People who have experienced migration know that at some point in their lives they want to tell their own story, if only for others to learn from their experiences or to understand how far they have come to get to where they are. Buchi Emecheta is one of the few who have had the opportunity to share their stories with the public. She experienced migration firsthand and knows that immigrants go through all forms of transformation to reach their goal. Immigration brings about tremendous changes in people’s lives, and in the course of these changes, some people pass through hell to achieve success, while some others are simply crushed. Many are lucky to reconstruct their lives in the process and become better persons. But there are others who cannot cope with the rigorous transformation involved and end up either totally destroyed or forced back to their point of origination. A close reading of Buchi Emecheta’s heroines Adah (In the Ditch, 1979) and Kehinde (Kehinde, 1994) reveals the impact of migration on female identity formation. We shall see that in migration, the struggle to overcome obstacles in the country of destination leads to a transformation of the individual and ultimately to a search for a new identity that involves multiple forms of negotiation.

Migration occurs when there is a permanent change of residence by a person or a group, although that may not exclude an intention to move back later to the original place. The exact definition of “permanent” should not be a major concern as long as the original intention is to relocate and settle in another place. History is replete with several examples of immigrants from Europe, Asia, and Africa who spent many years in America and later moved back to their country of birth.
Migration may be voluntary or forced. Forced migration, especially if politically initiated, often results in exile. Transatlantic slavery and the expulsion of Ugandan Asians by Idi Amin are forms of migration that fall under this category. But strictly speaking, there is a thin line between forced and unforced migration in the sense that there is always some compulsion behind all migration; in other words, even where there is choice, there is always some compelling reason that makes the individual or group move to another location. To explain the dynamics of migration, sociologists often use the concepts of “push” and “pull.” Some migrants are “pushed” by circumstances (e.g., famine, wars, civil disturbances, natural cataclysms) to seek elsewhere to obtain basic means of livelihood, while some others are “pulled” by attraction (e.g., marriage, opportunities for jobs, or desire to live in an ordered and technologically advanced society).

The push and pull factors sometimes combine to initiate migration process. A good example is found in Buchi Emecheta’s *The Family* (1990), where hardships linked to unemployment add sweetness to cravings for a kind of paradise fulfilled in the various socioeconomic opportunities that the United Kingdom offers her former colonial subjects in the Caribbean. In this sense, migration serves as a quest for solution to life’s problems. Often the quest yields good results for some and thus gives rise to rumors of exaggerated fulfillments in regions of destination. The bridge once established, the mad rush for the gold of life follows. The outcome is often the unexpected, for the emigrants are filled with such high expectations that they hardly ever stop to consider that other forms of hardship also exist in the regions of their destination, for example, racism, strange cultural environment, discrimination based on accent, communication skills, gender, age, and religion. One should, however, not get the impression that migrants are given only a one-sided and often golden image of their destination through letters from friends and relatives and through newspapers and television. In fact, migrants, especially voluntary migrants, are mostly informed of future hardships and problems in their dream countries, but the urge to escape “the dungeon” and the romantic excitement about moving to a better place blind them to the realities awaiting them.¹

In Emcheta’s novels, migration involves male and female characters; however, her concentration is on female migration, which epitomizes her own migration. Her concentration on women in migration should not be viewed as another case of a writer twisting the hand of history, for studies on migration show that in the last half century, the flow of migration, especially into the United States, has been dominated by females (Houston, Kramer, and Barrett 908). Sylvia Pedraza argues that the focus by writers
on the achievements of men from Europe to America at the turn of the twentieth century, to the neglect of the women’s, was as a result of “the persistence of negative stereotypes which made it appear that women did little worth writing about” (304). Common factors responsible for female migration include job opportunities, especially in the health care industry, socioeconomic conditions, but more emphatically, marriage and family reunification (Pedraza 306). Several women migrate to Europe from poorer countries to seek positions as domestics, seamstresses, and factory workers, but nothing has moved women to migrate to Europe or America as much as marriage. According to Leslie Page Moch, “Marital relations were the impetus for women leaving for Europe to join a spouse or a man to whom they were engaged. Marriage was an explicitly female strategy for the transoceanic migration of thousands of women who left their homes in order to marry men whom they did not know” (11).

One of mankind’s most barbaric experiences is the nearly four centuries of forced migration of Africans to Europe and the Americas on slave ships. The rupture caused by slave trade is an ugly legacy that only time can repair. It is interesting to note, however, that from colonial period down to the mid twentieth century, the flow of migration was from Europe to Africa and the West Indies, but in recent times, more especially in the postcolonial era, the reverse has been the case. There are now over two million black immigrants in Britain alone, most of them from the West Indies. Knox attributes this flow of migration to the motherland to poverty and unemployment and to what he calls the “ratchet effect,” meaning that the more people migrate from the Caribbean to the motherland, the more others are encouraged to migrate (Knox v). Consequently, “There are some districts in the West Indies today where there are more people away in Britain than there are at home. Those who remain feel left out, and depart to join their family and friends. It is clear that this momentum is likely to be self-perpetuating” (v–vi). There is no doubt, of course, that the despoliation of Africa as a result of slave trade and colonialism is partly to blame for the new transatlantic waves of migration from Africa to Europe and America.

The two novels of Emecheta discussed in this paper are essentially fictional autobiographies that deal with female migration, transformation through marginalization and other oppressive conditions, and the renegotiation of identity. In her nonfictional autobiography, Head above Water (1986), she makes it clear that most of her earlier novels, like her children, are too close to her heart; they are “too real,” and “they are too me” (1).

A number of African writers have written about migration and identity in various forms, but none experienced migration to the extent Emecheta did. She left her home country, Nigeria, in her early years and settled in
London. Most of her novels are fictionalized accounts of her life experiences. Writing was her powerful tool to share her experiences and to reconstruct her identity, giving meaning to Edward Said’s theory in *Culture and Imperialism* concerning the power of the story to achieve emancipation and identity formation (xii–xiii). At nineteen she moved to Britain with her husband and two children in 1962. While in Nigeria, England had represented for her “the kingdom of God, a place we all dreamed of coming to” (Kenyon 46). Moving to the United Kingdom was partly a realization of that dream and partly a fulfillment of a promise she had made to her father that she would one day go there (*Head above Water* 26). But her first encounter with England (via Liverpool) was shockingly disappointing: “I felt like walking into the inside of a grave: I could see nothing but masses of grey, filth, and more grey” (26–27). Yet, notwithstanding her disappointment with England, she was resolved “to make it here or perish” (27). However, her marriage collapsed, having deteriorated to the point where her husband had burnt the manuscript to her first novel, *The Bride Price* (1976). Emecheta remained a single parent with five children whom she had to feed and shelter under the most wretched housing conditions.

