

**WRITING HER/SELF: A CRITICAL STUDY OF BUCHI
EMECHETA'S NOVELS**

ABSTRACT



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Buchi Emecheta was born to Igbo parents in Lagos on 21 July 1944. She received traditional Igbo upbringing and witnessed early the tensions between traditional African culture and western values. Orphaned as a young child and raised by an extended family she attributes her desire to write to her aunt who was a story teller. Though schooling for girls was discouraged, Buchi Emecheta managed to get an education at a missionary school. Bound by custom she left school at the age of sixteen to marry a man to whom she had been engaged since she was eleven years old. She moved to Britain in 1960, where she worked as a librarian and became a student at London University in 1970, reading Sociology. She worked as a community worker in Camden, North London, between 1976 and 1978. Much of her fiction has focused on sexual politics and racial prejudice and is based on her own experiences as both a single parent and a black woman living in Britain. Her first novel, the semi-autobiographical *In the Ditch*, was published in 1972. It first appeared in a series of articles published in the *New Statesman* magazine, and together with its sequel, *Second Class Citizen* (1974), provides a fictionalised portrait of a poor young Nigerian woman struggling to bring up her children in London. She began to write about the role of women in Nigerian society in *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977), which was a winner of the *New Statesman* Jock Campbell Award; and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), which was an account of

women's experiences bringing up children in the face of changing values in traditional Igbo society. Buchi Emecheta is also the author of several novels for children, including *Nowhere to Play* (1980) and *The Moonlight Bride* (1980). She published a volume of autobiography, *Head Above Water*, in 1986. Her television play, *A Kind of Marriage*, was first screened by the BBC in 1976. In 1983 she was selected as one of twenty 'Best of Young British Writers' by the Book Marketing Council. She lectured in the United States throughout 1979 as Visiting Professor at a number of universities and returned to Nigeria in 1980 as Senior Research Fellow and Visiting Professor of English at the University of Calabar. She runs the Ogwugwu Afor Publishing Company with her son. It has branches in London, where she lives and in Ibadan. Since 1979 she has been a member of the Home Secretary's Advisory Council on Race. She was a member of the Arts Council from 1982 to 1983 and is a regular contributor to the *New Statesman*, the *Times Literary Supplement* and *The Guardian*.

The black women's literary tradition began in a conscious effort to create a space for black women's writing and to illustrate a distinction between black women's reality and the realities of others. The literature within the tradition is influenced by how black women perceive themselves and the world around them. As a result, identity is an important part of black women's literature. Race, class, gender and ethnicity are all components of one's identity and are

critical in the formation of one's lived experiences. The moment a black woman like Buchi Emecheta steps out from her native place she's no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. Undercutting the inside/outside opposition, her intervention is necessarily that of both not quite an insider and not quite an outsider. She is, in other words, this inappropriate other or same who moves about with always at least two gestures: that of affirming 'I am like you' while persisting in her difference and that of reminding 'I am different' while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at. All of Emecheta's novels take up the question of where a character's original "home" is, what ancestral "roots" are and how such an "origin" shapes black female identity. Buchi Emecheta's novels are creations that construct imaginary homelands and they are also crucial sites for the exploration of black women's identity. Buchi Emecheta's novels also suggest, that for a black woman to identify only with the past, with one's ancestral "roots," is also a kind of death, because it means one has no future but only the idealized past as the locus for identity and yet the past cannot be simply done away with. Thus Buchi Emecheta reveals the problem of this "in between-ness" for black women; that home is not Africa nor can it wholly be mainstream European culture. It is a

problem of homelessness and so if identity is to be fulfilled in her novels, then “home” must be recognized as at once mythical and determinative. But there is no prescription for either the character’s recovery of home or resolution to “homelessness.” Emecheta’s novels illustrate that black women often feel unfulfilled and their desire to fulfil themselves can be explained as a desire to “go home.” Black women characters in Emecheta’s novels are searching for self completion, for a way to feel unified with their surroundings or at least feel that they have a distinct way of feeling themselves as individuals who are also part of a larger community and/or culture.

Women have been silenced historically due to cultural domination and it is because of this fact that language is necessarily male. However, it is possible to identify the female voice through the barriers of this repression. As argued by several feminist critics, women have never had their turn to speak and because of this, they did not have the scope to develop their own literary history based on a female language. Helene Cixous proposes that "woman must put herself into the text - as into the world and into history - by her own movement,"¹ and thereby equates the act of writing with the acquisition of agency. This writing must stem from woman's own personal experience, an experience which is rooted in the body. But for a black writer like Buchi

Emecheta it is not always possible to inscribe her bodily experiences in the text due to the problem of unrepresentability of those experiences like race and patriarchy complicated with gender, which emanate from the body but go beyond it. It may be mentioned in this context that Black feminism which is critical specifically of Western forms of feminism and their universalization of female experience argues for a different representation of black women. Buchi Emecheta addresses some of these issues in a paper delivered at the Second African Writers' Conference in Stockholm in (1986). As she states:

I am just an ordinary writer, an ordinary writer who has to write, because if I didn't write I think I would have to be put in an asylum. Some people have to communicate, and I happen to be one of them. I have tried several times to take university appointments and work as a critic, but each time I have packed up and left without giving notice. I found that I could not bring myself to criticize other people's work. The writer also has a crucial control over the subject s/he writes about. For myself, I don't deal with great ideological issues. I write about the little happenings of everyday life. Being a woman, and African born, I see things through an African woman's eyes. I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African women I know. I did not know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist then I am an African feminist with a small f.²

Emecheta like the Black feminists argues that cultures impacted by colonialism are often vastly different and should be treated as such. Therefore Black feminists can be described as feminists who have reacted

against both universalizing tendencies in Western feminist thought and a lack of attention to gender issues in mainstream postcolonial thought. Black feminists argue that the liberation of black women entails freedom for all people, since it would require the end of racism, sexism and class oppression. One of the theories that evolved out of this movement was Alice Walker's Womanism.³ It emerged after the early feminist movements that were led specifically by white women who advocated social changes such as woman's suffrage. These movements were largely white middle-class movements and ignored oppression based on racism and classism. Alice Walker and other Womanists pointed out that black women experienced a different and more intense kind of oppression from that of white women. The term is an alternative for black feminism. Ogunyemi, a Black feminist believes that the 'ultimate aim of womanism is the unity of blacks everywhere under the enlightened control of men and women.' She lays stress on womanism as a black global ideology which encompasses issues of racism, imperialism and sexism⁴.

At the base of the criticisms of Black feminists is the reformulation of the self as a site constituted and fragmented, by the intersections of various categories of domination/oppression such as race, gender and sexual orientation. Thus, far from being a unitary and static phenomenon untainted by experience, one's core identity is made up of the various discourses and

structures that shape society and one's experience within it. Many Black feminists have taken this argument one step further and asserted that the self is by its very nature fragmented: an illusory notion constructed as static and unitary but in reality completely fluid. Buchi Emecheta is such a Black feminist writer who explores the problematique of the construction of her/self. The present study examines the construction of the personal and the writerly self of Buchi Emecheta through the following chapters.

Chapter 1- Introduction.

This Chapter discusses Buchi Emecheta as a black diasporic woman who writes about the black female experience in different locations. Each of her novels tells the story of individual black women and their surroundings. Buchi Emecheta's novels have been pivotal in raising questions of 'difference' around such social axis as class, racism, ethnicity, sexuality and the problematic of global inequities for black women. Identity for Buchi Emecheta may be understood as diasporised in time and space. Her black female characters are all diasporised across social and psychic 'borders' and the desire for home is a desire for security and belonging. Several minority Black feminist thinkers have proposed the theory of the intersectional self. The basic tenet of intersectionality is that "women of color stand at the intersection of the

categories of race and gender, and that their experiences are not simply that of racial oppression plus gender oppression. The significance of each of these fragmented "selves" for one's sense of identity shifts as a result of both external and internal stimulus and experience. If identity constitutes a variety of meanings, including race, gender and class, then it is imperative that authors writing about identity construction have a space to do so.

Therefore to raise the question of Buchi Emecheta's identity in this Chapter is to reopen again the discussion on the self/other relationship in its enactment of power relations. The multiple jeopardy experienced by black women gives rise to a number of tensions between the interests of nationalism, feminism and racial politics. Black women may feel multiple allegiances: community affiliations, ethnic identification, global womanhood and racial solidarity. The black woman writer's identity may vacillate between a bond with global womanhood on one hand and that with her culture and race on the other. Such a writer may also maintain a commitment to the particularities of class, caste and religion. These multiple allegiances inevitably breed conflicts of interest as black women are occasionally forced to side with the camp of "sisterhood" or with that of their culture. Such controversial subjects like polygamy and obligatory motherhood problematize female or cultural solidarity. But within a working paradigm of black feminism, the theory makes

allowance for a certain flexibility in loyalties, refusing to impose a fixed or rigid analytical agenda. The complex living conditions of black women necessitate that they be allowed the freedom to choose allegiances that may prove contradictory. This implies that an examination be made of the complex processes through which the self can be located.

Chapter 2 Locating the Self

This Chapter argues that Black Feminism, particularly of the kind Emecheta subscribes to grew out of and in response to other social and political movements of the black women in Britain and America. Black feminists argued that the liberation of black women entails freedom for all people, since it would require the end of racism, sexism and class oppression. Black women in this category often referred to themselves as womanist. Alice Walker uses the term "Womanist" to describe Black Feminism and she rejected all that was oppressive for women. She wrote:

Womanist From womanish. (opp. of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color... Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one... Responsible. In charge. Serious..⁵

As Patricia Hill Collins⁶ aptly notes, that many black women viewed feminism as a movement that at best, was exclusively for women and at worst, dedicated to attacking or eliminating men. Womanism supplied a way for black women to address gender-oppression without overtly focussing only on sexism and also allowing for fluid multiple identities.

Although Black feminism originated in America it traced its antecedents back to Africa. Patricia Hill Collins calls it Afro American feminism but other critics have called for a broadening of the term. Also in the wake of continuing imperialism black women critics like Carole Boyce Davies have called for an inclusion for black women from Africa in an effort to reconnect black women dislocated through space and time and view their subjectivity as a migratory subjectivity. Black feminists argued for a coexistence of the multiplicity of black female voices, a fluidity which resented a fixed narrowing of identity.

Buchi Emecheta does not belong to the settled black diaspora but migrates from Africa after having spent a substantial time there. The diversity not the homogeneity of Buchi Emecheta's experience as a black woman identifies historical and experiential differences within and between communities, regions, cities and women across national cultures and between diasporas but also recognizes other kinds of differences that place, position and

locate black women in a changed scenario. Black women like Buchi Emecheta are always negotiating not with a single set of oppositions that place them in the same relation to others but with a series of different positionalities, each has its point of subjective identification within the Black feminist discourse. Therefore Buchi Emecheta's identity can only be viewed as a series of boundary crossings as argued by Black feminists. For writers like Buchi Emecheta border crossings are more than metaphor. Emecheta's narratives describe borders of geography, of history, of culture and of memory that are crossed and negotiated, as well as the patriarchal systems that are transferred across borders. She does so through an examination of the lives of black women, who are often exiled sometimes locally and at other times through transcontinental journeys. Buchi Emecheta takes us across the boundaries of time, to the colonial domination of Africa. This is not because the past necessarily provides answers for the present but because critique and insight gained can help shed new light on current predicaments. For black women intersectionality needs to be both historically-rooted and forward looking in order to challenge the power games that are currently played out on the world stage. Emecheta works within, through and across the boundaries of cultural differences, moving towards complex and dynamic understandings of intersectionality. Buchi Emecheta's journey from Africa to Britain and back again does not end in a radical assertion of herself as

someone who is essentially only black or as someone who is essentially only a woman but both. After having located Buchi Emecheta as a writer in the context of Black Feminism the following chapters will contextualize her theoretical position in her novels- *In the Ditch*(1972), *Second Class Citizen* (1974), *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977) and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). It will be seen that a study of the writer's work is also a study of her/self as the first two novels cited above are semi-autobiographical.

Chapter 3- Writing and Representation.

African literature has until recently been void of any female voice. Even today, African literature is dominated by male writers who have tended to depict female characters as being completely satisfied with their lives and their subjugation to African men. The emergence of female writers, such as Emecheta, challenges these male assumptions that include not only the female's submission to the male but also her approval and pleasurable response to that submission.

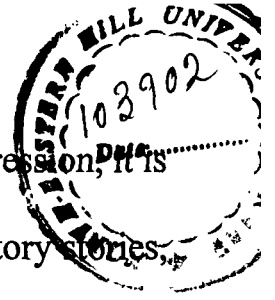
Emecheta's novels which span the oral and written traditions of Africa, seek to show how women, as speaking subjects, have been transformed into written objects through the collusion of the imperialistic subject and the patriarchal subject and how these beleaguered written objects are reinscribing their relevance as speaking/writing subjects. As the transition was made from

oral to written literature, new imperatives for control emerged. The factors that legitimated centrality shifted from those based upon age and sex to those based upon knowledge of the colonizers' languages, usually English. The sexual politics and Victorian ideals of colonial education created a hierarchy privileging men by virtually erasing any meaningful female presence. African women had a tough struggle to come to the fore.

Despite the constraining gaze of the male critic, African women writers of the second generation like Emecheta hint at the possibility of change. Although non-conformist characters in Emecheta's novels continue to be marginalized, the inevitability of change is never in doubt. In this regard, the endings of Emecheta's novels assume great significance. In *The Joys of Motherhood*(1979), for example, the open-endedness of the conclusion is full of foreboding and hints of a new dawn:

And her reward? Did she not have the greatest funeral Ibuza had ever seen? It took Oshia three years to pay off the money he had borrowed to show the world what a good son he was. That was why people failed to understand why she did not answer their prayers, for what else could a woman want but to have sons who would give her a decent burial? Nnu Ego had it all, yet still did not answer prayers for children.⁷

Here, the protagonist Nnu Ego's refusal to answer the prayers of childless couples is a bold statement of protest albeit a posthumous one. Thus the end of the novel announces both the death of the old Nnu Ego and the birth of a new one. Emecheta, as a writer, has to "transgress" at least two taboos: that of a woman daring to be a writer and that of using "the language of the Other." As spokeswoman for "silenced black women," Emecheta has sought to "subvert patriarchal colonial history" and as a postcolonial subject, she has shrewdly circumvented the cultural split threatened by the inherent incompatibilities of her mother tongue and English by adroitly deconstructing the colonial order. Emecheta's concern with language, includes the act of speaking and more significantly, of writing as speaking. This preoccupation is particularly acute in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) as reflected in the relationship between orality and textuality and the necessity of developing new ways of writing and reading, perspectives which might unveil silences and establish a complicity between storytellers, writers and readers. The conspiratorial mystique of Emecheta is directed not only at cultural conventions and literary genres, but subversively at the very nature of writing itself and the ability or inability of writing to articulate women's experience. This more palpably subversive thrust is evidenced in the novel in the tension between orality and textuality. The recuperation of one's discourse cannot be accomplished by writing alone. While



it is possible to read in Emecheta's texts a narrative of woman's oppression, it is equally possible to hear in her texts a multiplicity of often contradictory stories, perspectives and meanings that may tell about the black female significance. In this sense, Emecheta's novels must be read as multi - voiced discourse. Another aspect that one observes in the novel is that it explores the society in Africa where the pervasive ideologies of imperialism and sexism act as a barrier in realizing a black female self. Buchi Emecheta 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.

Conceptualizing a similar context ,Trinh Minh-ha suggests a "triple bind" in which Third World women may find themselves being colonized once by the colonizer then by the patriarchal order caught between the problems of race and

gender. Women writers face these predicaments in addition to the ambivalence vis-à-vis the language in which they write: "Writer of color? Woman writer? Or woman of color? Which comes first? Where does she place her loyalties? On the other hand, she often finds herself at odds with language, which partakes in the white-male-norm ideology and is used predominantly as a vehicle to circulate established power relations".⁸

Chapter 4- Writing as Breaking Silence

Dislocation is a significant trope in the work of writers like Emecheta who have made literal journeys from the Third world to the First world, or who have to journey against certain fixed notions of origin. Emecheta's principal concerns include memory, silenced history and transnational discursive border crossing. Her first two works are fictional autobiographies exposing the problems faced by women like her for whom categories of belonging have been made unstable as a consequence of the experience of postcolonial migrant circumstances. Black female characters with hyphenated identities pose problems in terms of classification. Emecheta is involved in multiple border crossings and her protagonist replicates the displacement engendered by her own experiences. Buchi Emecheta, fictionalizes her personal experiences to explore the various ways in which migration impacts individual identity.

