies to promote the production of exports for European markets and the mobilization of labour for African and European enterprises... Finally Europeans believed that they were in Africa for the local people’s own good. The idea of rule of law seemed to them to provide evidence of this fact, and it powerfully legitimized colonial rule. (56)

The legal system is important as Emecheta discusses the legal battle between the Ofulues and the Obidis. The actual historical and political background of Ibuza helps explain why
Emecheta portrays that “the whole town of Ibuza” turned out against the alien and slave Ofulue family in the British law court. Having grown up in Lagos, Aku Nna is ignorant of the marriage customs in Ibuza. She falls in love with her teacher, Chike, who is an Osu, or a slave. Though Chike has attended St. Thomas’ Teacher’s Training in Ibuza, people still call him “descendent of slave”, behind his back. Aku Nna is quite unaware of the stigma which is attached to Chike’s family. In 1956, the Act of Emancipation of the Abolition of Osu law was passed. This law made it illegal for anyone to be called by the name of Osu. Inspite of the law, the social ostracism continued to remain. Rebecca Bostrom quotes from a mid 20th century study by a distinguished lawyer who comments on the Osu act:

For, though, socially there are still numerous oru (ohu) (species of slaves) in Iboland in spite of the act of emancipation and the Abolition of Osu law, these can now own land as freely as anybody else. The social stigma remains, but as far as land rights are concerned partially every trait of legal instability is gone. An oru may not marry a free born, but he can purchase, lease or take pledge of land from anyone within the village or town…(Umeh 1998 61)

According to Ibo customs, Aku –nna is eligible for legal customary marriage when she begins to menstruate around age fifteen. By customary law, puberty must be reached before marriage. (Kasunmu & Salacuse 76) By received British common law (as interpreted by Nigerian lawyers for its relevance in Nigeria), the minimum marriage age for monogamous marriage for boys was 14 and for girls, 12. (Kasunmu & Salacuse 76) Here, Emecheta follows the Ibo tradition in portraying that most Ibo girls were betrothed and entered an arranged customary marriage soon after their first menstruation. The sociologist in Emecheta continues to interpret for the West, the various cultural practices of the Ibo- Yoruba culture.

The customs followed by the people have a mixture of both the traditional and colonial cultures. Among the Ibos who had embraced Christianity a close link with the traditional practices continued to remain. A marriage would be performed with all the traditional
rituals and then the couple would seek blessings from the church. A funeral would have all the traditional trappings and a priest would be called in from the church to be a part of it. This rather interesting co-existence of cultures is seen in the Odia household. Aku-Nna’s mother Ma Blackie is not able to conceive easily like most women. In order to produce more sons she is sent to all the native doctors in Lagos. When this fails, she is made to join the Cherubim and Seraphim sect as they have a “strange” way of praying. Finally when nothing works Ma Blackie leaves for her home town Ibuza to pray to the river goddess to give her more children. Though Ezekiel Odia is a peaceful man he never stops telling his wife that considering the fact that he had paid a large bride price for her there was very little to show for their marriage for all she had given him was one son. But being a monogamous man at heart he refused to marry again. Also, the strain of the city life showed in his decision as he knew he could scarce cope with more wives and a very large family. Ezekiel Odia, in life and death, mirrored the confusion of mixed cultures. While he liked to proclaim himself a practicing Christian he would not hesitate to go to a native doctor. He even kept a magical potion hidden behind the picture of their church marriage. The traditional beliefs were considered timeless and a part of one’s daily existence whereas everything European was seen to be modern and therefore fashionable. Commenting on the mixed cultures Emekata writes:

Lagos culture was such an unfortunate conglomeration of both so that you ended up not knowing to which you belonged. In his lifetime Ezekiel was a typical product of this cultural mix. He would preach the gospel on Sundays, he would sing praises to the European Living God, he would force his children to pray every morning, and to pray before and after meals but this did not prevent him calling in a native medicine man when the time arose. (5)

Ezekiel Odia in life and death signifies the conglomeration of cultures which has created a great chasm and confusion in his psyche. When he dies all hell breaks loose as there is a debate on whether he should go to the earth as the Ibo customs demand or to the heaven as preached by the church. While the Christian choristers try to outdo the pagan ones, little Nna-nndo, his son is called upon to decide his dead father’s fate. He chooses heaven.
as it seems more attractive which annoy his male relatives but the women seem happy with his choice. Anything European had to be more attractive than its native counterpart.

_The Bride Price_ is characterized by women who have forgotten their past glory. So caught up they are in the social web of confused existence that their position is lamentable. There is not a single voice of reason here. Women are shown to be towing the line of their men unquestioningly. Both Ma Blackie and Aku-Nna represent this kind of women. Aku-Nna displays her independence only once when she lies to her husband who tries to make love to her forcibly. Otherwise she is seen as a placid and a rather meek woman. She is also physically underdeveloped which is the reason for her death during childbirth. She does not even try to will herself to live. When Ezekiel dies Aku-Nna mourns the death of both her parents. According to the Ibo custom if you lose your father you are orphaned as the mother does not count as a parent.

