

CHARACTERS AND SPACE SHIFT IN BUCHI EMECHETA'S *THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD* AND CHIMAMADA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *HALF OF A YELLOW SUN*.



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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project titled: **CHARACTERS AND SPACE SHIFT IN BUCHI EMECHETA'S *THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD* AND CHIMAMADA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *HALF OF A YELLOW SUN***. was undertaken by **Beatrice JEGEDE (Miss)** of the Department of English and Literature, University of Benin, Benin City.

Dr. Osariemen Eguavoen
(Project Supervisor)

: _____
Date

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to almighty God, who has given me the strength and ability to do this work. I also dedicate this work to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Jegede who have given me all the love and support I needed as a student. I also dedicate this work to Nigerian women whom have inspired me to do this work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank God almighty for his love and mercy upon my life. I thank God for his protection and guidance, and for also giving me the ability to make the right decisions as a student.

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With joy in my heart, I want to appreciate my parents Mr and Mrs jegede for their love and support for me. I appreciate my mum for all the emotional support and prayers, her words of encouragement kept me going. I want to specially appreciate my Dad for providing all the financial support I need to go through school, it would not be possible without all your efforts and sacrifices. Thank you so much mum and dad, your love made everything possible for me.

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ABSTRACT

This essay focuses on the social and cultural shift of Nigerian women from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial era in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Chimamada Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Using post-colonial theory to explain the struggles of women which subsequently leads to their transformation and development over these eras. This essay employs a qualitative methodology to explore the elements of patriarchy and feminism in the novels . This essays concludes with examining gender roles expectation, issues relating to womanhood and more contemporary developments like carrier, marriage and adoption and how this developments creates as sense of hostility between individual freedom and the preservation of cultural heritage.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of study

This study examines the woman from the pre-colonial past to the post-colonial present in two Nigerian novels and verifies how shifting space affects the changes in characters. This research answers the following questions: how does time and space affect the female character in the different eras, how they are treated within their social space , and how they react to the changes in the way they are treated. This study also reveals the expectations of these women against the realities of their time.

1.2 Scope of Study

This research focuses on Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. This research focus on examining women's lives from the pre-colonial past to the post-colonial present and it addresses specific questions related to changes and space shifting. The geographical context for this research is basically the Igbo cultural setting.

1.3 Methodology

This research employs the qualitative methodology to explore the themes of women's experiences in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Chimamanda Ngozi

Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. This study utilizes in-depth textual analysis as its primary method of analysis, allowing for a nuanced interpretation of the characters' lives and the socio-cultural contexts in which they exist. By examining narrative structures, character development, and thematic elements, the research uncovers how these authors portray the complexities of womanhood across different historical periods.

1.4 Theoretical Background

The theory adopted for this study is the post colonial theory. The theory delves into several sub theories including, social change, feminism and intersectionality theory. Post-colonial theory provides a critical lens for examining the impacts of colonialism on the identities and experiences of characters in Nigerian novels. It enables an exploration of how colonial legacies shape societal norms and gender roles. Postcolonial theory is a critical framework that examines the cultural, political, and social impacts of colonialism and its aftermath. It focuses on how colonial powers dominated other nations, how these nations resisted and gained independence, and how colonial legacies continue to influence former colonies in terms of identity, language, culture, and economics. Postcolonial theory emerged in the mid-20th century alongside the decolonization of Africa. It began formalizing as field and theory in literature in 1950s to 1980s. It gained prominence as scholars and writers began analyzing how colonialism shaped identities,

knowledge, and global power structures. The intersection of intersectionality theory, feminist theory, and socio-cultural Change theory within postcolonial theory offers a nuanced framework to analyze the multifaceted effects of colonialism, especially when addressing marginalized groups, gender dynamics, and cultural transformations.

Juliana Abbebyi Makuchi in her work *African gender studies: "Gender, Feminist Theory, and Post-colonial (women's) Writing"* examines that an undifferentiated understanding of postcolonial theory not only erases the unique experiences and identities of so-called postcolonial subjects but also overlooks the power dynamics embedded in such broad, generalized categorizations. Within the expansive post-colonial category and more specifically within the internal centers and peripheries of post-colonial societies postcolonial women and their literary works demand a distinct form of theorization. Postcolonial women exist as fragments within a larger colonized framework, functioning as part of an oppositional system. This positioning subjects them to a "twice disabling discourse," as they navigate both colonial and patriarchal oppressions. Moreover, it is important to emphasize that women are not merely "a fragment, but rather multiple, intersecting fragments, each shaped by the various dimensions of their lived experiences. These intersecting fragments are burdened by multiple layers of a discourse that disables and marginalizes them in complex and overlapping ways.

Social change theory complements this analysis by focusing on how societal transformations influence individual and collective experiences. Anthony Smith's influential work on social change challenges the functionalist theory of evolutionary change by proposing the paradigm of historical change as an alternative. He critiques functionalism for its limitations, arguing that while it seeks to explain social change, it ultimately treats societies as static or frozen in their evolutionary trajectories. By contrast, Smith's historical change paradigm emphasizes the dynamic and context-dependent nature of societal transformations, rejecting the rigid, linear assumptions of functionalist approaches. One of the primary areas of focus in social change theory is the evolution of cultural practices, norms, and values. This theory help to contextualize the evolving roles of women in Nigeria societies, particularly in response to historical events such as colonization and subsequent independence. The theory highlight the dynamic interplay between social structures and personal agency, allowing for an examination of how women adapt to and resist changes in their environments.

Feminism serves as a foundational theory for understanding the specific challenges faced by women in the narratives. It emphasizes the importance of gender as a critical category of analysis, exploring themes of empowerment, oppression, womanhood, marital life and patriarchy resistance. The history of feminist theory spans centuries and encompasses

diverse ideologies, movements, and perspectives. Feminism is an interdisciplinary framework aimed at understanding and addressing gender inequality. Pre-Modern Roots . Early critiques of gender roles appeared in religious and philosophical texts. For instance, Christine de Pizan *The Book of the City of Ladies* Advocated for women's education and challenged misogynistic ideas in medieval Europe. The First Wave feminism Focused on legal and political rights, particularly suffrage. The Second Wave feminism (1960s-1980s) Expanded feminism beyond legal rights to address cultural and social inequalities and it focuses on Workplace discrimination, reproductive rights, sexuality, domestic violence, and education. Betty Friedan "The Feminine Mystique" 1963, Highlighted the dissatisfaction of suburban housewives. The Third Wave (1990s-2000s) Focused on individual identity, intersectionality, and diversity within feminism. It rejects a universal feminist identity; instead, it celebrated individual differences and included LGBTQ+ issues, women of color, and global feminism. By applying feminist theory, this study delve into the authors' portrayals of female characters, examining womanhood, sexuality, reproductive rights, their struggles against patriarchal norms, and their quests for autonomy across different eras.

Intersectionality theory was propounded by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal scholar, in 1989. She introduced the concept in her seminal paper, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of

Race and Sex,” which was later expanded in her 1991 article, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color.” Intersectionality examines how overlapping social identities such as race, gender, class, sexuality, disability, and more interact to create unique systems of oppression or privilege. It highlights that people are not affected by a single axis of discrimination, but by multiple, interlocking factors. For example a Black woman may face both racism and sexism, but her experiences cannot be fully understood by examining these separately. This theory help understand how institutions and policies perpetuate inequalities through these overlapping identities. Intersectionality seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of social inequality and ensure social justice efforts are inclusive. For this study, intersectionality theory serves as a tool to examine how the woman endure patriarchy, gender inequality, gender role expectations and personal and physical challenges. Intersectionality theory further enriches the analysis by acknowledging that women’s experiences are shaped not only by gender but also by factors such as class, ethnicity, and historical context. This approach facilitate a nuanced understanding of the diverse identities of women in the texts, revealing how intersecting social categories influence their lived experiences.

