Conclusion
Rachel Blau Duplessis, in her study of 20th century American, British and Canadian women writers, argues that women authors "write beyond the traditional 19th century romantic ending by creating narrative strategies that critique and de-legitimize romance and related narrative conventions. Writing beyond the ending, a process that disrupts dominant narrative structures, she maintains, "means the transgressive invention of narrative strategies, strategies that express critical dissent from dominant narrative." (5) The disruption, revision and rewriting of a dominant discourse underlies the discursive difference of black women's writing and suggests, as Dupleiss argues, a strategy that writes beyond the ending of master narratives. As Mae Gwendolyn Henderson notes:

> It is this notion of discursive difference and identity underlying the simultaneity of discourse which typically characterizes black women's writing. Through the multiple voices that enunciate her complex subjectivity, the black woman writer not only speaks familiarly in the discourse of the others, but as other she is in contestorial dialogue with the hegemonic dominant and subdominant or ambiguously (non) hegemonic discourses. (20)

The complexity of black women's subjectivity is a result of their simultaneous racial and gender identity. It is this interrelationship that structures their writing, and locates them in what Dale Bauer calls a "dialogic community". (XIII) By writing beyond the ending, black women challenge both hegemonic – white, male colonial discourses, and ambiguously (non) hegemonic discourses of black men and white women. As Bauer points out, a dialogic community can not exist without "tension between the marginal and the central, the eccentric and the phallocentric." (XIII) Through the narrative strategy of writing beyond the ending, which exemplifies transgressive speech, black women achieve discursive agency and suggest feminist resistance to dominant discourse.

The autobiographical form – the letter, journal, diary, or first person narrative – is a genre well suited to women’s introspective journey because it allows women to find voice. The narrative process is directly related to women’s search for self and is often a means of
therapy or healing. Writing disrupts dominant narratives that attempt to define women, allowing them to self inscribe. It is a strategy black women use to write beyond the ending of master narratives of the sub dominant black male or white female literary tradition. Alice Walker writes beyond the ending of Virginia Woolf’s *A Room Of One’s Own* in *In search Of Our Mother’s Gardens* when she questions the absence of race in Woolf’s discourse. Previously denied authorship – absent, silent, or created by male and/or white female authors – black female writers challenge the (sub) dominant narrative to offer alternative possibilities for women.

Buchi Emecheta writes beyond the ending of master “been-to” narratives such as Chinua Achebe’s *No Longer At Ease* and Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *L’Adventure Ambigue* by writing the story of the African woman’s experience abroad. Her autobiographies symbolically revisit these discourses to show how a gendered racial and cultural identity informs the consciousness and experience of African women in Africa and abroad. The dialogic community from which black women writers speak is suggested by each text’s relationship to the male literary tradition, but also by their connection to a specific female tradition.

The study of Flora Nwapa’s works gives credence to Amanor Dseagu’s statement that "the African novel has been influenced by the oral traditions of Africa" (Aje Ori Agbase 23). Flora Nwapa’s major literary motifs, in her novels *Efuru, Idu, Never Again, Women Are Different*, and *The Lake Goddess* are linked to the creativity embedded in Ugwuta oral traditions, which are dominated by women. One finds, for example, that the mythical figure of Ogboide (also known as Eze/Nne Mmiri and Uhamiri), the divine woman of the lake, is woven into her novels. The creativity shared by the Ugwuta griottes and Nwapa has prompted Gay Wiletz to define her oeuvre as “woman-centered oraliterature” (10).

Nwapa’s technique, as illustrated above, displays her conscious manipulation of Ugwuta oral traditions to achieve an individual creative alchemy. This technique does not falter even when she adopts the multiple character approach whereby the story is presented from the perspectives and views of several individuals. Generally, the characters who
emerge from her novels are strong, individualized women who are not burdened with the baggage of patriarchal societies. These women often make decisions and act in ways that question the general assumptions and social practices that restrict womanhood. In the creation of Efuru, in *Efuru* Amaka in *One Is Enough* and Ona in *The Lake Goddess*, for example, Nwapa presents the female characters as decisive in stepping beyond the institution of marriage. And while Nwapa may not be insisting that marriage itself is an institution that is obsolete, she gives considerable emphasis to the idea that such institutions should not be seen as insurmountable barriers to female self-actualization.

According to Marie Umeh:

A factor which emerges from Nwapa's feminine perspective is that the actions of her female characters catalyze events, and furthermore, the fates of other characters depend upon those actions. This revisionist stance is deliberate, for it stresses the realism of daily interactions in the Ugwuta society where the women are easily perceived as industrious, successful, and socially important in business as well as in religious and cultural activities. The revisionist aspect of Nwapa's novels becomes even more prominent when one notes that in divine activities the Goddess of the Lake is given much respect in the Ugwuta community, which means that the women who become her priestesses have a large measure of that respect and dignified reverence attached to them. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Chielo, the Priestess of Agbala is glimpsed only occasionally, but in *The Lake Goddess*, Ona the Priestess of Ugwuta Lake is just as much the center of consciousness as the character of Ezeulu is in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*. Like Achebe, Wole Soyinka focuses on male figures. In his plays, especially *The Strong Breed*, the famous priests and particularly the "carriers" on which the society depends for survival are male, with all the attendant patriarchal implications. In Nwapa's novels, short stories, and children's books, on the other hand, the "carriers," those characters who make sacrifices in the interest of the rest of the people, are female. Thus, the magnificence of the female essence of priesthood in Flora Nwapa's fiction subverts the literary tradition of patriarchy in Nigerian modern literature. (45)
Nwapa gives African women an authentic identity in literature by introducing a female literary tradition at a time when little or nothing of a realistic nature had been written about African women. For the most part, Nigerian male authors such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Cyprian Ekwensi depicted women living under a rigid sex-role segregation system, with no individuality, personhood, or power. However, Nwapa's women take center stage by exerting their industry, ingenuity, and resilience. (Umeh 45) According to Chikwenye Ogunyemi, “Nwapa thus accommodates the childless, the husbandless, the educated, and the distinguished woman, forced to make do with the limiting spaces allotted them in society. She magically transforms these outcasts into the category of the new woman who can help to reconnect the community.”(1)

