Chapter V

THE NEW WOMAN OF AFRICA IN GWENDOLEN AND KEHINDE

A picture of the migrant world is seen in the two novels selected from the third phase of Emecheta’s writing. Postcolonial psychosis caused by alienation and dislocation is seen mitigated by the hybridity of these communities. The two novels based on the diasporic experiences of the African female are *Gwendolen* and *Kehinde*. These two novels form a microcosm of the diasporic communities. The former is the heartrending tale of a young West Indian girl who goes to England, while the latter is the account of the self-awakening of a First world immigrant. Either novel deals with the gradual transformation of an African female and with her transformation into a fully developed woman, possessed of unique identity.

*Gwendolen*, a relatively recent work, falling in the third phase of Emecheta’s writing career, zeroes in on the life of a different brand of African woman. Unlike her Nigerian novels, this novel is the saga of a black West Indian girl from the native land of Jamaica, replanted to England, the ‘Moder Kontry’. A product of the colonial hangover, she is named ‘Gwendolen’ by her parents but she is known by the nickname June-June. Her early life away from her parents witnesses
her deflowering, by her grandmother’s sickly lover guised as her protector. She escapes to her parents in England only to realize that her father fails to recognize her as his own flesh and blood and abuses her sexually. Again the Emechetaen male character emerges as the brute as in *Destination Biafra*. The most hateful crime of child abuse and incest is committed by the father figure in the novel, the ravishing of own progeny/ward.

The novel is different in that it deals with an African identity of a new variety, the West Indian pidgin race, and is set in 1960s. The plot moves on to emigration to England, the First World, in the 1970s and to the racial situation prevalent at the time.

One interesting feature of the work is the names of the West Indian characters -- they are all English Christian names, a crying proof of the influence of westernization of the land. The incomprehension as well as the blind imitation by the natives of the Western culture is suggested in the initial statement of the novel: “She was christened Gwendolen. But her Mammy could not pronounce it, neither could her Daddy or his people” (*G* 1). The opening chapter describes her ‘Daddy’ going to England (for which he gets married to her Mammy for official purposes), at which everyone is extremely excited: “She had no idea where or what England was. But she sensed that her Daddy’s people who lived down in Kingston, and who were so incredibly sophisticated--because they all wore white gloves--thought it a good place.”(9). The veneration of the Carribean for their
'Moder Kondry' is another instance of the colonial umbilical cord still being uncut. Gwendolen’s Daddy’s people in Kingston, ridiculed as Yellow Niggers by them, considered themselves superior to the pure blacks of Granville; this is another cultural fiasco in the colonial countries.

All the young girls in the colony like Gwen and her friends Shivorn and Cocoa dreamed of being a First World citizen, of mingling their destiny with the moder kontry where “anybody could be anything” (44): “She dreamed that one day she would go to England or to America like Shivorn’s aunt, Monica. When they played, Shivorn, Cocoa and herself, they all talked of going overseas” (95). The ‘next generation’ clearly wished to leave their cultural baggage of mixed mongrels in West Indies and acquire a new status of the wealthy sophisticated Western elite. Gwendolen realizes her dream albeit a bit late in the day, when her parents sent for her to England.

The picture of blacks in England that Emecheta paints in *Gwendolen* is one of cultural amalgamation and interracial exchanges. Emecheta’s Nigerian nativity is seen in a number of significant characters in the novel, the closest friends of Sonia and Winston (Gwendolen’s mother and father) - Gladys Odowis and Mr. Illochina, as well as their landlord Mr. Aliyu are Nigerians. But the continental divide between these Africans who could not identify or completely appreciate each other’s values is suggested in the novel:
Mr. Aliyu had given up the task of teaching Sonia how to pronounce his name properly. Being a Nigerian with a deep family meaning to his name, he used to be annoyed when his name was badly pronounced, thereby rendering it meaningless. He could appreciate when white people would not bother to make the attempt, but when it came to black people like himself, the pill became very, very, bitter indeed. But by now he had learned to regard it as one of the dehumanizing processes of existence you have to go through in a country that is not your own. *(G 57)*

This led to a lukewarm relationship between the householder and tenant: Mr Aliyu did not bother about the Brilliantons who spoke pigdin English and the Brilliantons considered Mr Aliyu, the West African, as the ‘uncivilized African man’. Colonial encounter had made a deep breach between men of the same breed such as the West Indian and West African blacks.

Relations became strained between householder and tenant when Mr. Aliyu misinformed the Brilliantons that Granny Naomi was ‘very sick’ (as per Nigerian custom) instead of telling them that she is dead, thereby sending Sonia home, something she could ill afford. The lack of communication between Africans, says Emecheta, was like the confusion at the Tower of Babel: “the gulf which was made by slavery that separated brother from brother was still too wide and too deep to be crossed by a single narrow bridge made of the English
language” (120). The pidgin and creole identity of the West Indian and migrant Africans reveals the part played by language in the assimilation of culture. The dislocation felt by these people in spite of their acculturation becomes part of the language whereby they represent themselves.

Yet true friendship too can be seen between Nigerians and West Africans in the novel. The bosom friends of both Winston (Mr Illochina) and Sonia (Gladys Odowis) are Nigerian; in all critical periods of their lives we could see these friends seeking each other’s help and support. When Mrs Odowis was a victim of domestic violence, it was Sonia, her domestic help, who protected her from her husband, Tunde. Though socially and economically at a higher status than Sonia, Gladys becomes her friend and African sister. Sonia informs Gwen about Mrs Odowis, “We good friends. She Nigerian, you know. But she a nice woman.” (66).

The monstrous head of racial discrimination in the First World that the coloured people have to undergo is also recorded by Emecheta. She says that they ‘politely’ “treated them as if they were not there” (72). Mrs Odowis says,

She still could not cope with this type of solid wall of indifference in which people look past you, or on top of your head, or stare at your shoes, actually look beyond you so as not to look at your face, all of which was to tell you that, as far as they were concerned, you were not there…
their uncaring attitude was reducing her to the level of a child begging for attention. (60)

England is depicted by Emecheta throughout the novel as a dull and cold place. England was the sophisticated place “where everybody mind dem business” (162), and people hardly recognized each other. Gwen, the friendly Caribbean girl, finds herself snubbed and in an alien land, when the English returned greetings with a formal and distant “kind of smile that stretched the corners of the mouth but the eyes remained cold like those of a fish” (69). “Gwendolen from the Carribean is clearly socialized as the Other; her problems with British English are interpreted as stupidity, which triggers her resistance and truancy at school. Instead of promoting assimilation, her English school generates alienation” (Meyer 338).

