Chapter IV

POSTCOLONIAL AFRICAN WOMAN IN
DESTINATION BIAFRA AND DOUBLE YOKE

Woman writing from modern Africa sets new paradigms for the self of African womanhood as distinct from their earlier images as mules of the world or as the romanticized super woman. Writers of the new era like Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta and Bessie Head accentuate the racial and gender discrimination confronted by the African woman in the contemporary world. The double yoke women have to bear through culture collision is a recurrent theme that surfaces irrepressibly in modern women writing in Africa. Emecheta`s heroines present a wide-ranging spectrum from the untamed and free willed native woman to migrant diasporic citizens who form a new tribe. Her Destination Biafra, uniquely set in the thick of the Civil War following the independence of Nigeria, showcases a heroine who is a modern woman determined to play her own specific part in the formation of the nation. Double Yoke is another of Emecheta`s feminist works that present the central character as one voicing strident protest against the oppression on the basis of race and gender. Deborah in Destination Biafra and Nko in Double Yoke stand for rebellion, the former hailing from the urban upper class and the latter from a remote village of Nigeria.
*Destination Biafra* falls under the category of war novels that were published in the wake of the momentous experience in African consciousness. It expounds the neo-colonial conditions and the experience of women in the war which was a by-product of the colonization of Africa by the British. The heroine Debbie exemplifies the educated indigenous elite; she has a vision of her own apart from her innate African woman power and is capable of defending herself and even the nation against aggressive forces.

The novel castigates the corruption and nepotism rampant in African politics of the postcolonial times, with a plot built around Debbie, the daughter of a rich but corrupt father. The protagonist defies the conservative role of marriage and motherhood offered to the African woman and dons military trousers and weapons to undertake a mission of reconciling the two warring forces into overcoming the feuds fanned by colonialism. She is the epitome of the modern woman whose mind bears the imprint of Western feminist thought, she having received the education due to her status, thereby setting herself apart from the ordinary run of African heroines. Katherine Frank calls her “the most compelling example we have of the New Woman of Africa. She embodies a liberating potentiality, of a rich, active and fulfilling future for the African woman, and she embraces a future without men.” (qtd. in Biswas 85). Debbie can be considered Emecheta’s mouthpiece so far as her political convictions are concerned.
The Nigerian Civil War is the pervading theme and background of the novel. The war was a result of the ethnic tensions and conflicts within the three major tribes of the nation – Yoruba, Hausa and the Igbo. By the close of 1965, the federal government lost control of the country, and the Civil War broke out in the Western Region. In 1967, the Eastern region seceded, declaring itself an independent state named Biafra. Biafra was meant to be a nation that would put aright all that had gone wrong in Nigeria since 1960, viz: corruption, ethnic rivalry and personal ambition. ‘Destination Biafra’ was the code name given by the Ibo officers to the operation, which led to the coup in January, 1965. The historical conflict for a united nationality against racism is the background of the novel. Through the detailed rendering of Debbie’s travails in the civil war, Emecheta brings out the horrors of the Civil war. Nigeria, according to Emecheta, was plunged into the bloodiest carnage ever seen in the whole of Africa. The civil war was characterized by uncertainty as to the identity of the real enemy – the Western Ibos were a confused lot for whom both sides of the war--Biafrans and Nigerians -- had been invaders and sources of suffering. An Ibo woman’s agonized cry at a Biafran soldier reflects this trauma:

“Biafra, Biafra, what is Biafra? You killed our men from this part, the Nigerians came and killed what your soldiers left…Please go back to your Biafra. You call us Hausa Igbos, don’t you?” (DB 218)
As a war novel by a woman writer, *Destination Biafra* records the experiences of the woman in the war, and the rising consciousness of the African woman about her lot. Therefore the title of the novel gains in significance: if Emecheta describes the journey of Debbie to the Eastern land of Biafra, the protagonist writes about her journey to the utopian land envisaged before the Civil War--a place where justice will reign supreme among all men and women. “An ideal place where righteousness would rule, where there would be no bribery, was to be created, and that place would be Biafra” (*DB* 223). She is pictured as one of the minority tribes, Istekeri; and not one of the main ethnic factions. Emecheta by giving a poignant albeit gendered rendering of the Civil War is trying to prove that ‘beliefs can go beyond tribes’.

In order to transform her dream into reality, Debbie Ogedemgbe realizes that her fight as well as that of the Civil War is against corruption born of class and ethnic inequalities which is a positive indicator of neo-colonialism. Emecheta skilfully moulds the protagonist, as a woman of African independence born with a golden spoon in her mouth; her father was one of the neo-colonial powers that benefited from the bequest of power from the colonizers. She defies her parents and throws off the comfort offered by their position in order to help the country overcome oppressive corruption. In due course of it she has to fight with her father Samuel Ogedemgbe and her English lover Alan Grey. Debbie takes on the arduous mission of travelling to the east to realize her mission, and the class conflicts
seething within the nation make her job none the easier. She often has to hide her ethnic identity in order to escape close questioning. Debbie’s major challenge was to transcend the values of her class since she was a social superior. She faces it valiantly by deciding to join the army, which would distance her from the extravagant lifestyle of her parents and their corruption. But she soon finds out that the great military leaders are not better; even Abosi - the ‘symbol of Biafra’ turns out to be a betrayer. But finally she manages to subvert the values of her class by deciding to use her father’s money to raise orphans after the war and make amends for her past which is tainted with class distinctions.