But she persisted and finally emerged from “the ditch,” creaming her efforts by obtaining a degree in sociology. Both while in the ditch and later, she used her writing as a form of therapy to deal with her “ woes” and the truth about her life. Concerning her novels, she writes, “I must say that many a time I convinced myself that nobody was going to read them anyway, so I put down the whole truth, my own truths as I saw them” (*Head above Water* 58). As an immigrant, her “ woes” were no doubt multiple. She was no stranger to dislocation and disruptions that gravely affected her personality. The “truths” of her life, that is, the extent of the disruption, was “too horrible” and unbelievable, and so she decided to use fiction to deal with them (58).

By using fictitious characters to reenact her experience (including invented additions here and there), Emecheta is able to objectify events, evaluate her actions, and reconstruct or reconnect or renegotiate or define her true identity. The use of the narrative in reconstructing the self or establishing personal identity is of renewed interest to modern scholars in psychology. According to Espin, recent studies by Polkinghorne (1988), Erikson (1975), and McAdams (1990) focus on the following: 1) the idea that a self needs a story for its reconstruction; 2) the need to reconstruct life through the narrative to give it form and order; and 3) the role of the narrative in binding together our lives in time (450). These studies and others have demonstrated the way in which “narratives transform the passing of life into a coherent self” (Espin 450).

Buchi Emecheta’s use of metafiction in recreating reality places her in the
company of postmodern writers such as John Fowles, Doris Lessing, Margaret Drabble, Toni Morrison, and Margaret Atwood—writers who through their fiction explore the modern dilemma of self and meaning. According to Kolawole, many African women writers have not adopted a “disinterested attitude” in their works. To them, “writing is not a synonym for elusive fiction but a source of self-actualization,” which explains why many of their works are biographical (167).

Emecheta is also in company with African women writers like Ama Ata Aidoo, Flora Nwapa, Bessie Head, and Nawal El Saadawi who, as Africans and women, encountered difficulties in order to be published. These women “represent various levels of the quest for self-expression against a background of gender and other related forms of oppression” (Kolawole 168). Their use of biographical forms to initiate changes is a redemptive act that leads to self-definition and self-healing (168).

Emecheta’s *In the Ditch* and *Second Class Citizen* (1977) are two closely related novels that present a common protagonist, Adah, who is most representative of the author’s experience. According to Emecheta, “Life in the Ditch’ is a documentary novel of the daily happenings of my life when I was living in the place officially known as ‘Montagu Tibbles’ off Prince of Wales Road in North London. By the time I moved in there, however, the block of flats was known locally as ‘Pussy Cat Mansions’” (Head above Water 66). *In the Ditch* deals with the multiple life experiences of Adah, a young Nigerian immigrant who undergoes tremendous ordeal in her struggle for survival in London. Abandoned by a lousy and improvident husband, Adah is stuck with five children who need shelter, food, and tender care.

The story begins with a picture of Adah’s life in a London slum. She lives in a rat- and roach-infested apartment that she has rented from a Nigerian landlord who creates havoc in her life by charging her double the rent and terrorizing her with his juju antics. The problem with him started when Adah requested that he repair the apartment so as to get rid of the decay and filth. Shouting at her children, switching off the electricity and giving her eviction notices are other methods he used to try to get rid of Adah and her kids. Being black and harnessed with five children and no husband, it would have been almost impossible for any landlord to offer her accommodations if the Nigerian landlord had succeeded in throwing her out. The interesting thing about this landlord is that he is himself an immigrant who had apparently come to England in search of education. Part of the money he collected from rents was used to pay for his studies. His is a case of an immigrant preying on a fellow immigrant, a phenomenon not uncommon among immigrant societies. He does his best to subjugate Adah, but she
summons her energy to resist.

After nine months of struggle involving “court-going, letter-writing, and tribunal-visiting” (13), Adah is relocated to the Pussy Cat Mansions, a council flat in a housing project that Mrs. Devlin describes as “a God forsaken place” unsuitable for a hardworking woman with young children (11). Pussy Cat Mansions is likened to a prison yard, with its barbed wire windows, “impersonal bricks,” and dark interior (17). Littered with rubbish piled high all over the place, with no central heating, and with wet slimy stairs that some teenagers use as a toilet, and all the rancid stench therewith, it is obvious that the Pussy Cat Mansions is not much of an improvement from her former abode. This lateral movement is by no means redemptive; rather it offers Adah a lateral transition from one oppressive condition to another. Such an experience is common among immigrants as they grope and stumble in suffering, ever hoping that things will improve. It is this fleecy hope that sustains the immigrants’ faith and enables them to continue their struggle in the face of overwhelming crises. This is the case with Adah as she goes through her compounding problems. These include the problem of how to keep her job, go to school, and at the same time take care of the children, for already the other tenants are complaining about her children’s noises and her leaving them alone too long before and after school. After much consideration, Adah quits her minimum-wage job and goes on the Dole (welfare), a step she loathes to take knowing it offends her African sensibility and pride (33). But she has no alternatives, and the only one open to her—writing African stories—is aborted by constant rejection by publishers.

Life in the Pussy Cat Mansions is purgatorial, a type of baptism by fire. In London, Adah experiences the kind of tough life that she had least expected. The challenges she meets are numerous and overwhelming, and yet she manages to succeed, thanks to her ability to adapt and her unmitigated resolve to overcome all trying circumstances. Just three days after she moves into the Mansions, her next-door neighbor, Mr. Small, comes with anger to complain that her children are disturbing his three-week-old baby boy by the noise they make with their boots. His first statement is enough to upset a proud soul: “Look, I don’t mind your colour!” (18). This racial statement is only a preface to an unsavory complaint and warning that follows. Adah may have escaped the ordeals of a tribal, fetish landlord but not the stinging punches of a racist. Yet, to overcome this new monster (racism), she must devise a winning strategy. Should she apologize or return punch for punch? In the prison-like community of the Mansions, an apology is spurned, for it signals weakness and this invites an opponent to suppress the victim (19). Nevertheless, Adah refuses to sink that low and rather apologizes and
befriends Mr. Small and his family.

To counter racism one must not trade ignorance with one’s opponent: “But how did one become friends with someone who believed himself to be superior, richer and made of a better clay? . . . One of the methods she had found very helpful in securing friendship in England was to pretend to be ignorant. You see if you were black and ignorant you were conforming to what society expected of you. She was determined to try it with the Smalls” (20). In a confrontation with an old Greek lady in the washhouse, however, she is not so successful in containing a racial slur. When this angry old lady speaks spitefully to her, “Why don’t you go back to your own bleeding country?” Adah quickly retorts, “You don’t look English to me” (110). The other women at the washhouse laugh, while the old woman—herself an immigrant—picks up her clothes and leaves. Adah later regrets the incident. By whatever method Adah uses to contain racial discrimination and prejudice—by friendship or by personal confrontation—one point is clear: she gradually becomes one with the community of the Pussy Cat Mansions.