Sonia’s reluctance to return to England after her idyllic interlude in Jamaica is echoed in her thoughts: “Well maybe she must go back. Back to London with its rain. London with its gray skies. London with its green trees and concrete pavements. London where she could make money looking after other people’s children…” (139). As a black woman of the lower economic category, Sonia’s life was a bitter pill to swallow in London. As a black worker in the First World, her life of drudgery is in keeping with the life prescribed for women by patriarchy. The hard-hitting comment on the role of the woman in the family given by Emecheta in Destination Biafra is echoed in Gwendolen too:
She knew that good women were not supposed to live and exist for themselves. They were expected to remain alive for others. They were created to look after members of their families, to boost their ego of the man in their lives, be the man a father, a husband, or even a son. And they were to nurture and act as agony aunts to their offspring. But to live for themselves was not to be. (135)

Such is the conditioning effect of the traditional societies that the woman is not an individual in herself, but a mere appendage – if married she is supposed to be completely submissive to her husband, even if he is far from the ideal one would expect of manhood. The woes of an African woman who has to suffer physical assault from her husband are given in the character of the Nigerian, Gladys Odowis. The lack of support from the family and society that women receive is given in her own words:

Well, his people won’t see all that beating and harassment. They’ll say he’s your husband, stay with him. And in your culture, it’s bad to talk about the beatings you receive from your husband outside the family. Many people think a wife who is beaten deserves to be beaten. (65)

Later on we are told of Mrs. Odowis learning of her husband’s second marriage from a Nigerian newspaper. That men were by nature polygamous is an old African belief, and the male of the
species consider it their prerogative even in the modern times. Even Mr Illochina, Winston Brillianton`\'s friend, is introduced as the helpless husband of two wives, each intent on competing with the other in producing his offspring. The ills of polygamous lifestyle are described by Emecheta in a good-humoured way in the chapter titled ‘Mr Illochina.’

The darker side of the libidinous nature of men is depicted in the figures of Uncle Johnny and Winston Brillianton. Like Mr. Odowis and Illochina, Uncle Johnny and Winston too are betrayers. While Odowis and Illochina get off the hook of public condemnation because of entrenched patriarchal bias, Uncle Johny and Winston Brillianton present a blacker picture since they committed crimes and broke taboos which ostracized them from the society.

_Gwendolen_ is a study in sexual abuse, related as the story of a child developing into adolescence. She was sexually misused when she was hardly eight by Uncle Johnny, Granny`\'s boyfriend, by daily indoctrination that it was her way of showing him she loved him’ (25). Later, as an adolescent, she was abused by her own father, who told her that ‘if she loved him she would not deny him the little favour’ (144). The bewildered child losing her innocence when one of the most trusted grown-ups exploits her is poignantly rendered in the novel. The sad plight of the girl makes it a story of betrayal by the protector himself. If the rape in _Destination Biafra_ is a physical assault, the crime in _Gwendolen_ turns out to be an even worse
psychological battering upon girlhood. The frequent misuse engenders guilt feeling in her as a child, only to be multiplied by the threat that Johnny would expose their secret. The bedwetting of the grown up girl is the natural and extremely possible outcome of the psychological trauma she undergoes. Confusion is engendered in her at this double exploitation and doublefacedness of the male protectors in her life:

She gave in to her father because she did not wish to cause trouble for anybody. And if she could bear it with that stupid Uncle Johnny who forced himself on her, what of the Daddy she loved? It was a lot to give, but then could your own father hurt you?... All … formed a big lump of hatred against her father, against all men. … What game was her Daddy playing? The same game as Uncle Johnny played?” (191)

“Incest manifests itself as the internalization of the despicable: a tragic inward turn through which the black man misuses his paltry power, expresses his rage by preying on his weak daughter, violates boundaries and betrays her trust” (Ogunyemi, *Africa Wo/man Palava* 264). The incest with the daughter is the betrayal of the mother too, a fact that Sonia was reluctant to understand. But once she does, she too is furious at her husband. The final figurative stabbing of Winston Brillianton is Emecheta getting back at men-folk.
Nemesis stalks Winston Brillianton according to typical African belief. That he who committed a sin against Earth would perish by the forces of earth itself, like fire or water, was the native African belief. He dies in a gas explosion, though one wittingly induced by himself. “Winston Brillianton died, possibly suicidally in a fire which mirrors his own spent life of provincialism, racial subjugation and incest.” (Yongue 88).

Women prove each other’s best ally in Gwendolen too. Lack of understanding in language was not a barrier. “Gladys Odowis knew that Sonia could not understand her BBC Nigerian English at the best of times…. Yet Sonia could feel what she was feeling” (61). She also is a confidante of Gwen, an earnest and uncertain young girl being initiated to modern society in England. The teacher at the school, and other girl students who befriend her and the nurse at the sanatorium are other cases of woman-bonding seen in the novel. The slight strain in relationship between mother and daughter because of which Gwendolen is unable to speak to Sonia, and even to Granny (earlier in Jamaica under the same circumstances) may be ascribed to the difference from pure African culture and consequent distancing of customs. “That closeness between African mother and daughter had been lost during the slave passage” (170). Yongue says that Gwen’s boyfriend Emmanuel cares for her more than her mother.

Emecheta is not being insensitive to women’s predicament and to the way a mother is sabotaged by patriarchy into
withholding love from her daughter. Mothers of Sonia’s generation, like her own mother and Nnu Ego in *Joys of Motherhood* and Ma Blackie in *The Bride Price*, are probably ill-equipped psychologically, because of their situation with respect to old and new influences, to fight their conflict with much success. (88-89)

Despite psychological shackles, Sonia rallies around Gwen, once she learns that her daughter is insane with grief and decides to have it ‘out’ with Winston. Finally she closes the door of her life to all memories of Winston, once she realizes the parentage of her granddaughter.