Chidi Ikonne argues that Nwapa's womenfolk are imbued with beliefs that mirror Igwuta society. He goes on to say that her women passively accept the idea that "woman is basically inferior to the man, a concept which underlies the folk attitude to, and treatment of women" (102). While it may be true that Nwapa records traditional practices which oppress women such as clitoridectomy, polygamy, wife inheritance, and property disinherition, she also challenges some of the fundamental assumptions concerning Igbo women's passively accepting retrogressive cultural norms. (Umeh 43) For example, Idu, in the novel Idu, rejects the cultural ethics of wife inheritance, male dominance, and the primacy of the child. After years of yearning for an offspring, Idu finally gives birth to a son. But when her husband dies prematurely, she wills herself to die rather than permit herself to become the wife of Ishiodu, her husband's younger brother. Idu had had an ideal, loving relationship with Adiewere that another husband would have found hard to live up to. Her death shortly after her spouse's demise is therefore a protest against the traditional custom of levirate. In defense of Idu's final act, and of Nwapa's unconventional ending, Ernest Emenyonu, in "Who Does Flora Nwapa Write For?" says: “Too fantastic? Not if you have been listening to the voices in the novel. Too unrealistic? Not if you have been close enough to the Igbo culture and life-ways. Too remote? Not if you understand that even among the Igbo, the love between two individuals can be such that one cannot die without the other." (30)
Nwapa writes off the effacement, marginality, and misrepresentation of women with subtlety and grace, contending that a woman is not an inanimate object without brains, feelings, emotions, and desires. In challenging male perceptions of what women want and need, Nwapa gives the female point of view.

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

Another erroneous conception that Nwapa challenges in her oeuvre is the idea that African women are not property owners. It may be true that in some African communities women do not inherit property and are never heirs to their husband's wealth. Only sons are heirs. However, Nwapa points to the fact that in Ugwuta many of the "upstairs" (a two-three story building) in the township were erected and owned by women, whose sons inherit their wealth. One character in *Efuru* says, "Look around this town, nearly all the story buildings you find are built by women who at one time or another have been worshippers of Uhamiri" (Nwapa 1966 192). Priestess or not, having economic independence is part of an Ugwuta woman's self-esteem. In her "woman-centered oraliterature," she emphatically asserts that the so-called passive, passionless, unimaginative, powerless, and irresponsible African woman is a figment of the male's imagination which she has set out to correct. It is for this reason that Susan Andrade calls Nwapa's creation of strong, intelligent protagonists, an act of rebellion against a Nigerian literary tradition dominated by male writers (105).
Emecheta consciously places herself within an African female tradition by considering herself the “new sister” of African women like Flora Nwapa, Grace Ogot, and Bessie Head who all started writing before her. She also pays tribute to the oral tradition of her family kin, like her Big mother, who influenced her decision to write. Storytelling as a tradition has been carried forward from one woman writer to the other. Tsi Tsi Dangarembga is also influenced by the story telling tradition as she recalls hearing stories told by an older cousin when she was a child. The relationship of women writers to their foremothers, in both oral and written traditions, suggests a dialogic community of black women who speak to and from one another through their work.

The relationship of black women’s literature to a female tradition implies a constructive dialogue among black women. The contestorial dialogue, which Henderson argues characterizes Black women’s writing, is suggested by the interrogation of all dominant narratives: colonial, patriarchal, white, male and/or heterosexual. Within this dialogic community black women simultaneously speak to the margins – to their black female kin, and from the margins – to the dominant centre of hegemonic and ambiguously (non) hegemonic discourse. As Henderson points out:

These writers enter simultaneously into familial, or testimonial and public, or competitive discourses – discourses that both affirm and challenge...black women writers enter into testimonial discourse with black men and blacks, with white women as women, and with black women as black women. At the same time they enter into competitive discourse with black men as women, with white women as blacks and with white men as black women. If black women speak a discourse of racial and gendered difference in the dominant or hegemonic discursive order, they speak a discourse of racial and gender identity and difference in the subdominant discursive order. This dialogic of difference and dialectic of identity characterize both black women’s subjectivity and black women’s discourse. (20-21)

Black women’s complex subjectivity is suggested by their various locations within the dialogic community that Henderson outlines. It is from these “discursive domains”
(Henderson 21) that they write and speak to each other, and to a hegemonic and/ or ambiguously (non) hegemonic center. The disruption, revision and re writing of dominant discourse exemplifies what bell hooks would call “talking back”. It is defiant speech that challenges authority, and rejects inscription by a dominant other. Talking back subverts dominant narrative and, in the words of Du Plessis, “offers the possibility of speech to the female... giving speech to the muted”. (108)

Nwapa’s writings are Afrocentric and Africana womanistic. Not only does she promote women’s image as reflected in her identification of Efuru with the lake goddess, she also stresses community values. Efuru’s prosperity as a trader and her generosity bring health and happiness to her community. She achieves independence within the community, not outside it, and her individualism is sanctioned by one set of the community’s traditions (enshrined in the presence of the goddess Uhamiri) despite the fact that it departs from another set of traditions (centred on women’s more conventional role as wife and mother). For those who live by the lake, Efuru is the counterpart of the goddess. Through her position as a worshipper, she substantiates her earlier work in the community and her good qualities will be passed on to those she helps. The novel suggests that Efuru’s benevolence comes from this divine source. She treats all the villagers as members of her family, but because of her personal loss, her characteristic strength and goodness pour out specifically to the children. The upbringing of children belongs to the whole community as well as the parents, which emphasizes the African adage “It takes a village to raise a child”.