The post-colonial theoretical framework provide a comprehensive analysis for examining

the women in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. It enables an exploration of how colonial legacies shape societal norms and gender roles, revealing the women's shift in social and cultural space within the text.

In the context of this study, space refers to the social, cultural, or symbolic environment in which individuals, groups, or narratives exist and interact. It is not limited to physical locations but encompasses intangible aspects of context and experience. Social Space for example refers to the environment shaped by human relationships, roles, norms, and institutions like a workplace, a family gathering, or an online community. Social spaces influence how people behave, interact, and are perceived. Cultural space refers to the shared practices, values, traditions, and symbols of a specific community or society, e.g., religious rituals, a music festival, or a language group. Cultural space shapes identity, belonging, and the way people engage with the world. Space is a conceptual framework that helps us understand the environment, physical, social, or cultural, that influences interactions and identity and It can shift when these environments or contexts change. Ernest WB Hess- Lüttich addresses the influence of the spatial turn in literary studies, which focuses on space and place as central concepts for interpreting literature. The spatial turn marks a shift from traditional approaches centered on time, chronology, and

historical progression to an emphasis on how spatial relationships shape meaning, narrative, and cultural understanding.

Space shifting refers to changes or transitions in the social or cultural context of a person, group, or narrative. This concept is often used to analyze how individuals or communities navigate, adapt to, or transform across different social and cultural environments. Space shifting in social cultural context happen when people migrate, travel, or are exposed to different cultural practices, norms, and values, for example, an immigrant moving to a new country might experience a shift between their native culture and the dominant culture of their new home, Individuals may shift how they present themselves or behave in different cultural space, adapting to expectations of one community while maintaining connections to another. Cultural space shifting often results in the blending of traditions, practices, or creating new hybrid cultural identities. Narratives often use space shifting to depict characters' transitions between social classes, cultural environments, or communities (e.g., urban to rural, or colonial to post-colonial). Characters navigating social-cultural space shifts might experience feelings of alienation, cultural clash, or transformation.

1.5 Literature Review

Susan, in her article “Diasporic Vision in Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*,” discusses diaspora, and she argues that “the loss of Biafra renders these figures spectral in their powerlessness and foreign in their alienation from the triumphant nation” this essay examines the novel ‘s diasporic perspective highlighting Adichie’s depiction of colonial legacies that influence public history and disrupt personal communities . The description of these individuals as “spectral” underscores their diminished presence within the political and social fabric of Nigeria, reduced to shadows of their former selves, with little to no influence in shaping the post-war narrative. This imagery of powerlessness reflects the stark reality of their defeat: not only did they lose the war, but they also lost their agency and voice within the unified Nigerian state.

D. Williams, in her article “Trauma and Madness in *Half of a Yellow Sun*,” *Dark Swoops* examine the systemic, individual, and gendered traumas of the Nigerian-Biafran War to comment on the aftermath of the empire . D. Williams work reflects the negative aftermath of war. Her work examines the psychological and social consequences of the Nigerian-Biafran War, focusing on how trauma manifests on systemic, individual, and gendered levels. She explores how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie ’ s novel portrays the long-lasting effects of war, particularly its impact on women and marginalized groups.

Eleni Coundouriotis in her work “War Fiction in the Post colonial” *The People’s Right to the Novel* hails Chimamanda Adichie’s novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* for its reinvention of “the genre of domestic fiction by using it to tell the story of war” and, also for feminizing the war novel in the tradition of women fore bearers in Nigeria such as Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta (np).

Ato Quayson in *Postcolonialism: “Theory, Practice, or Process”* examines how Adichie situates the Biafran War within the larger framework of colonial history. He argues that the novel critiques the arbitrary boundaries imposed by colonial powers and highlights their long-term impacts on Nigerian ethnic relations.(np)

Elleke Boehmer, in *Postcolonial Poetics: “21st-Century Critical Readings”*, argues that *Half of a Yellow Sun* captures the trauma of war and the struggle for Igbo identity. She focuses on how the novel critiques global indifference to the Biafran cause while shedding light on the ways African writers preserve cultural memory. Boehmer emphasizes how African writers, including Adichie, preserve cultural memory. This act of storytelling challenges patriarchal historical narratives that often erase or diminish women’ s role.

Madhu Krishnan’s “Contemporary African Literature in English” discusses Adichie’s deliberate blending of fictional and historical elements. She highlights the novel’s interrogation of whose stories get told in history and the role of literature in shaping

historical consciousness.. The novel challenges dominant historical narratives by questioning whose stories are remembered and whose are erased. Krishnan highlights the role of literature in shaping historical consciousness, arguing that Adichie uses storytelling to give voice to marginalized perspectives, particularly those of Biafran civilians who suffered during the war. By merging personal and political histories, the novel not only preserves memory but also critiques the selective nature of historical record-keeping.

Malesela Edward Montle and Mphoto Johannes Mogoboya in their study :“A Feminist Study of Buchi Emecheta’S *The Joys of Motherhood*”, :*The Representation of African Traditional Women in African Literature* focuses on the African women writers to interrogate not only the mainstream society, but also challenges faced by women in traditional African societies (98) . They employ feminist theory to analyze the systemic challenges and societal expectations that African women face, particularly within patriarchal structures. Exploring several themes like patriarchy, Polygamous marriage, marriage and Childbearing, women as objects, The authors critique the objectification of women, portraying them as commodities within marital transactions and broader societal interactions.

Fridah Kanorio and Peter Muhoro Mwangi, examine the struggles of motherhood in African novel Buchi emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood*’ investigating the challenges women encounter in motherhood as well as the position of women in their societies,

credibly displaying both the truth as well as the strengths of women in modern setups. In their study, “The Struggles of Motherhood in the African Novella: A Feminist Analysis of Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood*,” Fridah Kanorio and Peter Muhoro Mwangi examine the challenges faced by African women in traditional societies, as depicted in these novels. They analyze how societal expectations and cultural norms contribute to the struggles of motherhood, highlighting themes such as polygamy, patriarchy, and the objectification of women. The authors employ feminist literary theories to critique these issues and advocate for social awareness and policy changes to address the challenges that women continue to face in many African countries.

Marie A Umeh in her work, “Myth or Reality?” argues that In *The Joys of Motherhood* Emecheta extends her metaphor of the enslaved Igbo woman, arguing that the society also programs women to be slaves of their male offspring as well as their husbands(7).

Marie A. Umeh critically examines Buchi Emecheta’s novel *The Joys of Motherhood*, challenging the traditional glorification of motherhood in African literature. Umeh argues that Emecheta deconstructs the idealized image of the African mother by portraying the protagonist, Nnu Ego, as a figure whose life is marked by suffering and unfulfilled expectations. The novel presents motherhood not as a source of ultimate joy and fulfillment but as a role fraught with sacrifice, hardship, and societal pressures. Umeh highlights how Emecheta’s narrative exposes the societal conditioning that subjugates women, compelling them to find identity and worth solely through childbearing and

motherhood. This critical perspective invites readers to question and reassess the romanticized notions of motherhood prevalent in African societies and literature.