“But Nna-nnado, you have got it all wrong, Aku-Nna said to herself. It is not that we have no father anymore, we have no parent anymore…. We have not only lost a father but we have also lost a shelter!”

It is so even today in Nigeria: when you have lost your father you have lost your parents. Your mother is only a woman, and women are supposed to be boneless. A fatherless family is supposed to be a family without a head, a family without shelter, a family without parents, in fact a non existing family. Such traditions do not change very much. (25)

Aku-Nna is proved right as immediately after her husband’s death Ma Blackie is forced to come back to the village Ibuza which is the land of her in laws. Her period of mourning is more than other women as her husband had cut a lock of her hair. Such a woman could never leave her husband and if he died her period of mourning would be for nine moons rather than the customary seven moons. After the mourning, Ma Blackie would be inherited by her husband’s brother. The mourning too is rather severe for the woman. “Ma Blackie was to remain alone in this special hut; not until the months of mourning were over could she visit people in their homes. She must never have a bath.
No pair of scissors nor comb should touch her hair. She must wear continually the same old smoked rags.” (72)

Aku-Nna has a very short life. She dies at the age of sixteen. In all sixteen years of her life she plays out the role of a virtuous Ibo- Victorian woman. So influenced is she by her school and its teachings that she models her life on the Christian tenets. In the world where she grows up the two world views are preached simultaneously. In her own way she tries to make sense of it. As a traditional Ibo girl her mind knows no peace till her bride price is accepted by her uncle and as a student of a Christian school she is not able to discriminate against a family of descendants of slaves therefore committing the most heinous crime of falling in love with Chike, an Osu. Osus are untouchables and it is unthinkable for free borns to associate with them. Right from her childhood Aku-Nna is a shy and reticent child. It is almost as if she knows how inconsequential her life is to her family and chooses not to question it. She has been trained to do the household work which she does with as much perfection as she can manage. Her school is of great delight to her and she is immensely thankful to her mother for letting her continue in school even in Ibuza. From the very outset she is shown to be a rather sickly child who is prone to catch any illness that is in the air. It is because of this that her mother calls her an “ogbanje” – a child who can not decide whether to live or die. Aku-Nna is different from girls of her age. Though she is not a beauty, she is attractive in a strange sort of way. The senior wife of Okonkwo calls her a strange girl.

Aku-Nna was different. She was not allowed to play rough games in the moonlight. She was not allowed to join in the dance of her age group for Christmas. There was a kind of softness about her which spelled peace; she would sit and listen to you for hours and just smile all the time and not say anything… Yes their mother was right. Aku-Nna would soon be fifteen, was still at school and no menstruation. What kind of a girl was she? (79)

As Aku-Nna grows up she slowly becomes aware of the puberty rites practiced by the clan. When a girl comes of age, sacrifices are made for her well being. There are several menstrual taboos she has to adhere to. She must not visit the stream nor must she enter
the household where the man of the family had a ‘Eze’ or “Alo” title. There is also another practice that the young girls and their suitors indulge in. Desirous young men would come to the young girl in the presence of an elder and play with her. It is a way of courting the girl.

Her mother would soon be back and then the boys who came to their hut for night games would come trooping in. Their custom allowed this. Boys would come into your mother’s hut and play at squeezing a girl’s breasts until they hurt: the girl was supposed to try as much as possible to ward them off and not be bad tempered about it, and so long as the girl did not allow the boy to go too far it was not frowned upon.(99)

Aku-Nna, indeed, leads a complex life. Emecheta calls her a passive victim of circumstances. She and her brother are like pawns in the hands of the society which is caught in the crossroads of modernity and traditionalism where greed is the buzzword of human existence. Commenting on the complexity of the situation in Ibuza she writes:

Aku-Nna and Nna-nndo soon grew accustomed to things at Ibuza, learning in school the European way of living and coming home to the countless and unchanging traditions of their own people. Yet they were like helpless fishes caught in a net: they could not as it were go back to the sea, for they were trapped fast yet they were alive because the fisherman was busy debating within himself whether it was worth killing them to take home, seeing that they were such small fry. (89)

It is also her ignorance of the traditional Ibo beliefs that result in her falling in love with Chike, the descendant of a slave. Chike is their school teacher who nurtures a soft corner for Aku-Nna. He is educated, kind and comes from a well to do family. But unfortunately he also happens to be a descendant of a slave woman. The prejudices against the slave family runs so deep that though Chike and his brothers are educated they are not allowed to marry any woman of the village. A slave is not allowed to look upon a free born with desire. Chike is duly warned by his father not to look upon Aku-Nna with desire because
he can never aspire to have her. But they also know of the immense greed of Okonkwo
and wish to play upon it by paying him a very big bride price. It is at this point of time
that disaster strikes. Yet another heinous act is perpetrated as Aku-Nna is kidnapped by
Okoboshi. This incident plays out yet another crime against women but according to the
social diktats there is nothing anyone can do to save Aku-Nna.