Emecheta explores the migrant black woman's disorientation as a result of movements, transformations and self-reconstruction that must occur during the quest for a useable identity.

Buchi Emecheta writes *Second Class Citizen* (1974) and *In The Ditch* (1972) in a fictional autobiographical form. Both these novels are reprinted together as *Adah's Story*. The protagonist of *Second Class Citizen* (1974) is a woman named Adah who is born in Nigeria and belongs to the Igbo tribe. Adah is a young girl who dreams of visiting the United Kingdom.

One of the major struggles for Adah in the United Kingdom is being a black woman in a predominantly white society. The fact that birth control facilities are available to her prompts her to use them though she feels guilty about it. She continues to pursue her goal in becoming a writer and ultimately between four children and a lazy, abusive husband finds the time to write. This is also the novel in which Adah looks at renewed interest at her own society in Africa. She laments about the loss of community life and the support system she enjoyed in Africa. Nevertheless she never gives up on her dreams, not even when her husband burns her first piece of work.

Fact and fiction merge and Buchi Emecheta shows Adah to be a writer just like her. This is also the pivot around which Buchi Emecheta shows her

assertion to write about herself and to interpret her circumstances in her own way. In no way can this be seen as a conscious move on Buchi Emecheta's part to forcefully project herself as a European feminist. Adah in the novel refers to the manuscript as her first brainchild.

That to Adah was the last straw. Francis could not kill her child, she could forgive him all that he had done but not this.⁹

She leaves Francis moving out with nothing but four babies and a new job but she hardly feels a sense of what European feminists would call the end of bondage. The novel ends with Adah alone and determined to survive on her own. The end itself is not a resolution to her problems neither does Adah feel liberated in leaving her husband. Yet the novel hardly shows Adah as a meek victim to her circumstances on the contrary she is constantly resisting her circumstances. Adah is also accused of being too European and a traitor to African values. This interpretation comes from Francis. Buchi Emecheta has also raised the issue of inter racial relationships in the novel. Buchi Emecheta throughout the novel shows Adah alternating back and forth between the two societies, neither of the two offering her cure to her problems. Emecheta's quest is for multiple freedoms. *In the ditch* (1972) continues where *Second Class Citizen* (1974) leaves, the continuity itself shows that Buchi Emecheta is still in the process of completing her narrative. Emecheta besets Adah, the central character of *In the Ditch* (1972), with numerous trials in London—

abandonment by her husband, threats of eviction from her greedy and unsympathetic landlord and many other ordeals in a welfare complex—to illustrate the trauma associated with displacement and the determination with which the heroine seeks to redefine herself. *Second Class Citizen* (1974) does not signify an end but continuity because unlike what was argued by European feminists her problems do not end with monetary control and education. Emecheta's fiction is deeply rooted in the contrasting sense of place and displacement. Emecheta's female protagonists are often caught between two worlds, to neither of which they can fully belong in the wake of continuing imperialism. Their sense of self is challenged by dislocation resulting from multiple factors which includes migration, yet the return to the homeland is described as an emotional crisis. As a displaced woman Buchi Emecheta through Adah dramatizes the crisis of identity in writing her own autobiography disrupting the attempts to signify her. European feminism would accuse patriarchy for oppressing women while critics seeking an authentic black subject accuse her of not idealizing black identity. Adah's story is that of a remarkable black woman who attempts to surpass gender, race and tribal roles in Africa and England to recover her dreams "the presence" and utilizes her talents. Buchi Emecheta is on a borderland, which is being between two cultures, not being accepted by Africans and denied also by Europeans. The

theme of colonialism is present throughout both books and gives the reader a first hand look at what happens to a woman when two different cultures merge. Buchi Emecheta struggles with the question of “who am I?” This forces a re-thinking of current epistemological concepts, which recover only a partial identity for Buchi Emecheta. As a woman born in a postcolonial scenario she internalizes her inferiority and searches for freedom. In Africa she is aware of sexism but her contact with colonization is not direct, it is only in Europe that she comes in direct contact with racism, which can be called quasi colonization. Deborah K King¹⁰ calls it the triple jeopardy of black women. In the absence of an end to the ideologies of imperialism Buchi Emecheta explores a world in which her creativity is limited. Buchi Emecheta finds herself longing for the Afrocentric female worldview, which provides sustenance to black women to preserve their own identity. These two novels are followed by Emecheta’s further interrogation of her black female identity in Africa in contrast to the linear progression of Eurocentric worldview. In breaking her silence through writing Buchi Emecheta shows how active imperialist ideologies continually attempt to silence her. For many feminists, a traditional woman is one who is dumb enough to live with a polygamist in a remote village and speak Igbo, or some other African language, while a modern woman is one who is able to leave her husband, move to a city and speak/write English. Conclusions are

drawn from these dubious categories whose validity is continually subverted by the literary texts themselves. If Western education is the key that unlocks the door to modernity, then Adah emerges definitely as a modern woman but there is always a lingering feeling of helplessness. Emecheta also shows her protagonist not just as a black mother but also as someone who links writing to mothering which has multiple significations of not only being a woman but also a humanist. Breaking her silence exposes the contradictions in her texts which signifies a disruption of her ideal of femininity which like that of the Black feminists incorporates freedom not only for herself but also for others. Her autobiography becomes the first step in her journey as a black woman and these two novels are followed by Emecheta's journey into the beyond in an attempt to find a deeper understanding of who she is. Both novels are not conclusive but end on a note of questioning furthered by Emecheta's exploration of her African heritage. Emecheta's narrative of self and identity reflects the gender, racial and ethnic tensions in a postcolonial society. Emecheta's novels taken together construct a dual narrative, which embodies individual and collective historical consciousness of black women. She tells her own lived story. At the same time her memories reconstruct a collective interwoven multicultural past. Through the narrativization of both her identity and the lived paradoxes of contradictory spaces, Emecheta weaves a provocative tale of an attempt, which

moves towards transgression and performances of the psyche. Autobiography, at its very core, is a process of self-creation. When autobiographers are conscious of this process, they can use its power in the struggle for personal freedom. Her journey of the self has begun. Emecheta also suggests that the women are fragmented because of a disconnection to their spiritual source: Africa. They must return to Africa, literally or figuratively, as part of their journey to selfhood. The complexity of black female identity reflects centuries of a transgenerational haunting associated with the pain of colonialism, slavery, exploitation and discrimination. Third World women in diasporic communities are caught in the interstices or overlapping areas between cultures, languages and societies. Rather than look nostalgically and reactively for a lost origin or a previous time of wholeness, "speaking from a border" raises the possibility of finding common areas and points of connection between, a painful past and the present.

Chapter 5- Writing Blackness

Emecheta's novels discussed above 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/imperialist 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 precursors's existence and experience, Emecheta restores their voices. Creating a palimpsestic subjectivity, Emecheta asserts the value of individual 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. In looking at the novels of Buchi Emecheta under study, 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. 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.¹¹

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 the migration may be even more difficult. 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. 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 older 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 ¹² 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. 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. 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. 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.

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 and she goes beyond an attack solely on sexism. She also indicts capitalism and racism which threaten to annihilate a black woman's existence. All the above novels end on an ambiguous note. 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.

Chapter VI- Conclusion

The question of home and the rewriting of home and nation in the diaspora, is a fundamental topic in black women's writings. Black feminist writers like Buchi Emecheta assert that women can never experience a genuine sense of home anywhere, neither in the metropolitan Britain nor in Africa. Where is home, for starters? On the one hand, can the country that has colonized your native land and is still refusing to acknowledge your existence be called home? On the other, can the homeland that failed to perform its nurturing function still be called home? The author's displacement has resulted in an ambiguity and ambivalence towards the idea of home that she has expressed directly or indirectly in her interviews, essays and above all in her fiction. Buchi Emecheta shows that women remain alienated and estranged not only from their foreign homes, as a result of colonization and racism, but also from their originary African homes as a result of nationalist ideologies, patriarchal oppression, poverty and other personal traumatic experiences. While Black feminists like Buchi Emecheta are often relegated to an outside position in Britain as emblems of colonial hegemony, they find it equally urgent to subject the African home to an internal critique that allows for rewriting home in the experiences of black women. In her anomalous position as a feminist, colonized and second-class citizen, Buchi Emecheta offers an alternative mode

of reconnecting to and remembering home. These writers balance their lack of a genuine sense of home as women, colonials and second-class citizens in both foreign and native spaces with the search for new meanings of community that can reintegrate them within transnational and transethnic communities of struggle, rather than within the exclusive borders of African diaspora. Emecheta's novels are representative of a multiplicity of black female voices from different generations; individual constituents brought together to comprise a universal mosaic. If identity is directly related to the choices one is able to make or the agency one maintains in his or her daily existence, then factors which curtail this autonomy could lead to a loss of self. The contemporary literary field reveals a plurality of ways within the narrative form that diasporic writers like Emecheta can explore to reflect their experiences as well as represent their disrupted dwelling spaces and identities. Hence, literature of migration is by no means monolithic: instead of uniformity there is multiplicity; rather than fixity there is flux; and instead of stabilization there are continually new understandings and foci.

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**WRITING HER/SELF: A CRITICAL STUDY OF
BUCHI EMECHETA'S NOVELS**

PRIYA RAGHAV

**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY
IN ENGLISH**



**NORTH EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY
SHILLONG-793022
2008**

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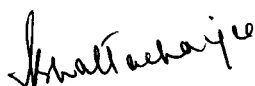
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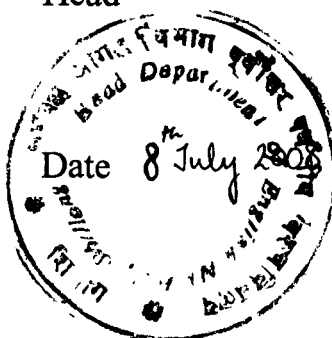
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I, Priya Raghav, hereby declare that the subject matter of this dissertation is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this dissertation did not form the basis of an award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute. This is being submitted to the North Eastern Hill University for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English.


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Date 8th July 2008

Chapter I Introduction

Buchi Emecheta was born to Igbo parents in Lagos on 21 July 1944. She received traditional Igbo upbringing and witnessed early the tensions between traditional African culture and Western values. Orphaned as a young child and raised by an extended family she attributes her desire to write to her aunt who was a story teller. Though schooling for girls was discouraged, Buchi Emecheta managed to get an education at a missionary school. Bound by custom she left school at the age of sixteen to marry a man to whom she had been engaged since she was eleven years old. She moved to Britain in 1960, where she worked as a librarian and became a student at London University in 1970, reading Sociology. She worked as a community worker in Camden, North London, between 1976 and 1978. Much of her fiction has focused on sexual politics and racial prejudice and is based on her own experiences as both a single parent and a black woman living in Britain. Her first novel, the semi-autobiographical *In the Ditch*, was published in 1972. It first appeared in a series of articles published in the *New Statesman* magazine and together with its sequel, *Second Class Citizen* (1974), provides a fictionalised portrait of a poor young Nigerian woman struggling to bring up her children in London. She began to write about the role of women in Nigerian society in *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977), winner of the *New Statesman* Jock Campbell Award; and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), an account of women's experiences in bringing up children in the face of changing values in traditional Igbo society. Her other novels include *Destination Biafra* (1982), set during the civil war in

Nigeria; *The Rape of Shavi* (1983), an allegorical account of European colonisation in Africa; *Gwendolen* (1989), the story of a young West Indian girl living in London; and *Kehinde* (1994), about a middle-aged Nigerian wife and mother who returns to Nigeria after living in London for many years. Her latest work of fiction, *The New Tribe*, was published in 2000. Buchi Emecheta is also the author of several novels for children including *Nowhere to Play* (1980) and *The Moonlight Bride* (1980). She published a volume of autobiography, *Head Above Water* in 1986. Her television play, *A Kind of Marriage* was first screened by the BBC in 1976. In 1983 she was selected as one of twenty 'Best of Young British Writers' by the Book Marketing Council. She lectured in the United States throughout 1979 as Visiting Professor at a number of universities and returned to Nigeria in 1980 as Senior Research Fellow and Visiting Professor of English at the University of Calabar. She runs the Ogwugwu Afor Publishing Company with her son. It has branches in London, where she lives, and in Ibadan. Since 1979 she has been a member of the Home Secretary's Advisory Council on Race. She was a member of the Arts Council from 1982 to 1983 and is a regular contributor to the *New Statesman*, the *Times Literary Supplement* and *The Guardian*.

Buchi Emecheta as a black diasporic woman writes about the black female experience in different locations. Each of her novels tells the story of individual black women and their surroundings. Buchi Emecheta's novels have

been pivotal in raising questions of 'difference' around such social axis as class, racism, colonialism, ethnicity, sexuality and the problematic of global inequities for black women. Identity for Buchi Emecheta may be understood as diasporised time-space. Her black female characters are all diasporised across social and psychic 'borders' and the desire for home is a desire for security and belonging.

The black women's literary tradition began in a conscious effort to create a space for black women's writing and to illustrate a distinction between black women's reality and the realities of others. The literature within the tradition is influenced by how black women perceive themselves and the world around them. As a result, identity is an important part of black women's literature. Race, class, gender and ethnicity are all components of one's identity and are critical in the formation of one's lived experiences. The moment a black woman like Buchi Emecheta steps out from her native place she's no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. Undercutting the inside/outside opposition, her intervention is necessarily that of both not quite an insider and not quite an outsider. She is, in other words, this inappropriate other or same who moves about with always at least two gestures: that of affirming 'I am like you' while persisting in her difference and that of reminding 'I am different' while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived

at. All of Emecheta's novels take up the question of where a character's original "home" is, what ancestral "roots" are and how such an "origin" shapes black female identity. Buchi Emecheta's novels are creations that construct imaginary homelands and they are also crucial sites for the exploration of black women's identity. Buchi Emecheta's novels also suggest, that for a black woman to identify only with the past, with one's ancestral "roots," is also a kind of death, because it means one has no future but only the idealized past as the locus for identity and yet the past cannot be simply done away with. Thus Buchi Emecheta reveals the problem of this "in between-ness" for black women; that home is not Africa nor can it, wholly be mainstream European culture. It is a problem of homelessness and so if identity is to be fulfilled in her novels, then "home" must be recognized as at once mythical and determinative. However there is no prescription for either the character's recovery of home or a resolution to "homelessness." Emecheta's novels illustrate that black women often feel unfulfilled and their desire to fulfil themselves can be explained as a desire to "go home." Black women characters in Emecheta's novels are searching for self completion, for a way to feel unified with their surroundings or at least feel that they have a distinct way of feeling themselves as individuals who are also part of a larger community and/or culture. This characteristic of black women is distinctly different from mainstream Western feminism where addressing of issues relating to gender inequalities is more privileged over ethnic and cultural constructions of the self.

Mainstream Feminism comprises a number of social, cultural and political movements, theories and moral philosophies concerned with gender inequalities and discrimination against women. The term 'feminism' has many different uses and its meanings are often contested. For example, some writers use the term 'feminism' to refer to a historically specific political movement in America and Europe while other writers use it to refer to the belief that there are injustices against women, though there is no consensus on the exact list of these injustices. Initially the term 'feminism' was used to refer to "the qualities of females", and it was not until after the First International Women's Conference in Paris in 1892 that the term, following the French term *féministe*, was used regularly in English for a belief in and advocacy of equal rights for women based on the idea of the equality of the sexes. Although the term "feminism" in English is rooted in the mobilization for woman suffrage in Europe and America during the late 19th and early 20th century, efforts to obtain justice for women did not begin or end with this period. Therefore some have found it useful to describe the women's movement in America as occurring in "waves". According to the wave model, the struggle to achieve basic political rights during the period from the mid-19th century until the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 counts as "First Wave" feminism. Feminism waned between the two world wars, to be "revived" in the late 1960's and early 1970's as "Second Wave" feminism. In this second wave, feminists pushed beyond the early quest for political rights to fight for greater equality, e.g., in education, the

workplace and at home. More recent transformations of feminism have resulted in a "Third Wave". Third Wave feminists often critique Second Wave feminism for its lack of attention to the differences among women due to race, ethnicity, class, nationality and religion.

