

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

**TRACING THE EVOLUTION OF THE ROLES OF FEMALE
CHARACTERS IN SELECTED WORKS OF CHINUA ACHEBE**

BY

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**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA,
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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is the result of an original study conducted by me, under the supervision of Professor A. N Mensah and Dr. E. Sackey of the Department of English of the University of Ghana, Legon. References made to other people's work have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has never been presented to any other academic institution, in whole or part, for an award of any academic degree.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all the mothers in my life who have contributed to my success, especially to Madam Rose Otoo who played the dual role of a father and a mother to me.

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ABSTRACT

Recognized as the founding father of modern African Literature in English, Achebe stands out as perhaps one of the most critiqued authors due to his portrayal of women in his early novels. In an attempt to respond to the disparaging representation of Africa in colonial novels such as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Achebe focused on portraying the power and charisma of the African male; the adverse effect of this being weak submissive women who succumbed to these powerful men. This study will look at the representation of women in three selected novels of Achebe, namely *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Anthills of the Savannah*. The main objective is to trace the evolution of the female characters from one novel to the other and investigate what accounts for the eventual shift from minimal roles of women in novels such as *Things Fall Apart* to central roles in *Anthills of the Savannah*. Theoretical analysis of these novels will be done from the perspective of Postcolonial Feminist Theory. The theory best fits this study because Postcolonial feminists concern themselves with the effect of patriarchy and colonization on women, and seek to correct the misrepresentation of women by the male authors.

Keywords: *Evolution, Postcolonial Feminism, Western Feminism, African Literature, African Women, Patriarchy, Precolonial, Postcolonial.*

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This thesis is a gender appraisal of selected novels of Chinua Achebe, that is *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). The study will trace the roles of the female characters before, during and after colonialism, and explore the change in roles from one novel to the other. From the perspective of Postcolonial Feminist Theory, the study will investigate the experiences of the female characters with patriarchy during precolonial period and with Western ideals during the postcolonial period.

As a writer who has been criticized for marginalizing women in his works, Achebe is one of the most criticized writers by Postcolonial Feminists who seek to correct the misrepresentation of women in male-authored works. Female writers are convinced that male writers dominate the literary scene, and misrepresent the female personality and her contribution to nation-building. Many female critics also believe that male authors write inadequately from the female perspective. Susan Gubar (1980) believes that men see women as “blank pages,” but that women sometimes also see themselves in this way, using writing to re-create themselves. The female author is deeply involved in her work, because it is often considered a re-shaping of herself, whereas the male author is creating something outside of himself.

Against this background, the first part of the study will investigate how Achebe represents his female characters in a densely patriarchal society. Achebe hails from a patriarchal Igbo society in

Nigeria and most of his novels are set in fictional towns of Igbo land. A titled Igbo Chief himself, Achebe's novels focus on the traditions of Igbo society, the effect of Christian influence, and the clash of Western and traditional African values during and after the colonial era. His style relies heavily on aspects of Igbo oral tradition such as the proverb and the folktale, and the masterful and artistic way in which he infuses this with literary tools has been highly praised. Gender power relation is a dominant feature in Achebe's novels and he has been criticized for marginalizing his female characters, while projecting strong, dominant male characters.

However, if there is the possibility that Achebe's representation of his female characters is a reflection of the situation of women during the period in which the novels are set, then that possibility must be explored. Therefore, in examining the changes in the roles of the female characters in *Things Fall Apart* through to *Anthills of the Savannah*, it is important to investigate how each period (that is precolonial, colonial and postcolonial) impacted women and how Achebe through this representation of women, addressed the negatives and positives of both the traditional and Western ideals. To this effect, the second part of the study will look at the experiences of the female characters in the hybrid society of Western and traditional customs. In this section, the position of women in the transitional society from traditional African to Western culture will be examined. The final part of the study will compare Achebe's presentation of women in the postcolonial period to the women in the precolonial and transitional period.

1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Postcolonial Feminism is a relatively new stream of thought, developing primarily out of the work of the postcolonial theorists who concern themselves with evaluating how different colonial and imperial relations throughout the nineteenth century have impacted the way particular cultures view themselves (Wikipedia.org).

Postcolonial Feminist Criticism examines how women are represented in literature about colonial and postcolonial period, and challenges assumptions which are made about women in both literature and society (Tejero, 2005). Postcolonial Feminists point out the ways in which women continue to be stereotyped and marginalized, ironically sometimes by postcolonial authors who might claim they are challenging the Western culture of oppression (Tejero, 2005). Postcolonial Feminist Theory is primarily concerned with the representation of women in once colonized countries and in Western locations (Tyagi, 2004). It differs radically from the Western model which is, by and large, an advocacy of sexual rights, female control over reproduction, choices within human sexuality and essentialism. While the postcolonial male author struggles against the literature that aims at misrepresenting him as inferior, the task of a Postcolonial Feminist is far more complicated. She suffers a “double colonization” as she simultaneously experiences the double oppression of colonialism and patriarchy. She has to resist the control of colonial power not only as a colonized subject, but also as a woman. In this oppression, her colonized brother is no longer her accomplice, but her oppressor. In his struggle against the colonizer, he even exploits her by misrepresenting her. Not only that, she also suffers at the hand of Western Feminists from the colonizer countries who misrepresent their colonized counterparts

by imposing silence on their racial, cultural, social, and political specificities, and in so doing, act as potential oppressors of their “sisters” (Tejero, 2005).

Postcolonial Feminists argue that the experience of women in cultures impacted by colonialism is often vastly different from that of women in Western countries and should be acknowledged as such. Postcolonial Feminists could be described as Feminists who have reacted against both universalizing tendencies in Western Feminist thought and a lack of attention to gender issues in mainstream postcolonial thought. Postcolonial Feminism began to examine the complex ways that gender interacts with other systems of oppression and discrimination. This form of feminism began as a criticism of the failure of Western Feminism to cope with the complexity of postcolonial feminist issues, as represented in Third World Feminist movements. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984), a principal theorist within the movement, in her seminal essay “Under Western Eyes” asserts that Western Feminists write about Third World women as a composite, singular construction that is arbitrary and limiting. She states that these women are depicted in writings as victims of masculine control and of traditional culture without incorporating information about historical context and cultural differences in the Third World. This creates a dynamic where Western Feminism functions as the norm against which the situation in the developing world is evaluated. Mohanty's primary initiative is to allow Third World women to have agency and voice within the Feminist realm.

During the colonial period, colonial powers often imposed Western norms on colonized regions. Many of the aftereffects of colonialism remained in place even after colonization had ended. Postcolonial studies examine the continued effects of colonization in now decolonized countries.

The Postcolonial Feminist movements looked at the gendered history of colonialism and how that continues to affect the status of women today.

Postcolonial Feminists saw the parallels between recently decolonized nations and the state of women within patriarchy. Both took the perspective of a socially marginalized subgroup in their relationship to the dominant culture. In this way Feminism and Post colonialism could be seen as having a similar goal in giving a voice to those that were voiceless in the traditional dominant social order.