The fictional universe of Nwapa is dominated by women. The heroes and most of the secondary characters in the novel are women. She records the day to day domestic and external activities of these women, and their personal and group interactions with one another and with men. These female characters are generally presented as beautiful, determined, hardworking, resourceful and respectful. Through her “oraliterature”, Nwapa stresses on the need for women to be self reliant. Economic independence and education are seen as twin forces which are necessary preconditions to a woman’s independence.
Buchi Emecheta offers equally interesting views on Ibo women’s roles and experiences through her novels. She reiterates that her main purpose in writing is to reconcile two different worlds – the African and the Western, and also to assert herself in a male dominated world where a woman is not fully accepted as an independent human being. She claims that her major interest is in writing about the ordinary, everyday happenings of life. But the major preoccupation of her writing remains African women’s issues. On several occasions she repeats that she is not a feminist in the European sense of the word; she believes in upholding African values and encourages women to keep their families together. She has no sympathy for a woman who deserts her children, nor does she sympathize with a woman who stays in an abusive situation. She believes that education for women helps them stay in control with regard to raising responsible children fit for the society.

Emecheta presents a balanced view of the sexes by showing that the conflicts the female protagonists experience are due more to the fact that they often want to act in accordance with their personal needs rather than in agreement with their society’s ideals about appropriate behaviour for women. Although her residence in Britain makes her a somewhat “displaced” African living in the diaspora, she nevertheless demonstrates for the readers and for herself what it means to be African.

From her work, we can also see that there is a conflict on the African continent because of the exposure of the indigenous culture to the outside world. Since the end of this conflict is not yet in sight, it will continue to affect African life and literature. And writers like Emecheta continue to portray this conflict, while at the same time communicating the culture from which it emanates. For these reasons, one may see Emecheta as an Afrocentrist realist who depicts the cosmology of which she’s still a part even though she no longer lives in the continent. She is not an absolutionist, as are many Western feminists, but seems to be working more to bring a balanced view of the world into her works, an African cosmological perspective. There is a recurrent use of myth and ancestral memory in her works which exudes a solid African foundation. It is this that makes her want to draw people together, not drive them apart, by letting her readership glimpse the spirituality that informs her literary efforts. The ethos of her people is also
reflected in her works, making her a truly Afrocentric Womanist writer. Sougou describes Emecheta as a "cross-cultural figure" who was born in Nigeria, lives in London, and who "draws on African materials and experience," but who also has been named "one of the best Young British Writers." (88)

Emecheta's writings present conflicts for the reader which defies simple classifications. Her novel *The Joys of Motherhood*, for example, is anything but joyous: Sougou characterizes it as "a radical questioning of the myth of motherhood as it has crystallized in African societies and writing ... The events and actions lay bare the dark side of motherhood and undermine the myth of maternity as a source of happiness" (93-94). Emecheta's anger, often directed at an African culture in transition, is the language of protest, not toward Africa only but toward cultural discrimination and ethnic and gender oppression in general.

The reader of either of these texts will come away with the conviction that subversion is alive and well and as powerful as ever. Maybe we can still hope for a crosscultural text and a crosscultural world that will blend rather than divide, save rather than sacrifice, and never, never behead another woman (or another) anytime anywhere. (Hill 88) The contradictions and conflicts engendered by this dual cultural dwelling are dramatized in the representation of the female body. Like the female body on which is scripted the sexual violence of territorial and ethnic domination, the female maternal body, in national and the diasporic formations, destabilizes assumptions about oppression on women being specific to any location. In other words, just as women's bodies become targets of specific forms of sexual violence within national and diasporic patriarchies, the maternal aspects of their bodies and lives are also subject to various forms of control imposed by nationalist and diasporic societies.

In exploring the issues of rape, fertility, and motherhood, Emecheta's novels depict a range of women, traversing the spectrum from the female intellectual to the illiterate woman grappling with the demands of traditional tribal life. The female intellectual is often one who has access to global cosmopolitan education. However, these categories of the female intellectual and the ordinary female subject are not entities separated by
geographic location, or class privilege. In fact, in her autobiographical novels, Emecheta depicts the transformation of the Ibo girl into a migrant intellectual. The boundaries of the intellectual and the female subaltern are somewhat fluid in Emecheta’s œuvre. The experiences of sexual violation too are not restricted to the underprivileged woman in the novels. The most striking example of this is Debbie in *Destination Biafra*, who at the beginning is a privileged transnational intellectual, but as she travels through the war ravaged Nigeria; her status is reduced to that of a war refugee. However, after the brutalities of war are over, Debbie regains her original status. Solidarities between intellectuals and the common women are sporadic and happen only in situations of emergency.

In a similar vein, the transformation of an Ibo girl into an immigrant in Britain and a writer of fiction is not an uncomplicated narrative of easy class mobility. If Adah in the autobiographical novels, *In the Ditch* and *Second Class Citizen* feels a sense of solidarity and identifies with other poor white women in the welfare, she retains a sense of class prejudice against the uneducated and the undereducated Nigerian immigrants in Britain. Thus deeply entrenched racial and class prejudices, which erupt across fissures in the text, caution against a utopian reading of these novels as expressing an easy affiliation between the female intellectual and the female subaltern. Buchi Emecheta’s novels recognize and acknowledge the complications introduced by class in the fashioning of a solidarity based only on gender. In *Destination Biafra*, the act of rape creates a temporary bonding between the heroine, Debbie, and other rural women who are her companions in the journey across Nigeria. This suffering is a rite of passage for Debbie, shaping her as an anti-war intellectual/activist.

Emecheta’s depiction of the Nigerian Civil War, erupting from the political wrangling of power between the three most populous tribes in Nigeria – the Hausas, the Yorubas and the Ibos, coheres around the representation of acts of violence on women. Although the novel depicts widespread acts of savagery, triggered by the political conflict, including especially the political assassinations and coup d’etats, which initiate the civil war, the most poignant emotive core of the novel remains the brutal rape of the heroine, Debbie.
Rajeshwari Suder Rajan in her essay “Life After Rape and Feminism” in her book Real and Imagined Women, uses a comparative method of literary analysis to explore the connection of the interconnections between rape, narrative structure, and feminist politics. She approaches two canonical English novels, Clarissa and A Passage to India, and examines their representation of rape of the female protagonist in comparison with a third world text, a Tamil short story called “prison” by popular magazine writer Anuradha Ramanan. Sunder Rajan also draws upon representations of rape by African American female writers like Marie Anjelou and Alice Walker, as well as the cinematic treatment of rape in Jonathan Caplan in Jonathan Caplan’s film The Accused. In the canonical text, Sunder Rajan observes “all that is really left for the raped woman to do is to fade away. Adela, doing the decent thing, “retracts and returns to England; Clarissa, transcending her body’s humiliation falls ill and dies.” (72)