Black feminism is critical specifically of Western forms of feminism and their universalization of female experience. Black feminists argue that cultures impacted by colonialism are often vastly different and should be treated as such. Colonial domination may result in glorification of pre-colonial culture which, in cultures with traditions of stratification of power along lines of gender, could mean the acceptance of or refusal to deal with, inherent issues of gender inequality. Black feminists can be described as feminists who have reacted against both universalizing tendencies in Western feminist thought and a lack of attention to gender issues in mainstream postcolonial thought.

The field of Black feminism arose from the gendered history of colonialism. Colonial powers often imposed Westernized norms on colonized regions. After the formation of the United Nations, former colonies were monitored for what was deemed "social progress" by Western standards. The advancement of women, among other variables, has been monitored by arguably Western organizations such as the United Nations. Black feminists today struggle to fight gender oppression within their own cultural models of society rather than through those imposed by the Western colonizers.

Black feminism argues that sexism and racism are inextricable from one another. Forms of feminism that strive to overcome sexism and class oppression but ignore race can discriminate against many people, including black women through racial prejudice. Black feminists argue that the liberation of black women entails freedom for all people since it would require the end of racism, sexism, and class oppression. One of the theories that evolved out of this movement was Alice Walker's Womanism¹. It emerged after the early feminist movements that were led specifically by white women who advocated social changes such as woman's suffrage. These movements were largely white middle-class movements and ignored oppression based on racism and classism. Alice Walker and other Womanists pointed out that black women experienced a different and more intense kind of oppression from that of white women. The word womanism was later qualified by the Nigerian scholar Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi with the word African to refer to the everyday lives and situations of African women². The term is an alternative for Black feminism. According to Kohrs-Amissah, both Walker and Ogunyemi define womanism within a black context as the coming of age of a young woman which brings about the emergence of femaleness.

Additionally, Ogunyemi believes that the 'ultimate aim of womanism is the unity of blacks everywhere under the enlightened control of

men and women. She lays stress on womanism as a black global ideology which encompasses issues of racism, imperialism and sexism³.

The body of feminism is complex and like any other discourse it has raised many contentious issues regarding the role and function of women. The concerns become especially difficult to address as women are shaped as much by the society they live in as by their gender. There is also a danger in using feminism as an umbrella term to address the issues of women. Some have even argued that feminists as a whole are working towards their erasure in trying to reinstate the marginalized position of women. Nevertheless that possibility is still farfetched for those belonging to the Third world and for them feminism does address the issues relating to women but it might not do so in a unified voice.

At this historical juncture then, asking whether one is for or against identity politics is to ask an impossible question. Wherever they line up in the debates, thinkers agree that the notion of identity has become indispensable to contemporary political discourse at the same time they concur that it has troubling implications for models of the self: political inclusiveness and the possibilities for solidarity and resistance. Charles Taylor argues that modern identity is characterized by an emphasis on its inner voice and capacity for authenticity that is, the ability to find a way of being that is somehow true to oneself⁴. While doctrines of equality press the notion that each individual is

capable of deploying his or her practical reason or moral sense to live an authentic life qua individual, the politics of difference has taken over the language of authenticity to describe ways of living that are true to the identities of marginalized and subordinated social groups. Increasingly in the present century, the modernist notion of the self as unitary, stable and transparent has come under criticism. At the base of the criticisms of Black feminists is the reformulation of the self as a site constituted and fragmented, at least partially, by the intersections of various categories of domination/oppression such as race, gender and sexual orientation. Thus, far from being a unitary and static phenomenon untainted by experience, one's core identity is made up of the various discourses and structures that shape society and one's experience within it. Many Black feminists have taken this argument one step further and asserted that the self is by its very nature fragmented: an illusory notion constructed as static and unitary, but in reality completely fluid. White feminist theorists made a significant contribution to the rejection of the modern unitary self by asserting that if such a separate and autonomous self exists, it is certainly not the female self. Instead, they propose an alternative description of the female self. Early attempts by White feminists in particular, at creating a separate theory of the self, however fell prey to the same essentialist problems inherent in the modern self. As the Black feminists noted, description of the male and the female could more accurately be described as white male and female. By accepting the prevailing concept of the unitary, autonomous self as applied to white males,

and supplementing it with an essentialist female foil, White feminists replicated the exclusionary tendencies of the modern self. White women assumed that to really deal with sexism one should look at the experiences of white women "unmodified" by race. Thus, they assumed that black women's experiences and ontological space could be captured by adding the "race" and "gender" categories together. As Angela Harris notes, this new framework reduced the lives of black women who experienced multiple forms of oppression to addition problems: racism + sexism = straight black woman's experience⁵. Some White feminist theorists thought that the essential female perspective was best articulated by white women whose experiences as women were somehow equivalent to the black female experience distilled of race. To extend the mathematical metaphor, these White feminists felt that they could "isolate" the variable of sexism from the variable of racism. Similarly, the paradigmatic racial experience became that of the minority black male, whose experiences of racism were isolated from sexism. Using this theoretical framework it was possible to construct the experience of minority black women without even considering them. Hence, this conceptualization of the female self functioned to exclude, rather than include, all but the "typical" white female. In reaction to this flawed analysis, several minority Black feminist thinkers proposed the theory of the intersectional self. The basic tenet of intersectionality is that "women of color stand at the intersection of the categories of race and gender, and that their experiences are not simply that of racial oppression plus gender

oppression." These systems of oppression combine in symbiotic ways to create unique experiences. Thus, intersectionality subverts the notion of the modern self. It states that "we are composed of a welter of partial, sometimes contradictory, or even antithetical 'selves.' The significance of each of these fragmented "selves" for one's sense of identity shifts as a result of both external and internal stimulus and experience. If identity constitutes a variety of meanings, including race, gender, and class, then it is imperative that black women writing about identity construction have a space to do so.

To raise the question of Buchi Emecheta's identity is to reopen again the discussion on the self/other relationship in its enactment of power relations. Female identity as understood in the context of a Eurocentric feminist discourse relies on the concept of an essential authentic female core that remains hidden to one's consciousness and that requires elimination of all that is foreign or not true to the self. Eurocentric feminism thus supposes that a clear dividing line can be made between men and women. The further one moves away from this core the less likely one is thought to be capable of fulfilling one's role as the real self. The search for an identity thus becomes a search for that lost pure authentic self often situated within a process of elimination of all that is superfluous, fake and corrupted. For European feminists it meant the elimination of what they saw as male hierarchies instituted to keep women in an inferior position but for Buchi Emecheta the journey to selfhood is much more

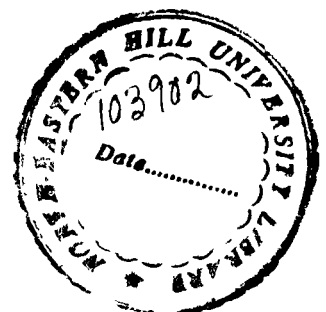
complex as it is cross cut by multiple factors like race, class and gender. One effort to overcome the limitations of singular identity politics, developed within Black feminist activism and theory, combines multiple categories of oppression to create more specific forms of identity politics. The theory is that categories such as 'woman' are too limited in their focus. Black feminism, then, is an effort to produce new forms of knowledge based on multiple subject positions. These knowledges allow for the expression of voices which have been repressed by the hegemony of white, male, imperialist and middle-class experience. The multiple jeopardy experienced by black women gives rise to a number of tensions between the interests of nationalism, feminism and racial politics. Black women may feel multiple allegiances: community affiliations, ethnic identification, global womanhood and racial solidarity. The black woman author's identity may vacillate between a bond with global womanhood and one with her culture and race. Such a writer may also maintain a commitment to the particularities of class, ethnicity and religion. These multiple allegiances inevitably breed conflicts of interest as black women are occasionally forced to side either with the camp of "sisterhood" or with that of their culture and ethnicity. Such controversial subjects like polygamy and obligatory motherhood problematize female or cultural solidarity. But within a working paradigm of Black feminism, the theory makes allowance for certain flexibility in loyalties, refusing to impose a fixed or rigid analytical agenda. The complex living

conditions of black women necessitate that they be allowed the freedom to choose allegiances that may prove contradictory.

Patricia Hill Collins too develops her trope of "outsider-within"⁶. Notably, similar concepts, such as "migration", "border crossing" and "diaspora" are proposed by a number of postcolonial and Black feminist theorists. All share some sense of a dual or plural identity developed through engagement with positioning within some kind of community as well as being excluded from a community. Collins uses the term to describe "the location of people who no longer belong to any one group," as well as "social locations or border spaces occupied by groups of unequal power." Thus in her formulation, outsider-within refers not to mere duality/plurality but to the power relations which are implicated therein. Outsiders within are able to gain access to the knowledge of the group/community which they inhabit or visit, but are unable to either authoritatively claim that knowledge or possess the full power given to members of that group. Collins sees black women as ideal outsiders-within, in that they were both dually marginalized as women and as Blacks, yet able to move among a variety of communities; she perceives the result of this boundary crossing to be a particular collective viewpoint known as the Black feminist standpoint. This kind of multiplicity is a fruitful theoretical location for Collins, because unlike elite knowledges or oppositional knowledge derived from resisting only one kind of oppression, outsider-within positions "can produce

distinctive knowledges that embrace multiplicity yet remain cognizant of power." In addition, when developed in this way, Black feminist thought remains a dynamic practice which is responsive to change and current social, historical and political conditions. Buchi Emecheta attempts to locate herself from this contradictory position of outsider- within where she becomes an alien not only in Europe but also in Africa. Based on the above discussion the central concern of this study is examine the ways in which a black woman's identity is positioned within hegemonic discourses. The present study examines the construction of the personal and the writerly self of Buchi Emecheta through the following chapters.

A detailed analysis will be done of *Second Class Citizen*(1974), *In the Ditch*(1972), *Joys of Motherhood*(1979), *The Bride Price* (1976) and *Slave Girl* (1977).



END NOTES

1. Alice Walker. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. New York: Harvest, 1983, 15.
2. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. "Buchi Emecheta: The Shaping of a Self." *Komparatistische Hefte*. 8 (1983): 65-77.
3. *ibid*, 68.
4. Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.
5. Angela P. Harris, *Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory*. New York: Harvest, 1990, 590-605.
6. Patricia Hill Collins. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990, p.52.

Chapter II Locating the Self

Two views of the self have been prominent in contemporary political philosophy — a Kantian ethical subject and homo economicus.¹ Both of these conceptions saw the individual as a free and rational chooser and an autonomous agent. However, they differed in their emphasis. The Kantian ethical subject used reason to transcend cultural norms and to discover absolute moral truth, whereas homo economicus used reason to rank desires in a coherent order and to figure out how to maximize desire satisfaction. Whether the self was identified with pure abstract reason or with the instrumental rationality of the marketplace, these conceptions of the self isolated the individual from personal relationships and larger social forces. For the Kantian ethical subject, emotional bonds and social conventions imperiled objectivity and undermined commitment to duty. For homo economicus, it made no difference what social forces shaped one's desires provided they did not result from coercion or fraud, and one's ties to other people were to be factored into one's calculations and planning along with the rest of one's desires. Feminist philosophers have charged that these views were at best incomplete and at worst, fundamentally misleading. Many feminist critiques took the question of who provided the paradigm for these conceptions as their point of departure. Who modeled this free, rational self? Although represented as genderless, sexless, raceless and classless, feminists argued that the Kantian ethical subject and homo economicus masked a white, healthy, middleclass, heterosexual man. Deeming women emotional and unprincipled, these thinkers advocated confining women

to the domestic sphere where their vices could be neutralized, even transformed into virtues, in the role of submissive wife and nurturant mother.

Feminist critics pointed out, that this misogynist heritage could not be remedied simply by condemning these traditional constraints and advocating equal rights for women, for these conceptions of the self were themselves gendered. In Western culture, the mind and reason were coded masculine, whereas the body and emotion were coded feminine. To identify the self with the rational mind was then, to masculinize the self. If selfhood was not completely impossible for women, it was only because they resembled men in certain essential respects, they were not altogether devoid of rational will. Yet, feminine selves were regarded as necessarily deficient for they only mimicked the masculine ideal. Feminists objected that this philosophical consolidation of the preeminence of the masculine over the feminine rested on untenable assumptions about the transparency of the self, the immunity of the self to deviant social influences and the reliability of reason as a corrective to distorted moral judgment. Today people live in social environments where culturally normative prejudice persists, even in communities where overt forms of bigotry are strictly prohibited. Although Eurocentric official cultural standards uphold the values of equality and tolerance, they continue to transmit camouflaged messages of the inferiority of historically subordinated social groups through stereotypes and other imagery. These deeply ingrained schemas commonly

structured white attitudes, perception and judgment despite the individual's conscious good will. As a result, white men often considered themselves objective and fair, yet they systematically discriminated against "different" others while favoring members of their own social group. Fortified by culture and ensconced in the unconscious, such prejudice could not be dispelled through rational reflection alone. In effect then, the Kantian moral subject countenances "innocent" wrongdoing and occluded reinforcement of the social stratification that privileged the minority of white men whom this conception took as paradigmatic.

These oversights necessitated the reconceptualization of the self. To account for the residual potency of this form of prejudice, feminists urged, the self must be understood as socially situated and murkily heterogeneous. To account for the self's ability to discern and resist culturally normative prejudice, the moral subject must not be reduced to the capacity for reason. This nullification of women's selfhood was once explicitly codified in law. The legal doctrine of coverture held that a woman's personhood was absorbed into that of her husband when she married. The wife's assuming her husband's surname symbolized a revocation of her separate identity. In addition, coverture deprived the wife of her right to bodily integrity, for rape within marriage was not recognized as a crime. She lost her right to property, as her husband was entitled to control her earnings, and she was barred from making contracts in her own

name. Lacking the right to vote or to serve on juries, she was a second-class citizen whose enfranchised husband purportedly represented her politically.

Simone de Beauvoir insisted that the womanhood that we know of was a social construct; one is not born but rather becomes a woman. Civilization all of it, culture, knowledge, arts, values were identified as creations of man. Man was regarded as the normative being, the one and woman his other. Men were constructed as active transcendent able to transform their environment whereas women were viewed as passive and immanent, that is existing within themselves with little capacity to transform themselves outside the society. Men were the subjects of their own lives, the actors and women were the objects the acted upon. Women according to her were dispersed among the males, attached through housework, residence and economic standing to men, which prevented women from bonding together in a way that fostered solidarity. She wrote

Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. Michelet writes: 'Woman, the relative being ...' And Benda is most positive in his *Rapport d'Uriel*: 'The body of man makes sense in itself quite apart from that of woman, whereas the latter seems wanting in significance by itself ... Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man.' And she is simply what man decrees; thus she is called 'the sex', by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex – absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with

reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other.²

She further argued that the eternal feminine was a myth.

In an essay entitled "Sorties," Hélène Cixous draws on numerous metaphysical categories in order to reveal the 'place' of woman. "*Where is she?*" Hélène Cixous implores, before enumerating a list of binarisms—

Activity/passivity

Sun/ Moon,

Culture/Nature,

Day/Night,

Father/Mother,

Head/heart,

Intelligible/sensitive,

Logos/Pathos.

Form, convex, step, advance, seed, progress.

Matter, concave, ground—which supports the step, receptacle.

Man_____

Woman³

Hélène Cixous relentlessly illustrates that 'she' is *there*, "wherever an ordering intervenes" and a "law organizes the thinkable by dual, irreconcilable;

or mitigable, dialectical oppositions. She rejected the whole system itself as phallocratic and called for a radical change where female culture could flourish, challenging the solidarity of logocentrism and phallogentrism, threatening the stability of the masculine edifice, which passed itself off as the eternal natural.