Another aftereffect of colonialism is that it sometimes results in the glorification of pre-colonial culture. In many places, the pre-colonial culture had traditions of power stratification along gender lines, and women had very little power. Thus the push back against the colonial power could lead to the acceptance of inherent gender inequality in the society and a refusal to try and change that to give more power to women. One way that postcolonial Feminists wanted to fight this entrenched gender inequality is by putting gendered questions into the postcolonial discourse, and thus forcing postcolonial theorists to begin addressing women's issues in their theories.

bell hooks- *Feminist Theory- From Margin to Center*

Having published over 30 books which addressed issues of race, class, and gender in education, art, history, sexuality, mass media, and Feminism, bell hooks is known as one of the radical feminists who defined feminism as a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. In her feminist discussions, hooks addresses topics including the goals of feminist

movement, the role of men in feminist struggle, the relevance of pacifism, solidarity among women, and the nature of revolution.

Feminist Theory- From Margin to Center (1984) is the second book by hooks and she discusses topics such as the goals of feminist movement, the role of men in feminist struggle, the relevance of pacifism, solidarity among women, and the nature of revolution. hooks is rather radical in her approach to feminism and argued that the social system in male dominated societies is corrupt, and that achieving equality in such a system is neither possible nor desirable. She promotes instead a complete transformation of society and all its institutions as a result of protracted struggle, envisioning a life-affirming, peaceful tomorrow. She rejects the definition of Feminism as a movement to make women socially equal to men (18) because there are men in the lower social class who are exploited and oppressed, and women in this class would not want to be equal to them. hooks proposes that if feminism is defined in such a way that it called attention to the diversity of women's social and political reality, it will centralize the experiences of all women, especially the women whose social conditions have been least written about, studied, or changed by political movements (25). She simply defines Feminism as the struggle to end sexist oppression (26). Feminism as a movement to end sexist oppression changes the focus from equality with men to systems of domination and the inter-relatedness of sex, race, and class oppression. In this way, Feminism centralizes the experiences and the social predicaments of women who bear the brunt of sexist oppression as a way to understand the collective social status of women (31). Like hooks, Mohanty (2003) reiterates the importance of including women from all social class and race in the movement. According to Mohanty, the assumption of women as

an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic, or racial location, or contradictions, implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy that can be applied universally and cross-culturally (21). However, experiences of women differ across race, culture, social class etc. and all these must be factored in to make the Feminist movement a reflection of the needs of all women, not just a subset of women.

To this end, hooks therefore advocates what is contemporarily called intersectionality as one means of solving the problem of sexism. Sexism is perpetuated by institutional and social structures; by the individuals who dominate, exploit or oppress; and by the victims themselves who are socialized to behave in ways that make them act in complicity with the status quo. Sexist ideology teaches women that to be female is to be a victim (45). Sexism leads women to feel threatened by one another without cause. While sexism teaches women to be sex objects for men, it is also manifest when women who have repudiated this role feel contemptuous and superior in relation to those women who have not. Sexism leads women to devalue parenting work while inflating the value of jobs and careers. Acceptance of sexist ideology is indicated when women teach children that there are only two possible behavior patterns: the role of dominant or submissive being (47). hooks therefore calls for a transformation in the female consciousness in order to break away from the attachment to sexism (47). She suggests that instead of women bonding on the basis of victimization, they must develop strategies to overcome fears, prejudices, resentments and competitiveness (63). As Mohanty points out the notion of women as an oppressed group by Western Feminists is a sexist ideology that must be rejected (39).

Another distinguishing feature of *Feminist Theory* is hooks' insistence on the inclusion of men in the Feminist movement. hooks criticizes the anti-male stance of Western Feminism, asserting that this position excludes many poor and working-class women, specifically non-white women, from Feminist movement. Most black women feel an anti-male stance would intensify sexism by adding to the antagonism which already exists between women and men (70). hooks also notes that by excluding men from the Feminist movement, second-wave Feminists essentially reinforces the sexual division of labor by making Feminism the sole responsibility of women. Second-Wave Feminists argue that men are all-powerful, misogynist and oppressor- the enemy. Women are the oppressed- the victims (67). Such arguments reinforce sexist ideology and imply that the empowerment of women will necessarily be at the expense of men. Modupe Kolawole (1997), who essentially initiated the womanist theory, rejects the manipulation of female biological traits to hold women down socio-politically and economically. Instead, she espouses the fundamental communalist nature and orientation of womanism as one that proposes a principle of complete entirety – of co-existence of male and female in building a human society and democratic culture. African Feminism in the concept of womanism sees men as important in the building of any successful society and therefore appeal for joint forces of men and women for a balanced society.

hooks suggests using the negative effects of sexism on men as a way to motivate them into participation in Feminism. According to hooks, men act as oppressors but are also oppressed, particularly in black communities where men are working class and poor. Feminist activists must therefore call to attention the relationship between ruling class men and the vast majority of men,

who are socialized to perpetuate and maintain sexism and sexist oppression even as they reap no life-affirming benefits. This action would motivate the men to examine the impact of sexism in their lives (75). Conclusively, hooks asserts that since men are the primary agents maintaining and supporting sexism and sexist oppression, sexism and sexist oppression can only be successfully eradicated if men are compelled to assume responsibility for transforming their consciousness and the consciousness of society as a whole. They should share equally in resistance struggle. Particularly, men have a huge contribution to make to Feminist struggle in the area of exposing, confronting, opposing and transforming the sexism of their male peers. When men show a willingness to assume equal responsibility in Feminist struggle, performing whatever tasks are necessary, women should affirm their revolutionary work by acknowledging them as comrades in struggle (81).

In the chapter 10 titled “Revolutionary Parenting”, hooks counters Feminist movements that label motherhood as a trap, confinement or another form of oppression for women. Black women, however, view work in the context of family as humanizing labor, work that affirms their identity as women, as human beings showing love and care (133). hooks believes that motherhood is not given enough significance and value during the movement. Whereas many White Feminists advocate for a liberation from house chores, and freedom to be financially independent and career-oriented, they soon discover that sexism is still the norm even at the workplaces, where there is unnecessary competition promoting envy, distrust, antagonism, and malice between individuals. This makes work stressful, frustrating, and often totally unsatisfying (134). Though work helps women gain a degree of financial independence or financial self-

sufficiency, for most women it does not adequately fulfill human needs. As a result, women's search for fulfilling labor done in an environment of care has led to re-emphasizing the importance of family and the positive aspects of motherhood (134).

This resurgence of interest in motherhood, however, had a negative impact. Though it is welcoming that women who chose to bear children were recognized by Feminist movement, women who chose not to be mothers and focused exclusively on a career, creative work, or political work were doomed by Feminist movements to live emotionally unfulfilled lives (135). This idea was advocated by white bourgeois women who balance career with childbearing. hooks admits that female parenting is significant and valuable work which must be recognized as such by everyone in society, including Feminist activists. Though it should receive deserved recognition, praise and celebration, there should be renewed effort to re-think the nature of motherhood, to make motherhood neither a compulsory experience for women nor an exploitative or oppressive one, to make female parenting good effective parenting whether it is done exclusively by women or in conjunction with men (136).