Insanity is an escape mechanism both mother and daughter resort to when life becomes too incomprehensible and exploitative for them. The shock and sorrow of her mother’s death are the superficial cause of Sonia’s misery. But on careful analysis one could see the uneasiness surfacing in her mind even before she leaves England. Once back in Jamaica, the premonition that she would not find matters as they stand on her return to England, coupled with the startling reality of the death news makes Sonia question Winston and Mr. Aliyu playing tricks upon her, and she loses her mental equilibrium. She recovers with the sympathetic care and attention of the village women friends. Similarly Gwendolen gets help from a number of African sisterhood when she is in the mental sanatorium. She becomes crazy with grief due to the strained atmosphere of the
silent betrayer (her father), accusing mother and prodding social workers. The trauma and agony she suffers is of an excruciating degree – that of double betrayal wherein she loses her long sought for family—her father who exploits her and a mother who condemns her. It is only the image of her unborn baby that helps her tide over the period of insane hysteria.

The love of Gwen for her child surfaces in her naming her child ‘Iyamide’, “my mother is here”, an African name: “it means everything I ever wanted, warmth, security, comfort is all here in a female form. That is going to be her Christian name. But it is a name with a meaning and you see you can pronounce it.” (237). Thus Gwendolen announces her liberation from the colonial and psychological shackles that have long since fettered the African woman. Rejecting a ‘grand’ Christian (Western) unpronounceable name like her own and choosing a return to the roots with a sensible African name glorifying their culture venerating women, Gwendolen rises like a phoenix over the ashes of her undesirable past.

Gwendolen invites comparison with Akunna in The Bride Price since as women of two different generations they choose different names for their children. When Akunna chooses the English name ‘Joy’ for her child, Gwendolen, with more direct experience of the West decides to give her daughter a Yoruba name of significance. Nnu Ego and Akunna leave their future generation to fight the cause. To quote Rose Ure Mezu, Gwendolen’s “new infant Iyamide
(synonymous with warmth, security and self fulfillment), and Joy, Akunna’s young daughter, represent the promise of a new world that can successfully fulfil dreams that promote female transcendence” (Mezu 145).

The psychological liberation of the African woman is complete in the picture closing the story--a family portrait of Gwendolen, Emmanuel and Iyamide, which, is different from Nnu Ego and her stillborn daughter in *The Joys of Motherhood* (89). Whereas the motherhood prayed for in the early African woman’s life in *The Joys of Motherhood* turns out to be a denigrating process, in *Gwendolen*, the motherhood thrust on her finally becomes the liberative force in the life of the new Afro-mother.

*Gwendolen* by Buchi Emecheta stands out as a symbolic presentation of the African woman finding herself. The eponymous heroine of the novel is a representation of thousands of African women who would like to declare their independence of invading cultures. Gwendolen, christened so by illiterate West Indian parents, realizes what her name is only upon reaching England, the ‘Moder Kontry’. The cultural displacement of the African coming into contact with the English, liberating herself in the process is recorded into the novel when Gwen loses her way home in the first snow of her life (77). Finally she acquires her freedom and an independent outlook on life, which allows her to decide that ‘I want the child’, (181) despite the obvious difficulties waiting for a single mother.
Gwendolen also promotes a number of interesting observations as a postcolonial novel set in the immigration period. We see that the change from the ex-colony to the mainland causes significant changes in the personality of the individual in the settler community. Culture collision may have confused the African mind for a while, but the natives were gradually learning to find their steps, a bit unsteadily but with certainty. The Moder Kondry with its alluring glamour had received many immigrants like Sonia and Winston. Such a move made drastic changes in their lives--the couple ‘gets married’ when Winston leaves for England and Sonia sports new teeth and other articles that change her into ‘becoming a new Mammy’(17), in order to be citizens of the Western world. As she herself reaches England, Gwendolen has mixed feelings about England and its people. Though her physical needs were met, the experience at her school as a dunce does not improve her psychological happiness--she felt reduced as a person (98). How different the new culture appears to them can be seen in Gwendolen’s comment that the climate, the people and their clothes are ‘dull and gray. Even their place of worship is found wanting. “The people here must be worshipping a white, cold God….They [Africans] needed a livelier God” (109).

But upon tasting the freedom and liberty unconsciously obtained by the First World citizens in their childhood, Gwendolen too changes from the unquestioning and undemanding womanhood pictured in Sonia, to that of a more individualistic persona. Winston Brillianton notices it initially, when she prods him on to acquiring
better living quarters. As he realizes, “This one was going to demand more from life than his Sonia” (86).

Even Sonia finds that her attitude and outlook to life had changed with her stint at London when she arrives back in Jamaica. She even begins to favour single life, unthinkable to the other women in the village, who could not imagine a life apart from husband and children. Thus she finds herself psychologically and physically dislocated from the native womanhood and from the cold and unappetizing life in England. Upon returning to London she realizes she could relate more to Gladys Odowis than to the Granville bred Roza:

Again Sonia felt closer to Gladys than she was to Roza. They were like lost children. They had stayed away from their countries of birth too long. It would have been nice if they could feel their beating heart each time the British national anthem was sung. But no, they could not do that either. Because even if they had stayed all their lives here, they would be perpetually marginalized and that would always make them suffer a kind of religious, social and political paralysis. (164)

This statement is a strong plea on the status of the emigrant natives to the First world, the in between place, as citizens of neither the undeveloped or developed countries. The feeling of psychological dislocation is an underlying similarity for all migrant people. The unsure mentality sported by these people becomes inevitably their
trademark. Only the second generation settlers, such as Gwendolen in the novel, finally find their feet in the foreign soil. And a good measure of such newfound feeling of belonging is due to the education they achieve.