Teresa Derrickson's work, "The status of women in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*", focuses on the novel's critique of traditional Ibo society. Specifically, such articles read Emecheta's text as a denunciation of the reproductive practices of the Ibo people, practices that do harm to women by promoting the idea that a proper wife should seek only to beget and care for her offspring (1) . Derrickson argues that the protagonist, Nnu Ego, is not only constrained by traditional Ibo societal expectations but also by the disruptive forces of British colonialism. This dual pressure subjects Nnu Ego to a complex interplay of cultural and economic transformations that redefine her roles and status. Derrickson emphasizes that while traditional Ibo culture places significant value on motherhood, the advent of colonial rule introduces new economic systems and social norms that undermine these indigenous values.

Zahra Barfi, and Sarieh Alaei in their work "Western Feminist Consciousness in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*" focuses on Feminism as a collection of movements which struggles for women's rights. Focusing on gender as a basis of women's sexual oppression, feminist scholarship attempts to establish equal rights for women politically, economically, socially, personally.(np)

1.6 Thesis statement

Characters and space shift in Buchi Emecheta *The Joys of Motherhood* and Chimamada Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, reveals the struggles of the woman through the pre-colonial to the colonial and post colonial eras which manifest in new forms of mental, educational, and socio-economic independence.

CHAPTER TWO

STRUGGLES OF NIGERIAN WOMEN IN PRE COLONIAL ERA

In globalization , The modern world is increasingly interconnected, leading to shifts in social and cultural spaces through technology, trade, and communication. These shifts can result in conflicts, misunderstandings, or struggles to preserve cultural heritage, for example, diaspora communities or Individuals who belong to a diaspora experience cultural space shifting as they balance their heritage with the culture of their host countries. Someone who identifies with multiple intersecting social categories e.g, gender, race, class may shift between spaces to navigate different aspects of their identity.

2.1 The Identity of Women in Igbo Precolonial Society

The pre-colonial era society was primarily patrilineal, with inheritance and lineage traced through the male line, However, women retained strong ties to their natal families, which gave them a dual identity as daughters and wives. This duality allowed women to navigate power structures and maintain a degree of autonomy. the worldview emphasized complementary gender roles, where men and women had distinct but equally important responsibilities, while men dominated the public sphere of warfare and politics, women thrived in economic and social domains. This balance was central to the community's

functioning and stability. In the pre-colonial era, women played significant roles and held dynamic identities within their communities. Their lives were shaped by a highly communal, agricultural society with social structures that balanced individual responsibilities and collective well-being. Women's roles extended across economic, political, social, and spiritual spheres, making them indispensable to life despite the presence of patriarchal elements.

In Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, there is a significant shift in characters and space following the transitions and conflicts experienced by Ona Nnu Ego's mother, Nnu Ego, Nnu Ego's daughters, and other characters. These shifts reflect both physical movements and the deeper social, cultural, and emotional changes brought about by colonialism and modernization. The character of Ona, a tough and peculiar character in the narrative is a representation of the pre-colonial Igbo woman who asserts strength, she challenges traditional gender norms while also reflecting some of the cultural expectations of women in her time. Ona is described as "a very beautiful young woman who managed to combine stubbornness with arrogance"(11). Despite being arrogant and proud, she gave in to patriarchal norms by following her father's decision to not getting married but instead remained in his house and have children.

...but Ona grew to fill her father's expectation. He had maintained that she must never marry; his daughter was never going to stoop to any man. She was free to have men, however, and if she bore a son, he would take her father's name, thereby rectifying the omission nature had made...
(12)

This expression of Ona's father reflects the issues of patriarchy of that era, when a woman remains submissive to her husband or father. Ona is required by her father to remain in his house and have children that will carry his own lineage. Despite her independence, Ona's identity is tied to her role in perpetuating her father's lineage. Her father insists that any child she bears will belong to him, and not Agbadi. This reflects the pre-colonial Igbo emphasis on lineage and the importance of women as vessels of continuity. Ona's relationship with Agbadi is both loving and contentious, while she challenges his authority and refuses to be fully subservient, her assertiveness and sharp tongue often put her at odds with Agbadi, showcasing her resistance to male dominance while navigating a patriarchal structure.

Ona's story highlights the expectations placed on women to bear children, especially sons, as a measure of their worth. She fulfills this duty by giving birth to Nnu Ego, who becomes the protagonist of the novel. Despite her resistance to marriage, Ona cannot escape the societal pressure to define her identity through motherhood, reflecting the

tension between personal freedom and cultural obligations. At the same time, her life is shaped by communal expectations, particularly her father's insistence on her role as a bearer of his lineage.

Ona's character serves as a foil to her daughter Nnu Ego. While Ona experiences a degree of freedom and independence in the pre-colonial era, Nnu Ego struggles under the weight of colonialism. Nnu Ego, who is born and raised in the village, despite coming in contact with colonialism, still holds onto the values and traditions of the ideal pre-colonial era woman, which leaves her to the struggle of navigating between the complexities of two eras

Nnu Ego's movement from her traditional Igbo village to the urban colonial city of Lagos signifies a major spatial shift, the village represents a communal, agrarian space where traditions and kinship ties are central to life. Lagos, on the other hand, is depicted as a modern, individualistic, and economically driven space, with its colonial influences creating a clash of values. This shift introduces Nnu Ego to a fragmented existence where her traditional expectations of motherhood and womanhood are at odds with the urban, colonial realities. The rural space embodies cultural traditions and stability but is also restrictive in terms of gender expectations. The urban space offers opportunities for economic advancement but isolates individuals and undermines communal support

systems.

2.2 Marital Struggles of the Pre-Colonial Era Women

Despite the significant roles of the women , Igbo women in the precolonial era face marital challenges and societal expectations. They also experienced patriarchy which often limited their economic autonomy and freedom.

The marital expectations of the society from the women of the pre-colonial era surpass just physical activity but also mental and emotional sacrifices such as sacrificing their personal desires for their husbands and children, total submission to husbands who may oppress them and also the ability to desist from jealousy when their husbands go for new wives. Although polygamy was a normal and accepted practice, it didn't change the reality of the emotional trauma they had experienced , in Buchi emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, Agunwa becomes very ill the night she heard her husband make love to his mistress.

Agbadi's senior wife, Agunwa, became ill that very night. Some said later that she sacrificed herself for her husband; but a few had noticed that it was bad for her morale to hear her husband giving pleasure to another woman in the same courtyard where she slept..(22)

The woman could not deal with the trauma that comes with hearing or watching a husband make love to another woman, even though it was expected of her to accept that as a norm. Polygamy, as common practice in pre-colonial time was extremely repressive to women, as they were expected to suppress any feelings of jealousy, because society dictated that a woman's worth was tied to her ability to accept and endure such arrangements without protest.

The pre-colonial women were objectified by their husbands and were expected to become a sexual and reproductive partner, Nnu ego for instance didn't have the power to turn down Nnaife sexual demands the first night they met, in fact, it was considered his right, despite Nnu Ego being tired and she didn't even approve of him "he demanded his marital right as if determined not to give her a chance to change her mind". (44)

Fertility was a critical expectation for the women in marriage. Bearing children, particularly male heirs, is viewed as a woman's primary contribution to her husband's lineage. A woman who failed to conceive or bore only daughters often faced stigma and pressure to allow her husband marry additional wives. When Nnu Ego fails to produce children for her first husband, it was as if her life and existence is useless to the family and society, she gradually lost her sense of joy and felt as though her purpose in life had slipped away. "I am sure the fault is on my side. You do everything right. How can I face

my father and tell him that I have failed?" (31) . Nnu Ego who's probably used to seeing women being blamed for not having children concluded it is her fault that herself and her husband did not have children. Why should any woman be put in a position to be so ashamed of herself for not bearing children as Nnu Ego? As if she has the power to decide her fertility or, as if there are no possibilities of the man being the problem.