In contrast, feminist texts of rape, Sunder Rajan argues, “must engage in textual strategies to counter narrative determinism. Such negotiations are achieved by and result in alternative structures of narrative. (73) One means by which feminist authors achieve the goal of avoiding narrative determinism in a rape narrative is to alter the placement of rape in the plot structure. The rape incident is located at the beginning of the narrative in Angelou, Walker and Ramanan’s texts. In the canonical texts of rape, Clarissa and A Passage to India, the rape incident is located at the centre of the novels, and “the novels can not altogether avoid on the one hand a certain relaxation of tension not unlike sexual titillation, and on the other a certain relaxation of tension, resembling post – coital boredom, around the point.” (Sunder Rajan 74) Moreover Sunder Rajan points out that in these canonical novels, the actual incident of rape is present only as an absence. In both Clarissa and A Passage to India the incident of rape is left unrepresented. In A Passage to India, the omniscient narrator relinquishes his authority and does not tell us what actually happened. These evasions and absences are symptomatic, according to Sunder Rajan, of a deep underlying male fear of accepting the unsupported accusation of a woman who has
been sexually violated. Sunder Rajan catalogues the strategies used by feminist texts of rape to counter narrative determinism:

By representing the raped woman as one who becomes a subject through rape rather than merely one subjected to its violation; by structuring a post rape narrative that privileges her strategies of survival instead of a rape centered narrative that privileges chastity and leads to trials to establish it. by literalizing instead of mystifying the representation of rape, and by finally by counting the cost of rape for its victims in terms more complex than the extinction of female selfhood in death or silence.

Does Destination Biafra fit the rubric of a feminist representation of rape? The question impinges on the larger question of Emecheta’s relationship with feminism itself. As discussed before we see that Emecheta’s relationship with feminism is a selective one. As a creative writer, rather than a theorist, her fiction combines elements of her natal African culture as well as the cultural influences of Britain, her adoptive homeland. Interrogating both of these received structures of belief and knowledge, Emecheta’s fiction evolves into a kind of feminism, which is deeply conscious of the blind spots of first world and western feminism. Although aware of her difference in her situated knowledge about women’s experiences, as opposed to academic feminists she does not try to consciously posit an alternative framework like womanism or third world feminism, in opposition to hegemonic western/white/middle class feminism. As her London novels demonstrate, she constantly seeks to imagine transnational and inter racial women’s imaginative and political coalitions. And yet, she is not embracing of aspects of western feminism, in fact she distances herself from it time and again, in her autobiographical statements and interviews.

Given Emecheta’s tentative and partial alliance with the movement and ideology of mainstream feminism, Emecheta’s novel of rape can not fit into the classic narrative paradigm of a feminist text of rape postulated by Sunder Rajan. In between Sunder Rajan’s binaristic division of the canonical/male text of rape, there must exist a variety of
narratives, which blur and complicate these schematic boundaries. Tuzeline Jita Allan has studied the evolution of rape narratives in Buchi Emecheta’s fiction. She argues that “Africa’s quintessential rape narrative tells the story of economic and cultural ravishment of the continent by foreign prowlers and native sons. The feminization and idealization of Africa finds its finest expression in the trope of rape which carries the potent threat of displacing “real women in rape discourse”. (Allan 208) Allan argues that this image of “Mother Africa as rape victim” (209) erases the violent reality of rape with respect to its female victims. The African female writer faces the enormous challenge of representing the gendered oppression that rape embodies, while at the same time preserving their commitment to expose their political exploitation of the African continent. Instead of privileging either woman or nation, African woman writers attempt “to locate the post colonial project at the intersection of gender and nation in order to adjudicate the rival claims of these competing categories. (Allan 209-210) Allan examines the issue of marital rape in Emecheta’s novels like Second Class Citizen and The Joys of Motherhood and points out the contradictions, silences and the authorial diffidence in naming marital rape as rape. Destination Biafra marks an interesting shift in Emecheta’s fictional oeuvre because in it she attempts to put “women into African rape discourse next to the symbolically ravished body of Africa.” (215) Allan ultimately sees this attempt as unsuccessful because Emecheta’s representation of rape ‘challenges but fails to unsettle the standard practice of rape representation in African literary establishment, forcing a compromise that undercuts the woman’s rape experience in the novel.” (Allan 215). Allan’s argument is that in creating her dream woman and ideal heroine in Debbie Ogedemoge, Emecheta is unable to explore the full impact of the trauma of rape that she is subjected to. Not only is there an absence of the emotional response recorded in the novel, the imperative that the ideal heroine Debbie has to survive and fulfill her destiny as an ambassador of peace puts pressure on the narrative not to mourn or linger over the traumatic act of rape. In a sense, the female experience of rape gets sidelined or cast into the periphery of the text, as the novel rushes to fulfill its commitment to Nigerian nationalism facing a devastating crisis.
The rape narrative of Emecheta’s is much more than the masculine domination of the feminine. She uses it for the larger discourse of nationalism where Debbie becomes the mouthpiece of Africa. In her introduction to her autobiography *Head Above Water*, Emecheta describes Debbie as her dream woman. She uses a similar trope in *The Rape Of Shavi* which is a departure from her realist narrative novels. This novel is an allegory of the white man’s domination and rape of Africa. Though it reads as a moral fable, its deceptive folkloric mode encompasses even wider spatial and topical grounds than *Destination Biafra*. It marks Emecheta’s foray into the national epic. It is a visualized recommendation to the postmodern community to be willing to recognize the authenticity and strangeness of the “Other”. The encounter between Africa and the West is one that, despite claims of cultural superiority, will leave an indelible mark on all the participants. For, as King Patayon intuitively foresees, “This was something new, after which things would never be the same again” (Emecheta 1985 10). The glaring differences in attitude between the two races constitute the textual references for speculating on the uses of cross-cultural conversations. Shavi occupies a timeless, geographical space that has escaped the ravages of a decadent Western culture. The escaping Westerners come not to colonize but to seek shelter from their decadent society.