A constant underlying theme in all Emecheta’s works is the significance of education as a liberating force in one’s life. Even in Granville, as soon as Sonia plans to leave for England, she arranges Gwendolen’s education. Financial difficulties soon put an end to it, leading to Gwendolen being very backward in her class in England. The sessions in the remedial classes along with a lot of stupid children made her feel herself a failure. The living conditions in Granville and London, where she had no time to improve her studies, cause her downfall. Even the relationship between Sonia and Winston degenerates, as Emecheta points out, due to the lack of education. Unable to read or write letters, Winston sends her away to Jamaica, believing Mr. Aliyu’s words since he had read the message for them. Upon reaching Jamaica, Sonia is cut off from Winston due to their inability to write to each other. The separation of two years, during which Gwendolen dropped out of school to play housewife, makes her pregnant with her father’s child. It is the entry of Emmanuel, the Greek boy, into the scene as her boyfriend that changes Gwendolen’s horizons. His obvious learning (albeit from old Sun newspapers) impresses her and she decides to learn from him. At the end of the novel, as Gwendolen emerges as a new woman, she proudly announces that she has “read a whole book written by a black woman,
and I will read a lot more” (212). As Emanuel observes, motherhood seems to make her wiser since with the arrival of the child she begins to read books from cover to cover and to feel like a new person. She thanks Emmanuel for it:

I’m so glad I can now read. I am like that person that was blind who became suddenly sighted when Jesus touched his eyes. I can now share the thoughts of other men and women who lived outside Granville. You now make me see. (213)

Education is the eye-opener, the miracle drug that provides vision to the blind and the ignorant. It is also symptomatic of the change in the racial attitude of the people. The New Generation of people (viz, Gwendolen and her classmates) unbaptised to memories of slavery herald a new earth and a new heaven in racial matters.

Life in England opens up new vistas hitherto unimaginable to Gwendolen. Her generation was the lucky one stepping out into a world of equality in matters concerning race and gender and class. As a new black girl of working parents in the school, Gwendolen is suitably attired like any other and she would not have been classified a ‘free diner’ if only she could speak proper English. In spite of their parents being workers (even her mother as a child minder), they were earning more than the educated Mrs. Odowis. The living room apartment they inhabit is another proof to class being marginal in their priorities and problems. Colour and racism being taboo in the
post-slavery period, educational agencies were taking up liberal positions, which is reflected in Gwendolen’s classroom. The teacher is welcoming and much to her surprise, she finds herself making friends with white children in contrast to the older white people’s indifference to blacks. “The girls really took notice of her; they listened to what the teacher was saying about her …She could not imagine herself having a white girl as a friend. But it was beginning to look as if this would be possible” (72).

Towards the end of the 20th century, slavery was getting non existent and even some of the whites were taking pains to acknowledge their dark skinned counterparts. Gwendolen is pleasantly surprised on reaching England to see the cabdriver, a whiteman, thanking her father, a black man: a sight she had never seen.

Granny had always said that people with pale colour put on airs as if they had two heads. Gwendolen had accepted it as natural especially after her encounter with Granny Elinor. But here, a real whitey thanked her Daddy. (51)

Likewise the teachers in her school, as well as many of her white friends were of the progressive world order of egalitarianism. Gwendolen’s class comprised “four other black girls…one of Indian origin… About half of the class was white; the others were of Mediterranean origin” (81). By showing that interracial distances are getting shorter, Emecheta is adumbrating a world order where social equality and amity reign supreme.
This contact with the West that makes her ‘become confident and free like the English girls’ (90), and ask for her own private space, that puzzles Sonia of the older generation. This new outlook which encompasses all races under one roof brings to her life Emmanuel, the God sent during the difficult time of her pregnancy. He was her first boyfriend: “She’d never been out with anyone before, white, blue or pink. Colour was not her problem” (152). Neither Emmanuel nor Gwendolen minded the difference in their races or colour and cared only for each other in innocent friendship. Unlike Sonia who upbraids her for her relationship with a heathen like him and for giving her granddaughter ‘an uncivilized, African voodoo name’ (237), Gwendolen has an inclusive world view. She realizes she could make a life of her own with or without Emmanuel’s continuing friendship. She doesn’t find it imperative to tie down Emmanuel with the suggested parentage of her child, and is willing to take up life, one step at a time- The African woman has come of age.

_Gwendolen_, despite being a tale of incest, has a visionary womanist ending from Emecheta’s pen. Winston the criminal in _Gwendolen_ dies according to the African belief viz that a man who has sinned against nature should die by natural forces. His death by gas explosion propels him into a drum where he is symbolically baptized by tar. Emecheta records men like Winston as trash, by closing the novel with Sonia kniving a waste bin calling it Winston Brillianton. Emmanuel, Gwen’s boyfriend turns out to be a messianic figure (a carpenter by trade) who brings order in Gwen’s life.
Emecheta’s novel on incest is illuminating in the sense that she revises African American tragic concept of the incest victim as a childless crazy survivor such as in Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, into a progressive ending of Gwen overcoming hurdles to give birth to a beautiful African daughter whom she names ‘Iyamide’. Giving the daughter an African name is a distinct transition from the precolonial AkuNna naming her daughter ‘Joy’. The meaning of the term ‘Iyamide’ – ‘my mother is here’ – explicates Emecheta’s trust in African womanhood. The essence of African woman as mother and the strength it encapsulates find expression in the name. Though in her ‘feminine’ novel *Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta deplores the yoke of motherhood succumbed to by women, in her ‘female’ novel *Gwendolen*, she casts motherhood as eagerly embraced by the liberated African woman. Such is the evolution of the African woman in the novels by Emecheta.

Gwendolen, who has overcome a good number of sexual and racial and economic hurdles in her short life, is an emblem of the womanist in the African female. She is a progressive woman who has a balanced view on life and is on the path to individual selfhood and identity.

In this connection Lisa H Iyer points out:

Gwendolen is by no means guaranteed a rosy future. Yet she has at a relatively young age discarded some of the cultural, racial and sexual baggage which still weighs her
mother down, and seems positioned to build a conscious self unhampered by oppressive cultural and sexual norms of Jamaica or England. (133)

As the curtain falls, one looks at the picture of the interracial unit of the Greek Emmanuel, West Indian Gwendolen and Iyamide of pure African image named so to represent the unique culture.