Even as they were doing all this, they knew it was useless. Aku-Nna had gone. All
the man responsible had to do was to cut a lock of her hair—'isi nmo'—and she
would belong to him for life. Or he could force her into sleeping with him, and if
she refused this his people would assist him by holding her down till she was
disvirgined. And when that had been done, no other person would want to take
her anymore. (138)

It is only late at night that the perpetrators of crime reveal themselves. Okonkwo has little
choice but to agree to the marriage. He even agrees to accept a nominal bride price to
show his agreement to the marriage. When Aku-Nna realizes that all doors have been
closed for her she decides to pay Okoboshi in his own coins. She tells him that she is not
a virgin and that she has been disvirgined by a slave born. Here, too, the hypocrisies of
the society come to the fore. While a man is allowed his pleasures a woman is supposed
to guard her virginity like a precious jewel. Aku-Nna’s lie earns her the title of a fallen
woman as a clean towel symbolizing that no blood has been shed on the first night and a
half empty tumbler is presented to a crestfallen Okonkwo. She has been used as a pawn
yet again as Okoboshi’s father kidnaps her in order to get even with Chike’s father. Now
all her life she would have to remain Okoboshi’s wife—a man whom she loathes and as a
fallen wife she would be treated like a slave in his compound.

Aku-Nna is however saved by Chike and they elope to Asaba. Chike gets a good job at
the oil fields and the newly weds start their life with mutual understanding and love. In
the village their names are sullied and those associated with them are punished. Chike’s
father’s crops are burnt while Okonkwo divorces Aku-Nna’s mother. Inspite of his public
humiliation, Chike’s father tries to pay the bride price for his son, but Okonkwo refuses
to accept it. He would rather die than accept money from a slave born as bride price. He
is so incensed that he makes a doll like Aku-Nna and pierces it with pins. The woo doo practice is for killing her for having brought shame to the family. So the marriage continues to remain unblessed. Being physically weak right from her childhood Aku-Nna is unable to sustain the pressures of a teaching job and her pregnancy. Having conceived at an early age of sixteen, she breathes her last after giving birth to her daughter Joy. In her last breath she tells her brother not to worry as with her death she will have paid for the sin committed of entering into a marriage where the bride price had not been paid. Emecheta ironically comments on Aku-Nna’s life. She had actually proved true the age old taboo of dying at childbirth if the bride price was not paid. Inspite of Aku-Nna’s and her husband’s Western education they are not able to fight against the dogmatic rules of the society. They fall prey to the greed and lust of their own people for daring to disobey.

So it was that Chike and Aku-Nna substantiated the traditional superstition that they had unknowingly set out to eradicate. Every girl born in Ibuza after Aku-Nna’s death was told her story, to reinforce the old taboos of the land. If a girl wished to live long and see her children’s children, she must accept the husband chosen for her by her people, and the bride price must be paid. If the bride price was not paid, she would never survive the birth of her first child. It was a psychological hold that existed for a very long time. (135)

Aku-Nna’s life embodies the enslaved stature of the woman. From the fiery Ona, to a struggling Nnu Ego, Aku Nna shows yet another face of the Ibo womanhood which is passive and all accepting. Trapped in the complex world of confused ideals, the resilient Idus and Efurus have been replaced by the confused Aku-Nnas. Even her educated status fails to save her as she’s caught up in the confusions of one culture imposing itself on another. Aku-Nna, thus, represents the twice colonized woman, who has been shocked into passivity lacking the fiery self of her predecessors or the aggressive face of the so-called “modern” woman.

Slave imagery dominates The Bride Price. It’s prevalent through the text and links it to Emecheta’s other slave narrative, The Slave Girl. On Chike’s first visit to Aku Nna’s patrilineal home after she has become secretly eligible for marriage, his family’s slave
background dominates the scene. The lovers sit on a mat on a mud couch. The wealth of symbolism simply reflected in a woven mat arises from the mat’s origin and history. It was made in Sierra Leone and brought in Lagos. Lagos had a history of many former slaves settled there. Perhaps half the population of Lagos in 1850 was slaves, most of whom became rich and powerful, similar to the Ofulues in Ibuza. (kasanmu & Salacuse 45) More slavery symbolism is contained in the detail that the mat was made in Sierra Leone. Ties between Sierra Leone and Nigeria were based on Sierra Leone being the geographically closest British colony to Nigeria, from which slaves and ex slaves had come to Nigeria and to which British colony many repatriated slaves were sent. Lagos as a British colony in 1862, was administered as part of Sierra Leone after 1866 and then as part of the Gold Coast from 1874 to 1886, at which time Lagos was separating from the Gold Coast and began a self governing British colony.

When the Ofulue family takes the Obidi family to court, the prominence of old Mr. Ofulue cannot be overlooked. His high status is known because he is a ‘member of the Native administration’ (84), a historical politico legal system of indirect rule by the British. His slave background has, however, prevented him from becoming a chief in Ibuza.(84) Ironically his slave background has helped him to become an educated and important man:“In the olden days, slaves used to be sent there (to missionary schools) simply to appease the disapproval of the white missionaries: but later events were to show that it was these same educated slaves who ended up commanding key positions.”(74)

The whole village turning out to the trial was not atypical of the Ibo people. The elders of the village unite in testifying against the slave family but due to the verdict of the British colonial court, the Ofulue family wins. Emecheta narrates he court proceeding simply, only commenting on the essence of the court justice involved.

