

**RECLAIMING IGBO WOMANHOOD: A STUDY OF SELECT  
WORKS OF FLORA NWAPA, BUCHI EMECHETA AND  
CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE**

Thesis submitted to the  
University of Calicut for the award of  
the Degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH**

*By*

**MISHA JOSE**

*Under the supervision of*

**Dr. Zeenath Mohamed Kunhi**

Assistant Professor,  
PG and Research Department of English,  
Farook College (Autonomous), Calicut



**Centre for Advanced Studies and Research  
in English Language and Literature  
Farook College (Autonomous), Calicut**



Affiliated to the University of Calicut  
**September 2023**

## Declaration

I, Misha Jose, hereby declare that the thesis entitled **Reclaiming Igbo Womanhood: A Study of Select Works of Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**, submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, is an original record of observations, and bona fide research carried out by me, under the guidance of **Dr. Zeenath Mohamed Kunhi**, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Farook College (Autonomous), Calicut and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship, or any other similar title or recognition.

Calicut University



Misha Jose

## Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis entitled, **Reclaiming Igbo Womanhood: A Study of Select Works of Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**, submitted by **Ms. Misha Jose**, to the University of Calicut for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, is an original record of observations and bona fide research, carried out by her, under my supervision, and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma or similar titles.



Calicut University

**Dr. Zeenath Mohamed Kunhi**  
Assistant Professor  
PG & Research Department of English  
Farook College (Autonomous), Calicut



## **Acknowledgement**

I express my deep sense of gratitude and love to my research supervisor **Dr. Zeenath Mohamed Kunhi** for her invaluable suggestions, impeccable insights, and incessant efforts in guiding me effectually throughout the course of this study. It is indeed a privilege to be guided by a resourceful teacher whose competence in the subject and uncompromising dedication towards her scholars, students, and profession, deserve to be respected, acknowledged, and appreciated. I consider myself fortunate to have worked under a person who values emotions, upholds integrity, and radiates all shades of sublimity through her words, deeds, smiles and silences. I shall ever be indebted to her for her strengthening words and relentless support, that were much needed to keep me going through an awfully challenging period in my life, wherein she taught me that love, patience, confidence, and perseverance are what matter when shaken by “rough winds” in one’s life.

I am deeply indebted to **Dr. K. A. Aysha Swapna**, the Principal, Farook College, for always being a great source of inspiration to all of us. Her competency, enthusiasm, and profound vision continue to be a great asset to the institution. My humble thanks to **Prof. E.P. Imbichikoya** and **Dr. K. M. Naseer**, former Principals of this institution, for the favours and support they rendered on different occasions. My heartfelt gratitude and sincere love to **Dr. K Rizwana Sultana**, Head of the Dept. of English, Farook College, for her encouraging words and timely interventions in enabling me to submit my thesis on time. I express my deep sense of gratitude to **Dr. Sajitha M.A**, former Head of the English Department, Farook

college, for her love, support, and valuable suggestions during the course of this study. I also register my sincere thanks to **Dr. Basheer Kotta** and **Prof. C. Ummer**, the former Heads of the Department of English, Farook College, for their love, guidance and motivation. I am also grateful to **Dr. Umer Thasneem**, **Prof. Dr. Mohamed Shahin Thayyil**, and other distinguished members of the RAC for their valuable insights and suggestions, crucial for the successful completion and time-bound submission of this thesis.

Heartfelt gratitude to all faculty members, Department of English, Farook College, for the bountiful love and endearing smiles with which they receive me every time. My gratitude goes out to the very supportive library staff, non-teaching staff, and all others in this prestigious institution, who facilitate an ambience conducive to academic pursuits and ensure a comfortable space to all those who walk into the 'Farookian' family. I am also deeply thankful to my fellow research scholars in the department for their continual moral support and valuable assistance.

Words fail to express my deep sense of gratitude to my colleagues and students at Kunnamangalam Govt. Arts and Science College (KGASC), where I spent the first phase of my career from 2018-2023. I acknowledge my humble gratitude to the former Principal **Dr. Saji Stephen**, and the former Principals-in-Charge, **Dr. K Muhammed Noufal** and **Mr. Basheer V. P** for their generosity in standing by me during all my difficult times. I shall ever be indebted to **Mr. Basheer V. P** and **Ms. Sreedevi C.K**, as my colleagues in the Department of English, for their selfless efforts in helping me balance my professional and personal responsibilities during this period. But for their inspiring words and relentless

support, this study would not have been possible. Heartfelt gratitude to all other teaching and non-teaching staff at KGASC for their boundless affection and unbending support that aided in the successful completion of this thesis, and rendered my memories of the campus so intense that I still feel rooted in the throbs of KGASC.

I shall always be indebted to my brother-in-law, **Dr. Moncy Mathew**, Associate Professor and Head of the Department of English, Govt. Arts and Science College, Calicut, for being the perpetual radiance in my academic path. His constructive criticism, insightful deliberations, and affectionate counsels have played a decisive role in all my academic accomplishments, and I consider it a great privilege to have a dependable mentor, enlightening educator, and considerate brother in him. My sincere thanks also go out to all my teachers, friends, and colleagues for their steadfast support and timely assistance during the course of this study.

**I proudly dedicate this thesis** to my father **Mr. Jose Thomas** and mother **Dr. Sushama Jose** for being the two strong pillars of my life. I feel blessed to be born as the daughter of such immensely supportive parents who firmly believe that education is the most beautiful jewel to embellish and the most powerful weapon to empower their two daughters. Thankyou dear Pappa and Amma for your unconditional love, unwavering support and unrelenting prayers that have always strengthened and blessed our lives with health, happiness, and success. I also express my profound love and gratitude to my sister, **Ms. Joshma Jose**, for her encouraging words and deep affection that often motivated me to stay calm and

focused on my work. I deeply cherish her boundless love and constant companionship, and appreciate the uniqueness of her personality that has always influenced and transformed me into a better person. I whole-heartedly thank my husband **Mr. Bany M Jacob** for his committed love and profound faith in my potential. I am grateful to him for always supporting my dreams, and for being with me in my successes and failures. I am deeply indebted to my father-in-law, **Mr. M.T. Jacob**, brother-in-law **Mr. Shaju**, and sister-in-law, **Ms. Dany Shaju** for always being so considerate of me. Their continual support and abiding love have indeed been very crucial to all my successes. The one person to whom I owe the most is my beloved son, **Ian Bany Jacob**, who has been desperately waiting for me to submit my thesis so that I will be more available to him. His words of optimism and encouragement have often surprised me, and I thank him for all the warmth and beautiful emotions that he has brought into my life. Love to my nieces **Elaine** and **Erin**, and my nephews **Rohan** and **Ryan** for being such an adorable part of my life.

As I stand at the terminus of this long journey, I fondly remember my mother-in-law, late **Ms. Shirly Jacob** for her unfathomable affection and irreplaceable influence in my life. The joy of having completed this thesis will ever be marred by the grim reality that we lost you forever during this period. Yet, I firmly believe that you are rejoicing this moment and showering great blessings on us with that warm, affectionate smile of yours.

**Misha Jose**

## **Abstract**

Transnational feminism, as a significant paradigm of postcolonial feminism, is sensitive to the differences in female experiences across the globe and emphasizes the necessity to undertake distinct decolonial approaches for contesting Western feminist attempts to generalize and obscure the distinct needs of women in postcolonial countries. It seeks to identify, critique, and resist the intersectional elements and patriarchal structures operating in the lives of women belonging to distinct contexts. While asserting their solidarity with Adichie's proclamation that "We should all be feminists," the postcolonial feminist thinkers and academics recognize the growing relevance of Women's Studies as one of the most pertinent branches of feminism, capable of exploring multiple dimensions of female experiences, and aiming to bring about radical changes in the society by effecting gender equality. Women's Studies, as a significant branch of feminism, attempts to explore various aspects of a culture that are oppressive to women, and relies on interdisciplinary approaches to identify and strengthen the individual and collective female potential, specific to different cultures.

This thesis attempts to investigate the role of select women writers belonging to Igbo ethnic community in southeastern Nigeria in giving a more inclusive representation of the experiences and concerns of Igbo women. The Nigerian writers Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, explore the multiple dimensions of female experiences in Igboland in their creative articulations and present the need to reclaim the ethnocultural heritage and agency of Igbo women to institute a socio-political transformation towards gender equality,



simultaneously not negating completely certain constructive aspects of the colonial impact. The changing nature of gender ideology in Igboland, the general Igbo attitude towards women's reproductive ability and maternal care labour, and Igbo women's substantial participation in the Nigeria-Biafra War of 1967, as represented in select texts by these writers, when read in the light of the theoretical precepts put forward by Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie and those of several other relevant African theorists and ethnographers offer a better insight into the specific nature of Igbo women's experiences of both oppression and resistance.

Keywords: Igbo women, Adichie, Emecheta, Nwapa, African motherhood, Biafran War.

## സംഗ്രഹം

പോസ്റ്റ്-കൊളോണിയൽ ഫെമിനിസത്തിന്റെ ഒരു പ്രധാന മാതൃക എന്ന നിലയിൽ ട്രാൻസ്ഫാഷണൽ ഫെമിനിസം, ലോകമെമ്പാടുമുള്ള സ്ത്രീ അനുഭവങ്ങളിലെ വ്യത്യാസങ്ങളോട് സംവേദനക്ഷമമാണ്. കൂടാതെ പോസ്റ്റ് കൊളോണിയൽ രാജ്യങ്ങളിലെ സ്ത്രീകളുടെ വ്യതിരിക്തമായ ആവശ്യങ്ങളെ സാമാന്യവൽക്കരിക്കാനും മറയ്ക്കാനുമുള്ള പാശ്ചാത്യ ഫെമിനിസ്റ്റ് ശ്രമങ്ങളെ എതിർക്കുന്നതിന് വ്യത്യസ്തമായ അപകോളോണിയൽ സമീപനങ്ങൾ സ്വീകരിക്കേണ്ടതിന്റെ ആവശ്യകത ഉറപ്പിപ്പറയുന്നു. വ്യത്യസ്ത സന്ദർഭങ്ങളിൽ പെടുന്ന സ്ത്രീകളുടെ ജീവിതത്തിൽ പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്ന വിഭജന ഘടകങ്ങളെയും പുരുഷാധിപത്യ ഘടനകളെയും തിരിച്ചറിയാനും വിമർശിക്കാനും ചെറുത്തുനിൽക്കാനും ഇത് ശ്രമിക്കുന്നു. "നമ്മളെല്ലാവരും ഫെമിനിസ്റ്റുകളാകണം" എന്ന അഡീച്ചിയുടെ പ്രഖ്യാപനത്തോട് ഐക്യദാർഢ്യം പ്രഖ്യാപിക്കുമ്പോൾ തന്നെ സ്ത്രീകളുടെ അനുഭവങ്ങളുടെ ബഹുമുഖങ്ങൾ പര്യവേക്ഷണം ചെയ്യാനും, ലക്ഷ്യമിടാനും കഴിവുള്ള ഫെമിനിസത്തിന്റെ ഏറ്റവും പ്രസക്തമായ ശാഖകളിലൊന്നായി സ്ത്രീപഠനത്തിന്റെ വർദ്ധിച്ചുവരുന്ന പ്രസക്തി പോസ്റ്റ് കൊളോണിയൽ ഫെമിനിസ്റ്റ് ചിന്തകരും അക്കാദമിക് വിദഗ്ദ്ധരും തിരിച്ചറിയുന്നു. ലിംഗസമത്വം പ്രാബല്യത്തിൽ വരുത്തിക്കൊണ്ട് സമൂഹത്തിൽ സമൂലമായ മാറ്റങ്ങൾ കൊണ്ടുവരാൻ ഫെമിനിസത്തിന്റെ ഒരു സുപ്രധാന ശാഖയെന്ന നിലയിൽ സ്ത്രീകളെ അടിച്ചമർത്തുന്ന ഒരു സംസ്കാരത്തിന്റെ വിവിധ വശങ്ങൾ പര്യവേക്ഷണം ചെയ്യാൻ ശ്രമിക്കുന്നു, കൂടാതെ വ്യത്യസ്ത സംസ്കാരങ്ങൾക്കനുസൃതമായി വ്യക്തിഗതവും കൂട്ടായതുമായ സ്ത്രീ സാധ്യതകളെ തിരിച്ചറിയുന്നതിനും ശക്തിപ്പെടുത്തുന്നതിനുമുള്ള ഇന്റർ ഡിസിപ്ലിനറി സമീപനങ്ങളെ ആശ്രയിക്കുന്നു.

തെക്കുകിഴക്കൻ നൈജീരിയയിലെ ഇഗ്ബോ വംശീയ സമൂഹത്തിൽപ്പെട്ട തിരഞ്ഞെടുക്കപ്പെട്ട വനിതാ എഴുത്തുകാരുടെ പങ്കിനെ കുറിച്ച് അന്വേഷിക്കാൻ ഈ തീസിസ് ശ്രമിക്കുന്നു. നൈജീരിയൻ എഴുത്തുകാരായ ഫ്ലോറ ന്യാപ്പ, ബുച്ചി എമിച്ചിറ്റ, ചിമമാണ്ട കോസി അഡീച്ചി എന്നിവർ ഇഗ്ബോലാൻഡിലെ സ്ത്രീ അനുഭവങ്ങളുടെ വിവിധ മാനങ്ങൾ അവരുടെ സർഗ്ഗാത്മകമായ ആവിഷ്കാരങ്ങളിലൂടെ പര്യവേക്ഷണം

ചെയ്യുകയും ഇഗ്ബോ സ്ത്രീകളുടെ വംശീയ സാംസ്കാരിക പാരമ്പര്യവും ഏജൻസിയും വീണ്ടെടുക്കേണ്ടതിന്റെ ആവശ്യകത അവതരിപ്പിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു. സമത്വം, ഒരേസമയം കൊളോണിയൽ സ്വാധീനത്തിന്റെ ചില സൃഷ്ടിപരമായ വശങ്ങളെ പൂർണ്ണമായും നിരാകരിക്കുന്നില്ല. ഇഗ്ബോലാൻഡിലെ ലിംഗ പ്രത്യയശാസ്ത്രത്തിന്റെ മാറിക്കൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്ന സ്വഭാവം, സ്ത്രീകളുടെ പ്രത്യുത്പാദന ശേഷി, മാതൃ പരിചരണ തൊഴിൽ എന്നിവയോടുള്ള പൊതുവായ ഇഗ്ബോ മനോഭാവം, 1967 ലെ നൈജീരിയ-ബിയാഫ്ര യുദ്ധത്തിൽ ഇഗ്ബോ സ്ത്രീകളുടെ ഗണ്യമായ പങ്കാളിത്തം, ഈ എഴുത്തുകാർ തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത ഗ്രന്ഥങ്ങളിൽ പ്രതിനിധീകരിക്കുന്നത്, വെളിച്ചത്തിൽ വായിക്കുമ്പോൾ ചന്ദ്ര തൽപാഡെ മൊഹനിയും മൊളാറ ഒഗുണ്ടിപെ-ലെസ്ലിയും മുന്നോട്ടുവച്ച സൈദ്ധാന്തിക നിർദ്ദേശങ്ങളും മറ്റ് നിരവധി ആഫ്രിക്കൻ സൈദ്ധാന്തികരും നരവംശശാസ്ത്രജ്ഞരും അടിച്ചമർത്തലിന്റെയും ചെറുത്തുനിൽപ്പിന്റെയും ഇഗ്ബോ സ്ത്രീകളുടെ അനുഭവങ്ങളുടെ പ്രത്യേക സ്വഭാവത്തെക്കുറിച്ച് മികച്ച ഉൾക്കാഴ്ച നൽകുന്നു.

താക്കോൽ പദങ്ങൾ: ഇഗ്ബോ സ്ത്രീകൾ, അഡീച്ചി, എമിചിറ്റ, ന്യാപ, ആഫ്രിക്കൻ മാതൃത്വം, ബിയാഫ്രൻ യുദ്ധം.

## Contents

---

<b>Chapters</b>	<b>Titles</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
Chapter 1	Introduction	1-60
Chapter 2	Uncovering Gender Ideologies in Igboland	61-140
Chapter 3	“Variegated Landscapes of Empowered Mothering”	141-202
Chapter 4	Women in the Shadow of Biafra	203-272
Chapter 5	Conclusion	273-282
Chapter 6	Recommendation	283-284
	Work Cited	285-299

---



## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Decades after the French feminist and intellectual, Simone de Beauvoir observed in 1949 that “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (330), the Ethiopian poet-activist Billene Seyoum Woldeyes illuminated in her poem “From Foetus to Woman”:

now that we have **become** women  
we are the sole bearers of what that becoming can mean  
we can rewrite our stories  
transform the landscapes of our narratives  
define and redefine  
what it means  
to be a Woman.

It was only towards the latter half of the twentieth century that African women began to “define and redefine” their lives and experiences as different from what colonial writers and African patriarchal literary tradition had voiced about them over the years. African feminism, which fundamentally differs from Western feminism in numerous ways, contends that the experiences and potential of African women are largely ethnic and culture-specific, and hence, the women of each ethnic group need to be methodically considered to encourage their socio-political participation and

economic inclusivity for the overall development of the African nations. This consigns great responsibilities upon the women writers of Africa, for as the Kenyan writer Asenath Odaga believes, “When more African women write, they will try to give the African woman the dignity she deserves and put her in her right place” (129). The Nigerian writers Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, explore the multiple dimensions of female experiences in Igboland in their creative articulations and present the need to reclaim the ethnocultural heritage and agency of Igbo women to institute a socio-political transformation towards gender equality, simultaneously not negating completely certain constructive aspects of the colonial impact. The changing nature of gender ideology in Igboland, the general Igbo attitude towards women’s reproductive ability and maternal care labour, and Igbo women’s substantial participation in the Nigeria-Biafra War of 1967, as represented in select texts by these writers, when read in the light of the theoretical precepts put forward by Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, and those of several other relevant African theorists and ethnographers offer a better insight into the specific nature of Igbo women’s experiences of both oppression and resistance.

The misrepresentation and negative portrayal of African women in the writings of male authors, and the generalization of the experiences of Third World women in Western feminist discourses, need to be challenged and replaced with a more authentic representation of the varying experiences of African women living in distinct ethnic cultures. This thesis specifically focuses on the literary representation of African women belonging to the Igbo ethnic community in Southeastern Nigeria.

The study argues that Igbo women did not emerge empowered abruptly as ‘the new woman’ in the postcolonial period, as asserted in several studies, but they had been more authoritative, eloquent, and unyielding in pre-colonial times. From traditional to postcolonial times, Igbo women of all generations have struggled to remain self-assertive despite having to confront several forms of patriarchal oppression and victimisation. The study contends that during these altering phases imbued with challenging experiences, Igbo women could uphold a resolute spirit because of their industriousness and economic self-sufficiency, their belief in individual abilities and collective female potential, and their strong sense of responsibility towards their community and fellow beings. The study attempts to posit Igbo women’s empowering experiences as a microcosm of Africa’s female power and argues that Africa’s future is intricately bound to the recognition and inclusion of this power in all socio-political and economic spheres of African nations.

A major event that lent impetus to this concern was the Fourth Annual International Igbo Conference held at SOAS, University of London, in 2015, which emphasised the need to “engage with various conceptions of Igbo womanhood vis-à-vis the changing position of Igbo women and the changing practices in Igbo culture” (Egbunike 2014). It also resolved “to explore Igbo traditions in relation to the role and status of women and examine the numerous social and political contributions made by Igbo women” (Egbunike 2014). In her inspiring speech at the Igbo Conference in 2015, the British-Nigerian writer Chikodili Emelumadu asserted, “We, as Igbo women, we have to take charge of the narrative. We can’t continue to



define ourselves by values placed on us by a patriarchal society. We have to take charge of who we are” (53:30 - 53:48). Igbo women writers like Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Ifeoma Okoye, Akachi Ezeigbo, Chika Onigwe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Ada Udechukwu, to list a few, have made sincere attempts to address issues specific to Igbo women and to replace the stereotyped victim images of these women with a more authentic representation that reveals them as resolute, undaunting, and enterprising. These writers explore the role of traditional ethnocultural practices, colonial manipulations, and socio-political conditions in transforming the women in Igboland, and insist that Igbo women have never remained passive victims in the face of any kind of challenges or injustice. The writers attempt to recover the unheard voices of women through their characters and represent the exceptional position of Igbo women within the family and society. The works selected for study include Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* (1966), *One is Enough* (1981), *Never Again* (1975), and *Wives at War and Other Stories* (1980); Buchi Emecheta’s *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Destination Biafra* (1982); and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006).

While several studies have attempted to explore the experiences of Igbo women through the lives of female protagonists in the selected works, there is a dearth of comparative studies on the works by the selected women writers of three different generations, which is important to comprehend the transmuting experiences, shifting perceptions, differing modes of resistance and socio-cultural transformation of Igbo women over time. Not many studies have gone into

discovering what renders Igbo women self-assertive and resistant to victimization. Most of the studies primarily indulge in analysing only the female protagonists in these works, lauding them as representatives of the “emerging new women” in Africa, strengthening the Western feminist assumption that pre-colonial African women were all passive victims. Only a very few studies encompass the lives of other minor, yet powerful, female characters in the texts, whose varying metiers, voices, silences, and actions are decisive in comprehending a holistic picture of Igbo women’s experiences, disposition, nature of their victimisation, and strategies for resistance. In addition, it is pertinent to analyse the selected texts by drawing insights from ethnographical and anthropological texts as it would render a more critical and in-depth understanding of the changing dynamics of gender ideology in Igbo society. The socio-political and cultural changes in Igboland need to be traced for a better understanding of the experiences and position of women in private and public spaces. Another conspicuous research gap concerns Igbo women’s motherhood experiences and patterns of mothering in Igbo society. Though mothering is regarded as a principal function in the lives of African women, only a very few studies have explored the challenges faced by Igbo mothers and the different mothering patterns discernible in Igbo society. The varying attitudes of both Igbo women and men towards childlessness, motherhood, and mothering experiences need to be analysed to recognize how reproductive ability plays a decisive role in determining the lives of Igbo women. Further, the war narratives by the selected authors need to be examined methodically in the light of historical texts on the Nigerian Civil War, which is essential in getting a more reliable and comprehensive understanding of Igbo women’s involvement in the war and their

commitment towards fellow-beings and community. All these research gaps need to be addressed to recognize and encourage Igbo women's involvement in the public domain.

The thesis aims to establish the relevance of women's writings in giving a more inclusive representation of the experiences and concerns of women belonging to distinct ethnocultural, socio-political, economic, and other differing contexts. It seeks to underscore the necessity to enhance the strength and agency of women from distinct African contexts for bringing about a socio-political transformation in the continent of Africa. It attempts to specifically examine the experiences and potential of women belonging to the Igbo ethnic community in Nigeria. It traces the survival strategies adopted by the Igbo women to support themselves and their fellow beings in times of adversity. It aims to bring out the female agency specific to women living in Igboland and to reinstate that such female strength ought to be empowered to bring about gender equality and stability in African societies.

To achieve these aims, the study has set definite objectives. It analyses the trajectory of Igbo women's experiences, as chronicled in the selected works by the three Igbo women writers belonging to three different generations, to understand how Igbo women responded to the patriarchal Igbo traditions and customs such as the bride price system, female genital mutilation, polygamy, and widowhood practices, and looks for the different provisions within their culture that enabled them to live a dignified life in the private and public domains. The study traces the gender ideology in pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial Igboland to identify how the domestic autonomy and socio-political position of Igbo women altered during

these periods. It seeks to reveal the victimization of and violence upon these women in the name of culture, religion, and morality, and observes how Igbo women, at all times, resisted different forms of oppression in their distinct ways. The selected texts draw attention to the themes of childlessness and motherhood as well and reveal how such societal expectations, both strengthen and constrain the freedom and recognition of women in society. The texts are examined to identify how the perceptions of Igbo men and women about motherhood and mothering altered tremendously from precolonial to postcolonial times. It intends to understand how women endured the challenges associated with mothering in a changing Igbo society. The war narratives by the three writers are analysed to discover how these writers have represented the exceptional support rendered by Igbo women during the Nigerian-Biafran War of 1966. The narratives are analysed to identify the extent of physical, mental, and sexual atrocities experienced by Igbo women during this gruesome war period. It seeks to foreground the brave initiatives rendered by Igbo women during one of the most poignant and challenging phases in the history of Nigeria and disproves the general assumption that the Biafran War has been largely a male enterprise. In the course of realizing these objectives, the study seeks to examine how the three women writers' familiarity with both Western and ethnic cultures has influenced their perceptions about the varying experiences of Igbo women.

The stereotypical representations of African life and people by Western travellers and litterateurs were challenged and deconstructed by African writers in the postcolonial period. Western writers and academicians had failed to capture the

latent shades of life experienced by the indigenous people in Africa and often sought to denigrate and humiliate everything that was African. To most of the early European travellers like the Scottish missionary David Livingstone, the Scottish historian William Winwood Reade, and the English journalist H M Stanley, Africa was a dark continent that needed to be explored, controlled, and enlightened. *Through the Dark Continent* (1878), the very title of Stanley's detailed account of his journey to the interior of Africa, reveals the general colonial comprehension of this distant continent as dark, dangerous, mysterious, and barbaric. The representation of Africa and Africans by Western writers was largely intended to cater to the impulses of the colonizers who wanted to give an exotic picture of the conquered land to their native people. Michael Echerou, in his critical study of the novels of Joyce Cary, questions the denigrating representation of Africans in the novels authored by English writers like Cary. Critical of the racist undertones in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, he observes that "if there is anything 'true' of such novels, it is not essentially (or properly) in its setting or in its depiction of character and personality, but in the accuracy of its reflection of the imaginative temper of the author's culture" (5). Similarly, a large corpus of literature, especially travelogues, penned by European colonizers, explorers, and missionaries reflects a prejudiced narrative, wherein a constant and deliberate effort is made to justify their conquering of Africa and the exploitation of its people. H M Stanley, in his account of exploration and experience in Africa, blatantly reveals the shrewd tactics employed by the colonizers in taming the stereotyped inhabitants of the 'uncanny' land:

Whatever deficiencies, weaknesses, and foibles these people may develop, must be so manipulated that, while they are learning the novel lesson of obedience, they may only just suspect that behind all this there lies the strong unbending force which will eventually make men of them, wild things though they now are. For the first few months then forbearance is absolutely necessary. The dark brother, wild as a colt, chafing, restless, ferociously impulsive, superstitiously timid, liable to furious demonstrations, suspicious and unreasonable, must be forgiven seventy times seven, until the period of probation is passed. (Stanley 71)

Such vehemently scurrilous language was the European way of representing the indigenous people of Africa who were all generalized as uncultured black mass whose age-old pristine culture was left to deteriorate, ethnic differences were manipulated for colonial expedience, physical labour viciously exploited, and plenitude of resources unashamedly plundered.

This kind of racial stereotyping was soon followed by sexual stereotyping. African women were stereotyped by both Western writers and African male writers as ignorant, illiterate, passive, victimised, hulking, and lustful. Their lives have been represented as intricately bound to domestic duties, traditional customs, and rituals, and as objects of male desire and derision. The African women were denied their space and voice in these works which failed to recognize the significant efforts they took to look into the needs of their family and community and to sustain the inherent values of their respective cultures. More than the injustice meted out to them in the Western writings, the African women were offended by the insensitivity of African

male writers and their tendency to trivialize or neglect the concerns and potentials of women. The Kenyan writer Rebeka Njau expresses her discontentment with the stereotyped representations and underrepresentation of African women when she says that men “look at traits they want in a woman and that is the kind of woman they portray. A woman who is most concerned about beauty and dresses, a woman who wallows in a brothel. But a woman who has personality and strength of the spirit never features because they are afraid of that kind of woman” (107).

Several studies have already been carried out to explore the disparity in the lived experiences of Igbo women and their representation in the works authored by both European writers and Igbo male authors. A review of literature based on these writings reveals that a majority of postcolonial Igbo male writers, such as Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, and Elechi Amadi have either underrepresented, stereotyped, or completely ignored their women, assuming that colonization and consequent convulsions within and outside the country have in no way affected the women-folk around them. Their works have often been compared to the writings of Igbo women writers, to bring out the deliberate or inadvertent patriarchal implications rendered in the male-authored texts.

A majority of studies done so far have engaged in a systematic analysis of how Flora Nwapa, the first African woman writer to be internationally published, had to abide by all deprecating remarks by European critics as well as African male writers. Their indictment aimed at diminishing the morale of an emerging female writer from Africa, on account of her race and gender. Notorious among such works is Eustace Palmer’s review of Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* wherein he denounces that the novel

exemplifies her naivety as an amateur writer. In the same line, Anita Kern in her 1978 review of Nwapa's *Never Again* devaluates the oversimplified, monotonous, "school-primer" (58) kind of sentences and clichéd phrases used by the author. In a study as early as 1985, regarding the European and African male hostilities towards Nwapa's writings, the Anglo-Nigerian writer and critic Adewale Maja-Pearce defends Nwapa and her work *Efuru* from vehement criticism unleashed by writers like Eustace Palmer, who has been described as the "most savage" (10), Solomon Ogbede Iyasere, and even by "the great imaginative writer" (11) Nadine Gordimer. The novel was derided for its exhaustive portrayal of Igbo society, plainness of language, and lack of clarity regarding the author's thematic concerns. Maja-Pearce justifies each of these charges and claims that the ultimate theme of *Efuru* is the role of fate in determining the lives of women in Igboland. He explains that Nwapa did not mean to write a psychological novel but just wanted to lay bare the life of a woman in an Ibo society and her lack of choice before what is pre-destined. He argues however that more than the theme, language, or the pessimistic ending, what is most important is the emergence of an African fiction from a "feminist point of view" which ventures to reconstruct the image of African women as capable of being good, sincere, efficient, and true to oneself despite the multiple forces of patriarchal oppression.

Prof. Eldred Jones' disapproval of Nwapa is yet another study that received much critical attention. He makes a comparative study of Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, and Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* in an attempt to understand the representation of the locale and universe in Igboland in



these three works. He criticizes Nwapa for her failure to create a round character in *Efuru* and places it inferior to Elechi Amadi's popular novel *The Concubine* which is applauded for its success in probing into the psychological depth of his characters.

Margaret Laurence's 1968 study *Long Drums and Cannons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists, 1952-66* introduces Flora Nwapa as the first woman in Nigeria to have written a novel. The work praises Nwapa for her woman-centred novel *Efuru* and praises her for juxtaposing with *Efuru* two other fully developed characters - Ossai and Ajanupu. Laurence reviews the novel as one of enormous merit and extols Nwapa for her accomplishment as a great writer. Another early work that recognizes the literary significance of African women writers is Lloyd Brown's *Women Writers in Black Africa* wherein he disapproves of the negative and often ambiguous mode in which Chinua Achebe treats women in *Things Fall Apart*, and Leopold Senghor's idealization of women, especially his glorification of Mother Africa generalizing it to African women's identity which has hardly any correspondence to the actual living condition of women in Africa. Comparing them with Ousmane Sembene's socially realistic works that focus only on women's lack of opportunities and subordination, he asserts that "even among the male authors there is a significant variety of opinion regarding the woman's role and experience in Africa (9)". Brown recognizes the significance of African women as propagators of oral tradition and appreciates their role as storytellers and performers. He further, admires Nwapa's short story collection *This is Lagos and Other Stories* for its uniformity in narration and appreciates her novels *Efuru* and *Idu* for effectively

portraying the Igbo women's predicament in being torn between individual desires and communal expectations.

Carol Boyce Davies' work *Ngambika* remains another significant study that analyses the disparity evident in the representation of African women by male and female writers. In her in-depth study of Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, *Idu* and *One is Enough*, she concludes that Nwapa's world is exclusively a woman's world where "men are shown to be intruders" (249). Women's concern for the self as pitted against the idealised roles of wifedom and motherhood is discussed by Davies as the central theme in all these novels. She also offers a comparative study with regard to the representation of mothers and motherhood in select works of Achebe, Nzekwu, Nwapa, and Emecheta. While the male writers associate motherhood with tradition and culture and tend to idealize the role, the female writers make a bold attempt to state that being a mother does not make a woman complete. It should be added that female writers recognise the significance of motherhood and mothering, yet their portrayal differs from the romanticised perspective often found in the works of male writers. Nwapa advocates childless women to seek fulfilment in other alternative sources to success, whereas Emecheta is frustrated at the way society exploits motherhood as a way to enslave women.

In her collection of scholarly documents on twelve Igbo intellectuals, Gloria Chuku, internationally distinguished for her contributions to African Studies, particularly her profound exploratory studies on Igbo people in Nigeria, evaluates the major themes in Nwapa's works for comprehending the historical details that inform the life of women in Oguta, the central locale of the majority of her novels.

The study also attempts to reconcile some of the contradictions apparent in the representation of women as fictional characters and their actual experiences and socio-cultural positions in different historical contexts within the region under study. In *Black Women Writers Across Cultures*, Prof. James Etim, studies the representation of women and society in Nwapa's works to emphasize the significant literary contributions of Nwapa along with other African and Afro-American women writers. He describes her novels *Efuru* and *Idu* as "novels of development" (167) which attempt to redefine women's role in society. Nwapa's representation of men as "imbecile, poor and unfit" (167) is stated to be accountable for inviting indictments and poor reviews from her male contemporaries. Another chapter in the same work studies the representation of women's realm in Nwapa's two novels, *Women are Different* and *One is Enough*, and her short story collection *This is Lagos and Other Stories* to reveal how Nwapa addresses women's oppression at the hands of tradition and patriarchy.

Mary Umeh, whose specialisation on African women has produced such intensely meticulous works as *Emerging Perspectives on Flora Nwapa* (1998) and *Flora Nwapa, a Pen and a Press* (2010), analyses Nwapa as a pioneer in exposing Igbo women's predicament and struggle towards self-actualisation. She extols Nwapa for her realistic depiction of Ugwuta women thereby initiating a female oral tradition into African literature. In her close analysis of Nwapa's life and experience, Umeh arrives at an inference that most of the women-centred characters of Nwapa bear a close resemblance to the author's own real-life experiences, especially the relentless anguish she suffered living in a polygamous family. Umeh also records an

interview with Nwapa wherein the author strongly advocates for women to be economically independent.

Mgbeadichie in his study on Afrocentricism, analyses Flora Nwapa's works *Efuru* and *Idu* from a womanistic perspective. While Afrocentricism is lauded as a theory of social change that seeks to liberate Africans from Western images and Eurocentric theories, he underscores the necessity to turn to internal factors of oppression within every society in Africa, including marginalisation of women, *osu* caste system, *oro* festival and the tradition of ritual suicide. He chooses to study Nwapa's *Efuru* and *Idu* from a womanistic point of view. Although he appreciates Nwapa's venture to represent the predicament of Igbo women, he agrees with Lloyd Brown that the endings of the novels have failed to resolve the question of women's liberation from patriarchal traditions and do not offer any hope to women in Igboland. Nureni Oyewole Fadare studies the narrative voice in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and analyses the novel based on the theoretical framework of Obioma Nnaemeka's concept of "Nego-feminism" which considers the negotiation and harmonious co-existence between men and women. She argues that African women have never been silent about their hardships though their voices have been ignored for long by male writers. It is with the emergence of women writers that these voices were made heard and women were represented as strong, beautiful, and enterprising new women. Mary D Mears has analysed select works of Flora Nwapa such as *Efuru*, *Idu* and *One is Enough*, and aimed to bring out the voices of all female characters appearing in these novels. The study was grounded in the criticism of Barbara Smith, Obioma Nnaemeka, and Barbara Christian for analysing the female

characters and their desire for choice and self-discovery. The study also relies on the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, Jonathan Dollimore, and Mae Handerson to understand the language, dialogue, and heteroglossia. The works of Lloyd Brown, Mary Modupe Kolawale, and Molara Ogundipe Leslie have been examined to analyse the female characters who make choices in their lives and bear the consequences of these choices. The influence of Christianity and education in Igbo society and the social position of women are also examined in detail. Though the thesis studies each of the selected works from multiple perspectives, it has not devoted much space to include the voices of women other than the central characters, as stated in the objective. A number of other studies by scholars like Anthonia Adevoha, Patrick Colm Hogan, Sabine Jell- Bahlsen, Taiwo Adetunji Osinubi, and Elleke Boehmer, to enumerate a few, have also made a close analysis of Nwapa's works to understand how she represents the Igbo traditional customs which affect the lives of Igbo women.

A study of the representation of female experience by major West African writers like Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, and Mariama Ba is done from a postcolonial perspective by Jean Wilson. She appreciates Nwapa's creation of women-centred African novels that explore the impact of tradition and colonialism in the lives of Igbo women. According to Wilson, Nwapa's women in *Efuru* and *Idu* are quite beautiful and less rebellious. In *One is Enough* Nwapa makes more progressive thoughts on the economic independence of women. Wilson observes that Buchi Emecheta exposes the vulnerability of women in marital relationships and questions the celebration of motherhood in almost all her novels. The work also

analyses in detail the impact of colonialism in Nigeria, including the changes brought about by Western education. The study explores the deterioration of women's social position and role consequent to Western influence. Female voices, for instance, were restricted to storytelling, marketplace conversations, or as priestesses with the advent of colonizers. With the establishment of Western textile industries and importing of Western goods into Africa, women lost their monopoly over local trade. Wilson's analysis of Buchi Emecheta's *In the Ditch* and *Second-Class Citizen* reveals that more than Nwapa, Emecheta is more critical of traditional Igbo attitudes toward women.

*African Wo/man Palava: The Nigerian Novel by Women* by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi is another ground-breaking work that examines the literary skill of eight Nigerian women writers including Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta. It analyses almost all major works of the authors under study and observes how their writings have inspired both male and female writers to be sensitive in their treatment of gender issues within society. Flora Nwapa's works are analysed to explore the recurring theme of childlessness that seems to be representative of "the Nigerian angst" (136). It also analyses the Igbo myths and deities, especially the lake goddess Uhamiri which often forms the backdrop to Nwapa's novels. In her methodical analysis of Buchi Emecheta's works, Ogunyemi emphasises the motif of journey recurrent in these works and attempts to unravel the inherent metaphorical and imaginative journeys, and the subsequent repercussions awaiting the protagonists "travelling across temporal, geographical and social planes" (221).

Katherine Fishburn in her reading of Buchi Emecheta's works, exposes the intricacies ensuing when an African text is interpreted by Western feminists. Her work attempts to examine the cross-cultural disparity affecting the aesthetic experience of a reader belonging to a culture different from that of the author. She proposes an interactive or conversational mode of reading, focusing specifically on "moments of misunderstanding, wherein we isolate the passages that puzzle, irritate or alienate us" (5) and then assimilate the cross-cultural meanings embedded in them. A comparative study of Nadine Gordimer, Nayantara Sehgal, and Buchi Emecheta was carried out by Joya Uraizee, in an attempt to understand how postcolonial women writers belonging to different nations, races, classes, and cultures show striking similarity in their representation of women's experience. In her contribution to *Black Women Writers across Culture*, Uraizee examines the politics of gender in Emecheta's works and argues that Emecheta herself has been a victim of fragmented identity and the sense of displacement gets reflected in her central characters. Despite claiming to be the voice of the marginalised, "her writing suffers from a sense of fission in that the limitations imposed on her by history and ideology prompts her to silence or displace certain marginalised voices and issues while claiming to speak on their behalf" (172).

Harry Olufunwa studies five novels of Emecheta to conclude that Emecheta's characters display remarkable cognizance of their rights and the fluidity of gender roles in the changing postcolonial scenario. Catriona Cornelissen analyses selected works of African women writers to examine the contestation of cultural authority in the memory and writings of selected African women writers including

Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta. She infers that Nwapa and Emecheta are concerned with the woman as an individual rather than as a collective being. Nwapa's women bear the consequences of being non-conformists and vulnerably succumb to their fortune, whereas Emecheta's Western adaptation instigates her to question the Igbo customs and suggests women take up non-traditional roles for their self-actualisation.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, one of the most renowned among contemporary women writers, is often studied on par with other Igbo women writers. Her first novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) discusses the impact of colonialism and religious fanaticism in silencing and victimising Igbo women. Ogaga Okuyade in the article "Changing Borders and Creating Voices: Silence as Character in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*" conceptualizes silence as a character and shows how Adichie uses silence as an effective tool to break the shackles of oppression. Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* is closely examined by Dr. Chitharanjan Misra to interpret the symbolic and metaphoric meaning inherent in the text. Ehijele Femi Eromosele analyses *Purple Hibiscus* to trace the intricacies affecting the central character's physical, mental, and sexual metamorphoses in a postcolonial Christian Nigeria. He elucidates how Adichie reproaches Christianity for attempting to dampen the instincts in human beings by persistently dwelling on the notions of sin and redemption. A similar study on oppressive power structures in postcolonial Nigeria is undertaken by Izuu Nwankwo in the article "*Purple Hibiscus* and the Theme of Moderation as a Metaphor in the Evolution of Contemporary Nigerian Fiction." Adichie's narrative strategies and the intermingling of history, narration,



and trauma are found to be the crux of Joke de Mey's dissertation on *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The use of language, chapter divisions, and the presence of multiple narrators in the text have been analysed in-depth to explore the traumatic experiences of life during and after the Biafran War. Mey's study appreciates Adichie as a historical novelist who "uses the intersections of history and literature to keep the past in the present, to keep it alive, and also to make the historical and political history felt" (24). In *Narrating the New African Diaspora: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigerian Literature in Context* (2019), Maxmilian Feldner discusses the novel as a brilliant attempt to address the formation of a new national identity and argues that it exemplifies Adichie's observation that literature has a very decisive role in identity construction in Nigeria. Adichie's representation of nationalism in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is compared to Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of Savannah* in an article by Aghogho Akpome. Onyeka Ike makes a comparative study of the techniques deployed in the Biafran War narratives *Never Again* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* authored by Flora Nwapa and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Using the New Historical theory, Ike concludes that though the historical context is the same in both novels, their literary techniques vary considerably, revealing that no two writers treat the same matter in the same way. The changing perception of Britishness from 1933 to 2006 is traced by Francoise Ugochukwu in the writings of ten Igbo writers from Pita Nwana to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Niyi Akingbe, on the other hand, analyses Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* to appreciate the privilege enjoyed by a woman writer in representing the dehumanisation of women and children during the historical Nigerian-Biafran war of 1966.

Shalini Nadaswaran, in her doctoral thesis, *Out of the Silence: Igbo Women Writers and Contemporary Nigeria* (2013), traces the transition in the literary representation of Igbo women by eight Igbo women writers belonging to three different generations. These writers include Flora Nwapa as the first-generation writer, Buchi Emecheta and Ifeoma Okoye in the second generation, and Akachi Ezeigbo, Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie and Unoma Azuah among the third-generation writers. Nadaswaran employs African feminism and African womanism to examine the central female characters in select works of these writers and arrives at the conclusion that though there are conspicuous differences in the concerns of women's domestic role, all eight writers share a common stand about the representation of women's spirit of nationalism and quest for self-realization. She gives Flora Nwapa the credit for liberating female characters from the stereotyped images constructed by male writers and for having "dispelled the myth of silent women" (66). In her article titled "Rethinking Family Relationships in Third Generation Nigerian Women's Fiction", Nadaswaran examines the central characters in selected coming-of-age novels of four African women writers including Adichie to reveal the transition of the female protagonists from childhood to maturity. She traces in all these works two common figures of patriarchal oppression, the father figure and the husband, whose attempts to confine female identity to the glorified traditional pedestals are vigorously subverted by all these writers and their characters.

Syed Hajira Begum examines select works of Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie to examine how these women writers deconstruct

gender identities through their characters and how their literature exemplifies the emerging trends in African women's writing. They question the hegemonic power structures in postcolonial Nigeria and resist all forms of oppression using different subversive strategies. Swatiba Jadeja studies the female characters in the works of Adichie in her 2018 doctoral thesis titled "Portrayal of Nigerian Women in the Selected Works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie". The study posits that Adichie has portrayed the female characters in *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and *Americanah*, as victims of patriarchy who struggle to resist all forms of oppression. It concludes that Adichie and her female characters emerge as voices for change in Nigerian society, especially in its attitude towards women.

These reviews of literature underscore the remarkable input rendered by Nwapa, Emecheta, and Adichie in voicing the thoughts, emotions, and challenges experienced by Igbo women in pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial Nigeria. However, these studies have not sufficiently represented the individual potential and collective agency of Igbo women which were important aspects of Igbo womanhood that all the three writers were trying to emphasize. The literature review reveals a sufficient lack of studies that compare the writings of the three selected women writers belonging to three different generations. Their works need to be more systematically analysed in the light of ethnographical, anthropological, and historical writings, for a more comprehensive understanding of Igbo women's experiences over the period of time. There is a research gap with regard to the identification of mothering patterns in Igboland and how the Igbo attitude towards childlessness, motherhood, and mothering has altered and evolved over the period of

time. Women's survival strategies and invaluable contributions during the Nigerian Civil War or Biafran War have also not been comprehensively studied with sufficient insights from historical texts on this war.

This thesis endeavours to add to the existing studies on the Igbo women writers Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie by foregrounding the authors' attempts to reassert and reclaim the collective strength embodied by Igbo womanhood and examining the selected texts through the lens of ethnographical, anthropological, and historical texts to discover how authentically the women writers have attempted to portray the changing gender ideologies, female experiences, and political instabilities in Igboland. The study is also relevant in disproving the assumptions of the Western Feminist discourses that the Third World women are perpetual victims of patriarchy. By analysing the varying experiences and distinct survival strategies of Igbo women belonging to different localities, classes, domestic circumstances, and socio-political contexts, the thesis attempts to demonstrate that even within a single ethnic community, women's experiences depend on several factors and hence, cannot be generalised. The thesis recognizes that like most of the indigenous communities belonging to postcolonial countries, the Igbo community also underwent several conspicuous and latent changes during and after colonial rule. In the course of changing circumstances and ensuing challenges, the womenfolk of this community have struggled hard relentlessly, functioning as wives, mothers, caretakers, producers, traders, and social activists; all the while signifying their uncompromising commitment towards their fellow beings. The study plays a vital role in substantiating the necessity to "search for voices"

within women's writings so as to identify the subtle nuances of female experiences of distinct contexts and to empower women for a more inclusive tomorrow.

The central methodological framework for this thesis is borrowed from the postcolonial feminist theorizations propounded by one of the leading scholars of postcolonial and transnational feminist discourses, Chandra Talpade Mohanty. Also, several African indigenous theoretical formulations, most appropriate for realizing the multiple objectives of this study, have been applied to examine the distinct experiences of Igbo women.

In her influential essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1984), which was later published as a chapter in her groundbreaking book *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (2003), Mohanty denounces the Western feminist tendency to homogenize the experiences of all women of Third World countries as passive victims of patriarchy. She problematizes the Western feminist approach of limiting "the definition of the female subject to gender identity, completely bypassing social, class and ethnic identities" (*Feminism Without Borders* 31). She argues that "the application of the notion of women as a homogeneous category to women in the third world, colonizes and appropriates the pluralities of the simultaneous location of different groups of women in social class and ethnic frameworks" (*Feminism Without Borders* 39). While Mohanty, as a transnational feminist, endorses the concept of solidarity among women across the world, she insists that such solidarity should be inclusive of all women, conscious of the different nuances of their

experiences and perceive of their varying socio-cultural positions, so that they can operate united against all common forces of oppression.

One of the earliest branches of feminism that challenged the Western feminist imperial attempts to universalize women's experiences was African-American feminism or Black feminism. Black feminism denounced the Western feminist beguiling slogan, 'sisterhood is powerful', for having created a false sense of solidarity among women across the globe and failing to incorporate the concerns of women of colour. Living with the traumatic memories of a brutal past of slavery, violence, displacement, dehumanization, sexual assaults, and objectification, the black women's experiences in the land of the colonizers have been intensely complex and wretched, specifically owing to the intersectionality of race, class, and gender. The Black feminists continually challenged the American society's subordination of the Black women as the "other" and the prejudiced tenets of Western feminism:

US Black women have long recognized the fundamental injustice of a system that routinely and from one generation to the next relegates US Black women to the bottom of the social hierarchy. When faced with this structural injustice targeted toward the group, many Black women have insisted on our right to define our own reality, establish our own identities, and name our history. (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 79)

The Black feminist critics like Sojourner Truth, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Angela Davis, Barbara Christian, Audre Lorde, and Toni Morrison, to list a few, recognized the necessity "to construct independent self-definitions within a context

where Black womanhood remains routinely derogated (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 110)". Nkiru Nzegwu, in her poem titled "Sisterhood", expresses her contempt for Western women's pretensions of solidarity with African women as common victims of male chauvinism. She poignantly pictures the apparent racial discrimination and ill-treatment of black women by Western women and holds that feminism has in no way addressed the issues specific to them. The black woman's oppression has not been solely on the basis of her gender, but race has always been one of the most significant factors leading to her exploitation at the hands of white women. Nzegwu therefore criticizes the Western women for having replaced patriarchy with what she calls "sisterarchy" ("Sisterhood") and for having overlooked issues experienced by the black women. This negligence of the experiences of women belonging to different classes, races, sexual orientations, and geographical locations has often resulted in serious contestations against Western feminism and necessitates more specific women-centred approaches of study.

A subsequent offshoot of Black feminism is the concept of Womanism introduced by Alice Walker to address the issues specific to Black women or women of colour. In her ground-breaking work, *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden* (1983), she defines a "womanist" as "a black feminist or feminist of colour ...who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female (xi)". Walker's womanist theory proved distinct from Western feminism for its inclusivity of coloured women, for emphasizing solidarity

among women, for challenging oppression based on race, class, and gender, and for targeting social and gender equality. It emerged as a powerful theoretical framework for the Black women and women of ethnic minorities in Africa. Izgarjan and Markov, in their study, observe that “precisely because it provided a broader framework than feminism, many prominent female scholars and writers such as Buchi Emecheta, Mariama Bâ, Miriam Tlali identified themselves as womanists rather than feminists and used womanism as a paradigm in their analysis of the texts of women from ethnic minorities or economically undeveloped countries” (310).

It, however, turned out that though womanism attempted to include the predicament of African women in general, it still had a long way to go, in incorporating and addressing issues specific to the diaspora of African descent. The theories of Western feminism, Black feminism, and Womanism were found insufficient to explain the thoughts and experiences of African women across the globe. The African feminist scholar Clenora Hudson-Weems, therefore, emphasized the need for introducing a new name and a new theory for dealing with the issues of all women of African descent. She is disappointed at the apparent racial connotations in the words and attitudes of exponents of feminism in the West, where “race precedes sexism” (Hudson-Weems, *African Womanism* 3) at all levels of the society. According to her, Black feminism is “some African women’s futile attempt to fit into the constructs of an established White female paradigm” (Hudson-Weems, *African Womanism* 37).

Hudson-Weems strongly feels that terms like ‘Black feminism’, ‘African feminism’, and ‘Womanism’ are only mediocre terms that cannot fully encompass



the lives of African women living in continental Africa and abroad. She insists that “problems must not be resolved using an alien framework, i.e., feminism, but must be resolved from within an endemic theoretical construct – Africana Womanism” (Hudson-Weems, *African Womanism* 27). She coined the term “Africana Womanism” in 1987 as “the ideal terminology” (Hudson-Weems, *African Womanism* 22) offering an appropriate theoretical framework for Africana women’s discourses. She explains:

The first part of the coinage, Africana, identifies the ethnicity of the woman being considered, and this reference to her ethnicity, establishing her cultural identity, relates directly to her ancestry and land base – Africa. The second part of the term, Womanism, echoes Sojourner Truth’s powerful impromptu speech ‘Ain’t I a Woman’, one in which she battles with the dominant alienating forces in her life as a struggling Africana woman, questioning the accepted idea of womanhood. (22-23)

Hudson-Weems evaluates that feminism succeeded in convincing Black American women that sexism is a more dangerous and pertinent issue than racism. This provoked the Black women to turn against their men and to remain content with their subservient position among the upper-class white women, silently asserting solidarity with their demands. While Black feminism based its agenda on Western feminism and stereotyped all Africana men as unjust, cruel, and despicable, Africana Womanism adopted a more inclusive approach towards men.

Though one ought to acknowledge the efforts of the proponents and practitioners of these theories, in breaking the silences imposed on women of

African descent and addressing discrimination based on the intersectionality of race, class, and gender, it remains an undeniable fact that the experiences of women in the land of the colonizers is drastically different from those belonging to the land of the colonized. A comprehensive study of the oppression, subjugation, and empowerment of African women living within the continent of Africa, gradually developed into what came to be known as African feminism. Ameena Alhassan quotes the words of Nigerian Finnish writer Minna Salami that “African feminism is feminism by and for African women” (“Nigerians need to Discover”). Gwendolyn Mikell, a professor of Anthropology and the author of the meticulous work *African Feminism: The Politics of Survival in Sub-Saharan Africa* (1997), underscores that the oppression and subjugation of African women take place in both public and private spheres, often as a consequence of both traditional African culture and Western colonization.

African women are dealing with the dilemma of trying to achieve a consensus among themselves about how to respond to the persistent gender hierarchy in ways that are personally liberating as well as politically positive. They are seeking to redefine their roles in ways that allow them a new culturally attuned activism. This is not a totally new challenge for African women. Gender hierarchy and female subordination, evident in traditional African culture, became more pronounced during the phases of Islamic expansion and European conquest, as well as afterward. (Mikell 3)

African feminism, as an approach, is therefore significant in comprehending the marginalisation experienced by African women within their specific ethnic culture and consequent to the hierarchical gender roles established by the colonizers.

The necessity for the Third World nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to establish their own distinct theoretical formulations was further endorsed by a new branch of feminism known as Postcolonial Feminism which emerged in the 1980s. In 1984, two ground-breaking essays “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” by Audre Lorde and Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s “Under Western Eyes” were published which demanded the necessity for formulating indigenous theories to recognize the victimisation and resistance of women in postcolonial nations. Mohanty identifies that whenever Third World women are taken as a category of analysis, there are five common generalised assumptions that Western Feminists attempt to accentuate. These assumptions include perceiving women as perpetual victims of male violence, women as universal dependents, women as oppressed beings in familial systems, women as controlled by religious ideologies, and women as being affected alike by changing economic policies. Each of these assumptions constitutes the Third World women as a stable “coherent group” (31) and fails to look at the differences based on race, class, region, religion, ethnicity, and culture. They deny agency to the Third World women and render them incapable of rising “above their generality and their ‘object’ status” (39).

Mohanty, therefore, underscores the importance of decolonizing these assumptions through a discursive approach, wherein the women of Third World

countries begin to assert their agency and 'subject' position and celebrate the plurality of their identity, experiences, and socio-cultural positions by representing themselves to the world. She states:

Any discussion of the intellectual and political construction of "Third World feminisms" must address itself to two simultaneous projects: the internal critique of hegemonic "Western" feminisms and the formulation of autonomous feminist concerns and strategies that are geographically, historically, and culturally grounded. The first project is one of deconstructing and dismantling; the second is one of building and constructing. While these projects appear to be contradictory, the one working negatively and the other positively, unless these two tasks are addressed simultaneously, Third World feminisms run the risk of marginalization or ghettoization from both mainstream and Western feminist discourses. (17)

This underscores the significance of relying on distinct indigenous feminist discourses that reflect the specific situations of women in different ethnocultural, geographical, socio-political, and economic conditions.