Debbie also finds herself coming up against identity crisis in the novel due to her privileged life as a mentor of the indigenous elite. Her ambiguous position as an African woman who has assimilated western values due to her education is reflected in Alan Grey’s musings about her: “intelligent, nice to be with, but independent. She was too English for his liking …The way he saw it, people like Debbie were building themselves big identity problems” (36). This is later felt by Debbie herself when she tramps across the country in the company of her less fortunate sisters. She finds that she could not share her early life experiences with them:

Debbie really felt lonely, surrounded as she was by other women. Her education, the imported distinction of class, still stood in the way…These women would only accept
her if they did not know her real background, so she had to keep silent about her store of past experiences. (202)

This difference between Debbie and the other African women becomes conspicuous when she finds difficulty in ‘backing’ a child in an oja. Debbie wonders, “what kind of an African woman was she indeed?” (181) when she thinks that women of her age carried babies like that all day and still farmed and cooked—a feat she was unable to achieve.

In spite of achieving Independence, the Africans were extremely dependent on the ex-powers so that the nation becomes a site of neocolonisation after independence. The ex-colonies, though independent technically, were still dependent on the colonial powers and the new superpowers. Neocolonialism also refers to the new elite, brought up by Western Education who exploit their own people and thus act as indirect agents of their former masters. This state of affairs led to class distinctions and subsequent troubles in the country. African political scene, immediately after colonization was sunk deep in corruption. Debbie, the heroine in the novel, is introduced initially as the ‘dutiful daughter’ of the corrupt politician Ogedembge:

I had no choice…. I thought things have changed. But no, even though the crowd today came in their best clothes, I saw that three quarters of them had no proper shoes, while my father bought a car costing ten thousand pounds just to drive through that crowd. (39)
But this money helped Debbie acquire the Oxford education and yet she kept her discriminating views on her father’s greed. After the federal coup, which killed her father, she decides to join the Federal army itself in building up the nation. As part of her official agenda, Debbie becomes a peace emissary between Momoh and Abosi, the two leaders of the warring factions. But war spreads like wild fire when the class problem turns to ethnic differences. Debbie the only one in the novel with a clear vision amid a nation rife with ethnic tensions is bemused: “[W]hat was her position in all this mess? She was neither Igbo, nor Yoruba nor was she a Hausa, but a Nigerian” (121). As she had abandoned the ethnic divisions, when she took up the peace mission, Debbie also transcends class divisions, with the hazardous journey she takes across the country. The whole lot of women along with her had only one identity–as women under one undifferentiated kind of peril that was their lot due to their common gender.

Though feminization of culture was a negative corollary of colonization, the education they imparted invested the African mind with a new outlook and modernity. The educated colonized behaved and talked like the Englishman, ultimately bringing on a threat to the colonizer himself by making the subjects of the inferior race “more English than the English”. This results in the psychological dilemma in the colonized termed ‘dislocation’ whereby the colonized find themselves in an in-between space neither accepted as pure natives nor acknowledged by the colonial masters as part of them. This
ambivalence that generated fear in the colonizers at the new subjectivity of the people they had dominated is seen in Alan Grey`s attitude to Debbie in Destination Biafra. Acquiring the much-coveted foreign education, Debbie is the African woman who has assimilated the western ideas of feminine emancipation and equality of the sexes. The militant feminism in Debbie does not allow her to be used like a doormat, by her lawful ‘owner’ in marriage following patriarchal rules, as her ancestors did. This is evident in her decision:

She would never agree to a marriage like theirs, in which two partners are never equal… She wanted to do something more than child bearing and rearing and being a good passive wife to a man whose ego she must boost all her days, while making sure to submerge every impulse that made her a full human…Surely every person should have the right to live as he or she wished? …she felt more and more like an outsider, and told herself that she must make a move to fashion a life for herself. Yes, she would join the army….she was going to help the Nigerian army not as a cook or nurse but as a true officer!

(44)

Her mother Stella Ogedembge frowns on this attitude followed by Debbie and her friend Babs. She advises Debbie against her career pointing out that marriage is the safer tried and tested path for a female. Debbie’s mother asks her to adjust herself to the cycle of
birth, socialization and marriage that all African women submit themselves to. But the old order gives way to the new; Debbie’s choice of a conventionally male vocation as a profession is unorthodox, but from her own perspective, a career in the army is an alternative to the stereotypically feminine roles of wife and mother which her society prescribed for her.