The whole of Ibuza came forward as witnesses against the Ofulues. But the law was based on British justice which did not make allowance for slaves, so the Ibuza people lost the case and were ordered to compensate the Ofulue family in
kind. The free men had to plant cocoa for the slave and the heavy fines were fully paid. (155)

Rebecca Boostrom points out that had Aku-Nna not been killed by Emecheta, the British laws of her time would have come to her aid. She writes: “Emecheta’s portrayal of Aku-Nna needing to die as an examplar for modern times conflicts with a new law enacted in 1958 in Nigeria that would have upheld historically anyone like Aku-Nna refusing to consummate a marriage.” (Umeh 1996 79) The law in question reads thus:

When any parent or guardian of a bride refuses his or her consent to a marriage or refuses to accept his or her share of the dowry, the bride, if she is eighteen years of age or above, and the bridegroom jointly may institute legal proceedings in a competent court against the parent or guardian to show cause why he or she should refuse consent…(Umeh 1996 80)

*The Bride Price* is set in a momentous phase in Nigerian history. The co-existence of the British and Nigerian cultural mores and legal systems play out in the backdrop of the star crossed love story. Emecheta’s ending is rather ambiguous but her sympathies very obviously lie with the women who have become pawns in this culture of one upmanship. According to Boostrom, “Emecheta’s delineated moral ending to her story, *The Bride Price*, is a notable exception to the many parallels between her story and the laws of mid-century Nigeria. To, the foreign reader, Emecheta’s portrayal of the love relationship between Aku-Nna and Chike appears to be useful in developing both social sympathy for and social acceptance of Ibo girls who choose lawfully to marry the man of their choice, “slave or no slave”. (Umeh 1996 80)

**The Slave Girl**

Slavery—human bondage for labor exploitation in domestic or market contexts—is a theme that has been explored by Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta, and Bessie Head. In addition to their interest in chattel slavery, the writers look at states that share some characteristics with slavery, notably oppression across class, ethnicity and gender, servility, and dependency. An effect of the explorations is a consideration of the
metaphorical status of slavery. Appearing at a time when the tendency in African literature was toward a close reflection of the current social and political developments, these writers' depictions of slavery are remarkable. In quantitative terms, the thematic emphases of the literary and critical literature in Africa from the Emecheta, like Aidoo, owes the material for The Slave Girl partially to her mother, who also told her the story of a slave girl, but this story is closer to home. The model for Ojebeta, the main character of The Slave Girl, is Emecheta's mother whom the author talks of in her autobiography:

My mother, Alice Ogbanje Ojebeta Emecheta, that laughing, loud-voiced, six-foot-tall, black glossy slave girl, who as a child suckled the breasts of her dead mother; my mother who lost her parents when the nerve gas was exploded in Europe, a gas that killed thousands of innocent Africans who knew nothing about the Western First World War; my laughing mother, who forgave a brother that sold her to a relative in Onitsha so that he could use the money to buy ichafosiliki—silk head ties for his coming-of-age dance. My mother, who probably loved me in her own way, but never expressed it; my mother, that slave girl who had the courage to free herself and return to her people in Ibuza, and still stooped and allowed the culture of her people to re-enslave her, and then permitted Christianity to tighten the knot of enslavement. (Emecheta Head3)

*The Slave Girl* published in 1977 is the story of Ogbanje Ojebeta who is sold into slavery by her own brother. The story is set in the early years of the 20th Century. The British rule was at its peak with England ruling almost half the world but interestingly, the Ibos think that they were being ruled by the Portuguese as they were unable to differentiate between the white men.

In fact the people of Ibuza- at a time when it was glorious to be an Englishman, when the reign of the Great Queen Victoria’s son was coming to its close, when the red of the British Empire covered almost half the map of the world, when colonization was at its height and Nigeria was being taken over by Great Britain-did not know that they were not still being ruled by the Portuguese. The people of Ibuza did not realize that their country, to the last village, was being amalgamated
and partitioned by the British. They knew nothing of what was happening; they did not know that there were other ways of robbing people of their birthright than by war. The African of those days was very trusting. (15)

Emecheta traces the history of the Ibos towards the latter half of the 19th Century and early 20th Century. The great king of Idu who was known for ruling the Ibo land had fallen since the massacre of Benin. The mythical name of the king of Benin was Idu. The Empire was portrayed as being at the very end of the world in all the mythical stories that were told in Ibuza.

He was a great king, this king of Idu known to the Ibuza people as Oba Idu. History, when it was written much later identified these rulers of Benin as Akenzuwas. But at the time when Ogbanje Ojebeta was born, there was little division between myth and reality. The trekking distance was vast and the road dangerous. If you were either killed as a human sacrifice to one of the Kings innumerable God’s or if you were lucky you would be sold to the pale-skinned ‘Potokis’ (as all white people at that time were called; it was only much later that those living in the hinterland realized that the Portuguese had long since given way to the English who brought with them a hypocritical kind of Christianity). (20)