When it comes to parenting, men do not equally share roles with women. Women or society as a whole see the mother/child relationship as unique and special because the female carries the child in her body and gives birth, and therefore women have a closer, more significant bond to children than the male parent (137). As a result, the responsibility for child care and childrearing is primarily women's work. From hook's perspective however, the biological experience of pregnancy and childbirth should not be equated with the idea that women's parenting is

necessarily superior to men's (137). There should be a concept of effective parenting that makes no distinction between maternal and paternal care. To conclude on the issue, she implores future Feminist movements to focus on the right of children to effective child care by parents and other child-rearers; and the restructuring of society so that women do not exclusively provide that care (140).

In hook's later book *Feminism is for Everyone* (2000), she reiterates the inclusion of men in the struggle for the elimination of sexism (67). She notes that instead of presenting a vision of men becoming more "feminine" as the only alternative to patriarchal masculinity, what is needed is a vision of masculinity where self-esteem and self-love of one's unique being forms the basis of identity (70).

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM/ THESIS STATEMENT

Is Chinua Achebe's representation of women in his novels a deliberate attempt to marginalize them or was he reflecting the evolving reality of women during the precolonial period and the eventual impact of colonialism/Western education on them?

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To trace the changes in the role of the female characters before and after colonialism.
2. To find out what factors impacted these roles during the two periods.
3. To investigate the extent to which Achebe's female characters represents the women in the two periods.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What changes occur in the roles of female characters in Achebe's selected novels before, during and after colonialism?
2. What factors account for these changes in the roles of the female characters?
3. To what extent are Achebe's female characters a true representation of the women of these periods?

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

Obviously, Chinua Achebe is one of the most discussed authors in terms of colonial and gender issues. Herbert G. Klein (2007) analyzed the different constructions of masculinity in four of Achebe's novels and demonstrated how they show a deep-seated malaise not only in Ibo or Nigerian society, but also in postcolonial African societies in general. Using *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God*, *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People* as his main texts, he deviated somewhat from the order of appearance of these novels by following their inner chronology, i.e., by discussing them according to the times in which they are set. He noted that all the protagonists suffer from an "essentialist" idea of masculinity – an idea which they try to live up to, but which ruins their lives. Achebe's protagonists are afraid of not conforming to what they conceive of as manliness - their ideas are based on a static view which does not take in its fluent and constructed nature (9). Klein's analysis was from the perspective of postcolonial unrest in Nigeria and he concluded that the re-establishment of a more balanced relationship between the sexes would aid in overcoming the inhibiting postcolonial situation, though Achebe did not really show how this could be achieved in the novels (11). Klein's study lends strength to the

assumption that the male characters in Achebe's novels flout the gender principles in the society and this leads to their ultimate downfall. Klein, however, did not give credence to *Anthills of the Savannah* in which there was a major shift in terms of gender issues in Achebe's novels. A comprehensive study of all five books including *Anthills* will provide a wholesome understanding of the concept of masculinity in the Ibo society and the impact of postcolonialism on the concept.

Away from masculinity, Linda Strong-Leek's "Reading as a Woman" explores *Things Fall Apart* from a Feminist perspective. According to Strong-Leek, to read as a woman required that one approach a work from a Feminist vantage. Consequently, in order to read *Things Fall Apart* as a woman, she argued that one must query readings which suggested that Okonkwo was the only major figure in the novel, and alternately analyze the motivations of principal female characters that are thoroughly developed within the work (29). Based on her recommendation, the roles of female characters such as Ezinma, Chielo and Ekwefi who play important roles in the novel will be examined and compared to male characters such as Okonkwo, Nwoye and Unoka. In her study, Strong-Leek reviewed the historical and cultural context in which *Things Fall Apart* was written. *Things Fall Apart*, first published in 1958, was initially written as a response to colonialist representations of Africa and Africans in literature, specifically Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* (1939). This is important to note in further analysis of the book, especially Achebe's representation of the African cultural and belief systems.

Strong-Leek's point is solidified in Odimegwu and Okemgbo (2008) study of "Men's Perceptions of Masculinities and Sexual Health Risks in Igboland, Nigeria" where they explored

the cultural setting of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Odimegwu and Okemgbo discovered that in Igboland, men are seen as the "head of the women," the king and defender of women from trouble (30). Furthermore, an Igbo man is not required to betray his emotions. A woman is described as the daughter, wife or mother of a man. Most policy-makers are males, although there are an increasing number of females in policy-making institutions, which in most cases is a matter of tokenism, however, since women have no power to forward their views (33). The Nigerian Constitution recognized equality of the sexes, yet male child preference is still common among the Igbo people. It may seem therefore that despite the imposition of Western institutions and systems on Africa, some traditional values and beliefs are still an integral part of the people. According to Odimegwu and Okemgbo, the view expressed by their study participants were in line with issues on Igbo masculinity discussed in Achebe's novels. In *Things Fall Apart*, the ultimate show of masculinity by an Igbo male is said to be keeping women in line either through mental or physical abuse. Odimegwu and Okemgbo further explained that in Igboland, to be a man is to be violent, strong, bold, fearless, competitive, and courageous. Showing any emotion is a sign of weakness or is considered to be a female trait. All that is good is considered masculine and all that is bad is thought of as feminine. This is shown in both the use of language and in work patterns. Despite the fact that Odimegwu and Okemgbo's study may support the assumption that Achebe's novels reflected the cultural situation of the time, the study was only limited to *Things Fall Apart*. It will be interesting to explore Achebe's other books to discover other factors which may have influenced his representation of women.

In "Feminist Trends in Achebe's Postcolonial Novels", Gebremariam Haile (2007) analyzed trends of feminism in three novels of Chinua Achebe: *No Longer at Ease*, *A Man of the People*

and *Anthills of the Savannah*. Haile explored the feminist outlook Achebe used in the portrayal of female characters, and also examined the development of the female characters in the selected novels. Using the Marxist feminist literary criticism as the theoretical framework, he focused on female characterization and their position in the periods the novels are set rather than on the intention of the author. Haile concluded that unlike the representation of women in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, Achebe tries to give them good features in his three novels namely: *No Longer at Ease*, *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*. Achebe seems to be conscious of women's roles in the new independent nation. Achebe's progressively changing attitude towards women roles in Nigeria and in many countries of Africa are highly emphasized in his novels. The trend of feminism in the roles of the female characters in the three novels is progressively changing for better. The foregrounded female roles in *Anthills of the Savannah* implicate that women in the postcolonial period are decision makers and politicians. Achebe structures his narrative in such a way that shows the gradual realization of women's strength in a society. From the Marxist feminism, Haile's study focuses on unequal economic and political power relation between men and women. This study, which will be based on the Postcolonial Feminist Theory, will therefore assess other aspect of inequality between men and women, for instance in relation to marriage, childbearing, etc. moreover, Haile's study of the development of female characters did not include critical analysis of female characters in *Things Fall Apart* but rather concentrated on the modern and independent characters such as Clara, Eunice and Beatrice. This study is therefore an opportunity to holistically assess each category of female character, from the traditional wife to the independent political advocate.