Buchi Emecheta’s work, *Kehinde*, set in the postcolonial and immigration period, is a study of the transformative effect of time in the attitude of the African woman. The novel is a story of an immigrant family in London; it portrays the variations in a settler’s conscience. The loyalty to one’s motherland and the relative autonomy accredited to women in the adopted land bring on a conflicting situation in the experience of the people belonging to the settler community. *Kehinde* is about a diasporic woman, a First World aspirant who looks towards the economic freedom of the First World to liberate her from the claustrophobic traditionality of her native land. The dilemma of the modern African woman, torn between two worlds, is clearly depicted in Emecheta`s novels.

The temporal and local background of the novel may be noted before we get deeper into the story. The time presented is the 1970s’or 80s’ which was the period of large scale immigration to England. The local setting is a typical east London terraced house. As it is recorded that it was ten years since their migration, the setting of the plot can be fixed in the late 80’s(1). The protagonist is pictured as
the proud wife of a first world immigrant, enjoying her status as a well paid employee in the white world. But she loses her job and peace of mind because of the whim of her husband to become an African Chief. After a brief interlude in the old country Africa, she returns to England, and ends up tasting the bitter experiences of the black woman of lower economic strata, as she struggles to pick up the pieces of her shattered life. Thus *Kehinde* could be considered a study of the middle class black woman of the diasporic community whose fortunes constantly ebb and flow. This work gives the postcolonial African dilemma in foreign land amid other races and permits an understanding of the racial problems, such as the immigration and the resultant brain drain and the emergence of the new hybrid community. The post colonial situation existing in the society is also given through snatches of conversation in the novel. The sudden oil boom and the plethora of work as well as the Nigerian mania for loads of certificates and indifference to experience, leave Kehinde and Albert without a job. The low pay in Nigeria which led to much brain-drain, and the hope that “maybe in the future things may change, there’ll be fewer corrupt leaders in our part of the world,... which will stop our best brains run away to work for the white man” (K 124), gives an accurate picture of postcolonial Nigeria. Such a political situation in the native land led to the Nigerian emigration into England. The large scale immigration during the 1960s and 70s constitutes a part of the multicultural ethnicity in England. In the novel, the Okolo family functions as the microcosm of such a new cultural mixture formed in
the Britain of the late 1970s. The novel opens with a considerable time lapse after Albert Okolo and his wife Kehinde settle in the colonialist country and form part of the settler generation. Their son Joshua and daughter Bimpe form the second generation immigrants, another distinct race in cultural history.

The racial, gender and class problems they encounter as the story unfolds represent the African consciousness of the age. As Kehinde has a plot built on First World immigrant blacks in the white world, it sets off typical questions of race that preoccupy the culture critics of the century. The two major characters – Albert and Kehinde, could be considered examples of the people who migrated to England in the 60s and 70s and “two decades later despite complaints about racism, unemployment, dignity robbed, would still be there” (115). In the exposition, the husband and wife present two different pictures of black life in London. As immigrants seeking better opportunities, class problems take centre stage. Albert who was in a low-pay job was more affected by the racism underlying the social veneer in England. But Kehinde holding a high post in a bank, commanded more respect and was treated almost equal to her white counterparts. This aspect of their lives comes out in Albert’s complaints:

Here I am nobody, just a storekeeper. I’m fed up with just listening to my wife and indulging her. The only alternative is to go to the pub, but going to stand among all the drunken whites is no solution. …Here she was full
of herself, playing the role of the white, middleclass
woman, forgetting she was not only black but an Igbo
woman, just because she worked in a bank and earned
more than he did. (K 35)

Racial identity is another thorn in the flesh for migrant workers
which Kehinde realizes on coming back to England after rejecting her
husband and Nigerian life. She finds it difficult to get a decent job
since she had already resigned the earlier one in order to join her
husband in their native land. As her friend tells her:

You got that job a long time ago, and you were stupid to
leave. You can’t get such jobs now. You never know,
with your degree you may even be regarded as being
overqualified. An educated black person in a responsible
job is too much of a threat. White people don’t feel
comfortable in their presence. (125)

As a black woman Kehinde realizes the trauma her
grandmothers had undergone. She has to eat the humble porridge of
the poor black woman in London, when she works in hotel service.
She finds herself taking English lessons for a rich Arab’s wife despite
her violent dislike for the man and his rude behaviour. After all, even
in the white world the sheiks “oil money makes people colour-blind,”
(126) and she has to stoop before his superior status. But his order-
“[t]ake your clothes off! I want to see what a naked black woman
looks like. …I’ll pay you” (131) was too much for Kehinde’s dignity
to bear. She walks out of the humiliating job and later takes up work in civil service. Her life takes on a turn for the better with governmental occupation that respected her dignity.

Though Buchi Emecheta’s novels in diasporic communities like Gwendolen represent bicultural and immigrant identity, it is Kehinde that brings across cross-cultural adaptation as the major theme of the novel, as projected by the characters. This could be read as the author’s own adaptation to the adopted country as a Nigerian female immigrant in London (Hawley 344-46). These migrants accept the dominant culture partly even though residual remnants of the native cultural practices remain within the psyche. Thus the final form of the adaptation of the culture brings forth the emergent culture as theorized by Raymond Williams (126). In the novel women are projected as a group able to bring a positive transformation in their life even after the mingling of the cultures. The main characters Kehinde and Albert in the novel testify to it. The clash between the two places and the two cultures forces Emecheta’s characters to form a fresh personal pattern of life and a new unique identity, partaking of elements from both native and host culture. To quote Paul White, it is possible to “conceptualise a number of overlapping multiple identities which are the subject of constant renegotiations in the face of the conflicts and compromises of everyday life” (Chiavetta 320).

Kehinde by Emecheta forms a female accolade by painting the female as the more adaptive one as compared to the male. The
husband Albert goes through a crisis phase wherein he could no longer stand the host culture.

In fact, he played to perfection the role of the Igbo family man in London. But he was far from satisfied with its restrictions. Kehinde did not understand, but his sisters did. Kehinde would soon learn when they got home how she was supposed to behave. (35)

It is this state of mind that caused him to say that he is a ‘nobody’ and that he should return to Nigeria to become ‘respected as somebody’. Albert suffering from racial discrimination in England as part of the lower economic job strata finds the culture difference more acutely than Kehinde and voices his disturbance openly. This culture conflict that is an unmistakable part of black life in a white world is implied in his words: “We are in a strange land, where you do things contrary to your culture” (15).

