Chapter V  Writing Blackness
Buchi Emecheta abandons the autobiographical mode of writing as she forays deeper into the African past attempting to recover the lost black female self. This again proves problematic not only because imperialism has tainted her world but also because of the sexist male chauvinism of African men. Emecheta’s novels progress backward through time and experience in order to enable first person narrators to emerge and take over the telling of their memories. Identity is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’ and it belongs to the future as much as to the past. Not a fixed and unchanged essence that transcends time and space or a true and authentic origin, to which Emecheta can ultimately return, identity for her undergoes constant transformation. Buchi Emecheta does more than simply reproduce culturally ordained silences of black women; instead, she reinscribes female silence as a subversive alternative. Articulating the "silences" of these culturally and historically muted women, Emecheta subverts patriarchal social and literary scripts. Paradoxically, she gains authority to author history by translating the earlier silences of black women into narratives of female experiences; as translator and recorder, Buchi Emecheta legitimizes not only her own voice but also that of other black women. The power to script history, whether to claim black women from deliberate obscurity or record an alternative story, can be found in all of Emecheta’s narratives. Simply acknowledging these female precursor’s existence and experience, Emecheta restores their voices. Creating a palimpsestic subjectivity, Emecheta asserts the value of individual black female
experience while weaving it into generations of female history. Through Emecheta’s working from within, the truths which continue to be uncovered in her narratives are something much more than factual reports. All of them may serve as force-field containers which textually hold still the shards and images of difficulty long enough to examine the site of the black female fragmented self. Because of the indirect transmission of traditional influences and the unwritten history of many African women, writers like Emecheta must combine imagination, (re)memory and knowledge in representing Africa. The rewriting of African female history from a personal perspective is what can be called "ghostwriting," which is a process of adaptation in which both the black author or critic brings her voice and perspective to the study of the past. In looking at these novels of Buchi Emecheta it is evident that historicized suffering becomes a trope that unites her sensibilities across culture, time and class, resulting in richly symbolic acts of counter-memory. Emecheta delves into the inner darkness of her soul to search for a way home, a sense of belonging as a black woman through the complex paths of memory that lead into the past. For bell hooks memory need not be a passive reflection, a nostalgic longing for things to be as they once were, it can function as a way of knowing and learning from the past and it serves to illuminate and transform the present. No self-knowledge, progress, or identity seems possible without suffering. Neither does any future seem possible without coming to terms with the past, not in a traditionally masculinist sense of overpowering or possessing it, which eventually only leads
to a loss of self, but rather through some other dialectic that allows for a space between self and history, even as one acknowledges one's deep embeddedness in history and its injustice to oneself. The past, always a rich source of subject matter for black women, presents itself as an urgent, enigmatic puzzle holding tantalizing clues to identity for women like Buchi Emecheta to whom self-definition has become increasingly important. Clearly, the notion of "home" both as a desired community and as a site of resistance in this case, to slavery and capitalist patriarchy is applicable to Buchi Emecheta's works. When faced with a violent and nihilistic history, coming by a homeplace that could be a place of nurturance and resistance is no easy task. Yet, Buchi Emecheta seems to be suggesting that the way to go about constructing such a place of resistance is by facing up to history, not shunning it. Carole Boyce Davies thinks through the ways literary representations can complicate ideas about gender as women migrate between families and homes. Davies argues that

the mystified notions of home and family are removed from their romantic, idealized moorings, to speak of pain, movement, difficulty, learning and love in complex ways. This complicated notion of home mirrors the problematizing of community/nation/identity that one finds in Black women's writing from a variety of communities.¹

Thus seeking out a place of origin or home is a conflicted process for many black men in a postcolonial or colonial scenario. For women however, migration may be even more difficult.
The unpleasant memories of slavery surface throughout her novels and confront the facts of black female existence not just during slavery, but after it as well, underscoring the need for resistance strategies based in remembering. Thus, it can be argued that the novels of Buchi Emecheta get much of their emotive power from their ability to convey to the reader the historically real suffering of slavery through their fictional form. Buchi Emecheta uses this fictional form in the service of counter-memory, similar to slave narratives. At the same time, Buchi Emecheta’s narratives convey the equally balanced need for achieving some method of healing of past wounds which have led to present failures, in order to secure an empowered and empowering future for those black women who suffer most from being labelled victims of history. Yet this psychic healing can fully occur only when hegemonistic powers recognize that their histories are entwined with the histories of the enslaved women. In other words, a refusal to remember the racial trauma inflicted on black women by slavery and its legacy leads to an ahistorical perspective that is used to justify the exploitation of black women. Buchi Emecheta emphasizes resistance to oppression in all its forms, especially the similarity between racist exploitation and colonialist hegemony. In these novels Buchi Emecheta’s protagonists experience oppression based not necessarily on racism, but on grounds of being "other" to racist/imperialist/patriarchal structures of discourse and power. It has been said that patriarchy was re-invented in the colonies. The complex interweavings of colonial and gender oppression in Africa, made black women a
marginal group both in the traditional power structures of British imperialism and Afrikaner nationalism. The appropriation and control of women's productive and reproductive capacity by men was the central dynamic of pre-capitalist farming society in Africa. Nevertheless, women had some autonomy and control of the agricultural process.