Kirsten Holst Petersen (1984), in her article “First Things First: Problems of a Feminist Approach to African Literature,” argued that an important impetus behind the wave of African writing which started in the 1960s was the desire to show that the African past was orderly, dignified, and complex, and altogether worthy heritage in order to fight cultural imperialism (37). In the course of that, women’s issues were not only ignored, but they were also sacrificed in the service of dignifying the past, and restoring African self-confidence. The African past was made the object of a quest. The picture of woman’s place and role in these societies had to support this quest, and was consequently lent more dignity and described in positive terms than reality warranted. Peterson criticized Achebe for contending with the unequal state of affairs, as she stated that Achebe’s much praised objectivity with regard to the merits and flaws of traditional Ibo society becomes less than praise-worthy seen in this light; his traditional women are happy, harmonious members of the community even when they are repeatedly beaten and barred from any say in the communal decision-making process and constantly reviled in sayings and proverbs (38). This study will therefore take into consideration all the gaps and recommendations from these previous studies and articles, and comprehensively explore the novels using hook’s theories and suggestions on Feminism.

1.7 METHODOLOGY

This study uses the three novels of Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, *No longer at Ease* and *Anthills of the Savannah* as the main source of primary data and focus of textual analysis. Since *Arrow of God* is a precolonial novel as *Things Fall Apart* and *A Man of the People* is also a postcolonial novel as *No Longer at Ease*, I will refer to them for textual evidence during discussion on the primary books. The study will be guided by the tenets of postcolonial Feminist theory and

analysis will be done to establish how complementation, conciliation, collaboration and consensus are achieved by various characters in the two novels. Online research helped in gathering data on Feminism in Africa and role of women in Igbo society. Descriptions of actions and scenes, analyses of characters and language provide data for this study and are used to present the main arguments of the study. Through close textual reading of the two novels, changing circumstances of the characters, plot and the narrators' point of view, we investigate how the female characters develop progressively in their roles and what strategies are employed by the author to map a path for this evolution. Critical essays, commentaries and other relevant writings on the subject matter are examined in line with the objectives guiding the study.

1.8 RATIONALE/SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The burden of this research work is to consider how gender issues have evolved through history and the factors that have accounted for the evolution. By using Nigeria as a case study of the African situation, the changes in the experiences of women in Africa from precolonial to our present day is important in assessing the future of female participation in the political and development processes of the society. The selected books of Achebe cover female experiences in all areas: female marginalization, forced marriages, early marriages, female education, women in politics etc. a discussion of these books is therefore an opportunity to look at the various representations of women in an African society. The study will also bring to light cultural practices in Nigeria (Africa as a whole) that advocate female docility and submission to men. In summary the study is a good opportunity to trace the gradual progression of women in re-evaluating their position in the society and the steps they have taken to cause change.

1.9 THE AUTHOR'S PROFILE

Chinua Achebe was born on 16th November, 1930. He hailed from Ogidi in Anambara State in Eastern Nigeria. His reputation was quickly established with his first novels *Things Fall Apart* (1958) which has been translated into over 120 languages. He published his second novel *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *Arrow of God* (1964). Literary Critics have argued that in Achebe's transition, mobility and thematic preoccupations, *Arrow of God* came before *No Longer at Ease* in historical sequence and order. *A Man of the People* (1966) aroused immediate interest on publication because of its seemingly prophetic insight into subsequent political events in Nigeria. Achebe's essays were published in 1975 under the title *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. His volume of poetry *Beware, Soul Brother* and his book of short stories, *Girls at War* were published in 1972. *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), Achebe's major work in 21 years also made an impact because of its clairvoyance into a military dictatorship in Nigeria.

Chinua Achebe has received many honours, including eight doctorate degrees from Nigerian, British, American and Canadian Universities. In 1970, he received Nigeria's highest accolade for intellectual achievement: The Nigerian National Merit Award (NNMA). He is the founder/editor of *Okike*, an African journal of new writing. Achebe has written on the political and cultural transition of Nigeria. In all his works, the issue of gender is brought to bear. This work will focus on how Achebe's women evolve from one novel to the other and the socio-political factors that influenced these changes.

CHAPTER TWO

THE FEMININE PRESENCE IN *THINGS FALL APART*

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* has been perceived by many critics as a response to the denigration of Africa in colonial novels such as Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* (1939) and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). In his famous early essay "The Novelist as a Teacher", Achebe himself admits: "I would be quite satisfied if my novels . . . did no more than teach my readers that their past... was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them (55)." Achebe seeks to redress the misconception that Africans are savages with no language and culture, a mistaken view which Western countries have used to justify their subjugation of Africa. He therefore presents Africa's systems and institutions as they really are without leaving out the gruesome practices which some Africans themselves questioned. Consequently, in making his argument in the novel, he presents the fictional town of Umuofia with their beliefs and customs, both the good and the bad. A patriarchal society, Umuofia has clearly defined traditional roles for men and women; the men having leadership and authoritarian roles while the women had domestic roles. Okonkwo, the protagonist of the novel, strictly adheres to the roles defined by the Umuofia society and also has intrinsically biased views of women which are reflected in the way he treats them. These notwithstanding, Achebe implicitly maintains a balanced view of women in his portrayal of female characters such as Chielo, Ekwefi and Ezinma. This chapter will examine evidence in the portrayal of these characters to confirm Achebe's balanced position on women despite the society's views and belief systems.

To effectively grasp Achebe's position on women in a patriarchal society such as Umuofia, it is important to first examine some gender issues in Umuofia and Okonkwo's perspectives on women.

This approach will provide a yardstick to measure the development of the female characters in the novel based on the changing society they find themselves in.

2.1 CONCEPT OF PATRIARCHY AND GENDER IN UMUOFIA

Umuofia is a heavily patriarchal society with strictly demarcated roles for men and women. Maleness connotes courage, brute force of will, raw physical strength, success, and a man who does not show these qualities is considered feminine. For instance, a man incapable of impregnating his wife is described as a woman. A man who talks excessively is described as a woman. The women themselves are normally perceived as gossipy, quarrelsome and bothersome. Okonkwo describes himself as “a shriveling old woman (51)” for being emotional about the death of Ikemefuna. For a man to show any form of emotion apart from courage and bravery is seen as effeminacy. Being a female throws up images of tenderness, sentimentality, mothering protectiveness and accommodation, affection and pacifism, and love and domesticity (Anyokwu, 18). However, Achebe in the portrayal of his characters twists these stereotypical traits of men and women by representing some male characters as “feminine” as in the case of Nwoye and Unoka, and representing some female characters as “masculine” as in the case of Ekwefi and Ezinma. These points will be examined further in the discussion of these characters.