The women are expected to respect their husbands and adhere to patriarchal family structures. wives are often required to defer to their husbands in decision-making, even when it conflicted with their own interests. Women were expected to honor their husband's extended family, participate in communal activities, and maintain harmonious relationships with in-laws. The women were made to believe that their life starts and ends with marital responsibilities , everything mentioned alongside a woman in pre-colonial time is somehow related to marital status and they are made to believe that their income or whatever they struggled to make was for their husbands because the husbands owned them so does he own whatever they work for. Nnu Egu who is brought up in the village and still holding tightly to the practices of the pre-colonial Igbo society said in court "Nnaife is the head of our family. He own me just like God in the sky owns us , so even though I pay the fees , yet he owns me. so in other words he pays"(217) . This statement may sound funny to the women of later eras and even to the other women in

the court room who have experienced social and cultural space shifting as a result of the colonialism in Lagos, but not to Nnu Ngo who still held firmly to the practices of her pre-colonial Igbo community

Another struggle faced by pre-colonial women was the issue of arranged marriage. Nnu Ego becomes a victim of this practice when her father selects a husband for her, a decision that ultimately sets the stage for her unfulfilling life and unhappy marriage. Nnu Ego complies with her father's choice of marrying Nnaife not only because she sees nothing wrong with it but also out of a desire to please him. However, later in the novel, her daughter Kehinde rejects this tradition, insisting on marrying a man of her own choice.

Kehinde represents the generational and cultural shift between her and her mother's era. Unlike her mother, who is deeply rooted in traditional beliefs that tie a woman's worth to childbearing and submission to patriarchy, Kehinde embraces a more individualistic perspective shaped by aftermath of colonialism and urban life. Her defiance highlights the growing divergence in cultural values within the family.

2.3 Economic Struggles of the Pre-Colonial Women

In pre-colonial Nigeria, women were vital contributors to the economy, particularly in agriculture, where they played key roles in food production, processing, and distribution. They also participated in craft-making, trade, and market activities, which were essential to sustaining local economies. Despite their significant contributions, women were often marginalized in terms of resource ownership and decision-making. Land ownership, a critical asset for agricultural production, was predominantly controlled by men, leaving women dependent on male relatives or husbands for access to land. This dependency reinforced patriarchy, limiting women's autonomy and economic power.

Pre-colonial women were also subjected to exploitation in various forms. Their labor, both in domestic and economic spheres, was undervalued and often taken for granted. In trade, women faced competition and exploitation from male traders and were sometimes restricted from accessing certain markets or lucrative economic opportunities. Additionally, societal expectations placed a heavy burden on women to fulfill their roles as caregivers, often at the expense of their economic pursuits. These expectations ensured that women's economic struggles were compounded by their domestic responsibilities.

In many cases, women were vulnerable to being exploited or "ripped off" through unfair practices in trade and labor. For instance, women's contributions to collective family

wealth were frequently overshadowed by male dominance in decision-making, where men often controlled the profits generated by women's efforts, Nnu Egu is a vivid example of this practice, from uprooting yams for her first husband in the village, to trading in Lagos, regarding herself and her profits Nnaife's. Despite these challenges, pre-colonial era Nigerian women displayed resilience, utilizing informal networks and community support systems to navigate these economic constraints.

The institution of marriage also limited women's autonomy, as they were subject to their husband's authority in every aspect of life, including their earnings and labor.

In conclusion Pre-colonial Nigerian women were deeply entrenched in traditional roles, with societal expectations tying their worth to their ability to manage households, bear children, and submit to patriarchal norms. Women were expected to prioritize their families over personal desires, enduring emotional sacrifices, such as accepting polygamy without jealousy or protest. Women faced immense pressure to produce children, as their societal value and identity were directly linked to fertility. The pre-colonial era women also experienced intense economic struggles following the patriarchal system of their societies, their efforts or hard work is often tied to their husbands and they have no autonomy or personal agency over their selves or their finances

CHAPTER THREE

STRUGGLES OF NIGERIAN WOMEN COLONIAL ERA

The colonial period in Nigeria, around the late 1800 to 1960, profoundly influenced the identity of Nigerian women, reshaping their roles, status, and self-perception. As colonial policies disrupted traditional societal structures, women found themselves navigating a complex interplay of indigenous customs, patriarchal colonial frameworks, and emerging nationalist movements. Their identity during this era can be examined through their social, economic, political, and cultural roles. The colonial period brought significant upheavals to Nigeria societies, reshaping social, economic, and political structures. For women, this era was marked by a complex blend of continuity and disruption, as they faced new challenges layered upon existing societal expectations. In Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego face new urban challenges while still dealing with the existing challenges of managing the home and taking care of her husband and children

When Nnu Ego felt stronger, she went back to her petty trading. As soon as Nnaife left in the mornings to go to Dr. Meer's compound, she would wash her baby, put him on her back and rush to catch the early workers on their way to work. They bought many matches and cigarettes from her. Then she would come home to feed her child and lay him down to sleep while she hurried through her housework. In the afternoon her husband

came in for lunch, and later she would "back" her baby again in time for the evening rush of workers.(54)

This explains how Nnu Ego navigates through the society expectations of her Igbo community, and the economic demand of the urban community. Fulfilling marital duties and also living up to the expectations of urban life.

Colonial economies were structured to extract resources and labor and women were heavily impacted by these changes. For example, in colonial Nigeria, women worked long hours to earn cash while their domestic responsibilities remained unchanged. Colonizers imposed their own cultural and religious values, often targeting women's dress, behavior, and social freedoms. Traditional practices were dismissed or outlawed, while Victorian ideals of womanhood were imposed. Colonial labor policies often forced men to migrate for work, leaving women to manage households alone, this absence of male partners compounded their struggles and added to their responsibilities. Nnu Ego in the text experienced a harsh reality during the absence of Nnaife when he was forced into army and during his absence to work in the ship, leaving Nnu Ego for many months to carry all the financial burden of the family including the domestic responsibilities.

3.1 Marital Struggles of the Women in Colonial Era

In Buchi Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood* Nnu Ego dreams of achieving joy and fulfillment through motherhood. Her journey to Lagos begins with hope for a prosperous

life as a wife and mother but over time, the pressures of raising children in a challenging urban environment lead to Nnu Ego's emotional unraveling. The space of motherhood, once seen as sacred and fulfilling, becomes a source of constant sacrifice and pain.

In Ibuza, the extended family and community provide a safety net for women like Nnu Ego. Support from relatives reinforces a sense of collective responsibility. In the urban colonial context, individualism replaces communal living.

...It was because she wanted to be a woman of Ibuza in a town like Lagos that she lost her child. This time she was going to play it according to the new rules.

She would sometimes ask herself how long she must do it. In Ibuza after the child was weaned, one could leave him with an elderly member of the family and go in search of trade. But in Lagos there were no elderly grandparents.(81)

Nnu Ego's marital struggles in Lagos are compounded by the lack of familial and community support, leaving her isolated in her sacrifices. The shift from communal to individualistic spaces underscores the novel's critique of colonial modernity and its impact on traditional African values.