The girls of the younger generation symbolized in Debbie and Babs who take up army as their career represent modernity as against the traditional life represented by their mothers. They refuse to be tied down to the old mode of living and strike out to make a new life of their own which would help realize their individuality. The novel also projects women as being stronger than their men folk in their capacity for patience, fortitude and resilience in the face of all the danger they undergo. Far from being the suppressed housewife, she becomes an active participant in nationalistic struggles which according to the women of the older generation was an act of “women behaving like men” (104), an androgynous act. According to Mrs Ogedembge, “We all want freedom for women, but I doubt if we are ready for this kind of freedom where young women smoke and carry guns instead of looking after husbands and nursing babies” (104).

Debbie is the symbol of the new generation of African woman whose liberation was the liberation of Mother Africa. A criticism raised about the process of national liberation from colonial powers is that the records were extremely male dominated. The written history
of most postcolonial countries has erased out the part played by women. The ‘violent act of decolonisation’ is mostly pictured as a male-centred act and the contribution of countless women in these colonies has been casually overlooked. Carol Boyce Davies says in her work *Black Women, Writing and Identity*, “[N]ationalism thus far seems to exist primarily as a male activity with women left out or peripheralised…the feminine was deployed at the symbolic level as in ‘Mother Africa’ or ‘Mother India’” (72). In spite of such sexual politics of the dominant male history, the distinctly active cast of the women in the nationalistic struggle will be evident by examining Nwapa’s *Wives at War* and Achebe’s *Girls at War*, both short story collections.

But in most cases, women during the war were treated as nothing but sexual objects. In *Destination Biafra* both the patriarchal male and the imperial masters use Debbie as a sexy tool. Debbie, in spite of being a well-educated and influential female, does not escape being categorized exclusively as female. When she asks to be admitted to his army, Abosi’s reaction is “it would certainly add glamour to the regiment” (55). Later on, even Alan Grey, her boyfriend, requests her to deal with Abosi, representing the English stand by using her sex appeal. When she is chosen by the Nigerian government to deal with Abosi, it was due to his being in love with her prior to her relationship with Grey. Emecheta stresses the sexist attitude of men who see woman only as objects of sex and preys to the lusts of man. Not only are they used by the men as instruments in
their political games, but also are they degraded emotionally and morally by being classified as intellectually inferior. Abosi declines to lend her his ear when she brings him the peace message from Momoh: “What good could you have done, just you, little you?”; this taunts her to question him, “tell me, if I were a man…would you have dismissed my mission?” (227). In the male perception, the national subject is by definition male and Debbie remains inescapably female despite her attempt to lay claim to the status of national object (Stratton 124).

Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* is an important feminist text in that it lays open literature to feminist criticism, by proving that the written word is the “record of the collective consciousness of patriarchy” (Humm 33). She speaks of the role of women as sexual objects, used as means of pleasure – forcefully or otherwise. Andrea Dworkin’s *History of Rape* also deals with this aspect of male-female relationship. Rape as a potent weapon of the dominant to establish and proclaim their power over the powerless is dealt with by Emecheta in this realistic rendering of the Civil War. Young women were raped by both the Federal and Biafran soldiers. Debbie too undergoes the humiliation of rape during her mission of peace. One of Debbie’s companions, a pregnant woman is brutally killed by ripping out the unborn child from her. The soldiers also rape and kill the nuns who gave medical help to the sick refugees.
This book by Emecheta is iconoclastic in that it gives the lie to male-manufactured history which tends to glorify male exploits, and promotes male interest. She demonstrates that women’s heroism is as real as men’s and that their trauma is as tragic as their male counterparts.

Since Debbie chooses to enter the male terrain of army officership, the other male soldiers make her excruciatingly aware of transgression into masculine bastions. She is gang raped by the officers of her own army who refuse to believe her credentials. In yet another episode an officer Lawal Salihu, also decides to show her that she is “nothing but a woman, an ordinary woman” (167). Rape is the sexual weapon used by the soldiers to establish their victory over the rival power and also as a way of settling scores with women who try to be equal to men. Colonization that gave the women new ideals and reminded them of their fair share of privileges and duties also upset the patriarchal status quo of the African male/female frame of balance. This led to the atrocities against women during the Biafran war. Emecheta records:

In the distant past in that part of Africa women were treated almost as equal to men, but with the arrival of colonialism their frail claim to equality had been taken away. Now, with the coming of the independence, young women like them were determined to play their part in the new nation; and this in turn was making the army
boys more brutal to unlucky women caught in any helpless situation. (113)

Rape is considered the male privilege in war situations where ‘men lose their self-control’. Biafran war is no exception and cases of assault on women are considered part and parcel of the story. The soldier to whom Debbie’s mother complains brushes the whole incident off with “Give her hot water to wash herself. Hundreds of women have been raped—so what? It’s war. She is lucky to be even alive. She’ll be all right” (129). The conspiracy of silence that women resort to in order to hide their pain and humiliation unconsciously protects male interests. In the male authored history, the tears of women and the trauma they undergo remain unrecorded. The passive role that is enjoined on them by tradition makes it unbecoming of them to resist male tyranny. They are left with no option but to undergo the humiliation.