Hélène Cixous wrote

Phallogentrism is the enemy, of everyone. Men stand to lose by it, differently but as seriously as women. And it is time to transform, to invent the other history. There is no such thing as destiny nature or essence but living structures caught up sometimes within historio cultural limits which intermingle with the historical scene to such a degree that it has long been impossible and it is still difficult to think or even imagine something else.⁴

According to Luce Irigaray⁵, female sexuality was always conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters. In the masculine culture, traditionally women's sexuality was suppressed and prohibited as a forbidden area. Luce Irigaray's analysis of sameness in Freud's theory was particularly important because she used it to criticize his theory of female sexuality. According to Freudian view on female sexuality, women had no subjectivity in sexual relationship to men. Freud understood women's clitoris as a castrated penis, which was a little sex organ or no sex organ at all. For Freud, a little girl was a little boy with no penis. Thus, women were recognized as the defective or lack. Luce Irigaray referred to female subjectivity and sexuality as "sexuality denied", considering that "the penis is the only sexual organ of recognized

value". Luce Irigaray argued that the complexity of female sexuality and eroticism did not fit into male notions of sexuality. Luce Irigaray celebrated women's autoeroticism. In her autoeroticism, a woman was not "pleasure-giving" to men but "self-embracing". The autoeroticism could be a clue to overcome the logic of sameness in phallogocentric understanding of sexuality and its male God. Julia Kristeva⁶ viewed the problematic nature of a woman's identity as a direct result of the patriarchal society in which a woman's identification with her mother ensured her exclusion from marginality in relation to the patriarchal order and if she identified with her father she ended up as his consort, complicit in her marginalization in supporting the patriarchal order, which worked towards her erasure.

What these feminists did was that they instituted a white female hierarchy instead of a white male hierarchy, which did not even hint at the possibility of how racial difference could alter the views of femininity. In arguing for a female identity based on biology they did not see other factors which came into play in defining a black women's subjectivity such as race and class. Their views have been criticized for being radical. French feminism, epitomised by theorists as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, with its emphasis on deconstruction and psychoanalysis was frequently dismissed in the African situation as being too élitist and apolitical, concerned with theory rather than practice. French feminism tends to enclose itself within the world of ideas, in

which language and discourse may easily exclude the harsh and painful realities of suffering and oppression experienced by black women. Annemarie van Niekerk argued that concentrating solely on the body was a distraction from the material world in which its experiences are embedded. It overlooked social, ideological and political determinants of identity. French feminist's theories were often said to be empirist rather than philosophical, thus their exclusive insistence on gender as a fully humanist pursuit. Other social and constitutive factors of identity such as race, gender and class were systematically overlooked. Usually, their criteria depended on a self-consciousness that measured the ability of literary works to reproduce, as real as possible, women's experiences. This position, based on a universal 'feminine experience' held on a very specific and naive definition of identity and subjectivity. Therefore, it was a gross simplification to use the umbrella term of 'women' for the definition of gender.

Nancy Chodorow⁷ saw the self as relational in several respects. Every child was cared for by an adult or adults, and every individual was shaped for better or worse by this emotionally charged interaction. As a result of feelings of need and moments of frustration, the infant becomes differentiated from its primary caregiver and developed a sense of separate identity. Concomitantly, a distinctive personality emerged. By selectively internalizing and recombining elements of their experience with other people, children developed

characteristic traits and dispositions. Moreover, Chodorow attributes the development of a key interpersonal capacity to nurturance. A caregiver who was experienced as warmly solicitous was internalized as a "good internal mother". Children gained a sense of their worthiness by internalizing the nurturance they received and directed it toward themselves, and they learned to respect and respond to other people by internalizing their experience of nurturance and projecting it toward others. Chodorow understood the self as fundamentally relational and thus linked to cultural norms of feminine interpersonal responsiveness. For Chodorow, the rigidly differentiated, compulsively rational, stubbornly independent self was a masculine defensive formation a warped form of the relational self that developed as a result of fathers' negligible involvement in childcare. Chodorow's relational self seemed to glorify weak individuation and scorn the independence and self-assertiveness that many women desperately needed.

Lesbians saw heterosexual women as traitors to the real cause of women.

The Woman Identified Woman manifesto declared

As the source of self-hate and the lack of real self are rooted in our male-given identity, we must create a new sense of self. As long as we cling to the idea of "being a woman," we will sense some conflict with that incipient self, that sense of I, that sense of a whole person. It is very difficult to realize and accept that being "feminine" and being a whole person are irreconcilable. Only women can give to each other a new sense of self. That

identity we have to develop with reference to ourselves, and not in relation to men. This consciousness is the revolutionary force from which all else will follow, for ours is an organic revolution.⁸

Lesbians saw homosexuality as the only way of being true to ones femininity and saw heterosexuality itself as a barrier to female self-realization. There was also the tendency to confuse female homosexuality with female heterosexuality. As more work went into studies focusing on homosexuality they emerged as group with more complex problems.

Other feminists too were revolting against the oppression suffered by women. White middle class women retaliated against male hegemony and they saw a solution to the identity conflicts of women in economic terms, which is why they wrestled for the economic control of their lives in order to escape marginalization. Betty Friedan⁹ defined women's unhappiness as the problem that had no name and then she launched into a detailed exploration of what she believed caused this problem. Through her research—which included many theories, statistics, and first-person accounts— Betty Friedan pinned the blame on an idealized image of femininity that she called the feminine mystique. According to Betty Friedan, women were always encouraged to confine themselves to the narrow roles of housewife and mother, forsaking education and career aspirations in the process. Betty Friedan attempted to prove that the

feminine mystique denied women the opportunity to develop their own identities, which could ultimately lead to problems for women and their families.

If I am right, the problem that has no name stirring in the minds of so many American women today is not a matter of loss of femininity or too much education, or the demands of domesticity. It is far more important than anyone recognizes. It is the key to these other new and old problems which have been torturing women and their husbands and children, and puzzling their doctors and educators for years. We can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: "I want something more than my husband and my children and my home."¹⁰

Feminists at this point were arguing for the right to have abortions and reproductive health care facilities, which was declared illegal at the time. Many women had to opt for illegal abortions seriously endangering their lives. They gave a call for sisterhood to enlist the help of various women and organized groups and camps where women could gather and discuss their problems. Despite their calls for sisterhood the movement was entirely white and race was a subordinated category which was not discussed. Sisterhood had emerged as the dominant model for feminist intercommunity relations. A term of political solidarity, "sisterhood" spoke of women's activism. The meaning it carried for its originators and deployers was one of shared oppression, common victimization, community of interests, solidarity and collective activism. Whether it referred to interracial, international, transglobal or cross-cultural relations, the ideal promoted was couched in the rhetoric of kinship and family

bonds. Nevertheless, many feminists have criticized this use of the term. Black feminists have, for example, pointed out what they consider the hypocrisy and the dishonesty of white feminists in advocating an unconditional love and solidarity amongst all women, even as they exercised their race and class privileges on the backs of non-white women. bell hooks, wrote about “false sisterhood,” indicating that the term’s meanings were not realized in the lives of feminists. She wrote:

Sisterhood became yet another shield against reality, another support system. Their [white feminists’] version of Sisterhood was informed by racist and classist assumptions about white womanhood, that the white “lady” (that is to say the bourgeois woman) should be protected from all that might upset or discomfort her and shielded from negative realities that might lead to confrontation.¹¹

Sisterhood amongst women of a racially and culturally diverse group, bell hooks concluded, was possible but only with a great deal of continuous work against all sorts of divisions most importantly racism. Thus for hooks, the problem with the concept of sisterhood was that it took political solidarity for granted rather than a goal to be worked at and achieved.

The feminist movement was elite and those black women who dared to contradict some of the White feminist presumptions were seen as traitors. Western feminism as a tool of imperialism was aligned with Western ideologies. As white women ignored their built in privilege and defined woman on their terms alone, black women emerged as aliens.

Issues surrounding feminism became more complex by the problems engendered by colonization, slavery and tribal practices in a world, which was changing according to the dictates perpetrated by European male hegemony. Control over one's sexuality and economic status alone could not provide an easy solution to the identity crisis faced by black women. The Eurocentric feminist focus on common oppression was more of an appropriation of female concerns, which promoted their class interests. It also enabled women to ignore their privileged status in comparison to that of black women who came from working class backgrounds. Western women, Chandra Mohanty¹² said, succeeded in staging themselves as modern and developed, equal and free, exactly by constructing the mirror image of the Third world woman as other. Universal images of the Third world woman, images constructed from adding the Third world difference to sexual difference were predicated upon assumptions about Western women as secular, liberated and having control over their own lives. Because the images of self and other were so closely interlinked, the patterns were hard to break by the self who constructed the other. Black women were confronted with this dilemma which encouraged them to represent themselves only as women discarding their blackness or to represent themselves only as black discarding their femininity as if it was possible to discard one's gender or race. Noting that gender, race and class stratification did not operate in isolation from one another but rather interacted to produce compound effects, *Black feminists conceived of the individual as an*

intersectional subject — a site where structures of domination and subordination converge. Intersectional theory did not purport to offer a comprehensive theory of the self. Its aim was to capture those aspects of selfhood that were conditioned by membership in subordinated social groups. Accenting the liabilities of belonging to more than one subordinated group, black feminists likened their position to that of a stateless border-dweller who was not at home anywhere. Black feminists embraced border-dwelling as a model of positive identity . Moreover, proponents of the intersectional self credited multiply oppressed black women with a certain epistemic advantage. In virtue of their suffering and alienation, these black women were well situated not only to discern which values and practices in their heritage deserved allegiance but also to identify shortcomings in the traditions of the groups to which they belonged. Thus, black women were acutely aware of racism within feminism and sexism within the struggle for racial justice. Their intersectional positioning and subjectivity made such insight virtually unavoidable.

Black feminism essentially argued that sexism and racism are inextricable from one another. It was not restricted to black women, but rather designed as an inner current of feminism which tied together gender domination with racism and capitalism. Forms of feminism that strove to overcome sexism and class oppression but ignored or minimize race could perpetuate racism and thereby contribute to the oppression of many people, including women. Black feminists

argued that the liberation of black women entails freedom for all people, since it would require the end of racism, sexism and class oppression. Black women in this category often referred to themselves as womanist. Black women began creating theory and developing a new movement which addressed the combination of problems, sexism, racism, classism, etc., that they had been battling. Black feminist organizations were extremely influential in shaping feminist politics. The phrase, “the intersection of race, class and gender” was axiomatic as a touchstone for doing black feminist work. But accounts of how Black feminists arrived at the intersection do not always show that they were going down all three streets at once from the very start of the movement. To a remarkably consistent degree, African American feminists in the second wave developed what is called the “vanguard center” ideological approach to feminist activism. Facing competing demands on their energies from both the Black and white women’s liberation movements, Black feminists did more than just reject Black Liberation’s sexism and white feminists’ racism, stepping into a limbo created by marginalization. Rather, Black feminists were critical not just of sexism and racism, but also of the middle-class assumptions and values that were built into both movements. In fact, the Black feminist critique of both sexist Black Liberation and racist white women’s liberation was in large part a class critique. All too often, black was equated with black men and woman was equated with white women. As a result, black women were an invisible group whose existence and needs were ignored. The search for a unified black self led

Frantz Fanon¹³ to conclude that the Negro was not any more than a white man. By drawing parallels with white men he further stated that black men fantasized about white women as the epitome of desirability. Fanon's concern was with the romantic and uncritical appropriation of pre-colonial history. The pan African movement homogenized black identity in a way, which was oppressive towards black women. Black was a colour coded politically based term of marking and definition which had meaning only when questions of racial difference and in particular white supremacy were deployed. Moreover black men often asserted their identity in connection with the concept of nation, which was rejected by black feminists. W.E.B Dubois¹⁴ spoke about the twin experience of being black and American and Leopold Sedar Senghor¹⁵ gave nationalistic overtones to his concept of negritude. The concept of nation itself was imperialist. While the feminine was deployed at the symbolic level as mother Africa and many women were involved in nationalist struggles black women were never empowered from this concept. Black men also furthered the myth that black women not only dominate the black family, but were also in complicity with the white power structure to disempower the black man. Many black men used this myth to assert that the black male should be reinstated into his rightful role as head of the Black family, of course, that meant that the black woman's role was reduced solely to supporting her man, often at the expense of her own self-definition. From a Black Nationalist point of view, anything that wasn't in line with this male-dominant/female-subordinate model was considered to be anti-Black

family. The purpose of the Black feminism was to develop theory which could adequately address the way race, gender and class were interconnected in their lives and to take action to stop racist, sexist and capitalist discrimination.

Black women faced constant sexism in the Black Liberation Movement. There were several different movements for black liberation like the Civil Rights Movement, Black Nationalism, the Black Panthers, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and others which did not really address the needs of black women. The movements, though ostensibly for the liberation of the black race, were in word and deed for the liberation of the black male. Race was extremely sexualized in the rhetoric of the movement. Freedom was equated with manhood and the freedom of blacks with the redemption of black masculinity. Many black men in the movement were interested in controlling black women's sexuality. Not only did the Civil Rights Movement primarily focus only on the oppression of black men, but many black women faced severe sexism within Civil Rights groups such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The Feminist Movement focused on the problems faced by white women. For instance, earning the power to work outside of the home was not an accomplishment for Black feminists; they had been working all along. Neither movement confronted the issues that concerned black women specifically. Because of their intersectional position, black women were being systematically ignored by both movements.

bell hooks¹⁶ comments that during the Black Liberation Movement, black men overemphasized white male sexual exploitation of black womanhood as a way to explain their disapproval of inter-racial relationships. It was, however, no contradiction of their political views to have inter-racial relationships themselves. Again, part of freedom and manhood was the right of men to have indiscriminate access to and control over any woman's body.

There was also disregard for the humanity and equality of black women. Black men in the Black Liberation Movement often made sexist statements, which were largely accepted without criticism. Amiri Baraka¹⁷ stated that the separation of black men and women was the cause of their need for self-consciousness, and eventual healing. He argued for the erasure of black separateness by providing a model, which projected healthy African identities, which embraced a value system that acknowledged no separation, but only that of the divine complement that the black woman is for her man. He argued that black people did not believe in the 'equality' of men and women.

We cannot understand what the devils and the devilishly influenced mean when they say equality for women. We could never be equals... Nature has not provided thus.¹⁸

Amiri Baraka insisted that men and women were unequal by nature. This was an attitude, which he considered healthy and worthy of promotion to other black men and women. Not only were men and women different, he said, but there was no reciprocity in their relationship to each other, hence, a black man

was not 'for' his woman as a black woman was 'for' her man. The two did not submit to one another, rather, the woman submitted to her black man. Eldridge Cleaver even admitted to sexually abusing black women living in ghettos. He felt that it was nothing deviant on his part but the norm. It must be stressed that it was not only many of the men but also a great number of the women in the Black Liberation Movement who were enforcing strict gender roles on black women. In much the same way that women in dominant societies do not resist but encourage sexism, black women fell prey to perpetuating patriarchy within the black community.

To divert black women from their own freedom it was often argued that the black woman was already liberated, racism was the primary or only oppression black women had to confront, feminism was nothing but man-hating, women's issues were narrow, apolitical concerns, people of color needed to deal with the larger struggle and feminists were nothing but Lesbians.

Blackness for black men also relied heavily on the concept of black nation in which black women had no role to play. These myths illustrated long-held misconceptions about black women, including the belief that the extraordinary strength black women have shown in the face of tremendous oppression reveals their liberation. In fact, this "freedom"-working outside the home, supporting the family economically as well as emotionally, and heading the households was often manipulated by black men at the expense of black women. Black women needed to define the goals of the Black feminism and to

determine its focus. Several authors have put forth definitions of the Black Feminism.

Among the most notable were Alice Walker's definition and the Combahee River Collective Statement. Alice Walker uses the term "Womanist" to describe the Black Feminism and she rejected all that was oppressive for women. She wrote:

Womanist From womanish. (opp. of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color... Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one... Responsible. In charge. Serious.