The ambivalence and dislocation within Albert are observed in the farewell party he throws for his friends which was designed according to the Nigerian traditional custom, in a ritualistic manner on the eve of his return to Nigeria. Kehinde and Albert dress in the traditional African style and prepare food as per custom. Albert even asks his wife to buy presents for the guests as was followed at home. Kehinde falls in with his wishes and prepares a customary Nigerian party. Albert thus celebrates his return home to the native land and its traditional mores. The residual traces of his cultural pangs are visible
in his actions. He longs for a return to Africa where he could be somebody—as a male patriarch. He felt belittled as his job in the first world was not as lucrative as his wife Kehinde’s. In his homeland, where males reign supreme and women were just appendages to boost the male ego, the comparative freedom and status accorded to women irritates him. In his conversation with his Pakistani friend Prabhu, this attitude towards women comes up: “that type of life is not possible here, in a country where a woman is Queen and where it’s beginning to look as if we’re soon going to have a woman Prime Minister. The trouble starts when women get educated….” (35-36).

It could be reasoned that the difference in treatment meted out to the two sexes in traditional Nigeria and modern England is not palatable to Albert. In spite of the long stay in the atmosphere of gender equality he could not imbibe the socio cultural psychological ambience of Britain and the Western mode of gender consensus. Thus he is obsessed with the idea of a return to Nigeria. “As Kehinde was perfectly well aware, behind the veneer of Westernization, the traditional Igbo man was alive and strong, awaiting an opportunity to reclaim his birthright” (35).

Albert leaves Britain earlier than the rest of the family—supposedly to prepare for their arrival. But the true colour of the African male comes to light when Kehinde finds on reaching Nigeria two years later that he has indeed ‘claimed his birthright’ – polygamy. Albert had already married a woman named Rike and “within
twentyfour months he had fathered a son and had another on the way” (86). Upon Kehinde questioning him, his rejoinder was that of a typical African male patriarch, with not even a glancing acquaintance with modern values: “I know you are angry. But look back Kehinde. My father had two wives, yours had three, so what sin did I commit that is so abominable?” (86). Albert, not one to do things by halves, is shown towards the end of the novel to marry a third and younger wife whom he visits during his business travels to northern Nigeria. Here one sees that polygamy as a social evil gained consensus among the people with eventual exposure to Western education, but the men continued to follow the conventional path that pandered to the view that ‘a man needs many wives’. Kehinde finds the image she had built up of Albert crumbling down around her when he turns to polygamy. When he was courting her, he had the “attitude that polygamy was degrading for women which he based on his own experience with his father’s two wives” (84). But he defends himself later saying that polygamy was all in the tradition, which both their father’s followed. Kehinde realizes that she does not have a say against a tradition where “it is considered manly for men to be unfaithful” (46).

African traditionality thus turns claustrophobic to women who had tasted the progressive outlook of the Western world. In Kehinde as in most of Emecheta’s other novels, traditionality is portrayed as cloying and detrimental to women. It was again the traditional customs that enabled Rike, (Albert’s second wife) to hook a ‘been-to’ man. The Igbo trait of earning a living was her trait too and her
lucrative university job was just as much in her favour as the man-child she carried for him. The character of Rike is used by Emecheta to depict those African women who blindly follow the set customs of society even when it is detrimental to their own growth. It is these women who are the real enemies of womanhood since they endorse patriarchy by their passive acceptance of it.

Female bonding is prevalent throughout the story. It is women who provide help to Kehinde whenever she is in a desperate situation. As she lay in hospital for abortion, Kehinde seeks the support (which she doesn’t receive from her husband) of another patient, a white woman. We also find Kehinde, who was acculturated in Western values, had imbibed within her the native beliefs and values too. Her dead twin sister Taiwo is her chi and she often appeared to her in visions and was Kehinde’s support from the spirit world. Again, her sister Ifeyinwa was the pillar of strength in the material Igbo world. She tries to explain away the ‘Nigerian’ situation of living to her sister, but it was obvious to Kehinde that her sister was extremely upset for her at the drastic change in Albert.

Ifeyinwa was crying for both of them... Kehinde tried to imagine the anguish and helplessness she must have endured these last months, not knowing how to break the news to her … thank God and her culture for her sister’s support. (72)
Through all these characters, Emecheta seems to be supporting the theory that women alone could understand the emotions of other women, which is the basis of such female-bonding. Another factor that comes up is the emotional succour provided by the African women to each other; as a custom it gets carried on through the generations.

Taiwo becomes the initiator of action by questioning the given facts of life and instigating her return to England. It was carried out with the help of her friend in London. Kehinde writes to Moriammo in an attempt to relocate with Britain and has timely help from her in the form of money to secure a plane ticket for her return passage. Thus Kehinde makes an escape from the suffocating patriarchal hegemony that was inhibiting her growth in her native land. Back in Britain, she reconciles her two cultural identities and adapts herself into becoming a part of the hybrid world, incorporating both Western and native outlook. It is neither a complete rejection of her native culture nor an unquestioning acceptance of the dominant host culture, but a judicious amalgamation of the values of both the cultures. The dislocation and the finding of a distinct identity by the hybrid race also take place here. The ultimate decision made by the woman for a life of her own divorced from the hegemonic tentacles of patriarchy is found in *Kehinde*. Emecheta in these two novels projects the deliberate utilization of their acculturation and hybrid identity of the African woman in the diasporic community to their own advantage.
We see here the significance of the title of the novel. The bicultural identity of Kehinde is hinted at even in the title that echoes the protagonist’s Igbo name ‘Kehinde’ meaning the ‘last born of the twins’. The title is suggestive of the dual identity of the protagonist and also “the cultural and psychological medium in which Kehinde`s cultural transplantation into British society is actualized” (Akilli). In spite of being a part of the rigidly conservative Igbo tribe, in Nigerian traditional society, it is this element of duality at birth that spurs on Kehinde into a meaningful reconciliation of the two cultures. This is what Emecheta seems to imply-

The metaphor of twin-birth that dominates the whole novel by being reflected in the title of the novel as well as in the name of the protagonist is not only an expression of the biological and psychological duality of Kehinde, but also an expression of a dual cultural identity reflected in the novel and its dual socio-cultural context. (Akilli)

Kehinde`s return to England after her disappointment in her native land denotes a progressive orientation in immigrant society. A similar context could be seen in The New Tribe. The protagonist, Chester, a male adolescent adopted by a white couple, tries to return to Africa in search of his nostalgic roots. But at the end of the novel, Chester is reunited to his adoptive family and his fiancée Esther who had earlier warned him: “You don’t seem to accept
reality… we don’t belong to Africa, we’re British. Black British maybe, but this is our home now”(NT 113).