In the text, the transition of marital values between pre-colonial and other eras , focus on how societal changes impacted women's roles in marriage. In pre-colonial Nigeria society , marriage was deeply rooted in communal values and traditional customs.

marriage was not just a union between two individuals but a bond between families and communities. A woman's role in marriage is defined by her contribution to the family lineage through childbearing and her ability to maintain harmony within the household and her value as a wife was tied to her ability to bear children, especially male heirs. Nnu Ego's identity is initially shaped by this pre-colonial expectation, as seen in her first marriage in Ibuza, where her inability to conceive leads to her rejection.

The colonial era brought significant shifts in marital values, disrupting traditional structures and introducing new pressure, the migration of Nnu Ego to urban Lagos introduced new marital challenges. Urbanization fostered individualism, weakening communal support systems that traditionally upheld marriage. Nnu Ego's isolation in Lagos contrasts sharply with the communal backing she experienced in Ibuza.

While polygamy remained a marital norm, colonial values and christianity increasingly challenged its acceptance, creating a thin line between traditional and modern marital expectations. Nnaife's decision to marry additional wives worsen Nnu Ego's struggles, reflecting the clash of old and new marital dynamics. Nnu Ego's contact with the Catholic Church and urban life changed her perception towards polygamy, she approached the issue of Nnaife getting more wives very differently from how she would normally do in the village. As a result of new mental development and shift in cultural

norms, the idea of polygamy feels weird to her and she struggle within herself to accept it. Emecheta uses this internal conflict to symbolize the struggles in cultural space shifting. Motherhood remains central to a woman's marital identity in both pre-colonial and colonial eras, but its significance evolves across the different eras. Nnu Ego's longing for children reflects the traditional expectation that a woman's worth is tied to her fertility but In Lagos, motherhood becomes both a blessing and a burden. The economic demands of urban life make raising children a source of hardship rather than joy.

Emecheta uses the character of Adaku to vividly describe the shift from the pre-colonial era to the colonial era, reflecting the changes between traditional roles and the emerging independence and agency that colonial modernity offered. Through her actions and decisions, Adaku reflects a move from the self-sacrificing, duty-bound identity of pre-colonial women to a more individualistic and self-determined identity shaped by the colonial context.

Adaku initially enters Nnaife's household under this traditional framework, becoming part of a polygamous marriage dictated by Igbo customs. But later on she challenges the pre-colonial era expectations by refusing to conform to the oppressive ideals of womanhood and marriage, Unlike Nnu Ego, whose identity is tied to her ability to bear children, Adaku refuses to be judged solely by her fertility or the gender of her offspring.

She asserts her worth as a woman. Adaku's conflict with Nnu Ego reflects her rejection of polygamous norms, especially when it disadvantages her and her daughters. She challenges the favoritism shown toward Nnu Ego's sons Oshia and Odim, signaling her discontent with the patriarchal system that devalues her children.

Adaku's decisions and actions align more closely with the values of colonial modernity, as she refuses to rely solely on Nnaife's meager earnings. She chooses to leave the household and pursue a career as a successful trader, representing the colonial era's value on individual agency and economic autonomy. By leaving Nnaife's household, Adaku breaks free from traditional marital expectations. She prioritizes her well-being and her daughters' future over societal approval, a radical move for a woman in her time. Her decision in Lagos, would never had become an option for her is she were to be in the village upholding to society expectations.

Adaku demonstrates forward-thinking values by deciding to invest in her daughters' education. This reflects the shift toward valuing Western education as a pathway to independence and empowerment not only for male children but also, female children .

Adaku's character serves as a foil to Nnu Ego, illustrating the contrast across different eras of womanhood, Nnu Ego finds her identity in fulfilling societal expectations, even at the cost of her own happiness while Adaku rejects the traditional ideals of self-sacrifice

and submission. She embraces a more individualistic approach, prioritizing her autonomy and her daughters' future. This contrast highlights the cultural and societal shift occurring during the different period, where women began to question and redefine their roles within a rapidly changing world.

By becoming a trader and providing for her daughters, Adaku signifies the growing opportunities for women to achieve economic independence in the colonial era, she also breaks out of the idea that a woman is being owned by her husband as she speaks to Nnu Ego, recounting her speech in the courtroom about herself and her income being owned by my Nnaife.

Adaku's character illustrates the shift from pre-colonial era traditional women's mentality to the newer eras of womanhood. In *The Joys of Motherhood*. While pre-colonial norms emphasized women's roles as submissive wives and mothers, colonization introduced new principles and self-definition.

3.2 Political and Economic Struggles of the Pre-colonial Era Nigerian Women

Nigerian culture was inherently patriarchal, colonization introduced changes that altered aspects of marital patriarchy, but not of patriarchal structures in political system. The political struggles of Nigerian women during the colonial era were marked by their fight against systemic marginalization, colonial policies, and patriarchal structures that

excluded them from decision-making processes. Women were largely excluded from colonial councils and decision-making bodies, perpetuating their lack of political power.

Chimama Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* reflects the politics of gender construction and the conventions of gender roles within conservative societies. The novel depicts a complex and varied world of women, highlighting how patriarchal systems perpetuate gender stereotypes through manipulative androcentric discourses and social structures that subjugate women. However, within this diverse portrayal of women, some challenge societal norms by stepping out of traditional domestic roles to occupy significant positions in social and professional roles .

Kainene in Chimamada's *Half of a Yellow Sun* defies societal expectations by stepping into a leadership role during the war. She manages a refugee camp, organizing resources and helping displaced people "There was a manic vibrancy about her, about the way she left for the refugee camp each day, about the exhaustion that shadowed her eyes when she returned in the evenings". (220) Her role demonstrates women's ability to take on traditionally male-dominated positions, directly challenging patriarchy norms. Chimamada uses Kainene to promote the resilience of women against patriarchy system. By describing Kainene as strong , confident and courageous, chimamada challenges the stereotypes of women being weaker.

Chimamada's contrasting of Kainene and Richard is not to devalue male and make the female characters appear more powerful, Chimamada's work and every other feminist view writers only reveal realities hidden under the shed of stereotype. Men are strong so as women, women are weak so as men. Dr Helen Chukwuma in her work "Positivism and the female crisis: The novels of Buchi Emecheta"

Buchi Emecheta's male characterization is neither exaggerated nor contrived for the purpose of demeaning the male. The truth of the matter is that this is a realistic portrayal of men and events; the quaintness of this is that the truth has never been told before; the writers have not been so bold as to dip their hands into their auto biography and spread out all the hidden linen to the public, Buchi looked and portrayed life as she saw it, as she lived it and as she saw others lived it at the place and time. It is no exaggeration it's the truth(10)

This above expression of Dr. Helen is a response to male writers who criticize Buchi Emecheta and accuse feminist writers for demeaning the male characters. This response highlights that neither Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Buchi Emecheta, nor any other feminist writer aims to ridicule the male gender in their works by depicting men as weak and women as strong and resilient, instead, they are portraying a reality that male writers often avoid acknowledging or representing in their narratives. Rather than engaging with these portrayals critically, some accuse female writers of "demeaning men" in their works.

For instance, a man reading *The Joys of Motherhood* might perceive Emecheta's depiction of Nnaife's inability to fulfill his responsibilities as an exaggeration designed to undermine men. However, this is not fiction but a reflection of reality. There are countless men who fail to meet societal expectations, some even worse than Nnaife, at the same time, there are remarkable women who rise above challenges, embodying strength and resilience. Feminist writers simply choose to tell these stories, challenging the one-dimensional narratives perpetuated by male-dominated literature.