Naomi Nkealah recognizes multiple indigenous theories of African feminism in her article "(West) African Feminisms and Their Challenges." It includes 'Motherism' by Catherine Acholonu, 'Womanism/Woman palavering' by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, 'Snail-sense feminism' by Akachi Ezeigbo, 'Stiwanism' by Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie; 'African womanism' by Mary Modupe Kolawole, 'Femalism' by Chioma Opara and 'Nego-feminism' by Obioma

Nnaemeka. Among these theorists, all except Ogundipe-Leslie and Kolawale are of Igbo descent. Nkealah analyses each of these indigenous theories and arrives at the conclusion that despite their genuine concern for the culture-specific experiences of African women, there are a number of challenges and inadequacies in these theories that have to be rectified. While the indigenous theories decried the exclusionary predisposition of Western feminism, they themselves are exclusionary in many respects. For instance, Catherine Acholunu's concept of motherism tends to exclude urban women in Africa while romanticizing the rural women alone for giving and nurturing life, and for the social, economic, agricultural, and political contributions and productivity that they render. It therefore becomes incapable as a theoretical tool to study West African women's writings that project "modern, educated, economically independent, and assertive urban women" (Nkealah 65). Akachi Eziegbo's snail-sense feminism invites criticism for lauding African women as capable of evading problematic situations instead of confronting them. The ineptness of this theory is evident in its comparison of the survival strategies of African women to the cautious moves of a snail. Nkealah is critical of Eziegbo's elucidation that "like a snail that traverses harsh terrain with caution, flexibility, foresight, alertness to danger, and the sensibility to bypass obstacles, a snail-sense feminist negotiates her way around patriarchy, tolerates sexist men, collaborates with non-sexist ones, avoids confrontation with patriarchs, and applies diplomacy in her dealings with society at large" (68). It dampens the revolutionary and demanding spirit of African women who have always adopted unbending strategies for the survival of themselves and their community. Femalism by Chioma Opara, also has been criticized for its comparison of the exploited female body to the colonised and

battered African nation. This theory is apparently too broad and vague to address the day-to-day issues specific to women of specific ethnic groups. Kolawale's theory of African womanism, on the other hand, is found to differ from Alice Walker's concept of womanism in that the former excludes women of different sexual orientations. African womanism places "heterosexual women at the centre of their feminist politics with their emphasis on negotiation with and accommodation of (heterosexual) men – husbands, fathers, brothers and sons. Lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual women tend to be completely effaced" (Nkealah 65). Ogundipe-Leslie too refuses to address the issue of sexual orientation subtly by stating that sexual orientation is a private matter that need not be discussed. However, her concept of Stiwanism has been relevant in asserting the central argument of this study.

It is in her ground-breaking work *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations* (1994), that Ogundipe-Leslie introduced the concept of Stiwanism as a proposal to include the African female power into the male-dominated spaces in the public domain. STIWA is an acronym for Social Transformations Including Women in Africa, wherein she encourages African women to break the shackles of gender oppression and insists the African patriarchal society to recognize the potential of women and be more inclusive of their ability to undertake and execute great responsibilities for the prosperity of the communities and nations in Africa. She considers literature as a vehicle for social transformation and emphasizes the need for combining activism and academia. Stiwanism underscores the need to augment "the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual resources

of African women that constitute significant cultural capital for the revitalization of African societies” (T.J. Allan 197).

This thesis thus endeavours to accomplish its aims and objectives by effecting the dual projects proposed by Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her essay “Under Western Eyes”, which demands that the Western assumptions about Third World women be deconstructed by relying on specific indigenous theories that are “geographically, historically, and culturally grounded” (Mohanty 17), so that the experiences and concerns of women belonging to distinct contexts may be recognized and their individual and collective female potential be enhanced for bringing about a socio-political transformation of the African societies as envisioned by Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie.

A study of literature formulated on the experiences of women belonging to specific ethnic groups in a region proposes an inquiry into the historical and socio-cultural milieu of the land for a proper understanding of the ethnic women’s lives. The origin and growth of the Igbo kingdom, their traditions, belief systems, and cultural practices reveal the social position, cultural expectations, and traditional roles ascribed to Igbo women. The study is chiefly informed by the works of Igbo anthropologists, ethnographers, and scholars like Elizabeth Isichei, Victor C Uchendu, Joseph Therese Agbasiere, Philip Koslow, Ifi Amadiume, Toyin Falola, Pade Badru, Kalu Ogbaa, Michael Muonwe and the like.

Since 1960, the period after Nigeria’s independence, there has been a conspicuous upsurge in the historical scholarship on Nigeria. In the “Preface to Academic Historiography” in *Nigeria, Nationalism and Writing History* (2010), the

eminent African scholars and professors, Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto observe that there has been a great difference in the historiography of Nigeria recorded by Western historians, missionaries and explorers during the colonial period and those written by Nigerians themselves. While the former wrote with colonial motives and to improve “Europeans’ knowledge of the so-called savages” (Falola and Aderinto 4), the Nigerian and African historians wrote the histories of their land and culture with a larger agenda. According to Falola and Aderinto, the two major agendas of African scholars included “the need to defend African cultural heritage in the face of Western stereotypes and the desire to document the past for posterity” (10). They aimed to reclaim the rich tradition and past, in an attempt to assert their African identity and ethno-cultural diversity. The result was a rich corpus of anthropological, ethnographical, and historical works on Nigeria that played a decisive role in exploring the traditions, cultural diversity, and ethnic plurality characteristic of the country.

The region that emerged as a nation named Nigeria in the twentieth century was a land pervaded by European colonizers as early as the fifteenth century. Prof. Victor C Uchendu, in his pioneering ethnographical study *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria* (1965) expounds on the preliminary contact of the West Africans with the colonizers:

For nearly four centuries (1434-1807), the Niger Coast formed a “contact community” – the contact point between European and African traders: The Portuguese from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Dutch from the seventeenth and the British from the eighteenth century. It was a period of



trade on the coast rather than one of conquest or empire building in the hinterland. (V. Uchendu 4)

Till the beginning of the nineteenth century, this trade involved the traffic of African men and women as slaves to different parts of the world, but with the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, the European powers set their eyes on the raw materials and other resources in the mainland, which gradually demanded their permanent settlement and political subjugation of the region. In the Berlin Conference of 1884, the European powers enthusiastically schematized a ‘Scramble for Africa’, which tore the continent into disproportionate masses. “The Berlin Conference spanned almost four months of deliberations, from 15 November 1884 to 26 February 1885. By the end of the Conference, the European powers had neatly divided Africa among themselves, drawing the boundaries of Africa much as we know them today” (“The Berlin Conference”). The region in West Africa which came under the British colonial power was initially taken over as three protectorates namely Northern, Eastern, and Lagos protectorates. The West African scholar Pade Badru records that constant violation of boundaries by bandits and outlaws, and increasing colonial resistance by local chiefs provoked the colonizers to merge ‘the area along River Niger’ to form a new nation named “Nigeria”. “Thus, the creation of Nigeria by the British imperial state was merely for administrative purposes. As far as geopolitics is concerned, Nigeria is simply an amalgam of different cultures with very little shared historical or socio-cultural characteristics” (Badru 4). E.C. Ejiogu also underscores this observation in his scholarly work *The Roots of Political Instability in Nigeria* (2011). He expounds that “the part of West Africa’s Niger Basin which

the British carved into Nigeria is one of Africa's several microcosms. It encompasses the continent's typically rich socio-cultural diversity, particularly because of the distinct groups that inhabit it" (Ejiogu 22). He deliberates this plurality as one of the major causes why the creation of Nigeria proved to be a "failed" and "abstract" state construction.

These studies account for why the country which had only three regional divisions during the colonial period namely the northern region, western region, and eastern region, gradually disintegrated into a total of thirty-six states in the decades following Nigeria's independence in 1960. Chiemela Godwin Wambu et.al, in examining the recurrent state-creation in Nigeria, opine that the ultimate objective of this political move was to achieve "political, economic and numerical domination of the south by the north" (1). In 1963, the mid-western region was carved out from the Western region altering the tripodal regional structures into four regions. Thereafter in 1967, the military General Yakubu Gowon divided the country into twelve states, and in 1976, Murtala Mohammed added seven more states to the country making it to a total of nineteen states. Under the regime of Ibrahim Babangida, eleven more states were created, two in 1987 and nine in 1991. The total of thirty states thus created was augmented to thirty-six when in 1996, General Sani Abacha added six more states to the country. The balkanisation of the forcefully established country of Nigeria to thirty-six states in less than four decades of independence is evocative of the deterring ethnocultural plurality and accelerating political instability within the country (Wambu 4). This multiplicity and subsequent state of violence in Nigeria has however provoked historians, anthropologists, and other scholars to inquire into

the heritages of varying traditions, socio-cultural structures, belief systems, and colonial repercussions defining the lives of over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups in the country.

In *Lords of the Savanna* (1997), a historical record of ancient kingdoms in pre-colonial West Africa, Philip Koslow traces the transcending power in the region from the Nok culture of the 5th century BC, to the establishment of West Africa's first great kingdom of ancient Ghana by 750 A.D and from there to the emergence of Mali and Songhay "whose domains extended along the mighty Niger River and across the rolling plains of the West African savanna" (9). These kingdoms later gave way to numerous powerful ethnic identities such as the Bambara of Mali, the Igbo of southeast Nigeria, the Mossi of Burkina Faso, Nupe of Northern Nigeria, and the nomadic Fulani. It included such small and large ethnic clusters as Hausa, Fulani, Bini, Ijaw, Kanuri, Yoruba, Tiv, Okpe, Ibibio, Igbo, Igala, Efik, and others. Among these tribes with distinct cultural practices and beliefs, three groups gradually emerged into prominence: the Hausa-Fulani in the North, Yoruba in the Southwest, and Igbo in the Southeast. These groups, along with the minority ethnic groups differ from each other in several aspects including religion, culture, and language. Hausa and Fulani are in fact two separate ethnic groups in the North, with Islam as their religion. Intermarriages and common religion resulted in a harmonious relationship between these two strictly patriarchal groupings and they soon came to be known together as the Hausa-Fulani group. The Yorubas who occupy the southwestern part of the country were basically nomadic. The Yoruba land has both Islam and Christianity as its religion.

The Southeastern part of the country is occupied by one of the most educated and studied tribes in Africa namely the Igbo or Ibo. The present-day Igboland, which is domicile to the different clans of this lineage, encompasses the states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. The Igbos are said to have embraced Christianity during the colonial period but like all other ethnic tribes in Nigeria, they treasure their traditional culture with great awe and reverence. The three major groups also differ in terms of the language spoken. Gbade Aladeojebi in his book *History of Yoruba Land* states that the languages in Nigeria are broadly classified into three linguistic groups namely the Niger-Congo group, the Nilo-Saharan group, and the Afro-Asiatic group. While Hausa belongs to the Afro-Asiatic group, Yoruba and Igbo belong to the Kwa subgroup of the Niger-Congo family. There are also considerable differences among the three tribes with regard to lifestyle, food habits, occupation, festivity, judicial system, and other customs and traditions, which are beyond the scope of this study.

However, there is a dearth of significant evidence concerning the origins of the Igbos. “When and from where the Igbo came into their present territory is not known. Their origin is a subject of much speculation. The people have no common tradition of origin” (V.Uchendu 2). However, the Igbo people are believed to have been living “in south-eastern Nigeria for at least 5000 years” (Koslow 31-32). In *Igbo-Israel: A Comparison of Igbo and Ancient Israel’s Culture*, Odi Moghalu traces the Igbo roots in ancient Israel and claims that the Bible and the testimonies of Olaudah Equino and George Basden serve as reliable pointers to the Igbo heritage in the Hebrew culture. He analyses numerous biblical, historical, and linguistic

factors to emphasise his argument that the Igbos originate from Moses' contemporary Eri, who is proclaimed to be the progenitor of the Nri kingdom. The Igbos are thus said to be the descendants of Eri, the fifth son of Jacob, who migrated to the Western part of Africa before the Israelites' exodus from Egypt (Jannah "History"). However, the Igbos firmly believe that their supreme god *Chukwu* placed them in Igboland right at the moment the world was created. Hence, they resist all external attempts to trace their origin and assert that they did not come from anywhere and that anyone who states they have come from anywhere "is a liar" (Ogba 11). They led a comparatively complacent and peaceful life, especially in the eastern region of the Niger River.

The domestic and public issues in Igboland, the southeastern region where the Igbos inhabited, were generally resolved by several ritual men and village elders. Hence goes the popular Igbo dictum *Igbo enwe eze* which means 'the Igbo has no kings'. This proposes that in an Igbo community, the authority is not in the hands of a single person but decisions are taken by leaders in the community. Odi Moghalu explains that this democratic spirit is transferred from generation to generation through oral narratives, ceremonies, and festivals. Community issues are put to open discussions and deliberations before the elders. The oldest man will preside over the discussion and pronounce the people's decision at the end of the meeting. They abide by "democratic principles of free speech, assembly, equity, equality and justice as guides to an Igbo functioning society" (Moghalu, Ch.2). This encourages and enables communal solidarity which builds and strengthens the Igbo society. Koslow, therefore, describes the Igbos as "pioneers of democracy" (31). It may be

noticed here that it is this democratic spirit of the Igbos that encouraged the participation of traditional Igbo women in all significant meetings, especially those that concern the issues of women.

The political institutions of the Igbos provided room for individual growth and advancement, for they believed that self-development was essential for the growth of their community. In the pre-colonial period, the strength and prestige of every village depended upon the physically tough male warriors of the land who established their valour by taking an enemy's head. A person's ability and valour were honoured above his age. A good citizen should also be "a man of great prestige, *okwu ome* – 'one who says and does what he says'" (V. Uchendu, 34). Igbo individualism, according to Uchendu, is deeply rooted in solidarity with the community. It is this solidarity and democratic tactics that initially dampened the colonial attempts to conquer Igboland. The absence of a central and uniform governing system made it difficult for the Britishers to contrive their colonial strategies which were fiercely resisted by the Igbos. The Igbos' resistance to European exploitations is evident right from the time of the trans-Atlantic slave trade that purposed to crush the dignity and self-assurance of even the most valiant of Igbo men. These bitter humiliations however continued to augment their conviction in gods and ancestors and also added to their resolution to oppose the tyranny as a community.

Prof. Uzodinma Nwala, the Father of African philosophy, is one of the early African scholars to spearhead a systematic probe into the crux of African traditional philosophy that has been orally transmitted generation after generation against the

well-written critical philosophy propagated by Western philosophers. Born in Mbaise, Imo state, and hailed as ‘Ikenga of Itu Mbaise’, Nwala has been lauded for his efforts in initiating a renewed interest in Igbo philosophy. In his seminal book *Igbo Philosophy* (1985), Nwala describes *Omenala* in the following words:

*Omenala* includes major beliefs about the origin of the universe and its nature, the place of the spirits, deities, man and other beings in the universe, the nature or character of taboos, regulations, prescriptions and prohibitions as to what is proper in such a universe – rules of marriage, sexual intercourse, attitudes to strangers – and forms of social relationship, as well as the realm of simple decency and etiquette. Indeed, *Omenala* is a body of law and morals along with their metaphysical foundations (Nwala 27).

These laws and morals were strictly observed and practised by the community in an attempt to transmit their belief system to posterity. The religious and cultural belief system of the Igbos is known as *Odinani*, and its cultural practices are what is known as *Omenani* or *Omenala*. According to Emmanuel Anizoba, “Odinani is the primeval revelation given to early races for the guidance and instruction of all humanity” (34). The scholar and professor of philosophy Ngangah identifies four core aspects of the Igbo belief system, namely *Okike* (Creation), *Alusi* (Deities), *Mmuo* (Diverse spirits), and *Uwa* (the visible physical world). He holds that “since supernatural and natural forces are interlinked in Igbo cultural belief system, these four aspects are necessarily interconnected” (4).

Being pantheistic, there is a long array of deities for the Igbos to worship and appease. Chinua Achebe throws light on this when he says, “In some cultures, an

individual may worship one of the gods or goddesses in the pantheon and pay scant attention to the rest. In Igbo religion such selectiveness is unthinkable. All the people must placate all the gods all the time!” (C. Achebe, “Foreword” xi). Central to these deities is the creator who is named *Chukwu*, the supreme god whose abode is in heaven and who is therefore invoked as *Chi-di-n’Elu*, “God who lives above” (V. Uchendu 95). Next to this ‘high god’ are the minor gods and goddesses who may often be very unsympathetic, hard-hearted, and fastidious. Among these deities, *Ala* or *Ani*, the earth goddess, has far-reaching influence as the goddess of fertility. While *Chukwu* is also worshipped as *Chineke*, ‘the God who creates’, *Ala* is responsible for preserving all that has been created by *Chukwu* and assures that her children abide by the laws of the land. Her blessings are considered to be indispensable for the fertility of both the land and the people who inhabit it. In the words of Uchendu:

*Ala* is a merciful mother. She interceded for her children with other spirits. Minor deities may not take action against Igbo without asking *ala* to warn her children, but no spirit may intercede or intervene when *ala* has decided to punish. But she does not punish in haste; she gives many signals of her displeasure. Quite reluctantly, after many unheeded warnings, *ala* may kill by bouncing the wicked on the ground until they are dead (96).

Offence against *ala* includes infringement of Igbo taboos such as incest, and the people who dare to indulge in such offences are “denied ground burial, the worst social humiliation for any Igbo” (96). *Chukwu* and *Ala* are often seen as representing the complementarity of gender positions in Igbo society. Another very important



deity is *Chi*; the spirit descended from ‘the Great Spirit’ *Chukwu* and resides within every individual as his/her personal guardian.

According to the Igbo philosopher Emmanuelle Anizoba, *chi* resides in not just human beings but all living forms. “That *chi* is key in Igbo theogony is evidenced in such expressions as *chi na-edu* (It is the *chi* that guides); *chi m e-gbuo m-oo!* (My *chi* has abandoned or killed me!); *Onye na chi ya* (To everyone his *chi*). In these examples, the use of *chi* is preferred to that of *Chukwu* or *Chineke* because *chi* is closer to man than *Chineke* or *Chukwu*” (Anizoba 31). Igbo brotherhood and solidarity are based on the belief that every individual has been bestowed a *chi* by *Chukwu* with a different mission, and hence people behave differently. The sun-god *Anyanwu*, the sky-god *Igwe*, the river goddess *Uhamiri* devotedly known as ‘Mami Wata’, the god of thunder and lightning *Amadioha*, the trickster god *Agwu* who is regarded as the patron deity of the diviners like ‘dibia’, and *Ikoru* the drum deity who “represents the power of the community to make successful wars” (V.Uchendu 100) are some of the other deities of importance in Igbo culture. Apart from them, the Igbos believe in the existence of several spirits such as the Igbo evil spirit *Ekwensu*, wicked spirits such as *agbara* or *alosi*, the spirit of wealth *mbataku*, and *agwo* who terrifyingly demands the chosen one to serve it through priestly ordination.

The significance attributed to Igbo women in traditional Igboland can also be traced to their role as priestesses. The Igbo thoughts and perceptions are found to be shaped by a number of priests and priestesses who act as mediators between the deities and the people. They also play a significant role in unravelling the spiritual or

'invisible' world called *ala muo* to the inhabitants of the physical or 'visible' world known as the *ala mmadu*. The spiritual world is believed to be the world occupied by the dead ancestors who are revered with great awe and whose words are conceded in all matters of serious deliberations. The ancestral spirits are referred to as *ndichie* and they are believed to appear in the form in which they died as human beings. In many parts of Igboland, ancestral shrines are erected, and sacrifices are made to ensure the blessings of the ancestors from the world of the dead. For an Igbo, even man is a spirit which often allows him to enter the world of the dead ancestors and to perform mysteries, magic, and occult activities. Every living and non-living being has a power ingrained in them which is called the 'spirit' and which "connotes the concept of force or vital energy. And it is this which sustains the unity of being (Nwala 37). Chinua Achebe explains that "*Ike*, energy, is the essence of all things human, spiritual, animate and inanimate. Everything has its own unique energy which must be acknowledged and given its due" (C.Achebe, "Foreword" ix). Igbo religion thus involves numerous rituals, prayers, and sacrifices that are offered at every step to appease each of these deities and spirits, and in this, they are assisted by diviners, *dibias*, and priestesses who guide and warn the people through oracles and prophecies. The predominant deity, religious cults, *dibias*, and oracles, differ from region to region in Igboland. Nwala enlists a few prominent ones which include the *ibini okpabi* or the 'Long Juju' at Arochukwu, *Igwe-Ka-Ala* of Ummuneoha, *Agbala* of Awka, and the Nri priest cult. "The common characteristic of the Igbo oracles are their secret operations, the institutionalization of an 'intelligence service' and the attraction of the clients through a chain of contact agents" (V.Uchendu 100). Though an Igbo has the freedom to approach any oracle

of his choice, it could be done only through certain agents and hence, consulting the oracle often proved to be very expensive and exhausting.

The philosophy and customary practices of the Igbos reveal the Igbo society to be fundamentally patriarchal in nature. The power of a priest and the male elder of a family is symbolised by a cult of *ofo*, which is a carved stick made of the *ofo* tree. The holder of the *ofo* has supreme authority in the family and in the society as the “custodian of morality” (Nwala 63). The *ofo* is also significant as a legal seal or judicial instrument with mysterious powers that can even kill a deceitful or impertinent person with curses. “This legal seal is secured by striking the *ofo* on the ground and uttering curses on anyone who would contravene the decision of the Amala Council. And everybody responds, ‘i-zee’, an equivalent of Amen and meaning ‘so be it’ “(Nwala 64). The Igbos also believed in the continuing role of dead ancestors in protecting the living and in the notion of reincarnation of the dead. Ancestors are honoured, offered a part of their food and in return, they are expected to mediate with the deities and spirits for the protection of their children. In case they fail to do their role, they are reprimanded and denied food as if they are still living.

The Igbos are also people who are receptive to changes. Both men and women are very hardworking people who consider land as deeply reverential. Like their neighbouring ethnic groups Yoruba and Edo, the Igbo’s labour on land, farming their most prominent staple food yam, along with other crops such as cassava, taro, okra, corn, melons, and beans. The land was also respected for being the burial ground of their ancestors. The Igbos’ industrious nature and money-

mindedness are revealed in their involvement with the Europeans in the trade of slaves and palm produce.

In addition, Igbos are known for their fondness for festivals and celebrations. Music and dance, visual arts, masquerades, attires, and food are integral to their marriage customs, death rites, and other traditional rituals and celebrations. Igbo art and masquerades hold great cultural and religious significance. Apart from its ritualistic implications, it reveals the agility, aggression, and dynamism of the Igbo community which believes in the acknowledgement of *Ike*, the essence and power imbued in all animate and inanimate beings. The artifacts made by them serve peculiar ritualistic purposes and thereafter they are set aside in *mbari* houses with much neglect. It is seen as a sacrifice to appease a particular god as a remedy to certain grievances. Once the god has ameliorated the suffering, the *mbari* is offered as a mark of thanks-giving and this offering is done with great rejoicing and celebrations. In the foreword to Aniakor and Cole's *Igbo Arts: Community and Cosmos*, Chinua Achebe, explains why the 'process' of artistic creation than the 'product' itself is more important for an Igbo. "Process is motion while product is rest. When the product is preserved or venerated, the impulse to repeat the process is compromised" (ix). He states that the Igbo never wants artistic creativity to be restricted by rigorous rules and conventions, or to be static. It reveals their cosmological understanding that nothing is static or permanent in this world. They believe that there might occur certain phases in their lives wherein even the existing gods and goddesses would fall out of power, and so new art forms must be made ready to embody the new forces required for their survival. "The practical purpose

of art is to channel a spiritual force into an aesthetically satisfying spiritual form that captures the presumed attributes of that force. It stands to reason therefore that new forms must stand ready to be called into being as often as new (threatening) forces appear on the scene” (C. Achebe, “Foreword” ix). It reveals their cosmological understanding that nothing is static or permanent in this world.

The Igbo literature in the precolonial period was primarily oral, conveyed through songs, chants, and poems. The overindulgence of idioms and proverbs in conversation was a characteristic feature of the Igbo language. It was a common part of their conversation and so every adult was supposed to use and understand them during conversation. Only children were spared from this knowledge of proverbs and idioms.

“In some societies, informal activities such as moonlight play, entertainment and regular rituals are the ways children learn about the societies. In Igbo societies, children are taught stories which convey the morals and values of their society. Songs and poems, riddles and rhymes, are memorized; in some of them, the names of animals, the varieties of yam, animals and genealogies, etc. are recited. Through such informal yet institutionalized procedures, children learn about nature and society” (Onwuejeogwu 23).

Early Igbo literature which emerged in the twentieth century, primarily dealt with the British intrusion into Igboland. Pita Nwana, the carpenter-turned-writer who wrote the first Igbo novel named *Omenuko* in Igbo language, the English translation of which appeared in 1933, traces the intrusion of British colonial administrators in the first few decades of the century. Through the eponymous

character Omenuko, Nwana underscores how the British administrators and the Igbo warrant chiefs shared a symbiotic relationship wherein the warrant chiefs often manipulated the administrators' power and furtive cordiality for their personal feats. British encroachment and impact, celebration of African traditions, and postcolonial culture continued to be the major concerns of almost all the subsequent novels including Achebe's masterpiece trilogy *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *Arrow of God*.

It was only in 1966 that Flora Nwapa emerged as the first Igbo woman writer to publish in English language and became a source of inspiration to a long array of literary progenies to voice the concerns and experiences of Igbo women whose identity and existence had been obscured by the male literary traditions. Flora Nwapa, born Florence Nwanzuruahu Nkiru Nwapa, (1931-1993) began writing at a time when Igbo literature was completely dominated by male writers like Chinua Achebe, John Munonye, Uche Chukwume, Chike Obi, and so on. She became the first African and Nigerian woman writer to publish in English and is hailed as the mother of African Literature. She was born into the Igbo community in Oguta, south-eastern Nigeria, as the eldest of the six children of Christopher Ijeoma and Martha Nwapa. Her early education was in missionary schools in Nigeria and later she went to the University of Ibadan and the University of Edinburgh for higher education. She is one of the earliest writers in Africa who voiced the issues of African women especially those living in traditional Igbo culture in colonial Nigeria, and is rightly regarded as the mother of modern African literature.

Nwapa's novels are an attempt to foreground the lives and concerns of Igbo women, and the changing gender roles and perspectives over time. According to her biographer Marie Umeh, Nwapa comes from a "rich tradition where women paddle canoes up, down, across and beyond Ugwuta Lake, transporting passengers and their wares for a nominal fee, where women are leaders in trade and commerce, where a democratic gender system recognizes talent, regardless of one's sex, where confidence and perfection are nurtured in both males and females..." (Umeh, "The Poetics" 24). However, along with gender complementarity, the Igbo customs and traditions were also patriarchal in several ways. The women-centred powerful narratives of Nwapa challenged the gender-biased system in Igboland and ended the foregrounding of passive, victimised, domesticated, down-trodden and often promiscuous images of Igbo women that were recurrently projected in the literature by Igbo male writers and Western litterateurs. Nwapa set out to bring to light the metiers and confines of Igbo women in the patriarchal traditional society that was constantly changing under colonial influences. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi observes that "Nwapa captures the evolution of Nigeria through the status of women" (145) in her works.

Nwapa's writings were largely informed and inspired by the experiences and folk tales narrated to her by her grandmother, who was one of the seven wives of a polygamous family (James 115). Her first novel *Efuru* (1966) is about a bold, industrious, and independent woman who values her customs, yet acts according to her rationality and emotions throughout the testing phases of her life. Along with the eponymous heroine, the novel also portrays many other women through whom

Nwapa successfully presents a female point of view regarding Igbo beliefs and customs. Her second novel *Idu* (1970) boldly challenges several traditional practices among the Igbos, especially with regard to marital customs, motherhood, and widowhood practices. *Never Again* (1975) is a brilliant account of how the Biafran War affected the lives of women and children, and also one of the earliest attempts by an African writer to reveal to the world that women too suffer and play crucial roles during the war. Her next novel *One is Enough* (1981) narrates the life of a skilled businesswoman Amaka, whose bitter experiences in marriage break her faith in the patriarchal institution and sets out to live a life of complete freedom and complacency in embracing motherhood outside marriage. *Women are Different* (1986) traces the lives of four Igbo women from schooldays to adulthood to reveal how educated women who experience disillusionment in marriage withstand all trials and tribulations, and prove themselves to be efficient single mothers. Nwapa has also authored two short story collections namely *This is Lagos and Other Stories* (1971) and *Wives at War and Other Stories* (1980). The former is set in the city of Lagos and narrates the lives of independent women, their relationships, and some of the problems universally faced by women. *Wives at War and Other Stories* (1980) is a collection of eight stories that represent female characters fighting heroically the multiple challenges in their lives engendered by traditions, patriarchy, and most significantly the Nigeria-Biafra war. *Cassava Song and Rice Song* (1986) is her only volume of poetry that questions the privileging of yam as a male crop over the female crop cassava, which metaphorically alludes to the privileging of Igbo men over Igbo women.



All these works of Nwapa voice Igbo women's overwhelming desire for change, recognition, equality, and making significant choices with regard to their lives. What Nwapa attempted to profess through her works, was also notably practised by her in her real life. An enterprising woman with uncompromising self-esteem, she established her own press named Tana Press in 1976 for the publication of writings by African women. While her first two novels were published by Heineman Publishers, all other works were published in her own press. Nwapa thus proved herself to be a great scholar, political figure, and successful businesswoman whose voice empowered many suppressed female voices in Igboland and Africa as a whole. In an interview given to Adeola James, she recollects how she had become a source of inspiration to Buchi Emecheta, then an emerging writer, to feel strengthened to write fiction even against the will of her husband. She proudly affirms that "Buchi didn't give up because there was a Flora Nwapa" ("Nwapa", *In Their Voices* 117).

Buchi Emecheta was born as Florence Onyebuchi "Buchi" Emecheta on 21st July, 1944. She was the second child of her poor parents hailing from Ibusa in Nigeria. Though born in Lagos, Emecheta spent a good part of her childhood in Ibusa, listening to the fascinating songs and narratives passed on to her by her elders, and thriving in the rich oral tradition and culture of her community. In her autobiography *Head Above Water*, Emecheta describes herself as the "mysterious daughter" of her mother Alice Ogbanje Ojebeta Emecheta, a "slave girl who had the courage to free herself and return to her people in Ibusa, and still stooped and allowed the culture of her people to re-enslave her, and then permitted Christianity to tighten the knot of enslavement" (Emecheta, *Head Above Water* 3). Her mother's

life transpired the multiple rungs of enslavement girdling an African woman, especially an Igbo woman. The emerging writer soon found herself enmeshed in similar constraints and decided to unveil the inhuman rites, practices, and attitudes meted out to African women in the name of race, sex, culture, and tradition.

Settled in the UK in 1962, Emecheta's life had been one long struggle charged with misery, poverty, desolation, betrayal, and solitude. After the death of her father and the subsequent customary inheritance of her mother by her father's brother, Emecheta was literally orphaned at an early age. However, she was fortunate to manage a scholarship for herself which enabled her to pursue education in one of the most prestigious institutions of the time – The Methodist Girls' High School run by CMC sisters. Although she was never comfortable with the rigid school system and stringent measures of the Anglican teachers at the Methodist School, she preferred to continue with her studies, for she did not want to conform to the gender role expectations in her society. Sixteen years was too late an age for an Igbo girl to get married, and Emecheta rejecting all men her family suggested to her, married an Igbo man Sylvester Onwordi, a dreamy student at the time of marriage.

Onwordi turned out to be an easy-going self-centred man who preferred to be an eternal student in the UK instead of being a responsible breadwinner of their rapidly growing family. Emecheta left her enviable job at the American Embassy in Lagos and left for the UK at the age of eighteen with her two toddlers to join her husband. Going to the UK was a silent vow which Emecheta had made to herself in order to please her father who admired and revered the United Kingdom “as if it were God's holiest of holies” (Emecheta, *Head above Water* 26). Though her father

died when she was still a child, Emecheta was determined to realize the vow she had made to make her father happy. Life in the UK with an unfaithful and irresponsible husband was a period of unfathomable suffering for the twenty-one-year-old mother of four helpless children. “Then I looked at Chiedu, who was then four, at Ik, three, Jake still crawling at seventeen months, and at Christy who was only twelve days old – and knew that I could not afford to die of sorrow. My kids would suffer” (Emecheta, *Head above Water* 32). A year later, when she was pregnant with her fifth child, Emecheta decided to get a divorce from Sylvester, not because he was irresponsible and unsupportive, or because he was not a good father to his children, nor because she found him sleeping with a white woman in her own bedroom, but because he coldly burnt every page of the manuscript of her first book *The Bride Price*, which was her very first and most cherished brainchild. Weeks before their fifth child was born, their divorce case came up in the Magistrates’ Court where Sylvester claimed that they were never legally married and disowned all the five children including the one in her womb. “We were married but he burnt my Nigerian passport, the children’s birth certificates, and our marriage certificate, knowing full well that to get those documents back from Nigeria was impossible” (Emecheta, *Head above Water* 36).

As a single mother of five little children, in a foreign land imbued with racial prejudice, Emecheta’s plight was more poignant than even the most miserable of her characters. However, armed with the power of education and undaunted determination, she confronted the turbulent waves lashing at her life and tirelessly swam ahead with her “head above water.” She pursued her dream of becoming a writer even while going for various jobs and raising her five kids all alone. With sixteen novels, several children’s books, and a number of articles to her credit,

Emecheta emerged as one of the most powerful female voices from Nigeria, evoking worldwide concern over the social and cultural position of women, especially, Igbo women living in Nigeria and abroad.

Although *The Bride Price* was the first novel that Emecheta had written, her first novel to be published was *In the Ditch* (1972), an autobiographical narrative revealed through the life and experiences of Adah, a single parent of five small children. A sequel to this came out two years later, titled *Second Class Citizen* (1974), which continued to explore themes of sexism and racism through the life of the protagonist Adah, a replica of the author herself. Both these novels were later published as a single volume, *Adah's Story*, in 1983 by Allison and Busby. Emecheta's next few novels were exclusively devoted to the study of women's predicament on account of traditional, patriarchal, and colonial dominance. *The Bride Price* (1976) critically examines some of the cultural practices and customs in Igboland that are often quite oppressive and disquieting to the Igbo women. *The Slave Girl* (1977) explores the theme of slavery in Igboland through the life of Ogbanje Ojebeta, a little girl who is sold into domestic slavery by her own brother after they are orphaned at their parents' death. The novel also sheds light on the unscrupulous means pursued by the Igbos in accumulating wealth and power. *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) is yet another powerful novel that addresses a number of issues confronting women and their ambiguous position in a culture caught between tradition and modernity. Through the heartrending tale of Nnu-Ego's life, the author vehemently contests the unwarranted exaltation of motherhood at the expense of women's dignity, freedom, and individuality. *Destination Biafra* (1982) emerges as one of the earliest accounts of the war from a woman's point of view and is centred on the willpower and experiences of a female protagonist enrolled in the military.

Later works like *Double Yoke* (1983), *The Rape of Shavi* (1984), *Gwendolen* (1989) and *Kehinde* (1994) explore varying themes pertaining to women's experiences and cultural dilemmas encountered by the Nigerian diaspora. She also authored a number of children's literature and established a publishing company along with her son Sylvester.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the third author chosen for this study, is one of the most recognized feminist icons of the present century. With her immensely powerful TED talks such as "We Should All Be Feminists" and "The Danger of a Single Story," she has impelled a fresh insight into the concept of culture, racism, gender, and feminism. Born on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1977, in Enugu, Nigeria, she is the fifth of six children of James Nwoye and Grace Ifeoma Adichie. Her father was a Professor of Statistics and her mother was a Registrar in the University of Nsukka. A native of Abba, she grew up in Nsukka where her parents worked. She discontinued her medical degree course in Nsukka and shifted to the United States to pursue higher studies of her choice. Her first novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) set in postcolonial Nigeria, is narrated by the fifteen-year-old female protagonist Kambili and portrays the predicament of women disempowered and dominated by the patriarchal forces of colonialism, religion, and culture. *Half of a Yellow Sun*, published in 2006, beautifully captures the varying shades of love and sacrifice during the gruesome period of the Nigerian Civil War. Through powerful characters like Olanna, Kainene, Odenigbo, Richard, and Ugwu, Adichie recounts the horrors of war and the victimisation of innocent civilians, especially women and children traumatized by war experiences. The book received the Women's Prize for Fiction in 2007 and numerous critical accolades, extolling Adichie as the literary daughter of the Father of African Literature, Chinua Achebe. Her next novel *Americanah*

(2013) was yet another significant milestone in her literary career. It was her first attempt to deal with the theme of racial prejudice experienced by the African diaspora in the US. Through the bitter and challenging experiences of Ifemelu and Obinze, Adichie reveals the physical, sexual, and psychological implications of “becoming black” in a white nation, and reveals how life in America influences and alters the perceptions of African diaspora. The oppressive forces in America are further explored in her short-story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* published in 2009 which comprises twelve powerful short stories that reveal the pathos of identity crisis, racial and sexual discrimination, culture conflict and psychological complications experienced by the African diaspora in the US. Her next work titled *Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, exceptionally proposes the significance of raising boys and girls with mutual respect and genuine concern for each other. Adichie remains a powerful voice in the social media and digital space and continues to inspire people across the globe through her stimulating talks and lectures.

A comparative study of such intensely perceptive voices as Nwapa, Emecheta, and Adichie therefore, demands an eclectic and methodical approach so as to incorporate the diverse themes and concerns addressed in their selected works. The thesis is basically structured around the examination of the evolution of gender ideology in Igboland, the Igbo perspective on women’s reproductive roles and the notion of motherhood, and acknowledging their substantial participation in the Nigeria-Biafra War of 1967 as delineated by the selected writers, shedding light on the unique experiences of Igbo women on account of their ethnocultural background, colonial history, and subsequent socio-political shifts in Nigeria.

The present introductory chapter briefly details the theoretical framework adopted for this study. It traces how theories of Western feminism, Black feminism, and Womanism become inadequate to examine the literary representation of the experiences of women belonging to a specific ethnic community. It attempts to substantiate how the postcolonial feminist theory propounded by Chandra Talpade Mohanty becomes an appropriate theoretical framework for this study, while also explaining the necessity to rely upon certain indigenous theories of African feminism and Western discourses for analysing the specific concerns of each of the three core chapters. This is followed by a glimpse into the life and culture of the Igbo ethnic community whose ritualistic observances, socio-political conditions, belief system, and practices need to be familiarised for a better understanding of the distinct experiences of Igbo women. The chapter ends with a brief biographical note on the three Igbo women writers selected for this study.

Chapter two titled “Uncovering Gender Ideology in Igboland,” is a detailed analysis of Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* (1966), Buchi Emecheta’s *The Bride Price* (1976), and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2003). The chapter undertakes to examine the changing gender ideology in precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial Nigeria by reading the selected texts in the light of several ethnographical, anthropological, and historical studies. It recognizes the distinct experiences of Igbo women in the private and public domains, to eventually assert Mohanty’s argument that not all women in the Third World countries are voiceless, fragile victims oppressed by male violence, economic depravity, familial circumstances, religious ideologies or developmental processes, as erroneously assumed by most Western discourses. It discovers the privileges enjoyed by Igbo women at different times and identifies them as women of great strength and assurance.

Chapter three, “Variegated Landscapes of Empowered Mothering,” analyses Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* (1966) and *One is Enough* (1986), Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006). The title has been borrowed from Andrea O’Reilly’s groundbreaking work *Matricentric Feminism*. The chapter examines the changing attitude of the Igbo society towards childlessness, motherhood, and mothering, from precolonial to postcolonial times. The study subverts the general Western assumption that motherhood or women’s reproductive ability limits and oppresses all women, especially those belonging to African countries. It asserts the centrality of motherhood in African societies but recognizes a paradoxical nature of m(othering) in the Igbo society, wherein immense privileges are enjoyed by the mothers of sons, whereas the mothers of daughters and childless women are stigmatized and disgraced. The study argues that though motherhood was mostly oppressive to women in the precolonial Igbo society, the joys of mothering were greatly affected by colonial interventions and consequent socio-economic changes. It also identifies and appreciates the inclination of Igbo men in postcolonial Igboland, who keenly partake in the labour of mothering, which was an exclusive women’s job in the traditional society with several co-wives and grandmothers for assistance.

The subsequent chapter, titled “Women in the Shadow of Biafra”, analyses the female perception of the Nigerian Civil War or Biafran War of 1966 as depicted in Nwapa’s *Never Again* (1975) and her short-story collection *Wives at War and Other Stories* (1980), Emecheta’s *Destination Biafra* (1982) and Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006). It further, challenges the Western assumption that women are rendered powerless in the face of male violence and economic instability. The study posits that although Igbo women were victimised, sexually abused, and



economically deprived during the Biafran War period, their strong sense of responsibility and female solidarity strengthened them to adopt all possible enterprising strategies for the survival of the sick and starving children, the terrified and orphaned elderly, and all the deserted and displaced civilians who had nobody to look up to. The self-sufficient and unbending disposition of Igbo women, which were obscured in the war narratives by male writers, are rendered in a powerfully realistic manner by the three writers in their respective works.

The last chapter sums up the arguments and observations by underscoring how the different aims and objectives have been realized. It recognizes how the three Igbo women writers who were acquainted with both Western and Igbo traditional cultures have succeeded in eliciting the positive effects of both cultures for empowering the women in Igboland. The thesis concludes by emphasizing the decisive role played by the selected Igbo women writers in reclaiming the dignity of Igbo women and all African women at the global forefront through their fictional representations.

A chapter titled “Recommendations,” which proposes the scope for further studies and researches in this area, has also been added as an appendage to the concluding chapter.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Uncovering Gender Ideology in Igboland**

A study of the experiences of women in a culture demands an understanding of the gender dimensions and gender ideology particular to that culture. USAID defines gender as “the arrays of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis” (*Gender Terminology* 71). In the booklet titled *What is the Gender Dimension in Research*, published by the Research Council of Norway, Korsvik and Rustad hold that “the notion of feminine and masculine, manly or womanly, is often unconscious, and the concept of gender varies over time and between cultures” (8). In *Gender in Third World Politics*, the gender studies scholar and British political scientist, Georgina Waylen, propounds the significance of including gender as an analytic category within feminist academics. She holds that “if gender differences are historically and culturally specific, and what it means to be a man or a woman varies over place and time, then the variations need to be investigated and if desired, political programmes can be instituted to alter gender differences” (Waylen 6). Such studies, therefore, render ‘gender’ as an extremely intricate area of study that ought to be approached in different ways in different socio-cultural milieus across the globe. It also underscores the importance of challenging the universality of female experiences, the concept of sisterhood, and further, the tendency to address the issues of all Third World women “from the framework of a universal homogenizing feminism” (Waylen 8).

Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie distinctively articulate concepts of femininity, masculinity, and gender ideology as constructed and reconstructed by the traditional and colonial patriarchal forces in Igboland. Through their works, *Efuru*, *The Bride Price*, and *Purple Hibiscus* respectively, these writers portray Igbo women's marital encounters, experiences of victimization and domestic violence, instances of betrayal, and assertions of selfhood, to present a compelling account of their challenges and triumphs.

The selected texts are explored based on relevant insights from significant ethnographical and anthropological texts authored by several Igbo and Nigerian scholars in these disciplines. It places the study within the framework of the postcolonial feminist precepts put forward by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, as detailed in the introductory chapter and also based on certain propositions by African feminist scholars like Molaria Ogunjide Leslie. The cultural significance of several practices in traditional Igboland and the aftermath of colonial influence on gender relations and women's socio-cultural positions are critically evaluated in the light of female experiences depicted in the texts selected for the study. The analysis subverts the generalization of Igbo women as passive victims of traditional and colonial patriarchal forces and argues that during all phases of oppression, the Igbo women have struggled to assert their freedom, power, and dignity, despite the varying nature of oppression based on culture, Western influence, class division, socio-political circumstances and the temperament of the male members in the families.

The Nigerian gender scholar Oyeronke Oyewumi posits that gender studies in Africa ought to be studied in a more systematic way. In her work *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, she criticizes the European colonizers for “the inferiorization of women” (152) and for relegating women to the “very bottom of a history that was not theirs” (153). Western feminism is critiqued for its apparent perception of gender from a biologically deterministic framework. Oyewumi compares the Western culture and Yoruba culture and argues that “not all cultures necessarily organize their social world through a perception of human bodies” (“De-confounding Gender” 1053). She therefore, insists that “studies of Africa should not rely on Western-derived concepts to map the issue of gender in African societies, but instead must ask questions about the meaning of gender and how to apprehend it in particular times and places. Thus, the problem of gender in studies of Africa is fundamentally an epistemological one” (*Gender Epistemologies* 1).

This study, therefore, demands an inquiry into the origin, history, and culture of the Igbo ethnic group in Africa, with particular emphasis on the changing patterns of gender ideology, man-woman relationships, and women’s status within the Igbo society during its period of transition from traditional to colonial and postcolonial times. Most studies on Igbo women by colonial anthropologists like George Basden, Margaret Green, and Sylvia Leith-Ross, to list a few, are found ineffective in rendering an unprejudiced representation of Igbo life and women. This study seeks to rely on the ethnographic works authored by Igbo anthropologists and scholars like Joseph Therese Agbasiere, Victor C Uchendu, Ifi Amadiume, Kalu Ogbaa, Michael

Muonwe, and the like. Toyin Falola, Susan Arndt, and Christine Oponng are some other significant African scholars whose observations have been crucial in understanding the lives of women in Africa.

It is argued that the gender ideology in Igboland is very different and unique from the gender systems and gender relations in Western countries. Igbo scholars like Amadiume, Uchendu, and Agbasiere condemn and question the racist undertones implicit in the works of Western feminists and academics, who claim to be better aware of the quandaries and inadequacies experienced by African women and are keen to represent African women as voiceless, crude, and oppressed beings. Western scholars are disapproved of their “imposition of concepts, proposals for political solutions and terms of relationship” (Amadiume, *Male Daughters* 8) that tend to undermine the dignity and self-sufficiency of African nations in eliminating the gender disparities within their societies. Like Mohanty, the Igbo scholars, therefore, attempt to invalidate the Western notion that African women have always and only been victims of patriarchy. The Igbo women writers seek to assert the agency of Igbo women and represent them as different from the negative and generalized images propagated in Western gender discourses.

The Irish sociologist Ethel Crowley in her essay “Third World Women and the Inadequacies of Western Feminism” states that “we must turn to the study of culture to show that women who are ostensibly passive, often resist patriarchy in many inventive yet practical ways, as it exists in their own local environment” (44). She insists that ethnography is an “essential element” for strengthening arguments in postcolonial feminism. The study, therefore, begins with an attempt to identify how

far the select literary texts of Igbo women writers comply with the ethnographical studies concerning Igbo women's life. It assumes that the women writers are able to render a more authentic and realistic portrayal of the experiences of Igbo women than what has been rendered by Igbo male writers. The ethnographical and scholarly texts reveal the extent to which Igbo male writings failed to accommodate the real-life predicament of Igbo women and their resistance to patriarchal traditions, culture and colonial forces of oppression.

Likewise, the industriousness of Igbo women, their business skills, trading potentials, the monopoly in the market space, central positions held in the traditional economy, privileges to socio-economic titles, political associations, and services towards the welfare of the community, received little or no recognition in the literary canvas of Igbo male writers. The male writers failed to give representation to the audacity of Igbo women who upheld a long tradition of meticulous functioning in both private and public spaces, striving towards a life of dignity and self-assertion in the fundamentally patriarchal Igbo society. It, therefore, becomes the responsibility of Igbo women writers to articulate the multifaceted experiences and potentials of these women. This ensures a more authentic representation of the Igbo woman's life as different from the inferior position foregrounded and propagated by male writers. Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie emphasizes this when she says "Observing the women in their various sites, paying attention to female bonding which is absent from much of African creative literature written by when would yield a more correct epistemology of women" (*Recreating Ourselves* 13).

The Igbo scholars investigate the socio-economic, political, and religious or ritual status of Igbo women in pre-colonial times and identify how their role, position and agency deteriorated during the transition from traditional to colonial and postcolonial times. They identify that although traditional culture allowed certain advantageous positions and recognition to women, Igbo society has fundamentally been patriarchal in nature. Likewise, while colonial education and Christianity played significant roles in women's education and in eliminating certain social evils like the *osu* caste system, child marriages, female genital mutilation, infanticide of twins, and so on, it adversely affected the social status and economic self-sufficiency of Igbo women in several ways, thereby, reinforcing the patriarchal nature of the Igbo society. The study argues that during all these shifting periods that witnessed the varying nature of patriarchal dominance, Igbo women could live with dignity primarily because they were hardworking, economically self-sufficient and had a strong sense of solidarity to address the grievances of women.

The establishment of male superiority in traditional Igboland is found to transpire in conjunction with the growing restraints in the lives of Igbo women, despite the fact that the Igbo society ensured sufficient possibilities and space for a woman to thrive as an individual. The Igbo anthropologist Ifi Amadiume notices that in traditional Igbo society, sexual differentiation is very little in early childhood (*Male Daughters* 94). Joseph Therese Agbasiere also observes that "In Igbo society, physical separation of sexes has always been minimal and it is not observed up to the age of puberty. In many households, brothers and sisters often sleep, eat, and play together" (*Male Daughters* 45). However, once they attain puberty, there are

conspicuous differences in how boys and girls are taught and expected to socialize. Boys are encouraged to wander away from home and form gangs of their age groups. They prepare themselves for demonstrating their valour and skill in hunting, wrestling, and masquerading, which are regarded as imperative for evincing their masculinity.

This growing sense of male superiority can be identified in the character of Nna-ndo, Aku-nna's brother in Emecheta's *The Bride Price*. Though he is two years younger to his sister, he is seen to consider himself privileged as a male and behaves rudely to her with an obvious air of superiority. He is unhappy with his sister for her persistent ill-health and frail disposition, and calls her an *ogbanje*, which literally means a living dead. When he fails to find enough water in the pot one evening, he is furious at Aku-nna for having finished it. Despite finding his sister sick, he refuses to bring water from the stream. He believes that being a man, he need not condescend to fetch water from the river which was a woman's job. However, when an egotistic Nna-ndo goes to borrow a bottle of water from the house of his neighbour and friend Dumebi, Dumebi's mother refuses to give him water and chides him for not bothering to help his mother and sister despite being a healthy boy.

Contrary to the custom, wherein the mother figures are usually found to admonish only girls, Emecheta allows the mothers in her works to reprove young boys as well. She seems to be discontented with the young boys and the men of traditional Igbo society who put on an air of superiority and are arrogant enough to take for granted both women and their physical labour. In *The Bride Price*, Ngebeke,



the first wife of Okonkwo, is also portrayed as a woman of great dignity, who makes sure that she is respected by men, including her sons, for her position as a mother and also as the senior wife in the family. When her sons ask her questions, she chooses to answer with a delay to assert her sense of self-importance. When they demand their sister Ogugua to bring the food, the mother lies to them that she is busy filling pipe for her, although she knows that Ogugua has been sitting idly. She seems to be doing it deliberately in an attempt to prove her dominance in her hut and to assert her authority as the first wife in the family. She is an embodiment of a typical traditional Igbo woman, who is very confident about herself and eloquent enough to speak out her opinions and insights in the face of any man.

Flora Nwapa also creates such a powerfully eloquent and assertive character in Ajanupu, who is ever adamant that men respect women for their hard work and sincerity. She is annoyed when her sister's son Adizua abandons an efficient and well-mannered woman like Efuru, to live with another woman. Later, when Efuru falls sick for many days and her second husband Gilbert suspects her guilty of adultery, it is Ajanupu who reacts on behalf of a bedridden Efuru. She confronts the allegation of Gilbert with harsh curses and it ends up with the enraged woman breaking his head with a mortar pestle, for having dared to accuse a dignified woman like Efuru, of adultery.

The Igbo society is particular about the sexual restraints and morality of young girls and women, but holds little restrictions regarding the sexuality of men. As young boys grow into self-assertive, adventurous and self-sufficient men, they are encouraged to have sexual fun with girls of marriageable age. Emecheta states

how embarrassing it can be for young girls to be objectified for the entertainment of young men, even if the girls were least interested in it. Girls are left with little choice when the suitors come to have fun with them with the consent of the elders. They are reproached for being arrogant or egotistical in case they expressed disinterest or resistance to such objectification. In Emecheta's *The Bride Price*, the teenage protagonist Akunna feels helpless on hearing the voice of her suitors outside the house. Being in love with her master Chike, she does not want to become a source of entertainment to any other man. She is also weak and ill, and wants to be left alone. However, she knows that there is little choice for girls of her age. Although the visit of the suitors would enable a girl to get acquainted with all men likely to become her husband, she is mindful that the ultimate decision would be taken by the elders, based on who can offer more bride price. Chike's affection for Akunna is disliked by all as he is the son of a slave, and so when Chike arrives, one of the boys misbehaves with Akunna to provoke him. Akunna feels hurt and humiliated when her blouse is torn and she cries out to her mother Ma Blackie. But, instead of paying heed to her tearful complaints or supporting Chike who strikes the boy for his sexual misconduct, Ma Blackie yells at her, waving aside her pleas: "Girls like you tend to end up having babies in their father's house, because they cannot endure open play, so they go to secret places and have themselves disvirgined. Is that the type of person you are turning out to be? I will kill you if you bring shame and dishonour on us. How can he hurt you with all these others watching?" (121).

Though Ma Blackie is concerned about her daughter and also has high regard for her teacher Chike, she seems to have responded unethically, for fear of what

others would say. Being the mother of Aku-nna, she is accountable to society for any arrogance or dislike on the part of her daughter towards such customs. The Igbo regarded it the primary duty of a mother to prepare her daughter to become a good wife and mother, for “a girl’s life is essentially a preparation for marriage. Mothers lose no time in reminding their daughters that certain types of behaviour cannot be tolerated from them” (Uchendu 53).

Michael Muonwe, a Nigerian theologian and anthropologist, states that “for girls, more than it is for young men, marriage is a very strong determining factor for social recognition and adulthood. Wealth, education or any other social accomplishment by any woman without marriage seems almost meaningless in the eyes of many” (3). Due to these reasons, getting married and having children become one of the strong aspirations of almost all Igbo women. Girls are encouraged to aim for happy marriage and motherhood, and from a very young age, they engage in discussing their hopes about their future husbands, as can be seen in the chattering among Akunna and her friends Obiagili, Obiajulu, Ogugua, and others. They are constantly made aware of the significance of safeguarding their chastity and are conditioned to believe that boys and men are privileged and superior to them.

Emecheta, emphasizes the paradox within the Igbo culture that entitles all men to have sexual adventures with any number of women before and after marriage but expects girls to uphold chastity and sexual restraint. She is sceptical of “men who would go about raping young virgins of thirteen and fourteen, and still expect the women they married to be as chaste as flower buds” (*The Bride Price* 84).

Young girls are constantly advised and monitored by the mother figures around them to safeguard themselves from the sexual advances of lecherous men so that they do not tarnish the reputation of the family by conceiving prior to marriage. Ifi Amadiume observes that the socialization of girls emphasises “sexual restraint and preparation for their future roles as wives and mothers” (Amadiume 94). Once a girl begins to show signs of growth, such as breast development or menstruation, her movement is greatly restricted by the elders. She can no longer wander about alone or be adventurous, and is likely to be married off without much delay. There was also the threat of being kidnapped by men who could not afford to pay the bride price. According to Igbo custom, if a man cuts a lock of hair from a mature girl, she has to remain his wife forever. So, girls were encouraged to crop their hair short and to always move about in groups instead of going alone. It is because of these risks that Chike tells Aku-nna to keep it a secret when she happens to menstruate for the first time in his presence. Chike knows that her family would not wait for her to complete her exams and would marry her off. He is also bothered by the fact that despite being in love with her, he will not be able to marry Aku-nna as he belonged to the *osu* family. However, he too enjoys the privilege to have sexual adventures with any woman of his choice and is known to have had several mistresses right from the time of his teens.