Again, the concept of gender in Umuofia is realized in the categorization of crops as male and female. “Female” crops include cocoyam, beans and cassava, and did not generate much income as compared to the male crop such as yam. Okonkwo and his sisters grow these “female” crops which does not bring in enough income to meet their financial needs, but Okonkwo’s status

changes when he begins to grow Yam, the king of the crops and index of masculinity. Just as yam was an index of masculinity among crops, Okonkwo represents the epitome of masculinity in the Umuofia society.

From an early age, Okonkwo is obsessed with championing his masculinity to avoid being called an *agbala*, like his father. *Agbala* is not only another name for a woman but a term used to refer to a man with no title, and Okonkwo puts in every effort to avoid being associated with both meanings of the word. In an attempt to be identified as fearsome and courageous, Okonkwo does not establish a loving relationship with his wives and children who are in perpetual fear of him. The family system is an important aspect of the clan system in the Igbo society but Okonkwo's attitude towards his family deprives him of the love and sense of belonging which comes with being part of a family. Okonkwo's wives are subjected to multiple beatings and temper tantrums for no justifiable reasons. On one occasion, his second wife is subjected to severe beating on the account that he is too bored because one is not allowed to farm during the New Yam Festival (30). Wife beating, it seemed, was an accepted part of the society as Achebe recounts another episode of wife-beating in *Arrow of God*, in the case of Akueke, Ezeulu's daughter, and her husband (60).

Despite the strong presence of dominating men in a viciously patriarchal society, Achebe interferes with the laid down roles for men and women by bestowing what the society would have considered "masculine" traits on his female characters. Examples of such "masculine" female characters include Chielo, Ekwefi and Ezinma.

2.2 FEMININE PRESENCE IN *THINGS FALL APART*

Chielo

Achebe's representation of Chielo echoes hooks' (1984) perspective on Feminism as a move to end sexist ideologies where women are taught to be victims and compelled to live within the status quo. While sexism teaches women to either focus exclusively on careers or find satisfaction in child-birth, Chielo effectively manages the dual role of being a mother and a spiritual leader effectively. Through Chielo, Achebe elaborates on the multiplicity and complexity of women's roles despite the defined roles of the society.

Chielo is a powerful spiritual leader of the clan and at the same time a widow with two children who lives like an ordinary woman and singlehandedly raises her children. One of the most important points Postcolonial Feminists make is that the term "women" does not comprise a coherent group based solely on gender. The status and roles of women vary according to complex interactions between factors such as ethnicity, class, culture, religion and biology. Chielo therefore balances her role as a mother and a priestess with efficiency. When the spirits possess her, she is a totally different person whose actions and speech are determined by the gods. She speaks with so much power and finality that even men tremble in her presence. Because African societies were constructed upon a corporate base that emphasized kinship and reproduction, women have unique roles. Scattered throughout the myths of both patrilineal and matrilineal groups are references to early female rulers and priestesses in charge of shrines and deities, who led and protected their people as they established or expanded their territory (Arhin 1983). Though male dominance existed at many levels, including the domestic/household level and level of popular culture, the

corporate and dual sex structures created a facade of egalitarianism by allowing women a voice in certain leadership roles and public female representation (Busia 1951). This leadership role is exemplified in Chielo who has the dual role of a mother and a powerful priestess. In her role as a priestess, Chielo commands absolute obedience and respect. For Achebe, the traditional woman is not limited to only domestic roles but has inner strength to juxtapose domestic work with other challenging roles in the society as a whole.

An unforgettable episode in the story is when Chielo interrupts Okonkwo's household with the message that *Agbala*, the deity of the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves, wanted to see Ezinma (72). Okonkwo is severely reprimanded by Chielo for protesting against Ezinma being taken away and for daring to speak when a god spoke (72). There is no other point in the novel in which we see Okonkwo plead with anyone, male or female, for any reason. We witness a woman not only ordering Okonkwo to give her his daughter, but threatening him as well. The fact that Okonkwo allows this is evidence of the priestess' power. Chielo renders Okonkwo, who epitomizes the qualities of masculinity in the society, powerless and helpless. Chielo is one example of a revered religious character in the novel.

Despite Chielo's power and authority, she does not intimidate or devalue the other female characters but rather shares a comradeship with Ekwefi and Ezinma, and has a solidarity with the other women in the society. For hooks, this is the best of Feminism where such sexist ideologies of dominating other women were eliminated (47).

For Achebe, the traditional woman's "power" diminishes with the introduction of colonialism. This point may be relevant considering the fact that not much was heard of Chielo in the second and third part of the novel. With the arrival of the white missionaries, the roles of priests and priestesses diminish with the introduction of a new God, as such Chielo's character is virtually non-existent during this period. Thus the fight against colonialism is not for the men alone but also the women since women are also affected. In this regard, hooks, like most Postcolonial Feminists, advocates that since men also face a form of oppression, an inclusion of men in the Feminism movement is a step in the right path. This idea is emphasized by Gayatri Spivak (1990) in an interview in *The Postcolonial Critic* about her male students who felt silenced by the rise in Feminist activities. She challenges them to attack the history that has led to the need for the Feminist movement rather than focusing on the effects of Feminism. Thus for Postcolonial Feminists, Feminism should be a move to end all forms of oppression and should not view men as the enemy.

While Achebe used Chielo to represent women in powerful religious positions, he used Ekwefi, Okonkwo's wife, to represent the domestic woman who had no spiritual power but lived the simple life of being a mother and a wife.

Ekwefi

"When mother-cow is chewing grass, its young ones watch its mouth (56)." Achebe used this proverb in *Things Fall Apart* (56) and repeated it in *Arrow of God* (173) to emphasize how important mothers are in nurturing and educating their young ones.

Ekwefi's roles as a mother, wife and a part of the women in the society are very critical especially in the development of key themes in the novel. Ekwefi's roles as a mother to Ezinma and a wife to Okonkwo, both of whom are principal characters in the novel, provide insight into the family life of Okonkwo's household and also shape Ezinma's character into a woman of strength and integrity at the end of the novel. Every society is built on families and women are responsible for the harmony and peace of the family. Though Ekwefi does not have a career apart from her duties as a wife and mother, her lack of career does not demean her prominence as a character. To this end, Postcolonial Feminists such as Chandra Mohanty (2003) endorse these traditional roles of women and have challenged Western Feminists' ideologies which have belittled the status of women as wives and mothers. In *Feminism without Borders* (2003), Mohanty rejects the assumption that the average Third World woman leads an essentially diminished life based on her feminine gender and her being "Third World" means she is ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc. while the Western woman portrayed herself as educated, as modern, as having control over her own body and sexuality, and the freedom to make their own decisions (22). Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) asserts that one of the premises of Postcolonial Feminism is that women's condition in Africa needs to be addressed in the context of the total production and reproduction of their society involving men and children. African women idealize motherhood and claim it to be a source of strength. Therefore, women need not neglect their biological roles to be considered empowered as the Western Feminists claim.