Also: A woman who loves other women,. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility(values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people,male and female. Not separatist, except periodically, for health.¹⁹

In addition she supplemented her definition saying, Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender in rejection of what was argued by American feminists. Noteworthy were the emphasis on self-determination, appreciation for all aspects of womanhood and the commitment to the survival of both men and women. This definition was both affirming and challenging for it endorsed a woman's stretching of her personal boundaries while at the same time called on women to maintain their connections to the rest of humanity. The entire self,

which was connected to others in the community, was valued in womanism. Whereas white feminism prioritized gender above other marginalizing factors, womanism sought to balance racial, gender and class/social differences while recognizing and respecting individual difference. Walker's construction of womanism and the different meanings she invested in it was an attempt to situate the black woman in history and culture and at the same time rescue her from the negative and inaccurate stereotypes that masked her in western society. First, Walker inscribed the black woman as a knowing/thinking subject who was always in pursuit of knowledge, "wanting to know more and in greater depth than was considered 'good' for one," thus interrogating the epistemological exclusions she endured in intellectual life in general and feminist scholarship in particular. Second, she highlighted the black woman's agency, strength, capability and independence. Opposed to gender separatism that bedevils feminism, womanism presented an alternative for black women by framing their survival in the context of the survival of their community where the fate of women and that of men was inextricably linked. As Patricia Hill Collins²⁰ aptly noted, that many black women viewed feminism as a movement that at best, was exclusively for women and at worst, dedicated to attacking or eliminating men. Womanism supplied a way for black women to address gender-oppression without overtly focussing only on sexism and also allows for fluid multiple identities.

The Combahee River Collective Statement²¹ set forth a more specific, political definition for black women which stated the most general statement of their politics at the time which was that they were actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual and class oppression and saw as their particular task, the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression were interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions created the conditions of their lives. As black women they saw Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppression that all women of color faced.

It was important for Black feminism to address the various ways that racism, sexism and capitalism all worked to perpetuate each other. Using the term black feminism disrupted the racism inherent in presenting feminism as a for-whites-only ideology and political movement. Inserting the adjective black challenged the assumed whiteness of feminism and disrupted the false universal of this term for white women. Since many white women thought that black women lack feminist consciousness, the term Black feminist highlighted the contradictions underlying the assumed whiteness of feminism and served to remind white women that they comprised neither the only nor the normative feminists. For black studies, which emphasized shared blackness the term feminism disrupted their assumption that they are the only authority on blackness. bell hooks wrote

Increasingly, patriarchy is offered as the solution to the crisis black people face. Black women face a culture where practically everyone wants us to stay in our place. Black females and males committed to feminist thinking cannot state often enough that patriarchy will not heal our wounds. On a basic level we can begin to change our everyday lives in a positive, fundamental way by embracing gender equality and with it a vision of mutual partnership that includes the sharing of resources, both material and spiritual.²²

Michelle Wallace²³ envisioned black women who would take their lives into their hands and fully and truly live lives of meaning and substance. She wanted black women to realize the importance their lives had, to realize that they were more than a group of women who have had bad things happen to them. She wanted black women to recover, reclaim and become reacquainted with their history of glories, accomplishments and triumphs. She wanted black women to step up to the plate and take on the responsibilities that come with being women and all that comes with it.

Some black men have relegated black women to being “Stand By” equipment, there laying to the side, put into the corner, to be used at the discretion of some men who have nothing but contempt for the woman. Nothing but callous disregard for the woman’s feelings, nor respect for her needs or desires²⁴

Black feminism traced its antecedents back to those of the colonial era and to Africa. Black women’s oppression in America was identified as a

domination that had been structured along three interdependent dimensions by Patricia Hill Collins²⁵. First was the exploitation of black women's labour, the ghettoisation of black women in service occupations. Second was the political dimension of oppression whereby black women were excluded from holding public office, forbidden to vote, fostering a pattern of disenfranchisement and relegating them to underfunded southern schools which kept women from attaining full literacy rates. Finally the controlling images of black women that originated during the slave era was seen as an attestation to the ideological dimension of black women's oppression. The stereotype descriptions of black women as mammies, jezebels, breeder women of slavery and ever present welfare mothers were also objected to by the Black feminists. This seamless web of polity, economy and ideology was seen as a highly effective system of control to keep black women in a subordinate place. Black feminists developed their resistance around notions of female Afrocentricity. An Afrocentric female worldview was regarded as distinct from the individualistic worldview in which they were living and indicated a subculture of female resistance. At the intersection of blackness and femininity they uncovered the interlocking systems of race, class and gender oppression. These three categories were seen not only as a vertical hegemony from top to bottom but also interstructured horizontally. Although Black feminism originated in America it traced its antecedents back to Africa. Patricia Hill Collins calls it Afro American feminism but other critics have called for a broadening of the term. Also in the wake of continuing

imperialism black women critics like Carole Boyce Davies²⁶ have called for an inclusion for black women from Africa in an effort to reconnect black women dislocated through space and time and view their subjectivity as a migratory subjectivity. Black feminists argued for a coexistence of the multiplicity of black female voices , a fluidity which resented a fixed narrowing of identity.

Buchi Emecheta does not belong to the settled black diaspora but migrates from Africa after having spent a substantial time there. The diversity not the homogeneity of Buchi Emecheta's experience as a black woman identifies historical and experiential differences within and between communities, regions, cities and women across national cultures and between diasporas but also recognizes other kinds of differences that place, position and locate black women in a changed scenario. The point is not that we identify the differences between black women for they are always negotiating different kinds of differences of gender, of race, of sexuality or of class. What is more significant is that these antagonisms refuse to be neatly aligned within the white feminist discourse or the black discourse, they are simply not reducible to each other, they refuse to coalesce around a single axis of differentiation. Black women like Buchi Emecheta are always negotiating not with a single set of oppositions that place them in the same relation to others but with a series of different positionalities, each has its point of subjective identification within the Black feminist discourse. The way in which a transgressive politics in one domain is constantly sutured and stabilized by reactionary or unexamined politics in

another explains in large part the focus on black female identity. Therefore Buchi Emecheta's identity can only be viewed as a series of boundary crossings as argued by Black feminists. For writers like Buchi Emecheta border crossings are more than metaphor. Emecheta's narratives describe borders of geography, of history, of culture and of memory that are crossed and negotiated, as well as the patriarchal systems that are transferred across borders. She does so through an examination of the lives of black women, who are often exiled sometimes locally and at other times through transcontinental journeys.

Buchi Emecheta concludes that if exile is the construction of a safe space it is only partially so, with exiled black women struggling to maintain a hold to their roots, as well as trying to deploy the new spaces in which they find themselves. Borders and boundaries are not just material barriers to be crossed – often in flight, sometimes in hope – but are fluid, shifting and changing.

Of course, these new spaces are often not safe spaces for exiled women, who have to negotiate the interrelationships between the supposed boundaries of racism, class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality. In revisiting intersectionality, Avtar Brah argues that the supposed boundaries of race, gender and class need to be deconstructed: they are not distinct and isolated realms of experience.

Buchi Emecheta takes us across the boundaries of time, to the colonial domination of Africa. This is not because the past necessarily provides answers for the present, but because critique and insight gained can help shed new light on current predicaments. For Emecheta social class and its intersections with

gender, race and sexuality are simultaneously subjective, structural and about social positions and everyday practices of black women. For black women intersectionality needs to be both historically rooted and forward looking in order to challenge the power games that are currently played out on the world stage. Emecheta works within, through and across the boundaries of cultural differences, moving towards complex and dynamic understandings of intersectionality.

Buchi Emecheta's journey from Africa to Britain and back again does not end in a radical assertion of herself as someone who is essentially only black or as someone who is essentially only a woman but both.

Donna Haraway²⁷ points towards the painful fragmentation among feminists along every possible fault line that has made the concept of a woman elusive, an excuse for the matrix of women's domination of each other. She sees hope in black women like Buchi Emecheta whom she calls sister outsider.

Sister outsider hints at a possibility of a world of survival not because of her innocence but because of her ability to live on boundaries, to write without the founding myth of original wholeness, with its inescapable apocalypse of final return to a deathly oneness that man has imagined to be the innocent and all powerful mother, freed at the end from another spiral of appropriation by her son.²⁸

Buchi Emecheta is in a paradoxical situation where she is already implicated within a number of pre-existing power hierarchies as a black woman. In asserting her race she can be seen as betraying the cause of feminists and in

asserting her femininity she can be seen as betraying the cause of black theorists. It is only within Black feminism that she can speak as a black woman. Resistance for Buchi Emecheta does not end up as an oppositional act of political intention, neither is it the negation of the other black women as a difference once perceived. Resistance for Buchi Emecheta is the ambivalence generated within hegemonistic discourses as she articulates signs of difference reimplicating her within the deferential relations of power hierarchies. As black feminists take into account race, class and gender domination, they defy the limitation of setting up another hierarchy.

The understanding of power not as merely domination but also productive of subjects and identities explains in large part the focus on black female identity. The identity of Buchi Emecheta is not a fixed monolithic structure but a lived discursive experience, never complete always in progress. As argued by Alice Walker, Buchi Emecheta searches for a woman's culture and moves backwards trying to locate it in Africa. She can retrieve her identity only if she addresses the interlocking matrix of domination and like Black feminists she attempts a journey back to Africa.

Buchi Emecheta's affirmation with Alice Walker is possible because like her she faces trouble in tracing an origin that has too many barriers especially as colonization has continued in a less overt form. She rejects identification with the European feminists in their outright rejection of all men as oppressors

besides the fact that the sisterhood they speak of never reaches out to her but she reserves the right to explore her femininity, which rejects black sexist attitudes. Buchi Emecheta argues for a fluid identity that resists closure like Black feminists.

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Chapter III Writing and Representation

Helene Cixous' notion of the female aesthetic is useless without the realization that all writing up until the point of realization is that of the masculine world -- written for, about and by a masculine voice, regardless of the sex of the writer. This body of male-dominated writing has been "run by a libidinal and cultural - hence political, typically masculine - economy and this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously."¹

Women have been silenced historically due to this cultural domination and it is because of this fact that language is necessarily male. It is possible to identify the female voice through the barriers of this repression, however Cixous' female aesthetic can never be truly embraced and identified until it is fully extricated from the male language. "Woman has never had *her* turn to speak" and because of this, she has not had time to develop her own literary history based on a female language. Helene Cixous proposes that "woman must put herself into the text - as into the world and into history - by her own movement" and thereby equates the act of writing with the acquisition of agency. This writing must stem from woman's own personal experience, an experience which is most likely sexual but necessarily rooted in the body. She instructs her reader: "Write yourself. Your body must be heard," implying that it is an expression of the body which appears on paper when a woman writes, as a woman's language is centered on and draws from her body: 'A woman doesn't

'speak,' she throws her trembling body forward.' In directing the woman writer to her own body as a source of inspiration to her female voice, Cixous implies that the female body is isolated from the male construction of language and literature and consequently, her body can liberate her. In this way, when a woman refers to her body as a means of writing her experience, woman is exclusive to her own sex and operates from outside of the traditional and historical paradigm, in that she writes in a language that is inherently and purely female, one which identifies with her own body exclusively. Necessarily, women who write this "feminine text, cannot fail to be more than subversive."

At the present time, defining a feminine practice of writing is impossible with an impossibility that will continue; for this practice will never be able to be theorized, enclosed, coded, but it does not mean that it does not exist. However it will always exceed the discourse governing the phallogentric system; it takes place and will take place somewhere other than in the territories subordinated to philosophical-theoretical domination. It will not let itself think except through subjects that break automatic functions, border runners never subjugated by any authority. But one can begin to speak. Begin to point out some effects, some elements of unconscious drives, some relations of the feminine Imaginary to the Real, to writing. Luce Irigaray² focuses on the child's pre-Oedipal phase when experience and knowledge is based on bodily contact, primarily with the

mother. Here lies one major interest of Irigaray's: the mother-daughter relationship, which she considers devalued in patriarchal society.

By introducing the idea of an imaginary father into religious discourse, Kristeva³ challenges the phallogocentric religious symbolic systems. She suggests that the semiotic contains the pre-Oedipal position of love relations recalled in religious symbolism as signs of the maternal. Kristeva distinguishes between two aspects of modalities of language, the semiotic and the symbolic. The symbolic is what constitutes the subject. The semiotic in Kristeva's usage, is the physical basis of language, its sounds, tones, and rhythms, originating in the body. The semiotic, as physical, is therefore "a psychic modality logically and chronologically prior to the sign: without this bodily basis there could be no symbolic, no language or culture". By considering difference, semiotic opens possibility of diversities and interpretation. Therefore, semiotic is a way of communication, which is closer to reality and 'truth'. For Kristeva, the semiotic is gendered feminine. Kristeva describes the relation between the semiotic and the symbolic as a dialectic oscillation. Without the symbolic, all significations would be babble or delirium. Yet, without the semiotic, all signification would be empty and have no importance for our lives. Signification requires both the semiotic and symbolic. Kristeva observes that males and females are not innately different but become viewed differently due to their social positions, claiming that there is no opposition between feminine and masculine in pre-

Oedipality. Kristeva chooses maternity as a prototype because it breaks down borders between nature and culture, subject and other. For Kristeva, the concepts man and woman are the products not of nature but of signifying practice. Since the rational orderliness of the symbolic is culturally coded masculine while the affect-laden allure of the semiotic is culturally coded feminine, it follows that no discourse is purely masculine or purely feminine. The masculine symbolic and the feminine semiotic are equally indispensable to the speaking subject, whatever this individual's socially assigned gender may be. It is not possible, then, to be an unsulliedly masculine self or an unsulliedly feminine self. Every subject of enunciation every self amalgamates masculine and feminine discursive modalities. According to Kristeva, what society systematically represses provides clues to what is oppressive about society and how society needs to be changed. Thus, she discerns a vital ethical potential in the semiotic. Since this ethical potential is explicitly linked to the feminine, Kristeva's account of the self displaces "masculine" adherence to principle as the prime mode of ethical agency and recognizes the urgent need for a "feminine" ethical approach.

Female writing for these feminists leaned towards a dismantling of all male phallic structures without which genuine female writing could not emerge. Although black women do relate their writing to creativity, theory falls silent as to how a black woman will inscribe her blackness and femininity through

writing and her resistance not only against gender oppression but also class oppression.

Elaine Showalter⁴ coined the term 'gynocritics' to describe literary criticism based in a feminine perspective. Probably the best description Showalter gives of gynocriticism is

In contrast to a fixation on male literature, the program of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories. Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture.⁵

Gynocritics aims to understand the specificity of women's writing not as a product of sexism but as a fundamental aspect of female reality. Showalter acknowledges the difficulty of "defining the unique difference of women's writing" which she says is "a slippery and demanding task" in "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness". She says that gynocritics may never succeed in understanding the special differences of women's writing or realize a distinct female literary tradition. But, with grounding in theory and historical research, Showalter sees gynocriticism as a way to "learn something solid, enduring, and real about the relation of women to literary culture". When first published *A Literature of their Own*(1977) quickly set the stage for the creative explosion of

feminist literary studies that transformed the field. Launching a major new area for literary investigation, the book uncovered the long but neglected tradition of women writers and the development of their fiction. It includes assessments of famous writers such as Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Margaret Drabble and Doris Lessing to name but a few of those prolific and successful Victorian novelists. Showalter traces the history of women's literature, suggesting that it can be divided into three phases, feminine, feminist and female. In the feminine phase , women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture and internalized its assumptions about female nature. The feminist phase was characterized by women's writing that protested against male standards and values and advocated women's rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. The female phase is one of self-discovery. Showalter says, "women reject both imitation and protest—two forms of dependency—and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature."