The sexual privileges enjoyed by men, and sexual restraints and lack of choices before women, necessitate an understanding of the role of Igbo culture in determining the confines of female sexuality. According to Marie Umeh, culture plays “a vital role in ‘locating’ sexuality” (512) of women. In *African Sexuality: A Reader*, Sylvia Tamale posits that “although sexuality might represent notions of pleasure and the continuity of humanity itself, the term conjures up discussions

about sources of oppression and violence” (1). In Igbo society, such oppression and confinement become rigid with the onset of menstruation in adolescent girls, as seen in the case of *Aku-nna*. According to Igbo culture, menstrual blood is believed to pollute the ancestral spirits and men, and hence, a menstruating woman is said to be in a state of taboo. Ifi Amadiume explains that a menstruating woman has to remain secluded in a hut and is not supposed to enter the hut of men, especially of *ozo* titled men “until the menstrual flow ceased, after which a chick would be killed and the ritual of cleansing performed ... (92-93). If a woman fails to observe these taboos, she has to face severe penalties, especially if her husband or father is an *ozo* titled man. *Aku-nna*, therefore, finds it very difficult to hide the inception of menstruation from her friends and family. She is conscious that if people come to know of it, she will have no escape from the grim future that awaits all young girls in Igboland. She is also afraid of the consequences she would have to face, if found guilty of breaking the taboo. *Aku-nna*’s conflict is evident when she wonders:

What would happen now? Would her people stop her going to school? The only thing she could do was to hide it, but how could she? The *Ibuza* women usually used rags which they changed frequently for freshness and washed several times a day – where would she dry hers without being seen? And when a woman was unclean, she must not go to the stream, she must not enter a household where the man of the family had either the *Eze* or *Alo* title – her uncle *Okonkwo* had the latter; if she went into such a house, the head of the family would die and the oracle would discover who the culprit was. (93)

Aku-nna's concerns throw light into how the traditional Igbo culture ensured the obedience of women through intimidating physical, psychological, and ritualistic forfeits. The tenets of patriarchal culture constantly cautioned women to check their choices and decisions toward autonomy and self-assertion.

Ketu Katrak, in *Politics of the Female Body*, holds that “in fact, every aspect of female identity and struggle for autonomy is affected by the controls of female sexuality as defined by different patriarchal structures” (xvi). One of the dominant practices in Igboland, and in most of the African societies, that aims to control female sexuality, is the custom of female genital mutilation or female circumcision. Ada Uzoamaka Azodo states that the “surgical invasion of women's bodies, popularly known as female genital mutilation, takes over where ideological indoctrination stops and the sensuality of women is placed in the control of men” (171). She elaborates that the process of clitoridectomy ensures that a woman loses her sexual urges and is reduced to a mere reproductive machine. Women are conditioned to believe that circumcision is an inevitable requisite “to become clean and ready for marriage and child-bearing” (171) so that they do not refuse the painful tradition imposed by patriarchy.

This can be observed in Nwapa's *Efuru* where the protagonist Efuru also agrees to “have her bath” (11), as circumcision was colloquially referred to, so that it would aid her in child-bearing. The discussion between her mother-in-law Omeifeaku and the midwife Ugwunwa, tacitly reveals the risks involved in female genital mutilation performed by traditional unqualified women, under completely unhygienic conditions that often proved fatal for young girls and pregnant ladies.

Several studies on this practice reveal that despite the high cases of mortality and an increasing number of health issues, this practice continues even today in the name of tradition. African gender scholars like Sylvia Tamale and Obioma Nnaemeka are however infuriated at the Western feminist activists and social anthropologists for their unscrupulous colonial obsession in foregrounding the images of circumcised African women, in an effort to vindicate “the white man’s burden” in intervening in the affairs of Africa. Obioma Nnaemeka, in *Female Circumcision and the Politics of Knowledge: African Women in Imperialist Discourses*, expresses her discontent with the double victimization of African women by both African culture and the colonizers. She maintains that African women stand united with Western women activists and scholars in the latter’s efforts to end the heinous practice of female genital mutilation. However, it is degrading for African women to perceive the mode in which Westerners are propagating the images of circumcision, without least consideration for the dignity of these victimized women. Nnaemeka holds that “it is not necessary to violate African women in order to address the violence that was done to them. In effect, African women are doubly victimized: first from within (their culture) and second from without (their ‘saviours’)” (Nnaemeka, *Female Circumcision* 30).

It is observed that the patriarchal reasoning of clitoridectomy as an effective means towards successful marriage and child-bearing principally contends with the hidden agenda of controlling women’s sexuality. However, it often has a negative impact on the sexual lives of the partners and apparently does not, in any way, aid the child-bearing ability of a woman. Though Nwapa, in *Efuru*, represents the

eponymous character as undergoing circumcision, she does not discuss anything about the sexual experiences of Efuru. Efuru's character and sincerity to her husband are not determined by performing this painful procedure upon her. She is as sincere and faithful to him as she is to everyone in general. Circumcision is neither found to alleviate her pain during childbirth nor does it enable her to become more productive. Efuru loses her only daughter in her infancy, her marriage to her first husband Adizua, and her second marriage to Gilbert fail, and she is also unable to conceive or produce more children. Through the life of Efuru, Nwapa seems to have tacitly alluded to the irrationality of the practice, which serves no purpose other than depriving women of their fundamental rights over their bodies and sexuality. She holds that a woman need not endure any patriarchal ordeal to prove herself to anybody and that a woman is a complete being despite failed marriages or childlessness.

After the circumcision, Efuru is treated well by her mother-in-law. She enjoys the period of feasting after circumcision but refuses to be confined in the house for more than a month. To her, such customs of confinement of women in the name of culture are inconsequential. She, therefore, tells the mother of Adizua that she would go to the market for trading on *Nkwo* day. Although such customs are said to be for the well-being of women, Nwapa seems to hold the view that it should be left to the woman to choose if she must rest or move about. When the mother is apprehensive of societal judgement, Efuru tells her, "Never mind what people would say" (18). Such a response from a woman belonging to a community like the Igbo is quite powerful and daring.



Nwapa and Emecheta are equally sceptical about the institution of marriage that has always occupied the central concern in the life of Igbo women. Helen Chukwuma posits that the institution of marriage continues to be “the true test of a woman” (5) in Igboland. She observes that “the marriage paradox lies in the fact that it is both sublimity and subsuming. Through it, a woman attains a status acclaimed by society and fulfils her biological need for procreation and companionship. Through it too, the woman’s place of second-rate is emphasized and too easily she is lost in anonymity to the benefit and enhancement of the household” (5).

The marriage ceremony, in Igboland, is found to operate in four distinct stages namely, “(i) formal enquiry (*ibu mmanyi ajuju*); (ii) legitimized testing of a girl’s character (*ittu mmanyi nwanyi*); (iii) formal betrothal (*ima ogu nwanyi*) and (iv) reaching an advance stage of marriage negotiations (*ilumi nwanyi*)” (Agbasiere 102). Each of these stages is carried out in a ceremonious way with a series of ritual acts, involving the extended families of the bride and the groom.

Although the stages of marriage are said to begin with the consent of the girl, there is often little or no choice left before the girl but to agree to the decisions taken by the elders and guardians. This is more because most of the girls, at the time of marriage, are either children or too young to voice an opinion of their own. A young man, who receives consent from the girl’s side, visits her house with kola nuts and palm wine to initiate the stage of ‘enquiry’. During this stage of enquiry, the girl’s family makes sure that the alliance is not from a blood relative or a member of the forbidden community such as the *osu* or *ohu*. Enquiries are also directed toward learning the health, wealth, and fertility in the family line. Further investigations

concerning the two individuals who are getting married are carried out, and the final decision is taken by the male elders.

The lack of choice before a girl or a woman is evident in the character of Ogea, the maid of Efuru. Throughout her childhood and adulthood, she remains under the care of Efuru and fails to have any identity or purpose of her own. Finally, when Efuru decides to recommend Ogea as the third wife to her husband Gilbert, Ogea is left with no choice but to concede. Gilbert's second wife Nkoyeni is also denied the right to follow her dreams when she is forced to consider the proposal of Gilbert to be his second wife. Although she wishes to pursue higher studies, Gilbert convinces her brother Sunday that educating girls is worthless and takes her as his wife. In *The Bride Price*, Aku-nna also recognizes the impossibility of being allowed to marry her teacher, Chike. Although they are in love with each other, Aku-nna dares not to utter her desire to marry him as he is the son of a slave, an *osu*. Her intimacy with Chike is known to everyone and her step-father Okonkwo warns her in an authoritative tone to put an end to her friendship with Chike. Aku-nna finds herself "trapped in the intricate web of Ibuza tradition. She must either obey or bring shame and destruction on her people" (116). Aku-nna's transformation into a woman corresponds with a change in her outlook as well. A girl who had been unsure about everything and everybody around her, she grows to be quite certain about her feelings for Chike and is determined to marry only him and no one else. She silently questions the injustice in denying a woman the right to make decisions about her own life. She is angry at her mother for being so pretentious in hiding her fondness for Chike simply to please her husband Okonkwo who is deeply prejudiced

in his attitude to the *osu* descendent Chike and who can only see a promising bride price in the educated Aku-nna. When circumstances provoke her to elope with Chike, her step-father Okonkwo is unable to forgive her for the disgrace she brings upon the family and resorts to psychological means to enervate the spirit of Aku-nna, who finally yields to death at childbirth.

Lack of choice can also be discerned in the custom of widow inheritance that allows a brother or a near-male relative of a deceased man to inherit his widowed wife. Salome Nnoromele observes that as most of the women in Igboland married men who were much older than them, most of them outlived their aged husbands. However, the customs for the observance of mourning are different for widowed men and women. Ifi Amadiume explains that in traditional Igbo society, a man, at the death of his wife, observes a period of about thirty to thirty-six days, after which he shaves his hair and then becomes free to go about his business. However, a woman who loses her husband is compelled by the custom to go through a long period of mourning which usually extends to almost one year and results in the physical, mental, and emotional deterioration of the widows. Michael Muonwe states that widowhood practices take place in several stages: “Some of these practices come immediately after the death of the husband. Some others form an integral part of the burial and funeral obligations that the widow owes her departed husband. Still, others occur after the funeral ceremonies have ended” (Muonwe136). The different ways of mourning and honouring the dead husband begin with the widow’s duty to wail aloud. She has to appear unattractive, ugly and moody. Amadiume observes that “traditionally, on the day a woman’s husband died, she

would undo and spread her hair and begin to look sorrowful as she entered a state of ritual taboo, which lasted for a period of one year, *ino na ijita*” (82). In *The Bride Price*, Emecheta explores the plight of widows through the life of Ma Blackie, whose husband Ezekiel Odia passes away leaving Blackie and her children to be inherited by his brother Okonkwo. A widowed Ma Blackie is made to unthread her hair. She is stripped of her clothes and made to wear an old set. A place on the cemented floor is cleared for her “to sit and cry and mourn for her dead husband” (52). This ritual is followed by the shaving ritual during which all the hair on the woman’s body is shaved and she is scrubbed and washed by wives of the patrilineage. This hair is then collected and burnt. The period of shaving is followed by a period of total confinement, wherein the widow has to remain isolated in a separate hut for a period of twenty-eight days (Amadiume 82) after which she can move out of the hut with several restrictions that will continue for nearly ten months.

Ma Blackie, who has been living with her husband and children in Lagos, is left with no choice but to go to her husband’s place in Ibusa, after the initial mourning ceremonies. In Ibusa a new hut is erected for Ma Blackie to stay and mourn for her husband. Usually, a widow has to mourn for her dead husband for seven months. But Ezekiel Odia had cut a lock of hair from his wife’s head which meant that the wife would be always his. According to the Ibusa custom, “once a man had taken this step, his wife could never leave him, for to do so would be to commit an abomination; and such a woman, if the husband died, had to mourn for nine moons” (71). This period is very testing for a widow. She has to remain in the hut mourning for her dead husband throughout the period. She is not allowed to visit

or mingle with anybody. She is allowed to wear only some old rags and is supposed to continue wearing them for all nine months. She must not cut or comb her hair and must not even take a bath during this period. Muonwe notices that there are several interpretations regarding this practice of “de-beautification” (142) of widows in Igboland. He explains that ethnographers and scholars like Oloko, Afigbo, and Nzewi construe that this practice is observed to dissociate or sever the dead husband’s interest in his wife (147). However, Joseph Terese Agbasiere holds that this kind of self-abnegation is symbolic of the Igbo women’s readiness to endure any hardship for the sake of people they love (Agbasiere 152). Although these different interpretations recognize the significance of the practice as central to the entire mourning process, it cannot be denied that it involves a total negation of a woman’s fundamental rights as a human being. A living woman’s choice and agency are practically made compliant with her dead husband’s. Emecheta decries these rigorous practices in *The Bride Price* and contends that these customs are so unhygienic and so mentally depriving that many a time the woman “might herself die and this would be treated as a clear indication that she had been responsible for her husband’s death” (71). Emecheta, here, alludes to the tendency of the society to closely scrutinize the widow during the period of mourning to see if she, in any way, is responsible for her husband’s death. If the deceased man’s lineage raises such an accusation, the widow has to undergo rigorous ordeals to prove her innocence. In such cases she “may have to prove her innocence by drinking the water with which the corpse was washed, eating kolanut offered by the elders or the high priest or being locked up with her husband’s corpse” (Nwogu 80-81). Such widowhood practices in traditional Igboland are thus found to be deeply excruciating,

dehumanizing and traumatic to the widowed women. Widows who are able to observe or survive this period are given a few choices regarding their future.

Salome Nnoromele observes that a widow with children could either choose to remain unmarried in the husband's home and maintain the husband's properties until her children become mature enough to look after the properties, or she could choose to be inherited by her husband's brothers or go back to her own native home until her children came of age and went to reclaim their father's property. However, despite these apparent choices, a widow usually has to obey what her relatives and community would advocate for her to do. Ma Blackie, in *The Bride Price*, has no choice, but to become the fourth wife of Okonkwo, the brother of her deceased husband. Aku-nna, on reaching Ibuza, is told by her cousin sister Ogugua, "Your mother is inherited by my father, you see, just as he will inherit everything your father worked for" (64). It comes as a great shock to Aku-nna that her mother could be inherited just like a property without any concern for her readiness to the marriage.

Ma Blackie, despite allowing the traditional customs to decide her destiny, is not ready to compromise the education of her children. She utilizes the money left behind by her deceased husband for the education of her children, and also becomes economically self-sufficient by learning to trade. Despite having to abide by many of the oppressive traditional customs, Ma Blackie could maintain a respectable position in Okonkwo's household largely because of the monetary savings and foresight of her first husband. While Emecheta alludes to the predicament of women in traditional Igboland, she also reveals how economic self-sufficiency greatly

contributed to the confidence of desolate women like Ma Blackie and enabled them to realize at least some of their dreams within an oppressive patriarchal structure.

Self-assurance, industriousness, and authority in trading ability may be undeniably recognized as the strength of Flora Nwapa's protagonist Efuru. Through Efuru, Nwapa underscores the necessity for women to make decisions with regard to their lives, instead of attempting in vain to rise up to patriarchal expectations. The very opening lines of *Efuru* tell us how the eponymous protagonist of the novel abides by her own sense of rights and wrongs rather than what the society would think of her. Her decision-making power is revealed right at the beginning of the novel when she herself makes the decision to marry the man she loves without waiting to convince the society or to seek the consent of the elders. Though such hasty decisions often lead the protagonist to numerous troubles, the very fact that it is the consequence of her own decision renders her capable of finding ways for moving ahead. When Efuru comes to know that her lover Adizua cannot pay the bride price, she tells him "not to bother about the dowry. They were going to proclaim themselves married and that was that" (7). She knows that the customs of her people ought to be fulfilled. But she is more practical-minded. Being set in a changing Nigeria where the means of income and production were gradually being taken over by the colonizers, *Efuru* shows an insight that many people in the community lacked. Nwapa realizes that, in colonial Igboland, men need to be given more stretch of time to meet with the money needed to pay for the bride they wanted. From the very beginning of the novel, we find her a practical-minded writer who is concerned with the troubled mindset, conflicting emotions, and changing

socio-economic scenario of both men and women in colonial Igboland. Nwapa is one of the earliest reformers who believed that customs and traditions ought to be flexible enough to accommodate the changing needs and demands of both men and women in the community. She undermines many of the traditional gender-biased customs in Igboland to emphasize that above all dictums prescribed by culture and traditions, human emotions and welfare ought to be prioritized.

When the people sent by Efuru's father, visit her after her elopement with Adizua, intending to dissuade her from the decision, Efuru convinces them that she is happy there and that her husband would pay the dowry at the earliest. Nwapa attempts to position a woman's happiness above tradition when the men who visit Efuru's house return saying: "We shall go, our daughter," the spokesman said. 'You seem to be happy here and we wonder why your father wants us to bring you back'" (9). Later when Adizua deserts her and fails to return even when their only child dies, she decides to leave him. When Gilbert proposes to marry her, Efuru herself decides to accept the proposal and informs the elders about it, although this marriage also ends up in separation. Throughout the text, we find that Efuru enjoys the freedom to make decisions regarding her life and bears the consequences of those decisions as well. However, she is never found to be reproached by anybody for having made wrong decisions. Efuru seems to be an embodiment of Nwapa's aspiration that the society recognizes women as autonomous individuals, instead of regarding them as inferior beings who need to be kept under constant male surveillance. Efuru and her aunt-in-law Ajanupu emerge as fully-developed individuals who exemplify self-assertive individualistic women in Igboland. They



are women who uphold the traditions, yet do not let any custom or person exploit their rights and status as individuals. They reveal that Igbo women are not always passive victims of patriarchy. Women who proved to be industrious and self-assertive gained respect and recognition in the Igbo society.

Efuru's ultimate renunciation of marital life, and determination to pursue a spiritual path as the priestess of the Lake Goddess Uhamiri, reveal that more than wifehood and motherhood, a woman attains fulfilment by following her inner dreams. The appearance of Uhamiri in the dreams of Efuru may be seen as symbolic of her inner passion to live a life of independence, wealth, prosperity, and contentment in rendering services to the destitute in her community. In "Desire, the Private and the Public in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and *One is Enough*", the scholar Shivaji Sengupta observes:

Her decision to serve Uhamiri and women of her village so that they do not have to suffer childlessness and bad marriages, makes Efuru an integral and important part of women in her village. As she lies sleeping, quietly dreaming of the Lake Goddess, Efuru is perfectly at peace. The similarity with the Goddess cannot escape the reader. Both are beautiful, wealthy and without children. Yet both are public figures, looking after the welfare of women in the private domain of marriage and motherhood. (562-563)

There are several instances in the novel which reflect Efuru's sincere concern for others, and foreshadow her deification as the priestess of Goddess Uhamiri. Her concern for elderly women like her mother-in-law and the latter's sister Ajanupu, her affection for her little maid Ogea, her financial assistance to Ogea's deprived

parents and other underprivileged fellow beings, her sincere efforts in helping the old woman Nnona to get her ailing legs cured, and her timely interventions that facilitate proper medical aid to Ogea's father Nwosu, are only a few instances that reveal Efurū's genuine concern and magnanimity towards the welfare of her people. Thus, Efurū emerges as a noblewoman in both private and public spaces, and attains respect and recognition, outside the shackles of marriage.

The marital rites which begin with fixing an appropriate alliance for a girl, is followed by the trial stage, during which the girl is tested for her character and her efficiency in household management at the compound of the prospective husband. The girl goes to stay with the mother or close female relative of the man in his father's compound. This allows the girl "an opportunity to survey her possible future home and her future companions within and without the home" (Agbasiere 106). Meanwhile, she is tested of her character and her abilities by the man's mother and other relatives. "Her capabilities in house crafts, her working habits, her temperament, her form and figure – all are observed" (V.Uchendu 52). Once she successfully completes the trial period, the prospective husband's people decorate her body with paintings and send her back to her parents with several gifts to suggest that she has passed the test. Girls like Ogea in *Efurū*, are constantly admonished and trained by elders to practice all female-specific obligations such as looking after children, cooking, fetching water from the stream, and so on. For instance, when Ogea accidentally breaks a pot while fetching water from the stream, Ajanupu is furious. She goes in search of Ogea who refuses to go home fearing Ajanupu's wrath. Upon finding her, Ajanupu whips her angrily. She makes Ogea

wash the dishes, clean the floor and continues to reproach her for every single thing that she does or says. She complains to Efurū about Ogea, “You are spoiling Ogea. You just leave her to do what she likes. Remember she is a girl and she will marry one day. If you don’t bring her up well, nobody will marry her” (45). The elders also narrate several stories to Ogea and other children which emphasize the significance of obedience, morality, and maidenhood in the lives of young girls. Nwapa incorporates several oral narratives that are traditionally sung to young girls to underscore the importance of sexual restraint and fidelity in marriage.

In the third stage of the marital rite, the girl and the man drink wine from the same cup in the presence of a large family, a gesture suggesting that they have finally become husband and wife. This ritual is followed by the next most important rite which is the settlement of bride price. The actual payment of the bride price takes place in the next stage and it is followed by elaborate arrangements in the girl’s household which is known as *idu ulo* or endowment for marriage. The girl’s mother gives her high-quality domestic wares, clothing, livestock, and vegetables, and “in addition to the material items provided by the mother, the girl is also given gifts such as cocoyams, breadfruit and, at the present time, money by other relative and friends” (Agbasiere 110). Meanwhile, the father often gives her rights over a certain expanse in the family land or points out certain food trees, especially, palm trees as a wedding gift. This encouraged the daughters to visit their father’s *obi* regularly even though they lived in their marital homes. According to Amadiume, “This indicates that the ritual and political role of daughters was not severed after marriage, as the patrilineal theory would have us believe” (*Male Daughters* 36).

However, apart from receiving rights over a meagre share of the father's property as an act of favour from the father or elder brothers, an Igbo woman basically had no right over the land of her father. Amadiume notices that "the principle of equality did not exist in the sharing of wealth, whether among brothers or among brothers and sisters. Consequently, the first sons started life more advantaged than their younger brothers, and brothers started life more advantaged than sisters" (35). Emecheta addresses this inequality in her 1979 novel *The Joys of Motherhood*, which is analysed in the following chapter.

Subsequent to arranging the endowment for marriage, a day is fixed for the girl to move into her husband's house. After an eve of elaborate feasting and dancing, she is accompanied by girls of her age group and a number of other people to the bridegroom's house, where she finally assumes the status of a wife.

Throughout these series of rites, one perceives how the whole process of marriage is fundamentally patriarchal in nature. As Joseph Therese Agbasiere observes:

The marriage process entails, first and foremost, withdrawal from usual activities with ritual confinement for the girl. While thus confined, a number of things are required of her. These include subjection to various forms of time-consuming and strength-sapping physical activities such as cicatrisation and so on, intense emotional restraints, a high degree of concentration on and serious acquisition of knowledge of traditional norms of behaviour. (112)

The prospective bride, thus, feels restricted in many different ways. She must allow herself to be judged and criticized by everyone including her possible in-laws during the trial period. She must prove her virginity, character, temperament, industriousness and knowledge of customs and traditions to everyone, whereas the man is free of all these assessments and demands. Man's superiority in marriage is also evident in the Igbo terms related to marriage. Muonwe makes a linguistic analysis of the Igbo words for husband and wife and recognizes that the most common Igbo word for husband is *di*, which means "someone who has authority and control over the other" (5), and the term *dibuno* means the master or head of the household. The terms denoting wife include *onyebe* which means a member of a household headed by someone and *nwunye* which suggests her subordinate position in relation to her husband. This subservience is also evident in the way the wives address their husbands as *nnamukwu* meaning "my great father /master" or *nna anyi* meaning "our father" or *oga m* meaning "my master." Thus, marriage, through ritual endorsement, legitimizes man's control over women. Uchendu expounds that marriage allows men to own and control wives in multiple ways based on traditional customs such as child marriage which was later abolished in 1956, the bride price system which validated a man's acquirement of rights in a woman, and widow inheritance which assured that the wife, children and wealth related to them, remain within the family of the deceased man. Muonwe observes that while living in the husband's compound, "there are a number of duties any Igbo wife is expected to render to her husband. The extent to which she performs them makes her a good or a bad wife with attendant consequences" (Muonwe 12). It includes such duties as cooking appetizing food for the husband, fulfilling his sexual needs, producing

children for him, defending his reputation, dignifying him, and in case he dies, observing proper mourning for the deceased husband.

A very conspicuous traditional custom in Igboland, which emphasizes the secondary position of women to men, is the denial of their right to present kola-nuts to guests. Even though kola hospitality lies central to Igbo customs, and the presentation, breaking, and distribution of kola nuts is regarded as the privilege of the host, this privilege is “denied to women (for ritual reasons) and other social inferiors” (Uchendu 74) on occasions involving the presence of a man. However, women are granted the right to this privilege if the gathering involves women alone. In Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru*, there are several instances when the guests are welcomed with the distribution of kola nuts. However, when Efuru is visited by her people at her husband Adizua’s house, she apologizes to them for the absence of her husband. Although it is the duty of a host to offer the kola, Efuru does not have the right to break it in the absence of men in the house. Instead, a male member among the guests is asked to come forward to break and share the kola nuts with everyone. Michael Muonwe finds this custom quite degrading to women and is critical of Uchendu for not illuminating the “ritual reasons” responsible for this inequality. Muonwe identifies several scholars who perceive this custom as highly discriminatory against women. Rose N Uchem, for instance, in her article “Women and Kolanut Saga in Igbo Culture: A Human Rights Issue,” vehemently reproaches this custom for its apparent degrading of women’s dignity. She contends that “there is absolutely no tenable reason to allow the kolanut ‘palaver’ to continue dehumanizing the women, and subjecting them to perpetual opprobrium. The

women are generally made to feel like outcasts, disgruntled second class citizens” (6). She holds that this custom does not serve “any purpose apart from boosting the male ego while demoralizing the female’s” (6).

The ethnographical studies clearly render the Igbo society as a patriarchal one, wherein women have to carry out a number of rigid well-defined roles and tedious duties, in an attempt to emerge as ideal wives and mothers, and thereby, attain social recognition. Though the irresponsibility, arrogance, and failings of the husband are to be forgiven by wives, the failure of a wife to perform her duties towards the husband, no matter what the reason be, is seen as a grave offence for which admonition, wife-beating or even inflicting violence upon the wife are vindicated by both men and women in the society.

One of the continuing practices that allow a man to exert power over his wife is the custom of paying bride price; the money offered by a man to the father of the woman he intends to marry. This amount is usually settled after a long negotiation between the male members of the two families, and the bride’s father can often be too demanding depending up on his financial needs or the merit of the girl. Ifi Amadiume observes that the importance of women in terms of exchange is revealed the moment a girl child is born. She would be referred to as a bag of money and a song would be sung as follows:

One has given birth to a bag of money.

Thanks be to God.

This cloth I wear is money.

This meat I eat is money.

This fish I eat is money.

This child I have is money. (Amadiume 78)

In Emecheta's *The Bride Price*, Aku-nna's father is also very happy when a daughter is born to him. He names her "Aku-nna" meaning 'Father's Wealth,' for he hopes that she would fetch him a high bride price at the time of her marriage. Aku-nna too resolves that she would study well and marry a rich man who can pay a huge sum as the bride price so that her father would be happy. However, her father, whom she calls Nna, dies due to ill health and leaves Aku-nna's future at the mercy of other male members of the family. People discuss the fate of Aku-nna and assume that she will be married off soon so that her brother Nna-ndo can be given a good education with the money obtained as bride price. This was customary in Igboland. With the bride price that a father received at the marriage of his daughter, the sons in the family would be educated. When Aku-nna's father dies, relatives pity her saying that she will be married off quickly so as "to get enough money to pay Nna-ndo's school fees" (38). Aunty Uzo, laments at her plight: "This is the fate of us women. There is nothing we can do about it. We just have to learn to accept it" (39). Lean and unhealthy girls, like Aku-nna, are married off according to the interest of the male members in the house, completely disregarding the physical health or mental readiness of the girls. This would often turn fatal to the young brides, especially during the course of pregnancy or childbirth. Emecheta condemns the ignorance of the people in interpreting unhealthy girls as *ogbanje*, literally meaning "living dead". Such girls "seem to behave too well, but they are only in this world on



contract, and when their time is up, they have to go. They all die young, usually at the birth of their first baby. They must die young because their friends in the other world call them back” (79). Emecheta is sceptical of the Igbo notion of *ogbanje* which renders an unscientific elucidation to the untimely deaths of young girls married off in their early teens. She seems to be criticizing the Igbo practice of early marriages of girls that resulted in the death of several teenage girls owing to complications from early pregnancy and childbirth.

Though the ‘redemption’ of a girl from maidenhood to wifhood is the most awaited festivity in the bride’s family, the prospect of receiving a ‘fair’ bride price remains central to their expectation and joy. Aku-nna’s stepfather Okonkwo does not prevent Aku-nna from getting education because he knows that educated girls would fetch more bride price. He hopes to utilize the money thus obtained to meet the expenses needed to receive the *Eze* title. When Iloba, one of his sons, asks him why he is wasting money in educating Aku-nna, he answers, “Aku-nna and Ogugua will get married about the same time. Their bride prices will come to me. You see the trend today, that the educated girls fetch more money” (75). When Aku-nna is later kidnapped by Okoboshi into a forced marriage, Okonkwo is thoroughly disappointed. He is broken not because his step-daughter Aku-nna is kidnapped, but because he realizes that he will not be getting the bride price that he had counted on his educated daughter. He understands with great shock that he will have to be satisfied with the meagre amount that Okoboshi’s people might offer him the next day. Unable to bear the reality, a completely shattered Okonkwo retires to get drunk,

without showing any concern for the life and dignity of his kidnapped daughter, or making any effort to rescue her from a forced marriage.

There have been several debates regarding the significance of the bride price system in Igboland and other African societies. Many educated women, including Western feminists, condemn this practice as endorsing commodification of women, wherein the bridegroom receives the bride in exchange for the money offered as bride price. However, a majority of African feminists argue that the bride price system is a significant aspect of their culture and it has nothing to do with the commodification of women. Instead, it is a token of gift that the bridegroom offers to the bride's family in appreciation for having raised the girl who is going to be his wife. The bride price is not seen as determining the worth of the bride but is often an attempt to prove the groom to be a self-sufficient and responsible man. When Gilbert in *Efuru* goes to Efuru's father in the customary way to marry Efuru, he settles the bride price with the latter and pays him in cash. It greatly pleases Efuru's father who says, "'You have done like a man,' Efuru's father said to him. 'Men of these days are not as responsible as we were in our days. They want to marry wives, but they don't sit down and count the cost. Appearances are sometimes deceptive, but as I can see, you look good and responsible'" (135). A socio-linguistic study conducted by Uche Oboko and Aloysius C. Ifeanyichukwu in 2020 holds that the bride price system is still considered to be an important aspect of Igbo marriages as it is symbolic of the changing status of a girl from maidenhood to wifehood. They, however, concede that the bride price custom often puts a woman in a disadvantageous position, as it provokes the man to claim his authority over the

woman whom he married in exchange for a huge sum of money. This leads to the apparent commodification of a woman as a property owned by her husband. For instance, in Emecheta's *The Bride Price*, Ezekiel Odia, the first husband of Ma Blackie, frequently reminds her that he had paid double the normal bride price to marry her and so considers it his right to reproach her for her inability to produce more than one son for him.

Among the three select authors, it is Emecheta who is most critical of the patriarchal motives behind such marital customs. She reveals how as an integral part of marital customs among the Igbos and many other African communities, the bride price system often puts a woman in a difficult position and emphasizes the patriarchal nature of these societies. Emecheta is sceptical about the sheer economic interest involved in the system of bride price. She is concerned about how the custom emphasizes the inevitability of this practice by foreboding fatal consequences to the woman whose bride price is not given so that nobody would dare to renounce it. This is depicted in the consequence that awaits Aku-nna when Okonkwo refuses to accept the bride price offered by the family of Chike, deliberately intending to bring harm upon her for her decision to choose an *osu* as her husband. It is embarrassing that Okonkwo accepts the bride price given by the man who had kidnapped his daughter, whereas refuses to accept the money offered by the man who rescues and marries her. It reveals the extent to which the *osu* caste system prevailed in Igboland and throws light on how girls, who ventured to choose for themselves against patriarchal interests, are made to suffer in every way. Though Aku-nna manages to elope with Chike the very next night following her abduction

and settles down happily as his wife in a place called Ughelli, she is ever haunted by the displeasure of her people. Okonkwo is filled with vengeance and refuses the bride price offered by Chike's father twice. He swears to harm Akunna in their traditional way. In this regard, Emecheta states:

It was known in Ibuza that if you wished to get rid of someone who lived far away, you made a doll in the exact image of the person and pierced the heart with a needle, or alternately set it alight and allowed it to burn gradually. It was evident that it worked, though nobody was sure how because those who knew the art would not submit it to scientific investigation; the victim usually died, very slowly and very painfully. (156)

The traditional superstition regarding the voodoo doll practice is substantiated when Aku-nna grows weak day by day and succumbs to death soon after giving birth to a baby girl. Her story is told to every generation of girls "to reinforce the old taboos of the land. If a girl wishes to live long and see her children's children, she must accept the husband chosen for her by her people, and the bride price must be paid. If the bride price was not paid, she would never survive the birth of her first child" (168). This was a psychological way of rendering women powerless in the face of customs and traditions that served only male interests and needs. However, the reason behind Aku-nna's death may be attributed to her ill health owing to early pregnancy, malnutrition and the psychological stress exerted on her by the presumed wrath of her people. Emecheta's pessimistic endings of her works decry the predicament of women constrained, abused, and enervated by the multiple patriarchal forces operating in the society. Though Aku-nna dies at the end

of the novel, she embodies the spirit of every woman of dignity who would happily endure the consequences of the choices they make for themselves rather than live a long life of frustration and subjugation for the sake of appeasing the male-dominated society.

Susan Arndt, in her comparative study of Igbo women's writings and the patriarchal undertones in *ifo*, the folktales of the Igbo society, opines that the death of Aku-nna at the end of the novel is inevitable because she is only partially emancipated. Emecheta, according to Susan Arndt, seems to suggest that a woman who decides to rebel against her society ought to be fully emancipated and brave enough to survive the harsh consequences. She reinstates that “only those people who are strong enough to free themselves totally from the fetters of tradition will have the opportunity to find a fulfilling life outside of these fetters. And every woman who suffers under the social dogmas as Aku-nna does, must and should – according to the message of the novel – be strong enough for such an uncompromising rebellion” (260-261).

In *Efuru*, the eponymous character is found to abide by all customs that are not detrimental to her freedom or individuality. She accepts the significance of the bride price payment in completing the blessings of the marriage ceremony. Though Efuru does not wait for Adizua to pay the bride price before eloping with him, she makes sure that it is paid at the earliest. Her second husband, Gilbert, also follows the custom and pays the bride price at the right time. When Efuru decides to put an end to her marriages, she recompenses this amount as per the custom, for according

to the Igbo custom, the separation between a husband and a wife becomes complete only when the bride price is retrieved by the husband.

Igbo anthropologist Victor C. Uchendu observes that an Igbo woman does not become her husband's "chattel" simply because he has paid the bride price. In Igbo society, a woman "enjoys a high socio-economic and legal status. She can leave her husband at will, abandon him if he becomes a thief, and summon him to a tribunal, where she will get a fair hearing" (87). However, the burden of refunding the bride price often delays the remarriage of the woman and puts her under great pressure. The scholars Oboko and Ifeanyichukwu recognize the hindrances associated with the bride price system and hold that the system renders marital separation difficult in cases where the bride's family belongs to an economically deprived section of the society. They observe:

This is because in Igbo culture, a woman is officially considered divorced only when her estranged husband formally retrieves the bride price he paid on the woman. By implication, some women in bad marriages find themselves trapped and often debased psychologically due to the traditional bureaucracies involved in divorce in Igbo land. Even women who walked out of their marriages are not spared as they cannot remarry unless the bride prices paid by their former husbands are officially refunded. (Oboko 10)

Barring the obligation of the bride's family to refund the bride price, divorce, in traditional Igbo society, was generally a very simple process. A man could leave his wife in case of adultery or neglect of duty, and a woman could leave her husband in case of physical abuse, or if he is found to be a thief or criminal (Nnoromele 52).

The Igbo system allowed a woman to end her marital ties for any genuine reason and encouraged her to return to her father's house if the physical abuse and neglect became excruciating. When Efurū leaves Adizua, she is welcomed by her people with great sympathy. When she meets a group of women by the riverside, one of them appreciates her for her decision to return home:

‘Efurū, the daughter of Nwashike Ogene, welcome to your father's house. You did well, my daughter. We are sorry that your husband had rubbed charcoal on your face, but we are also glad that you have left him to come back to us. We women married to men of your village are very happy, and so when we see women of your village being ill-treated by their husbands, we feel it very keenly. You have done well to come back. You are young, beautiful and of a good parentage, so you will soon have a good husband.’

(89)

The study reveals the ambivalent attitude of the Igbo society towards the custom of bride price. Though many still regard this as an integral part of their marital customs, a majority of feminist writers and scholars emphasize how the bride price system, like the dowry system practiced in several Third World nations like India, has largely added to strengthening the patriarchal agenda in the society.

Despite such apparent forms of injustice and gender inequality in Igbo traditional culture, the Igbo society recognizes that the needs, grievances, predicaments, and concerns of women are often different from those of men. They respect women based on their age, motherhood, and titles. The Igbo system allows both men and women to take different titles based on their economic

accomplishments and success. Amadiume observes that “in the traditional title system, there were both social and political rewards for economically successful women” (*Male Daughters* 49). The highest chieftaincy title is the *ogbuefi* title, open to both men and women. Flora Nwapa herself was honoured with this title in 1978 for her socio-political contributions and selfless services, especially in the wake of the Nigerian Civil War of 1967. The title that is granted exclusively to women through divination is the *Ekwe* title. The women on whom *Ekwe* title is conferred are believed to be chosen by the goddess Idemili. Such women would be at the apex of economic success and would emerge as eligible candidates for the title, based on their money-making abilities and leadership qualities. They enjoy “rights of veto in village constitutional assemblies, and can be said to have been the mouthpiece of the villages and the town” (Amadiume 50). Flora Nwapa alludes to this myth as she associates the money-making ability and success of Efuru, with her divine obligation as the priestess of the Lake Goddess.

Traditional Igbo society also facilitates the participation of women in the political affairs of Igboland, especially through the political organizations exclusively meant for women. Salome Nnoromele elaborates that though Igbo society is found to favour men in general, they do recognize the strength and significance of women as well.

They recognized the differences between men and women and the fact that their needs were not always identical. As such they created two different powerful and autonomous political systems that handled the affairs of men and women separately. Consequently, men had their own political



institutions where they managed and discussed issues affecting them and women had their own separate and equally powerful political institutions through which they managed their affairs. (26)

Two major political organizations of women include the one formed by daughters of the lineage known as *umuada* or *umuokpu*, and the other comprising wives of the lineage, called *ndinyom* or *inyomdi*. Agbasiere notices that “every woman, irrespective of creed or social status is expected to belong to these village-based groups” (40). Of these two groups, the daughters of the lineage enjoy a lot of power and prestige in the place where they are born. The leader of the group is chosen based on age or seniority. Their most important role is during funeral ceremonies, for which they expect to be properly paid with gifts such as fish, wine, yam, coco yam, etc. According to Ifi Amadiume, their importance in their patrilineage is “so secure that a woman’s husband could not tell her not to participate in her lineage activities” (*Male Daughters* 60). The wives of the lineage play a crucial role during marriages and child-naming ceremonies. They are responsible for general cleanliness and smooth running of the marketplaces. They address problems specific to wives or daughters and emphasize the significance of maintaining solidarity and cooperation among women. They often present issues before the men-folk for redressal. If men refuse to attend to their demands, they would go on strike which involves a refusal to cook for their husbands or denial of sexual services (Amadiume 65).

A Women’s Council is constituted to look into the general welfare and moral policing of women. The council would contribute money towards public works and

common welfare. Their greatest strength is in their solidarity with regard to matters affecting women. They are “consequently feared and respected by the menfolk. Traditional leaders dared not meet to discuss matters concerning women without women representatives being present” (Amadiume 66). However, despite such a significant position and recognition in society, the final word on matters of common interest is always given by men. Joseph Therese Agbasiere, therefore, posits that in the traditional Igbo society, women possessed a “consultative voice” (39) which could “exert significant political influence, especially in matters that concern women directly. In this sense, women’s role in traditional politics could be said to be advisory” (39).

If the grievance of a woman in her marital relationship is beyond what can be resolved through advice and involves considerable offense on the part of the husband, then she can decide to leave him and go back to her father’s place, as is observed in the case of Efuru. Efuru’s second marriage also does not end well. She agrees to marry her childhood friend Eneberi, christened Gilbert, because he seemed to be very hardworking, responsible, and pleasing. He is, initially, a very understanding and loving husband who, like her former husband Adizua, respects his wife a lot for her skill at trade and for her efficiency in carrying out her duties as a wife and daughter-in-law. However, unlike Adizua, he does not like it when Efuru refuses to obey him in matters of trade. Efuru always goes by her own will and choice especially when it comes to trade. For instance, when Gilbert tells Efuru that they should paddle down the Great River to get groundnuts for trade, Efuru tells him that she is already exhausted from paddling to Nnodi to get the groundnuts. She

suggests that they buy corn instead of groundnuts and return home, for she feels that that would be more profitable than continuing with the tiresome paddling. Though Gilbert finally yields to her suggestion and returns home with corn for trade, he is apparently very displeased and angry with his wife. Such a shift in male attitude towards women's freedom of choice with regard to trade seems to be the influence of colonial forces and Christianity which played a significant role in strengthening the Igbo male ego and in deteriorating the socio-economic status of Igbo women. As a western educated young man who had embraced Christianity, Gilbert's attitude seems to be much influenced by the colonizers' attitude towards women.

Ogundipe Leslie is critical of this patriarchal tendency to stand in the way of women's choices especially with regard to her participation in the public domain. She insists that "all men need to be progressive feminists, committed to a socially just society, wherein a woman can realize herself to her fullest potential, if she so chooses (*Recreating Ourselves* 230). Nwapa explores the increasing rigidity of patriarchy in postcolonial Nigeria in her work *One is Enough*. The female protagonist, Amaka, longs for the good old days when a wife was not only blamed for her husband's failure in business or life but would also be praised for his prosperity. Postcolonial Igboland saw men hesitating to admit or appreciate the skill of their wives in making good fortune. The success of the wife began to be seen as the failure of the husband and his masculinity, and this greatly resulted in the disgrace and exclusion of women from the socio-economic matters of the land. Men in traditional Igboland appreciated the industriousness and money-making abilities of their wives, unlike many of the Western men's egocentric assumption that an

earning wife blemishes the dignity of her husband by allowing the society to question his efficiency in meeting the financial needs of the family. Colonialism curtailed the enormous freedom and authority that Igbo women enjoyed in the marketplace and in their respective spaces in the husband's compound.

Within the husband's compound, every Igbo woman was given a specific matricentric or matrifocal space, with a separate hut of her own. She lived with her children and utilized the land attached to the backyard for vegetable cultivation when needed. Being industrious in nature, the Igbo women laboured hard to make monetary profits in the market space, which they monopolized. In *The Bride Price*, Aku-nna witnesses the drudgery and hardships of the village women as she reaches Ibuza with her mother and brother, following the death of her father. She observes these women rushing to the marketplace early morning.

They were carrying a heavy pile of damp cassava pulp, all tied with banana skins into baskets; many of the baskets were not very big, but with the heaps of dripping cassava pulp piled high on them they ended up looking like skyscrapers. *Akpu*, as the cassava pulp was called locally, was a very heavy foodstuff made from the roots of the cassava plant – so heavy was it that the necks of the poor women carriers (who were sweating profusely although the heat of the early sun was still moderate) were compressed to half their normal sizes. (63)

In spite of being engaged in such strenuous tasks, the women seemed to enjoy the trade, for the marketplace offered them a space to listen to and support each other. The strong sense of unity among the Igbo women is revealed in the

instance wherein Ma Blackie arrives at Ibusa as a widow with her children. The women sell their *akpu* in bulk, unaffected by the financial loss incurred by bulk selling, and rush to help the widow carry her things to the house of Okonwo, who was to inherit her.

Ifi Amadiume recounts that Igbo women held a central position in the traditional Igbo economy (39). They were found to be adept at trading and were very business-minded. Uchendu too holds that “trading has a long history among the Igbo” (27), with most of the rural village markets in pre-colonial times, being dominated by women. He adds that a Westerner visiting an Igbo rural market is likely to be surprised to see “the commercial activities of women petty traders” (29), for “they are literally everywhere as buyers and sellers” (29). Except for palm wine and yam, almost all other products were traded by women. This gave women access to money from the sale of either their goods or those belonging to their husbands. If men’s crops or livestock were sold, only the agreed sale price would be given to the men while the women kept the profit in return for her service in marketing the goods.

Women thus made monetary benefits by taking care of and marketing the husbands’ goods like palm oil, yam, plantain, banana, and other fruits. Money derived from the fruit trees planted by wives and from the “fruits of the palm tree pointed out to a daughter by her father, or to a wife by her husband” (39) also belonged to her. Most of the cash thus earned by women went back into the subsistence economy and enabled women to continue to dominate trade and market space. The money earned by men, on the other hand, was largely used for their

personal needs such as paying the bride price for marrying more wives, or for taking titles for themselves or their sons. Successful women often supported their husbands financially for genuine needs. In *Efuru*, Adizua, tired of working on the farm, leaves the job and joins Efuru in trade. They trade in yams, dry fish, and crayfish, and make huge profits. In this way, they are able to earn the money needed to pay the bride price to Efuru's father. When Adizua is further asked to give a bottle of schnapps to compensate for the apparent delay in the payment of the bride price, Efuru secretly gives him some money and asks him to give it to her father instead of going to get the bottle of schnapps.

Nwapa, thus, explores the possibility of mutual respect, concern, and tolerance in man-woman partnership in marriage. She attempts to emphasize that a woman's real happiness is not in being an appendage to a man but in her ability to decide and do whatever pleases her. Prior to colonization and its impact, women worked and earned on an equal footing with men. They were economically self-sufficient and yet, carried out their domestic duties efficiently. When Adizua returned from the farm every time, Efuru would cook for him and would take good care of him. In her relationship with Gilbert too, she remains a faithful, dutiful wife who exhibits immense proficiency in pursuing her individual desires without failing in her duties as a woman in a patriarchal society. That she is a wife and daughter-in-law, does not prevent her from following her interests or doing what she considers right. She acknowledges the superiority of her husband as "the lord and master" (55). Yet, all the while, she is cautious to uphold her rights and dignity as well. Once when she goes for dancing at a ceremony and reaches home very late, she fears her

husband Adizua would be angry for her failure to receive him when he returned from the farm and for not giving him food on time. She is sorry for her negligence and sings a song of apology to him to relent his anger:

My dear husband, don't sell me,

My dear husband, don't kill me.

Listen to me first before

You pass your judgement.

My dear husband, forgive me,

My dear husband, don't kill me.

Let me tell you how we danced,

Let me tell you how we danced.

My dear husband, my love is true.

My dear husband, I am constant.

My dear husband, don't be angry.

I went to dance with my mates. (30)

These lines clearly reveal the superior status enjoyed by men in traditional Igbo society. They also reflect a kind of warmth and intimacy between the husband and wife. Adizua is "completely disarmed" (30) on hearing the words of Efuru and does not reproach his apologizing wife. This incident is comparable to an episode in

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), wherein Okonkwo's youngest wife, Ojiugo, goes to plait her hair at a friend's house and does not return in time to cook the afternoon meal for her husband. Despite it being the Week of Peace, a furious Okonkwo breaks the peace by beating his wife very badly, without giving her a chance to speak her part (22). Okonkwo's ill-treatment of his wife would have been vindicated if it were not the Week of Peace for while most of Achebe's women characters are represented as completely dominated by and secondary to men, Nwapa attempts to claim that despite the apparent superiority of men in the Igbo society, women too had a status, voice and freedom of their own, and they did have much influence upon their husbands.

This influence is often found to deteriorate when the man takes several wives as allowed in the traditional Igbo society. The polygamous marital system allowed men to own any number of wives by either paying the bride price or inheriting the widows of their deceased brothers. Wives and children were regarded as the movable properties of man. Ifi Amadiume observes that wealth for men consisted of "houses, many wives and daughters (who would bring in-laws), livestock..." (30-31). It was customary for a man to have any number of wives and mistresses while he expected his wives to be loyal to him. Emecheta explores the injustice and mental agony of the wives in a polygamous marriage system, in her much-acclaimed work *The Joys of Motherhood*, which is discussed in detail in the ensuing chapter. In traditional Igboland, every wife would be given separate huts to live in and the husband would decide which wife he wanted to share the bed with. Usually, the husband would show preference to the youngest wife and tend to ignore the sexual



needs of other wives, though they would be respected as senior wives and mothers of his children. This would often lead to sexual frustration in the ignored wives and jealousy among the co-wives.

Emecheta throws light into this predicament through the characterization of Okonkwo's wives. Ozubu, the second wife of Okonkwo, tells Ma Blackie, in a tone of jealousy and disappointment that her husband calls only his new and young wife Ezebona to his hut every night, while his other two wives keep longing for his love and presence. She complains that Okonkwo will spend all his money on Ezebona whereas if any other wife complains of a headache, he would deny them treatment reminding them that he had paid a huge amount for them as bride price. Okonkwo is a typical traditional Igbo man who enjoys an air of superiority in front of his wives. He overlooks the sexual needs of his first two wives. His preference for Ezebona seems to be only because she is new, young, and beautiful. Beneath his love for her, there is an air of possession. When Ma Blackie takes his consent for going back to Lagos on knowing that her husband is sick, he commands Ezebona to go with Blackie to help her carry one of her bags to Asaba. She is also asked to return immediately. He tells her, "You must come straight back; I don't want to hear that you are at a Cable Point in Asaba gossiping with women who have nothing to do. So as soon as the mammy-lorry has left with Ma, you must come home at once. I want to see you when I return from the farm" (49). The words reveal that more than an apparent interest Okonkwo has for his new wife, he seems to be keen on asserting his right over her. When he later inherits Ma Blackie as his fourth wife at the death of his brother, his first wife Ngebeke grows jealous of the new wife as both the

children of the latter are sent to school and are privileged in many ways compared to her and her children. She scornfully refers to Ma Blackie as ‘the big Miss’ and is annoyed that her husband puts so much hope in the bride price of Ma Blackie’s daughter Aku-nna. She affirms to her children that as the first wife of her husband, it is she who deserves all privileges and respect.

Most Igbo women, in polygamous marriages, endured negligence and ill-treatment from their husbands by engrossing themselves in their gender-specific roles like doing household chores, mothering all the children including those of the co-wives, going to market, trading, farming, and being involved in several cultural activities such as narrating folklores, singing songs and dancing. Such activities kept them engaged and less dependent on their husband. To the Igbo women, marriage was important, for it enabled them to become mothers and enjoy a respectable position in society. Emecheta is thus critical of the practice of polygamy for the emotional agony it causes to these women on being denied expressions of love and intimacy by the only male partner that the culture allows them to live with. Men lose interest in their wives when they become pregnant or when they get occupied with the task of mothering. The women soon find themselves being replaced by new wives and it gradually renders the husband oblivious to the needs of his senior wives. Most of the young wives being girls in their teens or early adulthood, married to old men, such negligence often provokes them to seek sexual fulfilment in clandestine relationships with other men. Emecheta points out this when she reveals that Chike, like most Igbo men, had several mistresses in his teens, many of them being young wives.

His conscience did not worry him on that score, for these wives were still in the flush of girlhood yet tied to ageing husbands who, above all prided themselves on providing enough yam to fill their spouses' bellies. If they suspected that their wives needed more than yams to satisfy them, they were not talking. If they were aware that half the numbers of children being born and saddled with their names were not theirs, they knew better than to raise a scandal. (84)

Kanyoro and Uduyi hold that “the question of polygamy is of vital importance to the topic of African culture and sexuality” (3). Their work titled *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa* (1992) discusses the observations of African women theologians who argue that “men perpetuate polygamy for their own sexual, patriarchal, and material needs. They claim that polygamy is a form of oppression against women and that the church should stand in solidarity with women to reject this form of oppression” (3).

Polygamy, while being criticized by feminist activists as degrading to women, is also claimed to have several advantages to them living within the Igbo cultural frame. Salome Nnoromele observes how certain Western scholars like Sylvia Leith Ross, Margaret Greene, and G.T.Basden identified that the practice of polygamy was often encouraged by women themselves as it offered several advantages to the wives. According to Nnoromele, “polygamy served important social and economic functions for the community, specifically for the women” (50). One of the prominent reasons that condoned men's privilege to polygamy was that it guaranteed sufficient progenies in the family. Being fundamentally a farming

community, every Igbo family needed several children to assist in the farming activities. When a wife fails to produce more children, especially sons, they are conditioned to feel guilty and recommend their husband to go for another wife. In *Efuru*, when Efuru fails to conceive after two years of marriage to Adizua, she tells him, ““It does not seem as if anything will happen before Owu festival. I am losing hope again. Don’t you think it will be better if you begin to look around for a young girl for a wife”” (26). It is Adizua who asks her to wait for some more time. Though Efuru conceives and gives birth to a daughter named Ogonim, Adizua leaves her to live with another woman in secret, rather than marry her with the consent of Efuru, as was the custom. In her second marriage to Gilbert too, it is Efuru who insists that he take a second wife as she had failed to conceive and Gilbert marries Nkoyeni. Later, he expresses his wish to marry again and Efuru suggests her maid Ogea to him.

Apart from the significance of polygamy in facilitating the birth of more progenies in a family, it is also encouraged considering the relief it offers to women. The presence of co-wives often enabled a wife to share the laborious tasks in the fields, manage the domestic duties and trade, and also to look after children. Nnoromele holds that ““Considering the amount of work women had to do both within and outside the home, having more than one wife ensured that there were enough women to share the burden of housework, fieldwork, and other responsibilities of an Igbo woman. It also meant that women had some time for themselves and their children”” (51). Regarding women’s attitude towards polygamy, Helen Ware, in her statistical study titled “Polygyny: Women's Views in

a Transitional Society, Nigeria 1975,” finds that “Some 60 percent of wives said straight out that they would be pleased: to share the housework, husband care and child-minding and to have someone to gossip and "play" with. Only 23 percent openly expressed anger at the idea of sharing material and sexual resources with another wife,” (Ware 188). This reveals that analysing such experiences from a strictly Western feminist lens can leave one prejudiced in the understanding of these complex relationships. It is important to consider cultural relativism and respect for diverse practices and norms while examining polygamy in the African context. The social, historical, and cultural frameworks need to be taken into account before making value judgments. Such relationships are complex and need to be approached with cultural sensitivity. However, the agency and autonomy of the women involved in polygamous marriages need to be respected and not compromised. Both Emecheta and Nwapa while challenging the inherent flaws in their respective societies, share the uniqueness and strength of Igbo womanhood through their characters.