This integration with the interracial community, and in particular with the women, the oppressed victims of society, helps Adah’s transformation from a state of aloneness and helplessness to a state of belonging. Carol Boyce Davies, in her work on black British women writers, states that a central theme in their works is the notion of not ever belonging even as one makes one’s home in the Mother Country (Black Women, Writing and Identity 105). The theme of unbelonging is clearly present in Emecheta’s In The Ditch, but as the novel progresses, and as Adah persistently asserts herself, taking advantage of the welfare system at her disposal, the notion of exile yields to the notion of community and hope.

Although the Pussy Cat Mansions still bears the stamp of poverty, it provides warmth and friendship that ease the pains of sorrow: “The little group talked, gossiped and laughed; all were happy. They found joy in communal sorrow. . . . Adah stopped being homesick. She was beginning to feel like a human being again, with a definite role to perform—even though the role was in no other place but the ditch. It was always nice and warm in the ditch. That night she thanked God for her good neighbors” (61). These down-and-outs in the ditch, the so-called wretched of the earth, provide support for each other through friendship that is warm and natural (54). Such friendship and support fulfills William Wordsworth’s idea of the advantages of love in the poem “Michael”: “There is a comfort in the strength of love; / ‘Twill make a thing endurable, which else / Would overset the brain, or break the heart” (276). The natural warmth provided in the Mansions contrasts with the cold, mindless, artificial, and often bureaucratic relationships characteristic of the London sophisticated society. Poverty and rejection reduce
multiracial and multicultural groups to a common level in which prejudices and differences are eclipsed. In the Mansions, “differences in culture, colour, backgrounds and God knows what else had all been submerged in the face of greater enemies—poverty and helplessness” (71). Solidarity with the common folks is therefore a major key to Adah’s rehabilitation of the self.

With repeated assistance from Carol the Welfare worker, Whoopey and other inmates, and also the influence of such aggressive ones as Peggy (94), Adah gradually but finally regains her self-confidence. Earlier in the novel, her disposition is described as “insecure, uncertain, and afraid” (70–71). Her condition is fully expressed in the often quoted passage: “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 without a husband. Her whole life had been like that of a perpetually unlucky gambler” (71). By the end of the novel she is strong enough to think for herself and make her own decisions independent of other people’s feelings, as is evident in her joining with the other Pussy Cat dwellers to revolt against her friend Carol for her pretentious relationship with them (99–100), and in the fact that she now attends meetings and goes to the pub to drink and dance with Whoopey and Carol.

Thus, Adah’s spectacular development from a feeling of insecurity and uncertainty to that of confidence is a form of transformation resulting from her ability to create a space that enables her to embrace old ways and new ways, tradition and modernity, her African past and her present reality. This spatial extension calls for a radical dismantling of the identity inscribed on her as an ex-colonial subject and an immigrant. As an African female living in the Pussy Cat Mansions, she is already a marked victim of two forms of “difference” that determine her stereotyped image—racial and sexual. Adah, however, has taken steps to deal with such racial/cultural otherness that separates her from the rest of the community, and she does that through active and scrupulous participation in community affairs. Hence, she is always anxious to act correctly, “to follow her own instincts as a mother and yet to fit in with accepted ideas so that people would not talk” (75). And consequently, when Bubu throws a toy at a boy’s head causing him to bleed profusely, she “shook him and boxed his ears” (75). Adah will do what it takes to dislodge the “otherness” even if it calls for negotiating her identity: “She was always frightened that her real self was not good enough for the public. She would gladly play any role expected of her for the sake of peace” (75–56). In The World, the Text, and the Critic, Edward Said argues that the exile’s survival depends on his or her ability to negotiate alliances and allegiances, even to the extent of assuming the status of a social actor: “On the one hand, the individual mind registers and is very much aware of the collective whole, context, or situation in which it finds itself. On the other
hand, precisely because of this awareness—a worldly self-situating, a sensitive response to the dominant culture—that the individual consciousness is not naturally and easily a mere child of the culture, but a historical and social actor in it” (15). In essence, Adah chooses to anchor her identity in a collective communal identity, and since the Mansion community is mostly female, her action further fulfills Rita Felski’s feminist theory of integration, which promotes friendship and reconciliation with a female group as a form of an affirmation of self. The advantage is twofold: “On the one hand, this model of female community provides a means of access into society by linking the protagonist to broader social group and thus rendering explicit the political basis of private experience. On the other, it also functions as a barrier against, and a refuge from, the worst effects of a potentially threatening social order by opening up a space for non-exploitative relationships grounded in common goals and interests” (Felski 139).

The Housing Department finally decides to move the Pussy Cat Mansions dwellers to the high-rise buildings popularly known as the city matchboxes. The flats are beautiful, new, peaceful and private, but Adah refuses to live there because of her children and all the danger associated with leaving the children high up there. She is later assigned to a new flat in an affluent district near the famous Regent’s Park. This is a wealthy district, home to writers and actors. Adah, with all her ambition to be a writer, knows no better place to live than this. Before finally moving out of the Pussy Cat Mansions, something highly symbolic happens. After her last meeting with Carol, a meeting marked by its tone of reconciliation and gratitude, Adah walks to her flat through the Mansions’ cemetery. Reflecting on her life in the ditch, something becomes clear to her: she has to get out of the ditch for good and should never depend on any social officer for her needs. And furthermore, she is determined that she is not going to “lower herself any more for anything. The world had a habit of accepting the way you rated yourself. The last place in which she was going to incarcerate herself was in the ditch” (127). Then as she reads the names of those buried there, she bids them farewell, “Goodbye, ghosts, whoever you are, and sleep well” (127). When she gets home an offer for the new accommodation is already waiting for her. She moves out of the ditch a week later, “to face the world alone, without the cushioning comfort of Mrs. Cox, without the master-minding of Carol. It was a time she became an individual” (127). Thus, having symbolically buried the old self, she is to begin life afresh, with new determination and new personality. It is an important step in Adah’s transformation in which, like a Phoenix, she now rises from the ashes of a downgraded self into a new consciousness of empowerment.