For the people in the small village of Umuisagba, life was more or less simple and uncomplicated. They were aware of the existence of the whites. They even had an operational district court in the area. The white man’s jobs held a lot of attraction for the youth. The new religion had not yet made inroads into the village. In the early 20th Century, when the story unfolds, there is a strong distrust of the white man but that does not stop Ojebeta’s father Okwekwu from lifting an injured white man on his shoulders and take him to Ogwashi-Ukwu. The British had remembered this great runner and Okwekwu had been appointed a Kortu-ma in the court. The town of Ibuza was known for its hostile attitude towards the British. The Ibo hostility towards the British is a historical fact. Tracing the history of Ibuza, Emecheta writes:
An English District Officer had been sent to the troublesome town of Ibuza, where in the year 1900 the elders resisted the white administrators. Other Officers were dispatched there in 1909, and they were sent packing not only by the elders but also by their notorious malaria mosquitoes, and many other such tropical insect soldiers. It happened that one district officer who survived was so ill he could hardly walk, and all his guides had fled in the face of Ibuza determination—it was not for nothing that these people were nicknamed “those Ibos who would rather fight than eat”. (20)

If the men were great fighters, the women, too, were a force to reckon with. Umeadi, the wife of Okwuekwu Oda had had several miscarriages but that did not frighten her from delivering her child on her own. When her son wonders whether he should stay back to help she rebukes him mildly. She says she is still not so weak as to allow her husband and sons to waste a day of work just because she was delivering a child.

Immediately after (her delivery), Umeadi ran back as fast as she could. She was still in her prime, despite her many pregnancies. Her skin, the colour of a burnt cocoa bean— not ebony black like that of Okwuekwu— was taut and shiny. She was not at all fat, but was narrow, long legged woman whose figure bordered on skinniness. From her father she had inherited long, goat like legs and a neck that looped as she ran like a giraffe. (18)

Commenting on the Ibo woman’s resilience, Emecheta talks of her matter of fact attitude towards child birth. She could give birth alone and almost immediately after childbirth, would take the child on her back and get back to work.

In common with most Ibuza women, she treated the event in a very straightforward manner requiring none of the modern paraphernalia that now attends the birth of a child. A pregnant Ibuza woman would simply always carry a cooking knife with her, just in case she gave birth to her baby on her way to and from the market or far. If she were lucky she might have someone with her who could cut the chord; if not she would cut the chord herself, rest a while, put her new baby on
her back and thread her way home. As a result many people bore names such as Uzo Onitsha- "born on the way to Onitsha market"- and Nwa Oboshi- "born on the way to Oboshi River". (19)

Emecheta considers writing to be "therapeutic and autobiographical writing even more so" (3). *The Slave Girl* is Emecheta's tribute to her mother, whose story, as laid out above, is parallel to the story of the mother's namesake, Ojebeta, in the novel. But the novel is also Emecheta's attempt to "cover the history of womanhood and link it with the happenings of the rest of the world" (204). Formally educated as a sociologist, Emecheta brings to bear on her writing the exploratory reach of her discipline. Her study of "the tradition of slavery" suggests a digging around her subject to reveal the histories, manifestations, metamorphoses, myths, and ideologies of slavery in an early twentieth-century Igbo village. Ibuza, where *The Slave Girl* is set, is a node within an economic sphere located around the lower Niger River, which itself is a node within Nigeria, then a colony of Britain. This Nigeria in turn constitutes a cultural and economic space within the orbit of imperial Britain. The notion of slavery is one that Emecheta picks up again in a subsequent novel, *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), with which *The Slave Girl* finds a textual correlation, through the narration of the story of a slave girl, who is buried alive with her dead slave mistress. But the most intensive representation of slavery and colonialism in Emecheta's work is *The Slave Girl* (Umeh 1996 75).

The title of *The Slave Girl* pays homage to the character Ogbanje Ojebeta, whose ups and downs in her journey from being a freeborn to a slave form the loose plot of the novel. As Florence Stratton has suggested, however, it also projects the archetypal dimensions of a slave girl who is buried along with her dead mistress so that in the after-life the girl can continue to cater to the mistress who is ultimately the patriarch's slave. The "shallow grave" to which a girl in a patriarchal culture is consigned, is one that desperately tries to bury a girl's talents and being. Stratton is extrapolating from Ojebeta's life history and from the life histories of the other girls in the novel a common social fate symbolized in the story told by Chiago, one of Ojebeta's fellow slaves (Stratton 34).
The Slave Girl explores the links between colonialism, slavery and patriarchy. The novel projects the economic activities of the region in the time of the story's setting through the depictions of the markets. It also highlights the displacements of the various characters—most strongly symbolized by journeys—that are consequences of internal cultural exchanges and of the social and political transformations brought about by colonialism. It is useful, therefore, to pay some attention to these components of the novel's discourse. Such attention will reveal much more about the significance of slavery in the novel's etiological discourse.