In the uneven transition to capitalist relations of production new forms of oppression emerged and the assumption of male authority over women was reinforced. Western norms circumscribed the position of black women and missionary interventions weakened the rural family support systems. Colonial authorities entrenched customary law in a way which exacerbated the difficulties of African women: the outer form of the indigenous sex-gender system was preserved while its inner logic was destroyed. Buchi Emecheta shares her experience of gender oppression with what bell hooks calls the yearning for some form of empowering resistance through which she and her female protagonists can come into their own. This complexity allows Buchi Emecheta to see the necessity for negotiating and grappling with multiplicitous notions of identity, leading her to elaborate a multi-layered approach to and definition of resistance. As stated earlier, strategies of resistance to pervasive oppression necessarily must be multi-pronged and multiple. bell hooks acknowledges the difficulty of speaking about a unified, undifferentiated "black self," even as she posits the necessity of some kind of politics-of-
identity. Buchi Emecheta charts conflictual modes of identity-formation and sees the notion of blackness as a marker that unites the struggles of women of color within and without the United Kingdom against the common evils of imperialism, capitalism and gender oppression. Her primary emphasis is on an identity politics based on race/gender and class affiliations. What remains most important in her collective work, however, is the use of non-traditional, non-linear narrative forms to preserve and pass on the counter-memories that constitute the others - those accounts left out of the linear, diachronic narrative of western-style progress, of history itself. Black feminism gives voice to the specific historicities of women like Buchi Emecheta that have gone largely unrecognized and unremarked in the dominant discourse of an imperializing Western feminism. For Buchi Emecheta the act of counter-memory in going back to Africa serves both the function of identity-formation as in giving voice to the silenced Other, as well as the postcolonial project of identity-critique. All of Emecheta’s novels expound the theme of female oppression, the slave girl becoming her leitmotif -- the archetypal African woman buried alive under the heavy yoke of traditional mores and customs. Buchi Emecheta in the following novels explores the themes of self-love, survival and women’s community - womanist themes previously unexplored but which beckoned invitingly. They appeared to hold forth the promise of both personal and political change. What all these novels share is the removal of their protagonists from the mainstream of British life to a place more remote and more connected to an Afrocentric
past, a place where the protagonists can get in touch with sides of themselves they have long been forgotten or repressed. Buchi Emecheta shows a direct connection between awareness of and connectedness with the past and self-knowledge, that which invests everyday life with meaning. Such connectedness culminates in the neo-slave narrative and affords her novels wide-reaching significance. Buchi Emecheta gives voice to black women who have been long silent or silenced, revising historical assumptions about black women during slavery. Buchi Emecheta’s protagonists define their own reality, shape their new identity, name their history and tell their own story. In other words, the act of self-empowerment is an act of resistance, and this is precisely how Buchi Emecheta has expanded on the tradition which her black foremothers began.

Buchi Emecheta’s novels address the complicated nature of feminist practices that are demanded by the positionings of postcolonial/colonial female subjects in various locations. One of the many issues raised in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), is the conflict Nnu Ego feels in embracing and accepting new imperialist ideas when she moves away from her Igbo society to make a new life for herself in Lagos. Nnu Ego is caught between two cultures. While she sees that her old customs and beliefs are not conducive to a better life for her, she is unable to come to terms with urban Lagos' different societal rules. The world in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), is
one in which patriarchy intrudes oppressively into every sphere of existence. It is an androcentric world where the man is everything and the woman nothing. In domestic terms, women are quantified as part of men's acquisitions.