Polygamy liberated women from the possibility of frequent pregnancies and consequent complications and responsibilities. Nnoromele observes that in traditional Igbo society, there were no methods of contraception for women and so polygamy “constituted a form of family planning. Women were able to space out the birth of their children over two-to-three-year periods. This, in turn, ensured proper health for the women and the children. It prevented, in most cases, untimely deaths due to frequent pregnancies” (50-51). When Christianity gradually discouraged polygamy in colonial Igboland, women were deprived of the privileges they enjoyed

in the traditional marital system. Emecheta alludes to this in *The Bride Price*, in the life of Nwosu and Nwabata, the parents of Ogea. With Nwabata as his only wife, Nwosu does not have enough people to assist him in cultivation and this is one of the chief reasons behind the poverty of the family. His wife is also not able to help him much as she is occupied with intermittent periods of pregnancy and the task of mothering. In the absence of co-wives, she has no one to share the domestic duties or to help her look after her children. Yet they are contented in their companionship with each other and share a deep bond of love and loyalty, despite the little quarrels and complaints.

Though women in traditional Igboland saw several advantages in polygamy and many a time suggested new wives for their husbands, they would not tolerate relationships outside marriage. Both Nwapa and Emecheta explore the theme of betrayal in their works and are intolerant of men's depravity despite the numerous sexual privileges they enjoy in a traditional Igbo society. In *Efuru*, Nwapa presents several female characters who are betrayed by their husbands. While Igbo society allows men to marry or inherit as many wives as they want, the wife is always expected to be faithful to her husband. Even if the woman is physically harmed, emotionally harassed, or sexually ignored by her husband, she has to remain constant and faithful to him. She must continue as a neglected wife within his household.

In *Efuru*, when Adizua becomes irregular in coming home, shows little interest in eating the food cooked by Efuru, and does not bother to spend time with her, she begins to suspect him. If he had expressed any desire to take a second wife,

she would not stop him. Most women in African societies encouraged their husbands to take more wives as it would provide them with more time for themselves and their children. As Ajanupu, the sister of Efuru's mother tells her, "only a bad woman would like to be married alone by her husband" (57). Ajanupu herself had recommended another girl for her husband when she was too busy looking after him, taking care of her children, and at the same time pursuing her trade. Like most Igbo women she saw nothing wrong in a man wanting to marry another woman, but "he must go in an open and noble way" (57). In the case of Adizua, this was being done behind her back. When Adizua lies to Efuru that he is going to Nnodi for cultivation, Efuru senses that he is not going there alone and suspects a possibility of betrayal.

At the marketplace, Efuru happens to overhear a woman narrating to another woman that her daughter had eloped with somebody to Nnodi, and Efuru rightly assumes that it is the same woman with whom her husband would have gone. The eloped woman had been separated from her husband and was a mother of two children. One of the children had died and when the husband comes to claim the other child, she tells him that the child is not his. This kind of adultery by women is not tolerated in a society that expects all neglected or ill-treated wives to continue suffering with the vain hope that one day their 'wayward' husband might come back to them. The sexuality and sexual needs of women are often regarded as trivial, forbidden, vulgar, and immoral. We find the elderly women remarking that this sort of behaviour from a woman is "an abomination" (55). The conversation between these women reveals the narrow-minded, gender-biased notions of the society which

judges infidelity by men and women in two different ways. The promiscuity and betrayal of men are often overlooked by both men and women, whereas, for the same 'offence', the woman is ostracized as immoral and licentious.

When Efuru confides her worries in her mother-in-law, Ossai, the latter consoles her saying, "Have patience, my daughter. Don't be in a hurry. Everything will be all right. Don't mind my son. It is only youth that is worrying him and nothing else. He will soon realize what a fool he has been and will come crawling to you. Look after your daughter and your trade. Your husband will come back to you after all his wanderings. Men are always like that" (51). Adizua's mother represents the ideal kind of wife that the patriarchal society would want. She tries to console Efuru by narrating how she herself had suffered all through her life owing to the betrayal and infidelity of her husband. She remembers how Adizua's father had abandoned her several times and returned to her only when he fell sick and needed her care. There were times when she had wandered from place to place, with her little son, in search of her husband. Despite realizing that the man has no sincere love for her or the child, she continues to love him and waits for him. She refuses to obey her mother's suggestion to leave him and remarry. Throughout her life, she waits for him patiently in vain, and finally, when he returns sick and dies subsequently, she mourns him for three years. She tells Efuru to wait for Adizua for some more time and adds that despite being neglected by her husband, she is proud that she has been loyal to the one man she loved throughout her life.

Nwapa, apparently, creates an "ideal wife" in Adizua's mother, in an attempt to forewarn all married women, of the futility and absurdity of sacrificing their lives



in the name of love, duty, and fidelity towards insincere and fickle-minded husbands. She seems to suggest that a woman needs to take the right decisions for herself at the right time, instead of continuous futile attempts to conform to the conduct of an ideal wife, as fortified by the patriarchal society. Ajanupu echoes the strong, reprimanding voice of Nwapa herself when she rebukes her sister saying:

‘Didn’t my mother and I tell you to leave that wretched husband of yours? You would have married a better husband and had children. Instead, you remained in your husband’s house and shut yourself out from the world. You wanted to be called a good wife, good wife when you were eating sand, good wife when you were eating nails. That was the kind of goodness that appealed to you. How could you be suffering for a person who did not appreciate your suffering, the person who despised you. It was not virtue; it was plain stupidity. You merely wanted to suffer for the fun of it, as if there was any virtue in suffering for a worthless man.’ (79-80)

Ossai’s experience, instead of persuading Efuru to think in favour of her husband, serves as an eye-opener to her. She realizes that Adizua is going to behave exactly like his father as it is in his blood. She refuses to be deceived or taken for granted by a man, just because she is a woman married to him. A woman of dignity, Efuru believes that “to suffer for a truant husband, an irresponsible husband like Adizua, is to debase suffering” (62). She, therefore, decides to leave him once he is back and return to her father’s house with her daughter Ogonim. Adizua fails to return even when her daughter dies of convulsion. After six months of waiting, a broken Efuru, decides to end the marriage and return to her father.

Though Efuru's childlessness in her second marriage to Gilbert instigates her to find new wives for her husband, she feels offended when she comes to know that before taking a second wife, he had been involved with another woman and even had a son with her. Unlike Efuru, Gilbert is not very open to her. He does not tell her why he could not come for the funeral of her father Nwashike Ogene, and when Efuru seeks an explanation from him regarding the rumour that he had been in jail for three months, Gilbert fails to answer her properly. Efuru feels angry and broken at the thought that she has been deceived by both men she loved all her life. Finally, when Efuru falls sick, Gilbert crosses the limits by suspecting and compelling her to confide adultery which he believes was the cause of her illness. It is Ajanupu who comes to respond on behalf of a weak and shocked Efuru. Efuru leaves the house of Gilbert after her recovery, yet continues to enjoy a respectable position in the society as a worshipper of the Lake Goddess Uhamiri, and for her pleasing and compassionate behaviour to everyone around her.

Unlike Adizua and Gilbert, Ogea's father Nwosu is loyal to his wife Nwabata and takes care of all his six children. Through the little quarrels and worries in the life of this couple, Nwapa attempts to capture the beauty of an unaffected Igbo family, affected by the growing poverty and economic crisis in colonial Igboland. Colonial rules and regulations, imposition of taxes, restrictions regarding the making and sale of homely products, especially gin, and several such interferences into Igbo means of living, create a lot of frustration and economic liability to people. They borrow from whoever succeeds in making money but hesitate to repay their debt until forced by the creditors. Nwabata emerges as an

unbending woman who chides her husband for his lack of foresight in money management which often leads to poverty in the family. When Nwosu is disappointed that he has no money to begin farming that year, Nwabata declares that with the one pound she has, she will trade in cassava and help her children from starving. She is another typical Igbo woman who adapts to all challenging situations in Igboland, confident and assured of her perseverance. Through her female characters, Nwapa thus shows how in a rapidly changing Igbo society, women remained indomitable and steadfast and emerged more dependable than the men of the time.

Emecheta's female characters also, though viciously victimized in many different ways, are found to assume their own distinct strategies of survival amidst different kinds of oppressive forces in the patriarchal society. She seems to underscore the necessity to place human values and human life above all kinds of societal confines. Social status and cultural taboos should not be allowed to stifle men and women by denying them the fundamental right to live their lives as they want. In the relationship between Aku-nna and Chike, Emecheta explores the beauty and strength of a man-woman relationship that is marked with mutual love, respect, and genuine concern for each other. Aku-nna and Chike disregard many impervious cultural taboos in the Igbo society, for the sake of defending the honour and happiness of each other. For instance, when Aku-nna experiences menstruation for the first time while talking to Chike, he asks her not to panic and gets the necessary things for her. In a society that considered menstrual blood to be taboo to all men, Chike embraces her, provides her tablets for pain relief, gets a packet of sanitary

napkins from town and does everything to make sure that nobody else would come to know of her maturity, lest she be not allowed to finish her exams. Later, when Okoboshi kidnaps her to marry, the only men who genuinely strive to rescue her are Chike and her brother Nna-ndo. All others accept it as the fate of Aku-nna and leave her to the mercy of the egotistical man who exerts his authority over her by crooked means. Even the women in Okoboshi's family attempt to justify the act of forced marriage by advising her to accept her fate, and before even waiting for a half-conscious Aku-nna to realize what is happening to her, they tell her to give them many sons and daughters at the earliest. However, Aku-nna is unable to forgive the people who conspired to push her into wedlock against her will, in such a demeaning way. She is warned by her sister-in-law not to resist the sexual advances of Okoboshi, for otherwise, she would be raped by him with the help of his friends, as was allowed by the custom, to overpower girls who resisted male entertainment. Her twenty-four hours' experiences in the house of Okoboshi speak volumes about the intense physical, sexual and psychological violence and humiliations suffered by young helpless girls in the name of culture and destiny. Aku-nna realizes that if she remains weak and powerless that night, she will be sexually assaulted by Okoboshi and that would put an end to all her dreams. Emecheta writes:

A kind of strength came to her, from where she did not know. She knew only that, for once in her life, she intended to stand up for herself, to fight for herself, for her honour. This was going to be the deciding moment of her existence. Not her mother, not her relatives, not even Chike, could help her

now. She waited, planning that, if the worst came to the worst and she had to fight physically, she would go for his weak foot. (136-137)

Emecheta underscores the significance of women learning to become self-responsible for their lives and the necessity to bravely confront situations that tend to threaten their dignity and right to life. Her own life, having been a great ordeal that she traverses positively, Emecheta creates female characters whose lives attempt to reinstate the significance of women standing up for themselves. Helen Chukwuma, one of the predominant advocates of African women's causes, observes that Emecheta's "characters adopt a positivistic view in crisis, and do not just fold their arms in tears and self-pity. Rather, they think, plan, execute and concretize. Through this maze of self-assertion, female individualism and personality shows, she appears in another light, as a person capable of taking and effecting decisions" (4).

Aku-nna summons all courage to resist Okoboshi's sudden sexual advance which leads to Okoboshi slapping her so hard that she senses the inside of her mouth bleeding. Yet, she is not ready to yield. She realizes that it is impossible to conquer him physically and decides to use the power of words. She raves like a mad woman and lies to him that she is not a virgin, but a woman who has already yielded herself to her lover Chike. She pities Okoboshi for his miserable fate and is scornful of his father Obidi for proving that "the best he can manage to steal for his son is a girl who has been taught what men taste like by a slave" (138). The humiliation comes as a great shock to Okoboshi who swears never to touch her and calls her a "slut" "good enough to be given to gorillas for them to sleep with" (139). Emecheta is

apparently sceptical about a society that overlooks the sexual adventures of men before and after marriage, while sturdily refusing to tolerate the sexual affinities of women outside marriage; despite the sexual waywardness of the husband or his negligence towards the sexual needs of his wife. A woman who celebrates her sexuality is often labelled using derogatory terms like slut, whore, or promiscuous, whereas the promiscuity of men is vindicated as sexual adventures pursued for mere fun. Though the lie brings a lot of disgrace to Aku-nna and her people, she seems to realize that in a society that fails to recognize a woman's right over her body and life, the woman must stand up for herself with her own rights and wrongs, even if it means to disrupt the complacency in the male-constructed world.

In *Gender Violence in Africa*, December Green argues that “the sexual relations of power focus on the family as a site of gender violence” (15). Violence against women and girls may be recognized in Igbo cultural practices like female genital mutilation, forced sex, and wife battering. Green describes wife battering as “the violent victimization of women by the men to whom they are married or with whom they share a marriage-like relationship. This abuse usually involves a variable combination of the threat of violence, emotional violence, forced sex, and physical assault” (25). The physical abuse and the mental trauma that Aku-nna suffers at the hands of Okoboshi, draw attention to the prevalence of gender violence in Igboland. Despite the swollen eyes, wounded face, and other bruises on her body, nobody pities Aku-nna or questions Okoboshi for his violence. They leave no choice before the kidnapped girl who is supposed to yield to her husband, and ventures to mentally harass and ill-treat her on knowing that she has already lost her virginity to a slave boy. However, as in most societies, not all men are perpetrators of violence and not all women are victims of violence either. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty holds:

Although it is true that the potential of male violence against women circumscribes and elucidates their social position to a certain extent, defining women as archetypal victims freezes them into “objects-who-defend-themselves,” men into “subjects-who-perpetrates-violence” and (every) society into powerless (read: women) and powerful (read: men) groups of people. Male violence must be theorized and interpreted *within* specific societies, in order both to understand it better and to effectively organize to change it. (58)

Neither Nwapa nor Emecheta represent all male characters as violent. In *Efuru*, neither Adizua nor his wandering father or Gilbert are represented as violent. Ogea’s mother, Nwabata is also a contended wife who is proud that her husband Nwosu has never beaten her in their fifteen years of marriage. Emecheta too, does not represent violence as an integral part of a man-woman relationship in Igboland. Apart from the heinous acts of violence inflicted upon Aku-nna by Okoboshi, no other male character is found to be physically ill-treating women. Even the egotistical and chauvinistic Okonkwo does not batter his wives, including Ma Blackie, even when her daughter Aku-nna disgraces him by eloping with the slave boy Chike.

Thus, as inferred from the Igbo ethnographical studies and in view of the analysis of the works by Nwapa and Emecheta, it may be concluded that in traditional Igbo society, wife battering was not a common practice. Marriage offered a man the right to beat his wife, in cases where she failed to perform her duties. A woman had to experience culture-inflicted physical violence and emotional agony in the form of female genital mutilation, control of sexuality, and widowhood ordeals

and confinements, so as to concede to the patriarchal expectations and regulation of her body. But, being a close-knit community, instances of forced sex and other forms of physical violence upon women and girls in Igboland, are apparently less compared to several other societies. The presence of women's political associations and female solidarity in Igboland defended women from extreme forms of violence. As Ifi Amadiume puts it, "In any case of violence, relatives were at hand to defend their sister, daughter or mother. Women were therefore better protected in this system" (114). These readings render traditional Igbo men as conscious of the numerous rights of women as self-sufficient individuals, recognizing their significant position as wives, and respecting them for their efficiency in subsistence production and their unique capability for biological reproduction.

Although this gender ideology prevailed for some time even during the colonial period, the Igbo society underwent several conspicuous changes that gradually deteriorated women's position within the private and public spaces. Ifi Amadiume observes, "Whereas indigenous concepts, linked to flexible gender constructions in terms of access to power and authority, mediated dual-sex divisions, the new Western concepts introduced through colonial conquest carried strong sex and class inequalities supported by rigid gender ideology and constructions; a woman was always female regardless of her social achievements or status" (119). Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's seminal work *Purple Hibiscus* captures the deteriorated status of Igbo women and the transformation of Igbo society into a completely male-dominated territory under the influence of colonial education and religious indoctrination.



The colonizers were embarrassed at the socio-political involvement, self-sufficiency, eloquence, and rebellious nature of Igbo women, as opposed to the subservient demeanour of upper-class women in Western countries. Igbo women dominated trade, had a voice in socio-political matters, and were rebellious enough to mobilize a riot as was evident in the Aba Women's Riot of 1929, fought against the imposition of new taxes on women. The colonizers, therefore, recognized the need to deprive the Igbo woman of her position and authority in both domestic and public spaces. Ifi Amadiume recounts how the colonizers curtailed the privileges of Igbo women one by one and rendered them dependent, marginalized, and voiceless in their own land. They banned the *Ekwe* title whereby women lost their central position in the local government, and imposed measures to control women's organizations, including the Women's Council. The leaders of women's organisations were "used simply to enlist women's support for male-dominated political parties and their male candidates" (Amadiume 148). Women also lost their monopoly in the market as men took over various business and contracting works, leaving women to manage farming and household chores. This greatly affected the economic self-sufficiency of women. Within the domestic space and in the public domain, Igbo women had to accede to the limits proposed by the expanding forces of colonial patriarchy.

Women's domestication was further propelled by the missionary education system which established schools "to use them as instruments of proselytization" (Muonwe 230). The education that boys and girls received in these institutions was quite different from the informal education they used to receive in the traditional society, which equipped them to perform their varying roles, both private and public. "But the newly introduced Western educational system established some

demarcations. Whereas men learned how to play public roles, women's education concentrated almost exclusively on how to manage home. Moreover, they were made to understand that that constituted the sole ideal to which any reasonable woman should aspire" (Muonwe 241-242). Women were gradually rendered incapable of managing public roles and were relegated to the confines of their marital homes where they tried to prove themselves as the dutiful, obedient wives of their Christianized husbands and as upholders of Christian values and morality.

Michael Muonwe observes that when Christianity was first introduced in Igboland, the natives were very hostile towards it. They allotted the abandoned land known as "evil forests" to the missionaries for building churches and allowed the slaves and outcastes to seek the new religion. However, when these converts began to enjoy certain privileges in colonial Igboland, the native Igbos also eventually adopted a path of appropriation. Muonwe traces the growth of Christianity in the Igbo society and identifies that one of the chief reasons that led to an upsurge in conversion to Christianity was the introduction of missionary education. The privileges and social status enjoyed by educated men, especially the prosperity of the outcastes and slaves, provoked more and more natives to enrol in schools. "The missionaries made sure the curriculum was designed in such a way that religious instruction and indoctrination occupied the centre stage" (Muonwe 232). People realized that in the changing society, Western education would offer more possibilities for white-collar jobs and material prosperity. Consequently, there emerged a group of educated Igbo elites, who saw themselves as superior to the uneducated, non-Christian, traditional men. This soon gave way to the rural-urban division of Igboland and the emergence of a rigid class division within the Igbo

society. In “Colonialism, Social Structure and Class Formation: Implication for Development in Nigeria,” Imhonopi et al. observe:

By introducing Western education, the colonial administration and system guaranteed that more rewards and social mobility would go to graduates of its educational institutions. Therefore, the products of these institutions who were employed into the colonial administration saw themselves as a special breed as they now spoke the language, ate the food, wore the clothes, lived in the houses and generally learned and lived the ways of the white man. Thus, the class structure in Nigeria was restructured and redrawn along occupational and educational lines. This created the upper class, middle class and lower class. (115-116)

The upper class included very wealthy owners of the property, the middle class included “petit bourgeoisie” (Imhonopi et al 116) who managed the works of the upper class and did white-collar jobs, and the lower class included labourers. Such a class division also had an influence on the lives of the women belonging to these classes.

While the lower-class and middle-class women found life very oppressive and challenging, especially due to poverty and socio-political exclusion, they did retain the unyielding spirit of traditional Igbo women who refused to give in. It was the upper-class women who found themselves completely domesticated as elite housewives, whose privileged position was coupled with a complete dependency on their wealthy husbands. In *Negotiating Power and Privilege: Igbo Career Women in Contemporary Nigeria*, Philomena Okeke-Ihejirika studies the perplexity and predicament of the upper-class Igbo women in postcolonial Nigeria, who suddenly

found themselves entering into an elite circle, as the only wife of an affluent husband in a newly introduced monogamous family system. They were also greatly affected when the changes gradually divided the Igbo society into rural and urban spaces. Okeke observes:

The rural-urban divide, in addition, made the village forums of women's associations inaccessible to elite women. Not only were they separated by distance from the groups that had, in the past, provided crucial support but their concerns also became largely irrelevant to the challenges that village women faced. Over time, elite women were forced to develop their own advocacy forums in order to survive in a new environment. (32)

The upper-class Igbo women thus lost the solidarity and support of the different women's associations in villages which greatly affected their power within the family and public as well. The identity and individuality of these women gradually got obscured behind the name and reputation of their prosperous husbands.

Adichie portrays the victimization and helplessness of the domesticated wives of upper-class elite men in the mother character of her novel *Purple Hibiscus*. Beatrice, the mother of the fifteen-year-old Kambili and the seventeen-year-old Jaja, is representative of the upper-class elite women, who find themselves constrained despite their respectable and envious position in the society. She is the only wife of Eugene Achike, a prosperous businessman but a religious fanatic, who enjoys a prominent position in society and in church. She is grateful to her husband for not taking more wives and feels guilty for her inability to produce more children for him. The novel which is narrated through the eyes of Kambili captures the fear

clouding the lives of the mother and children, who experience frequent physical abuse and mental torture under the fanatical head of the family, Eugene, whom the children call Papa. Papa embodies every upper-class man in postcolonial Nigeria who emulates colonial ways to demand respect and obedience from the people around him. He is, as his sister Ifeoma observes, “too much of a colonial product” (13). His religious fanaticism renders him impervious to the intensity of cruelty and inhumanity that he inflicts on his wife and children. In the very opening scene itself, Eugene emerges as a very intolerant man who is angered at his son Jaja, for his outright refusal to accept the holy bread during the mass. He flings his missal across the room and breaks the collection of glass figurines maintained by his wife Beatrice. Throughout the novel, Adichie reveals how gender violence in the Igbo society worsened as a result of the colonised man’s desperate attempts to be recognized as a Westernised, Christianised man.

As a mute victim of physical abuse and violence, Beatrice represents the predicament of a majority of economically dependent Igbo housewives who are left with little choice during instances of inter-partner violence. Kambili, as the narrator of the novel, records several instances, that inform the extent of violence that her mother experiences as a silent victim. Kambili notices that whenever her mother was physically abused, she would quietly go and stand by the glass figurines and polish them one by one. The glass figurines are symbolic of the mother’s vulnerability and lifelessness in the house of an inhuman and brutal husband, and through the act of polishing them, she seems to be consoling herself to accept her passivity. Kambili remembers that “there were never tears on her face. The last time, only two weeks ago, when her swollen eye was still the black-purple colour of an overripe avocado, she had arranged them after she polished them” (10-11). However, when the

figurines get shattered on the day Papa flings the missal at Jaja, Mama tells Kambili that she will never again replace it. This reveals her utter desperation and urge to put an end to her long period of suffering and passivity. Eugene's fanaticism is at its peak when he punishes his weak and expecting wife for her hesitance to obey him when, after the mass, he decides to drop in to visit Father Benedict as they usually did on Sundays. Despite her pleadings that she would remain in the car, Eugene hints to her that he expects obedience, and is obeyed. On reaching home, he brutally ill-treats her for her apparent defiance until she bleeds and has to be hospitalised. Kambili recalls this traumatic incident:

Swift, heavy thuds on my parents' hand-carved bed-room door. I imagined the door had gotten stuck and Papa was trying to open it. If I imagined it hard enough, then it would be true. I sat down, closed my eyes, and started to count. Counting made it seem not that long, made it seem not that bad. Sometimes it was over before I even got to twenty. I was at nineteen when the sounds stopped. I heard the door open.... Mama was slung over his shoulder like the jute sacks of rice his factory workers bought in bulk at the Seme Border. (33)

The children find trails of blood along the way Mama is carried into the car. She remains hospitalised for two days and also has a miscarriage. The incident is so traumatic to Kambili that she is haunted by the colour of blood and is unable to study. She says, "I went upstairs then and sat staring at my textbook. The black type blurred, the letters swimming into one another, and then changed to a bright red, the red of fresh blood. The blood was watery, flowing from Mama, flowing from my eyes" (35). The colour of blood continues to traumatize her, for even days after the

incident, she says, “I still saw the print in my textbooks as a red blur, still saw my baby brother’s spirit strung together by narrow lines of blood” (52).

What is most frightening is that despite the horrible consequences of his violence, Eugene does not realize his cruelty and prays to God to forgive his wife for her disobedience. He is proud of his religious fervour and feels entitled to exert authority over anyone who fails to follow the religious precepts he insists upon. It is ironic that despite being the publisher of a newspaper, writing extensively on the rights and freedom of individuals in a politically chaotic Nigeria, Eugene is immune to the value of freedom that his own wife and children deserve at home. The disparity in his character reveals the mounting patriarchal zeal among Igbo men who insist women to their concerns to domestic roles and religious observances. They dominate the political domain to the exclusion of women and then degrade them for their apparent political illiteracy and inefficiency.

Unlike traditional Igbo society, there is less gender disparity with regard to raising children in postcolonial Igboland, for people recognized the importance of educating both boys and girls in a rapidly changing society. Both Kambili and Jaja are treated alike in their family. Kambili says that although there were maids in the house, she and her brother Jaja washed their uniforms on their own, and were expected to observe all morals and manners alike. Eugene emerges as a very controlling father as well and fails to recognize the rights and freedom of his children as individuals. He insists that both Kambili and Jaja live their lives according to the schedule that he designs for them. His rigid measures and severe punishments affect the personality and mental strength of the children, who increasingly withdraw into themselves unable to socialize or freely enjoy their lives.

Kambili fears talking to her classmates and does not know how to converse with confidence or openly laugh with them. This provokes her classmates to call her a “backyard snob” (51) and she feels avoided in class. Eugene is adamant that his children should come first in class and punishes them rigorously if they fail to rise to his expectations. Kambili recounts an incident that occurred when Jaja is ten-years-old. “He had missed two questions on his catechism test and was not named the best in his First Holy Communion class” (145). Eugene punishes him by taking him to a room, locking it and breaking the little finger of his left hand. When Kambili, traumatized after the distressing experience of her Mama, is able to manage only a second position in class, Eugene is very disappointed. The thought of his punitive measures puts Kambili under great mental stress, yet she attains the first position in the next exam.

Adichie contrasts the affluence of the Achike family with the growing poverty in the urban region by giving a picture of the marketplace. The growing economic difference is evident when Kambili and Jaja go to market with Mama to buy new bags and shoes for the next term. Kambili feels guilty about this extravagance because they did not really need new bags or shoes, as they were still new and in good condition, whereas there were a whole lot of people in the market struggling to earn a living and feed their stomachs while living in filthy, pathetic conditions. She observes “half-naked mad people near the rubbish dumps” (43) and women desperately haggling aloud to sell their vegetables to make some income. However, what grieves her the most is the sight of women wailing and yelling at soldiers who mercilessly demolish their stalls by the roadside claiming that such stalls are illegal. A frightened Mama asks her children to hurry into the car, for the harsh realities experienced by these ordinary women desperately move her. Her



meekness may be compared to the brashness of the market woman who spits at the face of the soldier despite being whipped and ill-treated by him. The woman is representative of the traditional Igbo women who fought tooth and nail whenever there were cases of injustice and ill-treatment. The growing number of beggars and hawkers by the roadside, which included young girls wearing “moth-eaten blouses slipping off their shoulders” (45), are all heart-rending glimpses of postcolonial Nigeria, affected by growing poverty and expanding economic differences.

The pomposity and flamboyant liberality of Eugene in different instances throw light into the affluence of the wealthy class who enjoys the humble gestures of humility and respect shown by the poverty-stricken people around them and assumes an air of superiority as the privileged class. This is revealed when the Achike family visits their hometown in Abba to celebrate Christmas, with bags of rice, *garri*, vegetables, chunky pieces of meat, yams, cartons of juices, and many other things to throw a feast to the poor villagers as part of the Christmas celebration. The pretentiousness and arrogance of Eugene Achike are seen in his contempt for everything pagan and traditional. Even his own father is disdained and ignored for his refusal to embrace Christianity. During every Christmas vacation, he would allow Kambili and Jaja to visit their grandfather for only fifteen minutes and warned them not to eat or drink anything from a pagan’s house. It grieves Kambili to notice that when the whole village was enjoying the feast offered by Eugene, his own father, who stayed just a few yards away from their mansion, was living a life of abject poverty simply because his son forgot to value his culture and detested everyone who refused to change according to the Western culture. He is also very arrogant to Anikwenwa, an old man of his father’s age, who had refused to convert

to Christianity. He shoos the man away when the latter enters the compound of the four-storeyed house of Eugene that was open only to Christians.

The time spent with Aunt Ifeoma and her children introduces a new vibrant episode in the pre-scheduled rigid lives of Kambili and Jaja, and makes their colonised minds conscious of the traditional Igbo culture that was foreign to them. They soon recognize that there is more freedom and more possibilities for self-discovery in the simple lives lived by ordinary people who followed a path of moderation in postcolonial Nigeria. Aunt Ifeoma, the sister of Eugene, is a widow, working as a university professor in Nsukka. The character of Ifeoma, a middle-class economically independent woman, is sharply contrasted with that of Beatrice, whose life as an upper-class dependent wife, is full of fears and silences. Ifeoma emerges as a very high-spirited and loquacious woman who is fearless of her brother Eugene and even ventures to embarrass him for his colonial affectations. She and Eugene quarrel with each other about their father Papa Nnukwu, when Eugene bars Papa Nnukwu from entering his house as the latter refused to convert to Christianity and preferred to remain a 'heathen'. Despite being a Catholic, Ifeoma respects her traditions and customs and attends the traditional ceremonies whenever possible. She is excited about the *Aro* festival which was an important celebration for the Igbos and invites Kambili and Jaja to join them to look at the *mmuo*, a masquerade performed annually by men to represent a beautiful female ancestor. She manages to get Eugene's consent to send the children by lying that they are just going for an outing. The presence of Ifeoma seems to strengthen Beatrice as she finds her stifled thoughts and emotions being voiced aloud by her fearless sister-in-law, who is everything that she is not.

Kambili, meanwhile, notices how their cousins, the children of Aunt Ifeoma, are quite different from them. Unlike Kambili and Jaja, they were very pleasant and confident. They had their own opinion about everything and were very inquisitive in nature. Kambili notices that her three cousins, Amaka, Ibiora, and Chima, “all laughed alike: throaty, cackling sound pushed out with enthusiasm” (78). Amaka and Kambili are of the same age but Amaka is a very outspoken girl who hates the pretensions and snobbery of her uncle and his children. She is apparently jealous of the affluence of the upper class and unleashes her bitterness on Kambili whenever possible. Aunt Ifeoma is however very sympathetic to Kambili and Jaja and plays a significant role in changing their perspectives in a constructive way. She enables them to become conscious of their individuality and encourages them to celebrate every human emotion without the fear of sin and punishment. She teaches them the importance of accepting traditions and respecting people with all their differences. Their stay at Nsukka in the limited amenities in Aunt Ifeoma’s house enables them to recognize that the challenges in life ought to be confronted with a smile, hope, and togetherness, and that radiating joy is more life-giving than negating the self and others in the name of God and religion. Kambili is impressed at the self-assurance of Aunt Ifeoma, whose voice is never bound by any fear or doubt. She seemed to be very different from her own mother whose every word was uttered in whispers, with caution, so that she does not offend God or her husband. Kambili recognizes the beauty of selfless love and unrestrained freedom within a family during her stay with Aunt Ifeoma. She reflects, “Laughter floated over my head. Words spurted from everyone, often not seeking and not getting any response. We always spoke with a purpose back home, especially at the table, but my cousins seemed to simply speak and speak and speak” (120). She is fascinated to observe “a table where you

could say anything at any time to anyone, where the air was free for you to breathe as you wished” (120). The glimpse of middle-class life at Nsukka, reveals the narrowing gender disparity in the Igbo society, where women were economically self-sufficient and eloquent, and children were raised alike without any special preference to boys.

Papa Nnukwu, the father of Eugene and Ifeoma is representative of all traditionalists who were ignored as ‘pagan’ by their Westernized children. Papa Nnukwu believes that the reason behind his son’s disregard for him is Western education and regrets for having sent him to missionary school. His daughter Ifeoma, however, observes that it is not the missionary education but Eugene’s misconception of the new religion and growing self-pride that provoke him to deride everything and everyone traditional. Though Ifeoma is the one who is genuinely concerned about Papa Nnukwu’s health and happiness, he is sad that his son has no love for him. His attitude reflects the traditional preference for the son when he jokes to Ifeoma, ““But you are a woman. You do not count”” (83). When Ifeoma pretends to be offended he says, ““I joke with you, *nwa m*. Where would I be today if my *chi* had not given me a daughter?”” (83). It is again his daughter Ifeoma, who brings her father to her home in Nsukka and takes care of him during his last days. The novel thus explores the changing gender expectations and gender roles in Igboland. Alice Peace Tuyizere observes that the “misinterpretation and misunderstanding of religious myths and sacred texts relegate women to a position of subordination, submissiveness and oppression, thus resulting in gender inequality and violence” (4). Ifeoma seems to have imbibed the better of the values of both worlds, placing herself in a more privileged position in terms of agency.

Aunty Ifeoma also represents the economic struggles of the middle class amidst the growing insecurities and political unrest in Nigeria. Her dilapidated house and lack of facilities at Nsukka are contrasted with the mansion and extravagance in the house of Eugene at both Enugu and Abba. She tells Beatrice, ““I want a new car *nwunye m*, and I want to use my gas cooker again and I want a new freezer and I want money so that I will not have to unravel the seams of Chima’s trousers when he outgrows them”” (95). When Beatrice asks her to seek the help of Eugene, Ifeoma refuses. A woman of dignity, she knows that if she requests, her brother would support her but in return, she will have to yield to all his fanatic demands. She is disappointed that in his obsession with God and religion, her brother is forgetting to do his duties towards their aged and ailing father. She tells Beatrice, ““Eugene has to stop doing God’s job. God is big enough to do his own job”” (95). It is his preoccupation with the misconstrued religious doctrines of Christianity that renders him indifferent to the rights of others and makes him intolerant towards the doings of others which appear ‘ungodly’ to him. This is the reason why he becomes enraged when he finds Kambili eating food before going to mass at church, for they were supposed to observe the Eucharist fast which “mandated that the faithful not eat solid food an hour before Mass”. Mama and Jaja had given Kambili a bowl of cereal with milk so that she could take a pain-relieving medicine to alleviate her menstrual cramps. But Eugene feels entitled to punish them on behalf of God and lashes his belt mercilessly upon his terrified wife and children. And as always, after the punishment he holds them close, justifying his action and preaching to them the necessity of keeping away from sinful ways.

Adichie seems to capture the changing nature of men and changing concepts of masculinity in the three generations of men represented by Papa Nnukwu, his son

Eugene, and Eugene's son Jaja. Papa Nnukwu, as a traditionalist, upholds his traditional beliefs and is interested in transmitting their cultural values through folklore and anecdotes. He appreciates his daughter Ifeoma for her concern for others and Amaka for her skill at painting. He is representative of the deteriorating Igbo culture and traditions, and in the children's affinity for their grandfather, one may notice a new emerging interest in preserving whatever remained unchanged in the culture. Eugene, on the other hand, has a completely colonised mind. He despises everything Igbo and despises even his father for not converting to Christianity. When Papa Nnukwu dies, he does not grieve at his death but is disappointed that Papa Nnukwu could not be Christianised before his death. He is angry at his children for hiding Papa Nnukwu's arrival at Aunt Ifeoma's house and cruelly punishes Kambili by making her stand in a tub of boiling water which burns her feet and leaves her bedridden for days. He punishes Jaja too in a similar way. Later, when he finds Kambili and Jaja adoring a painting of Papa Nnukwu given by Amaka, he is so furious that he kicks and stamps her cruelly with his metal-buckled shoes until she faints and is hospitalized in a critical condition. He represents the intolerance of the colonizers towards everything traditional and reveals a temperament similar to the colonial vigour to conquer and control everyone and everything by force and violence. Jaja, however, represents the hopeful future of the members of the developing countries who learn to decolonize their minds and appreciate their culture while accepting the positive precepts of the new culture and religion. His defiance of the fanatical demands of his father may be juxtaposed with his fascination for the purple hibiscus in Aunt Ifeoma's garden. It is symbolic of his affinity for a hybrid culture, which negotiates between the two cultures. Kambili says, "Jaja's defiance seemed to me now like Aunt Ifeoma's experimental purple

hibiscus: rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom from the one the crowds waving green leaves chanted at Government Square after the coup. A freedom to be, to do” (16).

“Freedom”, according to Ethel Crowley, “certainly does not mean the same thing to all the women of the world” (47). They often venture to attain this freedom “in anonymous, invisible ways, which may ultimately serve their interests much more efficiently than an overt challenge to the existing system” (54). Like the female characters in the select works of Nwapa and Emecheta, the women in Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* also seek freedom and dignity in their own ways, in a completely different postcolonial society. Aunt Ifeoma is a victim of political instability, despotism, and the consequent economic deprivation in Nsukka. She is a fearless woman who does not care about getting fired from the University for speaking the truth against corrupt and unjust authorities who had started appointing soldiers as lecturers and forcing students to attend their lectures with guns to their heads. She recognizes that without proper salary and financial stability, she will not be able to raise her children in Nigeria and thus decides to migrate to the U.S. Her decision to leave Nigeria cannot be seen as escapism, for as her son Obiora says, ““It’s not running away, it’s being realistic”” (232) in a society where the basic amenities for life were denied to the common mass. Ifeoma’s daughter Amaka exhibits a strong affinity for traditional Igbo culture. She finds freedom from colonial upheavals by attempting to hold on to the strong Igbo culture and by being critical of colonial interventions and Christianity. In her deep bond with Papa Nnukwu, her love for African songs, her contempt for the pretentiousness of the upper class, her refusal to take a Christian name for confirmation, and her brimming confidence and adamant positions with regard to all matters, she reflects the

traditional Igbo woman's unyielding nerve and vigour. To Kambili and her brother Jaja, freedom means life at Nsukka with Aunty Ifeoma and her children. It is during their stay with their aunt that they discover the possibility of life being full of love, laughter, and freedom. Living a life of strict discipline and untiring obedience under their oppressive father, their childhood in Enugu is imbued with looming fear of sin and fierce punishments. Aunt Ifeoma and her children offer them an uninhibited space to speak, laugh, and celebrate every human emotion. Kambili is able to break the shell of silence and withdrawal and experiences sexual awakening in the company of Father Amadi whose encouraging words teach her to love herself, discover her talent in sprints, and live her life with more confidence. Aunt Ifeoma and Father Amadi are the embodiment of the essence of the purple hibiscuses that reveal the beauty of tolerance, moderation, and inclusivity. All these different people open new paths of freedom for Kambili.

The one character to whom freedom is most denied is Beatrice, the wife of Eugene Acheke and mother to Kambili and Jaja. Being the wife of a privileged man respected by the Church and society and being completely subdued by a fanatically religious man who brutally tortures her and her children, Beatrice adopts a shockingly "invisible" way of resistance and vengeance. When the violence begins to risk the lives of her children and she herself is brutally tortured several times resulting in painful abortions, Beatrice realizes that she can no longer allow herself to be a passive victim to these cruelties and musters the courage to slow poison him to death. With the help of her maid, she slowly adds poison to her husband's tea which eventually affects his health and leads to his death in a few days. Though such acts of murder can never be justified, her decision to put an end to years of abusive control and psychological trauma from an imperious husband reveals her desperate



necessity to at least breathe without fear. It is the realization of his mother's sufferings that incites Jaja to take up the responsibility for his father's murder. He does not resent being imprisoned, for he considers it his duty to protect his mother who had been silently suffering through the years for the sake of her children, the years of imprisonment and torture under her oppressive husband. The novel ends on an optimistic note of Jaja's release from jail, and Kambili and her mother estimating their future days which places a smile of simple joy on the face of Beatrice.

Gender ideology, as construed from the analyses of the selected texts, reveals the wide-ranging experiences of Igbo women from pre-colonial to postcolonial times in Igboland, as radically different from the experiences of Western women. It evidently emphasises that the experiences of women in a society depend on several factors including ethnicity, culture, class, socio-political contexts, and the nature of patriarchal intolerance within the domestic space. Despite having to undergo numerous physical, psychological, and sexual constrictions and subjugations, the Igbo women have endeavoured to resist all forms of oppression and emerged dignified and self-assertive in their specific private and public spaces. The study also recognizes that culture, indigenous or Western, is capable of effecting both debilitating and emancipating impact on women. As Adichie proposes in her revolutionary Ted x Talk "We should all be feminists": "Culture does not make people. People make culture. If it is true that the full humanity of women is not our culture, then we can and must make it our culture" (28:00-28:15).

## **Chapter 3**

### **“Variegated Landscapes of Empowered Mothering”**

One of the principal functions, crucial in determining Igbo women’s fortune and respectable position in the private and public spaces, is her role as a mother. The selected works of the three Igbo women writers throw light on the experiences of Igbo women as mothers and reveal how the Western women’s concept of motherhood and the experience of mothering are different for women belonging to different ethnic groups and cultures. Motherhood, which is widely contemplated as a requisite phase in a woman’s life, has been a topical subject of discussion among feminist thinkers and theorists. Childlessness and motherhood are two aspects very often discussed as defining the identity of a woman in every culture. Rather than being viewed as a discretionary phase in the life of a woman, motherhood has more often transpired to be “the cultural process of locating women’s identities in their capacity to nurture infants and children” (Ross). This “capacity” or incapacity to breed and foster children, is accountable for the multitude of identities thrust upon a woman in a patriarchal society, often glorifying or deifying her, and often denigrating and humiliating her to an extent detrimental to all self-defined identities that the woman appreciates, nurtures, and prefers for herself. Informed by seminal texts analysing the motherhood experiences of European, American, and African women in general, this chapter attempts to map the trajectory of motherhood experiences specific to Igbo women living in Nigeria based on the works selected for the study. It is understood that the experience of motherhood and perceptions about mothering vary according to ethnocultural patriarchal assumptions, socio-

political changes, economic statuses, and the nature of patriarchal coercion within the domestic space. Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and *One is Enough* (1986), Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) throw light on how the Igbo society's attitude towards infertility, motherhood and the concept of mothering has undergone several changes from precolonial to postcolonial times, and how these changes have influenced, affected and altered the lives of Igbo women in traditional, colonial and postcolonial societies.

Examining the chosen texts through the lens of the African paradigm of motherhood, as expounded by Patricia Hill Collins in her article "The Meaning of Motherhood in Black Culture and Mother-Daughter Relationships," facilitates a better understanding of the notions of motherhood among Igbo women. Collins identifies four themes that characterize an Afrocentric ideology of motherhood. These include bloodmothers, othermothers and women-centred networks; providing as part of mothering; community othermothering and social activism; and motherhood as a symbol of power. These themes illustrate the contrasting African viewpoints on motherhood and nurturing as compared to the preoccupations of Western feminists and scholars on motherhood. The chapter also seeks to bring to light the paradoxical location of 'mother' as both a central and a marginal category in the African context. In the light of the concept of mothering as m(othering) expounded by Obioma Nnaemeka and Ketu Katrak, the study reveals how in the Igbo society, mothers of sons are given several privileges whereas mothers of daughters and childless women are stigmatized mercilessly.

In her article titled “Revolutionary Mothering”, the academic scholar Dr. Serawit Debele observes that the African feminist scholars like Ifi Amadiume, Oyeronke Oyewumi, Obioma Nnaemeka, Nkiru Nzegwu, and Filomina Steady have voiced “against a particular ideology of the 1970s and 1980s that singled out motherhood as an oppressive institution built by patriarchy. Their work interrogated those strands of radical feminism determined to “emancipate” women from motherhood through what Nnaemeka called a philosophy of evacuation (Debel 135). A study of the aspect of motherhood represented in the selected texts reveals that African women’s sense of liberation and agency do not negate motherhood or ignore children, for, to the Africans, children have always been a collective responsibility. As biological mothers or othermothers, they are constantly involved in rearing, nurturing and safeguarding children as well as those dependent on them. The African society’s inclination for mothering is further emphasized by the Igbo historian and professor Catherine Acholunu in her groundbreaking work *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism* (1995). According to Acholunu, “the motherist is the man or woman committed to the survival of Mother Earth as a hologrammatic entity. The weapon of motherism is love, tolerance, service and mutual corporation of the sexes” (3). The theoretical formulations of Acholunu are significant in identifying the centrality of motherhood and mothering in the lives of African women. However, these ideals emerge inadequate to address the concerns of African women in the changing postcolonial societies in Africa. Acholunu’s doctrine of unconditional love, tolerance, and sacrifices, and her tendency to equate African women to the all-enduring and compromising Mother Earth, limit the

freedom, choice, identity, and agency of African women in the increasingly rigid patriarchal structures during the postcolonial period.

Third World feminist scholars like Patricia Hill Collins, Barbara Christian, Ketu Katrak, Kim Anderson, Obioma Nnaemeka et al are sceptical about the idealization of the White perspectives on motherhood. In “The Meaning of Motherhood in Black Culture and Mother-Daughter Relationships,” Collins identifies three themes implicit in the Eurocentric views on motherhood. First is the assumption that mothering is the total responsibility of the mother within the private space of a nuclear family household. Second is the strict sex-role distinction for the man and woman in the family, and third is the assumption that a ‘good’ mother should take up mothering as a full-time occupation and stay at home while seeking economic dependency on men (Collins 275). Such Western patriarchal attempts to confine and subdue White women in the name of motherhood have been vehemently criticized and challenged by several Western feminists and motherhood scholars. Some of the seminal feminist texts on the motherhood concerns of Western women include Betty Frieden’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Adrienne Rich’s *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976), Sarah Ruddick’s *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (1989), and Ann Taylor Allen’s *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe 1870-1970: The Maternal Dilemma* (2005).

The American feminist intellectual Adrienne Rich rightly observes that woman, her sexuality, and her role as a mother have always been defined and regulated by various patriarchal structures surrounding her. In her seminal work *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976), Rich reproaches

“masculine imagination” for perpetuating two contradictory ideas about women: one that “the female body is impure, corrupt, the site of discharges, bleedings, dangerous to masculinity, a source of moral and physical contamination, ‘the devil’s gateway’”. On the other hand, as a mother, the woman is beneficent, sacred, pure, asexual, nourishing...” (34). These two ideas are so deeply internalised by women themselves that they look up to motherhood as the only possible way for ‘redemption’ and recognition in the male-dominated world. *Of Woman Born*, a “personal testimony mingled with research” (x), largely draws from Rich’s own experiences as an individual torn between patriarchal expectations of motherhood and the irresistible inclination of her individual self to seek contentment in poetry writing. She rigorously challenges the patriarchal rendering of motherhood as an institution that regulates a woman’s body and stifles her intellectual and emotional faculties with an “interpenetration of pain and pleasure, frustration and fulfilment” (33). She distinguishes between “two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the ‘potential relationship’ of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the ‘institution’, which aims at ensuring that that potential – and all women – shall remain under male control” (13). *Of Woman Born* underscores the reproductive freedom and rights of women, and vehemently criticizes the detention of a woman’s body, her aspirations, and capabilities in the name of her procreative ability. Rich notices that whenever women are admitted to work, no consideration is given to them for their role as mothers, which exerts double strain on the mothers and renders them doubting their own capacities to continue as working mothers. They realize that the liberation that ensures their participation in the economic system of their country has not liberated but compelled

them to compromise their private lives and put so much strain on relationships that it seemed “there was more autonomy, more real freedom in full-time motherhood” (xiv). Throughout the text, Rich consistently divulges the impervious conservative position of the patriarchal society that would not facilitate a woman to closely pursue her goals, without evoking a sense of maternal guilt in her. She asserts that “motherhood, in the sense of an intense, reciprocal relationship, with a particular child, or children, is (only) one part of female process; it is not an identity for all time” (36-37).

The American feminist Sarah Ruddick also emphasises this argument that mothering is only a work that cannot define a woman’s identity. In her revolutionary work *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (1989), Ruddick identifies that birth giving and mothering are “two distinct and quite difficult activity” (xii). While birth-giving can be done only by a woman, mothering is “a kind of care labour” (xi) that can be performed by any person with a mindset to nurture a child with love and care. She states that “mothers are not identified by fixed biological or legal relationships to children, but by the work they set out to do.... Mothers are people who see children as ‘demanding’ protection, nurturance, and training; they attempt to respond to children’s demands with care and respect rather than indifference or assault” (xi). Ruddick also observes that when mothering is done by a woman, especially when it is a biological mother, society often tends to see her as an exclusively emotional being, who seems to have taken a detour from rationality on account of her motherhood. Ruddick is contemptuous of men’s misconception that motherhood renders a woman incapable of thinking and reasoning. She argues that a

mother's "preservative love" is not "imbued with feeling" alone; instead, mothers, in the course of their mothering experience, acquire the ability to think and feel in a balanced way.

Rather than separating reason from feeling, mothering makes reflective feeling one of the most difficult attainments of reason. In protective work, feeling, thinking and action are conceptually linked; feelings demand reflection, which is in turn tested by action, which is in turn tested by the feeling it provokes. Thoughtful feeling, passionate thought, and protective acts together test, even as they reveal, the effectiveness of preservative love (70).

Ruddick thus elevates mothers and mothering as imbued with potentialities to nurture and protect the world with a careful intermingling of reason and emotion.

Ann Taylor Allen's *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe 1870-1970: The Maternal Dilemma* (2005) is another significant text that traces the European women's changing attitude to motherhood and the varying concerns of feminist activism across Europe. She traces the shift in the perception of motherhood as a woman's primary concern to motherhood as a matter of choice in the twentieth century. Women's "difficulty of reconciling maternal and familial responsibilities with individual aspirations" (A.T. Allen 235) is what she terms 'the maternal dilemma'. Like the American feminist Sara Ruddick, Allen too concludes that motherhood is not sufficient to give fulfilment to a woman and that while child-bearing can be done only by women, child-rearing can be done by anybody willing to nurture the child. She extols the European government for the numerous measures



adopted to support mothers in managing professional work and family work, yet is disappointed that the maternal dilemma will continue to haunt women as long as gender inequality continues its existence in the society (A.T. Allen 237).

While Western feminism, in the twentieth century, was thus engaged in an intense debate over women's reproductive rights, professional ambitions and maternal dilemmas, women in Africa and of African descent had a multitude of other concerns to deliberate. As Mohanty posits in "Under Western Eyes", a generalisation of the experiences of women worldwide is not possible, for the needs, concerns and demands of women vary according to different factors. It was a period when African and African-American women were gradually beginning to voice the heart-rending experiences of slavery, colonial despotism, racial prejudices, physical brutality, sexual assaults, poverty, malnutrition, maternal and infant mortality, and forced subservience of their dignity and individuality to the expectations of patriarchal traditions and colonial demands. Despite these miseries and challenges, the Black women's attitude to motherhood was predominantly a positive one. Patricia Hill Collins, observes that "historically, the concept of motherhood has been of central importance in the philosophies of people of African descent" (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 188). Barbara Christian too points out, "There is no doubt that motherhood is for most African people symbolic of creativity and continuity" (Christian 214). However white women and men positioned "the motherhood experience of white middle-class women as the real, natural and universal one" (O'Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism* 82) and were contemptuous of the black women's ways of mothering:

African American mothers do not mother according to the script of what constitutes good mothering—a woman at home, who is financially dependent on her husband and totally responsible for the care of her children, whose mothering is centred on the emotional and intellectual development of children (not just physical), and who sees home and love purely in terms of affection (not politics). Hence, African American mothers are deemed unfit or “bad” mothers. (O’Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism* 82).

They “were accused of failing to discipline their children, of emasculating their sons, of defeminizing their daughters, and of retarding their children’s academic achievement” (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 187). Such criticisms in turn were countered by the Black men in America, whose over-glorification of Black motherhood and over-emphasis on motherly values like unconditional love, hard work, sacrifices and suffering, incapacitated the Black women from articulating their complex experiences owing to race, class, gender, poverty and other forms of oppression in the U.S. Collins observes that “For women of colour, the subjective experience of mothering/motherhood is inextricably linked to the sociocultural concern of racial ethnic communities - one does not exist without the other” (*Black Feminist Thought* 47). It was only much later that Black women themselves ventured to articulate their ambivalent attitude to motherhood under oppressive circumstances.

Within the continent of Africa, the experience of women as mothers was different. The traditional African societies saw motherhood as empowering and rewarding though it had its own pains and challenges. The traditionally privileged

position of motherhood, however, experienced numerous challenges and predicaments as the socio-economic and political conditions in colonial Africa underwent drastic changes. Consequent to colonial interventions, there was a severe deterioration in the socio-political position of mothers that soon rendered mothering an increasingly demanding care labour. In the postcolonial male writings that emerged, there was a recurrent tendency to compare the victimized land of Africa to a sacrificing, all-enduring mother; an analogy that specified and emphasized the fundamental qualities that a woman should hold on to as an ideal mother. This can be identified in the postcolonial writings of African male writers like Leopold Senghor, Camara Laye, David Diop, Chinua Achebe, et al. who widely proliferated the image of Africa as Mother Africa. Such emphasis on ideal motherhood in the works of male writers was later challenged by several feminist writers and activists in Africa. For instance, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie identifies the different stereotypical representations of African women in literature and observes that “the mother stereotype leads to the limiting of woman’s potential in the society” (*Recreating Ourselves* 58). Florence Stratton critically examines the different modes in which African male writers represented African women, especially in Negritude poetry. She observes that in most of these works, a woman’s body “takes the form either of a young girl, nubile and erotic, or of a fecund, nurturing mother; and it is frequently associated with the landscape that the speaker seeks to explore or discover” (113)”. The deification of women in the name of motherhood and the overplay of the Mother Africa trope mystified and obscured the real predicament of African women and mothers (Brown 8). Ketu Katrak also observes that “Motherhood is a key tradition venerated and glorified often outside of its realistic parameters in terms of

mothers' actual struggles of feeding and rearing children. Women writers contest such mystification, especially the equation of womanhood with motherhood" (209). African women writers, in general, attempt to bring to light the quandaries and rewards associated with 'mothering as an experience' in the changing socio-political scenario in Africa.

Women in traditional Igbo society enjoyed a number of privileges and positions on account of their motherhood. The Igbo mothers were revered for their procreative ability which was significant in retaining the future of the community. This reverence for motherhood is evident in many of the Igbo proverbs and idioms. The Igbo anthropologist Joseph Terese Agbasiere notes, "The most common is *nne bu ihi ukwu*, which translates literally as 'motherhood is a very significant thing'. The proverb also underscores that identification with one's mother is a major value. A similar idea is embodied in the expressions *nne amaka* meaning 'motherhood is beautiful or excellent', and *nneke* 'motherhood is the highest good'" (85). However, despite such veneration, women's privileges and efficiency as mothers and the efforts they put into mothering, hardly received any significant consideration in the works produced by Igbo male writers. It is only with the emergence of the women writers beginning with Nwapa that the multiple dimensions of the motherhood experiences of Igbo women began to be recognized as different from the oppressive and frustrating experiences of mothers of Western countries or those belonging to other societies.