The Slave Girl begins with a prologue that gives a synoptic history of the founding of the area where the story takes place. Along with the historical backdrop, the prologue describes the area's prominent cultural institutions and assumptions. The first icon mentioned is the market, described as "the center of all that mattered in Ibuza" (9). Markets turn out to be the foremost defining icons of the adjacent areas as well. Asaba, Idu, and Onitsha—all big towns—are presented through their markets alone, a representation that is ultimately slanted, even if in the early years of the twentieth century, the story's setting, southern Nigeria was experiencing a mercantilist expansion arising from increased urbanization and from a diversification of international trade as a calculated attempt to suppress slave trade. We find these truly multifarious towns reduced to markets in the novel. (Modupe 173)

The distinguishing features of the markets include the presence of a new currency, whose significance incorporates its portability. The people could carry on their person the new money and use it to magically transform their identity. The market is also a place for spectacle, in which the new wealth can be displayed. In the novel, all roads lead to the all the different markets, as people who live in the villages take products ranging from cassava pulp to palm oil, palm kernels, and rubber to larger distributing/collecting centers for domestic and foreign consumption. But the new markets and the new money have also generated new values, or modified old ones. It is against this context of new-market-new-money-new-values that Ojebeta's brother, Okolie, takes the precipitous action of selling his younger sister. Seduced by the magic of the new money, the English currency of the expanded markets, Okolie leaves for Onitsha with his seven-year-old sister in tow.
Ojebeta has become Okolie's ward because their parents have been killed in an epidemic that originated in Europe and spread across the world, and the eldest child in the family has abandoned Okolie and Ojebeta in order to pursue his own economic salvation. On the way to Onitsha, Okolie experiences bouts of guilt for deciding to sell his sister, but the only thing that suppressed the guilt is his thought of the liberating potential of the new money:

Mixed up with these feelings of self-justification was the conviction that he desperately needed whatever money came his way to prepare himself for his coming-of-age, one of the most important events of his age-group. (26)

When Okolie and Ojebeta run into a suspicious relative, Okolie cooks up a story woven around the legendary riches that Onitsha markets generate:

"...You remember our relative Olopo who married a Kru man? She is very rich now. They say she has built many houses in Otu at Onitsha. She heard of all the mishaps that were befalling us, with everybody dying and sent a messenger last market day to tell me that I should bring Ojebeta to Onitsha since she wished to see her and buy her this and that, to console her for the loss of her mother. . . ." (41)

Okolie gets to sell Ojebeta, and he does have his coming-of-age dance in Ibuza market in the grandest style in Ibuza's living memory. No one in Ibuza asks Okolie, who is known as a lazy and indigent farmer, the source of the money with which he stages his spectacular coming-of-age. All that seems to count in the village is the glory, however fleeting. The people of Ibuza take the occasion to inscribe the centrality of their market as an icon of their success:

By the time they had danced round Ibuza, many relatives from Okolie's mother's side had joined in singing his praise names. One old woman from Ezeukwu who had looked after his mother Umeadi as a child came out and said:

"Who was born in the center of the biggest market in Ibuza?"
"He!" the crowd replied. Fingers pointed at Okolie, and the voice of the crowd was as heavy as the blast of a gun, as frightening as claps of thunder. (83)

If the narrator's commentary here suggests an authorial distancing from the celebration of Okolie's market show, there is nevertheless a degree of praise in the narration of the teeming life of the Onitsha market and of the industry of its women merchants. The women are shown to rule the market. These merchants include Ma Palagada and Ma Mee, prototypes of the new importer-exporter. The women circumvent the laws banning export slavery. Choosing to see those laws as obstacles to their generation of significant personal wealth, these merchants turn to agricultural and industrial products for export/import. They export farm products such as palm oil and rubber, and import finished goods, notably cloths. To build their wealth, the businesswomen rely on the labor of the slave girls and boys—other people's children—whom they acquire illegally by pretending to be interested in liberating the children from poverty while actually enslaving them. The hard-boiled merchant, seasoned by the markets, succeeds very well; her child, the successor, who has not been re-born into the market, fails woefully. Thus, Ma Palagada's economic empire disintegrates in the hands of her son, Clifford, "who has passed through the market but through whom the market has not passed". (Modupe 150) The slaves of the market who literally grow up there become its inheritors. Clifford reports on the Palagadas' slaves at the end of the story: "Jieunuka was now a successful businessman in Otu and had married Nwayinuzo; her friend Amana had also gone into business and had a big shop, and a car, and though she was now widowed was fine and happy" (177).

The novel suggests that the economic slavery promoted by the new market ethos is a product of the colonial annexation of the Nigerian market economies to Britain. But there is also an indigenizing process that reflects the people's identification with the industriousness promoted by the new market economy. Hence Ma Palagada, an apologist for slavery, is drawn with some degree of warmth. There is a subplot that traces Ma Palagada's triumphs and trials. Ma Palagada, who buys Ojebeta from Okolie, comes across generally as a wise investor. She is frequently ahead of all the merchants, turning every challenge into profit. When she dies and her empire collapses, there is a sense of
loss. Smart, feisty, industrious, wealthy, and beneficent, Ma Palagada would be irresistible except for her dealing in slaves. (Modupe 150) When she is purchasing the small children whose labor she will exploit, she is relentless. But Ma Palagada, too, suffers under patriarchy. By virtue of being a woman, in a largely patriarchal society, she is potentially threatened by social subjugation and economic exploitation. She takes a route that will ensure her financial independence and that will diminish, if not erase, the effects of an imposed social inferiority. Her measure of success is wryly noted in the narrative in the reversal that her personality and fortunes effect in a common patriarchal convention. Typically in that convention, a married woman is identified by her husband's name. Interestingly, Ma Palagada's last husband, and her children by her two husbands are called by her sobriquet—"Palagada," which is a reference to the sound made by her legs when she is walking (70).