Unlike Sonia in *Gwendolen* who is reluctant to go back to London, Kehinde thinks nostalgically of her life there:

> This was October, autumn in England….In a few weeks , the cherry tree in her back garden would be naked of leaves, its dark branches twisted like old bones. On a day like this, after the Friday shopping, her feet would be stretched in front of her gas fire, while she watched her favourite serials on television until she was tired and until her eyes ached. Autumn in England. (96)

The difference in attitude that results from generation gap- the class/gender situations forms a complex aspect of living. The change in lifestyle that education is instrumental in bringing about can be read in the life stories of Sonia and Kehinde. Sonia like Nnu Ego being uneducated confronts severe pitfalls in their life, in spite of nascent revolt. But Kehinde and even Gwendolen of the later generation, achieving the fruits of education try to liberate themselves from restrictive situations in life.

If Nnu Ego and AkuNna tottered under the ‘weight of custom’ and Debbie and Nko showed ‘signs of change’, Kehinde emerges as the modern woman who forges her life according to her own wishes.
The assertion of her individuality comes to the fore when she gets back to London:

‘Home sweet Home!’ Taiwo who had not spoken to her since she had gone to Nigeria was back. Kehinde rebuked the voice: ‘This is not my home. Nigeria is my home’. As she said it she knew she was deceiving herself, and Taiwo would not let her get away with it. ‘We make our own choices as we go along,’ came the voice. ‘This is yours. There’s nothing to be ashamed of in that’. (141)

In the beginning of the novel, Kehinde is seen playing the part of the ‘proper’ African wife, when she says it is ‘your house’ to Albert though it was legally hers. On returning to London to build up a new life for herself, she states categorically that “[t]his house is mine” (108).

Kehinde’s words in the novel demonstrate her metamorphosis from the African woman to a modern individual—“Claiming my right does not make one less of a mother, nor less of a woman. If anything, it makes me more human” (141). Thus Kehinde proclaims her right to grow as a human being with her own rights and privileges and not just an Igbo wife and mother as tradition and society enjoined her to be. In the novel we see the African woman coming full circle. She even allows room for a man in her life, that too of another race: her Caribbean tenant. Her past experiences had taught her that life does not centre on her being an Igbo woman. She finds a pleasant change incorporating new attitudes, which would have shocked even herself a
few years ago. Her son’s protest on her choice of partner is that “he’s not a Nigerian or even an African. He’s a West Indian and years younger than you” (138). It does not make Kehinde budge from her stand. She had begun to realize that ‘women have options’ and that the difference of barriers like ‘race’ was not going to be a stumbling block to her anymore. The Kehinde seen in the end is a woman for whom the ‘world is her oyster.’

In having a relationship with another man when her husband was found lacking, Kehinde takes up her forebear’s polygamous way of living, to her own advantage. She decides to live for herself and not for her patriarchal owner. Kehinde’s revolt against Albert’s proprietary rights over her begins when he coerces her into aborting their child which was against their social custom. Kehinde deprived of the control over her own body, identifies herself as a prostitute, on considering her husband’s attitude to her—“To him, they were the same, just bodies, convenient vehicles which, when they took on an inconvenient burden, could be emptied out of it by the same means” (17). Unlike Nnu Ego who shifted in patriarchal control, from father to husband to son, Kehinde who had never been under the hegemony of the father, also tried to be equal to her husband and when her son tried to dictate terms to her as though “he had the answer to the world’s problems, having been to Africa, where young men were made to feel they owned heaven and earth” (137), she puts him in his place, by asserting her own freedom in the African tradition.
As Joshua returns to London a budding Igbo ‘man’, he finds a completely transformed mother, who was very well able to survive without male support and who asserted her right to live as a human being herself—not just an Igbo woman who shoulders the family’s responsibilities alone.

The mother he had found in England was different from the one he remembered. She had gone by herself and got a degree, and survived without any of them. Joshua had not bargained for what that meant…. She seemed to be glorying in it. Enjoying shedding her duties. Most Igbo women liked taking on the whole family’s burden, so that, they would be needed. His mother no longer cared. (141)

*Kehinde* begins with Albert, the male in the story enforcing an abortion upon his wife--act of the woman losing her self due to hegemony. She is made to lose her first lucrative job too since Albert asks her to join him in Nigeria. The act of selling the house in London, bought on her money, fortunately is stalled by fate. The final awakening of Kehinde’s self and her assertion of an independent life away from patriarchal forces by announcing that ‘this house is mine’ stands for her winning back her lost self.

There are in *Kehinde* passages that glow with symbolism as in *Gwendolen*. Emecheta employs pathetic fallacy not infrequently in *Kehinde* as when the protagonist comes home:
Though it was cold, the sun was shining, and she felt a surge of elation. Only a few hours before, still in Nigeria, she had thought the whole world was collapsing. Now she noticed that the trees the council had planted along the street were just beginning to bud. In a few days, they would burst into bloom, and it would be spring. (107)

These lines indicate the cultural transplantation of Kehinde to a different soil where she could burst into bloom in a cultural climate conducive for her individuality.

*Kehinde* set during the period after the exodus of Africans to England has a protagonist Kehinde, who makes good in the colonizer’s land and comes to regard it as her own. Emecheta brings in clearly the initial ambivalence to her own native place in the novel. Kehinde finds the inhibitions and customs ordained for the typical African senior wife as being too oppressive as she has neither any status nor a voice in her home in Nigeria. Finding herself a mere cipher in her own home, she virtually makes an escape to her adopted country and begins a new life.