The setbacks that Debbie has to confront in her masculine vocation make her mother advise her again to return to the traditional pattern of life. The fear that her daughter will not find a husband since she was raped by soldiers, prompts her to force Debbie to give up her mission and get married: “In marriage you’d have all the protection you need and no one would dare refer to what happened again… It’s a man’s world here. Even if you remain single by choice, nobody would believe you” (152). Being the progressive daughter of Africa, Debbie is able to reason out her life on her own. Debbie, the woman of Africa
with a mind and will of her own, decides on a future as a single mother-- a casualty of the Biafran War. She learns through the war that men can be hateful and believes that she could lead a life without male support.

The other women of the country who lose their ‘stronger’ spouses too make a bid for a future of survival and fulfilment. The resilience, strength and survival instinct of the African woman handed down through the generations are opened to Debbie’s eyes during her journey to Biafra by the character, Mrs Madako. The strength of the true African woman resonates in Mrs Madako’s voice as she says:

Our men were useful, yes very useful: but other men now killed them. We have children to look after. Just like our grandmothers… 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 fathers name and in the process of letting your husband provide for you, you have become dumb and passive. Go back to being yourself now. (203-204)

The strength of the African womanhood that is its power based on solidarity among women is clearly manifest here. The war situations that test the women’s stamina, also bring out the hidden strength within the woman. Stella Ogedemgbe is one example of the weak and passive African wife transforming into an able social worker who helps the cause of the country. She helped the women
who were left to fend for themselves, by their husbands and “urged
the wives to remember that the only thing their political husbands
gave them was their names” (216). The wives of other major officials
like Mrs Ozima and Mrs Eze are some of the others who know that
the dream of a Biafra is fast turning into a nightmare whatever their
deluded menfolk choose to believe. Men succeed only in wreaking
havoc in the nation. As Stella says, men make all the mess and then
call on women to clear it up. Men kill themselves and the hapless
civilians and leave it to the women to pick up the pieces and make a
new start. The women characters in the novel, like Debbie and her
friend Babs, Stella, Uzoma and the nuns build up a sisterhood that
ultimately ushers them through the horrors of the war to safety.

The bloody civil war comes to an end, opening the eyes of the
people to the reality of colonialism. The capacity of the colonizers for
exploitation and manipulation of the native land is clearly depicted in
this historical novel. The novel opens with a clear picture of the link
between the ethnic tension in the country and the colonial policies and
practices by the governor of Nigeria. The governor Macdonald is
shown as favouring the election of the Northern Party as the Hausas
are the most tractable tribe, which would offer least resistance to
Britain’s continuing influence in the country. Emecheta also touches
on Alan Grey’s business of stealing all the primitive art and craft of
the poor country to adorn the houses of the rich first world citizens.
The election in the newly independent country of Nigeria as well as
the later civil war is closely monitored by the European powers.
Debbie’s lover Alan Grey personifies ‘England in the war’. His sole aim was to bring the profits of the nation into British account and he tries to promote British interests, even at the cost of millions of starving Nigerians. The role played by the English in the Nigerian war was one of securing their interest at the cost of the lives of the people of the newly liberated Nigerians. Once they realize the extent of the oil boom in Nigeria, they decide to help the nation in its war and join for a quick kill. Alan Grey is then entrusted to sell all the old unwanted ammunition of the country to Nigeria, to aid the civil war. He also arranges mercenaries from Britain to help Momoh in his attack of Biafra. Later he comes to the aid of the Biafrans, to show the world-conscience that they are against the war and stand for peace. As Abosi says:

Alan Grey….he is England in this war, He arranges mercenaries and arms to be sent to Momoh, then come to Red Cross our people. He wants to fatten us up for the slaughter…Some people have no conscience. This war is Britain’s greatest shame. (217)

In giving her vituperative denouncements of the English exploitation, Emecheta does not lose sight of the negative aspects of her own country. If the English are able to manipulate them, it is mostly because of the corruption built into their system. This is manifested in the election campaign where Alhaji practically bribes people into electing him by feeding the beggars every Friday. All the
politicians were extremely corrupt and Debbie’s father is one among them. A minister in the first post-independence cabinet, Ogedemgbe, uses his position to make money and live extravagantly. Self-serving and corrupt, he is shown to be more interested in his Swiss bank account than in the welfare of his nation. Emecheta is also critical about the quality of the leadership provided by the rival camps in the war. Saka Momoh, is portrayed as vacillating and ineffectual, while Abosi turns out to be as unprincipled as her father. Neo-colonialism following colonisation sounded the death knell of the peaceful existence of the African tribes, pushing the nation into a civil war. Thus Africa was degraded by the colonialists like Grey and later by the neo-colonial powers such as Abosi who finally abandons his army and makes good his escape.

Emecheta introduces the theme of love into the novel by making Alan Grey propose to Debbie. It is a classic situation of the confrontation between the wounded and injured African womanhood and the colonial oppressor. Her rejection of her colonial male oppressor in strident terms forms the chief anti colonial feminist statement in the novel.