A number of modern theorists have used the body image to describe the
triumphant reintegration of a displaced subject. Michael Dash in his work on Caribbean literature discusses two prominent colonial/postcolonial writers that used such body images: Aime Cesaire and Frantz Fanon. Cesaire’s epic poem, “Cahier,” for example, “ends with a triumphant vision of sensory plenitude as the subject is possessed by the lost island-body” (Dash 332). Cesaire’s poetry in general is rich with images of dismemberment and reintegration. Similarly, Fanon manipulates corporeal imagery to express the ideal of revolutionary self-assertiveness; for example, he “attempts to rewrite the body of colonized man, creating a new subject from the dismemberment and castration inflicted by the coloniser’s destructive gaze” (Dash 333). In Emecheta’s *In the Ditch*, the dead bodies buried in the cemetery point to the dismembered self from which Adah has triumphantly emerged in the course of her transformation.

Before we change our focus on the novel *In the Ditch*, we need briefly to examine Emecheta as a protest writer, with particular reference to this novel. Emecheta is an ex-colonial subject now migrated to the metropolitan center from where she is more properly situated to engage the old master on his claims to superiority and excellence. *In the Ditch* is an attempt to unmask the sophisticated claims and pretensions of an imperialist power; it is a fight-back by a subject who uses the instrument of writing to attack the colonial authority, in order to redefine her self-image. Salman Rushdie’s famous phrase, “the Empire writes back,” now title of a book, implies that postcolonial subjects write back to the metropolitan center, questioning the bases of her authority and claims (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 39).

The first step toward a decolonization of the mind is to destroy the colonial mystique that turgidly hangs over the colonial power. As a colonial subject, Emecheta had perceived England as a paradise or a kingdom of God. But once in England, she gets disillusioned and uses the opportunity to launch her protest against the imperial authority. In her novels she consistently questions what Katherine Fishburn terms “the construction of gender” (52), and also the impact of colonialism on the African mind. Fishburn rightly says that Emecheta’s *In the Ditch* “celebrates a plurality of protest” (52). Apart from the need for demythologization of the imperialist’s claim to exclusivity, Emecheta has more reasons to protest. As soon as she stepped out of colonial subjugation, thanks to political independence, she stepped back into it in her migratory relocation to the London Council flats where racism is rife, and where the women are marginalized and, indeed, colonized. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin have rightly pointed out, marginalized women in imperialist countries “share with colonized races and peoples an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression, and like them they
have been forced to articulate their experiences in the language of their oppressors” (*The Empire* 174–75).

The heavy reliance on tradition in the novels of Emecheta is, in a sense, a form of protest, for, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, “… the study of national tradition is the first step and most vital stage of the process of rejecting the claims of the center to exclusivity” (*The Empire* 17). “Without ever stating it outright,” Fishburn comments, “this novel [*In the Ditch*] shows how even British women living in the ditch can benefit from traditional Igbo values” (60). Adah’s appreciation of her African values, though dipped in protest, is indeed the beginning of what Soyinka has characterized as the “process of self-appreciation” (xi). In migration or exile, such old values do contribute to the heroine’s survival, more so if she is able to integrate them into her new environment (Fishburn 60–61).

The internal migration, which originates from a private landlord’s apartment in a slum and traverses a city ghetto, ending in an affluent district, charts the progress the immigrant makes in the process of integration within the new community. It is as winding as it is multiculturally embracing. This upward movement is indicative of the migrant’s successful adaptation and acculturation, in short, the actual transformation that is part of migratory experience. In ritual language, it is a purification process leading to self-redemption. Although Adah’s movement within London is winding and upward, migration in this novel is a linear process: the protagonist from Africa explores all available means to sort her life out in a strange and difficult environment with no explicit intention to go back.

A totally different picture of migration is presented in *Kehinde*, where the movement is gyral—from Nigeria to England, back to Nigeria, and then back to England. In the former novel, *In the Ditch*, Adah, despite all her struggle, never wishes to go back to her country of origin, whereas in *Kehinde*, Albert Okolo, accompanied by his wife, goes to England for further studies, but they also plan to return to Nigeria sometime later, which is common with many Nigerians who go abroad for their education. Whereas Adah’s problem is predicated on survival, that is, on how to climb out of the ditch made possible by husband abuse, poverty, racism, and the ordeal of single parenthood, all of which lead to a dislocation that has to be repaired for meaningful life to emerge, Kehinde’s problem is different and is best summarized in a simple question: where is home?

The novel opens with news about a letter from Albert’s sisters asking him to return home to Nigeria and settle down for good. Kehinde is quick to object, pointing out that the invitation to come home excludes her and their children, Bimpe and Joshua. This objection introduces the major conflict in the story, namely, where should be home for the Okolo family after
eighteen years of migration to England? Meanwhile, Kehinde and Albert are well established in London: Kehinde is employed in a management position at Barclays Bank, while Albert is done with schooling and now works as a shopkeeper. Their combined income makes it possible for them to own a house in London. The greater part of the income, however, comes from Kehinde, and, indeed, it is right to say that Albert and their two children were at one point totally dependent on Kehinde’s income for their school fees and sustenance.

The theme of economic exploitation and eventual betrayal of the female protagonist by the husband is common in Emeketa’s novels, and is dominant in Kehinde. On the surface, Kehinde and Albert enjoy a perfect relationship in their marriage; Kehinde relates to Albert “as a friend, a compatriot, a confidant” (6). But the unfolding conflict is further defined in the fact that Kehinde is feeling fulfilled in England, whereas Albert is not, for he still longs for the “sunshine, freedom, easy friendship, [and] warmth” with which he associates Nigeria (6). To a fellow migrant worker, Prahbu, a Pakistani by birth, he confides that he is uncomfortable with his westernized self, for in England he is a “nobody,” and life is full of restrictions. This means that he misses the freedom and male dominance that traditional life afforded his father and his counterparts in Nigeria. And again, he does not exert traditional control over his wife: “I’m fed up with just listening to my wife and indulging her” (35). All this prepares us for the unromantic relationship that will characterize their marriage in Nigeria. We get further hints of this future relationship when the narrator reveals that Albert loves his wife “in his own way, but needed room to breathe” (35). Moreover, Kehinde herself knows that “behind the veneer of westernization, the traditional Igbo man was alive and strong, awaiting an opportunity to reclaim his birthright” (35). It is therefore not surprising that Albert should vigorously pursue his sisters’ importunity for their emigration.

Albert and Kehinde are both liminal figures who, in Said’s notion, are occupying a median state, an in-between space separating two cultures, the colonial and the metropolitan: “The exile therefore exists in a median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another” (Representations of the Intellectual 49). What matters indeed is not so much the couple’s liminal situation as much as the choices they make from it between the two competing cultures. Albert, resisting his dislocation and migration to the metropolis, becomes an exile yearning for the “fresh pots of Egypt” or the homeland. He thus fails to benefit from the insight and strength that liminality offers, for according to Bhabha, the liminal space
“prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities,” and further “opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (*The Location of Culture* 4).