The political struggle of the women in colonial era was rooted in deeper issues of systemic marginalization and radical politics. Women not only fought to be recognized as equals within their communities but also to be heard and included in the broader political landscape. Despite their active involvement in anti-colonial movements and their critical contributions to economic and social life, they were consistently denied access to political positions and decision-making platforms.

pre-colonial Nigerian societies often relied on women as key contributors to agricultural production. However, colonial economic policies disrupted this system by prioritizing cash crop production like cocoa and palm oil for export. Men were given control of this new economy, sidelining women and diminishing their access to land and resources.

Colonial taxation policies and regulations undermined women's autonomy in these

markets, reducing their influence and profitability. Colonial administrators prioritized men for formal employment in industries, construction, and government services. Women were largely excluded from these opportunities, confining them to unpaid domestic labor or low-income informal sectors, for instance, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnaife is able to get jobs from the whites why Nnu Ego is limited petty trading.

The other women taught her how to start her own business so that she would not have only one outfit to wear. They let her borrow five shillings from the women's fund and advised her to buy tins of cigarettes and packets of matches. A tin of cigarettes cost two shillings, and she then sold the cigarettes singly for a penny each; as there were thirty-six in each tin she made a profit of a shilling on a tin..(52)

The above citation recount how Nnu Ego is introduced to petty trading by other women in Lagos who were also used to the urban economic struggles. As a mother, Nnu Ego's primary economic struggle revolves around providing for her children. She takes on petty trading to supplement her husband's meager income, often working tirelessly, trying different petty trades with little reward. In her Igbo culture, a woman's worth is measured by her ability to bear and care for children, but in Lagos, the urban economy demands financial contributions from all family members, including women. Nnaife's inability to provide stable financial support increases Nnu Ego's struggles, his sporadic employment and lack of ambition leave her to shoulder most of the family's economic burden.

In conclusion, the colonial period in Nigeria drastically altered the lives of women, reshaping their roles and identities within a complex intersection of indigenous traditions, colonial structures, and emerging nationalist movements. Women faced immense challenges as colonial policies disrupted traditional communal systems, replacing them with individualistic urban lifestyles. The colonial era reshaped the women's identity and personal development, causing them to find fulfillment from modern developments, such as prioritizing their selves and having the ability to make decisions for their self. The era also had its marital and economic challenges on women. In *the Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego's role as a mother and her ability to bear children is devalued in a colonial capitalist system that prioritizes wage labor over familial duties. Nnu Ego struggles to reconcile her identity as a mother with the demands of urban life. The colonial urban space disrupts traditional gender and family dynamics. Men like Nnu Ego's husband, Naife, work low-paying colonial jobs, while women like Nnu Ego bear the double burden of motherhood and contributing to the family income. The shift in space reflects the conflict between traditional Igbo values and the modern, colonial world. In Lagos, Nnu Ego's cultural expectations of being cared for by her children in old age clash with the harsh realities of urban poverty and the lack of communal support. In the village, Nnu Ego would have had the help of extended family and community in raising her children. In

Lagos, this cultural space of support is lost, leaving her isolated and overburdened.

In the text, Nnu Ego's struggles exemplify the isolation and sacrifices that women endured in urban settings. While pre-colonial marriages emphasized communal support and collective responsibility, the colonial shift to individualism left Nnu Ego bearing the weight of economic and marital obligations alone.

Colonialism sidelined women by prioritizing men in formal employment and granting them control of cash crop economies. Women, relegated to the informal sector, took on low-paying jobs, petty trading, and domestic labor to sustain their families, and also balancing their traditional roles as rearing children. Nnu Ego's financial struggles intersects traditional expectations of motherhood and the harsh economic realities of urban life.

Politically, Nigerian women were excluded from formal decision-making processes during the colonial era, Writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Buchi Emecheta explore how women navigated these struggles, challenging patriarchal systems and redefining their roles in society. Characters like Kainene in *Half of a Yellow Sun* represent women's fight for autonomy, leadership, and recognition in a society resistant to change. Together, these narratives highlight the resilience of Nigerian women as they confronted systemic oppression and carved spaces for empowerment amidst societal transformation.

CHAPTER FOUR

STRUGGLES OF NIGERIA WOMEN IN POST COLONIAL ERA

Since independence, Nigerian women have experienced significant transformations in various aspects of life, with these changes continuing to progress and expand over time. Over the post-colonial years, this evolution has shaped what is now recognized as the post colonial Nigerian woman. post colonial Nigerian woman is the Nigeria woman today, shaped by modern influences, challenges, and opportunities. Post colonial Nigeria women can also be referred to as contemporary Nigerian women who embody a blend of traditional values and modern perspectives, reflecting the country's cultural heritage, socio-political changes, and advancements in education, technology, and gender equality.

Contemporary Nigerian women face modern challenges and embrace more advanced values such as education, business, politics, and beauty standards, rather than just marital responsibilities and child-rearing, which once were seen as the primary purposes for women. While childbirth and marriage still hold significance, they are no longer the sole measures by which a woman's worth or value is determined.

In Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* Kehinde represents a significant postcolonial figure, her character reflects the intersection of tradition, colonial influence,

and the struggles of modernity in post colonial Nigerian society. Kehinde's life reflects the cultural shifts and generational changes brought about by colonial rule and its aftermath. Kehinde represents a new generation shaped by urbanization, and individual aspirations. She challenges the patriarchal and communal expectations of her society by her defiance of traditional norms by insisting on not getting married to a husband picked for her by her father and also putting herself first, not considering fulfilling her fathers expectations off her marriage to his desired suitor, "a certain young man who had not gone to college"(204). Her willingness to assert her independence, despite the limitations imposed by traditional structures, highlights the complexities of identity formation in a postcolonial context.

Olanna and Kainene in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, represent two distinct but interconnected portrayals of postcolonial Nigerian women. Through their experiences, Adichie explores themes of identity, gender, and power in the context of Nigeria's post colonial struggles and the Biafran War. Both women navigate the challenges of modern aspirations in a changing society by acquiring High Quality Education. Kainene is a sharp contrast to her sister, who's pragmatic, independent, and less constrained by societal norms, she defies traditional gender roles and takes on leadership in managing her father's business and later organizing refugees during the war.

Kainene's assertiveness and self-reliance highlight the evolving roles of women in post colonial Nigeria, challenging the boundaries of female agency in both public sector and in her private relationship with Richard. Olanna exhibits quiet feminist resistance by pursuing a meaningful career as a university lecturer, asserting her intellectual capabilities, and making choices that prioritize herself and emotional well-being. While the character of Kainene challenges patriarchy in leadership, the character of Olanna embodies the issues of womanhood, contemporary view of bride price, marriage, adoption and fertility.

4.1 Feminism

The contemporary issues of the Nigerian women society is broad, and they somehow intersects with each other. Over the years, women's resistance to patriarchal practices has shaped the idea of feminism among the Nigerian women. Women's fight for equality among both genders in politics and economics is the most essential objective of feminism in Nigeria. Colonialism brought a lot of changes to the Nigerian atmosphere and its impact was negative on women. The British who were used to seeing women as fragile delicate beings without a brain for politics or administration, totally cut women out of the political scene. Male chiefs collaborated with the British colonial administration in collecting taxes and governing, the position of female chiefs declined in importance.

When the economy became increasingly geared toward the production of cash crops for export, Nigerian men and European firms dominated the distribution of rubber, cocoa, groundnuts, and palm oil. Women were pushed to the background, and were forced to shift to the production of subsistence crops.