In traditional Igbo society, becoming biological mothers or what Collins terms "bloodmothers" (Collins, "The Meaning of Motherhood" 277) was considered

to be the primary duty of all women. According to Victor C Uchendu, “Motherhood brings an important change in a woman’s status, a change from a mistress who simply attracts and allures, to a mother who shares the dignity of her husband and who has increased the lineage membership. Igbo women realize that the romantic aspect of the husband-wife relation does not last as long as the child-mother bond” (57). The life of every girl was, therefore, a preparatory period to become a mother, and so, after marriage, childbearing became her primary obligation towards her husband and his people. Joseph Terese-Agbasiere explains that “a young wife is expected to produce a child by the end of the first year of marriage or soon after. Until this happens, she will continue to be regarded not only as a minor but to a large extent, as an outsider since she has yet to be ritually incorporated (i.e. absorbed) into her husband’s lineage, which happens only with the birth of a child” (128). Giving birth to children was also considered to be a sacred responsibility. According to Devi T, “The significance of mothering in Africa lies in this notion that motherhood binds women together in a collective experience of childbirth and nurture, which eventually means nurturing the community itself” (38).

Such customs and societal expectations created a lot of anxiety in the new brides in traditional Igbo societies, for it determined their social position and status within the husband’s family. During the preparatory period for becoming mothers, the Igbo women were expected to undergo the painful process of circumcision or female genital mutilation, which was believed to be essential to ensure safe and easy childbirth. Flora Nwapa makes a subtle mention of this practice in her first novel *Efuru*, wherein Efuru agrees to her mother-in-law’s suggestion to prepare herself for

motherhood in the customary way. The complications of female genital mutilation and the Igbo women's collective resistance to such patriarchal impositions have been analysed in detail in the previous chapter.

Nwapa reveals how women who were subjected to circumcision were taken care of by elder women in traditional societies, for it was a significant preparatory phase for embracing motherhood. After Efuru undergoes this painful process, her mother-in-law sees to it that Efuru is very well looked after. Efuru is given the best food and is not allowed to do any work. She is asked to take complete rest so that her body would "grow fast" (15) and be ready to bear a child. Her clothes are dyed in camwood and everything is done to make her face and skin glow with beauty. After the period of feasting is over, she is taken to the market by her mother-in-law where all women praise her as her daughter-in-law emerges as a gorgeous robust woman with a perfect body for child-bearing. Such customs visibly suggest the significance of motherhood in the lives of every woman in Igboland. Nwapa does not comment on any of these customs but simply lays down these practices and ensuing consequences, for the readers to know and reflect upon. As a forerunner to all-powerful female voices that ensued, Nwapa simply renders a glimpse into the intricate lives and experiences of ordinary Igbo women and thereby establishes an interminable space within the international literary terrain for African women of all generations to voice out their thoughts, experiences, and concerns.

The very significance attached to motherhood explains why the Igbo society becomes harsh and intolerant towards women who fail to become bloodmothers or biological mothers. Devi T observes, "Since mother is central to women's lives in

many African States, it becomes an important topic in African literature. At the same time, the African writers in their writings showed their disappointment at the denigration of childlessness in African society. They portrayed the realistic picture of trauma that a barren woman goes through” (38). Despite being exceptionally efficient in various private and public ventures, the inability of a woman to become a bloodmother was looked at with contempt and regarded as a grave offense by both men and women in Igbo society. This often resulted in self-derision and a sense of failure in the woman. Childlessness was seen as a woman’s greatest failure in life and deemed to be a curse to the family and community. Ketu Katrak, one of the prominent Indian postcolonial feminist scholars and academicians, is critical of this apparent tendency of all patriarchal societies to stigmatize only the woman and not the man for infertility. According to her, “This severe social and psychological prejudice exiles the woman further from her body that has failed to provide the visible physical marks of pregnancy and child-birth” (215). She considers such “social censure as a form of violence on women’s bodies, minds and psyches” (215). The extent of humiliation, segregation, and sense of failure that a childless woman in traditional and colonial Igbo society had to experience, appears as one of the central concerns in the works of all the three writers under study. The works of Nwapa, Emecheta, and Adichie, while exploring the challenges experienced by biological mothers in a changing Igbo society, also throw light on the bitter experiences of childless women in Igboland. They underscore how “mothering” as “a kind of care labour” (Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, xi) is always at the core of the Igbo community and can be rendered by both non-biological women and men. They explore the different strategies adopted by the Igbo women to assert an identity

outside wifehood and biological motherhood. The experiences of childless Igbo women represented in the selected works have been analysed to trace how Igbo women's perceptions of childlessness and motherhood have undergone considerable changes over the period. Igbo society's over-emphasis on biological motherhood has been critiqued and challenged in an attempt to assert that a woman is a complete individual even without becoming a mother, and deserves to be loved and respected for her other competencies and sense of responsibility towards herself and her community.

In *Efuru* and *One is Enough*, Nwapa depicts the theme of childlessness through the differing experiences of Efuru and Amaka. Though both suffer a lot of mental agony on account of their childlessness, the two characters live a self-assured and complacent life on account of their business sense and economic accomplishments. Efuru is portrayed as an ideal woman who is diplomatic, industrious, and an independent decision-maker living within the bounds of traditional Igbo customs. Though Nwapa portrays her as a well-behaved and successful woman in every way, she is said to have a *chi* who denies her motherhood. In her first marriage to Adizua, she is unable to conceive even after two years. Despite all her good qualities, people begin to talk behind her back and wonder "why Adizua should not marry another woman since, according to them, two men did not live together. To them Efuru was a man since she could not reproduce" (24). Often such scornful comments were made right at the face of a childless woman to remind her that she ought to be guilty for her inability to bear children for her husband. This was usually done by women, especially elderly



women, whose impolite and reproachful remarks in public places caused a lot of mental anguish to such women.

The scholars Nwosu and Onwe, in their sociological study titled “The Plight of Infertile Women in Nigeria,” examine how childless women in Nigeria have to bear humiliations and abuses within the family and community. They observe that “the attitude of in-laws is relatively unfavourable towards the childless woman and in the long run, they do support her dehumanization because they believe that the childless woman is aiding the termination of their lineage. As such, in-laws encourage the marriage of a second wife in an attempt to ensure the continuation of their lineages” (43). When Efuru fails to conceive even in the second year of her marriage to Adizua, her worried mother-in-law suggests she consult a *dibia* and to consider her childlessness seriously. The positive words of the *dibia*, instil hope in the mother who tells her son Adizua, “I am glad to hear this. I was going to suggest you marry another woman. A woman who will give you children. It is going to be with the consent of Efuru, of course” (26). Though Efuru soon gives birth to a baby girl, the child dies in her infancy, leaving Efuru childless again. In her second marriage to Gilbert, she is unable to become a mother and so encourages her husband to take more wives.

The centrality of motherhood in the lives of Igbo women is further challenged by Nwapa in her work *One is Enough*. In most of the studies on *One is Enough*, the character Amaka is glorified as a representative of an empowered African woman, an independent decision-maker, and a wonderful businesswoman. However, despite these accomplishments, Amaka may be seen as a victim of the

African society's overemphasis on motherhood. The novel opens with Amaka guilty of "barrenness" after six years of her marriage to Obiora. She intreats her husband and mother-in-law to retain her in the family. She lies about miscarriages and consultations with doctors and bears the humiliations of her mother-in-law. Obiora's mother calls her a liar for not accepting that she was 'barren'; whereas she justifies her son's secret relationship with a woman who bears him two sons. Infertility of women was seen as a curse and an ample reason why a man should go for another wife. What Amaka had done for her husband's happiness, pride, and financial security was completely inconspicuous before her inability to produce an heir for him.

Amaka, in her desperation, contemplates several methods to experience "the joy of being a mother" (Nwapa, *One is Enough* 20). She thinks of adopting children from far distant places, taking care of her siblings' children, becoming a female husband by marrying a wife who would conceive children for her husband, or arranging a maid for her husband. But nothing seemed to be a practical idea with numerous complications entailing each method. Feeling forsaken, Amaka wonders if she is "useless" if she cannot become a good wife or mother (Nwapa 20). The accusations of the mother-in-law and the guilty attitude of Amaka, the daughter-in-law, reveal the extent to which women of all generations internalised the inseparability of motherhood from a woman's life.

Buchi Emecheta also explores the theme of childlessness in her critically acclaimed work *The Joys of Motherhood*. In her first marriage to Amatokwu, the protagonist Nnu Ego fails to conceive even months after marriage. Though initially

she expresses her fears to Amatokwu, she soon realizes that she cannot “voice her doubts and worries to her husband anymore. It had become her problem and hers alone” (31). Nnu Ego hesitates to go to her father either, for every time she went, she would be surrounded by her father’s wives and people who expressed disappointment at knowing that she had not conceived. She is left with no choice when her husband bleakly demands her one day to move to another hut as his people have found a new wife for him. Nnu Ego’s plight is worsened when the new wife conceives the very next month after marriage, making the latter more adorable and Nnu Ego more detestable to Amatokwu. Amatokwu hardly speaks to her and rudely commands her to help him on the farm on account of her inability to produce children for him. And when a son is born to his second wife, Nnu Ego loses her position as the senior wife. When she shares her grief and dejection with her father who, like a typical Igbo man, consoles her saying, ““Don’t worry, daughter. If you find life unbearable, you can always come here to live”” (33). Nnu Ego, however, remains in the house of her husband hopeful that she will conceive someday. The new wife being amicable to Nnu Ego, allows her to look after the child while she herself spends most of her time amusing her husband in his hut. This allows Nnu Ego to spend more time with the child so that she grows very fond of him and even begins to suckle the crying child when his mother fails to return from her husband’s hut to lactate him. As this continues several times, Nnu Ego notices milk dripping from her breast due to constant stimulation, which leaves her overwhelmed with motherly affection for the child and adds to her desperate longing to have a child of her own. However, this fulfilment does not last long. On the eve the second wife was giving birth to her second child, a heartbroken Nnu Ego puts the baby to her

breasts but forgets to lock the door. She is caught suckling the child by a furious Amatokwu, who snatches the child from her arms and brutally beats her for her apparent misdeed in showing the nerve to breastfeed another's child without consent. When Agbadi is summoned the next day, he does not blame Amatokwu for beating his daughter for the offence she committed. However, as a father who loved his daughter to the core, he takes her back to his home to be taken care of by his wives. Later when Amatokwu comes to know that Nnu Ego has left for Lagos to be married to another man, he does not show any feelings for her and consoles himself saying "She is as barren as a desert" (39).

Ketu Katrak reproaches the way all patriarchal societies deride and victimize women who are unable to produce children. She terms this austerity towards childless women as "m-othering" and observes:

A different aspect of mothering is also commonly revealed, that is, mothering as m-othering, when the experience of being a mother or of not being one (infertility, or by choice) is alienating and destructive to a woman's psychic state. Failure to be a biological mother exiles the woman from her body. She is regarded as a failure, not a complete woman; infertility is considered unfortunate, sometimes even a curse. Such views persist even among educated classes in postcolonial societies. (Katrak 212)

Such a sense of failure, on account of childlessness, can be seen in Adichie's well-educated protagonist Olanna as well. Though she is self-assertive, affluent, and efficient in many respects, she feels enfeebled and worried at the thought that she might never conceive. "The sudden thought that something might be wrong with her

body wrapped itself around her, dampened her” (Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun* 107). Her disappointment and sense of failure are aggravated when, in her absence, Odenigbo’s mother tricks her drunken son into sleeping with another woman who soon bears him a child.

Despite such prejudices and “m-othering” of childless women, which Katrak considers to be “violence on women’s bodies, minds and psyches” (215), Igbo women would not allow themselves to be subdued or overpowered by the undue social stigma associated with women’s procreative inability. The childless female characters in the selected works refuse to be let down by patriarchal pressures, though the strategies they choose for self-assertion are different. Among all the childless female characters in the selected texts, Amaka, in *One is Enough* is more revengeful, unbending, and sagacious in nature. She emerges as a woman determined to avenge the society for all the mortifications she suffered on account of her childlessness. Despite being faithful to her husband and supporting him financially with her hard work and business skills, she is disgraced and abused emotionally by her husband Obiora, and his people for her inability to become a bloodmother. Obiora informs her abruptly that all these years he had been involved in a relationship with another woman who had given him two sons. His mother readily accepts the children and he asks a shocked and broken Amaka to accept the mother of his sons as her co-wife. When Amaka is furious and tells him straight that if he could do so much behind her back, she too could go to the extent of betraying him without any sense of moral compunction. In the quarrel, physical abuse and resistance that follow, Amaka blows a heavy hammer on her husband’s chest

leaving him severely injured and hospitalized wherein he spends his days trying to recover “more from shock than severe injury” (Nwapa 31). The responses of Amaka, her mother, and her aunt reveal how Igbo women would never tolerate disrespect and betrayal by their husbands, though they would accept the co-wives brought in through proper marital customs.

When Amaka leaves Obiora’s house, her mother rebukes her for having tolerated him for so many years. She complains, “I told you, four years ago, to leave him, or if you did not want to leave him, to go to other men and get pregnant. You are my daughter. We are never barren in our family, never. Even in your imbecile father’s family, there was nothing like barrenness. But you refused to take my advice. You were being a good wife, chastity, faithfulness my foot. You can go ahead and eat virtue” (Nwapa 32). Amaka’s mother asserts the futility of endurance and morality in the lives of women who do not receive love, loyalty, or respect from their husbands. Her words reveal how motherhood was an intensely crucial factor in determining the destiny of women in Igboland so that women often felt compelled to resort to secret relationships to become impregnated for a respectable existence. She emphasizes that women need to break free from the cocooned lives prescribed to them by patriarchy and pursue a path of self-assertion and contentment. This is why she advises her married daughters to be in control of their lives and never to be at the mercy of their husbands. She is proud of her daughter Ayo who left her husband on knowing that he was cheating on her and sought to become mistress to a man whose wife was away. She tells Amaka:

‘Ayo moved in. In four years, she had four children. In four years, her ‘husband’ had sent her to school to improve. She is cleverer than all of you. She qualified as a teacher. In the fifth year she was able to make her husband buy her a house in Surulere, and that year the wife returned without anything, and my daughter moved out gracefully with her children, into her own home.’ (Nwapa 33)

Amaka’s mother is representative of the unyielding spirit of the Igbo woman who would conform to the patriarchal regulations only as long as she received the respect she deserved. The Igbo women simply refused to be meek and submissive like a majority of upper-middle-class Western women whose silent endurance often resulted in psychological ailments and frustration. Instead, they ventured to exploit all possible means to secure a comfortable life of material wealth and prosperity for themselves and their children.

Amaka resolves that in a society that refuses to accept and respect a woman as an individual outside her reproductive ability, she shall seize the denied recognition by choosing to become impregnated by any man, compromising all moral values and virtues that the society demands of an ideal wife. Her vengeance provokes her to leave her husband and his village to explore her happiness and to realize her intentions in the city of Lagos. When she narrates her bitter experiences to her childhood friend Adaobi settled in Lagos, Adaobi consoles her saying, “‘I have always said and believed that if one makes a mistake in marriage, one should not live with one’s mistake. One should try and start again. I know you well and what you are capable of doing” (Nwapa 33).

While there are several intentions behind her physical relationship with men of influence in Lagos, the most powerful intention is to become pregnant, to embrace motherhood. She does not mind whose child she would bear, but she just wants to conceive and become a “bloodmother”. As her friend Adaobi talks about Amaka to her husband, “If they will give her children, she will sleep with all of them one after the other. She will not even care who the father is, once she is pregnant. She went through hell on account of this, and she would bend over backwards to have a child from any man, even a beggar from the street” (Nwapa 60). Her desperate attempts to become a mother are also her way of avenging her husband, mother-in-law, and society as a whole, for all the humiliating blame and ill-treatment meted out to a woman who fails or refuses to utilize her procreative ability. Her motherhood may be seen as her reply to the condemning attitude of a society that values male pride, decisions, and requirements above the dignity, rights, and choices of a woman over her body.

Nwapa reveals how in the traditional Igbo society, motherhood was given more importance than wifhood. Though women were insisted on safeguarding their virginity until marriage, and to be sexually loyal to their husbands after marriage, the sexual freedom and waywardness enjoyed by Igbo men often resulted in women becoming impregnated outside marriage. However, even in such cases, the woman would be respected for having given birth to a life and the child would be taken care of by her family. If the newborn was a son, there were instances wherein the family of the man who fathered the child would come to claim his right over his progeny.



The significance of motherhood above wifedom was endorsed by many of the traditional women in the community who had no particular interest in their husbands and willingly sought new wives for them so that they could free themselves from the liability of catering to the husband's needs and producing his progenies all alone. Nwapa throws light on such unbending female attitude in the characters of Amaka's mother and aunt. Amaka's aunt has been portrayed as a self-assured woman whose views are significant reflections on Igbo women's attitude towards wifedom and motherhood. She advises Amaka neither to depend on her husband nor to slave for him. She insists that the man who marries does not matter. He can be irresponsible, selfish, or despicable. What really matters is whether marriage to the man can beget children or not. She says, "What is important is not marriage as such, but children, being able to have children, being a mother. A marriage is no marriage without children. Have your children, be able to look after them, and you will be respected" (8). Such emphasis on motherhood was largely because, in traditional Igbo society, a woman received respect, recognition and privileges on account of her motherhood, particularly, as the mother of sons.

Amaka's own mother is another self-reliant woman who learned a lot from her experience. She too advises Amaka: "Marriage or no marriage, have children. Your children will take care of you in your old age. You will be very lonely then if you don't have children. As a mother, you are fulfilled" (Nwapa 11). Amaka's mother is sceptical about the Western missionaries and their educational system which quaff away the confidence, decision-making power and verbose of women like Amaka, by constantly reminding them of a woman's subordinate position to

man, with undue emphasis on women's tolerance, chastity and silences in marriage. Amaka realizes "from the behaviour of her illiterate aunt and mother that they did not share in this belief of her people. Her mother brought them up to be independent, but she did not emphasise marriage. She had several children no doubt, but her emphasis was on self-determination and motherhood" (22-23). "Let yourself go; I say" (11) is the advice that the mother gives Amaka.

Amaka's decision to go by her mother's words is largely motivated by her desire to prove herself to the world. She is determined to seek happiness in being a single woman. She resolves that "the erroneous belief that without a husband, a woman was nothing, has to be disproved" (24). Her life with Obiora had taught her that a husband bothers to care for his wife only if she fulfils his expectations as a homemaker and produces his children. She remembers with pain how her husband had yelled at her when she questioned his secret relationship with a woman who had begotten him two children: "You barren and senseless woman! You forget that you are childless. You would not raise your voice in this house if you were sensible. You should go about your business quietly and not offend anyone because if you do, one would be tempted to give you one or two home truths.... If you are sensible, you will stay here under my protection. A woman needs protection from her husband" (19). Instead of placing her life at the mercy of a husband who has no love or respect for her, Amaka decides to leave him and goes to the city of Lagos in pursuit of a new life and with a determination to become impregnated by any man. When Amaka finally gives birth to twin boys, she is appreciated and recognized by everyone. When she goes to her village, all express their happiness at the sight of the

two healthy boys. Amaka's mother, her sister Ayo and her friend Adaobi are all happy about it. Amaka's mother considers it a victory over her enemies and nobody bothers who the father of the children is. Having flourished in business and as a mother of two children now, Amaka proves that a woman can always find happiness and contentment even outside the rigorous patriarchal family system that respects a woman only for the different roles that she is expected to efficiently perform. This is why Amaka is not ready to confine herself to the bounds of marital institution again. She dreads at the thought of the father of her children, Father Mclaid, claiming his children. She is determined to raise the kids all alone, as a single parent, and in her decision, we get to see an iconoclast who is done with the traditional concept of family life, wherein the woman must obey and submit herself to the demands of her husband, endure their physical and mental torture, and often bear their infidelities silently. She refuses to allow herself to be tamed in the name of chastity, modesty, responsibility, love, tolerance, and other virtues, that compel a woman to restrain herself from expressing emotions like anger, impatience, enthusiasm, desires, and sexual urges. The structure of the family imposes too many responsibilities on women and Amaka does not want a man to control her in the name of these responsibilities. She feels broken when Father Mclaid declares that he is going to give up the priesthood to live with her. He wants to marry her and live with his children. The decision shocks Amaka for she had never thought that he would go to this extent to claim his children. She laments before her sister:

I don't want him. I don't want to be his wife. I think he is realising it, and wants to have the twins for a start. Ayo, I don't want to be a wife any more, a

mistress yes, with a lover, yes of course, but not a wife. There is something in that word that does not suit me. As a wife, I am never free. I am a shadow of myself. As a wife I am almost impotent. I am in prison, unable to advance in body and soul. Something gets hold of me as a wife and destroys me. When I rid myself of Obiora, things started working for me. I don't want to go back to my "wifely" days. (127)

Amaka seems to have recognised that she cannot be contented by performing the role of a wife. She is a woman of great ambitions and is confident of her potential to accomplish them one by one. She is determined to live her life the way she wants and not according to how any man or society would like her to live. Her mother too initially supports this decision when she tells Ayo, "She would either have a husband or her business. She could not have both. The demands of her husband would be too much and she would be unable to cope" (118). However, when the mother comes to know that Father Mclaid has been elevated to the post of Commissioner in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, she begins to force Amaka to agree to the marriage so that Amaka can enjoy the prestigious and enviable position as his wife. But Amaka is determined that she will not become anybody's wife anymore. She had learned that a woman can attain enviable positions and fame with her own potential. She does not need any recognition through an appended identity as 'somebody's wife'. Her decision turns right because Father Mclaid is in fact not very faithful to Amaka. He had often been involved with other women and his enthusiasm to marry her was only because of his excitement at the sight of his children. When he meets with a serious car accident and considers the escape as a

divine intervention and revelation to continue with his priesthood, Amaka is very excited and expresses great relief. She even forgets that her Izu had met with a serious accident and exclaims to Ayo that they need to celebrate the noble decision taken by him.

Nwapa's works thus explore the life and experience of childless women who, despite their intense longing to embrace motherhood, refuse to compromise their dignity and aspirations before a patriarchal society that tends to disregard and ill-treat a woman who is unable to produce a child. Through these characters, Nwapa asserts that with or without children, Igbo women are efficient, industrious, and intelligent enough to find happiness and contentment in their lives.

Through the life of Amaka's friend Adaobi, however, Nwapa reveals the beauty of family life where both husband and wife know to love, respect, and appreciate each other. Though Adaobi indulges in business and manages to own a property and build a house without her husband's knowledge, she remains sexually loyal to him. It is her intuition and foresight that enables the family to shift to their new bungalow when there is a revolution in Lagos and Adaobi's husband Mike is suddenly asked to evacuate their official residence in Lagos. Being a mother of four children, she feels responsible for their safety and explains to Mike that it is her priority for her children's safe future which provoked her to join Amaka's business and make money to own the property. Amaka, her mother, her aunt, her sister Ayo, her friend Adaobi, and the women contractors in Lagos are all examples of independent and self-assertive women who excelled in their businesses, supported each other as traditional Igbo women used to do, and considered it equally important

to become mothers either within or outside the patriarchal institution called marriage. Nwapa emphasizes the importance of women identifying the numerous choices in front of them and wisely choosing what they want for themselves instead of letting men or society decide what is right and wrong for them. Nwapa asserts that a woman need not become a wife or a mother to enjoy her life. According to her, “Marriage is not the end of this world; childlessness is not the end of everything. You must survive one way or the other, and there are a hundred and one things to make you happy apart from marriage and children” (Nwapa, *In Their Own Voices* 114-115).

In *Efuru*, the protagonist Efuru is able to accept that she will not be able to produce children anymore. She, however, believes that her husband needs to beget children to uphold his lineage, and so, welcomes new wives for Gilbert. That she herself is childless does not worry Efuru too much, for she, as the powerful voice of the author, refuses to devalue herself just because she could not become a biological mother to a child. She finds contentment in taking care of her husband’s children with his other wives and in being affectionate to the poor children of her neighbourhood. In other words, she becomes an “othermother” to the children in her family and community. Patricia Hill Collins observes that in African culture, “the boundaries distinguishing biological mothers of children from other women who care for children are often fluid and changing” (“The Meaning of Motherhood” 277-278). She emphasizes how women of African descent often share the care labour necessary for bringing up a child. She says:

Biological mothers or bloodmothers are expected to care for their children. But African and African-American communities have also recognized that vesting one person with full responsibility for mothering a child may not be wise or possible. As a result, “othermothers”, women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities, traditionally have been central to the institution of Black motherhood. (278)

Though raising children was considered to be precisely a woman’s job, it was usually shared among the different female figures within the family or neighbourhood, which Collins describes as “women-centred networks”. She recognizes the centrality of women in the extended families of African societies and holds that “Organized, resilient, women-centred networks of bloodmothers and othermothers are key to this centrality. Grandmothers, sisters, aunts, or cousins acted as othermothers by taking on childcare responsibilities for each other’s children” (278).

In *Efuru*, we find Efuru resuming trade a few months after a child is born to her. The child, named Ogonim is taken care of by Efuru’s mother-in-law and a little maid named Ogea. When Ogonim falls sick, it is Ajanupu, the sister of Efuru’s mother-in-law who frequents the house and does her best to save the poor child from dying. Finally, when they fail to save the child, Ajanupu stays by Efuru and helps her to recuperate from the grief. Even after Efuru leaves Adizua and marries Gilbert, Ajanupu continues to support Efuru throughout her life in a motherly way.

Strong women-centred networks can also be found in Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* wherein one can observe a contrast in the experiences of Igbo

mothers living in the city of Lagos to those living in the village of Ibuza. Nnu Ego, the daughter of Nwokocha Agbadi and his mistress Ona is brought up by the “othermothers” in the house of Agbadi when a sick Ona dies a few days after giving birth to Nnu Ego. Later when Nnu Ego’s first marriage fails on account of her childlessness and Agbadi brings back his physically abused and mentally broken daughter from her husband’s house, she is brought back to life by the love and care of these othermothers. They are sympathetic to her and nurse her mentally back to normal. They make her “feel that even though she had not borne a child, her father’s house was bursting with babies she could regard as her own” (35). The strong women-centred network can also be seen when a pregnant Nnu Ego, along with her children, comes from Lagos to Ibuza to visit her aged father Agbadi. After Agbadi dies and Nnu Ego gives birth to the child, she remains in Ibuza for nine months. It is during this period that Nnu Ego realizes how life in a traditional Igbo village is much easier for women, especially mothers, as there are so many women to support each other in performing their gender-specific roles within and outside the domestic space. Every woman had a hut of her own where they could live with their children. All the children would be fed and looked after by all women together. The infants were never the responsibility of the bloodmothers alone but would be taken care of by othermothers in the family, which gave these biological mothers ample time to rest or engage in their other duties and responsibilities. Emecheta writes:

One clear night, Nnu Ego sat contentedly in front of the hut she had to herself, enjoying the cool of the evening. Her children and other children of the household had been fed, and the noises they made in their moonlight



games reached her now and again. Baby Nnamdio was in the willing hands of Adankwo, a strong woman in her early forties – one of those wiry, dependable women whom people assumed would always be there. (*The Joys of Motherhood* 156)

Adankwo is the senior wife in the Owulum family, the family of Nnu Ego's husband. She is addressed "Mother" (156) by Nnu Ego. Throughout her stay in Ibuza, Adankwo is very protective of her and is representative of the strong mothers of Igboland. She takes care of Nnu Ego's children and also shows genuine concern regarding Nnu Ego's life and future. Adankwo in *The Joys of Motherhood* and Ajanupu in *Efuru* emerge as typical othermothers who play a significant role "in not only supporting children but also in supporting bloodmothers who, for whatever reason, were ill-prepared or had little desire to care for their children" (Collins 278).

The concept of motherhood, as seen in the Igbo context, is extended beyond biological ties. This communal approach to mothering emphasized the importance of collective care and support for all children, creating a strong sense of belonging and interdependence within Igbo society. This broader perspective of motherhood emphasized the vital role that women played in shaping the well-being and development of the entire community.

The significance of othermothering can also be perceived in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* which is set in a postcolonial scenario. Though polygamy was eventually replaced by monogamy in postcolonial Nigeria, Igbo women never considered motherhood as disempowering in any way. When the innocent village girl Amala, impregnated by a drunken Odenigbo, gives birth to a

daughter, and both Amala's people and Odenigbo's mother refuse to take up the child's responsibility because it is a girl, it is Olanna who immediately offers to accept the child.

She could raise a child, his child. She would buy books about motherhood and find a wet nurse and decorate the bedroom. She shifted this way and that in bed that night. She had not felt sorry for the child. Instead, holding that tiny, warm body, she had felt a conscious serendipity, a sense that this may not have been planned but had become, the minute it happened, what was meant to be. (Adichie 251)

Contrasting the character of Amala, the biological mother of the child to the genuine love and sense of obligation of the non-biological mother Olanna, Adichie reveals that motherhood and mothering are two different aspects. Amala represents all those women on whom motherhood is forced; women whose circumstances and vulnerability prevent them from adoring their biological position as a mother and simultaneously rendering them immune to "the joys of motherhood" as expected by the society. Olanna pities Amala for the latter's inability to face people, her aversion to herself as an exploited woman, and her refusal to eat anything or even touch the baby she has given birth to. Her silence echoes the silence of all those oppressed women who are denied pleasure, contentment, and freedom of choice with regard to their bodies. Olanna tries to read the mind of Amala but wonders how much one can know "of the true feelings of those who did not have a voice" (250). She calls the child 'Baby' and brings her up as her own child. In "Doing Motherhood, Doing Home: Mothering as Home-Making Practice in *Half of a Yellow Sun*," Barbara Jilek

explores the “triadic relationship between the female protagonist Olanna, her houseboy Ugwu, and Olanna’s adoptive child Baby” (4). Jilek observes how Olanna, despite being a non-biological mother to Baby, considers feeding and bathing the child as her primary responsibility, trying to assume the concerns traditionally expected of a biological mother. She asserts that “throughout the novel, Baby’s bathing and feeding are first and foremost on Olanna’s mind, a fact that not only highlights the strong bond between them but that simultaneously shows how Olanna’s expression of care in terms of specific practices is socially conditioned. Olanna views herself as mainly responsible for Baby’s care, and she not only seeks to fulfil the child’s needs, but she also asserts her own role in their relationship through claiming the responsibility that is traditionally placed on mothers” (article 4). Her bond with Baby reveals how sincerely even othermothers or foster mothers can look into the needs of the children entrusted to them.

Bloodmothers, othermothers, and women-centred networks thus function in an interchanging manner depending upon the demands of the situation. This reduced the burden of mothering in Igboland and allowed all women to earn a living and add to the economic resources of the family. While recognizing the ideology of African motherhood among African-American women experiencing racist and sexist prejudice, Patricia Hill Collins observes that despite these challenges, Black mothers have never stopped being providers of economic resources to the family. She says, “In contrast to the cult of true womanhood, in which work is defined as being in opposition to and incompatible with motherhood, work for Black women has been an important and valued dimension of Afrocentric definitions of Black motherhood”

(279). Women in Igboland too never cease to be providers to their children and family despite rendering their duties as bloodmothers or othermothers in the midst of numerous challenges.

For instance, Efuru ventures into trading when her baby is only eight months old. In her absence, her husband Adizua fails to make much profit and acknowledges Efuru's skill at money making. Efuru not only provides for her own family but also lends money and help to all the needy people who approach her. She is motherly to her maid Ogea and supports Ogea's parents Nwosu and Nwaononaku financially. The financial independence enjoyed by Igbo women right from the precolonial times recounts for why women were also considered significant providers in the family; sometimes on par with and often more efficiently than their male counterpart. Amaka in *One is Enough*, her friend Adaobi and all the women contractors in Lagos are representative of the Igbo women's incessant impulse to make money for themselves and their children, which in turn, aids towards the growth of the community as well.

Providing, however, became very difficult for Igbo mothers when the traditional women-centred networks collapsed during the colonial and postcolonial periods. It became even more difficult for women who lacked financial and societal support in a changing Nigerian society. Ketu Katrak rightly observes that "...economic factors play a role in a woman fulfilling her role as mother...(213). In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta explores the quandaries of Igbo mothers who experience numerous challenges owing to the changing socio-economic scenario in Nigeria. Kim Anderson, the veteran scholar of indigenous motherhood experiences,

studies how the African concepts of motherhood and mothering alter consequent to colonial influence. In “Giving Life to the People: An Indigenous Ideology of Motherhood,” Anderson observes that native mothering experiences numerous challenges on account of the incursion of the three c’s namely Capitalism, Christianity and Colonialism. She says, “Colonization involved the denigration of Native womanhood and the implementation of a series of external controls on Native motherhood” (770). One of the earliest attempts of the colonizers was to prove that the native women were bad and inefficient mothers who needed training. According to Anderson, “The proposed solution to their inadequate parenting was to contain them within a monogamous, patriarchal, nuclear family unit, in which the husband would be the breadwinner and the native wife could take up her duties as mother and homemaker” (770). This deteriorated the status, economic independence and confidence enjoyed by traditional women and rendered them more and more insignificant within the domestic and public spaces.

Anderson holds that Native mothers are often “at greater risk in urban environments, where they have less kin support...” (764). For Igbo mothers settled in urban regions, mothering became increasingly difficult when care labour became the sole responsibility of the biological mother, and the colonial pressures exerted on Igbo men resulted in frustration, incessant discords and discontent between the husband and wife in a family system that was caught between traditional marital customs and Western emphasis on monogamy. Through the life and experiences of the traditional Igbo woman Nnu Ego in the city of Lagos, Emecheta reveals the

challenges encountered by Igbo women who struggle to adapt themselves to the demands of capitalism, Christianity, and colonialism.

Nnu Ego has the first experience of disillusionment when she reaches Lagos and meets the man she is to marry. Nnaife is completely different from Nnu Ego's concept of a traditional, hardworking, responsible, tall, and tough man. Yet, she accepts him as her husband only because of her desperate desire to become a mother. She is also quite disappointed at his job as a washerman to the English couple Dr. Meers and his wife. Through Nnu Ego's displeasure at the kind of job done by Igbo men, Emecheta reveals how the traditional concept of masculinity which measured an Igbo man by his physical strength and labour in the fields, sense of responsibility towards family and community, and acts of bravery beginning with the ritual initiation into manhood, was replaced by a crushed dignity and lost identity as the servants of colonial masters in the city. It is the servile life as obedient servants under colonial masters that provokes the men to be very arrogant, commanding, and insensitive to their wives. Cordelia, her Igbo neighbour in Lagos and wife of Nnaife's friend Ubani who worked as a cook in Dr. Meer's house, tells her, "They are all slaves, including us. If their masters treat them badly, they take it out on us" (Emecheta 51).

Nnu Ego also realizes that Igbo men in colonial Nigeria have forgotten to respect and appreciate their wives for their procreative ability. When Nnu Ego becomes pregnant and eagerly waits for the appropriate time to reveal the good news to her husband, Nnaife disappoints her by identifying the changes on her body as signs of pregnancy and rudely asks her to be grateful to him for making her

pregnant. Nnu Ego thus emerges as one of those Igbo wives, whose secluded life in the city, without the support of women-centred networks find themselves completely at the mercy of their husbands who have no love or respect for them as traditional men used to have. When Nnu Ego confides her worries in Cordelia, the latter laughs and says, ““You want a husband who has time to ask you if you wish to eat rice, or drink corn pap with honey? Forget it. Men here are too busy being white men’s servants to be men. We women mind the home. Not the husbands. Their manhood has been taken away from them. The shame of it is that they don’t know it”” (51). Nnu Ego bears the loveless and insulting remarks of Nnaife only because of the hope that her life will be imbued with happiness once the child comes into her life. But her happiness is only short-lived, for one morning she finds her son lying lifeless on the mat. The incident is so traumatic to her that she loses her senses and ventures to put an end to her life. She laments aloud to the people who rescue her, ““But I am not a woman anymore! I am not a mother anymore. The child is there, dead on the mat. My *chi* has taken him away from me”” (62). The intensity of Nnu Ego’s mental agony reveals the profound significance that Igbo women rendered to their position as mothers, outside which, they believed, there was no meaning to their existence.

Nnu Ego, however, conceives again soon and gives birth to a boy named Oshiaju. She remembers that when her first child was born, she had tried to make money of her own by going for trade with the baby tied to her back. She understands that mothering and trading in Lagos is going to be very difficult for a woman. In Ibuza, a new mother could go for any business after weaning the infant, who would

be then taken care of by co-wives and grandmothers. They were all mothers to the children of every woman in the family. However, in Lagos, there was nobody to share the task of mothering. The biological mother herself had to manage household chores and the task of mothering so that it became very difficult for her to enter into the public space to make an income of her own. Nnu Ego who does not want to risk the life of her newborn, decides to remain at home like the women in Lagos and other urban spaces, and completely rely on her husband's income:

She might not have any money to supplement her husband's income, but were they not in a white man's world where it was the duty of the father to provide for his family? In Ibusa, women made a contribution, but in urban Lagos, men had to be the sole providers; this new setting robbed the woman of her useful role. Nnu Ego told herself that the life she had indulged in with the baby Ngozi had been very risky: she had been trying to be traditional in a modern urban setting. (81)

As Nnu Ego rightly identifies, it is her inability to change and adapt herself to an urban culture that becomes the chief cause for her fears and disappointment in Lagos.

However, Nnu Ego realizes that she cannot live like a white woman in Lagos by waiting for her husband to provide money for the needs of the family. She understands that there are no choices in front of her. As Collins observes of African American women, "Whether they wanted it or not, the majority of African American women had to work and could not afford the luxury of motherhood as a noneconomically productive female 'occupation'" (280).



Nnu Ego too ventures into trade when the European couple returns to England permanently, and Nnaife loses his job. Being an independent woman who is fundamentally good at trade and trained in wrestling for self-defence like the majority of women in Igboland, Nnu Ego decides to risk her life to make some profit in a society that was increasingly shifting towards capitalism, with the market under European control. Despite the warnings of her husband, she sets out to illicitly buy cartons of cigarettes from soldiers who had stolen them from ships. She is fortunate to return with sufficient cigarettes, trading which, the family could meet with the expenses for a few weeks. However, Nnu Ego realizes that she will not be able to venture into the business fully as she is already expecting a second child.

When Nnaife comes to know of her pregnancy, he wonders, ““What kind of a *chi* have you got, eh? When you were desperate for children, she wouldn’t give you any; now that we cannot afford them, she gives them to you”” (91). Her life becomes increasingly miserable as her husband Nnaife proves to be a very irresponsible and arrogant man, who unleashes all his frustration and failures upon his wife. He too belongs to a generation of colonized people who are caught between traditional and modern culture. Though Nnaife is comfortable doing the white man’s jobs in Lagos, he has no regard for his wife or children. Unlike traditional Igbo men, who appreciate the labour and economic independence of their wives, Nnaife constantly feels his masculinity threatened when Nnu Ego indulges in trade and manages to meet the expenses of the family. Living in a city where women were supposed to be financially dependent on their husbands, Nnu Ego’s independence renders Nnaife more hostile to her.

The motherhood experiences of Nnu Ego are imbued with challenges. She has to evacuate their rented house with her son Oshia when Nnaife is away in search of a job. The growing poverty affects the health and happiness of Oshia too. In his torn shirt which is the only dress he has, he is secluded and humiliated by his age-mates. He is unable to go to school regularly as Nnu Ego fails to pay the fees many times. His worries, complaints and tears grieve Nnu Ego a lot and instigate her to put in more effort to ensure a better life for her children.

Their poverty was becoming very apparent and Oshia was constantly hungry. He was lucky if he had a good meal a day. His mother had not been able to go out to evening market since the birth of his brother, so she would make a display stand outside the house, with cans of cigarettes, boxes of matches and bottles of kerosene, and ask Oshia to sit beside them. If there were any customers, he would shout for an adult to sort out the intricacies of change and money. (Emecheta 103)

Poverty, lack of rest and malnutrition render the mother and her children weak and sick. Oshia's health deteriorates badly and Nnu Ego fears that she would lose him. He is saved only because their neighbour, a woman belonging to Itsekiri tribe, identifies that it is starvation that is deteriorating the health of the mother and children, and so gives them a nutritious stew to recuperate. Nnu Ego has a brief period of happiness and extravagance when Nnaife returns from the sea having made a great profit. Though Oshia is able to enrol in a good school and Nnu Ego is able to afford several outfits for herself and her children, life in the city of Lagos is rendered complicated when the family fails to forgo traditional Igbo customs.

Though life in urban cities is marked with complications emanating from unemployment, meagre income, confined spaces for accommodation and deteriorating community spirit, men refuse to give up the privilege of polygyny and inheritance of the widowed wives of brothers. When the brother of Nnu Ego's husband Nnaife dies, she is filled with horror at the thought of her husband inheriting all the wives and children of the deceased brother. She wonders how Nnaife, with his new minor job as a grasscutter at the railway station in Lagos, was going to provide for all of them. She desperately hopes that the system is not forced on them in Lagos. However, Adaku, the youngest wife of the brother surprises Nnu Ego when she comes to Lagos with a four-year-old girl, determined to live with them as the second wife of her husband. When she addresses Nnu Ego as "senior wife," she stares at her embarrassingly.

Nnu Ego stared at her. She had so lost contact with her people that the voice of this person addressing her as "senior wife" made her feel not only old but completely out of touch, as if she was an outcast. She resented it. It was one thing to be thus addressed in Ibuza, where people gained a great deal by seniority; here, in Lagos, though the same belief still held, it was to a different degree. (118)

Life becomes increasingly difficult for both Nnu Ego and Adaku as Nnaife becomes more and more irresponsible and selfish. Unlike traditional Igbo men who worked hard on the farms to provide for their families, the Igbo men in the city found it hard to meet the expenses of city life with the meagre amount granted to them by the colonial masters who employed them. As for Nnaife, apart from giving food money

to both his wives, he had to pay the school fees of his elder son Oshia. However, he gradually begins to spend more money on drinks instead of ensuring that his growing family has sufficient to eat. His attitude grieves a helpless Nnu Ego, for as the mother of four children then, she finds herself incapacitated to end her relationship with an unfeeling man like Nnaife. She considers herself “a prisoner, imprisoned by her love for her children, imprisoned in her role as the senior wife. She was not even expected to demand more money for her family; that was considered below the standard expected of a woman in her position. It was not fair, she felt, the way men cleverly used a woman’s sense of responsibility to actually enslave her” (137).

In the character of Nnu Ego one may see the “motherist” ideals of tolerance and sacrifice which Acholunu asserts in her doctrine of motherism. However, the life of Nnu Ego reveals the absurdity of women negating their own lives to fulfill the patriarchal expectations on women’s role as ideal wives and mothers. While Nwapa’s women characters assert that women have a right to find their own means of happiness and success instead of living a subordinate life as appendages to men, Emecheta reveals the pitiable future awaiting women who remain enmeshed within the patriarchal demands. Nnu Ego, as her co-wife Adaku rightly observes, is “sometimes more traditional than people at home in Ibuza” (127). Her inability to change despite the changing circumstances and shifting relationships in a colonial city renders her entire life miserable, confused, and bleak. Motherhood poses a weighty challenge to her as she struggles to make ends meet, especially after Nnaife is recruited into the British army. Living in a one-room apartment with seven

children, Nnu Ego fears dreaming of a better life as that would be at the cost of the money meant for her sons' education. Though she dedicates her entire life to providing for her children, her poverty affects her bond with them, dampens her confidence in trading, quaffs away her beauty and health, and restricts her mobility and desires. She often becomes conscious of the bleak life she is living in trying to satisfy her husband and children at the expense of her own health and happiness. Yet, having been brought up as the obedient and submissive daughter of the wealthy local chief Nwokocha Agbadi in Izu, she did not know to place her freedom and interests above the responsibilities thrust upon her as a wife and mother. She pities herself as she deliberates: "I am a prisoner of my own flesh and blood. Is it such an enviable position? The men make it look as if we must aspire for children or die. That's why when I lost my first son, I wanted to die, because I failed to live up to the standard expected of me by the males in my life, my father and my husband – and now I have to include my sons" (187).

Nnu Ego's predicament reveals how colonial influences and restrictions gradually render Igbo women incapable of being happy bloodmothers or selfless othermothers. With limited facilities and financial constraints, women in urban cities struggle to ensure proper food, health, and education for their children. Under such circumstances, the biological mother is forced to compete with the co-wives, if any, and fails to become sincerely involved in othermothering. This is the reason why, when a widowed Adaku, inherited by Nnaife, comes to stay with them in their one-room apartment in Lagos, Nnu Ego is unable to accept her and her children. Unlike NnuEgo, who is enchained by her sense of responsibility and traditional ways,

Adaku soon learns to get along with the urban ways. The jealousy and the verbal conflicts that follow leave both the women more frustrated day by day. Nnu Ego, however, enjoys the privilege of being a mother of sons while Adaku constantly faces certain setbacks on account of her inability to produce sons for her husband. Emecheta is sceptical about the Igbo society's double attitude to mothers of sons and mothers of daughters. She reveals how the Igbo men respected women for producing male heirs to their father, and considered the mothers of daughters to be more inferior.

This preference for sons or male heirs continued even among the Igbos who shifted from the village to the city. This is the reason why when a group of men are called to settle a dispute between Nnu Ego and Adaku, they support Nnu Ego although the mistake is largely on her part. They remind Adaku that it is not she but Nnu Ego, who is "immortalising" (166) her husband by giving birth to sons. She is therefore asked to accept her inferior position to Nnu Ego and to always respect her. Adaku, who initially blames her fate for refusing her sons, gradually begins to question the patriarchal notions of wifhood and motherhood, and the constant tendency of men to define and prescribe a woman's thoughts, words, and actions according to rigid and biased traditions. It is such humiliation and injustice that provoke Adaku to leave the house of Nnaife and seek a life of liberation where her dignity, happiness and ethics are defined and determined by herself. She tells Nnu Ego, "I am not prepared to stay here and be turned into a mad woman, just because I have no sons. The way they go on about it, one would think I know where sons are made and have been neglectful about taking one for my husband" (169). As an

expression of all her disgust and hatred for the stifling customs debilitating women's dignity and freedom, Adaku declares that she is going to be a prostitute, earn a lot of money, and educate her girls so that at least they do not have to lead a life of enslavement, conforming to the ideals set by an unjust society. She is also critical of women like Nnu Ego who unquestioningly abide by all patriarchal norms and demands, and set impossible standards for women themselves.

Nnu Ego, on the other hand, feels sorry for Adaku and resents the Igbo society's discriminatory attitude towards mothers of sons and daughters. When she later gives birth to her second set of twin daughters, she feels offended noticing the disapproval on the face of Nnaife and sadly contemplates, "Men – all they were interested were in male babies to keep their names going. But did not a woman have to bear the woman-child who would later bear the sons? 'God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage?' She prayed desperately" (186). Though Nnu Ego realizes the prejudices and injustice meted out to women, she is unable to wriggle out of her circumstances, just like her mother Ona in her youth.

Ona, Nnu Ego and Adaku are all victims of the paradoxical nature of mothering in Igboland. In the character of Ona, Emecheta represents the vulnerability of women who are forced to assume dual sex roles in Igbo society. 'Ona', meaning 'priceless jewel', was the name of the most loved and desired mistress of Nnu Ego's father Nwokocha Agbadi. Being the only daughter of her father, she is ritualised to become a 'male daughter' who is allowed to enjoy sexual intimacy with any man of her choice but is not allowed to marry. This custom

compels a woman to remain with her father and produce a son for him by choosing to sleep with any man. The biological father will have no right over the child, as the son will uphold the family name and legacy of his mother's lineage. Though Ona is deeply in love with Agbadi and conceives his child, she is not allowed to become his wife. In the helplessness of Ona, who hides her ache for Agbadi beneath an arrogant disposition, Emecheta reveals the emotional agony and lack of choice before girls who are oppressed in the name of such customs simply to procure male children to preserve the lineage. The reproductive ability of a woman is exploited, and her emotions and individuality are curbed, in order to realize the egotistical impulses of patriarchy. When Ona gives birth to Nnu Ego, the child of Agbadi, Ona's father allows him to take his child as it is a daughter but refuses to accept his bride price and to let him marry Ona. Agbadi is furious at the self-centeredness of the father whose desire for a male progeny denies a life to his daughter and asks him angrily, "Is it her fault that you have no son?" (26). He feels sorry for his mistress Ona whom he is desperate to marry. He recognizes her emotional and mental agony, torn between her duty towards her father and passionate love and desire for Agbadi.

Ifi Amadiume's *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* (1987), a pioneering ethnographical study on Igbo women of Nnobi region, elaborates on the sexual dualism among the Igbos and explains how the dual sex barrier is broken "through the manipulation of gender concepts and flexible gender construction" (89) in Igboland. Amadiume, foregrounds only the positive side of this custom and argues that gender construction in Igboland is flexible and that it honours women with certain privileges that are originally reserved for men in the society. She explains



that Igbo men who did not have any son to inherit their properties could choose one of his daughters to perform the role of a son and she would be known as a ‘male daughter’, following a ceremony known as *Nluikwa*. His male daughter will have to remain with her father, unmarried, and carry out the responsibilities of a son. She inherits the land and property of her father. She can, however, be a mistress to any man and the child she conceives thus, if it is a son, would belong to her father and not to the biological father of the child. Women also have a right to marry other women if they are wealthy enough to pay the bride price. They are called ‘female husbands’ and they have every right over these wives, just as a man has over his wives. However, the relationship is not found to be sexual. These wives could be mistresses to any man but the children she produces would belong to the female husband. This provision was especially utilised by barren, widowed, or wealthy women who wanted to have children in their lineage or increase their property by adding more wives and people to their families. Such a system of gender complementarity did accord great respect and recognition to women in the traditional society, yet many a time they also proved detrimental to the dignity and autonomy of these women.

Evelyn Nwachukwu Urama studies the physical and psychological impact of same-sex marriage among Igbo women in her article “The Values and Usefulness of Same-sex Marriages Among the Females in Igbo Culture in the Continuity of Lineage or Posterity,” and argues that same-sex marriages greatly facilitate “the succession and continuity of lineage, but they have not depicted the gender and insecurity issues that accompany it” (2). Michael Muonwe is also critical of Amadiume’s “romantic approach to Igbo culture” (xxxiii) that appreciates the

system of male daughters and female husbands “as a sign of strength simply because, by designed “male” or “husband”, the daughter is given access to some privileges accorded to male children in the family” (xxxiii). Apart from these privileges, women found these customs very mortifying, intimidating, and binding.

In *The Bride Price*, Ona refuses to leave the house of her father even after he dies, for she is hardened by the custom that denies her a life of her own. By the time Agbadi finally convinces her to move in with him as his wife, Ona is mentally and emotionally enfeebled. She does not have the physical strength to bear a second pregnancy and succumbs to death after giving birth to a premature son who too fails to survive. Before breathing her last, she tells Agbadi never to let their daughter suffer as she suffered on account of her father’s love and expectations. She tells him, “Please don’t mourn for me for long; and see that however much you love our daughter Nnu Ego, you allow her to have a life of her own, a husband if she wants one. Allow her to be a woman” (28). However, as in the case of her mother Ona, Nnu Ego’s life is also exploited on account of her reproductive ability. Nnu Ego also becomes a victim to the patriarchal attempts to control the reproductive ability of a woman. Nnu Ego’s life becomes endlessly miserable, initially due to her procreative inability, and later due to frequent pregnancies and ensuing responsibilities that deteriorate her health and happiness. Through the lives of Ona, Nnu Ego, and Adaku, Emecheta throws light on how women constantly feel the pressure to fulfil the expectations of men in order to be recognized and accepted in the society.

With the advent of colonialism, such customs gradually declined in Igboland. However, men became more chauvinistic and harsher towards women, presumably because of the insecurities and economic instability they suffered in a land that

could be no longer called their own. Nnaife, the husband of Nnu Ego, who is sent by the Britishers to the warzone in Burma, returns from the war as a wealthy man. He is proud of himself for having earned a great amount through his hard work but refuses to recognize the struggles of his wife Nnu Ego who had been all the while struggling to manage her trade and meet with the needs of her impoverished children. When Nnaife comes to know that his second wife Adaku has left him and has chosen to live as a prostitute, he goes to Ibuza to visit the other wives he inherited at the death of his brother. The senior wife in Ibuza conceives again and Nnu ego feels sorry for her that she has to go through the complications of pregnancy and childbirth at an old age because of Nnaife. Nnaife, on the other hand, comes with a new wife, a sixteen-year-old girl named Okpa, from Ibuza. The author presents Nnu Ego's desperation: "Where are we going to put them all"? she screamed at her husband and the girl whom she thought would soon start breeding as well. 'Have you gone mad or something?'" (184). Recurrent pregnancies deteriorate the health of Nnu Ego who gives birth to a stillborn child in her seventh pregnancy at the age of forty. She falls into a state of illness for days and takes a long time to recover.

Nnu Ego suffers all hardships hopeful that her children, especially her sons would grow up and take up the responsibility of looking after her and the family. She is, therefore, broken when her eldest son Oshia, upon whom she had invested a lot of hope, blames her for his miserable childhood while having a high regard for his father who had been away in the warzone. Nnu Ego is soon thoroughly disillusioned as she realizes that children grow to live a life of their own and that she has been foolish all these years in believing that a woman attains joy and fulfilment only by producing children and mothering them. Throughout her life, she fails to even think of herself as an individual separate from her children. When they grow

up, she helplessly witnesses them choosing a path of their own, where she, as a mother, seems to have no significant role or position in their lives. Oshia becomes so completely self-centred that despite the considerably good income that he earns in the U.S., he refuses to support the education of his younger brothers or sisters. He states rather rudely to his father that he cannot take up the responsibility of looking after his parents or siblings, as was expected of the eldest son in an Igbo family. Nnaife is furious at Oshia on whom he had spent most of the money he had earned fighting for the Britishers at warfront. Nnaife is more offended when Kehinde, one of the twin girls, refuses to marry the man chosen for her by her father and tells him that she wishes to marry a Yoruba man, the son of a butcher. Nnu Ego is crushed by the blame unleashed on her by Nnaife whenever her children behave contrary to the expectations of society.

Pointing a shaking finger of blame at Nnu Egu, he threatened: "I have a mind to tell you and your brats to leave this house immediately. I was not created to suffer for you till I die". Understanding was gradually dawning on Nnu Ego. She could guess that his anger was connected with the children. She was becoming fed up of this two-way standard. When the children were good, they belonged to the father; when they were bad, they belonged to the mother. Every woman knew this; but for Nnaife to keep hurling it in her face at the slightest provocation was very unfair. (206)

Finally, when Kehinde elopes with the Yoruba man, a furious and offended Nnaife rushes to their house with a cutlass and wounds one of the Yoruba men there. He is arrested by the police and sentenced to imprisonment for a period of five years. However, it is later decided that he be released after three months.