No, I am not ready yet to become the wife of an exploiter of my nation…. I didn’t mind you being my male concubine, but Africa will never again stoop to being your wife; to meet you on an equal basis, yes, but never again to be your slave. (245)
Debbie’s defiance of the colonial oppressor completes the process of her emergence as a new woman, who carves out a niche for herself in the man’s world. Debbie is the true feminist who flouts the conventions and patriarchal prejudices and brings out the androgynous character underlying every woman. *Destination Biafra*, set against the Civil war, has a masculine theme with a heroine to match. Debbie “seems to represent an attempt to explore the potential of the African female in a society reduced to shambles by male decision makers” (Driesen 8). *Destination Biafra* allegorically stands for the ramshackling of the nation by colonial and neocolonial powers; only Debbie, the woman of Africa tries to reassert the idealism and nationalistic concerns that were once held tight by the likes of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*. At the end of the novel we find Debbie recording her experiences in a manuscript titled ‘Destination Biafra’. It speaks of her vision of a utopia of freedom and peace in her land. The existing condition of dystopia by civil forces is symbolized by the dying of the child ‘Biafra’ adopted by Debbie during her journey across the land. Being close to the major historical moments taking place in the country, Debbie can be seen as an extension of the nationalistic image.

The novel *Double Yoke*, a work belonging to the second phase of Emecheta’s writing career, is a full-fledged feminist work. The story is set in the campus of a Nigerian University and the protagonist is Nko, an undergraduate who tries to cope with the double yoke of Tradition and Modernity. *Double Yoke* denotes the condition of a developing nation
conspicuously akin to Indian circumstances. Nigeria is an African nation with its own wide and varied culture – conquered, plundered but now independent and in the steady plod towards development. In her novel Emecheta deals among other things, with Nigeria’s painful experience of growing up.

The novel is set in the campus of the University Calabar and it presents through the characters the social and economic conditions of the country. The economy of the developing country is laid bare as follows: “Now high living cost was fast eroding the salaries of the academics; one had to go all the way for a Ph.D to be able to live (luxuriously) …. And an intelligent working wife was a must.” (DY 65)

The electricity failure mentioned at the beginning of the novel is really an index to the sad state of affaires the University finds itself in. While Mrs Bulewao, the noted writer, speaks to the University audience on Creative Writing, electricity fails. Emecheta seizes it as an opportunity to launch an attack on the corruption and administrative incompetence of the officials.

NEPA people were at it again … They gave and took away electricity lights whenever they felt like it. They always gave some unheard of excuses like the cables being overloaded, or that they were doing some repairs. Of course, it was pointless trying to inform the rest of the population before the cuts since there were so many in a typical day. And in a country where the telephone system
was more of a decorative instrument than a functional one, warning the students for instance, was thought out of this world. (DY 4)

The neocolonial situation in the country is also artfully introduced by Emecheta:

Most of the rich in the country however did not have to feel this. They had built in generators .... Some of the important buildings in the University where the titled people worked, had generators as well but the lecture halls, where students like Ete Kamba and his colleagues had to take their instruction, were not among the privileged buildings. (4)

The pathetic state of the University library constitutes another comical picture; Emecheta says that the Atlas was very dusty, so much so that the blue cover could only be imagined from its grey overcoat of dust. Even the cemented floor was equally dusty, though the cleaners would tell any student who dared ask them why, that they had cleaned the place and the dust they saw had simply piled up during the day (10). Emecheta appears a harsh critic of society when she speaks of the toilet cleaners who did not do their duty and just “had to be seen around the building… for the Federal Government was paying them full time till three thirty in the afternoon.”(8)
The West which claimed that they brought “civilization” into the East was able to hammer in the notion into the minds of the gullible natives, especially with the help of the ‘education’ they imparted to them. The native’s unquestioning acceptance of the Western version of their own selves is given in the beginning of the second chapter itself: “Air conditioners…. one must not grumble about them; next to quinine, they are a must for tropical living”. (7) Nigeria reputed for long distance runners, had transformed so much that a ‘civilized’ modern man would “rather be seen dead than walk along the main road. Walking was now an occupation for the very poor” (35). The imitation of the West to such a high extent is ridiculed by Emecheta. The import of ‘civilization’ by the missionaries and education told on the religion of the land too. “Calabar is one of those places where a modern African brand of religion is mushrooming fast” (45). The ancient religious rituals were replaced by a brand of African Christianity later on complemented with Revivalist stream. In Ete Kamba’s friend Isa’s cynical words Emecheta poses the question ‘You mean our people did not have any sense of decency before the arrival of this ‘Alleluya, praise the Lord thing?” (69).