According to Mezu, “This attitude underscores the ultimate tragedy of colonialism-its refusal to see and value the colonized as autonomous and creative human beings. When the colonial relationship translates to a psychological non recognition of the subjectivity of the colonized, an opportunity for a mutually beneficial cross-cultural encounter is missed. This is ultimately what happens in the Shavian encounter, because some of the Westerners bring with them the supercilious belief that any mode of living that is “strange” and unfamiliar is inherently inferior to theirs”. (18)

Ronje, one of the white men who are forced to land in Shavi, refuses to recognize the dignity of the Shavian way of life, to learn about the people, or to speak their language. Thus, he willfully remains ignorant of the true rank of Ayoixo, Prince Asogba’s betrothed, whose innocent charms attract him. "To him, the Shavians were savages and Ayoko was just a serving girl" (Emecheta 1985 94). He surprises the princess while she is bathing in
the stream and indulges his lust; he falls on her, and "in less than ten minutes, takes from the future Queen of Shavi what the whole of Shavi stood for" (Emecheta 1985 94). Ultimately, his attitude embodies the colonizer's arrogance. Showing some remorse after he has raped her and found out that she was a virgin, he calls out to the fleeing princess and promises to "civilize" and marry her. Thus Emecheta thematizes the rape of the Shavian princess as a metaphor for the ravages of racism and colonialism.

The strength of the women of Shavi is galvanized by this rape into a cohesive national force as women bond together to liberate themselves from actual and psychological domination, resisting both indigenous patriarchal and European repression. The revolutionary resolution plan of the women denotes the active desire of the oppressed to throw off the mantle of oppression and make use of their strength. Emecheta here, embarks on a historical reconstruction of the true power of women to rule and to eradicate evils that threaten the fabric of familial and communal life. A "Women's War" is figuratively waged and won against Western and African males. Shavian women apparently know that the male council's democratic deliberations may end in words and not in action. Since the rape of Ayoko is the rape of Shavi itself and, therefore, a national calamity, the time for pampering men is over. The women's cause is a just one. The locus of political power quickly shifts as the women proceed to reverse the site of that power. When Ayoko's mother, Siegbo, states that "Rape ages and humiliates any woman, young or old", (Emecheta 1985 95) it is obvious that Emecheta is removing the problem of "rape" from the level of the individual to that of the collective.

Ayoko witnesses her mother instantly transformed into a "warrior," while Shoshovi, the Queen, becomes "abruptly militant." The narrator resorts to animal imagery: Ronje becomes the dog that bites a human, hence must be destroyed. One is reminded of Frantz Fanon's analysis of the creative force that rape and colonization have on natives: "The practice of violence binds (the colonized people) together as a whole, since each individual forms a violent link in the chain. (2) Ogene, the metaphorical goddess of the lake, is the only witness to the "pact of silence" of the women (Emecheta 1985 106). These middle-aged women lay an ambush for the miscreant. Without inflicting physical harm on him, they trap Ronje with a net and abandon him to the mercy of desert vultures.
However, it is a gauge of the depth of the female victim's compassion that Ayoko, suspecting what the women have done, goes to his aid, cuts the wire net, brings him clothing and food, and leaves him to his fate. Ronje symbolizes destructive corruption, and when it is revealed that Ayoko has contracted syphilis from him, the "albinos as carriers of disease" (Emecheta 1985 138) make a hasty departure from Shavi.

The effects of Western corruption prove to be ineradicable. Asogba, the curious searcher after knowledge, comes back from his sojourn in the West radically changed, corrupted by alien ideas that adversely affect his kingdom. When he marries Ayoko, he is infected as are his other wives. The physical sterility of his line symbolizes the sterility that results from the Shavian contact with the West, who as Flip acknowledges, can only produce "instruments of physical and moral destruction" (Emecheta 1985 102). Shavi becomes the victim of the West, represented by the colonization, mineral exploitation, abandonment of the agrarian economy, and introduction of modern warfare among neighbors and communities in violation of Shavi's sacred and peaceful traditions—a violation redolent of shame that kills King Patayon and the other wise men.

On both the gender and interracial levels, Emecheta's message appears to carry a postmodernist counsel to peoples to accept the strangeness of the "Other" in both racial and gender terms. Thus, the Shavian women proceed from disconnection to discover new connections. The Rape of Shavi is Emecheta's revalorization of traditional African thought, her critique of the entire concept of what constitutes civilization. In the final analysis, the story represents her exploratory literary foray into the nature of understanding across cultures. (Mezu 10)

The Diasporic Emecheta

Emecheta has a distinct position as a writer. She is of Nigerian descent but has lived for the better part of her life in London. In spite of her fame in London and the US, she is often looked upon as an outsider by her own colleagues in Nigeria. Chima Anyadike, a Nigerian professor teaching in Senegal feels that Emecheta, who lives in London, is an "outsider" who does not write from within Ibo or Nigerian culture. He distinguishes her
from Chinua Achebe as he feels that Achebe “writes from within Nigerian culture”. (Ogunyemi 78) Although Anyadike considers himself to be supportive of equal rights for women, he admits that he finds Emecheta’s feminism off-putting. (Ogunyemi 78)

Anyadike’s comments suggest the complex political and emotional topography of identity, culture and migration in Africa. These axes of identity greatly influence different individual’s understandings of diaspora and identity. The divide between Anyadike and Emecheta suggests how the Nigerian diaspora, as with the African diaspora is marked by history, identity and emotions: by varying experiences of colonialism and post colonialism; by individual identities of gender, class, and ethnicity; and by feelings of bitterness, anger and hope. Anyadike and Emecheta are only two individuals in a diaspora (both Nigerian and African) which is also inflected by class, education and mobility. Commenting on Emecheta’s unique position in history, Sougou describes Emecheta as a "cross-cultural figure" who was born in Nigeria, lives in London, and who "draws on African materials and experience," but who also has been named "one of the best Young British Writers." (1)