Closely associated with the markets are journeys that symbolize cultural exchanges and displacements. At Ojebeta's birth, her caring father makes a journey to Idu, similar to a mythic journey, to procure the medicinal protection that will ensure her survival. Ojebeta's greedy brother takes her on a journey that parodies family members' instinct for mutual protection. Okolie claims that by selling his little sister to the wealthy Ma Palagada, he is offering her "a chance to make the best of her life" (38). On their way to Onitsha, Okolie and Ojebeta pass a stream and then cross the big River Niger. Like Ojebeta, Chiago crosses many rivers on her way to slavery in the Palagadas' house. In the market at Onitsha, the riverside is equally important. The market mammy, Ma Mee, has her stall on the edge of the river, a position that enables her to snap up people disembarking from canoes and to sell them her merchandise. The rivers and streams have a strong association with slavery in a manner that recalls some diasporic African slave narratives: "Whenever they went to Otu market, and she went to the waterside, she still used to gaze across the tangle of boats, canoes and steamers, across the River Niger, thinking to herself that one day she would be free" (95).

The slaves in the Palagada household are displaced, many of them permanently:
It was said that Pa Palagada had bought the men from some Potokis [Portuguese] who were leaving the country and returning to their own land. The two, who were young boys at the time, could not remember where they had originally come from, so they were given Ibo names and were put to work on the Palagada farms. (60)

One of the Palagada slaves was born a twin and her people, somewhere among the Efiks, did not accept twins; her mother had nursed her secretly and later had her sold, simply to give her a chance in life. (63)

The kinds of displacement illustrated in these passages are due to the influence of the transatlantic slave trade and to intercultural exchanges within the area.

In the country at large, a more widespread form of displacement is taking place. This displacement affects mostly the men who are leaving their farm work in the villages to take up European jobs in the cities, but it does not preclude the women. The narrative compares the European jobs, called "olu Oyibo," to the slaves' separation from their homes. When Ojebeta returns to Ibuza after negotiating her freedom from the Palagadas, the people of her village celebrate her "smooth skin and such modest and polished manners" (149). They do not inquire about her experience in Onitsha, but they probably would not have believed her if she had told them that dispossession, loneliness, unpaid toil, and a dire struggle to retain her personal dignity have constituted her experience as a slave of the Palagadas:

They would call Ojebeta's stay with Ma Palagada anything other than a good thing. For had she not returned with such fine manners and clothes, just like the older men who went to seek their fortunes in white man's jobs, in olu Oyibo. No, it was to olu Oyibo that she too had gone, not just to Otu Onitsha. That was an understatement. (149)

Like the willful amnesia that the people of Abura in Aidoo's Anowa court to prevent them from confronting slavery, the fantasy spun by the people of Ibuza cushions them against recognizing their complicity in the evil that stares them in the eye. Their hyperbolic sense
of the prosperity that olu Oyibo—the white man's jobs, which are drudgeries reserved for the colonized—will confer on their sons and daughters is underscored by their continued poverty. They do not forget to remind their children, such as Jacob who becomes Ojebeta's husband, to "make more and more money to come and give to your people," but when these children make their periodic visits home, they can only hand out the white man's biscuits to the relatives (161). (Modupe 172)

Jacob, whom Ojebeta marries, reimburses Ma Palagada's son for the amount that Ma Palagada had initially paid for Ojebeta. As a result of being virtually bought anew by Jacob in a customary ritual called bride price, Ojebeta begins a new form of slavery in which she is obligated to serve her husband as he chooses. The novel's closing paragraph emphasizes the link between the foreign and indigenous forms of slavery:

So as Britain was emerging from war once more victorious, and claiming to have stopped the slavery which she has helped to spread in all her black colonies, Ojebeta, now a woman of thirty-five, was changing masters. (179)

Ma Palagada energetically trades in slaves, buoyed up by her conviction that slavery is "a necessary evil." The character Ogbanje Ojebeta—to whom the novel's title refers primarily—embraces her husband, who buys her from Ma Palagada's heir, as a "better master." (179).

The Slave Girl is Emecheta's strongest critique of the role of Christianity in the colonial expansion. She calls it a hypocritical religion. The Ibos valiantly resisted colonialism but fell an easy prey to Christianity. Here was a religion which was seemingly harmless, preaching love and brotherhood among the masses, but it had a more insidious role to play. It created a class of elites and furthered a class divide. Soon, the Christian Ibos start to look down upon their own brothers as pagans. Work on the farm which had been their sole source of livelihood for generations was now god enough only for "bushmen". The white man's job is considered elite and fashionable. Moreover, Christianity instead of coming down heavily on the slave masters, help their trade. While the Christian tenets preach simplicity and renunciation of wealth, the Ibo churches encourage donations. A
show of wealth and power is also encouraged as it brings many more into the fold who choose to convert seeing the prosperity of their brethren. One such example of an obscene show of wealth is recorded in *The Slave Girl*.