A Room of One's Own (1929) gave voice to what Virginia Woolf saw as a painful predicament for women writers:

It needs little skill in psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who has tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled apart by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her own health and sanity to a certainty.⁶

In this work, Virginia Woolf asks for economic independence and privacy, as well as for control over marriage, reproduction and education. Even as she argues for androgyny, a sameness of experience without discrimination of resources, Virginia Woolf also sees that "Shakespeare's sister" would be "Judith," not another Shakespeare. On the one hand, her ideal suggests that women should fight to overcome the forces that sexually objectify ("mirror"), refuse to educate and entrap her. However, a sense of alienation still pervades the work. This eagerness for sameness, with the recognition of difference isn't surprising, since she explains that women have been alienated from patriarchal culture and institutions: "Again if one is a woman, one is often surprised by a sudden splitting of consciousness ... she becomes... outside of it, alien and critical."

Virginia Woolf leaves with a sense of urgency, danger and promise. She has explained her views on women and fiction, but she has, in some sense, left the project of "figuring how it will all work" to others. In that sense, she is drawing the reader into the conversation, forcing him or her through stream of consciousness to see what she sees, know what she knows and then decide. Woolf's answer is a materialist answer. That is, Woolf says that there have been few great women in history because material circumstances limited women's lives and achievements. Because women were not educated and were not allowed to control wealth, they necessarily led lives that were less publicly significant than those of men. *Until these material limitations are overcome,*

women will continue to achieve, publicly, less than men. Woolf's materialism implicitly contests notions that women's inferior social status is a natural outcome of class inferiority, which has to be corrected. Yet Woolf is able to ignore the fact that her room is tainted with the spoils of the Empire.

White feminists saw writing broadly as a tool by which they could escape the limitations imposed on them by male hierarchies and focused on women's oppression. Black women's writing was still excluded from this discourse. Black feminists argue that race and class are not explored as factors which could alter a woman's way of writing. Also black women have not defined their writing particularly as one opposed to male writing.

Playing in the Dark (1992) focuses primarily on the literary imagination of European Americans and how it is impacted by Africans. In particular, Morrison examines the kind of roles African female characters have been given in novels and other works not written by them and what ends these roles have served, whether artistic or societal. To this task Morrison⁷ brings a unique set of critical tools and concepts. She asserts a new paradigm by which to reconsider the history of American literature, namely the presence of Africanness or blackness at the centre of American literature and culture. Morrison asserts that American literature has depended on a "real or fabricated Africanist presence" to create, through contrast, a "sense of Americanness." She further expresses her concern about the manner in which white authors and culture silenced black

voices and culture, relegating conflicts to a 'blank darkness,' to conveniently bound and violently silenced black bodies," not only because she sees this metaphoric appropriation of the black body as a form of theft, but because she sees the consequences of this appropriation as a "master narrative that spoke for Africans" instead of allowing them to speak for themselves.

Morrison believes that the impact of Africans and later African Americans, on the literature of America has been so pervasive that it needs to be recognized as a continuous history unto its own, a history which she labels, more frequently, as an "Africanist presence." In spite of the paucity of work in support of this contention, Morrison argues that American literature - as well as the body politic, the church, and other definitive elements of American society - have shaped significantly the dynamics of this coexistence, often negating blackness. Boldly, the author raises the question of whether "the major and championed characteristics of American national literature - individualism, masculinity, serial engagement versus historical isolation; acute and ambiguous moral problematics; the thematics of innocence coupled with an obsession with figurations of death and hell - are not in fact responses to a dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence" which views blackness as a negative aspect to privileged whiteness.

According to Morrison, the formation of an Africanist presence seems to have followed a roughly three-part development: The first and least

complex stage that of "hierarchic difference," established the Europeans' belief in their moral and intellectual superiority over Africans. This belief enabled the enslavement of Africans and their status as slaves became a crucial factor in the reinforcement of that difference. Here the identity of the African is associated with ignorance, wildness, savagery - clearly something foreign and inferior.

The second fundamental stage in the construction of race in American literature is the use of the Africanist presence as surrogate for meditations on the nature of white social identity. As Morrison states in *Playing in the Dark* (1992), "The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious." When early American writers represented African people, they did not do so to discuss the historical plight of black individuals and their ungranted rights, but to meditate on the fissures and uncertainties that lurked within the construction of their own New World. The presence of an enslaved people served as the playing field for the imagination in the construction of freedom and autonomy in the new society.

Morrison finds this process of surrogacy most clearly in the Romance genre. While Romance as a whole, she agrees, was an exploration of the contending forces and issues that were born in the encounter with the New World, it was the black population that became the element upon which these fears and questions were projected and played out:

The slave population, it could be and was assumed, offered itself up as surrogate selves for meditation on problems of human freedom, its lure and its elusiveness. This black population was available for meditations on terror, the terror of European outcasts, their dread of failure, powerlessness, nature without limits, natal loneliness, internal aggression, evil, sin and greed. In other words, this slave population was understood to have offered itself up for reflections on human freedom in terms other than abstractions of human potential and the rights of man.

Throughout these meditations, black people were used to signify the "darker" side of the American Dream, the side that consisted of failure, powerlessness and exploitation.

The final stage in the construction of race is also highly metaphorical; here blackness becomes a "fully blossomed threat of dread and desire". African American characters or other configurations of blackness are used to articulate a polarized phenomenology of experience (purity vs. sin, evil vs. good, moral vs. immoral, etc.) whereby they are representative of either extreme. As Morrison states, ". . . images of blackness can be evil and protective, rebellious and forgiving, fearful and desirable". Africans can be shadowy, recalcitrant slaves on the verge of revolt or they can be smiling, self-mocking servants enabling the objectives of their white masters. While black

women in America finally succeeded in creating a literary tradition of their own, black women writers from Africa still had a long way to go.

The emergence of female writers, such as Emecheta, challenges male assumptions that include not only the female's submission to the male but also her approval and pleasurable response to that submission. Carole Boyce Davies writes of the tension found in the works of many critics of African literatures, especially female critics like Emecheta. These critics, she says, work out of a growing awareness of the requirement to balance both the need to liberate African peoples from neo-colonialism and other forms of race and class oppression, coupled with a respect for certain features of traditional African cultures, and the recognition that a feminist consciousness is necessary in examining the position of women in African societies. Davies then outlines the issues of women writers in Africa including the relatively small number of women writers and the presentation of women in fiction written by African men, as well as the development of an African feminist criticism. In her treatment of the latter concern, she lists four major areas which African feminist critics tend to address: the development of the canon of African women writers, the examination of stereotyped images of women in African literature, the study of African women writers and the development of an African female aesthetic and the examination of women and the oral tradition. The seminal importance of black women writing is that these are texts written from the 'affective experience of social marginality' and from the perspective

of the edge' -- they offer alternative ways of seeing and thinking and thereby allow for narratives of 'plurality, fluidity and of always emergent becoming. Emecheta is caught between two cultures and two worlds in narratives characterized by ambiguity, ambivalence and multiple-voiced discourse, all of which evince the writer's determination to expose imaginatively the colonial heritage of centre-periphery conflicts, ethnic discrimination, gender oppression and the migrant female experience in multiracial communities.

Buchi Emecheta's writing too tries to recover that black female African presence and she looks back to Africa, at first as a migrant in Britain and then by exploring more of Africa. She tries to encode not just race and gender but also the undefined African female presence which she cannot recover completely because of the barriers already instituted in place. Her writing again escapes labelling. She not only incorporates traditional African words but also writes in English. Her writing can neither be called English nor African. Emecheta's novels which span the oral and written traditions of Africa, seek to show how women, as speaking subjects, have been transformed into written objects through the collusion of the imperialistic subject and the patriarchal subject and how these beleaguered written objects are reinscribing their relevance as speaking/writing subjects. As the transition was made from oral to written literature, new imperatives for control emerged. The factors that legitimated centrality shifted from those based upon age and sex to those based upon knowledge of the colonizers' languages that was usually English. The

sexual politics and Victorian ideals of colonial education created a hierarchy privileging men by virtually erasing any meaningful female presence. African women had a tough struggle to come to the fore. Black women traditionally were not only performers and disseminators of beliefs, cultural ideals and personal/collective history, but also composers who sometimes, transformed and re-created an existing body of oral traditions in order to incorporate woman-centered perspectives. African women writers have often acknowledged their indebtedness to "mothers" who were great story-tellers. Buchi Emecheta too pays tribute to her "Big mother":

But the Ibo story teller was different. She was always one's mother. My Big Mother was my aunt....It was a result of those visits to Ibuza, coupled with the enjoyment and information those stories used to give us, that I determined when I grew older that I was going to be a story teller, like my Big Mother.¹¹

Black women's writing has emerged as a wide expanse of physical, intellectual, and psychological space with its own dynamics, contradictions and tensions, an immense heterogeneous space punctuated by boundaries and edges which define the limits of numerous different pockets of realities. By bringing into focus the complexities, contradictions and tensions of the marginal spaces Emecheta designates black female writing as an ambiguous space, she highlights its heteroglossic nature and criticizes the pervasive concern with binary opposites which are bent on viewing the black woman as a one dimensional figure.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis⁸ describes liminality as fluidity, flux and "constant transition". According to her, "both/and" dynamics deny the validity of polarization. This sort of dynamics is definitely at work in the writings of African black women like Emecheta whose liminality results from their positionality in an ambiguous space that is neither "here" nor "there." Sitting "on the edge," African women writers are nevertheless sustained by a fear of living on the precipice. The cultural difference often associated with the alienated colonized is, in their case, further complicated and intensified by the sexual politics of their environment. Buchi Emecheta addresses some of these issues in a paper delivered at the Second African Writers' Conference in Stockholm in (1986). As she states:

I am just an ordinary writer, an ordinary writer who has to write, because if I didn't write I think I would have to be put in an asylum. Some people have to communicate, and I happen to be one of them. I have tried several times to take university appointments and work as a critic, but each time I have packed up and left without giving notice. I found that I could not bring myself to criticize other people's work. The writer also has a crucial control over the subject s/he writes about. For myself, I don't deal with great ideological issues. I write about the little happenings of everyday life. Being a woman, and African born, I see things through an African woman's eyes. I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African women I know. I did not know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist then I am an African feminist with a small f.⁹

Despite the constraining gaze of the male critic, African women writers of the second generation like Emecheta hint at the possibility of change. Although non-conformist characters in Emecheta's novels continue to be marginalized in her works, the inevitability of change is never in doubt. In this regard, the endings of Emecheta's novels assume great significance. In *The Joys of Motherhood*(1979), for example, the open-endedness of the conclusion is full of foreboding and hints of a new dawn:

And her reward? Did she not have the greatest funeral Ibuza had ever seen? It took Oshia three years to pay off the money he had borrowed to show the world what a good son he was. That was why people failed to understand why she did not answer their prayers, for what else could a woman want but to have sons who would give her a decent burial? Nnu Ego had it all, yet still did not answer prayers for children.¹⁰

Here Nnu Ego's refusal to answer the prayers of childless couples is a bold statement of protest, albeit a posthumous one. Thus the end of the novel announces both the death of the old Nnu Ego and the birth of a new one. Emecheta, as a writer, has to "transgress" at least two taboos: that of a woman daring to be a writer and that of using "the language of the Other." As spokeswoman for "silenced black women," Emecheta has sought to "subvert patriarchal colonial history," and as a postcolonial subject, she has shrewdly circumvented the cultural split threatened by the inherent incompatibilities of her mother tongue and English by adroitly deconstructing the colonial order.

Because Emecheta's own experience of Western acculturation gave her mastery of the colonizer's language as well as access to public space, she foregrounds language and space in her texts. Emecheta uses English, the colonial language, to chart her own life story and to recover--via translation--her oral tradition, the maternal legacy of song, legend and women's stories. And she reinterprets traditional female space so that it is no longer controlled by the male patriarchal gaze but is transformed instead into the locus of relationships. Finally, her appropriation of language and space leads to a confrontation with two patriarchal discourses, one English, the other African. On one hand, the novelist explores colonial archives in order to rewrite the history of England's conquest of Africa by reinserting women into the pages of history. On the other hand, she challenges the African patriarch's dominating gaze so as to empower black women and restore their subjectivity. Emecheta's concern with language, includes the act of speaking and more significantly, of writing as speaking. This preoccupation is particularly acute in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) as reflected in the relationship between orality and textuality and the necessity of developing new ways of writing and reading, perspectives which might unveil silences and establish a complicity between storytellers, writers and readers. The conspiratorial mystique of Emecheta is directed not only at cultural conventions and literary genres, but subversively at the very nature of writing itself and the ability or inability of writing to articulate women's experience. This more palpably subversive thrust is evidenced in the novel in the tension

between orality and textuality. The recuperation of one's discourse cannot be accomplished by writing alone. While it is possible to read in Emecheta's texts a narrative of woman's oppression, it is equally possible to hear in her texts a multiplicity of often contradictory stories, perspectives and meanings that may tell us about the black female significance. In this sense, Emecheta's novels must be read as multi-voiced discourse.

Feminist and postcolonial theories alike have begun by simply subverting images of existing hierarchies in a patriarchal or colonial setting. This strategy was not very effective, because a person may belong to more than one group simultaneously as Trinh Minh-ha,¹² suggests by proposing the "triple bind" in which Third World women may find themselves being colonized once by the colonizer then by the patriarchal order, caught between the problems of race and gender. Women writers face these predicaments in addition to the ambivalence vis-à-vis the language in which they write: "Writer of color? Woman writer? Or woman of color? Which comes first? Where does she place her loyalties? On the other hand, she often finds herself at odds with language, which partakes in the white-male-norm ideology and is used predominantly as a vehicle to circulate established power relations". Contemporary black female authors like Emecheta have attempted to articulate themselves through which they hope to be able to express the totality of their identities as they create new methodologies for others who wish to grapple with the continually shifting

discussion of identity. What is at once characteristic and suggestive about Emecheta's writing is its interlocutory or dialogic character, reflecting not only a relationship with the others but an internal dialogue with the plural aspects of self that constitute the matrix of black female subjectivity. If black women speak from a multiple and complex social, historical and cultural positionality which, in effect constitutes black female subjectivity, then Emecheta's writing refers to the expression of a multiple dialogic of differences based on this complex subjectivity. Black women writers enter into testimonial discourse with black men as blacks, with white women as women and with black women as black women. At the same time, they enter into a 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. It is the complexity of these simultaneously homogeneous and heterogeneous social and discursive domains out of which black women write and construct themselves (as blacks and women and, often, as poor, black women) that enables black women writers authoritatively to speak to and engage both hegemonic and ambiguously nonhegemonic discourse. In negotiating the discursive dilemma or their characters, these writers accomplish two objectives: the self-inscription of black

womanhood and the establishment of a dialogue of discourses with the others. The self-inscription of black women requires disruption, rereading and rewriting the conventional and canonical stories, as well as revising the conventional generic forms that convey these stories. Through this interventionist, intertextual and revisionary activity, black women writers enter into dialogue with the discourses of the others. Disruption, the initial response to hegemonic discourse and revision that is rewriting or rereading together suggest a model for reading black and female literary expression. Black women like Emecheta, speaking out of the specificity of their racial and gender experiences are able to communicate in a diversity of discourses.