Emecheta left Nigeria in 1962; two years after Nigeria gained its independence from England. She did not live in Nigeria during its chaotic post independence years, when the country struggled (as it has continued to struggle) in the aftermath of colonialism. Britain’s creation of the colony and Protectorate of Nigeria in 1914, when it carved Nigeria’s modern borders and its division of the country into four regional governments in 1946, plagued the nation over the next half century. Repeated coups and political threats have threatened Nigeria’s existence as a nation state. This tumultuous political history has profoundly affected the development of Nigerian literature written in English, creating a literary landscape in which many of the country’s better known writers live abroad. The political tumult of post independence Nigeria has resulted in expatriation, oppression and death of several writers. The Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka was jailed in solitary confinement for two years by the military regime in late 1960s and he returned to Nigeria in 1998 after four years of self imposed exile. In 1967, poet Christopher Okigbo died in combat during the Biafran civil war. Writer and Activist Ken Sero Wiwa was executed by another military regime in 1995. Other Nigerian writers fled to the US
or divided time between Nigeria and other nations. Achebe, now, lives and teaches in the United States and Ben Okri, winner of the Booker Prize for *The Famished Road* (1991) lives in England. All these writers have faced the difficulty in living as a writer in Nigeria. By remaining in their country, writers have few opportunities for outside means of economic support. They often lack an audience, due to a combination of factors – high illiteracy rates, poverty, a lack of free time and an absence of reading culture. In addition to these, they also face countless hurdles when it comes to publishing. Of this group of expatriates, Emecheta, in particular, has located herself between nations. identities and ideologies. Rooting herself in both Nigeria and England, even as she remains critical of both, Emecheta has forged her own transnational point of view and her own trajectory. She shows through her writing that a woman has no country and yet a woman can not divest herself of her country. (Woolf 23) Emecheta has remained content with no country, claiming the whole world, even as she has constantly reimagined and retold Nigerian history in her fiction. She has often been branded as an “outsider” and not an authentic Nigerian or African author. In response, Emecheta has claimed Nigerian identity for herself, using both her novels, articles and interviews to problematize fixed categories of nationality and ethnicity. She claims Nigeria as her “home” and England as her “second home”, and has returned to Nigeria for at least one extended period of time, even though she has not returned permanently. In fact being an outsider might come naturally to her as she grew up outside Lagos, a mostly Yoruba area, and her family is Ibo, an ethnic group who mostly live in southeastern Nigeria. Chikwenye Ogunyemi calls Emecheta a “wandering ogbanje”. (13)

As Emecheta made an uneasy home for herself in her adopted nation, she found herself a member of a London that was quickly becoming multicultural. The growing diversity in London led to efforts to fight racism. Emecheta arrived in England in 1962, just before the development of a coalition later in the decade between people of colour – particularly South Asians and West Indians – to combat racism. The politics of solidarity, Avtar Brah writes, mobilized around the category “black”, a term adopted by the emerging coalitions amongst African-Caribbean and South Asian organizations and activists in the late 1960s and 1970s. In the 1970s, black women’s groups such as Organization of Women of
African Descent formed political alliances. (Henderson 106). As an African, Emecheta may have found herself, once again, in the position of being an outsider, since it was West Indians in particular who were creating an African diasporic imaginary with which they could identify. Emecheta’s fiction explores how individuals can create communities in Britain based on factors other than blackness. When she imagines the cultural and historical links that connect people of African descent in her fiction, her “diaspora” broadens to become a community that extends beyond race. She throws out old maps of national boundaries and previous constructions of a transnational diaspora, imagining a new kind of African diaspora.

**Flora Nwapa’s creation of the Ibo world**

According to Chimalum Nwankwo, “To the Ibo Tribe, the word is the message, the kernel of every art. The novels of Flora Nwapa are framed against the backcloth of the history and culture of the Ibo.” (42) The ancient Igbo who thrived around the tell-tale mythological system of Nri and Umu Nri axis had an attitude to the crafts from smithing and carving, codified in one of their profound personal names, Okwulduinalnka 'there is word in the craft.' The word is the message, the kernel of every art. To the Ibo, it is the substance without which all art would be retrograde and forgotten as mere ihe/ife nkiri/knili, frivolous spectacle blighted by a transience measured by spiritual worth. It seems obvious that for any work to endure, the writer must be comfortable in the matrices of culture and history, the bedrock of the craft. The craft itself may come out and assert its image in reasonable comeliness and yet fail because of the unfinished wedlock between the word and the craft. (Nwankwo 42)

Generally, the word of the land is part of a complex assemblage of mores and values engendered by the preeminent cosmogonic Igbo myth. Chukwu gave the Earth to the first Ibo man, Nri. The next gift was the Ibo staple, the yam, a root metaphor by implication, with its "female" counterpart, the co-co yam, and so forth. Also, "Chukwu revealed the secret of the year to Nri and showed the four market days to the Eze Nri who brought them to the Igbo people." The gravity of that first encounter with Chukwu was accentuated by the fact that the Igbo founding ancestor had to sacrifice his son and
daughter in obedience to Chukwu for the land to produce. That production attested to the fact of contact and therefore a source of cosmic identification for the Ibo. According to the noted Ibo sociologist M. A. Onwuejeogwu: “There are codes defining our relationship with alusi, mmuo and things of this world. If these codes are not maintained there will always be confusion; fathers may even have sexual relations with their daughters and mothers with their sons. Peace (udo) cannot exist without defining relationships”. (Isichei27)

Nwapa’s world revolves around women. Childbirth is significant in the lives of most women. According to the Ibos, as well as many other African peoples, the power of production is the only true power a being has. It is a power that Ibos behold with awe because they see it as derived from the power of God in producing the world. God is sacred and commands man’s veneration for he has created the universe and all things therein. The Earth has her native power of fertility by which she produces. She is therefore a god, a servant god to Chukwu....The Earth, because of its fertility, is the archetype of all forms of maternity. It is the symbol of love because it “mothers” and cares for all things that exist. When the assembly of Igbo elders reaches a decision for their community, that decision and the course of action that it entails are usually regarded as “the word of the land.” (Nwankwo 43)