This biological and nurturing role of women is significant to the theme of masculinity, especially in a society where men are in control of everything but still need women to take care of their basic needs. In *Arrow of God*, an interesting scene plays out when the usually independent Ezeulu returns from Okperi heavily beaten by rain after being imprisoned for two months. The shivering and numb Chief Priest is attended to by his two wives, Ugoye and Matefi, who take turns to nurse him back to health (183). Even as children, the females are taught how to cater for the men and see to their well-being. Obiageli, Ezeulu's female daughter effortlessly takes care of her nephew Amechi and carries him on her back to stop his incessant crying, something her older brother Nwafo had failed to do (186). Distinct roles for women such as nurturing of babies are instilled into them from the initial stages of their lives to prepare them for motherhood. The story of Captain Winterbottom and Dr. Mary Savage is very significant to this nurturing role. Though a professional doctor, her initial reaction when Captain Winterbottom is rushed to the hospital was panic and shedding of tears (150). She, however, takes control of the situation and nurses him back to health. This role of nurturing is carried into the spirit world of the husbands where widows are made to offer sacrifices to the spirits of their dead husbands as a memorial to them (194). There is no record of such an offering for dead wives in the novel but each year, widows diligently leave food outside their huts for their dead husbands' spirit to eat.

Apart from her role as a wife, Ekwefi's role as a mother contributes to the development of Ezinma's character. The special bond between mother and child is evident in the relationship between Ekwefi and her daughter Ezinma; Okonkwo, the father, is excluded from this relationship. Ekwefi and Ezinma's relationship is more of equals than mother and daughter (61). The two

women partially deny Okonkwo some of the authority he seeks to wield over them by conspiring to ensure that Ezinma enjoys eggs despite Okonkwo's threat to beat Ekwefi if she continues to let Ezinma have the delicacy (61). Achebe portrays the deep bond between mother and child to reiterate the importance of the biological role of women in the traditional society in nurturing their children to be responsible adults in the society, as Ezinma turns out to be. For instance, Ekwefi trains her daughter, Ezinma, in storytelling and folktales, and this helps develop Ezinma's artistic consciousness. Through this role, Achebe emphasizes the role of the mothers in preserving the values and norms of the society, and passing them on to the next generation. Folktales and stories are a medium of transmitting the values and history of a society to the children, and mothers are the primary source of these information. In both *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, Achebe infuses into the plot moral folktales which are usually narrated by the mothers or daughters. These storytelling moments are sometimes the only form of respite for the family after a hard day's work. Stories such as the story of the quarrel between earth and sky (43) are perceived by Okonkwo as feminist stories and he prefers to narrate stories of war to his sons. However, these folktales carry age-old information about the origins of the people and explanations for some of their customs. The war stories end up putting the fear of blood into his sons rather than making them courageous as Okonkwo expected. Stories such as the bird who challenged the whole world to a wrestling match and was defeated by the cat teaches against overconfidence and excessive self-importance.

Ekwefi's character will be greatly remembered due to the part she plays during the episode with Chielo in the deep of the night. Ekwefi's bravery in following Chielo despite the threatening possibilities of spirits and wild animals accords her an important status in the novel. The Chielo-

Ezinma-Ekwefi union projects a strong bond of power and resilience in a male-dominated tradition. The encounter that evening is centered on the women and Okonkwo in this instance plays a minimal role in returning his daughter home. Ekwefi's pursuit of Chielo is in defiance of *Agbala* and this constitutes her challenge to Umuofia's male traditions, since *Agbala* was a male deity. Whereas Okonkwo challenges and defeats Amalinze, a mere human, Ekwefi defies the gods and challenges the traditions of the whole society. Okonkwo hesitates before following Chielo and arms himself with a machete, while Ekwefi immediately follows the priestess without thinking of her own safety. Ekwefi exhibits strength and courage and did not cower in the face of danger, as a woman would have been expected to do. For Achebe, women do not necessarily have to always be weak and need men for support. Due to her bravery and audaciousness, Ekwefi in this incident merited the status of a hero more than Okonkwo. Right after the triumph of Ekwefi, the plot moves to the exile of Okonkwo for accidentally shooting a sixteen-year old boy at his father, Ezeudu's funeral (41). Okonkwo's misfortune follows hard on the heels of Ekwefi's victory to highlight his loss of authority and helplessness. Ekwefi thus excels as a mother whereas Okonkwo's fatherly role is questionable, especially in relation to his ill-treatment of Nwoye.

Achebe endows Ekwefi with such a unique motherly role to depict the value placed on motherhood by the Igbo society. The Igbo society through proverbs and names portrays how significant and valuable motherhood is and the respect placed on women. For instance, the name "Nneka" meaning mother is supreme (96) shows the extent to which the Igbo tribe valued mothers. Even the chauvinist Okonkwo acknowledges this when he uses the proverb "A child cannot pay for his mother's milk" to show how priceless the love of a mother is. The Igbo society acknowledges the

kind of love and protection only a mother can give and therefore places tremendous value on them. This is one of their founding principles as a tribe, though this was not seen much in novels such as *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* where men like Okonkwo and Ezeulu dominate the plot and action of the story. The Igbo have a special relationship with their motherland, despite their patriarchal system. Motherland in *Things Fall Apart* stands for protection and safety, which are attributes of a physical mother. Uchendu, Okonkwo's uncle, confirms to Okonkwo that "a child belongs to his father. But when the father beats the child, the child seeks refuge in the mother's house (107)." He further says that "a man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness, he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you (107)." Given Umuofia's pursuit of male ideals and repeated sexism, we can regard it as masculine while Mbanta, Okonkwo's motherland, can be regarded as feminine due to her maternal protectiveness and affective succor (Anyokwu, 28). Mbanta welcomes Okonkwo with his bruised and battered ego, and nurses him for seven years. Where Umuofia does not give a second thought to his accomplishments but punished him severely by exiling him and his family, his motherland welcomes him, and his mother's family provides him land and seeds to farm and cater for his family (103). Despite the claim that people belong to their fatherland, when a person died, he is returned to his motherland and buried there. Thus an individual belongs to the mother and is returned into her arms for final resting. It was therefore not prudent to be alienated from one's mother's kinsmen, since they were a source of strength and protection in times of difficulty. Ezeulu faces a similar situation when he returned to his motherland, Okperi, after a long time away, to respond to the call of Captain Winterbottom (160). Initially he feels anxious and disconnected from the clan due to the many changes he saw on his return to the clan. Had it not been for the hospitality of his clansman John and his wife, he would have felt like the prisoner he truly was.

Ezeulu after being attended to by Nwadika's wife appreciated the importance of having maternal kinsmen.