Nnu Ego realizes that she no longer has the strength to bear the wrath of Nnaife or to indulge in any strenuous tasks to look after her children. She therefore decides to return to Ibuza before Nnaife is released from jail. She wonders where she has gone wrong all these years. She had always thought that “children made a woman. She had had children, nine in all, and luckily seven were alive, much more than many women of that period could boast of” (219). However, she realizes that she has never been really happy. Unlike women in Ibuza, who would gather for gossip and laughter on market days, or enthusiastically join in dance and celebrations of their traditional festivities, Nnu Ego in Lagos could not afford to have even friendship with any woman. “What with worrying over this child, this pregnancy, and the lack of money, coupled with the fact that she never had adequate outfits to wear to visit her friends, she had shied away from friendship, telling herself that she did not need any friends, she had enough in her family” (219). Without friends, family, or an understanding husband in Nnaife, Nnu Ego’s dedicated life for her children renders her a pitiable woman who feels tormented on realizing that she has neither her husband nor any of her children to rely upon in her old age. She finds herself a lonely being in Lagos and decides to return to Ibuza. Taiwo, her daughter, is quickly married to her suitor who is a well-educated man. The bride price received is utilized to pay Adim’s fee for a year and the rest is deposited in the post office for him to support himself. The twin girls, Taiwo and Kehinde, are happy in their new homes. Taiwo and her husband offer to raise Obiageli, one of the second set of twin girls Nnu Ego had. The other girl Malachi and a son Nnamdio go with their mother to Ibuza. Nnu Ego’s second son, the sixteen-year-old Adim, who is a more understanding child, tells his mother before she leaves for Ibuza: “What’s more, you need a little rest, Mother. You have worked

too hard all your life. You have to join your age-group at home, dress upon Eke days and go and dance in the markets. It's going to be a good life for you. Don't saddle yourself with so many children" (222). Adim's voice echoes a bit of significant advice to all women living with the assumption that a woman needs only "the joys of motherhood" to survive.

The problem with Nnu Ego may be identified in her inability to make a strong decision for herself. Even though Nnaife provided economic support to the family whenever he could, he fails to acknowledge, appreciate, or respect the efforts of his wife who has to spend a major part of her life raising their children all alone. Nnu Ego, however, cannot be labelled a passive victim. She is furious at Nnaife for his irresponsible, insensitive disposition and his thoughtlessness in taking more wives when they were struggling to find proper accommodation or food for their own growing family. It is only because of her fortitude and indomitable spirit that she is able to survive all challenges alone in a city where she has no one else to rely upon.

Her character is often contrasted with the character of her co-wife Adaku. Though a majority of studies glorify Adaku as an empowered 'new woman', this thesis argues that in the character of Adaku, one can recognize the self-assuredness of a traditional Igbo woman who refuses to tolerate a husband who has failed to respect her dignity or appreciate her efforts. Adaku is completely frustrated as the wife of an impulsive, discourteous man like Nnaife. Living in the one-room apartment with the senior wife Nnu Ego and her children, she is constantly humiliated and devalued by the people for her inability to produce sons. She therefore breaks all shackles of patriarchy by choosing to become a prostitute and

lives a fearless life in Lagos. With the money she earns, she rents a good house, prospers in her trade and is able to enrol her two girls in a boarding school, for she does not want her children to experience the miserable life of submitting to the inhuman doctrines of patriarchy. Nnu Ego, who did not want to be a prostitute, had little choice before her. The only possibility open before her was to decide to return to Ibuza with her children so that she would not have to burden herself with living in a rented house and meeting with all expenses in a city ruled by colonizers. Nnu Ego, however, fails to make such decisions and continues to suffer a relationship wherein she is hardly loved or recognized for all her sacrifices and efforts.

In her final days in Ibuza, Nnu Ego drifts into a state of melancholy and her senses give way as she fails to hear from her eldest son Oshia in America or from the second son Adim who had also moved to Canada. Finally, one night, she dies lying by the roadside “with no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to her. She had never really made many friends, so busy had she been building up her joys as a mother” (224). It is only at death that she is visited by all her children including Oshia who throws a huge sum of money at her burial ceremony to show the world what a good son he is. Even a shrine is made in her honour so that young women could appeal to her to make them fertile like her.

It could be argued that in Nnu Ego’s homeland of Ibuza her experiences as both a mother and a woman would have entailed a comparatively lesser degree of adversity in comparison to the challenges she had to encounter in the urban environment. The concept of other mothering within her native milieu would have afforded her a more conducive environment to raise her children, characterized by better spatial, temporal, and societal advantages. However, the idea of privileging a

woman who has mothered a son over a woman who has mothered a daughter is again a debilitating Igbo practice that Emecheta elucidates.

Emecheta reveals her scepticism towards the whole notion of the joys of motherhood when she concludes the novel by stating that however much people prayed for children, Nnu Ego “did not answer prayers for children (224). Through Nnu Ego’s life, Emecheta exhorts all women to value themselves as individuals and to be conscious of their existence outside the roles of daughter, wife and most importantly, the whims around their position and responsibilities as biological mothers of sons. Emecheta shows how during the colonial phase of urbanisation, motherhood as an institution failed to ensure support and privileges to Igbo women. The labour of mothering shifted from a community responsibility to the responsibility of the biological mother alone and dismantled the women-centred networks that were the real strength of the mothers in Igboland.

The study recognizes that despite these challenges in the postcolonial period, Igbo women at all times have respected women’s procreative ability and have believed that motherhood as an experience is empowering to women. Kim Anderson claims that despite the Western incursions, the “native women and communities are crafting experiences and ideologies of mothering as strategies of resistance, reclamation and recovery” (762). Igbo mothers devised their own strategies and refused to be enfeebled by the patriarchal and colonial ideologies regarding womanhood and motherhood. In women-centred networks and in the experience of being blood mothers and other mothers, the Igbo women could see a great strength of sisterhood which in turn has encouraged them to delve into community mothering and social activism. Patricia Hill Collins considers this as another enduring theme in



the African ideology of motherhood. Collins observes, “Black women’s experiences as othermothers have provided a foundation for Black women’s social activism. Black women’s feelings of responsibility for nurturing the children in their own extended family networks have stimulated a more generalised ethic of care where Black women feel accountable to all the Black community’s children” (280).

It is the power of this female unity and a strong sense of community mothering that safeguard the children, nurse the wounded, strengthen the aged, and resist the exploitation of fellow-women at the hands of ruthless soldiers and politicians during the Nigerian Civil War. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explores the strength of this female power in her war-based text *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which has been analysed in detail in the following chapter on war. There are several instances in the novel which reveal the female power in Igboland. For instance, when Olanna and her family are dislocated from their home during the war, they shift to a small lodging in a region that has been occupied by several such people. Women like Mama Oji, Mama Adanna, Alice, and Olanna are all representatives of the multiple ways in which people suffer on account of such political instability. Adichie reveals how such challenges render the Igbo women very agile and encourage them to rely on their collective power to support each other and bring about stability in their society. For instance, when Professor Ezeke sends to Olanna essentials like dried milk, tea, biscuits, Ovaltine, cartons of sugar and bags of salt, she is generous enough to share some with less fortunate ones. Women feel responsible for the health and safety of the children and are concerned about children being affected by diseases like malaria and kwashiorkor. Olanna is also worried about the deteriorating memory power of the children whose mental health is affected by the growing hunger and unending chaos around them. This provokes her to bring

together the children and engage them in learning something so that their minds remain alert. Her thoughts and actions reveal the commitment of Igbo women to the children of their community.

Her sister Kainene too emerges as a social activist committed to risking her own life to support the sick and hungry refugees of the Biafran war. As an efficient businesswoman, she runs a refugee camp and ensures the supplies of food to the people. She also launches a 'Plant Our Own Food' movement to ensure that her people do not go hungry in case the supply of food stops due to the uncertainties of war. It is this social commitment that later urges Kainene to get involved in a risky trade with women in the enemy territory. She risks her own life to feed the hungry refugees in her camp, and unfortunately, never returns home. Kainene thus represents the altruistic spirit of the Igbo women who would unhesitatingly risk their own lives to sustain the lives of the children and the destitute. Her disappearance is a tribute to all the women and mothers in Igboland who lost their lives in the Biafran war trying to rescue the numerous lives dependent on them.

Adichie also explores the possibility of men undertaking the task of mothering in Igboland. In traditional Igbo society, mothering was considered to be the responsibility of women alone and as discussed in this chapter, women would assume the role of bloodmothers, othermothers, or community mothers, and would together safeguard the life and health of those dependent on them. As Collins observes "Motherhood whether, bloodmother, othermother or community other mother can be invoked by Black mother as a symbol of power" (281). While Adichie explores all these themes in her novel, she strongly feels that care labour is a responsibility that ought to be shared by both men and women alike. In her much-

acclaimed epistolary manifesto *Dear Ijeawele, Or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017), Adichie emphasizes the significance of effacing the gender divide with regard to the task of mothering, and the necessity to share domestic responsibilities among men and women. In one of the fifteen suggestions made to her friend Ijeawele about how to raise her newborn daughter as a feminist, Adichie writes that both Ijeawele and her husband Chudi should be involved in the labour of caregiving equally. She writes:

Well, a father is as much a verb as a mother. Chudi should do everything that biology allows – which is everything but breastfeeding. Sometimes mothers, so conditioned to be all and do all, are complicit in diminishing the role of fathers. You might think that Chudi will not bathe her exactly as you'd like, that he might not wipe her bum as perfectly as you do. But so what? What is the worst that can happen? She won't die at the hands of her father. So look away, arrest your perfectionism. Still your socially conditioned sense of duty. Share child care equally. (11-12)

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, however, Baby's father Odenigbo is occupied with the complexities of war as child care is largely done by Olanna and Ugwu. While in Nwapa's *Efuru*, it is the little girl Ogea who comes as a maid to look after Efuru's daughter Ogonim, Adichie visualizes a young village boy named Ugwu to do the women-specific roles like housekeeping, cooking, and child-rearing. In the character of Ugwu, Adichie makes a brave attempt to reject the traditional gender roles and expectations and reveals how even men can efficiently manage domestic affairs and childcare responsibilities contrary to what the society has always tried to assert. According to Barbara Jilek, "The fact that Ugwu obviously performs his caring tasks

with great devotion and that Baby returns Ugwu's affection challenges the naturalizing discourses. A biological mother-child connection is no longer portrayed as the ideal foundation of a child's healthy upbringing and women's superior suitability for childrearing is questioned" (4). The sincerity and efficiency with which Ugwu feeds, bathes, sings, plays and takes care of Baby underscores the irrationality in the preconceived notions regarding ideal gender roles. Through the character of Ugwu, Adichie hopes to bring about a revolutionary change in the society by breaking all confines around the socially constructed notions of gender roles. As the female characters bravely venture into the dangers of war-torn public spaces and male-dominated territories, there has to be an equal amount of male participation in domestic space as well. As Sarah Ruddick puts it in "Maternal Thinking":

It is now argued that the most revolutionary change we can make in the institution of motherhood is to include men equally in every aspect of childcare. When men and women live together with children, it seems not only fair but deeply moral that they share in every aspect of childcare. To prevent or excuse men from maternal practice is to encourage them to separate public action from private affection, the privilege of parenthood from its cares. (107-108)

Adichie's work renders a note of optimism towards the realization of this "revolutionary change" in postcolonial Igboland and one can assume that her idea of co-parenting springs from the Igbo concept of other mothering and community othermothering.

The experiences of mothers as represented in the selected texts of the three writers reveal that motherhood as an institution and as an experience depends on several socio-political, economic and cultural conditions. The study reveals that though a woman was respected on account of her motherhood in precolonial Igboland, women endured several instances of humiliation, physical abuse and mental agony on account of childlessness and preference for male progeny. In the traditional polygamous family mothering was a women-specific job; the labour of raising a child was done by co-wives, grandmothers, and elderly women in the family. The traditional Igbos recognized that mothering cannot be the responsibility of the biological mother alone. The only obligatory responsibility of the biological mother was to lactate their infants. All other care labour would be shared by other women in the family so that the biological mother had time to do her trade and make her own money; she could attend women's meetings and join all festivities and celebrations.

However, in Lagos, where the Igbos migrated for job opportunities during the colonial period in Nigeria, the care labour involved in mothering turned out to be deeply demanding and exhausting. Colonialism and Christianity enforced marriages in church and replaced polygamy with monogamy, thereby substituting the joint family system with nuclear families. However, no alternate arrangements were thought of for assisting the biological mothers with the task of mothering. Colonialism put an end to the gender complementarity among the Igbos and insisted that women be relegated to the domestic space alone. Urbanisation and European markets affected the traditional modes of income through agriculture and trade, and the Igbo men felt enervated doing domestic duties or trivial jobs for their white masters. As for women, the absence of co-wives and lack of awareness with regard

to contraceptive methods resulted in frequent pregnancies that kept them occupied with the demanding task of mothering all alone. As Igbo men's income was always at the mercy of the colonial masters, women found it difficult to meet with their own needs and those of their children, and they were compelled to venture into some kind of trade or business along with their little children. This greatly deteriorated the health and happiness of Igbo women who gradually stopped experiencing the joys of motherhood as in traditional Igboland.

The study, thus, insists that despite all these challenges, motherhood still remains central to the lives of women in Africa. African women consider motherhood as empowering and central to their lives. Though the works produced by male writers are often criticized for the undue idealisation of a woman in the name of her procreative ability, a majority of African feminist scholars and writers recognize that motherhood did secure power and position for women in the African societies and attempt to reinstate the glory of mothering, while simultaneously effacing the patriarchal atrocities that relegate women to the margins in the name of motherhood.

The experiences of traditional African women as mothers are evidently different from the motherhood experiences of Western women whose very freedom of movement, the potential for socio-economic participation, and ardour for individual fulfilment were trivialised before their greater responsibility towards bearing and rearing children. Patricia Hill Collins discards the Western assumption that "motherhood and economic dependency on men are linked and that to be a 'good' mother one must stay at home, making motherhood a full-time occupation..." (275). It is often such impositions that lead to serious psychological

implications and frustration in the upper-class and middle-class women of Western countries, which Betty Frieden described as “the problem that has no name” (5). To the women in pre-colonial Africa, however, motherhood was never an obstacle that hindered their socio-political participation or economic inclusivity in the public domain. Mothers were treated with great respect and enjoyed several privileges in society. Remi Akujobi studies the significance of motherhood in African culture and literature and observes that “Feminists in Africa, while conceding that motherhood may at times operate in an oppressive manner, have tried to read many meanings to motherhood, meanings that are empowering for women” (4).

The female characters in the selected texts of Nwapa, Emecheta and Adichie reveal how becoming a biological mother is only one aspect of a woman’s life. The inability to produce a child or the choice of not becoming a biological mother does not render any woman inefficient or weak in any way, as may be seen in the case of characters like Efuru, Amaka, Olanna and Kainene analysed in this study. Neither does a woman become successful or fulfilled simply by becoming a bloodmother to many children, as observed in the case of Amala in *Half of a Yellow Sun* or Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood*. Mothering, thus, as a care labour, should be glorified as a combined effort of both men and women, both biological and non-biological, for nurturing healthy and efficient progenies for the socio-political transformation and economic self-sufficiency of a nation. Unlike Western women, a majority of African women will continue to consider motherhood and mothering as empowering because they believe in the multiple possibilities of biological mothering or bloodmothering, othermothering, and community mothering, which operate through strong women-centred networks and equally strong male partaking in the present, enabling the pursuit of broader objectives directed towards communal well-being.

## Chapter 4

### Women in the Shadow of Biafra

The continent of Africa saw one of the worst faces of mankind consequent to the ‘divide and rule’ policies tacitly implemented by the Westerners, leading to some of the most brutal and bloody chapters in the history of different African nations. The civil wars, genocides, and incessant political turbulence in countries like Sudan, Nigeria, Uganda, Rwanda, Liberia, Mozambique, Kenya, Congo, and Zimbabwe, to list a few, reveal the latent complicity of Western power that led to miserable poverty, displacement, hunger and innumerable episodes of gruesome massacres within the continent. The themes of war, bloodshed, politics, corruption, nationalism, and ethnic identities became *de rigueur* in literature written by African male authors and critics, but the experiences and contributions of women who bravely fought these harsh times were conveniently ignored or misrepresented in many of the mainstream literary texts. In her study of war-time experiences of women, Gloria Chuku notices that “in fictional and nonfictional accounts of war, especially those written by men, women are often peripheralized or stereotypically represented as passive spectators and victims of armed conflicts” (Chuku, “Women and the Nigeria-Biafra War” 329). Women writers like Flora Nwapa, who attempted to give a positive representation to women, were often overlooked by male critics who considered the crux of women’s literature to be an irrelevant “feminist propagandizing” (Chuku, “Women and the Nigeria-Biafra War” 329). This chapter, therefore, attempts to deconstruct the general notion that war is predominantly a male enterprise and that women remain passive victims of male atrocities in times of



war. The analyses focus on Flora Nwapa's *Never Again* (1975) and her short-story collection *Wives at War and Other Stories* (1980), Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982), and Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006).

The selected war narratives are examined to understand and recognize the experiences and contributions of Igbo women during the Nigerian-Biafran War or the Nigerian Civil War of 1967. It borrows insights from the historical texts on the Biafran War authored by Nigerian and Biafran historiographers and scholars, to understand how the three Igbo women writers have reflected and represented the incidents of the war and its impact on the lives of Igbo women. They render a female version spanning the turbulent period between 1967-70, when the ethnically plural country of Nigeria, was literally transformed into a gory warzone paraded by brutal murderers in uniform, wreaking havoc around and scattering corpses of their own people in the name of ethnic and political supremacy. The political figures and military forces that emerged after Nigeria's independence in 1960, turned out to be too voracious for power and position, and curtly became too conscious of their ethnic differences, thrusting the infant country to a point of vicious secession by 1967. The growing corruption among the political leaders and the uneven distribution of wealth among different ethnic groups provoked the military to overthrow the newly formed government for a better Nigeria.

Donald L. Horowitz observes that "ethnic conflict is a world-wide phenomenon" (3) which took a new turn with colonial disempowerment. During the colonial period, the chief concern of all oppressed ethnic groups was liberation from the tyrannical colonial powers. However, following independence, the ethnic groups

began to overtly proclaim their abhorrence for each other in an attempt to establish ethnic supremacy in the newly independent states. Ethnic affiliation in ethnically divided states became problematic because of the constant struggle among the ethnic groups to pervade into all major socio-political and administrative aspects of the state. Horowitz states:

In societies where ethnicity suffuses organizational life, virtually all political events have ethnic consequences. Where parties break along ethnic lines, elections are divisive. Where armed forces are ethnically fragmented, military coups, ostensible to quell disorder or to end corruption, may be made to secure the power of some ethnic groups at the expense of others.”

(12)

The three major ethnic groups in Nigeria namely the Hausa, the Yoruba, and the Igbos were involved in the coup that aimed to overthrow the government to end corruption and establish military rule in Nigeria. However, it turned out that most of the coup plotters were Igbos and most of those killed were non-Igbos; most of the Igbo political leaders also survived the coup. This triggered great unrest in the North, dominated by the Hausas, and led to a counter-coup in July 1966 in which the Igbo Head of the State, Aguiyi Ironsi, and several Igbo army officers were killed. It also led to a pogrom against the Igbo in the North, in which an estimated 30,000 Igbos and others of Eastern Nigerian origin were killed (Adibe 4-5).

Following these assaults, Colonel Emeka Ojukwu, the military governor of Eastern Nigeria refused to acknowledge Col. Gowon from the Middle Belt as the Head of the State and declared the Eastern part of Nigeria as an independent nation,

the Republic of Biafra. Nigeria, which would not let go of the rich oil reserve in the East, resorted to inhuman ways of brutality and murder until it finally forced the seceded state to merge with the rest of Nigeria in January 1970. “Nigeria’s civil war was one of Africa’s first. The degree of bloodshed and impact on civilians shocked the world.... On 12 January 1970, Biafra surrendered. The civil war gravely damaged Nigeria’s economy and reputation” (Falola and Genova xxxvii).

The decades following the war witnessed the emergence of several memoirs, reflections, and realistic fiction centred on the causes and consequences of the horrendous chapter in Nigerian history smudged with bloodshed, violence, murder, starvation, undernourishment, epidemics, and other ailments accountable for the “estimated one to three million deaths” (Heerten and Moses 3). Chinua Achebe’s *Girls at War and Other Stories* (1972), his memoir *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (2012), Chukwuemeka Ike’s *Sunset at Dawn* (1976), Isidore Okpewho’s *The Last Duty* (1976), Cyprian Ekwensi’s *Divided We Stand* (1980) and Elechi Amadi’s *Sunset in Biafra* (1982), are regarded as few of the most defining works addressing the horrors of war. It is, however, disappointing to discern that none of these male-authored works on the Biafran War reflect substantially on the unswerving endurance put forth by the Igbo women during the period.

According to Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, this apparent silence of African women in literature is not because they are voiceless, but because one fails to listen to their voices “in the sites and forms in which these voices are uttered” (*Recreating Ourselves* 11). Nwapa, Emecheta, and Adichie, venture to recover these unheard

voices and unshared experiences of women in the Nigerian Civil War, with an ingenious and remarkable mastery of narration. Though the fictional account of the war, as rendered by the three writers, reveals distinction with regard to narrative style, plot construction, and characterization, they stay united in their effort to capture the voices of women who lived through one of the most brutal periods in the history of Nigeria. The narratives recount how, despite witnessing the ruthless persecutions and murder of their men and children by the Nigerian army, despite being orphaned or widowed or raped by the military, the Igbo women remained resolute to strive ahead bravely for the survival of their petrified children and perplexed elders in the midst of vandalism, displacement, starvation, and diseases.

Flora Nwapa's *Never Again* narrates the experiences of Igbo women in Umuahia who are unwilling to forgo their hopes about the new nation and continue to adhere to their faith in the Lake Goddess Uhamiri who, they believe, would save them from the Nigerian vandals. *Never Again* is a first-person narrative that takes the readers through the course of all chaos, commotions, and unpredictability during a war period. The female protagonist Kate may be seen as a representative of the African woman's perseverance and fortitude signifying "how tenaciously could one hold on to life when death was around the corner" (Nwapa 1). *Wives at War and Other Stories* is also a very carefully conceived and powerfully constructed set of tales that subvert the victimised and passive images of Igbo women, and reveal them to be socio-politically conscious women, determined to assert their rights to be heard and recognized as fellow human beings. Unlike Emecheta and Adichie, Nwapa had a first-hand experience of war and so wanted to tell the world that the experience of

war was different from reading about it or listening to an account of it in history classes (Nwapa, *Never Again* 1). Buchi Emecheta, the iconic Nigerian literary figure, foregrounds women of potent personality and indestructible audacity in her 1982 novel *Destination Biafra*, which she pronounces to be a “historical fiction” (“Note to the reader” ix). Emecheta, who was a student in London at the time of the civil war, originally hailed from a remote land named “Ibuza in the Mid-West, a little town near Asaba, where the worst atrocities of the war took place” (“Author’s Foreword” vii). She dedicates this work to her friends and relatives who were victims of the war. Her work stands apart largely because of the direct involvement of the female protagonist, Debbie Ogedemgbe, in the Nigerian military service. Similarly, Adichie also writes to project the traumatic memory of her people who had lost much in the war. *Half of a Yellow Sun* differs from the other two war narratives primarily in its intermingling of love and war in the plot. Adichie who was born only ten years after the outbreak of the Biafran war holds that she “grew up in the shadow of Biafra” (“The Stories of Africa” 2), having lost both her grandfathers in the war. She says that she had always wanted to write a novel about Biafra for several reasons:

I wrote this novel because... I wanted to engage with my history in order to make sense of my present, because many of the issues that led to the war remain unresolved in Nigeria today, because my father has tears in his eyes when he speaks of losing his father, because my mother still cannot speak at length about losing her father in a refugee camp, because the brutal bequests of colonialism make me angry, because the thought of the egos and

indifference of men leading to the unnecessary deaths of men and women and children enrages me, because I don't ever want to forget. ("The Stories of Africa" 2)

Adichie, who was acclaimed by Chinua Achebe as a writer "endowed with the gift of ancient storytellers" (Nunziata "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie") captures the political and personal lives of her characters carefully delineating their emotions, vulnerability, desperation, struggles, hopes and strength with a lucid intellect and compassion.

War is a period when women go through terrible miseries, agonies, challenges, and inequalities. According to Jodi York, "War, with its necessary death, misogyny, homophobia, and economic inequities, provide a primary impediment to women's equality anywhere in the world" (24). York traces the long-running debates in Western culture with regard to the "dichotomy between 'women's peace' and 'men's war'" (19). She observes that women's invocation for peace has traditionally been ascribed to the predominant motherly instinct governing them. Motherhood renders them "inherently concerned about peace because of their special connection to life preservation and moral guidship" (19). York notices that activists like Helen Caldicott and Anna Shaw, and writers like Sarah Ruddick have emphasized this "motherist position" (20) as responsible for women's insistence on peace. Contrary to asserting such biological differences, cultural feminists argue that it is culture and socialization that mould the psychosocial development of men and women in an antithetical way wherein "women's psychosocial development prepares them to be connected caretakers. Men's psychosocial development prepares

them to be individuated competitors. The prevalence of this masculine mentality leads to war. Therefore, war can be averted by promoting the female mentality” (York 21). The cultural feminists were, however, critiqued for their apparent emphasis on the masculine-feminine dichotomy as defined by patriarchy which privileges the former while attempting to degrade the latter.

York observes how critics like Laura Duhan Kaplan hold that such a dichotomous understanding of the potential of men and women often tend to completely ignore women’s crucial involvement and valiant contributions “in supporting the war system” (York 22). The motherist and cultural feminist arguments were further challenged by ecofeminists who argued that “exploitation characterizes the relationship between men and either women or the Earth – the latter are there to be used and conquered” (York 22). York considers the arguments put forth by the ecofeminists to be the most compelling validation for why women, more than men, value peace. “These reasons have nothing to do with who she feels like she is, what her gender means to her, or how she feels about patriarchy. It is an argument of simple arithmetic: women pay for war. Whether you look at economics, families, refugees, or war casualties, the costs of war are borne disproportionately by women and their children” (23). This seems to be a prominent reason why war and post-war life constitute acute physical and emotional agony to women. And this also seems to be the reason why historically women, rather than men, have often stood for peace. York adds:

It’s not exclusively their domain, but since they pay the primary price when peace is absent, women have a particular interest in pursuing peace. Peace

has been viewed as a women's issue for nearly as long as there has been war. But the reasons have shifted through time, as have the danger and the ways in which wars are fought. Perhaps, now more than ever, peace is something women need to pursue: it stands between them and their goals, even when those objectives are as disparate as getting adequate nutrition on the one hand, and breaking through glass ceilings on the other. (24-25)

The observations made by York reveal how war and similar socio-political instability tend to affect the lives of women in numerous ways. It accentuates their anxieties about the safety of the people, especially children, and adversely affects her efforts towards self-realization.

The narratives by Nwapa, Emecheta, and Adichie reveal that during the Nigeria-Biafra War of 1967, several factors affected the lives of Igbo women and made them desperate for peace and stability. It was not simply because they were enfeebled by their motherly instincts or because they were psychosocially moulded to be everyone's caretakers. Despite standing firm for the Biafran cause and often risking their own lives for the survival of the starving children and weary elders, the Igbo women, especially the educated ones, grew sceptical of the war because they soon realized that the battle between Nigeria and Biafra was only a repercussion of the egotistical rivalry among different ethnic leaders, whose gluttony for wealth and power was being exploited by foreign rival nations. Women feel stranded due to the reckless, hasty political decisions of the men in Nigeria, who romanticized war despite the irreplaceable fatalities and apparent futilities of the war.



In Nwapa's *Never Again*, Kate is represented as an insightful woman who senses all impending danger and is thoroughly disillusioned when men in power refuse to make sensible decisions despite the massive surge in the enormity of physical, material, and economic loss for the Biafrans. She remembers the time when the Igbo-occupied Eastern region, which had declared itself to be the Republic of Biafra, had initially instilled great hopes as an ethnically united nation with an inspiring and promising future. People were overwhelmed as they listened to the national anthem of Biafra that professed their deep love, reverence, and faith in "the land of the rising sun" ("The Biafran National Anthem"). However, such ardent nationalistic fervour soon gives way to disillusionment and despair. She is sarcastic about the seething confidence and searing spirit of the Biafran men including her husband, and feels frustrated at the dishonesty of the political leaders and military who vigilantly safeguard their own lives while forsaking the innocent civilians and unarmed young soldiers to perish at the hands of the enemies. Kate is practical when she observes:

Words were impotent. Biafra could not win a civil war by mere words. How I longed to say that to Ojukwu. But who was I? And besides, it was too late, too damn late. We had already lost the war. We lost the war when we lost Port Harcourt. It was sheer madness fighting after Port Harcourt. All right-thinking people knew this. What we should have done was surrender. Surrender; nobody in Biafra could say that word openly and remain alive. (Nwapa, *Never Again* 23-24)

Kate is very sure that if the war continued for another year, they would all suffer from hunger and other ailments, and their children would suffer from the deadly disease Kwashiorkor, which was “more deadly in Biafra than leprosy” (Nwapa, *Never Again* 25). She is enraged at the Biafran leaders who went on giving wrong news and false hopes to the naive civilians when they clearly knew how starvation and lack of ammunition were to render Biafra an unfulfilled dream. Her husband Chudi and their friend Kal embody the false pride and far-fetched hopes of an entire generation of men, who seemed to be blinded by their virulent impulse for warranting pride and power within Nigeria. Chudi is always angry at his wife whenever the latter suggests evacuating from war-threatened regions. When Kate suggests leaving Port Harcourt sensing the imminent danger, Chudi flares up at her saying, “‘If you think, woman, that we are going to leave Port Harcourt for the Vandals, you are making a great mistake,’ .... ‘We will do no such thing. We will die here rather than leave Port Harcourt’” (Nwapa, *Never Again* 1-2). However, when Port Harcourt falls, Chudi rushes to Umuahia along with his family. In Umuahia too, it is the prescience of women that prepares their family for immediate evacuation, as seen in the case of Kate, her sister-in-law Sue, and their friend Mike’s wife Ifeoma.

Similarly, in Nwapa’s story ‘Daddy, Don’t Strike the Match,’ Mr. Okeke’s wife, Ndidi Okeke, emerges as a very efficient and prudent woman. She keeps telling her husband that Biafra will not be able to survive the war. However, like Chudi, Mr. Okeke too is infuriated by his wife’s calculations. Knowing that her husband would not pay heed to her words, Ndidi takes up the responsibility of safeguarding her family in case of an emergency evacuation. When she is warned by

one of her friends in Kano about the imminent danger to the Igbos, she realizes that she has to do something about it without waiting for her husband who could not be easily persuaded to leave Kano. She approaches some of her people who had come to Kano for some purpose and entrusts them to transport all her things to the flat she had hired in Enugu. She also transfers about two thousand pounds to the bank at Enugu. These groundworks facilitate their evacuation from Kano when the gruesome murder of Igbos is unleashed there.

In "Wives at War" as well, Nwapa discusses the corruption and extravagance of the officials in the military as manifested in the character of Ebo. When Enugu falls during the war, Ebo moves to Port Harcourt where he gets employed in the Department of Military Intelligence. He then buys an unfinished concrete house in Okpara village considering the safety of his family during the war. When he offers to roof the house with zinc, the landlord wonders, "How a man from DMI could, in war time, roof a house when millions starved" (Nwapa, "Wives" 2). He is seen throwing a party for his army officer friends there, forgetting the poverty and misery of the people in his neighbourhood. The villagers turn furious calling him a 'saboteur' and attempt to set the house on fire. When his wife Bisi moves into the house with their three children, she flares up at her husband for his imprudence in flaunting his wealth in a place where there is no sufficient water or food to intake. Later, when Ebo's childhood friend Eze and his wife Adamma seek refuge in Ebo's house, on being evacuated from their house, he demands Eze to pay him ten Nigerian pounds in coins. Bisi feels ashamed and turns frantic at her husband's callousness towards his friend as she clearly knows that her husband is corrupt to the

core. These words clearly mark her integrity and her disapproval of her husband's corrupt ways:

“I ask you; will you eat money? You have a hundred pounds in coins. You gave it to me for safe keeping. What are you doing with your friend's coins? Tonight, you will go to the airport. The plane will bring in your worthless Biafran notes. You and your so-called friends will steal a carton each from the plane before lorries convey the money to the Central Bank.” (Nwapa, “Wives” 13 )

Bisi's words echo the voice of many selfless women during the Biafran war who looked beyond their own misery and desperately wished that the war ended soon.

Likewise, in *Destination Biafra*, Emecheta renders a more assiduous glimpse into women's presumptions and discontent about the war, especially through the character of the protagonist Debbie. As the daughter of the wealthy, corrupt politician Samuel Ogedemgbe and as the beloved of Alan Grey, a handsome and diplomatic English instructor of Nigerian soldiers, Debbie has deep insights into the shrewd political game in Nigeria which engenders a strong sense of nationalism in her. She feels ashamed at the greed, corruption, and deception among the Nigerian political leaders, including her own father, who were continuing to appease the Western forces for their personal gains and ethnic supremacy, whereas a major part of Nigeria was desperately fighting against poverty and poor health conditions. She is suspicious of the political changes taking place in her country after independence. While many of her countrymen are carried away by the prospect of democracy and the formation of a new government, Debbie senses that the British men plan to

continue their rule in Nigeria indirectly. Her friend Barbara Teteku or Babs, who is also in the Nigerian army, is even more insightful and eloquent than her friend. She is quick to sense the horrific tragedy looming behind the innocent civilians wedged between two impulsive and egotistic leaders of Nigeria and Biafra. She rightly observes: “The women and children who would be killed by bombs and guns would simply be statistics, war casualties. But for the soldier-politicians, the traders in arms, who only think of their personal gain, it would be the chance of a lifetime. And the politicians who started it all can pay their way to Europe or America and wait until it has all blown over” (Emecheta, *Destination Biafra* 109).

Like Debbie, Babs expresses concern over the covert ways in which the Western forces, whom she calls “foreign vultures” (117), are scheming to exploit the rich resources in Nigeria by brewing internal tension in the ethnically plural nation. With Britain and the Soviet Union aiding the Nigerian federal troops, and Biafra being occasionally backed by countries like France and China, the causes and consequences of the civil war in Nigeria turn so convoluted that it soon slithers beyond what the Nigerians could resolve. The Nigerian scholar and activist, Osita Ebiem, clearly articulates the extent of the damage when he says:

And for a short two and a half years of indiscriminate and uncontrolled bombings and killings, the combined forces of Nigeria, Great Britain, Soviet Union (Russia), the Arab League and Egypt had used more small arms and ammunition on Biafrans and in Biafra, than all the ones used by the Allied Forces of World War II which lasted for six years. That accounted for the heavy Biafran civilian casualty within the short space of time. (Ebiem 88)

The Igbos were held responsible for the coup of January 1966 that involved the rapid killing of several reputed political and religious leaders in the North and West of Nigeria. The military which consisted of mostly Igbo soldiers had decided to overthrow the government owing to growing corruption, political rivalry, and instability in Nigeria. “The so-called Five Majors who carried out the January 1966 overthrow of the government had federal structure in mind when they struck. From an objective angle there was obviously no sectional or ethnic agenda in the pattern in their putsch” (Ebiem 74). They in fact wanted to take away the power from inefficient leaders and hand it over to Obafemi Awolowo who was not an Igbo, but a Yoruba, whom they believed would be a more efficient and able national leader. However, it turned out that the majority of soldiers in the insurrection were Igbos and those murdered were from other major ethnic groups in the Northern and Western region. Osiba Ebiem rationalizes that the lesser number of Igbo casualties in the coup was “only because Igbo politicians were not in key places at the federal level where the problems identified were going on” (76). The Igbo civilians soon became the target of all major ethnic groups especially the Muslim Hausa-Fulani in the North and the Yorubas in the West, with the Nigerian government leading the “revenge exercise” (Ebiem 77).

The perpetual atrocities on the “infidels” (Adichie 147), as the Igbos were called, forced the Igbos to flee from ruthless Nigerian Federal troops and callous religious fanatics to their homeland in the East. The Nigerian psychologist Christie Achebe, in her study of the Biafran war experiences of Igbo women, observes, “The federal government was the last institution from which the people expected any

help. Therefore, the communities and extended families assumed the awesome responsibility of catering to the social, economic, psychological, and survival needs of those fleeing from this gruesome slaughter to their homelands” (Achebe 792). The fellow Igbos who were settled in the East received their victimised brothers and sisters with great warmth, yet resolved to avenge the irreplaceable physical loss and mental agony that their fellow beings went through in the genocidal course across the territories of Nigeria.

The Nigerian scholar Obi N. Ignasius Ebbe elaborates on the Igbo solidarity in his work *Broken Back Axle: Unspeakable Events in Biafra*, wherein he states:

Many Igbos had lived in Northern Region and Western Region all their lives and forgot to build a retirement home in Eastern Region. During the Igbo exodus from the north and west of Nigeria, every Igboman who had lived all his life in the Eastern Region became his brother’s keeper. As over 65 percent of Igbos were living in the Eastern Region, it was manageable to rehabilitate the Igbo refugees in their own country. Although Igbos were known for culturally nurturing solidarity..., the pogrom against them consolidated Igbo solidarity to a higher zenith. (24)

Adichie’s novel records how this sense of solidarity was greatly strengthened by radio broadcasts of the time. In the novel one finds Odenigbo urging Ugwu to rush to the railway station with some bread and tea when they listen to the ENBC Radio Enugu recount eyewitness account from the North. It voices such fiercely macabre incidents as “...teachers hacked down in Zaria, a full Catholic church in Sokoto set on fire, a pregnant woman split open in Kano” (Adichie 144). The

newscaster announces, “some of our people are coming back now. The lucky ones are coming back. The railway stations are full of our people. If you have tea and bread to spare, please take it to the stations. Help a brother in need” (Adichie 144). Igbo men and women rush to the station to help their brothers and sisters who pathetically climb down the trains with “tired, dusty, bloody” (Adichie 145) and mutilated bodies, struggling to stabilize their traumatized mind or memory from what they had witnessed and experienced all the while.

The fictional representation of this incident is resourcefully presented by Adichie in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The protagonist Olanna, who goes to Kano in the North to bring her expecting cousin Arize for better treatment in Nsukka, tastes the bitterness of religious fanaticism when she finds the lifeless, mutilated bodies of her Uncle Mbaezi and Aunt Ifeka amidst a number of massacred bodies lying all around “like dolls made of cloths” (Adichie 148). Olanna is shocked to realize that these murders were reinforced by their own friend and neighbour Abdulmalik, who had seemed so amiable to Olanna during one of her earlier visits to Kano. It is Mohammed who drags his benumbed friend Olanna into his car and manages to shield her from the vandals, all the while muttering in frenzied disbelief that “Allah will not forgive them. Allah will not forgive the people who have made them do this, Allah will never forgive this” (148). Olanna has even more traumatic experiences in the crowded train into which Mohammed helps her get in. The sight of a little girl’s head in a calabash on the lap of a deranged traumatized mother is one of the most dreadful shocks that Olanna witnesses during her journey to Nsukka, and she soon has bouts of dark swoops which keeps her sick and bed-ridden for



several weeks. A similar horrifying sight also haunts Olanna's twin sister Kainene at Port Harcourt when her steward Ikejide, while desperately fleeing for his life, is beheaded as a piece of shrapnel strikes his head, leaving his headless body running before the final collapse (344).

War trauma affects the victims in many different ways. Nigel C. Hunt examines the psychological effects of war in his work *Memory, War and Trauma*. He states that to some people the memories become so overwhelming that they are unable to lead a normal life and gradually cut off themselves from family and friends. Another group of people are able to forget the traumatic incidents and experiences, and even if they are reminded of these, they manage to suppress them and are able to lead a 'normal' life. There is yet another group who deliberately thinks about the traumatic past and shapes their life ahead in the light of what they learned from the haunting memories and experiences. The last group, according to Hunt, is not traumatised at all and a majority of the trauma victims fall into this category. "They have no difficult emotional memories or problems. They can probably look back at the event and perhaps they get emotional, but it does not really bother them unduly or in a prolonged manner" (Hunt 8). In the war narratives by the three authors selected for study, one gets to see a representation of divergent categories of traumatized people.

In Nwapa's short story "A Certain Death," the narrator's brother is gravely affected when an air raid kills his wife and two children. She recalls that after the incident, he "went off his head. He was still dazed as the remnants of flesh, that were once his wife's and children's, were gathered and put in one hurriedly made

coffin” (Nwapa, *Wives at War* 31). He is unable to speak or eat or sleep, and withdraws to himself, terribly shattered by the trauma. The narrator, on the other hand, loses all her three children in an accident that occurs in Lagos, during the coup of 1966. Consequent to this severe emotional and psychological blow, she and her husband prefer to live away from each other, a strategy they devise to cope up with the tragedy. “A Certain Death” reveals how the character of Ifeoma, the daughter of John and Ndidì Okeke, frequently has nightmares and rushes to her parents in panic, screaming and trying to relate her illogical dreams:

The child was shaking with sobs. ‘They were running after me. They had guns and machetes. They painted their bodies with white chalk. One wanted to shoot me. He aimed his gun at me. Then Francis came in and pointed his toy gun at the soldier. “I will shoot you,” Francis said. Then a big cow came and chased us, and chased us. Daddy, it was a very big cow. It was bigger than this house. I saw it. It was bigger, it was white and had black spots. Then I ran to you. Daddy, I am afraid. (Nwapa, *Wives at War* 20)

Hunt analyses that war affects children in a way different from other civilians and “that can affect the rest of their lives” (Hunt 12). Ifeoma keeps visualizing armed soldiers chasing her with guns, or air raids targeting to destroy her family, and she keeps asking her father desperately, “Daddy, when will they stop this war? I want to go back to Kano, Daddy” (Nwapa, *Wives at War* 20). She always rushes to her father for comfort, sensing, despite her immaturity, that the war can end only if men make rational decisions forgoing egotistical rivalries.

In the same way, the character Kainene, whom Adichie represents as a quite intrepid and impervious character, is also much affected by the gruesome end of her steward Ikejide, running headless when a shrapnel severs his head and the body continues running with a “bloodied neck” (Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun* 317) before ultimately falling down lifeless in front of her. Kainene who numbly watches Richard and Harrison collect the body and head of Ikejide into a plastic bag is rendered emotionally paralysed for some time and finds herself bursting into tears at night. She tells Richard that she wants to dream of Ikejide but every morning she is reminded of “his running headless body clearly while, in the safer blurred territory of her dreams, she saw herself smoking a cigarette in an elegant gold holder” (318). The appalling death of Ikejide before her eyes and the slender escape of others including her, turn out to be a great revelation to Kainene, who realizes more than ever that she has much to do before the unpredictability entailing war effaces her forever, from the war-torn territory of Biafra. Olanna, meanwhile, has bouts of depression after her traumatic experience at Kano. “Her dark swoops were worse on the days she had visitors; sometimes three came in quick succession and left her breathless and exhausted, too exhausted even to cry, and with only enough energy to swallow the pills Odenigbo slips into her mouth” (157). Though she gradually recuperates, she is occasionally confronted with the images of her murdered relatives in Kano and the child’s head in the calabash during her return to Nsukka in the train crammed with refugees from Kano. When Odenigbo raises his hand while rendering a speech at a gathering, Olanna is reminded of the twisted hands of her Aunt Ifeka, lying in a pool of blood that “looked like glue, not red, but close to

black” (163). Olanna shakes her head in an attempt to shake away the thoughts and holds Baby close to her, to feel sheltered in the warmth of unwavering love.

In *Women and Conflict in The Nigerian Civil War*, Professor Egodi Uchendu investigates the Biafran war experiences of Igbo women in the Anioma region and attempts to illustrate the ordeals and “challenges they grapple with, during episodes of violence and civil strife” (2). Based on her interview with the survivors of the war and the relatives of the victims, Uchendu analyses the vulnerability of women during wartime. She discusses how women are challenged by starvation and epidemics in times of war, and how it exhausts them physically and mentally as they feel compelled by their sense of responsibility to provide for the sick, wounded, and destitute. Uchendu observes, “Countries facing war situations automatically inherit a state of emergency. War and a state of emergency heighten privations and make it all the more difficult for women to cope with their enlarged responsibilities. Searching for food with which to feed their dependents becomes strenuous and demanding. If women are forced to flee their homes, their burdens exacerbate” (Uchendu, *Women and Conflict* 2).

This burden of fleeing and displacement has been captured extensively in Flora Nwapa’s *Never Again*. Through the first-person narrative account of Kate, the novel traces the plight of the Biafrans compelled to flee from one location to another fearing the advancement of the Nigerian military. Nwapa draws our attention to the plight of wartime dislocation when she observes in the opening lines of the novel: “After fleeing from Enugu, Onitsha, Port Harcourt, and Elele, I was thoroughly tired of life. Yet how tenaciously could one hold on to life when death was around the

corner!” (Nwapa, *Never Again* 1). Fear of death forces Kate and her husband Chudi to leave Port Harcourt along with their five children, and they find refuge in their home in Ugwuta, from where the inhabitants are forced to flee a few months later as the Nigerian military makes its advancement to the region. Madame Agafa who bewails hysterically at her own fate and the fate of Ugwuta, who refuses to be consoled despite being told that her children are at safe places, the pregnant woman who breathes her last at childbirth, and the mad man Ezekoro who aggressively chides everyone for forsaking Ugwuta, are all grim faces of deserted human lives imbued with inexplicable emotions of fear and bewilderment.

A parallel situation is seen in Adichie’s novel when Ugwu finds himself and his master’s family fleeing from the enemy invasion into Nsukka. From Nsukka they reach Abba, and from Abba, they again run to Umuahia and live in a house that Ugwu finds quite “unworthy of Master” (Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun* 196). However, both Odenigbo and Olanna seem complacent with the house as they realize that “the scarcity is serious” (Adichie 197), and that it is a luxury to get a house for themselves when a majority of people are sharing houses and lodgings. Such complacency is yet short-lived as their lives are constantly under the threat of the Nigerians who keep exterminating the Igbos through air raids, shelling, and other means of weaponry imported from the West. Fear of death keeps haunting Olanna, who shudders every time she hears a loud or mild sound. She imagines that there will be more air raids and bombs will roll out of planes and explode. She quivers at the thought that the bomb will kill them all before they can escape to the bunker constructed by Odenigbo for their safety. Her insecurities throw light on the constant

sense of fear affecting ordinary people, especially women, in times of war, rendering them doubtful of their ability to safeguard their children and others dear to them.

Such scenes of exodus and panic can be found in Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* as well. Through the challenges encountered by the protagonist Debbie Ogedemgbe, in a mission that she undertakes to end the war, Emecheta gives a very poignant description of the physical and emotional miseries of the Igbo women and children, especially those living in the Igbo territory west to the Niger River. The novel gives a very graphic description of the seizure of a vehicle in Asaba and the subsequent atrocities unleashed on the Igbos who boarded it:

Women, dazed with shock, still stared unbelievably as they saw Lawal ordering the jeeps, trucks and ambulances to run over the bodies of more than two hundred men. 'We don't want it known that they have been shot. Run over them many times and clean up the roads.' Over two thousand Ibo men died along the Benin Asaba road on "Operation Mosquito". But as they say, that was war. (Emecheta, *Destination Biafra* 177)

Packed to the tailboard of a mammy wagon and traumatized by the cold-blooded murder of their men and young children, the journey ahead holds innumerable challenges for the women in the group which include two pregnant ladies as well. One of these ladies gives birth to a baby boy and soon succumbs to death. The newborn, who is left behind in the care of Debbie and other women, is symbolically named Biafra after the newborn nation, their destination, Biafra. After their journey begins on foot, it becomes so tedious that sick, pregnant, and old ladies are left behind. The single group later scatters into smaller groups for safety, and

Debbie joins a group that includes Baby Biafra, four boys whose mother had stayed behind, a woman and her six children, and the Madako family which includes Uzoma and her three children. Throughout their unending journey along dense forests, hiding breathless behind thick bushes, and even while waddling through the swamp into which they accidentally fall running from soldiers at night, the women strive to uphold their strength of mind, despite heart-rending setbacks such as the death of a few sick and starving children including Baby Biafra, which seemed to portend infant nation Biafra's impending defeat as well. Emecheta seamlessly weaves in the micronarrative of the baby and the macro narrative of the fate of Biafra to drive home the point with greater emphasis.

Unlike Nwapa or Adichie, Emecheta specifically focuses on the Asaba Massacre of October 1967 which is still regarded as one of the bloodiest chapters of the Nigerian Civil War. Emecheta, an Ibuza woman from Asaba dedicates *Destination Biafra* to the memory of several of her relatives, friends, and all Ibuza women and children who were mercilessly killed in the massacre of 1967. Although located on the western bank of River Niger, the inhabitants in the city of Asaba are basically Igbos. The city came under the threat of the federal troops when the Biafran leader Ojukwu frantically commanded the soldiers to invade the mid-west including Lagos. In retaliation, the well-armed Nigerian army began a frantic pursuit to efface all supporters of Biafra and entered the city of Asaba on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1967. The atrocities unleashed in Asaba have been recounted by Egoji Uchendu in her work *Women and Conflict in The Nigerian Civil War*, a study of Anioma women in the region. Uchendu analyses how “until the end of the war, women in Anioma were

subjected to untold brutality by federal troops. The subsequent decimation of men in Anioma in the course of the conflict left the women unprotected and vulnerable. They had to devise means of coping with the war and its aftermath” (Uchendu 8).

Emecheta’s novel recounts the events through the course of Debbie’s mission to Biafra. When Debbie and the other refugees reach Asaba, they sense great relief as they have reached very close to their destination, Biafra, which is separated from Asaba only by a bridge. However, in Asaba, they sense a looming danger as the place is ransacked by the Nigerian soldiers who are informed that the Asaba people are giving shelter to the Biafran soldiers who had retreated from the west. This is proved right when the Biafran soldiers finally manage to cross the bridge to Biafra and then destroy the bridge so that the Nigerian soldiers fail to enter their territory. As the bridge explodes, it also gives a hard blow to all the Igbo refugees from the West who had hoped to reach their new nation by crossing the bridge across River Niger. Debbie is astounded at this thoughtless and selfish act on the part of the Biafran soldiers who forgot all the help rendered by the Asaba inhabitants in the name of brotherhood and loyalty and left them to “the mercy of the conquering Nigerian forces”(Emecheta 223). The Igbos living in Asaba were thus cut off from the rest of the Igbos in the east, and “mercilessly exposed” (Emecheta 223) to the vengeance of the Nigerian army, as their loyalty to the Nigerian government had appeared uncertain.

Elizabeth Bird and Fraser Ottanelli render an insightful scholarship on the vicious happenings in Asaba in their attempt to “describe the killings, pillaging, and rapes” there and trace “the short-and-long term impact of the Asaba killing” (Bird



and Ottanelli 379). In their interview with the survivors of the massacre, they relate how the inhabitants of Asaba were tricked by the Nigerian soldiers to gather in multitudes and parade along the streets singing and dancing for a unified Nigeria. After an unsuspecting group of men, women, and children crowded in the streets dancing and singing all the way, the federal troop astutely separated women and children to another route while men including boys above 12 years were channelled to an open square at Ogbe-Osowa, a village in Asaba. What followed was rapid, incessant firing that seemed to reverberate the death knell of humanity in Nigeria. The square soon turned into a gory graveyard with hundreds of corpses piled up or scattered everywhere, and the “sporadic shooting continued for hours until darkness caused the soldiers to disperse” (Bird and Ottanelli 48). In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie alludes to the incident when a relative of Alice arrives to inform her of the tragedy at Asaba in which her entire family is massacred. The information completely shatters Alice who bewails hysterically until Odenigbo manages to comfort her. Having been abandoned by an army officer who bore her a child, Alice had been living a withdrawn and bare life after the death of her child. The news renders her orphaned and she is taken away by the relative to live with her distant relatives.

With the mass murder of their fathers, husbands, elders, and young children in Asaba, the women are confronted with horribly miserable days amidst the rancorous murderers in uniform. They are emotionally broken, terrified, traumatized, and yet they refuse to give in. The rampant atrocities in Asaba continued to unleash upon vulnerable women and girls who were brutally raped and

left to die. Emecheta describes how the lecherous murderers did not spare even the old women and nuns from such sexual assaults. She recounts in *Destination Biafra* that even missionary nuns, including the aged, affectionate Irish nun Mother Francesca, who had been quite generous to the refugee women and dying children, were not spared by the Nigerian soldiers. Dorothy, whose child is shot dead on her back, is filled with horror and disbelief at the plight of the assaulted nuns and laments:

‘No, they did not kill her, she just bled to death. They killed the young nuns and many others, but they did not kill Mother Francesca,’ Dorothy insisted, in a vain effort to wash away the sins of the men of her race who wore borrowed army uniforms, promoting an equally borrowed culture. A culture that did not respect the old. ‘She just bled to death. They would never rape an old woman, never...she just bled to death,’ she continued, accepting the death of her child, but not able to understand the abuse of the helpless old. (224-225)

The inability of Dorothy to come to terms with a ‘borrowed culture’ is clearly delineated in the above passage. Rape has always been a horrendous accessory of war and it is no different in this context as well. Dorothy’s words not only express the trauma of the experience but also encompass how women, whether old or young are doubly victimised by such a vehement patriarchal offshoot of war.

Uchendu in her work *Women and Conflict in The Nigerian Civil War* validates this reading when she observes that one of the greatest threats faced by women and girls during the period is rape and sexual assaults, which are often seen

as powerful weapons for humiliating and crushing the dignity of the enemies. No woman, educated or illiterate, urban or rural, married or unmarried, mother or expecting, young or old or handicapped, is spared from the vulnerability of sexual violence at the outbreak of war. The sexual abuse of women is a regular feature of wars and it is understood to have personal dimensions and often public and political aspects. In Anioma, Uchendu states, it was one of the dreadful humiliations of the civil war that reduced women to objects of war and humiliated their men. Soldiers act out their contempt for male civilians by sexually abusing their women, showing the helplessness of civilians to protect their women during crisis (Uchendu, *Women and Conflict* 79). Such atrocities greatly inhibited their freedom of movement and often forced them to disguise themselves as old women for fear of being raped by the federal troop.

*Destination Biafra* recounts many such horrendous and grotesque instances of violence against women throughout Nigeria from the time of the first military coup in January 1966. Samuel Ogedemgbe, before being dragged away during the coup, has to witness his wife and daughter being sexually harassed by the soldiers; Area Papa's wife Area Mama, who were both running a local bar in the North, is brutally raped in front of her husband before the latter is murdered by the violent men; the Igbo man Ugoji who is a bank cashier in Kano is forced to hide himself in the bush to escape the murderers, but on his return to his house he finds his beautiful girlfriend Regina raped and slaughtered to pieces of flesh; the husband of the Ibo family whom Debbie tries to defend from the Nigerian soldiers, fails to protect his innocent child, his pregnant wife and their unborn baby from the cruelties of the

soldiers. Christina M Morus, in her study of rape victims in the Bosnian war, observes:

Unfortunately, rape in war is commonplace, like looting, and has been treated as war's inevitable consequence, if not a victor's right – a spoil of war. In most accounts of war, rape is overlooked, downplayed, or regarded as a crime against the men to whom the “spoiled” women “belong” - a crime of (dis)honour or property damage. The latter perspective is rooted in the idea that wartime or genocidal rape, while assaulting women, primarily targets the men who cannot protect their women – their property. (55)

Debbie too encounters a similar fate during her mission to Biafra to meet Chijioke. Despite being in military uniform and despite reiterating that she is a Nigerian soldier and not a fleeing Ibo, she becomes a victim of gang rape by Nigerian soldiers in front of her mother. It comes as a great shock to Debbie that neither her education nor her ethnic identity or position in the military could defend her in the war-territory of ruthless men who could see her as nothing more than a female body. The seventeen-year-old Dora, the maid who attends to Debbie as the latter recuperates from the trauma of rape, is another rape victim presented in the novel. Dora is raped by an unknown soldier and conceives his child whom she looks after. The distressing experience of the little mother in her teens is just one of the innumerable cases wherein the lives of innocent girls and women were destroyed and discarded by beastly men in uniform. Susan Brownmiller in her groundbreaking work *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, traces the male culture of violence

and sexual assaults on women in times of war. She describes rape by male assailants as a “familiar act with a familiar excuse” (Brownmiller 32). She further adds:

War provides men with the perfect psychological backdrop to give vent to their contempt for women. The very maleness of the military—the brute power of weaponry exclusive to their hands, the spiritual bonding of men at arms, the manly discipline of orders given and orders obeyed, the simple logic of the hierarchical command—confirms for men what they long [suspected], that women are peripheral, irrelevant to the world that counts, passive spectators to the action in the centre ring. (Brownmiller 32)

Thus, war becomes an overt manifestation of male discernment of women as the most valuable possession of their men, whose inability to protect her honour and life, tends to disgrace him and question his manliness. In the context of war, every woman, instead of being murdered as an individual enemy, is objectified, used, and discarded as war booty or destroyed in front of her man, intending to crush his dignity.