END NOTES

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Chapter IV Writing as Breaking Silence

An autobiography, from the Greek *autos*, 'self', *bios*, 'life' and *graphein*, 'write', is a biography written by the subject or composed conjointly with a collaborative writer. Women have been writing autobiographical works for centuries and these texts are a valuable source of information about their lives and times. They reflect the personal experiences of their authors as well as the larger cultural, political and intellectual contexts in which they lived and wrote. In their struggle to speak in their own voices and make themselves heard black women have found in autobiography the apt means of story telling their lives from their own personal perspective. Dislocation is a significant trope in the work of writers like Emecheta who have made literal journeys from the Third world to the First or who have to journey against certain fixed notions of origin, and negotiate across heavily policed zones of identity. Emecheta's principal concerns include memory, silenced history and transnational discursive border crossing as articulated from the point of view of the black woman. Her first two works are fictional autobiographies exposing the problems faced by women like her for whom categories of belonging have been made unstable as a consequence of the experience of postcolonial migrant circumstances. Black female characters with hyphenated identities pose problems in terms of classification and therefore raise questions about notions of essential difference. Emecheta is involved in multiple border crossings and her protagonist replicates the displacement engendered by her own experiences. Buchi Emecheta, fictionalizes her personal experiences to explore the various ways in which

migration impacts individual identity. Emecheta explores the migrant black woman's disorientation as a result of movements, transformations and self-reconstruction that must occur during the quest for a useable identity. The struggle to overcome obstacles in the country of destination leads to a transformation of the individual and ultimately to a search for an identity that involves multiple forms of negotiation. Emecheta's displaced characters endure tumultuous unrest—experiencing a sense of dislocation as they attempt to embrace their pasts and associated demons—while adjusting to new environs that are, in most cases, as oppressive as those left behind. At the centre of Emecheta's novels is the notion that the black female subject at the turn of the century is always already "framed" in relation to the dominant white social structure and thus affirms, subverts or at least navigates through a social arrangement marked by "domination and subjugation," the white public's "network of opinions and desires" and the always ambivalent cultural compromises of occupancy and desire. Buchi Emecheta's writing not only breaks her silence but her writing also refuses to project a unified female subjectivity demanded by criticism centering either only on female roles or only on imperialism. Autobiography is born out of a particular introspection, in this case as it relates to black female experience. It also speaks to a construction of one's own reality and it is through this reality that the relationship between the self and the "other" can be understood. Autobiography also elevates the value of

individual experience, through which Buchi Emecheta explores the world as it appears to her as a black woman.

Literary critics seeking an authentic representation of the African woman saw Buchi Emecheta's novels as a veritable goldmine for representing the inside view of an African migrant woman. The problem lies in the fact that critics have already disputed over what a woman's identity or her writing should be. Despite the dual imagery of the self/other dichotomy argued by European feminists in their respective ways whereby female subjectivity is constructed, a perfectly other woman, black, female, colonized is impossible without Black feminism. Black women live out a moral wisdom that is different from that of black men because of the uniqueness of black women's vulnerability and exploitation and different from whites because whites endorse a system of oppression which was extended by European feminism. This moral wisdom does not rescue black women from the bewildering pressures and perplexities of institutionalized social evils, but rather, exposes those ethical assumptions, which are inimical to the ongoing survival of black womanhood. The moral counsel of black women captures the ethical qualities of what is real and what is of value to women in the black world. The resulting narratives bear witness to their wisdom in the face of the insidious effects of racism, sexism and economic exploitation on women of their communities. In the end, black women's literature offers the sharpest available view of the black women's soul.

Buchi Emecheta writes *Second Class Citizen* (1974) and *In The Ditch* (1972) in a fictional autobiographical form. Both these novels are reprinted together as *Adah's Story*. The protagonist of *Second Class Citizen* (1974) is a woman named Adah who is born in Nigeria and belongs to the Igbo tribe. Adah is a young girl who dreams of visiting the United Kingdom. The Ibo women who lived in Lagos were preparing for the arrival of the town's first lawyer from the United Kingdom. The title "United Kingdom" when pronounced by Adah's father sounded so heavy, like the type of noise one associated with bombs. It was so deep, so mysterious, that Adah's father always voiced it as if he were speaking of "God's Holiest of Holies". Going to the United Kingdom must surely be like paying God a visit. The United Kingdom, then, must be like heaven.

Adah's dream is to go to the United Kingdom to study and to see the greatness that she thinks is there. Her troubles begin from the first moment she realizes what her dream is. First she is not allowed to go to school because she is a girl and the family does not want to spend the money for her to go. She is a girl of her own mind though and she goes to school anyway which ends up getting her mother in trouble.

Her next set of problems occurs when her father dies and she is sent to live with her mother's brother. Any money that her family had went to her brother's education, and the only reason she was kept in school was because

it was thought that her uncle would be able to get more money for her when they finally married her off.

Children, especially girls, were taught to be very useful very early in life, and this had its advantages. For instance, Adah learned very early to be responsible for herself. Nobody was interested in her for her own sake, only in the money she would fetch, and the housework she could do and Adah, happy at being given this opportunity of survival, did not waste time thinking about its rights or wrongs. She had to survive.¹

This desire to persevere and survive in her society is what leads Adah in her struggle through life. This is also the part of the novel where Buchi Emecheta shows her protagonist as an extremely rebellious child. This rebellious attitude is also the driving force behind her desire to never give up on her dreams. She avoids marriage over and over until she realizes that marriage might be her only way to hold on to her dreams. She then manipulates her marriage to fulfil her goals. She gets a good job and takes care of her husband and her children and she saves money with the intent for her family to migrate to the United Kingdom. Her plan is to migrate to London along with her husband.

Adah is alone hoping for her dream to come true. So she found herself alone once more, forced into a situation dictated by society in which, as an individual, she had little choice but she is not above manipulating the circumstances. She would rather that she and her husband, who she was beginning to love, moved to new surroundings, a new country and among new people. So she said special prayers to God,

asking Him to make Pa (her husband's father), agree to their going to the land of her dreams, the United Kingdom! Just like her Pa, she still said the name United Kingdom in a whisper, even when talking to God about it, but now she felt it was coming nearer to her. She was beginning to believe she would go to England²

Adah is told in no uncertain terms that only her husband will be allowed to leave for London. Her husband's father does not approve of women going to England and so he will not allow both of them to move there. At first Adah is filled with rage, but she controls her anger and she comes up with another plan. "Be as cunning as a serpent but as harmless as a dove", she tells herself. Once again she asserts her individuality to get what she wants. She sends Francis to England to study and in the meantime she works and sends him money.

Adah does not give up here, she keeps her hopes up and when her husband writes to her a few months later that he is going to be in England for at least four or five more years she decides that it is time to make her move. She convinces her in-laws that it is necessary for her to be in England with her husband and that Francis wants her there, which he did say to her in his letter. She soon books herself and her two children first class tickets on a ship to England. Adah is welcomed by cold, rainy and cloudy skies foreshadowing of all that is to come for her. She is shocked by the grayness but she does not give up on her dream. Adah has arrived in the United Kingdom and this is where she confronts what bell hooks calls a white racist supremacy.

One of the major struggles for Adah is being a black woman in a predominantly white society. The fact that birth control facilities are available to her prompts her to use them though she feels guilty about it. She continues to pursue her goal in becoming a writer and ultimately between four children and a lazy, abusive husband finds the time to write. This book deals with many different issues and how they all interconnect and relate to one another and also one woman. Just as the reader starts to find hope for Adah another problem arises and as the book progresses one wonders how one woman can put up with so much and yet be so strong not only for herself but also for her children. This is also the novel in which Adah looks at renewed interest at her own society in Africa. She laments about the loss of community life and the support system she enjoyed in Africa. Nevertheless she never gives up on her dreams, not even when her husband burns her first piece of work.

Buchi Emecheta shows Adah to be a writer just like her. This is also the pivot around which Buchi Emecheta shows her assertion to write about herself and to interpret her circumstances in her own way. In no way can this be seen as a conscious move on Buchi Emecheta's part to forcefully project herself as a European feminist. Adah in the novel refers to the manuscript as her first brainchild

That to Adah was the last straw. Francis could not kill her child, she could forgive him all that he had done but not this.³

She leaves Francis moving out with nothing but four babies and a new job but she hardly feels a sense of what European feminists would call the end of bondage. The novel ends with Adah alone determined to survive on her own. The end itself is not a resolution to her problems and Adah does not feel liberated in leaving her husband. Yet the novel hardly shows Adah as a meek victim to her circumstances on the contrary she is constantly resisting her circumstances. Adah is also accused of being too European and a traitor to African values. That interpretation comes from Francis. Buchi Emecheta has also raised the issue of inter racial relationships in the novel. Francis is shown as constantly giving contradictory statements as he continues his extra marital affairs blaming Adah for their miseries living out his counter identity as a man at Adah's expense. Buchi Emecheta throughout the novel shows Adah alternating back and forth between the two societies, neither of the two offering her a cure to her problems. Frantz Fanon⁴ suggests an African view of life as a solution to everything that ails black people but Adah's life in Africa has hardly been ideal both because of sexist values and the invisible presence of the Empire. Adah's battle to guard and defend her black female self is a witness to her resistance as well as to the destruction of a black family in a white world. Buchi Emecheta stresses on the interlocking systems of oppression which black women deal with. She can only subvert race, class and sexist hegemonies by confronting all of them. Emecheta's quest is for multiple freedoms.

In the ditch (1972) continues where *Second Class Citizen* (1974) leaves, the continuity itself shows that Buchi Emecheta is still in the process of completing her narrative. Emecheta besets Adah, the central character of *In the Ditch* (1972), with numerous trials in London, abandonment by her husband, threats of eviction from her greedy and unsympathetic landlord and many other ordeals in a welfare complex—to illustrate the trauma associated with displacement and the determination with which the heroine seeks to redefine herself. *Second Class Citizen* (1974) does not signify an end but continuity because unlike what was argued by European feminists her problems do not end with monetary control and education. Emecheta's fiction is deeply rooted in the contrasting sense of place and displacement. Several of her female characters are concerned with the development or recovery of an effective relationship between their selves and the place where they live or where they were born. Emecheta's female protagonists are often caught between two worlds, to neither of which they can fully belong in the wake of continuing imperialism. Their sense of self is challenged by dislocation resulting from multiple factors which includes migration, yet the return to the homeland is described as an emotional crisis. The attempt to translate personal experience into a sociological interpretation of black womanhood has proved problematic for Buchi Emecheta because it does not resolve into larger holistic frames argued by European feminists and homogenized blackness.

Adah is forced to live in a housing estate set aside for problem families. This estate is known as Pussy Cat Mansions and it is a place filled with women. Adah cannot identify with the women of Pussy Cat Mansions and her dignity is wounded because of the charity she is forced to accept. There is again the Eurocentric notion of segregation embedded in Adah's moving to a place, which is meant for problem families. The main focus of the novel is on the importance of black female initiative and determination, for these are the only tools which help Adah get out of the ditch.

The dark and dismal scenario at the Pussy Cat Mansions is described by Adah in great detail.

The stairs leading to the top flats were of grey stone, so steep were they that it took Adah and her kids weeks to get used to them. They were always smelly with a thick lavatorial stink. Most of the rubbish chutes along the steps of the balconies were always overflowing and always open, their contents adding to the stink. The walls along the steep steps were of those shiny impersonal bricks still seen in films and prisons. The windows were small so were the doors.⁵

Adah's initiation is harsh, from complaints about her noisy children to the manner in which she lights her coalite for heat, nothing is left unobserved or unjudged.

All she had ever known in all her life was sorrow, anxiety and endless bitterness. These neighbours, the ones that the lady was talking about, must be the smalls. They had so successfully conditioned her that she could hardly listen to news on her radio

without a pang of guilt. She had stooped doing her own sewing because the hum of the machine disturbed them. What exactly was she supposed to do now?⁶

Adah's self-defense is to pretend as if she was stupid in order to conform to the stereotype of a black woman. As a black woman with five children, no job and no future she is rootless with no rightful claims to anything. She is not only faceless but also classless and raceless completely cloaked in invisibility. The rest of the novel concerns Adah's resignation to life in the ditch. Eventually Adah gets disillusioned of her welfare status. The book is replete with racial incidents. At the washhouse down the road from the Pussycat Mansions one incident angers Adah in particular. She encounters a white woman who is repelled at the idea of her sheets being washed next to Adah's clothes. She spits and screams at Adah

Why don't you go back to your own bleeding country?⁷

The novel ends in almost exactly the same way as *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) with Adah alone to find her way in the world. Both novels end on a womanist note as Buchi Emecheta constantly shows Adah longing for her black female past. Here is evidenced a central element of her black womanist ethics, without support, without money, without a means to live, even without a community, black womanist ethics exist in the form of a Adah's willfulness, an inherent sensibility, a dedication to affirming the value of a black woman's life. For Emecheta, the moral quality of life is expressed not as an ideal, but as an

attempt to balance life's complexities in such a way that suffering does not overwhelm and endurance with integrity is possible.

A strictly European feminist reading of these two novels inscribes the image of Buchi Emecheta as a woman who is essentially oppressed. A woman who belongs to a place where primitive cultural practices are prevalent and who needs to be guided into productive female roles by enlightened European feminists. Such readings generally construct an abstract entity, that of a traditional African culture locating it as the source of African women's oppression and looking to Western feminist consciousness for emancipation from a slavery of tradition. Katherine Frank argues

Slavery is for Emecheta the inherent condition of African women while education is the central liberating force in the lives of Emecheta's heroines and in fact their degree of servitude is inversely proportional to the amount of education they receive.⁸

Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi⁹ on the other hand supports the particularly violent example of silencing of women by men when she excuses Francis for burning Adah's manuscript in *Second Class Citizen* (1974) contending that he did not bargain for an English wife. Her only objection to his action is that it causes a blow to Adah's African identity and speeds up what she calls her Anglicization. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi also implies that African women who use writing as a strategy for self-defence are betraying their own culture. She claims that

Buchi Emecheta through Adah retaliates in a Western fashion with a Freudian weapon, the pen.

In a significant sense this kind of normative criticism which rejects as literary immature all that does not fit its paradigm of subjectivity has not escaped the feminist enterprise of rejecting the views of other women, the erasure of black female distinction and historicity within groups of women and the subsequent construction of a unified female representation to facilitate subjugation and control. Buchi Emecheta's critics demand an unproblematic self-representation of the African woman and often accuse her of being unable to represent herself adequately. Katherine Frank underestimates black female resistance in the face of opposition while Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi rejects Buchi Emecheta for not being authentic enough. In writing her fictional autobiography Buchi Emecheta subverts all attempts to fix her writing of herself. As a displaced woman Buchi Emecheta through Adah dramatizes the crisis of identity in writing her own autobiography disrupting the attempts to signify her. European feminism would accuse patriarchy for oppressing women while critics seeking an authentic black subject accuse her of not idealizing black identity. Adah's story is that of a remarkable black woman who attempts to surpass gender, race and tribal roles in Africa and England to recover her dreams "the presence" and utilizes her talents. Buchi Emecheta is on a borderland, which is being between two cultures, not being accepted by Africans and denied also by Europeans. The theme of colonialism is present

throughout both books and gives the reader a first hand look at what happens to a woman when two different cultures merge. Buchi Emecheta struggles with the question of “who am I?” This forces a re-thinking of current epistemological concepts, which recover only a partial identity for Buchi Emecheta. As a woman born in a postcolonial scenario she internalizes her inferiority and searches for freedom. In Africa she is aware of sexism but her contact with colonization is not direct, it is only in Europe that she comes in direct contact with racism, which can be called quasi colonization. Deborah K King¹⁰ calls it the triple jeopardy of black women. In the absence of an end to the ideologies of imperialism Buchi Emecheta explores a world in which her creativity is limited. Buchi Emecheta finds herself longing for the Afrocentric female worldview, which provides sustenance to black women to preserve their own identity. As a black woman Buchi Emecheta’s identity is exposed to those who have defined her and erased her. Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy, which uses black women as surplus commodities. By extension this has also been done within feminism and black theory. As members of such an economy black women like Buchi Emecheta are asked to handle their differences in two ways that is silence or assimilation. Plucking out one aspect of her identity in order to present a meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying other parts of her identity is how critics resolve their reading of Buchi Emecheta. This is a destructive and fragmented way to read her. These two novels are followed by Emecheta’s further interrogation of her black female

identity in Africa in contrast to the linear progression of Eurocentric worldview. Black feminists are able to find unity in diversity for black women but in the wake of continuing imperialism it becomes difficult for them to voice their silence. In breaking her silence through writing Buchi Emecheta shows how active imperialist ideologies continually attempt to silence her. For many feminists, a traditional woman is one who is dumb enough to live with a polygamist in a remote village and speak Igbo, or some other African language, while a modern woman is one who is able to leave her husband, move to a city, and speak/write English. Conclusions are drawn from these dubious categories whose validity is continually subverted by the literary texts themselves. If Western education is the key that unlocks the door to modernity, then Adah emerges definitely as a modern woman but there is always a lingering feeling of helplessness. Emecheta also shows her protagonist not just as a black mother but also as someone who links writing to mothering which has multiple significations of not only being a woman but also a humanist. Breaking her silence exposes the contradictions in her texts which signifies a disruption of her ideal of femininity which like that of the black feminists incorporates freedom not only for herself but also for others. Her autobiography becomes the first step in her journey as a black woman and these two novels are followed by Emecheta's journey into the beyond in an attempt to find a deeper understanding of who she is. Both novels are not conclusive but end on a note of questioning furthered by Emecheta's exploration of her African heritage.