On her part, Kehinde has no illusions about going back. Being so fully adapted to her London environment, and though not totally disengaged from her traditional Igbo background, she feels confused and at best reluctant at the prospect of returning to Nigeria. In this cultural hybridity, she might be said to represent an impulse commonly shared by many immigrants, including Buchi Emecheta herself. In an interview with Julie Holmes, Emecheta admits to keeping in touch with her ancestral roots in Africa, and that by her constant visits she is able to maintain her two worlds (*The Voice*, July 1999). Emecheta and her fictional other fulfill Edward Said’s concept of “voyage in.” The concept relates to the works and experiences of Third World intellectual immigrants who have integrated into the colonizer’s metropolis, thus reversing the former trend of the colonizer’s intrusion into the colony: “These incursions concern the same areas of experience, culture, history, and tradition hitherto commanded unilaterally by the metropolitan center” (*Culture and Imperialism* 244). The “voyage in” allows Emecheta to discuss and even critique the African as well as the metropolitan culture. Kehinde, her fictional self, uses the voyage hybridity to her advantage: she is able to judge the two cultures realistically and make her choice.

Indeed, there are times, especially prior to her trip to Lagos, when Kehinde’s allegiance tilts too much toward her African roots, as happens in the way she relates to Mary Elikwu, a more educated woman than herself. She expresses bitterness towards Mary during the send-off party held for Albert in London. She rejects Mary’s compliments and labels her “a fallen woman who had no sense of decorum” (38). Mary’s unpardonable sin is that, though she has six children, she abandons her abusive husband to live independently. From Kehinde’s traditional perspective, such a loose woman is not worthy of an invitation to her party. Mary’s unwelcome presence is accidental; she comes as a member of an invited group. It isn’t until Kehinde takes a trip to Lagos that she realizes she has misjudged Mary, and that Mary’s courage to get her education and live independently and successfully is praiseworthy. To an immigrant, tradition is a valuable asset, although it comes with its own danger, as in the case of Kehinde’s misjudgment of Mary Elikwu.

Albert’s dream for a new life of ease and comfort in Nigeria meets a dangerous obstacle that tests the couple’s faith and resolve. Kehinde discovers that she is pregnant. This means that their savings will be depleted, and it would be impossible for Albert to save “for their home-coming on his
income alone, to say nothing of feeding another mouth” (22). Being Igbo and Catholics, they are not expected to resort to abortion, for it is highly forbidden in both cultures. Igbo customs place much emphasis on children and regard abortion as an abomination (72). But nothing would stop Albert in his bid to go home and reclaim his birthright, and so he persuades Kehinde to have an abortion. Kehinde consents to please Albert, and we might say for the sake of peace in the family, but in so doing she compromises her conscience and spirituality.

An emigrant’s ambivalent position is part of the concern of this novel, and is no doubt of particular interest to the author who experienced it personally. Albert and Kehinde weave in and out of two worlds of the Igbo tradition and the British western values. To intensify the tensions within these two Nigerian emigrants, Emecheta emphasizes the dichotomy in the choices they make. For Albert, whose whole preoccupation is with reclaiming his patriarchal rights of male dominance, going back to Nigeria is not negotiable. Emecheta’s feminism is most visible in her portrayal of male characters in the two novels. In the first, Adah’s husband is shown to be lazy, unproductive, abusive, and a total failure. In the second, Kehinde, Albert is unconscionable and manipulative, and it is likely that without a woman to lean on (Kehinde or Rike or the latest wife from the north), he would drown emotionally and economically. So self-centered, his sole objective is to return to Nigeria, where he will fly in his patriarchal glory, surrounded by a host of wives. Like Albert, many an emigrant male are myopically resistant to Western values as a result of their rigid fixation to traditional life patterns which invest them with power and dominance over women. Migration leaves no traces of transformation in them. They may tolerate a degree of acculturation, but that is quickly discarded the moment they step back into their patriarchal domain. It is the case with Albert who, as soon as he returns to Nigeria, resumes his position as an overlord, with wives and servants at his service.

The neocolonial image represented by Albert is a matter of concern in this novel. It is significant that Albert’s decision to return to his country of origin is based on the invitation of his sisters who want him to come home to participate in the country’s booming economy. We realize, of course, that the event in the novel takes place a few years after Nigeria’s independence from Britain in 1960. Fully grounded in Western education, Albert is qualified to join the middle class, the elite that takes over the management of the country from the colonizers. In The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon warns about the educated national middle class, “the national bourgeoisie [who] steps into the shoes of the former European settlement,” and whose self-interests conflict with those of the people (122). These neocolonialists will
use their privileged education and position to replicate the colonial administration of the nation for their own personal profit. Given his character and motives, Albert is Emecheta’s neocolonial type whose activities will place the newly independent nation in jeopardy.

The periodic intervention of Taiwo in the novel is important and says something about Emecheta’s combination of Igbo and Yoruba traditions in *Kehinde*. Emecheta herself is familiar with both cultures; she is Igbo but raised in Lagos (Yoruba). Taiwo and Kehinde are twins, but Taiwo, the first of the two, dies at birth. In Yoruba “ibeji” myth, a Taiwo will continue to exert her spiritual influence over a Kehinde. The use of Yoruba and Igbo concepts of twins is best explained by Brenda Berrian: “Formerly, [the] Igbo abhorred the birth of twins and eliminated them and sometimes the mother, whereas the Yoruba have always revered twins. With the intervention of Christian missionaries and changing value systems, twins are presently cherished by the Yoruba and tolerated by the Igbo” (170). It might be an exaggeration to hold that the Igbo only “tolerate” twins in their postcolonial, Christian culture; they also love and respect twins. But the Yoruba tradition, ever rich in myths, does preserve the memory of a dead twin with an *ibeji* statue “carved to serve as the abode of the dead twin” (Opoku 107). Emecheta has combined the Yoruba belief in Taiwo with the Igbo belief in “chi”—one’s spiritual double, a kind of guardian angel. From time to time Taiwo returns to chastise, to warn, to guide, and to direct her sister, Kehinde. One of those instances occurs right before she has the abortion. Feeling lonely and confused, she hears the warning voice of Taiwo: “Our mother died having you. I too died so you could live. Are you now going to kill your child before he has a chance of life?” (17). As Kehinde feels lonely and anxious about Albert after he departs for Nigeria, Taiwo, “that intrusive inner voice,” intervenes again to confirm her fears and urge her to go back to Lagos and prevent Albert from getting another woman, because Nigerian men consider it manly to be unfaithful (46). Thus Emecheta uses Taiwo to represent spiritual vision and guide for her protagonist, but at the same time uses her as the author’s persona in certain critical and controversial matters. As Berrian, who sees the novel as “a quasi-mystical novel of human identity, a search for self,” has rightly observed: “Neither defeated by indigenous Igbo gender definitions nor constrained by Western gender definitions, Kehinde conjures up her own self-definition with the aid of her spirit twin Taiwo and embraces only those values which are the most beneficial for her lifestyle” (171).