The changing patterns in the love-relations between the hero-heroine pair Ete Kamba and Nko in Double Yoke portray the transition from tradition to modernity in gender attributes. As the novel opens, one finds Ete Kamba, the proud son of the village finding his girl in Nko whom he wants to be a virgin and similar to his mother – a feminine stereotype.
He would like her to be younger than he was and to be in a lower grade at school… a woman who would be like his mother but with this difference, she must be well educated… A very quiet and submissive woman, a good cook, a good listener, a good worker, a good mother with a good education to match. (26)

But at the same time he wants her education to be at a level a little less than his own so that she would not have the impertinence to talk to him at his own level. Emechets is here satirizing the average man’s egoistic notions of himself over his wife. He does not want his wife to match him in education as otherwise he would not be able to assert his superiority. Such is the fierce hanging-on to old and traditional patterns and stereotypes in which women are to be moulded into.

Such a concept of women unconsciously develops a chauvinistic attitude in the male of which one finds an example in Ete Kamba. Though he wants an educated wife to suit his generation’s needs, he wants her to be pliant with him to such an extent that he makes brutal love to her in the initial stages of their relationship. Again when she makes sensible and wise comments, Ete Kamba is pictured as a baffled and unhappy male unable to accept an equal wife in intellectual prowess. As the avenging male upon his rightful victim he manhandles Nko and vilifies her as a prostitute. He even resorts to physical assault in the campus hostel room as he suspects her of previous sexual relationships. Nko retorts that “it takes two people at
least to make a woman a prostitute…You seem to be forgetting the men who slept with the women. So if I am one, then what are you?” (58). These are the words of a fledgling feminist, who is well aware of the discrepancies hidden in the gender stereotypes. Emecheta leaves the question of Nko’s virginity unclarified “to destroy the obsessive image of the mother as a virgin…Nko affirms her new slant in morality and gender relationships by declaring that men turn women into prostitutes” (Ogunyemi, *African Wo/man Palava* 262).

Emecheta poses a striking question to the male of the species by making Nko her mouthpiece. The bewildered reply of the male is heard echoed in the room—“Men are never prostitutes, I have never heard of men being called prostitutes’, he cried. ‘I have read of male prostitutes’ Nko remarked slowly”(59). The impact of Western ideas of feminism percolating into the colonized culture and the subsequent awakening of the native woman is depicted by Emecheta here. The slow transformation of Ete Kamba, and Nko as the modern couple in Nigeria is the essence of the novel *Double Yoke*. Ete Kamba is pictured at the moment as the bewildered native who could not understand the new woman of Nigeria before him. He knew himself to be a clever person and for that he thought he deserved someone who was intelligent and yet able to be ordinary. He loses his cool and reacted like an ordinary village man and beats her mercilessly. “You can’t talk to me like that in my room. No woman has the right to talk to me like that ”(59). That Man tries to keep the woman under his thumb for fear of her superior nature is also voiced by Emecheta as
she records Ete Kamba’s mental process: “But now he knew that she knew many, many things. Could he cope with a woman like that?” (63)

The trope of the conquering African, the extremely masculine figure was what Ete Kamba had assumed himself to be and how his society extolled him to be. When he realizes that she was not a virgin when he first made love to her, it makes him extremely angry. Emecheta’s voicing his stream of consciousness is insightful.

He had previously imagined himself, the first of all men taking possession, hurting, conquering his bleeding partner whose blood would have washed them both almost like a living sacrifice … oh, how he would have loved her, this innocent, yet educated, not so young modern African woman of his dreams. (61)

Double Yoke stands out as the work in which Emecheta comes closest to discussing feminism with a capital F and its reverberation in a developing country called Nigeria. The light moments shared between Nko’s girl friends are Emecheta’s discussions on woman’s liberation. She bemoans the custom followed in the society permeated with male hegemony when she says that in Nigeria, if a woman is independent, she will be branded feminist, and that “Here feminism means everything the society says is bad in women. Independence, outspokenness, immorality, all the ills you can think of” (104).
The extremely pitiful situation where an educated and liberated woman in Nigeria tries to conform to patriarchal role model of womanhood is depicted in the caricatured character ‘Dr. Madam Edet’ a faculty member. “They all knew Dr. Madam Edet; her ridiculous height, and her attempt to play the gentle, the innocent, the religious, the ideally approved woman” (104). *Double Yoke* caricatures traditional masculinity and feminity in the negative characters of Prof. Ikot and Madame Edet, the pseudo intellectuals. Against these characters Emecheta projects the round characters of Ete and Nko.

Radical feminism is also discussed openly by Emecheta in the novel in the dialogue of the budding female academicians of Calabar University. She asks humourously, “Why the hell can’t they invent a machine or tool that can do all the loving and caring I need. Then I won’t have to suppress my personality, simply for a loving male … Or better still, we do it ourselves” (105). Emecheta concludes the discussion by posing a loaded question. “Must a woman be made love to, to be sane?”(105). She finally ends up commenting that the society would like them to think so and that very few women question the status quo. Obviously as an author Emecheta here is a voice of social protest and revolt.