It is shocking to Nnu Ego that money is now the status quo, not children. She finds it hard to believe that gender roles have been exchanged. Men now work as domestic servants for the white man. Women no longer have a large number of children. Nnu Ego’s strong traditional cultural beliefs are in direct conflict with her city life in Lagos. It is not that she is not aware of her marginalization within patriarchy but colonization brings its own set of complexities.

Children considered to be blessings in Igbo culture become burdens in a capitalist city. Whereas motherhood formerly implied power, it now came to be seen as an encumbrance. It is widely posited that motherhood is important in all of Africa’s societies or communities. Naturally, the requirement that all women ought to be mothers also operates in an oppressive manner to discipline those who are not able to bear children. Another very important factor to realize is that if we accept that black women were commonly oppressed by patriarchy, the agency that was primarily responsible was the State. The colonial State was not created by Africans. It was a colonial imposition. Being so imposed, it bore the racial hierarchy and gender politics of nineteenth century Europe as a result of which Africa was indoctrinated into all-male European administrative
systems, and the insidious paternalism of the new religious and educational systems. This had persistently affected all aspects of social, cultural, political and economic life in postcolonial African states. Akadu gives advice to Nnu Ego:

Have you ever heard of a complete woman without a husband?¹

*The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) explores the society in Africa where the pervasive ideologies of imperialism and sexism act as a barrier in realizing a black female self. Buchi Emechta speaks of the struggles and conflicts of black women and the gender roles imposed upon them within preexisting hierarchies. She further speaks of women's struggles to gain independence from their subservient roles as wives and to gain a voice of their own. In speaking about women and nationalism, Black feminists argue that nationalism and liberation have not done much to liberate women. As Nnu Ego struggles to put food on the table for her children with the little money Nnaife earns, she comes to the conclusion that she is a prisoner because of her role as a woman in a colonized world. She reflects on the way her life would have been in Ibuza as a senior wife. As senior wife in Lagos, she has many responsibilities but none of the rewards that come with being a senior wife in Ibuza:

On her way back to their room, it occurred to Nnu Ego that she was a prisoner, imprisoned by her love for her children, and imprisoned in her role as the senior wife. She was not even expected to demand more money for her family; that was considered below the standard
expected of a woman in her position. It was not fair, she felt, the way men cleverly used a woman's sense of responsibility to actually enslave her.

When Nnu Ego first comes to Lagos, she is shocked to discover that Nnaife works as a domestic servant who washes "women's underwear." She realizes that although they have all been enslaved, the condition of women is even worse. Although Nnu Ego loses respect for Nnaife when he doesn't take his responsibilities seriously, she still yearns for a community where she does not feel burdened.

All the same, like a good woman, she must do what she was told, she must not question her husband in front of his friends.

Nnu Ego's conflict further comes into evidence when Adaku is visited by Igbonoba's wife. When she sees how elegantly dressed this woman is, she feels desperate and angry. Not at the visitor, but at herself. She has begun to realize that the freedom she so desperately yearned for by having so many children is of little value in her new society in Lagos. Values have changed. Money is now the status symbol. The free market rule of supply and demand is now ascribed to human individuals, which fixes an identity based on commodity value on everyone. Black female roles are now further marginalized in the absence of tangible proofs of their value. Buchi Emecheta shows how a black woman now has to reaffirm her identity in monetary terms, which stifles her creativity.
Nnu Ego was the mother of three sons for which she was supposed to be happy in her poverty, in her nail-biting agony, in her churning stomach, in her rags, in her cramped room . . . Oh, it was a confusing world.⁶

Nnu Ego is in a state of oscillation. She is forced to move away from her traditional African customs and beliefs but she is still hesitant to embrace capitalist ideas. Buchi Emecheta shows the devastating impact of imperialism and sexism on a woman who comes from an agricultural background and her attempt to modify herself in order to fit in. Black women often find their creativity linked to their motherhood but sexist and capitalist values threaten even this ideal by denying women their fluidity. Nnu Ego tells her father:

When one grows old, one needs children to look after one. If you have no children, and your parents have gone, who can you call your own?⁷

The community ideal is further eroded in an individualistic society. If there are contrapuntal movements to the city and events in her life, the proximity to their oppressors provides easy access for “soljahs” Men disappear from “city” to “armee.” Children escape to “Emerika” and London while daughters marry across clan lines because:

“This is Lagos, not your town or your village”⁸

In Nnu Ego's case, England, the colonizing country, brings a different kind of industrial job market to the urban areas. This draws many of the villagers from their rural agricultural interior spaces and repositions them in an urban
environment where the lifestyle and society are very different. In the village, the women had formed a strong, supportive network. In Lagos, the network is broken because of the dispersal of the population and because the women are preoccupied with working within the colonial industry. Also, the colonial society brings new concepts of family and mothering to the environment. It is because of this western influence that Oshia doesn't understand his mother's expectations. Thus, in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) colonization breaks up the women's traditional support system and changes traditional attitudes about family and motherhood. In the end Nnu Ego goes back home, to safety. She has been dislocated. Once “home” she sinks into despair and wanders without time related events to daily activities. For Nnu Ego to have died alone, without her children, is ironic after she has sacrificed so much for them. Critics have commented on the ironical name of the novel. The fact remains that the text cannot be read as the joys of motherhood, but it also cannot be read as the sorrows of motherhood. In *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), motherhood is the source of not only Nnu Ego’s greatest joys but also her greatest defeats. As a girl, she is taught that her sole functions are to bear and raise children. Her initial struggle to conceive and her utter self-defeat when she is unable to do so exemplify how strongly she believes in this uniquely female destiny in her culture. The idea of motherhood informs her fantasies and her dreams. Yet when Nnu Ego actually becomes a mother and struggles to raise her growing family, her idealism begins to change. Nnu Ego ultimately regrets having so
many children and investing so much of her life in them since they seem to have little concern for her well-being. She forces herself to accept a vision of motherhood that has been radically modified from the ideas she once cherished. Instead of an honoured and revered figure Nnu Ego ends up as a lonely woman. The text can be read both as a triumph and defeat of motherhood. The *Joys of Motherhood* (1979) basically shows different attitudes to motherhood. Like most of Emecheta’s novels the book ends on an ambiguous note.

Being a woman from Africa, Buchi Emecheta knows firsthand the unfairness of a black sexist society and the conflicts it causes but it is hardly the only factor, which oppresses women. Understandably she is reluctant to be called a feminist. Buchi Emecheta writes about the plight of African women and their struggle for freedom and equality, which incorporates multiple factors. Through her writings, Buchi Emecheta hopes to be able to empower black women, especially women from Africa. What is finally at stake in the novel is the very meaning of the "joys of motherhood" and, more specifically, the equation between joy and motherhood and the unthinking identification that the community makes between the two. In the end, paradoxically, the joy of motherhood is a beautiful funeral. Here lies Emecheta's critique of patriarchal discourse and the need, in the interests of black women, to undermine such equations. But it also speaks to a more expansive claim about imperial history.
itself and the ways in which it too establishes certain modes or kinds of identification which are oppressive. Throughout the novel, Nnu Ego's alienated sense of dislocation is equally inflected by the forces of imperialism. Caught between the conflicting demands of a rural Ibusa, represented by the novel as traditional and an urban Lagos, identified with the modern, Nnu Ego figures the impossibility of finding a stable place amongst these demands. This "failure" is as much an indictment of Nnu Ego's futile individual search as it is a recognition of the need for new kinds of identification no longer premised on a rootedness to place at all. Chikwenye Okonjo Oguneyemi argues

The intelligent black woman writer, conscious of black impotence in the context of white patriarchal culture, empowers the black man. She believes in him; hence her texts end in integrative images of the male and female worlds sit uneasily with the kind of resentment and tension often expressed, implicitly and/or explicitly by Buchi Emecheta in her texts.  

Her reading overlooks Buchi Emecheta's Black feminist critique of the interlocking systems of oppression. Barbara Christian read The Joys of Motherhood (1979) in order to reclaim a matrilineal tradition around the images of black feminism which European feminism denies. Christian located this discourse on matrilineal connection and mothering in The Joys of Motherhood (1979) in order to discuss the simultaneous exaltation and disruption/destruction of mothering for Black women in African traditions, in Afro-American slavery, and in post-slavery and post-civil rights movement contexts in the U.S. She
uncovered the contradictions and complexities of mothering, reflecting on the many ways in which it is enjoyed, celebrated, enforced, and turned into a double bind for black women in all of those historical locations.

Buchi Emecheta explores Black feminism within the model of the inheritance from Africa of the tie between mothers and children, caring for each other in the impossible conditions of a world that constantly disrupts the caring. Buchi Emecheta like Barbara Christian proposes a narrative of maturation in the history of black female writing. The trajectory of maturation for them provided a specific model of the growth of selfhood and community for black women. Buchi Emecheta schematized the history of West African women writers' consciousness since colonization in terms of an initial flirtation with feminism and black theory, culminating in a mature womanism as argued by Alice Walker organized around the trope of the community of women as mothers, healers and writers centered around the image of a black woman. These images do not avoid the stark reminders of the sexist realities for many rural women in the postcolonial world, yet they invoke the positive self-sufficiency of black women, in contrast to the Western feminist figure of the bourgeois middle class politics with its negative feminist politics of protest.