Anne Barstow identifies three kinds of rapes during wartime: individual rape, mass rape, and military sexual slavery (11). While Emecheta’s work recounts several grotesque instances of individual rape, along with the gang rape of the protagonist Debbie, Adichie chiefly reproaches the mass rape of women by soldiers, in an attempt to investigate the politics behind such rapes during the circumstances of war. Dara Kay Cohen, in her work *Rape During Civil War*, explains the grotesque rationale behind gang rapes:

Rape – and especially gang rape, or rape by multiple perpetrators – enables armed groups with forcibly recruited fighters to create bonds of loyalty and esteem from initial circumstances of fear and mistrust. Members of the group form social bonds by participating in acts of rape, and these bonds are strengthened and reproduced in the process of recounting the violence in the aftermath. (Cohen 2-3)

The violence and trauma associated with rape are dealt with convincingly by the three selected writers in their war narratives. In Adichie's *Half a Yellow Sun*, Ugwu, just thirteen years old, is taken away and forcefully enrolled into the Nigerian army. He is later compelled by his fellow soldiers to rape a vulnerable barmaid who had failed to provide them with beer as there was no more beer left in the bar. The incident leaves Ugwu in a state of self-loathing, though he knows how impossible it was for him to disobey the nine sturdy soldiers provoking him to prove his 'manliness' before them. Later when Ugwu comes to know that his own sister Anulika was also very brutally gang raped by soldiers, he is filled with pain and remorse and breaks into tears. As Uchendu states in his article "Recollections of Childhood Experiences During the Nigerian Civil War": "Children caught in war-torn areas the world over, are depicted as both victims and perpetrators of violence" (Uchendu 393). Like all other practices of patriarchal violence, rape too is validated as an 'inevitable' accessory of war by the patriarchal machinery. Through the character of Ugwu, Adichie presents a more sensitive perspective of the boy-man who becomes both the perpetrator and later, the victim of guilt. Ugwu, who is presented as a boy sensitive to the feelings of women, thus becomes a victim to the

insensitive norms of male-controlled military where stern commands and inhuman actions efface all fundamental philanthropical morals.

Adichie addresses the issue of military sexual slavery in the experience of Ugwu's neighbour Eberechi whose parents force her into an army officer's room and in return, get their son employed in the army. She then gets accustomed to this new role of sexual slavery and is frequently approached by army officials whom she never disappoints, despite the infatuation she has for Ugwu. Ugwu's childhood love Nnesinachi also resorts to such a life of sexual slavery, living with a Hausa soldier whom, she finds to be a good and kind-hearted man. Flora Nwapa vindicates the characters Agnes and her sister who set out to give sexual services to a foreign mercenary, for the women are left with no choice when war shatters their everything and leaves them and their family impoverished. Such practices aggravate the victimisation of women and often force women to compromise their dignity for mere existence. Sexual slavery, thus, often emerges as the only choice left before perplexed, vulnerable women struggling to feed the hungry bellies of their fatherless children and of all those dependent on them. Gloria Chuku, therefore, considers such liaisons with army officials and wealthy leaders, as a coping strategy assumed by impoverished women in times of war (338). However, such women have to often bear the wrath of the society that vindicates the moral turpitude of men, especially in times of war, while censuring and ostracizing the irreproachable female victims of rape and starvation. For instance, when Debbie in *Destination Biafra* seeks the help of a bus agent to go to Aba as part of her mission, the man is suspicious of her morality and reproaches her:

I know your type of woman. You are running away from your husband, looking for army men. Now they own all the money in the country, you women are leaving your husbands and going after soldiers. What will happen to you lot when the war is over? Have you thought of that? I would rather die than have anything to do with a woman who has been touched by those soldiers. (Emecheta 162)

Apart from sexual slavery to the military, the impoverished women and refugee girls also become obliged to yield to the sexual whims and demands of the 'benevolent' men who offer them food and other essentials in exchange for sexual gratification. In "Wives at War," Bisi hints to Eze's wife that when she approached the priest for food essentials like milk, sugar, flour, and the like, the priest demanded sexual favour in return. Sensing his depravity, she stops going to him and begins to send her boys to get essential things from him. In Adichie's narrative, Father Marcel, the priest who is in charge of the refugee camp run by Kainene, sexually exploits the starving women in the camp whenever they approach him for protein-rich crayfish entrusted to him by Kainene. When Kainene comes to know of Father Marcel's evil deeds leading to the pregnancy of a little girl Urenwa and victimization of many hapless beings like her, she fumes with rage and dismisses him outright along with his partner Father Jude. As Ugwu and Olanna watch, Kainene pushes Father Marcel with both hands, screaming with rage, "*Amosu!* You devil!". She then turns to Father Jude and shouts as tears roll down her face, "How could you stay here and let him spread the legs of starving girls? How will you



account for this to your God? You both are leaving now, right now. I will take this to Ojukwu myself if I have to” (Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun* 398).

While rape and sexual assaults often turned traumatic to young girls and women in Biafra, what shattered them the most was Nigeria’s political strategy of economic blockade. The Nigerian government adopted rigorous measures to prevent all external assistance to the Eastern region. It appealed to all countries to refrain from supplying food and medicine to Biafra so that the territorial integrity of Nigeria could be restored. “Economic blockade created artificial famine, as essential foodstuff and medicine dwindled away. Hunger, malnutrition, and related diseases quickly set in, claiming hundreds and thousands of children as its first victims (Ezeh 97). Nwapa’s work just glosses over the plight of the refugees whose exodus with young children and clinging infants is paved with perils and inexplicable agonies. The protagonist Kate in *Never Again* is however portrayed as a solid woman who is prescient about the trajectory of war and is determined to subdue all possible quandaries. Yet when it comes to her children, she shares the fear and anxiety of all mothers evacuating to unknown destinations with their children. She anticipates these concerns when she says, “Hunger was paramount in my thoughts. Hunger. I have never known hunger all my life. Now I was going to be faced by hunger. My children would be faced with hunger. In a short time, they would have kwashiorkor and if we were lucky, they might survive, but it could impair their health for life” (Nwapa, *Never Again* 50). The novelist here presents the concerns of women as a preserver and underscores how children are her primary concern.

As seen, in the novels by female authors, children become an important part of the war experience because this technically enhances the plight of women. Being the caretakers and protectors of children, women directly confront the issue of war and children in a patriarchal system. Nikolic-Ristanovic observes that when war began in the former Yugoslavia, women were asked to send their husbands and sons to the battlefield. Patriarchy expected them to benumb their motherly instincts and supplant them with nationalistic fervour and to emerge as proud mothers of soldier sons. The mothers, who initially protested, were threatened or brainwashed and transformed into 'brave' mothers who eagerly sent their sons to the warfront. On the one hand, women were glorified as biological regenerators of the nation and on the other hand, they were silenced, subdued, and subjected to a massive abuse of their reproductive rights and maternal emotions. With the growing spirit of nationalism, women were denied of their right to abortion. Leading political leaders, supported by the church authorities, compelled women to conceive and produce children to be sacrificed at the altar of male ego for power and supremacy. They completely disregarded the physical, emotional, and mental agony of mothers and deprived them of their rights and responsibilities towards safeguarding their children. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Olanna feels heavy when she witnesses a mother frantically crying at the sight of two soldiers pulling her tall boy along with them. The mother screams: "I said you should take me!" ... "Take me instead! Have we not sacrificed Abuchi to you people already?" (Adichie 330). Despite these heart-breaking pleas of the mother, the soldiers drag away her second son also to be conscripted into the perishing Biafran army. The sight fills Olanna with great fear as she becomes worried about the safety of her servant boy Ugwu, for whom she

cherishes motherly love and concern. Although she repeatedly warns Ugwu to hide from the soldiers, he is spotted, chased, and captured by the Biafran soldiers as he carelessly strolls along a narrow pathway to see off his neighbour and beloved Eberechi. The conscription of Ugwu leaves Olanna broken and she uses all means to find him out. To the great relief of Olanna, Odenigbo, and their little daughter named Baby, Ugwu escapes death fighting with the vandals. They reunite when somebody informs them that Ugwu has been hospitalized in a severely wounded condition.

The narratives of Nwapa too emphasize that during war, conscription means a certain death. Nnidi Okeke and her husband, in “Daddy Don’t Strike the Match,” are deeply worried about their eldest son Martin, a tall, young boy of fifteen years, prospective to be conscripted into the Biafran army at any time. Nwapa further titles one of her short stories “A Certain Death”, wherein an orphaned woman struggles to save her brother, traumatized by the murder of his wife and children, from forced conscription. When she approaches the man in charge of conscription, he responds with great tactlessness:

‘My two children are in the army. We are at war with Nigeria. They killed us like flies in the north. We must fight for our freedom. There is no going back. It has come to the stage when all of us should be called. He must go. When I am called, I too must go. Those Biafran youths dying were born of women. They were human beings like you and I. So don’t see why your brother should not go to war.’ (Nwapa, *Wives at War* 34)

Wartime experiences of women thus reveal them to be torn between their responsibilities towards their nation as loyal citizens and their inexplicable torment as wives, mothers, siblings, and relatives of men dragged into the battlefield without proper arms, ammunition, or food to fight. This predicament can be read in the light of Nikolic-Ristanovic's observations on the Yugoslavian war where she recalls the case of Yugoslavia mothers and observes that "women on both sides of the nationalist fence were equally powerless to prevent their children's death. They viewed violence against their children as violence against themselves—a kind of violence that, according to one refugee woman I interviewed, affects women more than rape or any other form of violence aimed directly against them" (235). This is universally true of all mothers afflicted by violence, starvation, and unpredictability.

While mothers of young boys and adult sons lose their children through forced military conscription and dispassionate killings, the mothers in war-stricken regions and refugee camps become passive witnesses to the deaths of their children through starvation and ill health. The plight of children in wartime is quite poignantly portrayed by Emecheta in *Destination Biafra* when Debbie helplessly witnesses how children, orphaned or separated from parents, suffer emotionally during evacuation and how they perish physically due to lack of food, nourishment, and proper hygiene. Baby Biafra, whose mother dies at his birth, gradually becomes "a shrunken lifeless skeleton" (Emecheta 212) despite all the efforts of Debbie and other women sneaking to Biafra through the dark, swampy bushes. The grief-stricken women silently watch Debbie unwrap the lifeless baby from her back but fail to have the courage to look into his face. Soon other children also succumb to

starvation and dysentery. Debbie notices Ijeoma, Mrs. Madako's daughter, "beginning to have the same symptoms of dysentery that had killed baby Biafra and seemed to be killing Ogo" (Emecheta 220-221). Ogo's elder brother Ngbechi is mercilessly shot dead by the Nigerian soldiers as he rushes to the mission hospital with his sick, unconscious brother on his back. The death of baby Biafra, the heart-rending moans of dying Ogo, and the lifeless body of Ngbechi are some of the most painfully lingering instances recounted by Emecheta in the novel.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie too attempts to render the severity of starvation and the impact of malnutrition among the children of the refugees. Ugwu painfully watches the plight of women who struggle to feed their children in the absence of their husbands who are either dead or hiding or are posted at the war front. Adichie writes: "The refugees: Ugwu saw them, more and more each day, new faces on the streets, at the public borehole, in the market. Women knocked on the door often to ask if there was any work they could do in exchange of food. They came with their thin, naked children" (Adichie 285). Adichie illustrates how during the war period, the deadly disease Kwashiorkor killed millions of children and women in a most dreadful way and reproaches the Western hands who incited and supported Nigeria in imposing an economic blockade in the region of Biafra, thereby committing a terribly heinous crime against humanity. Through the lyrics of a poem that the character Ugwu writes as an epilogue to his book 'The World Was Silent When We Died', Adichie bemoans that the Biafran War was a period when the humanity of the entire world seemed to have coarsened to the core:

Did you see photos in sixty-eight  
Of children with their hair becoming rust:  
Sickly patches nestled on those small heads,  
Then falling off like rotten leaves on dust?  
Imagine children with arms like toothpicks,  
With footballs for bellies and skin stretched thin.  
It was Kwashiorkor – difficult word  
A word that was not quite ugly enough, a sin... (Adichie 375)

Kwashiorkor, a severe condition of prolonged protein deficiency in children, took the lives of millions of innocent children of Biafran refugees, especially as the disease and its cure were unknown to the illiterate mothers who mistook it for diseases like malaria. For instance, in the novel, when little Adanna grows weak and bedridden with a swollen belly and fatigue, Mama Adanna mistakes it for malaria and keeps giving her neem medicine. When Olanna corrects her that it is kwashiorkor and not malaria, she immediately rushes out to fetch a bunch of green leaves which she calls “anti-kwashiorkor leaves” (Adichie 339), disregarding Olanna’s suggestion of nourishing the child with protein-rich crayfish and milk. Later Olanna gives a tin of sardines and dried milk to Mama Adanna, knowing that the latter could not afford to get them for the sick child.

Forcing the enemy to starvation was a deplorable war tactic employed by the Nigerian force. Osita Ebiem mentions how both Nigerian and British officials had proclaimed publicly, as the war progressed, that starvation was a legitimate weapon of war. He states that “the officials-the Prime Minister of Great Britain Harold Wilson, Nigeria’s Yakubu Gowon, Obafemi Awolowo, and Anthony Enahoro- had repeatedly emphasized the point and the world could not have missed it and they used the weapon very effectively such that at the height of the Biafran blockade 25,000 Biafran children were dying daily from hunger (Ebiem 88).

Adichie reveals a ghastly picture of the kwashiorkor victims when Olanna visits one of the kwashiorkor centres with her twin sister Kainene who was actively involved in getting foreign aid to the sick and dying refugees in the relief centres. As Kainene leads her through the stinking rooms, Olanna finds twelve skinny people lying immovable on bamboo mats in the first room. In the second room, she finds a more agonizing sight: “A mother was sitting on the floor with two children lying next to her. Olanna could not tell how old they were. They were naked; the taut globes that were their bellies would not fit in a shirt anyway. Their buttocks and chest were collapsed into folds of rumped skin. On their head, spurts of reddish hair. Olanna’s eyes met their mother’s steady stare and Olanna looked away quickly” (Adichie 348).

Olanna cries with disbelief when Kainene tells her that the mother is in fact dead and her body is to be removed. There was another woman too who had died and her emaciated child was clinging to her back. Kainene who had managed to get some protein tablets from the Red Cross, forces a “powdery tablet into the small,

open mouth” (349) of the orphaned child. The two women silently share the pain and bleakness as Kainene slips her hand into Olanna’s to comfort her. The twin sisters embody the compassion and toughness of Igbo women whose social consciousness and logical strides empowered them to support and save as many lives as possible, while the men in Nigeria were wreaking havoc all around in the name of power and vengeance. The mutual support extended by the women in the community helped them overcome the impediments posed by the war and other adverse situations. Adichie very dextrously presents both the strength and vulnerability of the Igbo women through her life-like characters.

The works of Nwapa, Emecheta, and Adichie thus reveal how the Igbo women struggled through a period of unprecedented violence, hunger, poverty, diseases, and deaths during the war. It was a period that empowered them through the memory of their firm and strongminded foremothers who never got flustered or incapacitated during the hostile phases in life. In *Women and War: A Historical Encyclopedia from Antiquity to the Present* (2006), Bernard A. Cook analyses women’s involvement and skill at war, and records how history and mythology reveal women to be proficient in fighting back, taking revenge, killing, and resisting. He holds that “if women have so often been victims of violence, they have also proved to be capable of being agents of violence” (xxxvi). He traces women’s changing roles in all major wars across the world, in an attempt to substitute the stereotypical victim image of women with that of brave-hearted, dynamic women who have actively partaken in the defence and establishment of power and peace within their nations. In the foreword to this work, Judith Lawrence Bellafaire



recounts women's role in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and observes that "limited to medical and supply-related functions that reflected their societal roles, women served in secret, nursed the wounded, or became involved in production, collection and dissemination of food, medicines, clothing, and equipment" (xxvii). In the twentieth century, however, more roles were open for women, in the absence of sufficient men on account of numerous warfare, especially the two World Wars, which demanded women's participation in the economic and social sectors of the societies they lived in.

During World War II women were expected to take up different jobs in both the civilian and military sectors when there arose a scarcity of manpower. Women were employed not only as nurses and administrators but they were also forced to take up vocations conventionally held by men. They became mechanics, truck drivers, and air tower control operators. "The function of need even superseded traditional concerns for military women's safety and placed Army nurses on the front lines in North Africa and Anzio and members of the Women's Army Corps in London during the German bombing" (Bellafaire xxvii). Cook documents the might, struggles, and bravery of legendary women warriors from the Greek Amazons to powerful medieval women rulers and other undaunted war heroines of the later centuries who served as nurses, physicians, ambulance drivers, servicewomen, Air Force pilots, war correspondents, journalists, spies, suicide bombers, revolutionaries, activists, radio operators, traders, pacifists and so on. Cook insists that despite numerous setbacks marked with heart-rending episodes of death, diseases, starvation, afflictions, sexual assaults, and persistent physical and emotional

victimization during the war, women across the world have always stood firm and have strived hard to survive amidst all odds.

Similarly, the Nigeria-Biafra war of 1967 divulges the fortitude of Igbo women who, despite being physically, mentally, and sexually tortured and destroyed, confronted all hardships with great strength of mind and prudence. Gloria Chuku observes that despite the adverse situations brought about by the war, women in Biafra persevered and waged war on both battlefronts and home fronts “in order to ensure the survival of their families, communities, and Biafra, which eventually collapsed in January 1970 after thirty months of hostilities” (Chuku, “Women and the Nigeria-Biafra War” 330).

The psychologist Christie Achebe examines the experiences of Igbo women during the Nigeria -Biafra war and analyses the survival strategies adopted by them based on a two-process model of primary and secondary coping strategies, a significant model expanded in the discipline of psychology. She explains that the primary and secondary control systems provide two pathways to the exercise of control. In the primary control system, an individual makes an effort to alter the circumstances, favourable for his/her survival. In the secondary control system, however, the individual perceives external factors or circumstances as inevitable and hence attempts to accommodate himself/herself to the adverse situations. She adds that “A characteristic of primary and secondary control process model according to the authors is that a balance of both primary and secondary control is necessary and that one need not have primacy over the other” (Chr. Achebe 789). In her study of

the lived experiences and “coping strategies” of Igbo women during the Biafran war

Christie Achebe bases her inquiry on six categories listed below:

1. Women’s literary contribution to the war process.
2. Women’s political role.
3. Women’s economic mobilization: Cross-border farming, “affia-attack” and so on.
4. Nutrition, children’s welfare, education.
5. Women’s role in the military – BOFF.
6. Primary and secondary process analysis of women’s coping strategies. (Chr. Achebe 792)

In the years following the war, there emerged a handful of Igbo women writers who felt compelled “to bring out of the archive of silence, the experiences of ordinary Biafran women in wartime and immediate post war period” (Chuku, “Women and the Nigeria-Biafra War” 330). The narratives by Nwapa, Emecheta, and Adichie are part of this attempt to scrutinize how Igbo women “negotiated the exigencies of the war years” (Chr. Achebe 786). The three authors portray characters who reveal that women, being profoundly affected by political instabilities and recurring episodes of violence, are passionate about being conducive to the socio-political affairs of their country.

History reveals that though Igbo society has primarily been patriarchal, it has always respected and recognized the words and emotions of women, especially the

common interests or complaints put forth by various women's groupings in society. Judith Van Allen observes that "in traditional Igbo society, women did not have a political role equal to that of men. But they did have a role – or more accurately, a series of roles – despite the patrilineal organizations of the Igbo societies" (62). Allen argues that though the Western influence has, in many ways, elevated the position of Igbo women with regard to the marital system, education, health, and hygiene, and relieved them from social evils like slavery, human sacrifice, female genital mutilation, and infanticides of twins, it ended up abating many of the advantages safeguarded by the community in the pre-colonial times. Colonial rule in Igboland attempted to curtail the rights and freedom enjoyed by Igbo women in the traditional political system, which resulted in a number of vehement protests and demonstrations from the part of the frustrated women.

One of the most striking political uprisings by women of Southeastern region was *Ogu Umunwanyi* or Women's War of 1929 which made the colonizers realize that "women could organize mass rallies and demonstrations without the instigation and assistance of men" (Matera 108). Also known as 'Aba Riot,' it started in November 1929 when a group of enraged Igbo women, along with a multitude of women from other minor ethnic groups in the region, paraded the streets of Igboland demanding the warrant chiefs deployed by the Britishers to put an end to their oppressive measures on women and to refrain from the decision to tax the women-folk. The colonial strategy of indirect rule had vested undue power in the Igbo men chosen as warrant chiefs. They exploited their superior position to tyrannize and pursue their fellow beings, in an attempt to impress the foreign power. Unlike the

Igbo political system wherein disputes were settled and decisions taken by a council of elders with proper representation of women as well, the new authority given to the warrant chiefs denied such political and economic space and voice to the women and elders in the community. After imposing a tax on men in 1925, the warrant chiefs turned to women and adopted measures to tax them as well.

The upheaval is said to have started when a census taker approached an elderly woman named Nwanyeruwa as part of commencing a numerical evaluation of every subject in her house including men, women, animals, fowls, and so on. Counting a woman and taxing her for her hard-earned profits were very uncommon and considered discourteous in the Igbo community. The Igbos believed that counting human beings would bring a curse upon the community and would severely affect women's fertility and reproductive life, apart from affecting hundreds of lives from the region. Pregnant women were believed to be most vulnerable to such curses. Nwanyeruwa was, therefore, so shocked and angered at the warrant chief's man that she confronted him crudely with the question 'Was your mother counted?', which sounded quite offensive to the man and instantly gave way to impertinent abusive interchanges between the two. After the man left in a rage, Nwanyeruwa rushed to the marketplace in Oloko to discuss the matter with more women which soon emerged as one of the most powerful and historically significant women's movements in West Africa. Palm leaves were sent to neighbouring villages in their district. The palm leaves signified the "invitation among women, telling them to come to a protest that was being organized at the district's administration office in Oloko. Each woman who received a palm leaf was

told to pass the leaf on with its message to another woman, forming a chain mail line of communication.” (“Igbo women campaign for rights”). Over 10,000 women across the region were summoned in no time and a powerful, systematic mode of resistance was planned and well-executed to the effect of accomplishing a written assurance from the district officer that women would be completely exempted from tax payment. The women were also adamant that the warrant chief be removed from his position for his apparent disrespect and tyrannical approaches towards them. Women’s War or *Ogu Umunwanyi*, is a substantial exemplum of the Igbo women’s traditional method of fighting men who failed to bestow proper respect to women and their dealings.

The Igbo society recognized several political organizations of women who held *mikiri* or *mitiri*, literally meaning ‘meeting’. Judith Van Allen records that *mikiri* emphasized group solidarity among women whenever they were in trouble or certain grievances against men had to be addressed. This solidarity was their strength, for it ensured them justice, freedom, and status within their community. Allen goes on to add that *Mkiri* offered women a platform where they could develop their political talents among a more egalitarian group than the village assembly, and “could discuss their particular interests as traders, farmers, wives and mothers” (Allen 401). The meetings were led by elderly or proficient women, and the decisions taken were conveyed to men by their wives or by any chosen spokesperson if necessary. However, if their decisions were ignored by men, they resorted to several crude means to overpower the guilty man, including the “ultimate weapon: ‘sitting on a man’” (Allen 75). To “sit on” a man involved gathering at his

compound, sometimes late at night, dancing, singing scurrilous songs that detailed the individual's offense and challenged his manhood, banging on his house with pestles, demolishing his house or plastering it with mud and beating the individual. In dealing with men as a group, women used boycotts and strikes in which they refused to cook, refused to trade, withheld sex, or emigrated from their communities until their demands were met (Mbah 156). This practice is almost reflective of what is presented in one of the greatest and earliest anti-war feminist plays *Lysistrata* written by Aristophanes in 411 BC. In the play one finds the protagonist Lysistrata compelling the women of the warring cities to deny sexual privileges to their husbands in order to stop the war and establish peace in the area.

Though the British managed to suppress the revolt, they failed to recognize that the fundamental cause behind the riot was the denial of political representation and socio-economic freedom for women which they used to enjoy prior to the colonizers' indirect rule and implementation of western gender-based political system. Matera et al. observe,

The conflation of African women's naked bodies and sexuality, on the one hand, and their supposed exceptional strength and ferocity, on the other, coloured Britons' understanding of the women's actions and rendered them unable to recognize the reality of women mobilizing in defense of their common interests against the encroachments of men, British and African alike. (Matera et al. 193)

They were shocked at the ferocity and crude ways in which women rose against the British administrative system and considered it ample reason to 'civilize' these

women through education and Christian teaching, aiming to make modest and virtuous Victorian women out of them. It soon resulted in the complete exclusion of women from the Reform Acts passed in 1933 which outlawed all forms of 'self-help' rebellions, including women's most powerful weapon of 'sitting on a man' (Allen 75). However, despite these setbacks in the political arena, Igbo women, especially the traditional ones, continued to render strong support to each other and believed in the power of group solidarity which strengthened them in times of all odds.

During the Biafran war as well, the Igbo women consoled and strengthened the morale of each other, drawing strength from the fortitude of their foremothers. They served as strong pillars of support to the grief-stricken victims and witnesses of deaths, diseases, sexual assaults, and poverty. For instance, when in *Destination Biafra*, Dorothy continues to lament over the loss of her murdered husband and feels incapable of raising her children alone, Uzoma walks up to her and hits her in rage and shouts, "'Shame on you, woman. Shaaaame!' she fumed. 'What type of Ibo woman are you? Which bush community did you come from? What unlucky woman raised you as a daughter? Since when have men helped us look after children? Have you not old people in your cluster of homesteads, to do their job of bringing up the younger ones?'" (Emecheta 212-213). She is furious at Dorothy for contemplating suicide, and forgetting her responsibilities towards her children. "'Don't you think you have to make sure you live so that you can look after them? Because the men also gave us their name, you forget your father's name, and in the process of letting



your husband provide for you, you have become dumb and passive. Go back to being yourself now” (Emecheta 213-214).

Gloria Chuku recounts how the mass murder and brutal persecutions of the Igbos across Nigeria generated a surge of pain, anger, and a call for vengeance among women who were widowed, orphaned, assaulted, and burdened with new responsibilities in a war-torn nation. The dead bodies of the fellow beings and the plight of the returnees from the North instilled a strong sense of vengeance among women, who like many, saw immediate secession from Nigeria as inevitable for their survival. Survival was very difficult for the returnee women who had lost their spouses in the pogrom. Having lost the breadwinners, it was all the more difficult to take care of their children. According to Chuku, “It was in this state of hopelessness that Eastern Nigerian women carried out protest demonstrations against the killings of over 30,000 of their people in the North and the uncertainty faced by their fellow returnee women and their children; and also urged for secession” (“Women and the Nigeria Biafra War” 331).

When the new nation was formed, women shared the excitement and hopes for a nation where they could live peacefully without the threat of the Nigerian vandals who were resolute to efface all Igbos from their territories in the North and West. The pogroms of the Igbos in these regions had inflicted such pain and shock among the Igbos that a secession appeared to be the only possible solution to the plight of Igbos spread across the country. Olannta in *Half of a Yellow Sun* shares the excitement of her family when Biafra finally secedes as “an independent sovereign state” (Adichie 162). “She had wanted the secession to happen, but now it seemed

too big to conceive. Odenigbo and Baby were moving round and round, Odenigbo singing off-key, a song he had made up – ‘This is our beginning, oh, yes, our beginning, oh, yes...’ – while Baby laughed in blissful incomprehension” (Adichie 162). As the war progresses, their lives are confronted with a lack of food, money, and overwhelming grief at personal losses, yet Biafran women continue to be ever hopeful of good times, singing and dancing Biafra’s impending victory in their own traditional ways of celebration:

Mama Oji started the song, ‘Onyega-enwemmeri?’ and the other women responded ‘Biafra ga-enwemmeri, igba! And formed a circle and swayed with graceful motions and stamped down hard as they said igba! Billows of dust rose and fell. Olanna joined them, buoyed by the words – Who will win? Biafra will win, Igba! – and wishing Odenigbo would not just sit there with that empty expression. (Adichie 332)

Secession did offer women reasons for celebration and this is evident in the works of other women writers as well.

Nwapa’s short stories reveal how the women rejoiced in the secession of Biafra and ensured their political involvement in all grave matters pertaining to their country and its people during the war. In her short story “Wives at War,” Nwapa introduces three groups of politically vigorous Biafran women namely the National Women’s Club, the Busy Bee Women’s Club, and the Women’s Active Service Club, who send a petition to the Queen of England pointing out the pathetic condition of starvation and death among the children in Biafra. The Queen is deeply moved and distressed to know the condition in Biafra and sends for Her Excellency

to go to Biafra and directly speak to the Biafran women to study the matter more accurately and to render all possible help. However, when Her Excellency lands in Uli airport, there is a sudden air-raid from Nigerian planes, and Her Excellency rushes back to Britain in the same plane she arrived. Meanwhile, the protagonist Ebo manages to steal into a relief plane along with his wife Bisi, and three children and escapes from Biafra. The next day a rumour spreads that a woman from Biafra has gone to Britain to represent the Biafran women before the Queen of Britain. This provokes the women's organizations in Biafra who dash into the office of the Foreign Secretary demanding an explanation for excluding the actual representatives of Biafran women. When the Foreign Secretary denies these charges, they are infuriated and retorts, "You wait until the end of this war. There is going to be another war, the war of the women. You have fooled us enough. You have used us enough. You have exploited us enough. When this war has ended, we will show you that we are a force to be reckoned with. You wait and see (Nwapa, "Wives at War" 16-17). Nwapa, Emecheta, and Adichie frequently bring in the connivance of the colonizers in corrupting and dividing communities and initiating insurgencies in the newly independent Nigeria.

Over the course of the war, one recognizes that, in times of war, women's subservient position to men is emphasized more astutely than ever, congealing the gender-based roles for women both on the home front and at the warfront. Nwapa observes that the uneducated traditional women "made uniforms for the soldiers, they cooked for the soldiers and gave expensive presents to the officers. And they organised the women who prayed every Wednesday for Biafra" (Nwapa *Never*

*Again* 7). Madam Agafa's words also resonate with the spirit of these Biafran women when she pronounces rather passionately in a meeting, "I am a woman. But I am not going to be evacuated. Have you heard? We women are solidly behind our men" (Nwapa *Never Again* 12). Women's enthusiasm and spirit of nationalism were thus defined and confined by political leaders, the military, and all patriarchal institutions who wanted women to perform their traditional roles more efficiently, for the comfort of the men in the battlefield.

In *Gender & Nation*, Yuval-Davis investigates the "participation of women in both informal liberation struggles and in modern military and considers the ways this has had wider implication for the position of women in society" (Yuval-Davis 93). Although history has proven women to be skilled warriors and fighters, patriarchy gradually relegated women to the home front emphasizing the necessity to preserve women's bodies for the biological process of producing and rearing the future citizens of the nation. Women's nationalism has often been defined by patriarchy such that their sense of nationalism and attitude get transformed according to the whims and demands of the men on the warfront. Though the women performed their traditional responsibilities along with undertaking new roles in the absence of their fathers and husbands, their selfless services were mostly overlooked by men who went on exalting their own hardships, valour, and indomitable spirit at the war front and felt ashamed to acknowledge the indispensable support rendered by their women-folk. In Nwapa's short story "Wives at War," the leader of the Busy Bee Club reminds the men in the Foreign Secretary's office:

‘Without us, the Nigerian vandals would have overrun Biafra; without the women, our gallant Biafran soldiers would have died of hunger in the warfronts. Without the women, the Biafran Red Cross would have collapsed. It was my organisation that organised the kitchens and transport for the Biafran forces. You men went to the office every day doing nothing, busy, but doing nothing.’ (Nwapa 17)

The women were disappointed that despite handling a multitude of responsibilities in the domestic and public sphere, a majority of men were always inclined to downplay their sincere efforts and douse their political fervour. Such flagrant disregard was also meted out to women who were passionate about joining the army and to fight for their country on the war front. When Debbie, the protagonist in Emecheta’s *Destination Biafra*, decides to join the Nigerian military in an attempt to restore peace in her country, her decision is received with much astonishment and more sarcasm by everyone. Chijioke Abosi, a Western-educated Igbo army officer and friend of Debbie, expresses his readiness to enrol her in the army, commenting that “it would certainly add glamour to our regiment” (Emecheta 58).

Egodi Uchendu reflects that during the Nigerian Civil War, Nigerian women’s desire to serve the nation was quite degradingly exploited by the patriarchal federal army:

It was the job of the pretty guerilla girls to infiltrate the Biafran forces for information and to assess the strength of their army, weapons, stores and food. Many of the girls succeeded in gaining employment as cooks and casual workers with the Biafran troops. Such opportunities facilitated their work and

enabled them to loot the stores of their unsuspecting enemies, returning to Ogbemudia with grenades, rifles, and ammunition which were used to fight the Biafrans. (Uchendu, *Women and Conflict* 78).

However, Debbie is determined that she would join the army not as a stereotypical cook or wife but as a real officer. She believes that “surely every person should have the right to live as he or she wished, however different that life might seem to another” (45). Debbie’s earnestness in serving her nation is unheeded by the army officers who initially suspect her loyalty to the army, for she is well aware of the army’s involvement in her father’s murder. They however consider enrolling her, on thought that she can be a “useful tool” (Emecheta 69) to them in reaching their goal. Such patriarchal presumptions regarding the capabilities of women are also quite discouraging as is evident from the words of the Women’s Active Service group leader in Nwapa’s “Women at War”:

“We are the creation of Biafra and our aim is to win the war for Biafra. Right from the word go, we organised the women for a real fight. We asked for guns to fight the enemy. We asked to be taught how to shoot. Did not women and girls fight in Vietnam? We asked to be taught how to take cover and how to evacuate women and children. But those who did not understand mounted strong propaganda against us. They said we were upsetting the women. But we were realistic. We knew Nigeria would fight us, so we must be prepared. (Nwapa 17-18)

Though Debbie’s military uniform and her rightful intentions are often overlooked or derided by both Nigerian and Biafran men, it is she who emerges as the voice of

undaunted Igbo women, as the novel reaches its climax. Debbie, who had headed to her destination, Biafra, with the mission of dissuading Chijioke Abosi from the war, soon realizes that it is too late. Neither she nor Mrs. Ozimba or Mrs. Eze succeed in persuading the men whose senseless pride and unrelenting ego refuse to see the millions of corpses being strewn around them every minute. Eventually all optimistic leaders of Biafra, along with their incomprehensible Western ‘well-wisher’ Alan Grey, shamelessly dash into South African and French planes, fearing the torrent of Nigerian bombs and grenades exploding and obliterating whatever remained in the Biafran territory. Debbie’s outright refusal of Alan Grey’s proposal at this juncture to rescue and marry her is a gleaming reflection of the dignity of the entire African women, who have been bravely enduring, confronting, and resurrecting themselves and their children from the centuries-old dark period of slavery to the postcolonial epoch of man’s cataclysmic covetousness for wealth and power. She yells with infinite derision and raging revulsion at all spineless African men and all scavenging white men who shamelessly destroyed her land and people: “I see now that Abosi and his like are still colonized. They need to be decolonized. I am not like him, a black white man; I am a woman and a woman of Africa. I am a daughter of Nigeria and if she is in shame, I shall stay and mourn with her in shame. No, I am not ready yet to become the wife of an exploiter of my nation” (Nwapa, “Wives” 258).

Such bold, assertive, selfless, and independent decision-making power emerges as the trademark of African women, especially the Igbo women, who subvert all Western stereotypical male definitions of women as weak, dependent,

emotional, and irrational beings bound to confine themselves to mothering children and gratifying male-folk. Biafran war was a period that proved to the world that Igbo women, despite being victims of regular gender-based violence and socio-political oppression, were inherently born with the nerve to brave all challenges. To them, motherhood and womanhood were not onerous positions that would crumble them down, rather they saw these roles as ‘experiences’ (Nnaemeka, “Introduction” 5) which emboldened them to think, decide, act and rise to the occasion as the backbone of their perishing community and hope of their dying fellow-beings who had no one else to look up to.

While war compelled men to remain on the battlefield, women were left with new responsibilities in the refugee camps crammed with starving and dying civilians that included emaciated children, depleted elders, and sick women. Women soon realize that if they passively await the mercy of Biafran and Nigerian leaders, they would be left to die and rot owing to rising starvation and epidemics. Risking their own lives, women set out on foot, covering long distances along bushes and unknown paths, and ultimately crossing the boundaries set by the enemy forces. These kinds of transborder trades were called *afia* in Igbo, which meant smuggle trade. *Afia* attacks were discouraged by both Nigerian and Biafran armies alike; the former because it broke the norms of economic blockade declared by the FMG and the latter because they feared that the enemy might poison the food supplied to the Biafran traders (Chuku 342-343). However, left with no other choice to save their children and other destitute men and women, more and more Igbo women ventured



into this trade without a second thought about their own lives or safety. Nnedinso Ogaziechi, explains the 'Afia attack':

The very famous 'Afia Attack' literally translates to 'trading behind enemy lines' and was expectedly fraught with grim dangers but as they say, the battle for survival eschews any form of fear. The hallmarks of the Afia Attack were the exposition of the leadership skills of the women, their courage, sense of duty and commitment to group good and survival on one hand and the tales of lost hopes, pains, deaths, rapes (by both sides) and abductions. (Ogaziechi, "Afia Attack")

Gloria Chuku looks at *afia* or *ahia* attack as one among the many coping strategies adopted by Biafran women. As the whole trading process involved innumerable risks, women on both sides of the trade resorted to different trading strategies and coordinated their economic activities through different organisations. They encouraged house-to-house and bush trading, and shifted their trading points from towns to discreet spaces in villages, to be safe from air raids and other dangers. Most of the trading took place in the early hours of the morning or late in the evening, and the duration of trading time was also altered regularly for safety. The Biafran women, encompassed women of several other minor ethnic groups, though Igbos were the prominent ones. They masqueraded in a multitude of ways for the conduct of this dangerous trade across the enemy line. Also, their knowledge of other ethnic languages in Nigeria proved to be of great advantage to them, as it abetted them to conceal their real identity. They often disguised themselves as wives of wealthy army officials or as old women or weak pregnant ladies to avoid being

noticed or ill-treated by soldiers. Chuku reveals that “a number of the traders, disguised in Idoma, Edo and Yoruba wrappers and attires, were able to travel into enemy villages and towns without detection. Fluency in Hausa, Edo, Idoma, Nupe, Yoruba and other Nigerian languages meant added advantage for communication, understanding and trust” (Chuku, “Women and the Nigeria-Biafra War” 343). The women were thus able to trade personal belongings like apparel, ornaments, household goods, and other things in exchange for essential foodstuffs and medicines. “It was a life-or-death trade but a child of necessity. Women who engaged in this trade were those who had the capital and the gut to shoulder the risks involved (Chuku, “Women and the Nigeria-Biafra War” 343).

Nwapa, however, only glosses over women’s *afia* trades in her works and fails to explore the hurdles encountered by the fellow women engaged in such ventures. In *Never Again*, she just alludes to it when Kate comments that men who did not go to war front sat idle whereas women were always engaged in either cooking for the soldiers or trading with the enemy on the borders, which they called ‘attack trade’ (Nwapa, *Never Again* 13). Nwapa’s *Wives at War and Other Stories* also fails to accommodate any representation or allusion to this very crucial economic activity undertaken by Igbo women during the war.

Emecheta has however attempted to reveal how even the affluent wives of political leaders, who had been passive and docile in their husbands’ presence, were compelled by the war to venture into such trades to ensure the survival of their children. Mrs. Ozimba, Mrs. Eze, and Mrs. Ogedemgbe are representatives of upper-class women, who quickly realize that neither they nor their children would survive

the war if they remain passive as the wives of the wealthy leaders of Biafra. Debbie's mother Mrs. Stella Ogedemgbe is the first to undergo tremendous transformation when her husband Samuel Ogedemgbe is dragged away before her eyes during the coup, to be murdered brutally on grounds of alleged corruption. Debbie notices this change in her mother during her period of recuperation after the rape. She wonders at the incredible amount of strength and mental power of her mother "who for years had pretended to be so frail and dependent that tying her own headscarf was a big task" (Emecheta, *Destination Biafra* 157). She remarks with disbelief, "All that show of dependence just to keep alive her marriage and to feed her husband's ego; and to think she had played that charade for over twenty-five years!" (157).

When Debbie sets out to meet Abosi in Biafra, Mrs. Ogedemgbe remains in the Nigerian province but soon succeeds in establishing secret business ties with the Biafrans. She has four strong canoe men in her employ and also accomplishes the confidence of a few Biafran soldiers to assist her in all her clandestine operations. She writes a letter to Mrs. Ozimba and Mrs. Eze expressing her concern for the starving Biafrans and encourages the two women to take up the responsibility of safeguarding themselves and their children. She urges them "to remember that the only thing their politician husbands gave them was their names. And because she was Mrs. Ogedemgbe she could send them food through the creeks via the Mid-Western towns. She would accept Biafran money, and that way, they could get a business going" (Emecheta, *Destination Biafra* 227). Mrs. Ozimba and Mrs. Eze keep the letter to themselves and avoid any discussion with their husbands who are

preoccupied with Biafra's political destiny, whereas Biafrans bewailed the irretrievable loss of their robust sons and dear ones in the Nigerian onslaughts. Soon they too enter into the *afia* trade and smuggle sacks of salt and *garri* to feed the starving bellies of the Biafran population. They also manage to convince their sons to leave Biafra, lest they be conscripted into the army which meant death for sure. Along with the articles and money for trade, they send their sons to safer places away from Biafra. Ozimba and Eze come to know of it only when their sons write to them informing them that they are safe. The two men are in fact relieved that their sons are safe, yet wonder at the gallantry of their wives who devised means to transport the young boys to innocuous places when every nook-and-corner was under the surveillance of both Nigerian and Biafran forces. They shake their heads in astonishment and remark, "These women, what they can do" (Emecheta 228), recognizing the strength and determination of women to prevail over all barriers for the safety of their children. In the evacuation of the sons of wealthy leaders of Biafra, Emecheta exposes the hypocrisy of Biafran leaders who exploit their power to protect their own children and family, while being passive spectators to the tragedy befalling the innocent civilians in their nation.

Furthermore, in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Mrs. Muokelu and Kainene emerge as enterprising characters whose aptitude and expertise in fetching food and medicines for impoverished women and children, gradually induce them to indulge in *afia attack*. Mrs. Muokelu, whom Olanna meets during her refugee life, is described as a "barely educated primary school teacher from Eziowelle" (Adichie 265). Mrs. Muokelu's fearlessness reminds Olanna of Kainene as both of them

exuded great courage and confidence. When Baby, Olanna's child, falls sick and the doctor informs her that they have run out of antibiotics, it is Mrs. Muokelu who arranges for the medicine through her associates involved in the illicit transborder trade and also gets dried egg yolk for Baby from a newly opened relief centre. Mrs. Muokelu later informs Olanna of her decision to enter into an *afia* attack, "I have twelve people to feed," she said. "And that is not counting my husband's relatives who have just come from Abakaliki. My husband has returned from the war front with one leg. What can he do?" (Adichie 193). Her plight is not different from the many women who were burdened with the responsibility of providing at least a meagre amount of food to those dependent on them. She explains to Olanna that she plans to cross the border through her contact with a woman who supplied *garri* to the army. The woman used to receive a military escort to her lorry in return for the *garri* she gave them. The lorry would take the trading women to Ufoma from where they had to walk about fifteen to twenty miles to the trading point. There they would buy salt and *garri* in exchange for the Nigerian coins they had, and then walk back to the lorry to return to their boarding point. Mrs. Muokelu assures herself as she tells Olanna that "many are doing it and nothing has happened to them" (Adichie 293).

While Mrs. Muokelu's decision to *afia* trade was largely prompted by her obligation to feed her family, Kainene's efforts were propelled by a strong, altruistic desire to serve the downtrodden refugees. When she gets some Nigerian coins, she decides to go to the ninth mile to buy whatever she can get with them and also plans to continue the trade by exchanging the little things that the refugees in her camp

made with essential edible things that the Nigerian women produced. When Odenigbo warns her of the dangers of trading with the enemies, Kainene denies risks of any kind and contends that she does not see it as trading with the enemies, rather it is just trading with illiterate Nigerian women for what the Biafran women did not have (Adichie 403). Adichie's authentic representation of the selfless services of women in her war narrative resonates with Christie Achebe's non-fictional account:

To be expected, some of the women made it safely back to Biafra, whereas a number perished in their attempt. As long as a few women succeeded in bringing back fresh food and other items, these risky attempts were sustained until the end of the war. It was clear to the women that this was a war for the very survival of the Biafran people. Despite the hardship, women courageously kept Biafra going by choosing to risk their lives and exercise control. (Chr. Achebe 795)

Unfortunately, on the very first attempt Kainene ends up in a profound tragedy, as she fails to turn up from the enemy line even days and months after her departure. Her disappearance completely shatters Richard, Olanna, Odenigbo, Ugwu, Baby, and many others who had recognized her worth as a woman of indomitable spirit. All their attempts to locate Kainene fail and they console each other, though downheartedly, that she would return to them some day.

Nwapa, Emecheta, and Adichie reveal how Igbo women tried to be self-reliant and self-assured during the uncertainties of the war. They considered it their responsibility to cultivate or fetch food for the starving people around them. However, as they had to often shift from one place to another as part of evacuation,

they were rendered incapable of executing systematic farming and did not have proper land for cultivation in the places they arrived at. For instance, in Nwapa's *Never Again*, when Kate and Chudi reach Akatta with their family, they find that the land is very dry, infertile, and unfitting to grow even vegetables. However, despite all natural and man-made setbacks, the Igbo women believed in their ability to surpass all hardships. Many dared to secretly cross the border set by the federal army and managed to plant crops in the abandoned farms across the border. They often disguised as Nigerian women and spoke other languages to deceive the soldiers from identifying them during such 'cross-border farming'. When it was harvesting time, they went back across the border, harvested the crops, and then brought them for sale in the Biafran markets. Women in Biafra also made whatever they could and took it to the market to exchange them with female traders coming from across the border. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Mrs. Muokelu teaches Olanna how to make soap telling her that the common bar soap was in much demand in the market. In *Never Again*, Kate packs her five new wrappas while evacuating from Ugwuta so that she can sell them to get food for her children, in case there is any scarcity of food. Similarly, in "Daddy, Don't Strike the Match", Ndidi Okeke exchanges an ebony head with Father Anthony for four tins of Ovaltine which her children were used to drinking in Kano. Thus, women exchanged whatever they had with what they needed in an attempt to survive the debilitating effects of hunger and diseases engendered by the war, while men continued to contrive reckless measures to satiate their egotistical impulses.

Emecheta also depicts the theme of hunger in *Destination Biafra* through the hazardous journey undertaken by Debbie and other women fleeing with their children. The children are so desperately hungry and weakened that they begin to gobble down even “frogs, not caring that some might have been poisonous” (Emecheta 207). In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Olanna is astonished when a hawker comes with an enamel tray of roasted lizards and Baby craves to eat them. It equally shocks and grieves Olanna and Ugwu when Baby informs them in tears that Mama Adanna allegedly killed her fond dog Bingo and prepared meat soup with it. Hunger prompted the Biafrans to try consuming things that they never used to eat in the pre-war period. Gloria Chuku’s words validate the predicament:

These were leaves of cocoyam, paw-paw, cassava, hibiscus plant, wild Amarantus and wild bitter leaf. Bush combing for wild vegetables, spices, mushrooms, fruits, nuts, snails, insects—grasshoppers, crickets, termites—and small animals such as squirrels, rats and rabbits were common. These insects and rodents became vital sources of the much-needed protein in Biafra. (Chuku 340)

People, thus, went for bizarre eating habits when piercing hunger left them with few choices. Such instances reveal the pathetic state of the Biafrans, especially before their plight received international attention and certain welfare organizations decided to render a helping hand to the innocent victims of the economic blockade. “Photographic images of emaciated starving Biafran children, women and the elderly with matchstick legs, swollen stomachs, hollowed eyes and large heads in Western media in early summer of 1968 touched the conscience of Americans and



Westerners, and galvanized public opinions in favour of humanitarian support for Biafra” (Chuku 334). Thus, Chuku states that the conflict became the first postcolonial war to unleash a wave of humanitarian operations by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), African Concern, and various religious groups, which organized airlift of relief to Biafra.

The relief food which reached different centres in Biafra was indeed a great source of sustenance to the dying people as it provided them essential things like *garri*, salt, fish, and dried egg yolk to meet their protein deficiency. Though it could never put off their hunger completely, it enabled them to barely sustain their life. In Adichie’s novel, Kainene establishes a strong association with the Red Cross agents and is able to get sacks of *garri*, salt, protein tablets and other essentials for the refugees in her camp. She also gives some protein tablets to Olanna when Baby falls sick. Relief centres often turned out to be sites where people were often incited into disputes and scuffles when hunger and angst provoked them to forget all modes of social decorum. Olanna, whose primitiveness had been tamed by education and wealth, struggles to make her way among the crude, impetuous men and women pushing themselves ahead to fill their baskets with relief supplies. “The swift scrambling rush of the crowd surprised Olanna. She felt jostled; she swayed. It was as if they all shoved her aside in one calculated move since she was not one of them” (268). When one of her acquaintances at the relief camp slithers a packet of beef into her basket one day, it is noticed by a few shell-shocked soldiers in tattered uniforms, who brusquely assault her and in a flash of a second, run away, grabbing the packet of beef hidden in her basket. The incident leaves Olanna in tears as she

fails to shield the corn beef from the hungry, hysterical soldiers with “noise-deadened brains” (272). As the war progresses, such physical assaults, bickering, and stealing becomes quite common in Biafra where hunger benumbed people’s faculty for thinking and feeling. Those who indulged in stealing also included hungry soldiers who stole crops from the fields at night. Adichie refers to the situation when a soldier is caught stealing from the farm in the early hours of the morning. People who had worked hard on the farm to keep themselves from starving, turn furious and begin to beat him badly, until Kainene commands them to spare him. Richard realizes what is happening and observes sadly, “It happened everywhere now, farms raided at night, raided of corn so tender that they had not yet formed kernels, and yams so young they were barely the size of a cocoyam” (Adichie 404). It renders a grim picture of Biafra as a starving nation forced into mean and devious ways of survival. Gloria Chuku observes that women coped with this inevitable situation by harvesting crops prematurely and then preserving them using different methods.

Many of these food items were sun-dried or smoked by women. Breadfruit prepared with calcium and wrapped well with banana leaves could be preserved for a week or more. The intensification of food preservation practices by Biafran women led to the development of dry packing where processed or prepared food was sealed in cellophane bags in ration sizes. (Chuku, “Women and the Nigeria-Biafra War” 340)

This enabled them to use the food for longer periods and to improve their markets for trade. Igbo women thus incessantly devised strategies and measures to sustain and preserve life as opposed to the violent outbursts of the soldiers.

Educated women, on the other hand, while supporting the traditional women in farming and trading, took up the task of imparting basic education to children, in an attempt to reinforce the frightened minds of the children. They intended to give them at least a momentary relief from the war-torn world of elders by taking them to the tranquil world of letters and numbers. In Adichie's novel, Olanna and Mrs. Muokelu, along with Ugwu, arrange a few benches on the veranda to teach the children in the neighbourhood. They decide to teach mathematics, civics, and English every day. Olanna tells the other two, "We have to make sure that when the war is over, they will all fit back easily into regular school. We will teach them to speak perfect English and perfect Igbo, like His Excellency. We will teach them pride in our great nation" (291). While Olanna thus serves her people through educating children and sharing the essentials she often got from her friends and well-wishers, Kainene and her like, work with the Red Cross and similar organizations in distributing food and medicines to the refugees and the downtrodden. The fictional representation of these women in service can be read again in the light of Gloria Chuku's statements in her non-fictional work where she notes that some of the women associated with the Biafran Red Cross were recruited as nurses in the Armed Forces Nursing Corps (AFNC). Organizations like Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) included different service groups like the 'Kitchen Battalion' that cooked food for the soldiers and cultivated vegetables and crops,

while also attending to the refugees and the wounded. Young women and girls joined military groups like the Biafran Organization of Freedom Fighters (BOFF) and Special Task Force (STF) to ensure the internal security of Biafra (Chukwu 345-346).

Among the three authors whose powerful war narratives have been analysed in this chapter, only Emecheta centres her narrative on a female military woman, Debbie Ogedemgbe. However, Debbie has been characterized as a soldier enrolled in the Nigerian military and not the Biafran army. It is observed that neither of the three authors has ventured to explore the experiences of Igbo women soldiers in the Biafran Force or military organizations, though Biafran war scholars like Gloria Chuku and Christie Achebe have repeatedly asserted women's contribution to military service during the war period.

The chapter has thus examined the select war narratives from multiple perspectives, extending from an in-depth analysis of the nature of victimisation to an exploration of the survival strategies adopted by Igbo women during the war. The study arrives at a conclusion that accedes to Christie Achebe's argument that during the Nigeria Biafra war, the Igbo women resorted to both primary and secondary control systems in a balanced way so that an effective coping strategy could be accomplished. The writings of Nwapa, Emecheta, and Adichie furnish renewed prospects to perceive, appreciate, and discuss Igbo women's wartime experiences in hitherto unexpressed ways. These texts when read in the light of non-fictional works by academics like Christie Achebe and Gloria Chuku lend a better understanding of the struggles and contributions of the Igbo women during the Nigerian Civil War.