Nko, the epitome of the modern woman that Emecheta depicts in the novel, is in the beginning a young girl with a distinct individuality. She is also intelligent and able to chart out her life and
its path on her own. As she too acquires an entry to the University like her boyfriend Ete Kamba, she realizes that she was beginning to acquire a new self – one that questioned Ete Kamba’s opinion and decision. Even when Ete Kamba questions her meetings with the spiritual leader Prof. Ikot, she remains firmly in her stand. But unfortunately, the Professor turns out to be a wolf in sheep’s clothing and demands a trade of sex for her degree certificate. In spite of her entrapment, Nko is staunch in her determination to acquire her degree and serve her family. “Refusing to play the role of the helpless victim, she boldly demands from him the highest grade for her work, thereby attempting to dismantle the power structure” (Ogunyemi, *Africa Wo/man Palava* 263). She never loses sight of her dream, and makes calculated moves to secure her goal. She does not allow cultural dictum or the fear of losing her boyfriend stop her from following her decision.

Nko thus shows the modern woman of Nigeria – the woman from the village being educated and realizing a vision about herself—“a simple young woman whose ambition was to be a modern wife with a career, and children of her own” (109). But the sexual exploitation that she encounters in the university confuses her initially, and she decides to combine conventional female roles with academic success:

Oh, blast it all. She was going to have both. She was going to manoeuver these men to give her both. They
thought that they could always call the tune and women like her must dance to it. With her, they were going to be wrong. (135)

But these young modern women who aspired to have both the older generation’s agreeable family life and the new generation’s worldly success were bringing on serious problems of survival for themselves. As Nko’s mother told her, “you are under a double yoke. So you need a stronger shoulder with which to carry it” (94) than that of the women of the older generation. The woman of Africa is thus at a juncture wherein she has to hoist a heavier burden-- that of a private and public life -- and bear it nonchalantly. Like Nko many of them find themselves unsure of their footing. The expectations of their partner desired them to be a subservient wife and at the same time, the family in which she grew up expected her to fulfil her responsibility to the parents and look after them too. In a fast developing country like Nigeria, women also had to come out and be equipped financially. Social status also began to depend much upon the public life the women shouldered. It was also becoming a trend for educated young men to seek out educated women as their mates, because of which Ete Kamba chose Nko.

The African woman in this new role finds herself in deep waters and Nko, the emblem of such a group, finds solace at her mother’s breast and pours out her woes and uncertainties to her:
Oh, mother, I want to have both worlds, I want to be an academician and I want to be a quiet, nice and obedient wife, the type you all want me to be. I want them both mother. Oh please mother, help me. (94)

The bonding between mother and daughter is a source of comfort and solace to Nko in her journey onwards. The mother stands as a fount of wisdom and encourages her forward. Another case of women bonding is also present in the novel. At the university, in spite of her revolt, Nko finds herself going about in plain clothes, flat shoes and head scarf just because her boy friend wanted her to remain so, completely unspoilt, “simply for him”, until her friends laugh her out of it (100). Her friends throughout the story act as mentors to Nko.

Later on she has to have pragmatic sexual transaction with the repulsive and hypocritied Professor Ikot since he had indicated that she would not graduate otherwise. Nko’s misery is that she must either have her degree and be a bad, loose, feminist, shameless career woman who would have to fight men all her life, or do without her degree, and be a good loving wife and Christian woman to Ete Kamba and in the meanwhile reduce her family and herself to being beggars at Ete’s table. Nko realizes that her goal of becoming an academician is her topmost priority, to be achieved at any cost. Like Debbie in Destination Biafra, Nko too finds herself a single mother as a result of it. But the Africaness in her makes her decide to give birth to the baby and become in every sense an African ‘mother’.
The intermingling between the West and the East is evidenced in the novel *Double Yoke*, in the education sought for in the universities. Given in a postcolonial academic background, the novel fictionalizes the changes wrought on the mindset of the educated elite in Africa. Nko is the example of the African woman who has attained education imparted initially by the West in her country. This is evident even in her relationship with Ete. He began to suspect that Nko wanted and maybe loved him in a Westernized sense. But he realizes that even though their education was a westernized one, he was still a Nigerian male and had no wish to change himself.

It is obvious through passages like this that colonization had a deep impact upon the African culture and country. It was left to the enlightened to make the best of both worlds and acculture themselves accordingly. Another African practice applauded in the novel is the ‘communal sharing of problems’, that Ete’s friend Akpan reminds him:

> I don’t think it’s right for us to allow that part of our way of living to change. I know we are now carrying a double yoke of two sets of civilization. But it is left to us to make our yoke lighter by taking what is good from the new and using those things to enrich our old one. (131)

Similarly there is a passage in the novel where Nko’s friends discuss the similarity between the different cultures of the world. They were concerned about how the female is made to look enticing
during marriage ‘season’ to the opposite sex. If the western trend was to look slim and the women starved to be beautiful for men, their counterparts in the East came out of fattening rooms to engage the attention of their males. But with the advent of foreign culture in the East, even Nigerian women were beginning to “be skinny here as well, though not as skinny as the western models”. And that is the right kind of balance according to the ‘would be’ academicians of University of Calabar. Emecheta seems to evoke through passages like this that a commingling of cultures is essential in the modern world and a proper borrowing between different cultures is for the best of the future as depicted in the figure of Debbie too.