While waiting to sell their house in London, Kehinde experiences life in the ditch, similar to Adah’s ordeal in the earlier novel, except that she has no children for whom to provide. With Kehinde’s husband and children all gone, she feels terribly divided and incomplete; “she was a half-person”
Her feelings of isolation and marginalization are heightened by the fact that other Nigerians shun her. Even her best friend, Moriammo, avoids her company because her husband, Tunde, forbids her to associate with “a woman who had sent all her family away so she could have a good time” (56). Unable to sell the house, and getting mixed signals from Albert, who is insisting she should never resign her lucrative job, should first sell the house and then wait till he sends for her, Kehinde sinks deeper and deeper into depression. After she resigns her job, her state of insecurity and unbelonging makes her begin to understand the plight of widows and estranged wives like Mary Elukwu. Although well adapted in England, Kehinde still clings to her Nigerian traditional patterns as a model of existence. But when the factors that sustained the model collapse, life becomes a hell for her; in other words, when she is deprived of husband, children, and her Nigerian community, she feels like an exile, and London is no longer a place for her. She has to make a trip to Nigeria to reintegrate her sundered self, in short, to find a home.

Kehinde’s homecoming is the most problematic and mortifying experience in her life. Albert is at the airport to receive her, but he is so detached. He has a new and imposing look, beaming with confidence. In his white “agbada” and matching skullcap, he surely presents a new image suggestive of the new male power with which the country has crowned him. It does not surprise us because this has been foreshadowed by his nonchalance after the abortion, his infrequent letters from Nigeria, and his angry phone call insisting that Kehinde should return only at his own time.

Lagos for Kehinde proves to be another hell, even worse than what she experienced in London. Albert has taken another wife—a beautiful and sophisticated woman with a doctorate in literature, who also lectures at a university. She and Kehinde will share Albert’s bed in a polygamous relationship. Polygamy will prove a hard pill for Kehinde to swallow, especially after living for several years in England and being so Westernized. Nor can she put up with a number of other customs that sound ridiculous to her ears; for example, that she cannot call her husband by his first name, rather, she must address him as Joshua’s father. She must also learn to call him “our husband,” not my husband, because he is Rike’s husband, too. These customs are obviously meant to “favor the man but demote her status as a woman” (Berrian 175). She is reduced to a small bedroom and deprived of the use of the expensive furniture she had shipped home from London. With no job to occupy her time, and being entirely dependent on Albert for all her needs, she gradually becomes despondent and disenchanted and sinks further into depression. Kehinde’s case becomes hopeless when her only supporter, her very sister, Ifeyinwa, who loves her dearly and is out to protect her at all cost, sees the whole picture differently. As far as she is concerned, Albert is a good
man, behaving like every other Nigerian man. Rike is also good, a generous woman to Kehinde's children; she visits them at school every Saturday and provides for all their needs. Even Kehinde's children, Bimpe and Joshua, feel at ease with the system. Bimpe understands why Albert had to marry Rike, while Joshua has quickly adapted to the Nigerian way; he “soon became reconciled” to his father’s taking a second wife; besides, he has learned that in Nigeria “you don’t talk to your father anyhow” (74). The general feeling is that Kehinde should be submissive and accept things as they are (75).

One of the themes Emeheta explores in this novel is the impact of tradition on women. Her commitment to feminism is manifested in the manner in which she experiments on this theme. She uses Kehinde, a migrant who originated in this tradition but has been transcended and exposed to its counter (the Western), to expose and condemn the excesses and superfluities of Igbo tradition, specifically, the way it serves men and oppresses women. Emeheta obviously trusts that her audience, an enlightened audience, will transcend the level of judgment shown by the patriarchal society, in which female oppression is accepted as normal.

Questions have been raised regarding Emeheta’s position on the controversial subject of polygamy. From reading Kehinde, one might be tempted to think that, based on its general acceptance by everyone, including Kehinde’s sister Ifeyinwa, Rike, and her daughter Bimpe, she condones the practice. Bimpe’s compromise is clearly expressed in her letter to Kehinde (120–22), with particular reference to her father’s polygamous action: “I know it was painful for you, what dad did. Joshua and I were shocked at first, but we soon learnt that it is very common here. And Rike is not bad at all. She prays for all of us all the time. And we are family” (121). It might even be strongly argued that polygamy is advantageous, because in some sense it helps a woman achieve freedom from her husband to do the things that please her—a position Emeheta has maintained in an article “Feminism with a small ‘f’” (175). In Kehinde’s case, polygamy contributes to her final initiative to search for independence and a new beginning (175). Attractive as this proposition might be, based on textual content in which Albert is portrayed in a very negative light and in which Kehinde, Emeheta’s fictional other, abandons Albert and moves on with her life, it seems more accurate to say that Emeheta perceives polygamy as a form of female subjugation.

Kehinde’s Lagos experience reminds us of T. S. Eliot’s poem, “Journey of the Magi,” in which one of the wise men who had journeyed to Bethlehem to witness Christ reflects on the event years later. The event of Christ has had such a radical transformation on the Magi that they are “no longer at ease” with the old dispensation. Their journey to Christ gives rise to their own rebirth, which in itself is a death to the old life (Williamson 164). Kehinde,
disappointed and marginalized in her homeland with the patriarchal system that denigrates her as a woman, takes refuge back to London. Her romantic dreams of Africa have proved false, and she is compelled to choose between two evils, Lagos and London. She feels nostalgic for London, where although she might live as an “unwelcome” alien (96), she would at least have an environment in which she could fully exercise her rights as a person. Kehinde’s migratory movements, which finally terminate in London, properly define her as a nomadic subject whose subjectivity “blurs boundaries, making transitions between categories, states and levels of experience” (Andermahr, Lovell, and Wolkowitz 184). This transgressive subjectivity is best described in Virginia Woolf’s famous statement: “As a woman I have no country, as a woman I want no country, as a woman my country is the whole world” (197). Kehinde’s nomadic subjectivity in no way suggests homelessness, for despite initial setbacks, she finally discovers her true home in London.