Emecheta's narrative of self and identity reflects the gender, racial and ethnic tensions in a postcolonial society. Emecheta's works taken together construct a dual narrative which embodies individual and collective historical consciousness of black women. She tells her own lived story. At the same time her memories reconstruct a collective interwoven multicultural past. Through the narrativization of both her identity and the lived paradoxes of contradictory spaces, Emecheta weaves a provocative tale of an attempt, which moves towards transgression and performances of the psyche. Autobiography, at its very core, is a process of self-creation. When autobiographers are conscious of this process, they can use its power in the struggle for personal freedom. Her journey of the self has begun. Emecheta also suggests that the women are fragmented because of a disconnection to their spiritual source: Africa. They must return to Africa, literally or figuratively as part of their journey to selfhood. The complexity of black female identity reflects centuries of a transgenerational haunting associated with the pain of colonialism, slavery, exploitation and discrimination. Emecheta offers a compelling discussion of the complexities of African cross-cultural relationships and the problems of gender and post-colonialism as they are articulated from the point of view of Adah. To explore diasporic identities in all their complexities, she examines numerous topics that constitute and affect their multiply constituted selves, colonial history, sexist exploitation and stereotypical representations of black women. Diaspora in Emecheta's novels functions as a multi-focal condition and one that

constitutes not merely a physical relocation and alienation but also an internalized interior restlessness caused by the experience of racism, sexism, social isolation and the uncertainty that haunts the diasporized black woman's imagination as to its belonging. Third World women in diasporic communities are caught in the interstices or overlapping areas between cultures, languages and societies. Rather than look nostalgically and reactively for a lost origin or a previous time of wholeness, "speaking from a border" raises the possibility of finding common areas and points of connection between, a painful past and the present.

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10. Deborah K King. "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology." *Signs* 14(1) 1988: 42-72.

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 hooks² 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?³

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 Emecheta 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 her⁴

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 friends⁵

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

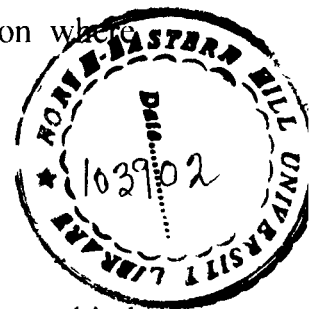
Nnu Ego is in a state of oscillation. She is forced to move away from her traditional African customs and beliefs but she is still hesitant to embrace capitalist ideas. Buchi Emecheta shows the devastating impact of imperialism and sexism on a woman who comes from an agricultural background and her attempt 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 where 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 *Joy 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 "joy 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 sits uneasily with the kind of resentment and tension often expressed, implicitly and/or explicitly by Buchi Emecheta in her texts ⁹

Her reading overlooks Buchi Emecheta's Black feminist critique of the interlocking systems of oppression. Barbara Christian¹⁰ 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 hegemonies. 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 Sojourner 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 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 Akunna's brother's name reminds Akunna 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 Iboya, 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.¹¹

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 Minha 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.¹²

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.

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Chapter VI Conclusion

Since contemporary global power relations structure living conditions all over the world today, the place where Black feminist power relations are in effect, is therefore equally ubiquitous. This place is neither outside social practices nor beyond the borders of western societies, but is rather reproduced within them as a social relationship of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion. Migrants and members of minorities specially black women appear in these texts primarily as speechless and powerless figures. An image of helpless subalternity is thus generated, which characterizes not only the perception of migrants and the minoritized as a whole, but also all of their utterances. Even today, migration movements are hardly inspired by voluntary motivations, but move instead in the context of an increasingly globalized world market.

Here, the analysis of postcolonial, feminist, and anti-racist critique means paying attention to the geographical and political context, in which this critique is produced and through which it is formed. In this sense we must not only ask with Spivak's¹ words: Can the subaltern speak?, Instead the question must be: But even if she has been talking on for centuries - why didn't anybody listen? If human subjectivity is inscribed like a palimpsest; written and re-written by 'violently shuttling' discourses of power and knowledge and from shifting positions, then it is impossible to retrieve subaltern agency from the colonial archives since one cannot assume that the colonised person has autonomy and that the archive presents a transparent record of her/his agency. The issue of

gender further complicates this task, as the colonial archive is usually dominated by the stories of men, as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. The story of Buchi Emecheta and her protagonists in other novels reveals much about microlevel, "multipositional" African female negotiations with the contested narrative of imperialism, the tension between race and gender equality that it embodied in a particular moment and space in history. This account carries important lessons about the interplay of identity, power, and the everyday politics of engagement and resistance in black women communities. Emecheta's novels offer a rich set of windows to study not only the positioning of her protagonists at the intersection of these different discourses of power but also to explore the fashion in which interactions among them moulded subaltern agency. Understanding power relations in this way illuminates the processes of negotiation in hierarchical societies that keep both hegemonic frameworks and subaltern identities in flux, confounding established notions of "otherness."

The question of home and the rewriting of home and nation in the diaspora, is a fundamental topic in black women's writings. Writing in the context of more than a century of imperial relations, patriarchal nationalism and circular migrancy between Africa and Britain, postcolonial Black feminist writers like Buchi Emecheta assert that women can never experience a genuine

sense of home anywhere, neither in the metropolitan Britain nor in Africa. Where is home, for starters? On the one hand, can the country that has colonized your native land and is still refusing to acknowledge your existence be called home? On the other, can the homeland that failed to perform its nurturing function still be called home? The author's displacement has resulted in an ambiguity and ambivalence towards the idea of home that she has expressed directly or indirectly in her interviews, essays and above all in her fiction. Buchi Emecheta shows that black diasporic women remain alienated and estranged not only from their foreign homes, as a result of colonization and racism, but also from their originary African homes, as a result of nationalist ideologies, patriarchal oppression, poverty and other personal traumatic experiences. While Black feminists like Buchi Emecheta are often relegated to an outside position in Britain as emblems of colonial hegemony, they find it equally urgent to subject the African home to an internal critique that allows for rewriting home in the experiences of black women. In her anomalous position as a feminist, colonized, and second-class citizen, Buchi Emecheta offers an alternative mode of reconnecting to and remembering home. These writers balance their lack of a genuine sense of home as women, colonials and second-class citizens in both native and foreign spaces with the search for new meanings of community that can reintegrate them within transnational and transethnic black female communities of struggle, rather than within the exclusive borders of African diaspora.

Buchi Emecheta deploys the trope of the condition of homelessness in native and foreign terrains alike. Her protagonists depict their exclusion from their families by virtue of their gender and class identities and from the imperialist nation by virtue of their racial Otherness and second-class citizenship. Her novels also offer a postcolonial critique of imperial domination of Africa, expressing strong concerns for the colonized community and its welfare. Emecheta thus unravels the destructive effects of colonialism on the native women and advocates self-determination for them. By disavowing the consolations of nostalgia to a mythic home, Buchi Emecheta constructs new topographies of agency and belonging for subaltern black women, committing herself to communities of struggle everywhere and fostering a transnational and transethnic politics of solidarity. Traditionally, the project of rewriting home in diasporic black women's writings has been confined to experiences of displacement and not belonging in the foreign, imperial home, where the black female subject feels excluded by long histories of colonization and racial Othering. The African home, in contrast, remains in these writings a mythical and overromanticized primordial site, where the black female subject is said to overcome the psychological scars of alienation in two related ways: by recuperating an originary ethnic identity (African roots) that reunites the subject with its authentic self, as posited in the influential philosophy of negritude and the Black Power movement in its different African incarnations; and by affirming their allegiance to a primordial homeland they can always return to.

For Buchi Emecheta, however, there is no genuine sense of home even in the homeland. This internal critique of African home is especially important for writers like Buchi Emecheta who are generally marginalized and devalued. Remapping the idea of home in the diasporic imaginary is central to the corpus of Emecheta's work. In her two fictionalized autobiographies, Emecheta decenters home at the intersection of gender, class and race, making it clear that, for underprivileged subaltern families like hers, home can never be a site of comfort and safety. The adverse circumstances of poverty, machismo and personal trauma in Africa as well as racism and discrimination in the United Kingdom deprive her of a real sense of home in both African and European spaces.

Buchi Emecheta imagines Africa as a fatherland where the black women finds sisters who are confronted by similar colonialist and sexist oppression. Although, the image of Africa as the dark continent is largely the creation of white male imperialists, this image is often reinforced by Western intellectuals, black or white, who often miscomprehend the real experiences of African women. Buchi Emecheta recognizes that it is a mistake to imagine that one can interrogate constructions of diasporic selfhood without critiquing the sites that record identity and through which ideas are transmitted. In articulating a reimagined selfhood, she recognizes a need to celebrate and foreground literacy/literary practices outside the Western tradition. Given the intensely patriarchal nature of traditional African cultures. Black feminism cannot be

considered radical. For white European and American women, feminism has predicated itself on ending gender discrimination and demanding equal job opportunities, voting and property rights. For African and diasporic black women, feminist ideology reflects specificities of race, class and culture. It is for this reason that the former has failed to make any lasting appeal to Africa and its diaspora. Because black women do not wish to alienate men, because black women do not wish to alienate the bulk of their tradition-based sisters, and because many traditional African customs and mores are worth preserving, most African feminists espouse womanism, which Alice Walker defines as a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womanhood. Its aim is the dynamism of wholeness and self-healing. All of Emecheta's novels illustrate the black woman's problems of self-contextualisation, of being located and dislocated in terms of history and identity. Reading Emecheta's fictional autobiography, we are primarily asked to bear witness to the great "balancing" act: how to be both a black and a woman; both a mother and a professional; and finally, how to traverse all these routes and end up in the position of a librarian in Britain. Because the axes of the subject's identifications and speaking positions are so multiple what we receive in this text is a braided voice, a voice that is both intricately textured and threatening to unravel at any minute. It is an "I" which is crossed and recrossed by categories of race, gender and class; identities which have, historically and ideologically been held to be incompatible in the context

of the Africa in which she lived. Emecheta's voice issues out of the intersections between, and within, these subject positions. Emecheta suggests that "freedom" is not something that is easily reached - at least not on "one walk" for the black woman. The process of arriving at emancipation is here conceived of as a much more splinted and fragmented one: the boundaries are plural and need to be crossed in all directions. Emecheta embraces a black feminist framework, which celebrates rather than denigrates the transgressive crossing of social boundaries and the shattering of binaries which have become her hallmark. Subverting Manichean thought, her narrative moves closer and closer towards a privileging of intermediary spaces. A consciousness which enables her to keep all the strands in the intricately textured tapestry of her identity alive at one time. Emecheta aims to articulate a universal condition of black female suffering, transgressing "fixed" notions of race, class and gender in both African and European discourses.

Working within this specifically Black feminist framework, she is not only one of the most prolific African diasporic writers of our time, but also one of the most controversial. As a result of her constantly evolving style and the complexity of her female characters, Emecheta is an author who consistently upsets fixed literary and authorial categorizations. Emecheta's novels are representative of a multiplicity of black female voices from different generations; individual constituents brought together to comprise a universal mosaic. If identity is directly related to the choices one is able to make, or the

agency one maintains in his or her daily existence, then factors which curtail this autonomy could lead to a loss of self.

The contemporary literary field reveals a plurality of ways within the narrative form that diaspora writers like Emecheta can explore to reflect their experiences as well as represent their disrupted dwelling spaces and identities. Hence, literature of black women is by no means monolithic: instead of uniformity there is multiplicity; rather than fixity there is flux; and instead of stabilization there are continually new understandings and foci.

Constructing the voices of black women often requires reading against the grain of a number of intersecting discourses. The shadow of colonialism provides the background to most of Emecheta's novels. Gender becomes a crucial lens through which colonial societies viewed their populations. Patriarchy worked in these societies in pragmatic and discursive forms, normalising certain cultural practices, social customs and ways of being as 'true' or 'natural'. Women were twice colonised in their simultaneous experience of patriarchy and colonialism, doubly relegated to the obscure margins by patriarchal and imperial discourses and narratives that celebrated male-oriented values, such as bonding between men and reticent heroism, outdoor activities like battles, exploration and missionary activities. Trinh T. Minh-ha² considers that the popularity of the 'third world woman' is due to the exoticising of the native woman into a fixed ineluctable alterity: 'It is as if everywhere we go, we become Someone's private zoo'. The sites of being for

migrant women are the spaces, both public and private, of their new landscapes where they perform and practice forms of social, economic and political action. The place of belonging for black women can no longer be purely geographic (a notion of place) or historical (a sense of connection) because it is 'cross-cut by a variety of global forces'. If identities are fluid, unfixed and changing, it is perhaps appropriate that black women can function across various arenas, appropriating the accoutrements of difference as they need them.

Gender identities cannot be split off from cultural, racial and class particularities. Therefore, theoretical considerations of gender in relation to colonial and postcolonial discourses cover an enormous range of distinctive issues and perspectives. Postcolonial black feminist work has indeed looked at the differences between gender experiences according to the race and class of the women involved, emphasising the need to contextualise, taking into account the particular cultural context involved in each case. Thus, for instance, Chandra Mohanty³ has explored the ways in which Western feminism has constructed a monolithic "third-world woman" as its object of knowledge, due to a lack of awareness of the persistence of colonial modes of representation while the African-American critic bell hooks⁴ has argued that feminism had its roots in a world-outlook coloured by racial imperialism, referring exclusively to the experience of white women, so different, for instance, from that of black women. For Mohanty the central problem occurs when western feminists employ "'women' as a category of analysis" based on the notion of a shared

oppression. This is problematic because it assumes that women are a 'coherent' group or 'category' prior to their entry into the social, cultural and family structure. According to Mohanty, any analysis of women needs to be based on "particular local contexts." At the same time meanings and explanations need to be given "according to the socio-historical context." For Mohanty then, any feminist analysis needs to take account of local cultural practices, class and kinship patterns and social-historical circumstances. Consequently Mohanty highlights the ethnocentrism that occurs in the writings of feminist texts, especially when some Western feminists make assumptions about women from other cultures without taking account of local, often complex, social structures. In this sense, in her well-known essay of 1988, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," Gayatri Spivak postulates that the subaltern female subject is not allowed to voice herself, due to colonial and also pre-colonial patriarchal paradigms. Spivak's point is that the combined workings of colonialism and patriarchy make it extremely difficult for the subaltern, doubly disempowered and secondary, to articulate her viewpoint or represent herself, being absent as subject of agency. Certainly, many black women are situated at the juncture of three oppressions that of race, class and gender. Needless to say, while the issue of gender is the main reason African women see the need to create their own theory, Kohrs-Amissah⁵ cautions that because "African women writers vocalize their simultaneous experience of multiple oppressions as...gender is (only) one issue out of many. Consequently, an African feminist theory cannot only deal

with the 'male-female'-problem because abolishing one of the oppressions will not solve the problems facing African women. Achieving equality between African men and women will still leave the problems of neo-colonialism, racism and imperialism". From this viewpoint, what we discover in Emecheta's novels, to a large extent, is the multiple literary representations of black women. The Empire writes back, and its women need to do so posing specific issues that concern their multiple oppression.

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DEGREE: M.Phil

TITLE OF DISSERTATION: WRITING HER/SELF: A
CRITICAL STUDY OF
BUCHI EMECHETA'S
NOVELS

DATE OF ADMISSION: 14 AUGUST 2006

COMMENCEMENT OF DISSERTATION: MARCH 2007

APPROVAL OF REASEARCH PROPOSAL

1. BPGS 23 APRIL 2007
2. SCHOOL BOARD 26 APRIL 2007

REGISTRATION NO: 268 (26 APRIL 2007)

DUE DATE OF SUBMISSION 26 APRIL 2008

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