Furthermore, through Ekwefi's character, the theme of the diversity of Igbo culture is discussed in the novel. Achebe carefully describes the communality and fluidity of Igbo culture, disclosing its essential pluralism in terms of the social and family rituals, marriage customs, food production and preparation processes, the process of shared leadership of the community, religious beliefs and practices, and the opportunities for virtually every man to climb the clan's ladder of success through his own efforts. Achebe shows that the Igbo people have a coherent system of values that nevertheless allows for a considerable exercise of individual choice. Achebe's female characters prominently contribute to the advancement of this theme in the novel. For instance, the female characters are given specific important functions to play during initiation ceremonies in the society. One such ceremony in which the role of women is discussed in detail was marriage ceremonies.

The roles of the women begin in preparing their daughters for the customary marriage activities that occurred before the bride was taken to her husband's home. Once a woman is betrothed and the initial rites began, the women of the society, especially the married ones, together with the mother of the bride, busy themselves with preparing the bride for her husband. Though the men are more active during the ceremonies, the women are backstage, putting the young bride together and teaching her how to be a good wife to her husband and his people. The role of the African woman during such cultural ceremonies as marriage has been applauded by Postcolonial Feminists

who believed that such roles create solidarity and a sense of responsibility among the women (Osha, 7). African women's 'unique' and 'universal' roles in rituals of birth, marriage, death and other rites of passage and the strong association of women with reproductive and household activities are strongly propagated by Feminists during the male oriented colonial era and has continued into the post-colonial moment (Osha, 7). As such, these age-long duties have become part of the women and is a source of pride to them, especially due to the worth and importance placed on their roles.

For instance, during Akueke, Obierika's daughter's marriage ceremony, Ekwefi and the other women are specifically in charge of cooking and taking care of the visitors who had arrived to perform the rituals for the groom (88). This service leaves a good impression on the bridegroom's family; that the bride is from a good home and will therefore take proper care of their son. Thus this duty is not taken lightly. Akueke is beautifully dressed and endowed with *jigida* (beads) which had been carefully woven by her mothers. She is greatly admired by her in-laws who interpret her beauty as a sign of her being ripe to bear children. The worth they placed on the woman affects the bride price they negotiated with her fathers. As such, the women go to all lengths to make the bride very presentable to her in-laws. Thus, though it may seem the men are in control with negotiating the bride price and steering all other important aspects of the ceremony, the duties performed by the women have a great impact on the outcome of the ceremony. The idea that it is possible for a wife to be perceived as a commodity in some way may be highlighted by the customary payment of the bride price which is a critical aspect of all Igbo marriages. In a recent and interesting article in a column titled 'One Small Male Voice' (Femina, 1999), Babusi Sibanda

investigates, in an accessible manner, customary practices such as polygyny and the payment of the bride price, known as 'lobola' in South Africa. On a satirical note, Sibanda suggests that such practices are not 'Y2K compliant' and he labels them as 'baggage' that is best discarded in the twentieth century. Sibanda concludes that, in his opinion, polygyny and lobola are 'male privileges' and that while he is 'proud' of his African heritage, he believes that making changes to what he terms 'oppressive practices' will not make Africans 'less African' (12). Presenting a goat to the mother if the bride happens to be a virgin (118) puts added pressure on the mother to ensure her daughter is chaste. No such requirement is expected of the bridegroom. Patriarchal cultures typically stigmatize female sexuality as inferior and “peripheral to the larger exploration of man’s experience (Davies, 247).” Postcolonial Feminists have openly criticized the objectification of women in society, literature, art and culture. For instance, Carol Boyce-Davies (1994) defines Feminism as “a politics of possible transformation that resists the objectification of women (28).” Requiring only the woman to be morally upright and chaste before marriage whereas the man is free to indulge himself puts the woman in the peripheral circle of the society. Despite the limitation the society has set on women, Ekwefi does not hide behind the shadows of her husband and does not let her circumstances define her personality. She represents the strong African woman who faced each day with optimism and this strength of character is passed on to her daughter Ezinma.

Ezinma

What makes Ezinma very significant as a female character is the fact that Achebe gives her most of the qualities Okonkwo expects in his male children. It is sufficient to say that she is the “son”

Okonkwo craves for, though he has male children. In addition to qualities such as courage, wisdom and strong will, Ezinma's roles as a daughter, confidante and succor to her parents and her contribution to the story make her stand out as one of the prominent characters of the novel, and this imposes a feminine presence on the male dominated society. Ezinma is an outstanding female character and has many enviable qualities such as intelligence, honesty, self-reliance, fearlessness, hard work and loyalty. Her many attractive qualities make her stand out as one of the strong characters of the novel but this is marred by her father's constant wish that she should have been born a male. Okonkwo would have proudly flaunted Ezinma's capabilities to the world if she is a male child. He therefore cannot express his admiration and pride for his daughter as he should have. Though a female character, she fits more perfectly into the role of a male child than Okonkwo's male children. Perhaps, Achebe ironically endows a daughter of Okonkwo with masculine qualities and a son of his with feminine qualities to throw light on the flexibility of gender in the social order. This is a lesson to Okonkwo to shift from his one-sided way of thinking and be open to other possibilities.

The circumstances surrounding Ezinma's birth make her an exceptional and unique child who demanded more attention than her other siblings. In return, Ezinma is a companion and source of joy to both her father and mother. Unlike Nwoye, Ezinma is looked upon with pride and happiness due to the woman she has become despite her difficult childhood. Ezinma is born an *ogbanje* (55), a child who endlessly appears in her mother's womb in a sequence of birth and death, and is usually destined to have a short life. Ekwefi's previous nine children had all died in infancy, usually before the age of three (55) and she blamed her own evil *chi* who denied her children (57). Through

Ekwefi and Ezinma, the story links the importance of custom and ritual to the importance of motherhood and childbirth in Africa. Ezinma is symbolically given a leadership role as she led the search for her *iyi-uwa* which links her to the spirit world (57), and its destruction ended her life and death cycle. Through Ekwefi and Ezinma's triumph over death, Achebe further explores the importance of individual strength in a gendered context. Their survival over death is contrary to Okonkwo taking his own life in the face of dire circumstances. The story of Ekwefi and Ezinma is vital to the narrative enactment of the strategies of survival within Umuofia's world (Osei-Nyame, 155). Okonkwo's death symbolizes an end to masculine control and Obierika, who understood the social balance and was a blend of rationality and affectivity, led the way to Okonkwo's body. The female survivors of the story, particularly Ekwefi and her daughter, now have the responsibility to transform the already yielding society to a more accommodating and balanced one.