Freedom to choose for oneself, especially after experiencing contrasting situations, lightens the burden of immigration. As tough as the new beginning will be in London, Kehinde is equipped with courage and strength to succeed. In her new rebellious mood, Mary Elikwu becomes her icon of revolt. In a letter to Moriammo written in Lagos, she confesses that Mary has remained on her conscience since Albert’s send-off party, and considering all she has experienced in Lagos, it has become clear to her that Mary’s path to liberation via education should be the model for all women (95). Emecheta’s opinion is most vividly expressed in this letter as well as in Moriammo’s reply, which states that Mary is making tremendous progress with her new book and her involvement with the “Milk for our babies” campaign. She is very much in the limelight (101). And then she adds what appears to come straight from Emecheta: “She [Mrs Elikwu] must know by now, what we women are like. When we are married, we feel we have advantage over a woman who is living by herself, even if the latter is a million times happier” (101). Here, as well as in her interviews, Emecheta pursues the theme of women oppressing other women, women contributing largely in a man’s world to the suffering of fellow women. Kehinde’s late recognition that Mary has chosen the better path is the beginning of wisdom, the beginning of her quest for independence and self-reliance, indeed, the beginning of her salvation and freedom.

Kehinde’s rejection of her husband and her assumption of full responsibility for her future remind us of similar situations in literature, particularly Edna’s rejection of wifehood and motherhood in pursuit of her personal freedom in Kate Chopin’s The Awakening, and Nora’s slamming of the door at her husband and walking away from him and her children to sort herself out in the world, free of the constraints of husband and family, in Henrik
Ibsen’s *A Doll House*. In each of these works, the husband is perceived as part of, if not the principal cause of, the protagonist’s subjugation. But Emecheta’s character is remarkably different; she stays in contact with her children by sending them money and exchanging letters. Her traditional role as a mother is seriously maintained, although she does not allow her freedom to suffer as a result. This in a way demonstrates Emecheta’s balanced attitude towards traditional matters. She embraces the positive aspects of tradition and rejects its negative aspects. In his discussion of “interculturalism” in the new literatures in English, Bernd Schulte writes:

‘Intercultural writing’ takes place in a historical situation which confronts the countries of the former colonies with the problems of finding ‘national identities’ somewhere between tradition and modernity—in a sort of socio-cultural moratorium. Orientation and identity formation seem to be staged within processes of intercultural oscillation. Thus, on a structural level, authors of ‘new’ literatures in English often develop patterns of motivational dispositions and they conceptualize their protagonists by fictionalizing such processes within the framework of distance and participation. The writers’ own attitudes towards Indian, African or other traditions turn out to be part of their biographies and a literary principle at the same time, as is demonstrated by their autobiographical as well as fictional works. (qtd. in Hawley 334–35)

In *Kehinde*, Emecheta is celebrating this “intercultural oscillation” alluded to by Schulte; what is even more important is that her protagonist is doing it by negotiating her cultural identity formation. Emecheta seems to “speak for all migrant women throughout the world who have taken root in the West but have maintained their ‘twin’ identity in their homeland. These women refuse to sever their connection with the nation of origin” (Hawley 336).

As soon as Kehinde steps her foot in London, she feels one with the natural surrounding. Notably, it is spring, symbolically, time for a fresh start. Everything welcomes her back; the immigration officials are most friendly, and “the smell of the London terrace house welcomed her like a lost child” (107–8). Once again, she merges with her twin, Taiwo, who had not spoken to her since she went to Nigeria. Strengthened by this reunion with Taiwo, she wrenches the “For Sale” sign in the front yard with this powerful declaration: “This house is not for sale. . . . This house is mine” (108). Her transformation into a new woman is obvious. Within three years she earns a degree in sociology, thus truly following the footsteps of Mary Elikwu, her new mentor. Since a befitting job is not easily available, she assumes menial jobs, for example, housekeeping at the hotel. The hotel job is not without its
own trial: a rich but perverse Arab Sheik demands to see her naked to fulfill his longing to view a black woman in the nude. This form of prostitution is beyond what she had bargained for in her quest for independence and freedom. Kehinde walks away from the job and maintains her dignity, which is Emcheta’s subtle and feminist suggestion to all women that true freedom must fly on the wings of morality and self-esteem.

Further evidence of her freedom and empowerment is shown when her son Joshua, prompted by Albert, arrives in London to claim his birthright— their house. This proves unsuccessful, and soon the message is driven home to Joshua that he is dealing with a rebellious mother who can no longer be intimidated by the corban of tradition; hence, she tells him in clear terms, “This is my house, though it may be yours one day” (137). An important change that Joshua discovers is that the new Kehinde, now properly in tune with her reintegrated Taiwo, makes her choice of what is good for herself. She chooses to befriend her Caribbean tenant, Michael Gibson, and when Joshua wants him out, she insists that in her house “whoever she wanted to stay, stayed” (137). Taiwo’s voice has at this point become “a permanent part of her consciousness” (135) and also a source of illumination and wisdom assisting her in making tough choices, particularly reaffirming her sexuality by taking as a lover a Caribbean man five years younger (136). This permanent merger with Taiwo is indicative of her complete reintegration of the self. Rehabilitation of the self or the redefinition of one’s identity is the beginning of real and meaningful existence. In Kehinde, such rehabilitation is achieved in London far away from the protagonist’s country of origin. Emcheta stylistically uses space and movement to resolve the conflict introduced at the opening of the novel.

That Emcheta is a feminist is an incontestable fact, for she uses all her resources to deal with the process of changing the gender relations in society, and more especially in situations that invest power on men and marginalize women. What needs further clarification is her brand of feminism, for feminism has assumed various colors since its inception. Black women theorists are prone to resist the imperialistic imposition by the so-called Western or First World feminists who claim to blow the final whistle on the criteria of struggle. African feminism is recently taking a center stage in feminist criticism, even with all its differences and emphases. By whatever name it goes— womanism, a term popularized by Alice Walker and much written about by Mary Modupe Kolawole, or nego-feminism (literally, “the feminism of negotiation; no ego feminism”), a concept much favored and propagated by Obiomma Nnaemeka (377)—African feminism, “a hybrid of sorts” (Davies and Graves 12), has come to signify a humanistic, collective, and culturally wholesome expression of African female (and sometimes male) concerns.
As Kolawole aptly puts it, “African womanism cannot be separated from humanism. Rather, it seeks to enrich the female gender through consciousness-raising while giving a human touch to the struggle for the appreciation, emancipation, elevation and total self-fulfillment of the woman, in positive ways. . . . African women can take whatever is positive in the encroaching modern values and simultaneously retain the essence by preserving what is good in their culture and establishing it” (204). Emecheta’s feminism, as demonstrated in the two novels under consideration, mirrors the attitudes shown in these statements. Her protagonists, seeking to define or rediscover themselves in migratory space, are prepared to cross boundaries and negotiate their ways with no taint of “ego-centricity and individualism that undermine collective action” (Nnaemeka 364). Their ability to combine modern values with authentic and salubrious traditional values is a major part of their success. Through migration experience, Emecheta and her fictional characters fulfill Nnaemeka’s vision of African feminism, especially in their willingness to negotiate and compromise and ultimately achieve balance.