Women however, didn't take this quietly or without protest, they constituted themselves into political pressure groups to fight injustices, oppression and exploitation of the colonial administration and their traditional rulers." The Aba women's war of 1929 occurred as a result of the restriction on women in government and administration. The revolt broke out when thousands of Igbo women from the Bende District, Umuahia and other places in eastern Nigeria travelled to the town of Oloko to protest against the Warrant Chiefs, whom they accused of restricting the role of women in the government. The Aba Women's War of 1929, is more aptly considered a strategically executed anti-colonial revolt organized by women to redress social, political, and economic grievances. The result of the revolt was the inclusion of women in native courts and it brought an end to the system of warrant chiefs in Southern Nigeria. After Nigeria gained independence in 1960, the country adopted the Constitutional Order in Council of 1960. This constitution included Chapter III, which outlined Fundamental Human Rights, ensuring the basic rights and freedoms of all individuals, including women. This was an

improvement from the colonial period, where such rights were often limited or non-existent for women. These provisions on fundamental human rights were carried forward and expanded in later 1979 Constitution, these rights were moved to Chapter IV, and additional protections were included. Similarly, the 1999 Constitution retained these provisions, emphasizing the importance of human rights. A significant development in the 1979 Constitution was the inclusion of a new Chapter II. This chapter outlined the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy, which set guidelines for the government to promote social justice, equality, and economic empowerment. Although these objectives were not directly enforceable in courts, they established a framework for ensuring fairness and addressing societal inequalities, including those affecting women. Nassin Diseye “women’s right and feminism in Nigeria” (8).

Despite this, the feminist movement kept growing in objective, and Nigerian women developed into the “second wave” feminism . The term 'second-wave feminism' was used to describe a newer feminist movement that fought social and cultural inequalities beyond basic political inequalities. It began with focus on the promotion of equal contract and property rights for women and the opposition to chattel marriage and ownership of married women and their children by their husbands.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* use the character of Kainene to create a feminist stance through her defiance of traditional gender roles, independence, and refusal to conform to societal expectations. "I too will be putting my newly acquired degree to good use. I'm moving to Port Harcourt to manage Daddy's business there" (31). Kainene takes charge of her family's business, asserting her authority in a realm traditionally dominated by men. "Kainene is not just like a son, she is like two, her father said". Kainene is a shrewd and successful businesswoman who refuses to be overshadowed by male counterparts. Her ability to lead and make critical decisions reflects her autonomy and challenges societal expectations of women as secondary to men in the workforce. Kainene rejects societal pressures to conform to traditional standards of femininity. She is unapologetically direct, sharp-tongued, and self-reliant. Kainene's relationship with Richard, a British expatriate, showcases her control and agency. She defies cultural and societal expectations by engaging in an interracial relationship on her own terms, she maintains her independence within the relationship, refusing to let it define or diminish her individuality. During the Biafran War, Kainene takes on a leadership role by managing a refugee camp. She demonstrates strength, and resourcefulness, organizing supplies and providing for those in need.

The objective of feminism did not end with the second wave feminism but developed into radical feminism'. The different branches of feminism were all controversial for their times, but none of them were as provocative with their theories and as extreme with their solutions as radical feminism. Radical feminism is a movement that was formed in the 1960's during the second wave period of feminism. The radical feminist theory did not just seek equality, instead it saw patriarchy as the sole problem of women worldwide and sought to eradicate all form of institutions based on patriarchy, male supremacy or any form of gender societal roles. Radical feminism fought for the total elimination of traditional roles. Some radical feminists have gone ahead to posit radical lesbianism, role swapping and thereby removing the family unit as we know it . The key issues for radical feminists include, Reproductive rights for women, including freedom to make choices to give birth, have an abortion, evaluating and then breaking down traditional gender roles in private relationships as well as in public policies, understanding rape as an expression of patriarchal power, not a seeking of sex. Nassin Diseye , women's right and feminism in Nigeria (8).

In *The Rebellion of the Bumpy chested*, a play by a Nigerian playwright Stella Dia Oyedepo , the characters engage in a radical feminist movement, challenging society gender expectations by engaging in activities that challenge society gender expectations,

they engage in role swapping with their husbands , dressed like men and took up men's dominated trade like taxi driving, thereby forcing the men to manage the home, doing house chores an also taking care of the children.

Stella Dia Oyedepo does not seem to support the rabid radical feminism espoused by her feminist character Captain Sharp. She obviously does not see the need to break down the social structure before women can exercise their right to contribute in the society. She is rather favorably inclined to the tenets of African feminism which advocates complementarity between the sexes for a more harmonious existence and for social development. To her, feminism is not the reversal of roles. Her view articulates the basic ingredients of African feminism to be "power sharing, complementarity, accommodation, compromise, negotiation, and inclusiveness". Rather than competing with men or swapping roles. John yesiebo, "Stella Oyedepo and the Feminist Vision in the Rebellion of the Bumpy-chested" (4)

4.2 Contemporary womanhood

Women have moved beyond the era when childbirth defined their worth. Today, many women feel comfortable with the decision not to have children without fear of judgment. Additionally, women now have the autonomy to decide between vaginal delivery and

C-sections. Societal values have shifted, unlike in the past, when women were often criticized, mocked, or labeled as weak for not having vaginal births.

Some women consider surrogacy as a means of having children, either for fertility reasons or personal preferences. This choice can stem from a desire to avoid the physical effects of pregnancy and childbirth, which often include stretch marks, sagging breasts, belly fat, and even medical complications. Over the years, some women have faced mistreatment from their husbands due to changes in their appearance after childbirth, leading to a loss of self-confidence. A woman may become insecure as a result of these changes, especially if her partner is unsupportive. This societal and marital pressure to maintain a “perfect” body has driven many women to either avoid having children or consider surrogacy. Although some may judge these decisions, it is important to understand the pressure women face, both from their husbands and society, to conform to unrealistic beauty standards. For many, such choice is a way to protect themselves from body shaming and emotional distress.

Some women choose to adopt children as a thing of choice or as a result of inability to have biological children. In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Olanna adopts Baby as her child. While this is not a legal adoption in the modern sense, Adichie uses this plot to highlight a shift in cultural values. If the experience of Olanna was to be

in the pre-colonial era, she would have faced criticism and unhappiness for not having biological children, but in the novel, she lives happily with Baby. This reflects a broader change in societal values, where women, and society in general, have come to recognize other forms of fulfillment beyond just bearing children. Despite not having biological children, Olanna finds fulfillment in her life through her education, experiences, and overall personality. She is appreciated by society for these qualities, illustrating how values around women's roles have evolved.

The concept of bride price is often seen as a reflection of patriarchal structures in marriage. In today's society, many women are moving away from the practice, choosing court weddings over traditional ceremonies. Bride price is perceived to promote a sense of ownership over women and impose societal expectations on their marital roles. As a result, some women prefer to live with their partners and have children without engaging in the practice of bride price paying . in *Half of a Yellow Sun*,

Each time he suggested they get married she said no. They were too happy, precariously so, and she wanted to guard that bond; she feared that marriage would flatten it to a prosaic partnership.(43)

Olanna declines marriage because she fears that formalizing her relationship with Odinofo might diminish its current happiness and excitement. She perceives their joy as “precarious,” suggesting it’s delicate and could be disrupted by marriage. She worries that marriage might transform their vibrant connection into a “prosaic partnership,” and becomes bonded by societal marital structure instead of the spontaneity and passion they currently enjoy. This reflects a common concern that formal commitments can sometimes lead to complacency, causing the relationship to lose its initial spark.