The core of ancient Ibo daily life in the effort to define relationships was saturated with those numerous codes called omenani, to such an extent that the associated taboos imposed a somewhat puritanical lifestyle or culture on man and woman. (Nwankwo 43) Early amateur or arm-chair sociological and anthropological reports or records have indicated a stable, industrious, and democratic Ibo country where man and woman lived together and worked in reasonable harmony. Ifi Amadiume argues that there is a distinct difference between sex and gender. In her comparative discussion of attitudes to women in Western and Igbo cultures, she says that “the flexibility of Igbo gender construction meant that gender was separate from biological sex. Daughters could become sons and consequently male. Daughters and women in general could be husbands to wives and consequently males in relation to their wives, etc.” (15). In other words, the character of the stigmatization that led to the marginalization of women in society does not parallel
what prevails in the West. As part of these omenani, it was not unusual to find women
whose material achievements and social standings compete favorably with those of men
being inducted to supremely exclusive male societies such as the masquerade cult. It is
therefore noteworthy that Uhamiri, the deity central to Nwapa's works and the lives of the
people she fictionalizes, is a female deity accepted by male and female, with all devotees
expressing equal fervor and credulity. It is also significant that some of the most powerful
deities of Ibo country are female and associated with water or underwater dwellings such
as the goddess Idemili of the Anambra area. Usually these female deities are associated
with largesse for devotees and even righteous folks who encounter them or their
manifestations fortuitously. (Nwankwo 44)

Women grew into their roles in society in consonance with certain expectations
contiguous to the sacred mythological foundations of Ibo values. The respect for the
woman must therefore be seen as related and extended to the existence of gender
flexibility pursued further by Amadiume in her suggestion that "in Ibo grammatical
construction of gender, a neuter particle is used in Igbo subject or object pronouns, so
that no gender distinction is made in reference to males and females in writing or in
speech" (17). Everyone is aware of the distraction posed by the gendered language of
Western secular and religious thought and the political and economic implications of the
distraction. It is clear that the very nature of social relations in traditional Igbo society
was such that women were comfortable in their roles and positions in society as a
different sex from males. The crises of their lives as women were therefore
contextualized. Roles that affirmed the honor of maternity akin to that of the Earth were
adopted with befitting rituals and ceremonies such as those associated with mgbede 'a
debut of maidens,' the ceremonies of betrothal and marriage, the joyous ones of ikuputa
nwa 'baby outdooring,' and so forth. Women remained passionately aware of the
implications of certain rites of passage especially those related to children. According to
Professor F. U. Okafor "Children are regarded as direct blessings from God." (Isichei 78)

In the Ibo land the end of marriage is procreation. Childless marriage is therefore a tragic
failure" (Amadiume 3). In her study, Amadiume says that "self-sufficiency for her came
only with marriage. “With marriage too, independence, aggressiveness and thrift were
encouraged in the protection of children" (97). If these tendencies stemmed from the honour of maternity, there are other complementary tendencies stemming from the myth of the dual aspect of all Ibo endeavors codified and enshrined in an Ibo proverb popularized by some of Chinua Achebe's writings: "When one thing stands another stands by its side."(45) Throughout history the Ibo woman has always been known to stand by the Ibo man, or indeed stand on her own culturally or in economic terms. The quality of such efforts is documented without glorification with variations from one Ibo community to the other. These are known to range through matrilineality and matrifocality to momentous historical interventions of all kinds at different points in time in Ibo history.

One is familiar with the historical circumstances that generated the women's riots of 1929 and the consequences for both British imperialism and the hamstrung condition of the colonized at that time. We are also familiar with powerful women organizations in all Ibo communities known as the umuada or umu okpu, which guarded and still guard the interest of women in all Igbo communities, in addition to lobbying or leveraging and in some cases aggressively intervening in all kinds of societal matters on behalf of women. It is important to note the role that women played in the creative adaptation of cassava into the Ibo families and in their general, social, and economic life. Nwapa immortalizes the women's struggle through The Rice and Cassava Songs.

In her first two novels, Idu and Efuru, Nwapa's depiction is almost lyrical. Beyond the roots of Igbo folklore, Efuru benefits from the projection and depiction of a specific reality complete with its own dynamics, especially the paradoxical nature of Igbo political and religious culture. The Igbo world is a world of fluid dualities, and the pragmatics of existence derives from those dualities. The flexible relationships between man and woman, between human beings and their chi or guardian spirits, between society in general and other metaphysical entities and realm indicate a world that is never closed in terms of meaning and possibilities. Nwapa's first two novels are in reality involved with the collapse of Igbo traditional structures and values during the early colonial period, but the historical markers for that trauma are unfortunately absent. Contact has been made with the white man and Western ways, but the novels treat that contact as if
everything about it was felicitous or indeed as if Igbo people were culpable for their throes of change.

However, in her subsequent works, there is a distinct change. At the end of *Never Again*, she describes the beauty of the lake which had remained pristine earlier but now it was polluted with dead bodies floating in it. It is as if Nwapa senses the decadence in the culture. The metropolis has a stamina that completely swamps whatever there is in the power of tradition. Most of the author's characters are still Ibo, but the legacy of the Lake goddess and other forms of values of restraint do not give these characters the verve with which to combat metropolitan circumstances. Writing about the decadence in her characters, Chimalum Nwankwo comments:” The battle lines are not clearly drawn in a philosophical sense. Obiora neither consciously pursues Western values nor does he deliberately reject those of tradition. Rev. Father McLaid is straight out from an illconceived melodrama. There is something rankling about the profligacy of women like Amaka and the unscrupulous Madam Ojei and the Cash Madam Club women. One also does not know where the dibia belongs in the unfolding picture, a far cry from the dibias in the worlds of *Idu* or *Efuru* who were professionally adequate or inadequate.” (44)

Nwapa documents life as she sees it. Critics like Nwankwo laud her craft in *Idu* and *Efuru* but see her faltering in her subsequent works. This is however incorrect as Nwapa merely holds a mirror to the society. The Ibo society in the post colonial times was definitely going through a phase of decadence. But one thing remains constant in Nwapa’s work – her faith in the Ogbuide women. In all her texts, her women characters are exemplary. According to Marie Umeh, “Her (Nwapa’s) honest portrayal of Ugwuta women insists on the complementary nature of Ugwuta society beginning with a mixed-gender age grade system, a mystical Lake Goddess, who guarantees women, as well as men, power, prominence, and peace. Indeed, woman is something, an achiever, a go-getter in Ugwuta, not only for her special child-bearing and child rearing abilities, but also for her potential to benefit her community spiritually, educationally, economically, and psychologically.” (22)
Nwapa and Emecheta

Nwapa has been the big mother for most African women writers. Emecheta and Nwapa have, in a sense, been sister in arms. Though several critics point out their stylistic differences -- Nwapa is seen to be more moderate while Emecheta has a firebrand image; both Nwapa and Emecheta have kept alive the figure of the strong African woman. In their works the women are viewed in all their glory – as decision makers and active participants in the social structure. They are seen as strong, resilient and carrying their burdens with dignity.