Two other works of Emecheta that require mention, since they portray the fortunes of the woman in England, are *In the Ditch* and *Second Class Citizen*, both autobiographical novels. Though *In the Ditch* was published before *Second Class Citizen*, the former is a corollary of the latter with Adah as the protagonist or the alter ego of the author herself.
In *In the Ditch*, the society with the inhuman system based on race, sex and property is projected to show its victimization of women. Adah is a poor, jobless woman with several children and without her husband and her life in Pussy Cat Mansions on the dole by the government is hardly liveable. The ditch of economic, social and psychological poverty that they have to dwell in shows the insensitivity of the larger world order towards the sufferings of the poor, black women in the white world. The novel becomes resonant with hope as Adah realises that she must overcome the most crucial ditch of female dependency enforced on her by traditional African dogmas and the humiliating social injustice of the west. She recaptures the individual initiative and rises like a phoenix from the ashes of her pathetic life on the dole and becomes a writer of merit.

The experiences detailed in *In the Ditch* and *Second Class Citizen* recount the hardships due to the triple bond of being poor, black and a female: "It is a curse to be an orphan, a double curse to be a black one in a white country, an unforgivable calamity to be a woman with five kids but without a husband" (81). The poor house dwelling Pussy Cat Mansions is a microcosm of the social hierarchy that relegates people into categories based on their race, class and gender. As a black woman who is struggling to raise her kids up alone, Adah the protagonist, is one of the single ‘mums’ who are the most neglected and looked down upon by the others in the mansion as well as by the governmental authorities who are supposed to take care of them. As the ditch-dwellers of the society, they form the lower-
most strata in the economic hierarchy. On account of her racial background, she is again at a disadvantage in a white country which expects blacks to be treated with contempt. Finally, as a woman, and a single mother, she was expected to demean herself for her survival.

*Second Class Citizen* details on the childhood and youth of this heroine Adah which was an extremely different one initially, as she was one of the elite in Lagos. She had acquired a good education and marriage to Francis Obi, a clerk in Lagos, along with a well paying job at the American Consulate Library ensures a comfortable life for her. In spite of it she decides to follow Francis to England as per her dream of reaching the Promised Land – “going to the United Kingdom must surely be like paying God a visit. The United Kingdom, then must be like heaven” (47). But once in London Francis opens her eyes to the truth of racial prejudice they encounter in Britain.

You must know, my dear young ‘lady’, that in Lagos you may be earning a million pounds a day; you may have hundreds of servants; you may be living like an elite; but the day you land in England, you are a second class citizen (*SCC* 39).

Adah has to confront not only racial discrimination from the white, but also male chauvinism from Francis. He was a sorry excuse for a husband as one unemployed and a failure as a student citizen. Adah has to hold the family together as the bread winner yet she finds
herself the second sex in the family, under the sadistic thumb of her husband. Constantly pregnant and struggling to keep together her family as per the dictum of African patriarchal values, she realizes that new rules for living have to be drawn for herself. She tries to assert her individuality by gaining some means of contraception; again she is beaten within an inch of her life by her husband. Adah turns to education to liberate her from her miserable circumstances and gains a degree in sociology at a London University. Adah is a resilient and determined young woman and she also tries to bring to fruition her dream of becoming a writer. Again Francis tries to destroy her by burning the manuscript, her precious brainchild. This is the ultimate calamity to occur, according to Adah, and she, pregnant with the fifth child, packs up her four kids and belongings and leaves Francis to live a single and free life.

As in *In the Ditch*, which records the sequel of her life, *Second Class Citizen* too displays life measured on terms of race, class and gender. As Francis informs her, though an elite in African soil, “you can’t discriminate against your own people, because we are all second class” (39). Again as a wife she realizes her second sex status as proved by her constant unplanned pregnancies—“a woman was a second-class human, to be slept with at any time, even during the day, and if she refused, to have sense beaten into her until she gave in” (164-65). As the poor immigrant students in London, they occupy second class status in the economic strata of the society. As Lloyd Brown says, “Africans are second class in Europe, blacks are second-class in a white society, and
emerging Third World Countries still retain second-class status in spite of intellectual and economic borrowings from the first-class West” (47).

If in *In the Ditch* it is the economic and psychological pit that the heroine climbs out of as a single, poor black mother, in *Second Class Citizen*, Adah realizes that as a black and woman she has only second class status in London and her family. It is these stumbling blocks that Adah, the alter ego of Emecheta in the first two works, sets out to conquer by sheer determination and will-power. The social ambience is similar to the one in *Gwendolen*.

In *Gwendolen* and *Kehinde* Emecheta displays the disporic section of Africans in Britain who inhabit the interstitial space or the ‘in- between’ border of being African and English. They constitute the hybridized cultural community, assimilating both the African and European values. The ambivalence, the consequent dislocation and the adaptation that they go through are pictured in the novel. London may be considered as a gendered space that offers the possibility of seeing a different pattern in women’s lives and where the conditions for change are possible. Kehinde, the protagonist, a prototype in this marginal community, is the incarnation of the final transformation of the African woman-- the woman who attains a space of her own, as neither African nor English, but a woman in herself, who formulates her own set of values and identity. Gwendolen who embraces a cross-cultural family structure is similar to Kehinde. In spite of harrowing familial and sexual dilemmas,
Kehinde and Gwendolen rise above the ashes of their past. As African women in alien lands, Emecheta records their policy as one of racial liberation and an inclusive outlook. In these two novels, Paul Gilroy’s words come true that diasporic framework acts as an “alternative to the different varieties of absolutism, which would confine culture in racial, ethnic or national essences” (Davies 13).

Thus we can conclude that the woman of Africa is a visionary. These two novels end on a note of cross cultural transitions and new mestizos in the making. Emecheta here points to the need to break out of the restrictive paradigms when she depicts the new African woman rising above barriers like race and nationalism. As a diasporic citizen the black woman of ‘Other’ worlds takes on a transnational identity.