White feminist reading of Black women's writing leads to what can be called an anthropological impulse during which the text is construed, not as a literary artifact, but as a comparative, educational document that highlights the
similarities between women of the First and Third Worlds. In such essentialist readings, black women depicted in the text are set up as models which require their guidance, transforming them into an image of what European women are without the controlling presence of capitalist hegemones. Buchi Emecheta is against such homogenizing and voyeuristic tendencies because a black woman’s worldview is not one rooted only against sexism. Black feminists do not want to exclude men as the enemy and take a more comprehensive view of the means of domination, which goes beyond sexism and is inclusive of race and class. The image of Africa as female recurs in anti colonial discourses also. In an appropriation of the Mother Africa trope by anti colonial male writers, Africa is frequently represented as the figure of a woman, who is young and fertile. For black women like Buchi Emecheta these images do not reflect genuine concerns for political position of black women, but instead represent either a projection of the degradation that men feel as a result of colonization or a sexist manipulation to fix a black woman’s identity. There is a tendency to confuse black motherhood with African Motherhood. Despite this, mothers and motherhood remain a powerful symbolic force in black female literature through which they can retrieve their identity. For the black female writer, the mother figure is also capable of bridging the gap between the oral storyteller and the creator of the written word, thus strengthening the connection between women's traditional role and that of the published author in English. Most
importantly, however, the image of the mother is capable of re-assigning the figure of women as is evident in black feminist discourse.

Buchi Emecheta in her novels shares the anguish of black women writers like, Alice Walker and Sourjourner Truth in her search for identity. Buchi Emecheta’s narrative makes a series of connections between marriage, motherhood, slavery and colonization, all forming a unique literary discourse that has been shared by other black women writers. A literature that acknowledges a common history of slavery and colonization, overlaid with representations of marriage and motherhood, is capable of uniting the political concerns of black women in different parts of the world, and also of stressing the importance of the individual black woman in the face of change allowing for fluidity.

The slave motif is an integral part of Black feminist fiction through which black women are able to trace their genealogies more effectively. Buchi Emecheta in using this motif shows her affinity with to the slave narratives which Black feminism talks of. The slave motif is used to articulate multiple factors which silence black women. Their seeming contradiction arises from their foray into the beyond, which incorporates not just their blackness but also their femininity. Not surprisingly in *The Slave Girl* (1977), Buchi Emecheta rings many changes on the idea of slavery, both literal and metaphorical. Her metaphorical uses of it appear in the fact that, like many Anglo-American
feminist abolitionists of the previous century, she uses slavery to represent the position of women. She devotes even more attention to the nature of literal slavery, its economic and social contexts, and the rationalizations of its practitioners. She gives conflicting views of slavery to show how those who are complicit with it evade abolishing it whether it is slavery engendered by native practices or colonization. In Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* (1977) childhood acts as a disillusioned, almost cynical, contrast to adulthood; yet this story, also shows how destructive external forces and oppressive social situations make that stage of life unstable. *The Slave Girl* (1977) gives only a brief specific depiction of childhood, when Ojebeta is a young girl and both her parents are alive, but this representation reverberates in Ojebeta's adult life. Ojebeta's parents pamper her. When Okolie, her brother sells her as a slave after their parents die Ojebeta is still a child but she now has the work responsibilities of an adult. Her facial tattoos and charms visually symbolize her special individuality; yet other women in Eke market laugh at her, not only because she appears strange, but because her parents designated her as special, in obvious contradiction to her social position. Significantly, Ma Palagada orders her charms removed. Their removal at Onitsha thus represents the removal of her humanity as defined in Ibuzan terms as her charms signify an important aspect of her in Igbo tradition. She is rid of superstitious and artistic paraphernalia -- which only to her tribe is not superfluous and deprived of wearing her parents' love for her, filial love only characterizing human
families. Throughout Emecheta's novel, fully detailed descriptions of actions seem to be the author's powerful yet subtle means of casting biting commentaries and judgments on various moments in Ojebeta's life.