Such a transition is what one finds in the life story of Nko. If in her youth she is content to conform to the patriarchal roles of feminine gender and ‘to be a good wife and mother’, she gradually transforms into a woman who strives with all her might to become a success, thus developing an individuality of her own. Finally even the male in the picture is moved on to acquire a different outlook from the chauvinistic, masculinist view held by the creative writer Mrs. Bulaewao as she prods him on:

The average modern Nigerian woman is almost priceless .... Ete Kamba, the question is – are you strong enough to be a modern African man? Nko is already a modern African lady but you are still lagging; oh so far, far behind. (162)
Such motivation spurs on Ete Kamba to go to the village with Nko, when her father dies and gives her comfort. Emecheta represents the state of affairs in the University in the novel. The anarchy existing in the university is symbolized in the initial chapter where the class is plunged into darkness due to power failure. Thus Emecheta poses the challenge of darkness where there should be light, as an institution of higher learning. It is Ete, the hero of the novel who brings out torchlight and dispels the darkness. Whereas the Mephistoplilean Ikot rapes Nko in the journey to Kwa Falls (‘Falls’ standing for Nko’s fall in life), Ete though pictured initially as the angry male, finally decides to lend a helping hand to Nko, the expecting mother.

Thus with an education/academic success, and motherhood, with the added advantage of having the love of her life coming back to her, Nko looks forward to a rosy future where her dreams materialize. Thus Nko stands unique in that she has surmounted both the patriarchal and the colonial constraints single handedly. She – the average ‘Modern African woman’--“transforms the cultural clash which results in a double yoke for African women into a progressive synthesis of the best each culture has to offer” (Iyer 134).

In Emecheta’s novel Double Yoke the Nigerian society is represented as undergoing a profound transition – emerging from the bondage of the past and moving towards new ideas and new patterns of life. The modern Nigerian female is a paradigm for their
progressive African woman and it finds shape in the protagonist Nko. As such, *Double Yoke* takes the form of a metanarrative, as Stratton points out: The plot is a story written by Ete Kamba as assignment during creative writing classes by Mrs. Bulewao on how their ideal Nigeria should be. Ete Kamba tells the story of his relationship with this childhood, sweet heart Nko and it reveals the “ideal Nigeria’ in Ete’s mind as one where male dominance and patriarchy remain intact. As Stratton says:

Promoting a derogatory image of woman, Ete’s narrative valorizes the manichean allegory of gender. Untroubled by the double stands he employs, Ete portrays Nko as the moral antithesis of his virtuous (though not so virginal) hero, himself. Representing himself as the innocent victim of female perfidy, he fixes her in the status of a prostitute. (129)

But the story told also by the narrator from Nko’s perspective subverts the codes of the conventional male narrative and questions the fictional author’s perspective on gender. Emecheta seems to question the authority of the conventional male narrative itself through *Double Yoke* and *Destination Biafra*. *Double Yoke* is supposed to be a narration by Ete of the fall in ideal womanhood. But Mrs Bulewao, the discriminating factor in Emecheta’s plot, points out to Ete that a change in outlook is imperative in his case, thus transforming existing traditional (mis)conceptions.
Debbie in *Destination Biafra* is a striking example of this aspect of the evolution in the African woman. If the traditional system relegated the woman to a mere functionary of man, the Western education converts the African woman as being a separate individual in herself who is able to reason out her own life and ideals. This can be seen in Debbie’s stance in her nationalistic zeal in the Biafran War. A striking transformation is to be seen even in Debbie in the course of the plot. Though she is seen voicing the Western values of feminism vigorously, in the end, surprisingly she holds up the major tenet in African womanhood- that of mothering. Here Debbie is in agreement with Nko in *Double Yoke*.

The women characters in *Destination Biafra*, crystallized in Debbie and Nko signify the changing flux of time in African history. Colonized by the English, Nigeria, the African nation, loses its integrity as their cultural values were questioned and denigrated. Missionary zeal educating the native people brought on a new wave of acculturation and assimilation of ideas into the colonized land. Women, the mainstay of culture, function as sources of change in the new milieu. The return of the native to a hybridized national outlook introduces new vistas to the African continent.

These novels highlight the changing potential of the African woman. She who was initially belaboured with the baggage of conventionality and stereotypical images, learns to overthrow them and strike out for pathways of emancipation and selfhood. Not only do they
overcome patterned moulds set for them by patriarchy, but also the shackles set by colonization. The new paradigm of the African woman who has synthesized a life defined by their own culture and identity is a mark of the progress womanhood has made through history. As Lisa Iyer points out: “In their awakening consciousness, progressive self-definition, and hybridization of the regional and the foreign, they are paradigms not only for African women, but for the rest of us, both male and female as well” (Iyer 136).