The present researcher has tried to intercept the literary texts with non-literary texts in order to authenticate the selected authors' representation of women's experiences during conflicting times. It endorses the words of the Nigerian writer Akachi Adimora -Ezeigbo that, "female writers construct and reconstruct women's particular experiences" specific to war times by "subverting the dominant paradigms of the war projected by male authors" (Ezeigbo 224). As mentioned earlier, a major chunk of the literature available on the experiences of the Nigerian Civil War is by men. Ezeigbo attributes this disparity to "the cultural constraints and social limitations under which women operate in Igboland" and the emphasis on "collective rather than individual memory" (Ezeigbo 226). Therefore, these works by the women writers selected for study are significant contributions to war literature, explicating an alternative experience of wartime.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

African feminists, while unitedly contesting all forms of oppressive patriarchal ideology, are substantially focused on the varying dimensions of female experiences within a continent like Africa inhabited by people with diverse ethnocultural identities and colonial experiences. The African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), a grant-making foundation that supports women's rights organizations, states: "Our current struggles as African feminists are inextricably linked to our past as a continent, diverse pre-colonial contexts, slavery, colonization, liberation struggles, neo-colonialism, globalization, etc" ("Charter"). During all these phases from the past to the present in Africa, women have experienced various forms of oppression and victimization which are being addressed from multiple perspectives, considering the specific nature of patriarchal ascendancy within different African societies. African feminists like Ama Ata Aidoo, Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, Anne McClintock, and others vehemently challenge the Western feminist notion that feminism was imported to Africa from the West. Instead, they emphasize how, right from the pre-colonial times, their foremothers have resisted several patriarchal systems of oppression, often individually and more often recognizing the collective female power in their specific community. The African feminists assert that their "pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial histories and herstories require special measures to be taken in favour of particular African women in different contexts" ("Charter"). They acknowledge the role of African women writers in revealing to the world, the agency and competence of African

women of diverse backgrounds through a powerful literary representation of female experiences in distinct patriarchal societies. The African women writers and scholars therefore attempt to render a more authentic representation of African women, by specifically focusing on “activism in their particular local/ national contexts” (Herr 2).

This thesis has attempted to discover the agency and activism of women belonging to the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria, and identifies the role of African contemporary intellectual feminism in “confronting and transforming the abiding patriarchal gender relations on the continent towards entrenching a progressive social order amenable to the concerns of women rights and wellbeing (Okoli 127). Through a textual analysis of selected works of Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, three of the most compelling female voices from Igboland, this study explores varying patriarchal ideologies, gender role expectations, and victimisation of Igbo women from pre-colonial to post-colonial times. It also discovers the strength and agency of Igbo women, and emphasizes the need “to explore the transformative essence” (Okoli 126) of such female agency for the socio-political transformation of African societies.

As the three selected authors are acquainted with both Western culture and the indigenous culture in Igboland, their narratives reflect an intermediate stand towards the accountability of Igbo ethnic traditions and Western colonial factors in affecting the lives of women in Igboland. They are critical of several traditional patriarchal practices among the Igbos that often risked the physical health and emotional stability of Igbo women, and denied them a choice over their body,

sexuality, and reproductive ability. Meanwhile, they also impute blame on the colonizers for silencing the Igbo women and eliminating the privileges they enjoyed by estranging them from the public domain. The experiences, perceptions and survival strategies of the female characters represented in the narratives divulge the differing nature of patriarchal oppression and the resultant resistance in both traditional and postcolonial Igbo society, simultaneously recognizing the positive effects of both cultures that can materialise gender equality and women's empowerment in Nigeria.

Three major aspects of women's functions in Igbo families and society have been analysed thoroughly, in the light of several ethnographic and anthropological texts, to comprehend the gender and socio-political positions of Igbo women from pre-colonial to post-colonial times in Nigeria. This includes a study of the changing gender ideology within the Igbo domestic and public spaces, women's shifting attitudes and perceptions about motherhood and childlessness, and their perilous ventures and altruism during the fierce Civil War in Nigeria.

The introductory chapter investigates the relevance of following a decolonial approach to locate the experiences of women belonging to different postcolonial nations. It also substantiates the necessity to implement the two-step process of deconstructing and dismantling the Western feminist notions of homogenous female experiences, and constructing "autonomous feminist concerns and strategies that are geographically, historically, and culturally grounded" (Mohanty 17). Each of the core chapters in the thesis has, therefore, attempted to confound and deconstruct the generalized notion that all African women have been passive victims in the pre-



colonial period and that they are less privileged than Western women. To realize the second part of the project, the chapter has examined some of the major ethnocultural traditions and colonial interventions in the lives of Igbos, which were crucial in understanding the complementary gender roles and nature of patriarchal ideologies among the Igbos. It further traces the necessity to incorporate certain Western theoretical formulations along with distinct African theoretical formulations to accomplish the objectives set for this study.

Chapter two titled “Uncovering Gender Ideology in Igboland,” engages in a close reading of Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* (1966), Buchi Emecheta’s *The Bride Price* (1976) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2003). The nature of gender ideology in Igboland from the pre-colonial to post-colonial period is analysed to understand the exaltation and subjugation of Igbo women by the indigenous and colonial patriarchal forces. The study foregrounds the fortitude of Igbo women and their self-assertive nature and recognizes that their self-assuredness is largely complemented by their enterprising nature, economic self-sufficiency, and uncompromising sense of responsibility towards their children and community.

Nwapa’s female characters like Efuru, Ajanupu, and Nwabata are not submissive wives who collapse at the irresponsibility or infidelity of their husbands. Instead, they centre their lives on their responsibilities towards their children and people who seek their support. The analysis of Emecheta’s text, *The Bride Price*, reflects how the perceptions and survival strategies of Igbo women altered when the gender ideology and nature of victimization changed owing to colonial influence. The experiences of Ma Blackie and her daughter Akunna, unveils the oppressive

customs and cultural practices among the Igbos that violated a woman's fundamental right to make choices and take decisions about her life. The widowed Ma-Blackie, while allowing herself to be inherited by her deceased husband's brother Okonkwo, is brave enough to invest her money in educating both her son and daughter. Emecheta acknowledges the significance of education in colonial Nigeria, for it enabled women to rely on emerging job opportunities as they gradually lost their traditional monopoly in trade and markets to colonial entrepreneurs. Though Ma Blackie and Aku-nna live a very frustrating and crippling life and are apparently women of meek disposition, they are found to exhibit immense strength of mind in moments of crises. The female characters in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, also reflect the unyielding mettle of Igbo women empowered by the virtue of their ethno-specific heritage. Aunty Ifeoma and her daughter Amaka, two major characters in *Purple Hibiscus*, are very assertive women who retain the indomitable spirit of Igbo matriarchs, while Beatrice emerges as an enfeebled victim of colonial religious indoctrination that emphasizes women to be obedient, meek and submissive to their husbands. However, when her husband's religious fanaticism turns fatal for her children, she ventures to eliminate him through slow poisoning. Adichie reveals the complex psychological impact on Igbo women as colonialism exterminated all their privileges in the public domain and dismantled the collective female agency which had always been the strength of every woman in traditional Igboland. Colonial patriarchal forces crushed the dignity and economic self-sufficiency of Igbo women and attempted to completely transform them into submissive beings. Adichie's work reveals the hidden danger in attempting to

violate the dignity of the daughters in Igboland and the futility of the colonial patriarchal attempts to transform them into “the Angel in the House” (Patmore).

Chapter three examines Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* (1966) and *One is Enough* (1986), Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) to unearth how childlessness and motherhood affected the identity and position of Igbo women from pre-colonial to postcolonial times. *Efuru* in the eponymous novel, Amaka in *One is Enough*, Nnu-Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood*, and Olanna in *Half of a Yellow Sun* are all victims of Igbo society’s stigmatization of childless women. The chapter discovers the centrality of motherhood in the lives of women in Igboland. The inability to become biological mothers is found to be a matter of grave concern to the women in traditional Igbo society, for it greatly deteriorated their position and privileges in the family and society. Childlessness caused a woman to fall out of her husband’s favour and justified the husband’s right to go for a new wife. Such traditional patriarchal positions are challenged by the women writers who assert that motherhood is only one aspect of a woman’s life, and that Igbo women could find fulfillment in “other mothering” and also by investing their potential into realizing their individual aspirations and socio-political concerns.

Nwapa depicts how, despite being childless, *Efuru* lives a respectable life by trusting in her abilities and making fearless decisions about her life. Amaka in *One is Enough* also ventures out to build her own world. Her decision to get impregnated outside marriage is her attempt to subvert the patriarchal forces that devalue a woman who fails to realize the gender roles expected of her or rather enforced on

her. The analysis of Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* discerns that biological mothers, especially mothers of sons, enjoyed great privileges in traditional society. As a mother of sons, Nnu Ego herself realizes the injustice meted out to her co-wife Adaku for the latter's inability to produce sons. Adaku chooses a life of prostitution to secure a good future for her girls, for she refuses to live her entire life as an unhappy, guilty, and frustrated woman on account of her inability to produce sons. Emecheta reveals that mothering was never a strenuous or confining task to the biological mothers in traditional Igboland due to the presence of several co-wives and grandmothers for assistance. However, the joys of mothering were greatly affected by colonial interventions and consequent socio-economic changes. Though Nnu-Ego had to endure several difficulties on account of her frequent pregnancies, poverty, and inability to give proper care to her children, she did not give up at any point. In creating a character like Nnu Ego, Emecheta reveals the extent of the sufferings of Igbo women during the colonial period when patriarchy rendered women's lives miserable. In the characters of Olanna and Kainene in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie explores the significance of Igbo women's roles as othermothers and community other mothers, and insists on how this ardent sense of responsibility may be exploited for ensuring socio-political stability and cultural sensitivity in a multiethnic nation like Nigeria. She also reveals how in the postcolonial context, mothering is gradually shifting from an exclusively female enterprise to a gender-neutral care labour.

Chapter four elicits the significant role played by Igbo women during the Nigeria-Biafra War of 1967. Titled "Women in the Shadow of Biafra," the chapter

examines at length Nwapa's *Never Again* (1975) and her short-story collection *Wives at War and Other Stories* (1980), Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982) and Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) in the context of the war. It explores the traumatic experiences of women during the Biafran War and studies how displacement, violence, rape, massacre, and other dire hostilities of the war have been represented by the three select writers. The women writers deconstruct the patriarchal notion that war is an exclusively male enterprise and that women largely remain the passive victims of war. Nwapa, Emecheta and Adichie underscores the irreplaceable contributions of Igbo women during the most appalling period in the history of Nigeria. Through characters like Kate, Debbie, Olanna, Kainene and several other major and minor female characters, these writers explore the survival strategies and brave ventures of Igbo women who risked their own lives to rescue the casualties of war, to protect the children, the sick and the aged, and ventured out fearlessly to fetch food, medicines, and other essential amenities to the ailing and displaced refugees of war. The war-time struggles, audacity, and resistance of Igbo women are foregrounded to reveal the strong sense of national consciousness and community feeling among Igbo women which need to be empowered for the political stability, economic expansion, and prosperity of Igboland and Nigeria as a whole.

While attempting to reclaim the intrinsic strength, voice, and collective power enjoyed by Igbo women in the past which privileged their position in the family and society, the writers do not fail to disapprove and severely critique how Igbo women in the pre-colonial period endured physical abuse and mental

harassment owing to several inhuman patriarchal traditions and customs specific to the Igbo community. Compelling young Igbo girls to entertain male suiters, subjecting them to clitoridectomy which often turned fatal, forcing them into early marriages to fetch the bride price, frequent pregnancies, miscarriages, and malnutrition that increased the rate of mother-child mortality, cases of wife-battering and infidelity, emotional and sexual neglect owing to polygamous marital system, stigmatization of childless women, the killing of new-born twins on account of certain superstitions, disgracing mothers with only daughters, inheritance of widows as a commodity and subjecting them to the rigorous widowhood customs are some of the major forms of oppression experienced by Igbo women owing to the patriarchal customs specific to the Igbo ethnic community. It ought to be mentioned here that colonial interventions and the introduction of education did play a very decisive role in eliminating several of these inhuman customary beliefs and practices. However, the colonial patriarchal forces refused to acknowledge the business acumen and administrative skill of the Igbo women and relegated them to the confines of the domestic space, thereby rendering the gender divide in the Igbo community more rigid and conspicuous. The collective power of Igbo womanhood was also something that was disrupted by colonial forces.

The thesis arrives at the conclusion that Igbo women did not abruptly emerge empowered in the postcolonial period as posited in a majority of existing studies which seem to contend that walking out of marital ties is the only overt validation of a woman's empowered and dignified disposition. Igbo women, by virtue of their ethnocultural heritage and economic self-sufficiency, have always strived for dignity

and self-assertion even while conforming to the complementary gender roles traditionally expected of them. The study discovers that during all these phases of oppression, a majority of Igbo women retained their strength of mind and utilized their collective agency in bringing about positive changes in the community and society. In cases of severe adversities, they presented their grievances before the women's council which normally resolved them, often proposing verdicts favourable to women and intimidating the accused men to treat women with respect. They enhanced their skill in trade and business, worked hard towards economic self-sufficiency, involved themselves passionately in all cultural ceremonies, and substantiated recurrently that their perpetual assiduity has always been crucial in sustaining the intrinsic values in the Igbo culture.

In light of these analyses, the thesis argues that the experiences of women cannot be generalised and that they vary in accordance with several factors, which have been overlooked by Western feminist scholars. The study also recognizes that the fortitude and agency of Igbo women in the private and public spaces did not receive the deserved representation in the works of Igbo male writers. This underscores the efforts of women writers in eliciting the experiences and concerns of women belonging to specific contexts, and restoring the dignity of African women in the global forefront. The thesis asserts the need for African intellectual feminism “to evolve an inclusive and progressive feminist praxis, capable of not only resisting or fighting iniquitous gender relations, but also transforming them” (Okoli 128) for bringing about radical social changes.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Recommendations**

This thesis has specifically focused on the varying experiences and shifting perceptions of women belonging to the Igbo ethnic community in southeastern Nigeria. During the course of this study, the researcher has discerned a few aspects that throw open considerable scope for further studies. The study has limited its purview to the representation of heterosexual Igbo women by women writers and has not attempted to explore the experiences of women of different sexual orientations. Studies pertaining to African queer literature and the impact of culture on defining women's sexuality may be studied using interdisciplinary approaches. The representation of men in the writings of women may be analysed to discover if men are being marginalized and stereotyped in women's literature. More research can be done to explore the centrality of motherhood in the lives of African women and how African women writers address the paradoxical nature of African motherhood as different from Western notions of motherhood as an oppressive patriarchal force.

The works of the selected writers along with the writings of other Nigerian women writers can be scrutinized for their engagement with ecological concerns. The evolution of eco-consciousness over time in the writers belonging to different periods can be analysed and compared to the representation of nature in indigenous works by other Igbo writers. Again, intersections between literature, theatre, and films in the works of Nigerian women writers writing in English can be studied to engage in a comprehensive and eclectic understanding of gender dynamics in their



societies. The works by Nwapa, Emecheta and Adichie can be examined by employing psychoanalytic theories to explore the inner workings of the characters, both men and women, to understand the underpinnings governing gender ideology, and also to analyse the motifs of trauma and memory, and the external manifestations of the unconscious.

Under the purview of medical humanities, one can also analyse the narratives of Igbo women writers in English to examine their representation of issues pertaining to health and healing, thereby examining cultural, social, and ethical dimensions of the deterioration of physical and mental well-being. Another possibility is to position the works of the chosen Igbo women writers within a broader scheme of indigenous literature from across the world, comparing their literary outputs with those of other indigenous writers to identify and express the shared themes of oppression and resistance of women in general. Another less explored area is with regard to the representation of spaces in the narratives by these writers. An analysis of the spatial tropes, both physical and mental can be a fresh addition to the scholarships on the works of these women.

These recommendations aim to expand the boundaries of existing scholarship and create new avenues for investigation into the culturally rich and varied literary contributions of Igbo women writers and Nigerian writers in general.

## Works Cited

- Achebe, Chinua. *The African Trilogy: Things Fall Apart; Arrow of God; No Longer at Ease*. Penguin Publishing Group, 2017.
- . "Foreword: The Igbo World and its Arts." *Igbo Arts: Community and Cosmos*, edited by Chike Cyril Aniakor and Herbert M Cole. Museum of Cultural History, University of California, 1984, pp ix-xii.
- . *Girls at War and Other Stories*. Anchor Canada, 2010. *Internet Archive*, [https://archive.org/details/girlsatwarothers0000ache\\_y3x5/page/n5/mode/2up?q=girls+at+war+and+other+stories](https://archive.org/details/girlsatwarothers0000ache_y3x5/page/n5/mode/2up?q=girls+at+war+and+other+stories), Accessed 16 April 2019.
- . *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*. Penguin Books, 2012.
- . *Things Fall Apart*. Penguin Books Limited, 2013.
- Achebe, Christie. "Igbo Women in the Nigerian-Biafran War 1967-1970: An Interplay of Control." *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 40, no. 5, 2010, pp. 785–811. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40648606>. Accessed 21 Feb. 2021.
- Acholunu, Catherine Obianuju. *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism*. Afa Publications, 1995.
- Adevoha, Anthonia. *Personified Goddesses: An Archetypal Pattern of Female Protagonists in the Works of Two Black Women Writers*. PhD Dissertation, Atlanta University, 2013, <https://www.pdfdrive.com/personified-goddesses-an-archetypal-pattern-of-female-protagonists-in-the-works-of-two-black-e37961211.html>. Accessed 30 Jan. 2017.
- Adibe, Prof. Jideofor. "Biafran Separatist Agitations in Nigeria: Causes, Trajectories, Scenarios and the Way Forward." *West Africa Insight Secessionist Movement*, vol 5, no.1, 2017, pp. 4-13. [www.academia.edu/35341178/](http://www.academia.edu/35341178/). Accessed 28 Aug 2018.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Americanah*. Fourth Estate, 2014.
- . "The Danger of a Single Story." *YouTube*, uploaded by TEDx Talks, July 2009. [https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_ngozi\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story). Accessed 26 Sept. 2020
- . *Dear Ijeawele: A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*. Fourth Estate, 2017.
- . *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Harper Perennial, 2007.
- . *Purple Hibiscus*. Harper Perennial, 2013.
- . *The Thing Around Your Neck*. Fourth Estate, 2017.
- . "We Should All Be Feminists." *YouTube*, uploaded by TEDx Talks. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hg3umXU\\_qWc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hg3umXU_qWc). Accessed 7 July 2018.
- . *We Should All Be Feminists*. Fourth Estate, 2014.

- Agbasiere, Joseph Therese. *Women in Igbo Life and Thought*. Routledge, 2000.
- Akingbe, Niyi. "Creating the Past and Still Counting the Losses: Evaluating Narratives of the Nigerian Civil War in Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra*." *Epiphany: Journal of Transdisciplinary Studies*. vol 5, no. 2, 2012, pp. 31-51. <https://www.academia.edu/3815918/>. Pdf download. Accessed 23 Aug. 2021.
- Akujobi, Remi. "Motherhood in African Literature and Culture." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* vol.13, no.1, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1706>. Accessed 16 March 2021.
- Akpome, Aghogho. "Intertextuality and Influence: Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of Savahhah* (1987) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006)." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol.53, no.5, Sept.2017, pp. 530-542. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17449855.2017.1333449>. Accessed 21 March 2018.
- Aladeojebi, Gbade. *History of Yorubaland*. Partridge Publishing Africa, 2016.
- Allan, Tuzyline Jita. *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1995, pp. 197-99. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3820283>. Accessed 20 Sept. 2020.
- Allen, Ann Taylor. *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe 1870-1970: The Maternal Dilemma*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Allen, Judith Van. "Aba Riots or Igbo Women's War? Ideology, Stratification and the Invisibility of Women." *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, edited by Nancy J Hafkin and Edna G Bay. Stanford University Press, 1976 pp. 59-86.
- . "'Sitting on a Man': Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women." *Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History and Representation*, edited by Roy Richard Grinker. Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pp 399-410.
- Alhassan, Ameena. "Nigerians Need to Rediscover Nigeria- Minna Salami." *Pressreader*, October 2015. <https://www.pressreader.com/nigeria/weekly-trust/20151010/282389808311639>. Accessed 23 June 2019.
- Amadi, Elechi. *Sunset in Biafra: A Civil War Diary*. Heinemann Educational, 1973.
- Amadiume, Ifi. *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*. Zed Books, 2015.
- Anderson, Kim. "Giving Life to the People: An Indigenous Ideology of Motherhood." *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings*, edited by Andrea O'Reilly, Demeter Press, 2007, pp. 761-781. *Z library*, <https://z-lib.io/book/14227153pdf>. Accessed 8 July 2020.
- Anizoba, Emmanuelle K. *Odinani: The Igbo Religion*. Trafford Publishing, 2008.
- Arndt, Susan. *African Women's Literature, Orature and Intertextuality: Igbo Oral Narratives as Nigerian Women Writers' Models and Objects of Writing Back*. PhD Dissertation, Bayreuth University, 1998. *Academia*, <https://www.academia.edu/32151302/>. Pdf download. Accessed 24 July 2020.

- Aristophanes. *Lysistrata*. Adapted by Winifred Ayres Hope. Samuel French Ltd., 1915. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/lysistrata00arisiala/page/n5/mode/2up?q>. Accessed 16 May 2021.
- Azodo, Ada Uzoamaka. "Efuru and Idu: Rejecting Women's Subjugation." *Emerging Perspectives on Flora Nwapa*, edited by Mary Umeh. Africa World Press, Inc., 1998, pp. 161-188. *Internet Archive*, [https://archive.org/details/emergingperspect0000unse\\_e0d4/page/n3/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/emergingperspect0000unse_e0d4/page/n3/mode/2up). Accessed 16 April 2019.
- Badru, Pade. *Imperialism and Ethnic Politics in Nigeria, 1960-96*. African World Press Inc., 1998.
- Barstow, Anne Llewellynn. *War's Dirty Secret: Rapes, Prostitution and Other Crimes Against Women*. The Pilgrim Press, 2000.
- Basden, George Thomas. *Among the Igbos of Nigeria*. Barles & Noble, 1966.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany Chevallier. Vintage Books, 2009. *Pdf Drive*, <https://www.pdfdrive.com/the-second-sex-d17304814.html>. Accessed 10 April 2018.
- Begum, Syed Hajira. "Deconstruction of Gender Identities: A Study of the Novels of Nwapa, Emecheta and Adichie." *Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature-JOELL*, vol.3, no. 1, 2016, pp. 86-93. *Research Gate*, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340248025\\_](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340248025_). Pdf download. Accessed 22 May 2019.
- Bellafare, Judith Lawrence. "Foreword." *Women and War: A Historical Encyclopedia from Antiquity to the Present*, edited by Bernard A. Cook. ABC-CLIO, 2006, pp. xxvii-xxviii. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/womenwarhistoric0000unse/page/n31/mode/2up?q>. Accessed 25 Sept. 2020.
- "The Berlin Conference." *South African History Online*. 27 Aug. 2019. <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/berlinconference#:~:text=The%20Berlin%20Conferenc,e%20spanned%20almost,as%20we%20know%20them%20today>. Accessed 18 June 2020
- "The Biafran National Anthem." *American Historical Association*. <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/teaching-resources-for-historians/teaching-and-learning-in-the-digital-age/through-the-lens-of-history-biafra-nigeria-the-west-and-the-world/the-republic-of-biafra/the-biafran-national-anthem>. Accessed 17 May 2022.
- Bird, Elizabeth S and Fraser Ottanelli. "The Asaba Massacre and the Nigerian Civil War: Reclaiming Hidden History." *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 16, no. 2-3, August 2014, pp. 379-399, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2014.936718>. Accessed on 25 May 2021.
- Boehmer Ellek. "Stories of Women and Mothers: Gender and Nationalism in the Early Fiction of Flora Nwapa." *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation*, Manchester University Press, 2005, pp. 88-105. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt155j4ws.9>. Accessed 19 Sept. 2020.

- Brown, Lloyd W. *Women Writers in Black Africa*. Greenwood Press, 1981. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/stream/womenwritersinbl00brow?ref=ol#page/n7/mode/2up>. Accessed 20 Nov. 2017.
- Brownmiller, Susan. *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. Ballentine Books, 1975. "Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists". *African Women's Development Fund*, 2016. [https://awdf.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/AFF-Feminist-Charter-Digital-AcA\\_A\\_-English.pdf](https://awdf.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/AFF-Feminist-Charter-Digital-AcA_A_-English.pdf). Accessed 20 July 2023.
- "Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists". *AFF-Feminist Charter Digital*. 3 Nov. 2016. <https://awdf.org/the-african-feminist-charter/> Accessed 20 Sept. 2022.
- Christian, Barbara. *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers*. Pergamon Press, 1985, pp. 211-252. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/blackfeministcri00chri/page/252/mode/2up?q=creativity> Accessed 26 June 2021.
- Chuku, Gloria. "Nwanibuike Flora Nwapa, Igbo Culture and Women Studies." *Igbo Intellectual Tradition: Creative Conflict in African and African Diasporic Thought*, edited by Gloria Chuku, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 267-294. Pdfdrive, <https://www.pdfdrive.com/the-igbo-intellectual-tradition-creative-conflict-in-african-and-african-diasporic-thought-e181624514.html>. Accessed 10 Nov. 2017.
- . "Women and the Nigeria-Biafra War." *A Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide: The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967-1970*, edited by A. Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten. Routledge, 2018, pp. 329-359.
- Chukwuma, Helen. "Positivism and the Female Crisis: The Novels of Buchi Emecheta." *Nigerian Female Writers: A Critical Perspective*. Edited by Henrietta Otokunefor and Obiageli Nwodo. Malthouse Press Limited, 1989, pp. 2-18.
- Collins, Patricia Hills. "The Meaning of Motherhood in Black Culture and Mother-Daughter Relationships." *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings*, edited by Andrea O'Reilly, Demeter Press, 2007, pp. 274-289. <https://z-lib.io/book/14227153.pdf> Accessed 20 Sept. 2022.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge, 2009.
- Cohen, Dara Kay. *Rape During Civil War*. Cornell University Press, 2016.
- Cornelissen, Catriona. *Negotiating Cultures: Modes of Memory in Novels by African Women*. PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1997. <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/10978/1/NQ27899.pdf>. Accessed 8 June 2020.
- Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. Penguin Books, 1994. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/heartofdarkness0000conr/page/n3/mode/2up>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2017.
- Cook, Bernard A. "Introduction." *Women and War: A Historical Encyclopedia from Antiquity to the Present*, edited by Bernard A Cook. ABC-CLIO, 2006, pp. xxxi-xxxvii. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/women-warhistoric0000unse/page/n31/mode/2up?q>. Accessed 25 Sept. 2020.

- Crowley, E. "Third World Women and the Inadequacies of Western Feminism". *Troicaire Development Review*, 1991, pp. 43-56. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8215621>. Accessed 13 July 2021.
- Davies, Carole, Boyce. "Motherhood in the Works of Male and Female Igbo Writers: Achebe, Emecheta, Nwapa, Nwaza." *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*, edited by Carole Boyce Davies and Anna Adams Graves, Africa World Press Inc, 1986, pp. 241-25. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/ngambika00tici/page/n15/mode/2up>. Accessed 21 Nov. 2017.
- Debel, Serawit B. "Revolutionary Mothering." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 35, no.2, 2023, pp.135-140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2023.2186383>. Accessed 23 Sept.2023.
- Devi, Trishna. "The Treatment of Motherhood in African Culture and Literature." *DJ Journal of English Language and Literature*. vol 2, no.2. 2017. Pp 37-42.<https://access.portico.org/stable?au=phw1b1f0msc>. Accessed 28 Dec. 2022.
- Ebbe, Obi N. Ignatius. *Broken Back Axle: Unspeakable Events in Biafra*. Xlibris US, 2010.
- Ebiem, Osita. *Nigeria, Biafra & Boko Haram: Ending the Genocides through Multi-State Solution*. Page Publishing Inc, 2014.
- Echerou, Michael. *Joyce Cary and the Novel of Africa*. Africana Publishing Company, 1973. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/stream/joycecarynovel00eche#page/n5/mode/2up>. Accessed on 16 Aug 2017.
- Ejiogu, Emenike C. *The Roots of Political Instability in Nigeria: Political Evolution and Development in the Niger Basin*. Routledge, 2011.
- Egbunike, Louisa Uchum. "CFP: The 4th Annual International Igbo Conference, Theme: Igbo Womanhood, Womanbeing and Personhood, SOAS, University of London." *H-Africa*, 12 May 2014,<https://networks.h-net.org/node/28765/discussions/54068/cfp-4th-annual-international-igbo-conference-theme-igbo-womanhood>. Accessed 26 July 2018.
- Ekwensi, Cyprian. *Divided We Stand: A Novel of the Nigerian Civil War*. Fourth Dimension, 1980.
- Emecheta, Buchi. *Adah's Story*. Allison & Busby, 1983.
- . "Author's Foreword." *Destination Biafra*. Allison & Busby, 1982, pp. vii-viii
- . *The Bride Price*. George Braziller, 2013.
- . *Destination Biafra*. Allison & Busby, 1982.
- . *Double Yoke*. Braziller, 1983.
- . *Gwendolen*. Flamingo 1990.
- . *Head Above Water*. Fontana Paperbacks, 1986.
- . *In the Ditch*. Allison & Busby, 1979.

- . *The Joys of Motherhood*. George Braziller, 2013.
- . *Kehinde*. Pearsons Education, 1994.
- . "Note to the Reader". *Destination Biafra*. Allison & Busby, 1982, pp. ix.
- . *The Rape of Shavi*. George Braziller, Inc., 2000
- . *Second Class Citizen*. Pearson Education, 1994.
- . *The Slave Girl*. George Braziller, Inc., 1977.
- Emelumadu, Chikodili. "4th Annual Igbo Conference: Chikodili Emelumadu - Different but Equal". *The Igbo Conference*, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v15Flwa9Ppk>. Accessed 3 May 2019.
- Eromosele, Ehijele Femi. "Sex and Sexuality in the Works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie". *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.5, no.9, March 2013.pp. 99-110.<http://www.jpanafrican.org/docs/vol5no9/5.9SexandS.pdf>. Accessed 14 May 2018.
- Etim, James.S. "Women and Society in Selected Novels and Short stories of Flora Nwapa". *Black Women Writers Across Cultures*, edited by Valentine Udoh James et al. International Scholars Publications, 2000, pp.103-120. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/blackwomenwriter0000unse/page/n9/mode/2up?q=flora+nwapa>. Accessed 03 May 2018.
- Ezeh, Marynoelle. "Starvation and Relief Operations in the Nigeria/Biafra War: The Role of Religious Organizations and the Local Population". *The Nigeria/Biafra War: Genocide and Politics of Memory*, edited by Chima J Korieh Cambria Press, 2019, pp.91-110.
- Ezeigbo, Akachi "From the Horses' Mouth. The Politics of Remembrance in Women's Writing on the Nigerian Civil War". *Matatu: Journal for African and Cultural Society*, vol. 29-30, 2005, pp. 221 -230. *BRILL*,[https://brill.com/view/journals/mata/29-30/1/articlep221\\_15.xml](https://brill.com/view/journals/mata/29-30/1/articlep221_15.xml).Accessed 29 May 2021.
- Fadare, Nureni Oyewole. "The Narrative Voice in Flora Nwapa's Efuru". *Ebonyi Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, vol.1, no.2, 2018, pp. 128-137.[http://www.ejlls.com/uploads/893370\\_1529800180.pdf](http://www.ejlls.com/uploads/893370_1529800180.pdf). Accessed 23 Dec.2017.
- Falola, Toyin and Ann Genova. *Historical Dictionary of Nigeria*. Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2009.
- Falola, Toyin and Saheed Aderinto. *Nigeria, Nationalism and Writing History*. University of Rochester Press, 2010.
- Feldner, Maximilian. *Narrating the New African Diaspora: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigerian Literature in Context*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.
- Fishburn, Katherine. *Reading Buchi Emecheta: Cross-Cultural Conversations*. Greenwood Press, 1995. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/readinguchiemec00fish/page/n7/mode/2up?q=buchi+emecheta>. Accessed 12 Dec. 2020.
- Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. Penguin Books, 2010.

- Green, December. *Gender Violence in Africa*. St. Martin's Press, 1999. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/genderviolencein0000unse/page/n5/mode/2up>. Accessed 26 June 2022.
- Green, Margaret. *Igbo Village Affairs: Chiefly with Reference to the Village of Umbueka Agbaja*. Routledge, 1964.
- Heerten, Lasse and A. Dirk Moses. "The Nigeria-Biafra War: Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide." *A Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide: The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967–1970*, edited by A. Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten. Routledge, 2018, pp.3-44.
- Herr, Ranjoo Seodu. "Reclaiming Third World Feminism: Or Why Transnational Feminism Needs Third World Feminism." *Meridians*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2014, pp. 1–30. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2979/meridians.12.1.1>. Accessed 9 Sept. 2023.
- Hogan, Patrick Colm. "'How Sisters Should Behave to Sisters': Women's Culture and Igbo Society in Flora Nwapa's Efurú." *English in Africa*, vol.26, no.1, 1999, pp. 45-60. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40238874>. Accessed 13 Oct. 2017.
- Horowitz, Donald L. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. University of California Press, 1985.
- Hudson-Weems, Clenora. *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*. Bedford Publishers, 1993. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/africanawomanism00huds/page/n3/mode/2up>. Accessed 27 May 2019.
- Hunt, Nigel C. *Memory, War and Trauma*. Cambridge University Press, 2010. "Igbo women campaign for rights (The Women's War) in Nigeria, 1929." *Global Nonviolent action Database*. <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/>. Accessed 23 Nov. 2020.
- "Igbo women's campaign for rights (The Women's War) in Nigeria, 1929". *Global non-violent action database*. <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/igbo-women-campaign-rights-womens-war-nigeria-1929>. Accessed 16 May 2020.
- Ike, Onyeka. "The Utilization of Literary Techniques in Flora Nwapa's *Never Again* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*." *Ejotmas: Ekpoma Journal of Theatre and Media Arts Vol 7. No.1-2*, 2019. Pp. 129-152. <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ejotmas/article/view/194694>. Accessed 21 March 2021
- Ike, Vincent Chukwuemeka. *Sunset at Dawn*. University Press PLC, 1993. Imhonopi, D., et al. "Colonialism, Social Structure and Class Formation: Implication for Development in Nigeria." *A Panoply of Readings in Social Sciences: Lessons for and from Nigeria*, edited by David O. Imhonopi and Ugochukwu M Urim. Cardinal Prints, 2013, pp. 107-122. *Figshare*, 7 Oct. 2017. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.5480131.v1>. Pdf download. Accessed 17 Feb. 2019
- Isichei, Elizabeth Allo. *A History of African Societies to 1870*. Cambridge University Press, 1997. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/historyofafrican00isic/page/n9/mode/2up>. Accessed 30 May 2021.
- Izgarjan, Aleksandra & Markov, Slobodanka. "Alice Walker's Womanism: Perspectives Past and Present." *Gender Studies*, vol.11, no.1, 2012. *Research Gate*, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311780907>. Accessed 14 June 2019.



- Jadeja, Swatiba. *Portrayal of Nigerian Women in the Selected Works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*. PhD dissertation, Saurashtra University, 2018. *Inflibnet Centre*, <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/237107>. Accessed 9 Dec 2020.
- Jannah, Immanuel. "History: How Igbos Came to Nigeria and Settled in the South-East." Nov.15, 2014. <http://obindigbo.com.ng/2014/11/history-igbos-came-nigeria-settled-> Accessed 28 Jan.2020.
- Jell-Bahlsen, Sabine. "The Concept of Mammywater in Flora Nwapa's Novels." *Research in African Literatures*, vol.26, no.2, 1995, pp. 30-41. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3820269>. Accessed 17 Nov. 2017.
- Jilek, B. "Doing Motherhood, Doing Home: Mothering as Home-Making Practice in *Half of a Yellow Sun*." *Humanities*, vol. 9, no.3, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h9030107>. Accessed 29 Oct. 2022.
- Jones, Eldred. "Locale and Universe: Three Nigerian Novels." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol.2, no.1, March 1967, pp 127-131. *Sage Journals*, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/002198946800300118> Accessed 7 Nov. 2017.
- Kaplan, Laura Duhan. "Woman as Caretaker: An Archetype That Supports Patriarchal Militarism." *Hypatia*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1994, pp. 123–133. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/3810173](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810173). Accessed 28 Apr. 2021.
- Katrak, Ketu H. *Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women Writers of the Third World*. Rutgers University Press, 2006.
- Kern, Anita. "Flora Nwapa: Never again." *World Literature Written in English*, vol.17, no.1, 1978, pp 58-59. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17449857808588505>. Accessed 6 Nov. 2017.
- Kipling, Rudyard. *A Book of Words*. London: Macmillian and Co. Limited, 1928.
- Health Canada. *Health Canada's gender-based analysis policy*. Government of Canada Publications.2000. p. 14. <https://publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection/H34-110-2000E.pdf>. Accessed 19 Aug 2018.
- Korsvik Trine Rogg and Linda Marie Rustad. "What is the Gender Dimension in Research? Case Studies in Interdisciplinary Research", translated by Connie J Stultz. *Kilden Gender Research*, 2018. [https://kjonnsforskning.no/sites/default/files/what\\_is\\_the\\_gender\\_dimension\\_roggkorsvik\\_kilden\\_genderresearch.no\\_.pdf](https://kjonnsforskning.no/sites/default/files/what_is_the_gender_dimension_roggkorsvik_kilden_genderresearch.no_.pdf). Accessed 26 Feb. 2021.
- Koslow, Philip. *Lords of the Savanna: The Bambara, Fulani, Igbo, Mossi and Nupe*. Chelsea House Publishers, 1997.
- Laurence, Margaret. *Long Drums and Cannons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists, 1952-66*. The University of Alberta Press, 1968. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/longdrumscannons00laur/page/n5/mode/2up?q=flora+nwapa>. Accessed 20 Nov. 2017.
- Leith-Ross, Sylvia. *African Women: Study of the Ibo of Nigeria*. Routledge and Kegan Paul PLC, 1965.

- Lorde, Audre. *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*. Penguin Classics, 2018.
- Maja-Pearce, Adewale. "Flora Nwapa's Efurú: A study in misplaced hostility." *World Literature Written in English*, vol. 25, no.1, 1985, pp.10-15.<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17449858508588918>. Accessed 6 Nov.2017.
- Matera, Marc, et al. *The Women's War of 1929: Gender and Violence in Colonial Nigeria*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. *Springer Link*, <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/9780230356061#.pdf>. Accessed 9 May 2021.
- Mbah, Ndubueze L. "Judith Van Allen, 'Sitting on a Man' and the Foundation of Igbo Women's Studies." *Journal of West African History*, vol.3 no.2, 2017, pp.156-165. *Project Muse*, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/682057>. Accessed 30 Jan. 2021.
- Mears, Mary D. *Choice and Discovery: An Analysis of Women and Culture in Flora Nwapa's Fiction*. Graduate Theses and Dissertations, University of South Florida, 2009.<https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3098&context=etd>. Accessed 10 March 2017.
- Mey, Joke De. *The Intersection of History, Literature and Trauma in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun*. Master Thesis, Universiteit Gent, 2010-11. [https://libstore.ugent.be/fulltxt/RUG01/001/786/608/RUG01-01786608\\_2012\\_0001\\_AC.pdf](https://libstore.ugent.be/fulltxt/RUG01/001/786/608/RUG01-01786608_2012_0001_AC.pdf). Accessed 19 July 2021.
- Mgbeadichie, Chike Francis. *The Critical Concepts of Afrocentricism in Nigerian Literature*. PhD dissertation, Exeter U, 2015. <https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871/21088/MgbeadichieC.pdf;sequence=1>, Accessed 9 June 2019.
- Mikell, Gwendolyn. "Introduction." *African Feminism: The Politics of Survival in Sub-Saharan Africa*, edited by Gwendolyn Mikell. PENN, 1997, pp. 1-50.
- Misra, Chittaranjan. "Blossoming of Freedom: Use of Symbols in Adichie's Purple Hibiscus." *Research Chronicler*, 2018. <https://www.academia.edu/37589104/>.pdf. Accessed 14 Jan. 2020.
- Moghalu, Odi. *Igbo-Israel: A Comparison of Igbo and Ancient Israel's Culture*. Kindle ed., Xlibris US, 2015.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Duke University Press, 2003, pp. 17-42. *Z library*, <https://z-lib.io/book/14943685>. Pdf download. Accessed 20 April 2019.
- Morus, Christina M. "War, Rape and the Global Condition of Womanhood." *Rape: Weapon of War and Genocide*, edited by Carol Rittner and John K Roth. Paragon House, 2012, pp. 45-60. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/rapeweaponofwar00ritt/page/n7/mode/2up?q=Rape+women+of+war+and+genocide>. Accessed 18 June 2020.
- Muonwe, Michael. *New Dawn for African Women: Igbo Perspective*. Xlibris, 2016.

- Nadasawaran, Shalini. *Out of the Silence: Igbo Women Writers and Contemporary Nigeria*. PhD Dissertation, University of New South Wales, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.26190/unsworks/15963>. Pdf download. Accessed 18 Aug 2019.
- . "Rethinking Family Relationships in Third Generation Nigeria and Women's Fiction." *DOAJ Open Global Trusted*, vol.5, no.1, 2011, pp.19-32. *Research Gate*, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286637455\\_](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286637455_). Pdf download. Accessed 16 April 2019.
- Neyer, G., & Bernardi, L. "Feminist Perspectives on Motherhood and Reproduction." *Historical Social Research*, vol.36, no.2, 2011, pp. 162-176. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.36.2011.2.162-176>. Accessed 12 April 2021.
- Nikolic-Ristanovic, Vesna. "War, Nationalism and Mothers in the Former Yugoslavia." *The Women and War Reader*, edited by Lois Ann Lorentzen and Jennifer Turpin, New York University Press, 1998. pp. 234-239. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/womenwarreader00lore/>. Accessed 18 April 2019.
- Njau, Rebeka. "Rebeka Njau." *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*, edited by Adeola James. Heinemann, 1990, pp. 102-109. *Internet Archive*, <https://tinyurl.com/yweycujb>, Accessed 07 Aug. 2019.
- Nkealah, Naomi. "(West) African Feminisms and Their Challenges." *Journal of Literary Studies*, vol. 32, no.2, 2016, pp. 61-74. *Research Gate*, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305485675\\_](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305485675_). Pdf download. Accessed 20 March 2021.
- Nnaemeka, Obioma. "African Women, Colonial Discourses, and Imperialist Interventions: Female Circumcision as Impetus." *Female Circumcision and the Politics of Knowledge: African Women in Imperialist Discourses*, edited by Obioma Nnaemeka. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005, pp. 27-48.
- . "Feminism, Rebellious Women, and Cultural Boundaries: Rereading Flora Nwapa and Her Compatriots." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1995, pp. 80-113. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/3820273](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3820273). Accessed 05 Dec. 2020.
- . "Introduction: Imag(in)ing Knowledge, Power, and Subversion in the Margins." *The Politics of (M)othering: Womanhood, Identity, and Resistance in African Literature*, edited by Obioma Nnaemeka. Routledge, 1997, pp. 1-25.
- Nnoromele, Salome. *Life Among the Igbo Women of Nigeria*. Lucent Books, 1998.
- Nunziata, Daniele. "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie." *Great Writers Inspire*. University of Oxford, 11 Aug. 2020, <http://writersinspire.org/content/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie>. Accessed on 22 September 2022.
- Nwala, T. Uzodinma. *Igbo Philosophy*. Lantern Books, 1985. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/igbophilosophy00nwal/page/n1/mode/2up>. Accessed 18 June 2018.
- Nwana, Pita. *Omenuko*. Translated by Ernest N Emenyonu, African Heritage Press, 2014.
- Nwogu, Mary Imelda Obianuju. "The Legal Anatomy of Cultural Widowhood Practices in South Eastern Nigeria: The Need for a Panacea". *Global Journal of Politics and*

*Law Research*. European Centre for Research Training and Development, vol.3, no.1, 2015, pp.79-90.

<https://www.eajournals.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Legal-Anatomy-of-Cultural-Widowhood-Practices-in-South-Eastern-Nigeria-The-Need-for-a-Panacea.pdf>. Accessed 20 June 2019.

Nwankwo, Izuu. "Purple Hibiscus and theme of moderation as a metaphor in the evolution of contemporary Nigerian fiction." *International Journal of Pedagogy Innovation and New Technologies*, vol.5, no.2, 2018, pp.112-121. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0012.9681>. Accessed 17 March 2020.

Nwapa, Flora. *Cassava Song and Rice Song*. Tana Press, 1986.

---. *Efuru*. Waveland Press, Inc., 1966.

---. *Idu*. Heinemann Educational, 1970.

---. "Flora Nwapa." *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*, edited by Adeola James. Heinemann, 1990. pp. 110-117. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/intheirownvoices0000unse>. Accessed 05 Aug. 2019.

---. *Never Again*. Africa World Press, Inc., 1992.

---. *One is Enough*. Africa World Press, Inc., 1995.

---. *This is Lagos and Other Stories*. Africa World Press, 1992.

---. *Wives at War and Other Stories*. E-book, ed. Tana Press Ltd., 2020. Kindle.

---. *Women are Different: A Novel*. Africa Research and Publications, 1992.

Nwosu, Innocent and Friday Onwe. "The Plight of Infertile Women in Nigeria." *Journal of Policy and Development Studies*, vol.9, no.3, May 2015, pp.39-46. *Research Gate*, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283869078\\_](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283869078_). Pdf download. Accessed 17 June 2020.

Nzegwu, Nkiru. "Recovering Igbo Traditions: A Case for Indigenous Women's Organizations in Development." *Women, Culture, and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities*, edited by Martha C. Nussbaum, and Jonathan Glover. Oxford, 1995, pp. 444-466.

Oboko, Uche and Aloysius C. Ifeanyichukwu. "Genderized Implications of Bride Pricing Culture in Igboland: A Sociolinguistic Study." *Journal Harian Regional*. <https://ojs.unud.ac.id/index.php/language/article/download/73353/42058.pdf> download. Accessed 12 May 2021.

Odaga, Asenath. "Asenath Odaga." *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*, edited by Adeola James. Heinemann, 1990. pp. 122-135. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/intheirownvoices0000unse>. Accessed 05 Aug. 2019.

Oduyoye, Mercy Amba and Musimbi R.A.Kanyoro. "Introduction." *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa*, edited by Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro. Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005, pp. 1-8.

- Ogaziechi, Nnendiso. "Afia Attack, as a Challenge to Nigerian Women in Politics." *The Nation*. January 16, 2021. <https://thenationonlineng.net/afia-attack-as-a-challenge-to-nigerian-women-in-politics/>. Accessed 18 April 2022.
- Ogbaa, Kalu. *Gods, Oracles, And Divination: Folkways in Chinua Achebe's Novels*. Africa World Press, 1992. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/godsoraclesdivin00ogba/page/n5/mode/2up?q=igbo+ancestors>. Accessed 21 Dec.2021
- Ogundipe-Leslie, Molar. *Re-creating ourselves: African women & critical transformations*. Africa World Press, 1994. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/recreatingoursel00ogun/page/n9/mode/2up>. Accessed 19 May 2019.
- Ogunyemi, Chikwenye Okonjo. *African Wo/man Palava: The Nigerian Novel by Women*. The University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Okeke-Ihejirika, Philomena. *Negotiating Power and Privilege: Igbo Career Women in Contemporary Nigeria*. Athens, 2004. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/details/negotiatingpower0000okek/page/n5/mode/2up>. Accessed 19 Aug 2021.
- Okoli, Al Chukwuma. "Exploring the Transformative Essence of Intellectual Feminism in Africa: Some Contributions of Amina Mama" *Open Political Science*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2021, pp. 126-135. <https://doi.org/10.1515/openps-2021-0013>. Pdf. Accessed 28 July 2023.
- Okpewho Isidore. *The Last Duty*. Longman, 1976.
- Okuyade, Ogaga. "Changing Borders and Creating Voices: Silence as Character in Chimamanda Adichie's Purple Hibiscus." *Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.2, no. 9, 2009. [https://www.jpanafrican.org/docs/vol2no9/2.9\\_Changing\\_Borders\\_and\\_Creating\\_Voices](https://www.jpanafrican.org/docs/vol2no9/2.9_Changing_Borders_and_Creating_Voices). Accessed 14 May 2020
- Olufunwa, Harry. "Earning a Life: Women and Work in the Fiction of Buchi Emecheta." *Africa and Its Significant Others: Forty Years of Cultural Entanglement*, edited by Isabel Hoving, et al. 2003, pp.35-44. *Research Gate*, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344885302>. Accessed 10 May 2020.
- Onwuejeogwu, Angulu M. *The Social Anthropology of Africa: An Introduction*. Heinemann Educational Books Limited, 1975.
- O'Reilly, Andrea. *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, Practice*. Demeter Press, 2021.
- Osinubi, Taiwo Adetunji. "Provincializing Slavery: Atlantic Economies in Flora Nwapa's Efurū." *Research in African Literatures*, vol.45, no.3, 2014, pp. 1-26. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/555709/pdf>. Accessed 16 Dec. 2017.
- Oyewumi, Oyeronke. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- . "De-Confounding Gender: Feminist Theorizing and Western Culture, a Comment on Hawkesworth's 'Confounding Gender.'" *Signs*, vol. 23, no. 4, 1998, pp. 1049-62. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3175203>. Accessed 9 Nov. 2022.
- . "Introduction." *Gender Epistemologies in Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 1-8.

- Palmer, Eustace. "Review of the Concubine by Elechi Amadi and Efurū by Flora Nwapa." *African Literature Today*, vol.1, pp. 56–58, 1968. Rpt. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol 3, pp. 127-131, 1968.
- Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. WW Norton and Company, 1976. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/ofwomanbornmothe00rich/page/n7/mode/2up>. Accessed 10 July 2020.
- Ross, Ellen. "Motherhood." *Encyclopedia.com*. Encyclopaedia of European Social History, <https://www.encyclopedia.com>. Accessed 16 June 2022.
- Ruddick, Sara. *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*. Beacon Press, 1989. *Z library*.<https://z-lib.io/book/15783602>. Accessed 28 Oct.2020.
- Sengupta, Shivaji. "Desire, the Private and the Public in Flora Nwapa's Efurū and One is Enough." *Emerging perspectives on Flora Nwapa: critical and theoretical essays*, edited by Mary Umeh. Africa World Press, Inc.,1998, pp.549-565. *Internet Archive*, [https://archive.org/details/emergingperspect0000unse\\_e0d4/page/n3/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/emergingperspect0000unse_e0d4/page/n3/mode/2up). Accessed 16 April 2019.
- Stanley, Henry M. *Through the Dark Continent, or, The Sources of the Nile: Around the great lakes of equatorial Africa and down the Livingstone River to the Atlantic Ocean*. Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, Rivington, 1878. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/throughdarkconti1878stan1/page/n7/mode/2up?q=>, Accessed 14 July 2017.
- "Sisterhood." *Sociology of Sexuality*, 25 April 2012, <https://sociologyofsexuality.wordpress.com/2011/04/25/sisterhood/>. Accessed 13 May 2020.
- Stratton, Florence. "'Periodic Embodiments': A Ubiquitous Trope in African Men's Writing." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1990, pp. 111–26, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3819304>. Accessed 14 May 2022.
- Tamale, Sylvia. *African Sexualities: A Reader*. Oxford, 2011.
- Uchem, Rose N. "Women and Kolanut Saga in Igbo Culture: A Human Rights Issue." *Conference Paper*, 2 April 2008. *Research Gate*, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271520905\\_Women\\_and\\_the\\_Kolanut\\_A\\_Theological\\_and\\_Human\\_Rights\\_Saga](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271520905_Women_and_the_Kolanut_A_Theological_and_Human_Rights_Saga). Pdf. Accessed 2 April 2019.
- Uchendu, Egodi. *Women and Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War*. Africa World Press, Inc., 2007.
- . "Recollections of Childhood Experiences during the Nigerian Civil War." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, vol. 77, no. 3, 2007, pp. 393–418. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40026829>. Accessed 21 Sept. 2020.
- Uchendu, Victor.C. *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965.
- Ugochukwu, Françoise. "From Nwana to Adichie: Britishness Goes Full Circle in Nigerian Literature." *Britishness, Identity and Citizenship: The View from Abroad*, Ed.Catherine McGlynn, Andrew Mycock and James W McAuley. Oxford: Peterlang, 2011. pp.135–149. <http://oro.open.ac.uk/29205/>. Accessed 12 Sept. 2019

- Umeh, Marie. "Flora Nwapa As Author, Character, and Omniscient Narrator on 'The Family Romance' in An African Society." *Dialectical Anthropology*, vol. 26, no. 3/4, 2001, pp. 343–55. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29790665>. Accessed 19 Sept. 2020.
- . "Finale: Signifyin(g) the Griottes: Flora Nwapa's Legacy of (Re)Vision and Voice." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1995, pp. 114–23. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3820274>. Accessed 19 Sept. 2020.
- . *Flora Nwapa, a Pen and a Press*. Triatlantic Books, 2010.
- . "Introduction: Historicizing Flora Nwapa." *Emerging Perspectives on Flora Nwapa : Critical and Theoretical Essays*, edited by Mary Umeh. Africa World Press, 1998, pp. 1-24. *Internet Archive*, [https://archive.org/details/emergingperspect0000unse\\_e0d4/page/n3/mode/2up?q=flora+nwapa](https://archive.org/details/emergingperspect0000unse_e0d4/page/n3/mode/2up?q=flora+nwapa), Accessed 27 Sept. 2020.
- . "The Poetics of Economic Independence for Female Empowerment: An Interview with Flora Nwapa". *Emerging Perspectives on Flora Nwapa: Critical and Theoretical Essays*, edited by Mary Umeh. Africa World Press, 1998, pp. 661-672. *Internet Archive*, [https://archive.org/details/emergingperspect0000unse\\_e0d4/page/n3/mode/2up?q=flora+nwapa](https://archive.org/details/emergingperspect0000unse_e0d4/page/n3/mode/2up?q=flora+nwapa), Accessed 27 Sept. 2020.
- United States Agency for International Development. *Gender Terminology*. USAID (gov.).
- Uraizee, Joya. *This is No Place for a Woman: Nadine Gordimer, Buchi Emecheta and Nayantara Sehgal, and the Politics of Gender*. Red Sea Press, 2000.
- . "Buchi Emecheta and the Politics of Gender." *Black Women Writers Across Cultures*, edited by Valentine Udoh James et al. International Scholars Publications, 2000, pp.171-206.
- Urama, E. N. (2019). "The Values and Usefulness of Same-Sex Marriages Among the Females in Igbo Culture in the Continuity of Lineage or Posterity." *SAGE Journal*, vol.9, no.2, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019850037>. Pdf download. Accessed 12 Aug.2021.
- Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. Orion, 2011.
- Wambu, Chiemela Godwin, et al. "Creation of States in Nigeria, 1967-96: Deconstructing the History and Politics." *American Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol.6, no.1, pp. 1-8, 2020. *Research Gate*, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342142383>. Pdf download. Accessed 16 May 2022.
- Ware, Helen. "Polygyny: Women's Views in a Transitional Society, Nigeria 1975." *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 41, no. 1, 1979, pp. 185–95. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/351742>. Accessed 14 Sept. 2020.
- Waylen, Georgina. *Gender in Third World Politics*. Open University Press, 1996. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/genderinthirdwor0000wayl/page/n3/mode/2up?q=georgina+waylen> Accessed 30 July 2021.
- Wilson, Jean. "Representations of female experience in the novels of post-colonial West African writers: Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Ba." Master of Arts

- (Hons.) thesis, University of Wollongong, 1997. <https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses/2198/pdf>. Accessed 29 June 2020.
- Woldeyes, Billene Seyoum. "From Foetus to Woman." *African Feminism*, 2017. <https://africanfeminism.com/from-foetus-to-woman/>, Accessed 10 December 2021.
- York, Jodi. "The Truth about Women and Peace." *The Women and War Reader*, edited by Lois Ann Lorentzen and Jennifer Turpin, New York University Press, 1998. pp. 19-25. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/womenwarreader00lore/>. Accessed 18 April 2019.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira. *Gender & Nation*. SAGE Publications, 1997. *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/gendernation0000yuva/page/n5/mode/2up?q>. Archived 24 June 2020.