It was an impressive sight that they made, people ran out of their huts and houses to watch, to marvel at how beautiful, how rich these people were. Why the servants were even dressed in silk! Ojebeta and Amanna were in front, carrying two hens each...they were followed by the bigger girls and then the men leading the fattest and the strongest goats. After they had gone round the neighbourhood twice, and the final church bell was pealing they returned to the front of their house and waited for the Palagadas. And they soon came out in style, all the members of the family. Pa and Ma walked with dignity and Clifford with a youthful swagger. Those who watched them envied and admired them, the “Church Missionary Society” Christians. (109)

The Bishop blesses the Palagadas- master and slaves and tells the slaves how lucky they are to have such good masters. “The Bishop took the gifts from them, blessed the labour of their hands, and told them to obey their masters and work diligently in all they were employed to do. And he begged God to accept the offerings of his subjects...the slaves and servants, happy to have been blessed walked back to their designated places at the back of the church, away from their superiors and sang more songs.”(109)

*The Slave Girl* is a treatise in the colonization of minds and creating slavish mentalities. The slaves are subjected to innumerable horrors in the Palagada household. From being a beloved daughter of poor parents, Ojebeta becomes a slave in a rich household. Initially it comes as a rude shock to her but the shock is slowly numbed by time and the healing touch of Christianity, which teaches her to obey her masters and superiors unquestioningly. Such is her socialization, that she even forgives her brother for having sold her as she feels that she would not have been the fine lady she is now had she not served at the Palagada household. For Ma Palagada, there is only gratefulness in her heart
though the former merely exploits her for her own benefit. On her return to Ibuza, she considers herself an elite and therefore socially above her poor aunt.

Slavery for Emecheta becomes a strong metaphor. She links up the slavery of the women to the slavery of the nation and to the creation of slave mentalities of all the colonized people. The women’s position is pitiable as she is caught between the rapidly changing cultures where the manipulative men in collusion with the British are constantly creating new ideologies and passing them off for religion. She comes down heavily on the close nexus between religion and financial gains as money becomes the buzzword of colonialism. Commenting on the manipulation of religion to suit one’s purpose she writes:

A woman could be taken to church and a ring slipped on her finger as easily as a piece of string can be put round a man’s cattle to market out from another persons. But that did not mean the man could have only her. What if he had enough money to afford more wives, or if the first one married in church had no child. So men would simply take wives when they felt like it; while women on the other hand, must have one husband, and only one. But only a stupid woman would expect her husband to remain married to her alone. What was she, if not only a woman? (98)

_The Slave Girl_ is Emecheta’s strongest indictment of colonialism and Christianity which aid in creating slavish mentalities. The setting of this novel is in the European colonial era, specifically from the height of World War I to the termination of World War II, when the most influential colonial power "was emerging from war once more victorious, and claiming to have stopped the slavery which she had helped to spread in all her black colonies," (179) heightens its ironic thrust.

**Conclusion**

Thus we see that Colonialism creates innumerable complexities in the Ibo society. By creating a new fangled elite culture, the society faces stratification like never before. The
traditional Ibo society respects money and wealth but it has to be earned. Hard work is respected. With the white man's jobs, the concept of white collared job is introduced. Farming is looked down upon and there is a mass exodus towards the cities. The traditional Ibo clannish structure crumbles. With money becoming the buzzword of existence, ethics are entirely forgotten. All this coupled with a new religion which is also the key to the rosy lifestyle of the whites, further complicates matters. In all this the woman's life is no better than a slave girl's. Bereft of the cushioning provided by the traditional societies, she is left to fend for herself in this alien world. Caught in the crossfire of the changing society, she is trapped body and mind. But even in this pitiable condition she has a mind of her own. She struggles against her bondages, falls, but struggles again. Inspite of severe oppression one cannot but admire her indomitable spirit.

The colonial discourse has forever marginalized the woman's entity. She is seen in roles defined by men as a good woman, a good mother and a good wife. Or she is seen as a fallen woman and prostitute. But real women are very different. Emecheta tries to record their struggle in her portrayal of the various women characters. Nnu Ego in The Joys of Motherhood struggles unsuccessfully to make her two ends meet in the alien world of Lagos; Aku-Nna dares to marry a slave even though it is taboo in her society. Umeadi delivers her own child and dares to spoil her in a society which is harsh on girls and Ojebeta who tries again and again to assert herself albeit unsuccessfully. Their quest may not be successful but in the turbulent times they live and operate in, it definitely merits a mention. If colonial identities and colonial experiences are seen as constructions, sometimes ascribed, sometimes embraced and sometimes resisted, the objective voicing of the silenced subaltern by an alternative narrative raises difficult questions. How much credibility should be given to these voiced silences? While the inability to voice the subaltern does not implicate one in the process of brutal silencing, imposing one's radical voice onto the subaltern is definitely an effort to make the subaltern speak. Emecheta makes a valiant effort to free the colonized woman from the stereotyping she has been subjected to. She achieves this by exposing the rootedness of cultural practices and narratives in exploitative prejudices of the society. Her women characters stand out as
rebels, however, their failures render them fallible and more real than portraits by male authors.

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Works Cited


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