Emecheta often employs the technique of leaving the reader with opposing yet possible and likely interpretations of her statements. These ambiguities reflect Buchi Emecheta's heavy use of hybrid construction that is, statements that seem to emanate from one person but in reality convey two semantic and axiological belief systems. This technique appears throughout the novel, especially in Ojebeta's thoughts. For example, when Jacob purchases Ojebeta he is referred to in what would be a bitter terminology from the mouth of a black woman, as her new master. Soon thereafter, however, she reflects that she feels free in belonging to a new master.

In showing the reality behind Ojebeta's rags-to-riches marriage critics feel that the novel is a Eurocentric feminist critique of marriage, an interpretation that allows them to maintain their identification with Ojebeta as a feminist. This identification is brought to an abrupt halt however, when we see how honoured she is when her husband buys her from the Palagadas. She seems both to suggest this and to add that it is not enough. Such ambiguities appear to be Emecheta's strategy of representing this complex society, one influenced by two contradicting cultures and she again evades the specificity of ideological labeling. This problem can only be resolved if Buchi Emecheta's
writing is seen as a Black feminist interpretation which does not get realized in the face of continuing imperialist ideologies. What Buchi Emecheta in her novels shows is that oppression cannot be defeated in monolithic forms. The multiple nature of oppression demands confrontation at all levels without which black women are not likely to get their freedom.

*The Bride Price* (1976) begins in Lagos, a port city in Africa. The setting of the story, a somewhat industrialized urban centre, will later contrast with the family's move back to the traditional, agrarian society of the their ancestral village. Not known to the mother and children of the Odia family, Ezekiel, the father, is dying. It is his farewell to his children that sets the rest of the events in motion. In their culture, a woman without a husband is unable, the reader is told, to take care of herself or her children. The translation of Aku-nna's brother's name reminds Aku-nna of this fact. His name means, father is the shelter. A fatherless family is a family without a head, a non-existing family.

It is in the first three chapters of the novel that Emecheta covers the transition from Ezekiel's death and funeral to the eventual departure of his widow and children from the city. In the course of presenting this transition, Emecheta informs the reader of some of the major conflicts that she will explore in the remaining chapters of the book. She brings up the concept of the bride price, the woman's role in African society, the influence of the Igbo
customs upon its members and the clash between these customs and the effects of colonization.

The name of the protagonist, Aku-nna, literally means father's wealth. Her name refers to the bride price that her father will receive upon her marriage. To him, the narrator says, this was something to look forward to. Aku-nna, at the age of thirteen, is well aware of the meaning of her name as well as her role in her society. She would not let her father down. She would marry well to a man who could afford an expensive bride price. This is Aku-nna's role, as it is the role of every woman in her society. She would bring in wealth to her family in the form of a good bride price. Then she would bring wealth to her husband's family in the form of children, preferably all males.

Unfortunately Aku-nna's father, although he tells her that he needs only to visit the hospital for a short time, is overcome by an infirmity and dies.

Ma Blackie, Aku-nna's mother, returns to Lagos to discover that her husband has died. She had left Lagos to visit her homeland in hopes of regaining her fertility and giving Ezekiel another child. She knows that since she is without a husband, she cannot remain in Lagos and therefore prepares her children for their return to Ibuza.

It is in Ibuza that Ezekiel's older brother, Okonkwo, lives. Okonkwo already has several wives, but he, by virtue of his brother's death, inherits and
eventually marries Ma Blackie. Okonkwo does this while looking forward to the bride price that Aku-nna will bring him. He is an ambitious man who covets the title of Obi, which he can claim if he has sufficient money.

It is in Ibuza, as she is walking toward the village on arrival, that Aku-nna meets Chike Ofulue, her future schoolteacher as well as her future husband. Chike is also a descendent of slaves, and, as such, friendship between Aku-nna and Chike, according to tribal custom, is strictly forbidden. Through a conversation between one of Okonkwo's wives and one of his children, the narrator states the serious nature of such a friendship. If it is true, as some of the villagers begin to suspect, that Aku-nna and Chike are developing a relationship, it was the greatest insult that could befall a family which had never been tainted with the blood of a foreigner, to say nothing of that of the descendants of slaves.

As the reader already knows by this point in the story, the rumours concerning the relationship between Aku-nna and Chike are definitely true.