Both writers see themselves as griottes or storytellers. In an interview with Theodora Ezigbio, Nwapa says:

> When I start writing, I don’t set out to prove anything. I write with an open mind; my aim is to tell a good and an interesting story as honestly as is possible. I try to be faithful to my vision. In doing so, a lot happens. Characters are consciously created; midway the characters take over the story. Sometimes, you may have some people in mind, but they are never the same people. There are changes; hence they are fictional. (657)

Nwapa talks of having read Emecheta’s works. When asked which writers have influenced her works, she says:

> Everyone with an inclination or ambition to write must read a great deal. I have read a lot. Chinua Achebe must have influenced me. When I was young, I was intrigued by Ekwenisi’s When Love Whispers. I read many of Hemingway’s works and he influenced me positively. For example his style in A Farewell to Arms and For Whom the Bell Tolls. Both novels are based on war and conflict. I was touched by T.S. Eliot’s Murder in the Cathedral. My uncle introduced me to Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde. I have also read fellow women authors like Buchi Emecheta and some African-American authors. (657)
Emecheta, on her part, has time and again acknowledged her debt to Nwapa. In her tribute to Nwapa, after the latter’s death, she writes:

As a young girl, I virtually devoured all the books I could lay my hands on written by women, whilst nurturing the hope of writing one day. When I came to England, borrowed a copy of *Efuru* from the local library, and read and re read it, my mind was made up. Since, you had written this, I could start writing as well. You became my model… When my first novel was burned by my husband, I did not give up. Flora Nwapa could do it, so could I. (29)

Emecheta’s interest in Nwapa diminished when the latter joined politics. However, it was rekindled years later when Brenda Berrian, a common friend visited Nwapa. Emecheta writes about the incidence:

I met Dr. Brenda Berrian in May’79 and she told me she was going to Nigeria. Imagine my surprise when she wrote to say she went to your (Nwapa’s) office in Enugu and saw my picture on the wall with the list of all my publications proudly displayed! All I was thinking was “Flora Nwapa knew about me! “ And our mutual friend from Pittsburgh, America was determined to make us meet. She succeeded. (30)

Emecheta also recalls their first meeting with immense fondness. The meeting of these two literary giants sealed their friendship for life. It reflects Nwapa’s humility and Emecheta’s bewilderment at being treated as a friend by someone of Nwapa’s caliber. She writes:

You (Nwapa) came to London and telephoned. I promised nervously that I would come and pay you a visit, because I thought my house with my boisterous family would not be good enough to welcome somebody like you. Whilst I was mopping my kitchen floor and wondering what to wear for the visit, you phoned again, you could no longer wait, you were coming right away. I started running round in circles like a rat on a bed of hot coal. I gave millions of instructions to my
children to behave, to disappear, to wash their faces. I was still holding the mop when you came in a black cab. ...I was rewarded with that famous Flora’s special laughter... That moment you disarmed me with your naturalness. (30)

Emecheta’s tribute to Nwapa is titled “Nwayi ama, biku nodu nma” which translates as “Beautiful woman, please farewell.” Summing up the debate on their brand of writing and feminism, Emecheta writes: “… at the end of the road, we are all working towards the same end – the dignity of the woman”. (31)

The Struggle continues

This thesis shows that through pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial times, Nigerian women have either fought attempts to overtly repress them publicly or used loopholes in the system to maintain and assert power privately. They have used different strategies like women's uprisings, strikes, and boycotts to maintain a place in the Nigerian society. Women's groups have continued to be very influential in instigating social and political pressures in postcolonial Nigeria. These collectives have maintained traditional tactics like sitting on men and using their sexuality to humiliate men and protest their right to interfere in women's economic power and social jurisdiction. In 1984 and 1986, women in Warri oil communities mobilized and protested against oil companies, demanding the companies pay them for lands seized and pollution damage (Agbase 14). When a United States oil company, Pan Ocean, refused to compensate the people for land acquired as oil fields or even pay for millions of dollars worth of crude oil, several thousand women rose in a similar fashion to the Aba Women’s War, and laid siege to Pan Ocean. When the company's managing director appealed to negotiate, the women "threatened to strip, to drive the point home that what they needed was compliance with their demands and not new negotiations" (Agbase 14). They made good on their threat and disrobed in public, an action that means serious trouble and permanently curses those they are exposed to, including the ruler of the area in some cases. Their demands were met. This uprising paved the way for similar protests by women in the Niger Delta in 1986 and 2002 to protest the deplorable state of the area.
The African woman writer's struggle continues unabated but the rock solid foundation has been laid by forerunners like Nwapa, Ogot, Emecheta, Aidoo, Head and others. The struggle is manifold but it has a unifying theme and that lies in according the woman her dignity. The following poem has been composed by the Danhiko Women's Group of Zimbabwe. It sums up the position women find themselves in today's world.

Independence

When I got home
from the war
I realised
our tradition had not changed
We were still second to men
being told
what to do

We had to wash
and to cook
and to clean the house
we had to bear a child every year

When I risked my life
during the war
I thought
liberation
was meant for men and women

Indeed
we got rid of the white oppressor
but today I see
we women are still not free
But as a person cannot walk
with only one leg
this country cannot develop
without us!

We are Zimbabwe's (Africa's) other leg
we are needed oh yes, we are!

Equality
Dignity
and love

Equality! (Agbase 18)

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