Critics are nevertheless baffled by the complex or, rather, seemingly shifting complexion of Emecheta’s feminism. On the one level, she seems to favor Western (individualistic) approach, for example, Kehinde’s final rejection of her traditional marriage with Albert. But on another level, Emecheta seems to accommodate the traditional practice, like polygamy, which might be shown to be a patriarchal instrument of oppression. She seems to condone polygamy by making it acceptable to everyone except the rebellious protagonist, Kehinde. To resolve this issue, we need to be clear on one point: In her novels Emecheta is not out to attack Nigerian culture but to affirm it, a critical point Katherine Fishburn consistently makes in her book, Reading Buchi Emecheta (58, 60–61). Fishburn further explains that independent women “may well be the heroines of Emecheta’s novels, but her fiction is no paean to rebellion. More than is obvious at first glance, her novels are a reaffirmation of her received African concepts of community” (56).

Another point to remember is that Emecheta has a great deal in common with Western feminists. On a large scale, she presents her novels on a feminist frame (Fishburn 58). If judged, for example, by the way she represents African husbands in her novels, she would look like a feminist Shylock in hot pursuit of male writers for the dreadful pint of blood. But in reality, Emecheta, though with a touch of Western feminism, is an African feminist. In an interview with Kirstern Holst Petersen, she makes the point clear: “I will not be called a feminist here, because it is European. . . . I just resent that. . . . If you look at everything I do, it is what the feminists do, too . . . my books have the same ideas. . . . It is just that it comes from outside, and I don’t like people dictating to me. I do believe in the African kind of feminism” (19).
Thus, she identifies with African feminism or what some call womanism, for although she is deeply concerned with the oppression as well as the social and economic upliftment of women, she still has a profound respect for African values and tradition. We must bear in mind, of course, that between Western feminism and African culture, there is a point of contact vis-à-vis their common emphasis on community. As Fishburn rightly points out, “If we recognize . . . that traditional Igbo culture values community in much the same way we feminists do, we can perhaps begin to rethink our own relationship to society at large and not to be judgmental” (58–59).

Emecheta goes even further beyond her mutual interests with Western and African feminists to promote the cause of the individual woman, and in doing this she is ready to sacrifice Western and African feminist ideologies. In other words, she is prepared to expunge a traditional custom, which impinges on her protagonist’s freedom and welfare, no matter how strongly the custom is entrenched in society. Such compromises are common in *Kehinde* and *In the Ditch*.

*The Bride Price*, however, presents a different picture. Here the individual is sacrificed in the interest of the community. Fishburn has observed correctly that in her fiction, Emecheta “continually reaffirms the value of community” and that she “does prescribe certain limitations for women that in real life she herself has soundly rejected” (59). Discussing this conflict in *Head above Water*, Emecheta explains why her protagonist is doomed to die for challenging tradition: “I had realized that what makes all of us human is belonging to a group. And if one belongs to a group, one should try to abide by its laws” (166).

The complexity of Emecheta’s feminism is rooted in her tendency to shift grounds and emphasis, depending on what her ultimate goal is. Generally, her goal is to “encourage solidarity among women” (Fishburn 58), to show women how to struggle against and overcome all forms of oppression, including those arising from tradition and modernity. In pursuing this goal, Emecheta is apt to negotiate courses. To gain self-fulfillment, her heroines would weave their ways between Western and traditional values, trading off and combining as need arises. Emecheta is therefore a seasoned pragmatic feminist or a typical negofeminist.

Albert’s weakness, made very explicit in *Kehinde*, serves one major purpose: it helps to clarify the principles inscribed on Emecheta’s female protagonist, Kehinde. Albert, the unfulfilled immigrant, seizes the opportunity of his homecoming to attempt to reassert himself. Back in Nigeria he becomes the real macho man, the master/husband of three wives, and the one who calls the shots. There are attendant problems, however, which include the sudden abdication by his first wife, who had largely provided for
him for about twenty years, and then the loss of his lucrative job with the ugly possibility of his having to depend on Rike’s income. Albert may not eventually succeed in solving all his problems, yet we cannot imagine him going back to settle in London. He has found his home in Nigeria, a place where he belongs, where he feels fulfilled enough to exercise his manhood. In the eyes of Emecheta, Albert is a failure. Like Obi Okonkwo who fails to make the best use of his privileged exposure to Western and traditional ways in Chinua Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease*, Albert fails because of his fixation to patriarchy and his inability to negotiate between the boundaries of space and culture. For Kehinde, however, the situation is different. Opposed to going back home from the start, she later changes her mind following her Taiwo’s advice. But in Nigeria she quickly discovers that, having been relegated to the back seat of social and family affairs, a situation that threatens to destroy her completely, she no longer belongs there. She rebels and returns to London, where she reorganizes herself and moves on. Although at the end of the novel Kehinde has not yet secured a permanent job in her professional field, the prospects are good. On the whole, she is liberated, confident, and happy. For her, therefore, London is the real home.

Thus, Emecheta’s fiction fulfills Schmidt-Grozinger’s notion of “progressive” in immigrant literature. Among the three modes of orientation Schmidt-Grozinger discusses, two reflect the direction taken by the two major characters in *Kehinde*: 1) the retrospective mode, in which a person defines himself through his origins, as Albert does when he takes refuge in the patriarchal system of his homeland; and 2) the progressive mode, in which a person critically examines his or her past and present situations and decides on what is best for his or her progress (112). Kehinde fulfills this second mode because, to borrow from John Hawley, she is “doubly rooted” in the African and Western traditions, having formed “a psychic bridge across the metaphysical space separating them” (339). We maintain strongly that it is this double rootedness that finally enables Kehinde to reconstruct her splintered self in her immigrant country just as it does for the immigrant writer, Emecheta.

In the end, the two women, Adah and Kehinde, follow the same pattern. Both follow their husbands to migrate to England; both are disappointed by them; both go through a period of bitter struggle and discovery; both finally find solace in freedom and self-rehabilitation; and “both find London to be their true home, indeed, a new space that allows them to blend old and new, tradition and modernity. In these two novels, Emecheta is attempting to resolve her personal life issues. Adah and Kehinde’s plights closely reflect her own experience in her migration from Nigeria to England. With these two novels she seems to resolve a persistent question for herself as well as
for millions of other women migrants, namely, that true home is any place or country where the self is liberated and fulfilled, an idea so succinctly expressed in Grace Nichol’s line, “Wherever I hang me knickers—that’s my home” (qtd. in Davies, “Black British Women Writing the Anti-Imperialist Critique,” 112).