"Chike would have outgrown Aku-nna," the narrator states, "and maybe she would come to regard anything there might be between them as mere childish infatuation, if the adults had just left them alone." But the adults do not leave them alone. They tell their children what they can and cannot do without giving them much explanation. Aku-nna eventually learns to disregard their admonitions, relegating them to a substandard of "everyday trivia." Having lost
her father to death and her mother to a complete immersion into the Ibo culture, Aku-nna feels isolated, alone. Chike is the only one she can turn to. Chike, for his part, is almost willing to forget about Aku-nna. However, he finds himself drawn to her, and when he witnesses the signs of her first menstruation, he is compelled to protect her. When a young woman experiences her first menstruation, it is the signal that she is available for marriage. Chike knows that young men will begin to gather in Aku-nna's house and their fathers will offer her father their bids on Aku-nna's bride price.

When Aku-nna fails to hide her second menstruation cycle from her cousins, it becomes publicly known that she is of marriageable age. Chike becomes aggressive in his protection of Aku-nna from other suitors and assaults Okoboshi, a boy from a neighboring village. Shortly afterward, Okoboshi's family steals into Aku-nna's village and kidnaps her. It is considered fair play for a man to kidnap a woman, thus forcing her to become his wife but with the help of her brother and Chike, Aku-nna escapes from Okoboshi's family.

The last two chapters of the book find Aku-nna and Chike living outside of the village. They have a house, which they furnish and then both of them secure rewarding jobs. In a short time, they are expecting a baby. This should signal a happy ending, but there is something wrong. Despite several generous attempts by Chike's father, Aku-nna's stepfather refuses to accept a bride price. Aku-nna
is well aware of the tribal curse on young wives whose fathers do not accept a bride price: the expectant mother will die in childbirth. In the end, Aku-nna cannot completely step away from the traditions of her people. One of her last statements is that only in death will she win her freedom. Buchi Emecheta again reiterates the fact that hegemony has to be confronted in all its forms for the black identity to survive in its fluidity as argued by Black feminists. Joyce Hart has also pointed to the multiple issues raised by Emecheta. In a colonized country like Nigeria and in the setting of Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*, the concept of the Other becomes even more complex. Relegated to the role of the Other by both the colonial powers and her patriarchal society Aku-nna, aware of her double marginalization, resists. As a black woman she is the Other to the white imperial gaze as well as the patriarchal mores of her culture. All these elements play themselves out in Aku-nna. She learns to vocalize her thoughts, which, in the beginning of the book, are heard only inside her head. It is through a development of her inner voice as she moves from daughter to wife, from city girl to country woman, from prepubescent teen to mother, that the reader gets a sense of how it feels to be the Other, and what it takes to resist and, hopefully, break down the confines of that role but in the end Aku-nna is unable to completely break away from her family traditions. Joyce Hart writes

It is interesting to see that the only hope of freedom in this story comes from being born so far out on the edge that tradition no longer cares about who you are or what you do. Aku-nna's baby
girl is that hope of freedom. Aku-nna has paid for her child's freedom with her own life. That freedom, despite the high cost, is not, however, totally unhindered. That child is still a female living in a patriarchal society whether or not she is accepted by her people. The independence comes to her at the price of not only losing her mother but of losing her grandmother, aunts, cousins, and all the men folk of the Ibuza village. To maintain that freedom, she must, as Emecheta herself must, remain an expatriate, possibly visiting her relatives but never living there. She lives so far out on the edge of the Other that she barely exists in terms of her own culture. 

Emecheta's stories end on ambiguous notes. In all the above novels Buchi Emecheta's firm rejection of sexist black male attitudes impose the role of a feminist on her. Yet all her novels explore broader issues and feminism is a vast body of discourse, which explains her uncomfortable attitude towards it. Feminism and post colonial discourse were parallel in the sense that both emerged almost simultaneously after the Second World War. Black women's issues were subordinated in both discourses. European feminists sometime draw parallels between black men and at times with black women. Likewise black men have at times asserted their similarity with white men and at other times attempted to speak for black women. The larger framework of race for black theory and women for Western feminists was seen as a corrective measure, which would automatically correct other inequalities. That has not happened and black women continue to face this dilemma in writing back to the centre. They are often accused of mimicry, which sees them as complicit
with Eurocentric notions of hegemony, feminist or otherwise. This also creates an ambivalence in their writing in which they are seen as conflicting with their roles. What has to be understood is that black women like Buchi Emecheta have to be accepted in articulating themselves out of this blackness. Buchi Emecheta’s novels are like the poems written by black women in which it is easier to interpret their sense of injustice in a world where they are considered worthless. All these novels explore the race, class, caste and gender hierarchies which create barriers in black female self-realization. What Buchi Emecheta is trying to show is that black women who try to flee from a particular hierarchy often find themselves implicated in another hierarchy. It could be racist or sexist or capitalist. Buchi Emecheta shows that without the combined effort to overthrow the interlocking matrix of domination black women will never be able to free themselves. As Buchi Emecheta speaks from a margin, which is often silenced, she shows a much deeper understanding of marginalization as well as resistance. In *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *The Slave Girl* (1977) and *The Bride Price* (1976) she shows the violence of black sexism on the black female psyche but she goes beyond an attack solely on sexism but also indicts capitalism and racism which threaten to annihilate a black woman’s existence. In arguing for Black feminism Buchi Emecheta also unites black women dislocated through time and place as she reconnects and remembers. None of the protagonists of her novels are able to conclude in a unitary celebration of femininity because of the pervasive politics of sexism.
imperialism and Eurocentric feminist ideals which black women cannot ascribe to. Buchi Emecheta’s writing uncovers the complexity in writing in an either/or perspective. Buchi Emecheta believes that unless black women are able to oppose the matrix of race, class and gender oppression in a transformation of the consciousness they will be unable to free themselves. The process of decolonization as Trinh T Minhã argues has to be continued within Black feminist movement.