4.3 Effects of the Contemporary Development among Women

While all this development may sound as positive developments which support the rights and freedom of women, it also have some negative effects on the society . As new values emerge for women, the changes in values have also led to the devaluation of cultural values that were once associated with women. These old cultural values, though were too patriarchal, it gave women a sense of consciousness and force them to uphold to morals. Adaku in Buchi Emecheta’s *The joys of motherhood* resorted to prostitution as a result of freedom and civilization that brought a shift in cultural values.

My chi be damned! I am going to be a prostitute. Damn my chi!" she added again fiercely.

Nnu Ego could not believe her ears. "Do you know what you are saying, Adaku? The chi, your personal god, that gave you life—

I don't care for the life he or she gave me. I'm leaving here tomorrow with my girls. I am not going to Ibuza. I am going to live with those women in Montgomery Road. Yes, I'm going to join them, to make some of our men who return from the fighting happy."

Adaku who is tired of being maltreated by her in-laws and husband for not having male children decide to leave her marriage and go into prostitution. If Adaku were to remain in the village upholding to cultural values, she would not consider the option of prostitution because she will be rejected by the community.

Women of today do not fear criticism because they believe they have the choice to live the way they want and still be accepted. Some women decide not to get married even at thirty years because they are busy with other objective they consider 'more important than marriage' as a result, women end up spending all their youth studying, doing business or some resorts to promiscuous lifestyle.

The idea of marital values that use to be so important and defined the life of women made women conscious about their lifestyle, because going against the societal moralistic

standards can cost them a good husband which they fear, because they believe their purpose is tied to getting married and fulfilling marital duties. In the pre-colonial and colonial eras, women stayed longer in marriage, even though they may be unhappy, there were tendencies for long lasting marriages. Women who left their husbands house were considered failures or a disappointment and so they endured marriage. Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood* remained with Nnaife because she fears being criticized over failures in marriage and she does not want her father to be disappointed in her, hence she endured. Unlike in post colonial time where women seek for divorce following the slightest inconvenience they experience in their marriage causing broken homes which affects the upbringing of children.

Many women of today decides not to get married and have children, and some even become lesbians, yet they are still accepted in the society. Most women of this days who have lived wayward lifestyles end up with good men, this reaction have lead more moral women to give up their values and become wayward too because it seems there is no price to pay for being wayward anymore.

Olanna in Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a yellow sun*, decided she was not going to get married to Odinogbo for some reasons but would rather live with him and have children. That is a decision very common among women of these days, the issue of bride price has

been devalued. Bride price which normally has a great significance is later sensed as one of the reason women are being objectified by men because it gives the men a sense of ownership over women. Olanna instead of initially getting married to Odinofo, moved to his house and insisted that her bride price not be paid, erasing the cultural significance of unity and family binding that bride price normally represents.

In conclusion, the evolution of Nigerian women from traditional roles to contemporary identities reflects a complex dynamics of historical, social, and cultural shifts. Over the years, Nigerian women have navigated the challenges posed by colonialism, patriarchy, and societal expectations, resulting in significant strides in education, politics, and personal autonomy. The feminist movements, from the early resistance to colonial oppression to the later waves of feminism, have been central to reshaping women's roles and fighting for gender equality. These movements have given rise to diverse expressions of feminism, including second-wave feminism and radical feminism, which have further challenged traditional gender norms.

At the same time, the contemporary Nigerian woman has redefined her identity beyond the confines of marriage and motherhood. Choices like surrogacy, adoption, and the decision to remain childless reflect a broader shift in societal values, where personal fulfillment and independence are becoming as important as familial roles. However, these

changes have also led to the devaluation of some traditional cultural values, which once provided structure and moral guidance. This shift has created a tension between individual freedom and the preservation of cultural norms, as younger generations of women embrace more liberal lifestyles that challenge longstanding societal expectations.

Ultimately, the contemporary Nigerian woman is a product of both modern influences and deep-rooted traditions, and they continue to navigate these competing forces, the challenge lies in finding a balance between personal freedom and respect for cultural heritage, while also addressing the broader societal impacts of these transformations.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This essay examines how women have undergone transformations over the years, it is a critical analysis of the issues and patterns of the life of women, how they react to certain circumstances and how this circumstance shape their growth and development.

From the pre-colonial era to the post present, the cultural identity of women and their societal roles have continued to evolve, leading to the emergence of new values and advancements. This transformation has resulted in the erosion of some traditional cultural norms and created conflicts as women navigate the balance between embracing modern developments and adhering to longstanding societal expectations.

These transformations have added more significant impact to women and has also given them a greater sense of purpose and autonomy, but also, it has led to certain negative outcomes.

Pre-colonial era Nigerian women lived in a society that deeply rooted them in traditional roles, where their worth was closely tied to managing households, bearing children, and adhering to patriarchal norms. They were expected to prioritize family over personal aspirations, enduring emotional sacrifices such as accepting polygamy without protest. Fertility, child birth and fulfilling marital responsibilities was a means for measuring

women's worth. Marriage further constrained women's autonomy, subjecting them to their husbands' authority in all aspects of life, including control over their earnings and personal freedom.

Economically, women contributed significantly to agriculture, trade, and crafts, yet their efforts were undervalued. Denied access to land ownership and subjected to exploitative trade practices, women were economically marginalized despite their labor. This burden was compounded by domestic responsibilities, leaving them heavily dependent on male relatives. However, pre-colonial women showed remarkable resilience, relying on communal networks to navigate these challenges. Their struggles highlight systemic inequalities while paving the way for future generations.

In the village, Nnu Ego's role as a wife and mother was validated by traditional Igbo customs, which tied her worth to childbearing. In contrast, her identity was devalued in Lagos under a colonial capitalist system that prioritized wage labor over familial responsibilities. This shift disrupted traditional gender and family dynamics, creating a conflict as she struggled to reconcile her role as a mother with urban life's demands.

The colonial period in Nigeria significantly reshaped women's roles and identities, intertwining indigenous traditions, colonial structures, and emerging nationalist movements. As colonial policies dismantled communal systems, women were forced into

individualistic urban lifestyles. Emecheta's depiction of Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood* captures this shift, showing the isolation and sacrifices women endured.

Pre-colonial communal support systems gave way to the individual responsibilities of colonial urban life, leaving women to bear family and marital burdens alone.

Colonialism further marginalized women economically, prioritizing men in formal employment and cash crop economies while relegating women to low-paying jobs, petty trade, and domestic labor. Politically, women were excluded from formal decision-making. Writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Emecheta highlight women's agency in navigating these struggles, using characters like Kainene in *Half of a Yellow Sun* to depict the fight for autonomy and recognition in a patriarchal society.

The evolution of Nigerian women from traditional roles to contemporary identities reflects the intersection of historical, social, and cultural transformations. Over time, women have confronted challenges posed by colonialism, patriarchy, and societal expectations, leading to significant progress in education, politics, and personal autonomy. Women move development from feminist movements in resisting colonial oppression to embracing modern waves of feminism and subsequently into radical feminism. This development has played a huge role in reshaping women's roles and advocating for gender equality.

Contemporary Nigerian women have redefined their identities, expanding beyond the confines of marriage and motherhood. Choices like surrogacy, adoption, and opting to remain childless reflect a societal shift toward valuing personal fulfillment and independence. However, these changes have also led to the devaluation of certain traditional cultural values that once provided structure and moral guidance. This creates a sense of hostility between individual freedom and the preservation of cultural heritage, as younger generations embrace more liberal lifestyles that challenge long-standing societal norms.

Ultimately, the contemporary Nigerian woman stands at the crossroads of modern influences and deep-rooted traditions. As they go through the competing forces, the challenge lies in achieving a balance between personal freedom and cultural heritage while addressing the broader societal impact of these transformations.

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