The choice many women of colour obliged to make between ethnicity and womanhood: how can they? You never have one without the other. The idea of two illusionary separated identities one ethnic the other woman, again partakes in the Euro-American system of dualistic reasoning and its age old divide and conquer tactics. Triple jeopardy means here that whenever a woman of colour takes up feminist fight she immediately qualifies for three possible ‘betrayals’: she can be accused of betraying either man (the man-hater) or her community (people of colour should stay together to fight racism) or woman herself (you should first fight on the woman’s side). The pitting of anti-racist and anti-sexist struggles against one another allows some vocal fighters to dismiss blatantly the existence of racism or sexism within their lines of action as if oppression only comes in separate monolithic forms.  

Emecheta presents an evaluative and reconstructive survey of the socio-economic, and political activities of traditional Igbo women, their place and participation in the task of communal cultural preservation, economic building
and codification of history itself. Emecheta also offers an aesthetic, philosophical and spiritual commentary on the patterned structure of a past precolonial/colonial patriarchal age, linking this earlier age to the written tradition of our contemporary age. It is a creative act of resurrecting dead / silent female voices, enabling the women concerned through their day-to-day activities to contribute to the continuum of female literary history. In this respect, Emecheta’s novels serve as a springboard to explore the situation and achievements of black women both traditional and modern for the rest of the West African region. It thus becomes feasible to plug up any lacunae that could interrupt the continuum of black female writings and activism from traditional orature to the modern scripted word. Thus, the rich, historical and experiential knowledge garnered about women of African descent can henceforth serve as inspiration to modern activists who are challenged to transport this knowledge to the wider social community. Emecheta places each woman's achievements in the context of her life and time in such a manner as to allow for a probing of the fissures in the lives of these women.

Emecheta's novels while painting a portrait of past societies yield useful insights into the lives of their women subjects, the choices available to these women and the strategies which enabled them to function constructively in sexist social environments. If, identities are the names black women give to the different ways they are positioned by, and position themselves within, the
narratives of the past then the re-reading and re-writing of those narratives and of the positions of black women in relation to those narratives is central to the project of examining contemporary conflicts of cultural construction and identity. What an examination of Buchi Emecheta’s novels can provide for us is a space in which to begin examining how those narratives that fall outside of the dominant culture's construction of itself within the nation/state may actually provide us with more supple and generous paradigms through which to consider the conflict and creativity emerging from the transnational contact zones of our contemporary world. Primarily, all the above novels represent repressed or subaltern black female figures as presences that are revealed through interactions between various voices, gaps in dominant discourse and constant displacement. In general, they appear as quests for alternate identities and are accompanied by visions involving a revised sense of identity. Despite these visions, the alternate worlds are largely unachievable. Their quest is for a world in which women become boundary markers of social change. In conclusion, the colonial black woman appears to be an ambivalent figure because her position in society is constantly displaced, her voice is always resisting imperial hegemony and her discourse constantly shifts and evolves. She is at once powerful and powerless, at once subversive and exploitative. Through the weaving of a canvas of voices, womanist writers like Emecheta undo the webs they feel caught in by colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy and offer a female
version of blackness which suggests the constant negotiation and renegotiation of identity.
END NOTES


4. Ibid, 137.

5. Ibid, 114.