To Okonkwo, Ezinma is a counsellor, confidante and a caretaker. Ironically, it is only Ezinma who can awaken Okonkwo's suppressed feelings. On account of her, he is tender, nurturing and submissive. After the death of Ikemefuna, it is Ezinma who cajoled her father to eat the food prepared by her mother and sat by him throughout the meal (50). Nwoye who is scared of his father had run away when his father requested his presence in his difficult time. Through Ezinma, Nwoye's weaknesses are highlighted, since she is everything his father wishes he is. She reinforces the belief in the supernatural and the role of the spirits in the lives of the people. Towards the end of the novel, Ezinma evolves into a woman worth celebrating. During his exile in Mbanta, Okonkwo views Ezinma as his most permanent link to his native village. He may lose Nwoye to Christianity, but can count on Ezinma as a kindred spirit. This is the same daughter he wishes was

a man and therefore did not give her due credit. She shares his bitterness about being away from home. During the family's last harvest in Mbanta, she goes about violently uprooting cassava tubers, blaming the small harvest on the poor soil of exile (153). On Okonkwo's request, she agrees to turn down her many suitors in Mbanta in order to marry in Umuofia (159). Ezinma provides strength and support to her father, enabling him to return with a flourish and regain the seven wasted years.

Ezinma establishes her presence in the novel as a strong female character who evolves into a woman who represents the next generation to carry the torch of Okonkwo's legacy, since his son Nwoye has turned his back on his people and culture. Ezinma's folktale of how the Tortoise and the Cat wrestled against the Yam puts the authority of the male tradition in question. According to Achebe, Yam is a monarch more visible in metaphor than in reality (Myth and Power, 15). It is only eaten once a day, that is in the afternoon, whereas the morning and evening meals are supplied by women's crops such as cocoyam and cassava. Ezinma's unfinished tale encodes significant possibilities for undoing the hierarchies of power and authority within a tradition where masculine authority can be supplanted by female insights and ingenuity. The open-endedness of the story means there is room for change in male- dominance of power. This change in male dominance is further expressed in two male characters who exhibited feminine attributes; Nwoye and Unoka.

Nwoye and Unoka

Nwoye and his grandfather Unoka are both seen as women because they do not meet the society and Okonkwo's standard of what a man should be. They are considered weak, effeminate and

failures. Okonkwo deals harshly with Unoka and Nwoye because he feels they do not exhibit the expected traits of masculinity in Umuofia.

Unoka is derogatorily referred to as a woman because he falls short of the society's expectation for a man. He is a gardener not a farmer, a coward, prodigal and a wastrel. His family does not have enough to eat and he has no titles till he dies. In the eyes of the Umuofia society, he dies a failure and is buried in the evil forest. While Okonkwo represents the "male" principles of his society, Unoka his father represents the "female". For Achebe, Unoka is not the thorough failure that Okonkwo and the society perceives him to be. Unoka's portrayal by Achebe as a lover of music and dancing make him the center of attention after the harvest season and wars, when the society found means of recreation after a hard day's work or after the bloodshed on the war front. Unoka is very good with the flute and his happiest moments are when he plays with the village musicians with an expression of blessedness and peace (4); the peace Okonkwo never have. Music and dance are very important aspects of every culture because of its unifying power and also because it serves as a means of storytelling. Unoka's flute song carries the stories of the brave heroes and legendary warriors from whom Okonkwo descended, and during the wrestling match against Amalinze the Cat, these songs spur Okonkwo on to victory and spread his fame across the clan. Okonkwo and the society fail to acknowledge Unoka's gift because he falls below their standard of what a man should be. Biologically being a man and socially being a "woman", Unoka's sense of balance which Okonkwo lacks is what gives him a relaxed approach to life, and sets him as an antithesis to Okonkwo; he is a more admirable character in spite of his negative

qualities. Unoka's grandson Nwoye is an exact replica of him despite Okonkwo's intolerance of such effeminate qualities.

Okonkwo's son Nwoye is one character who developed as the plot of the novel progressed. Like his grandfather, Nwoye is another character who can be considered feminine. He is constantly described by his father as effeminate, lacking courage, uninterested in hard work on the farm, detesting stories of aggression and war, and sympathetic and compassionate. Nwoye has too much of his grandfather's personality, and this always set him at war with his father. On many occasions, Nwoye hides his true self and tries to behave in the way his father expects. He loses himself in this process and therefore finds relief in the new religion. Okonkwo's intolerance of his son Nwoye whom he describes as a coward and effeminate pushes the boy straight into the welcoming arms of the new religion. He changes his name to Isaac and this signifies his new identity and redefinition of his true self as against what his father is shaping him to become. Though his father may see him as a failure, his zealousness with the Christian faith and resilience in facing his father to the point of being disowned, show courage and bravery which his father never recognizes. In rebelling against his father, however, he turns his back on his race and culture, and welcomes another form of oppression. His character is a foil to Ezinma who stood with her father despite his shortcomings and is left as the daughter to carry on their father's legacy.

2.3 CONCLUSION

In the representing of the Umuofia society, one can clearly see the contradictions in their values and beliefs. For instance, the membership of the *egwugwu* comprised nine titled men who represent the clans and settled disputes. When the *egwugwu* assembles to perform their duties, the men and the elders sit on stools while the women look on from the fringe like outsiders (63). The fact that the *egwugwu* is controlled by the mother of spirits did nothing to prevent the elders from excluding women in its membership. Again, during the engagement ceremony of Obierika's daughter, Akueke, for instance, all the women are absent from the culturally significant aspects of the ceremony, and not even the bride's mother is allowed in the gathering of men during the negotiation of the bride price. This sexist policy of exclusion is not however criticized or challenged by Achebe who simply narrated rather than correct a social issue. Again Achebe presents his female characters such that they seem to accept the maltreatment from their husbands and do nothing to come out of their patriarchal oppression imposed on them by the society. These women have accepted their fate and readily suppress their will and desires to accommodate that of their husband. Achebe instead of simply narrating these events should have condemned those aspects that infringe on women's freedom and restrict them from being part of decision-making that affected the society.

It seems, however, that Achebe shared a different view from that of Okonkwo and the society. He recognizes the contradictory nature of the society's value and therefore does his best to provide a balanced representation of women through the characters of Ezinma and Ekwefi.

CHAPTER THREE

IMPACT OF EDUCATION AND MODERNITY ON FEMALE CHARACTERS IN *NO LONGER AT EASE*

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter continues to trace Achebe's changing women by looking at the female characters in *No Longer at Ease (NLAE)*. Two very significant changes in this novel as compared to *Things Fall Apart* are the urban setting of the novel and the gradual shift from traditional to Western ideals and lifestyle. The discussion will therefore focus on how these changes affected the female characters.

No Longer at Ease (1961) was written in the transitional period of Nigeria's independence. It was a period of transition from colonialism to independent statehood. *NLAE* is set in urban Lagos, a very sophisticated city of the time. The Umuofia society in this novel has travelled a long way since the death of Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart*. The days are no longer the days of the titled elders and eminent warriors. The protagonist of the novel Obi Okonkwo, who is the grandson of Okonkwo, faces a very different world from that of his grandfather. The country has been under colonial rule, historically for quite some time now and the people have adapted to the new mode of life. Obi Okonkwo, the central character in *NLAE* is a typical educated Nigerian young man, who, to begin with, wants to cleanse Nigeria of its evils. While courage and inflexibility ruled the society of Okonkwo, his grandfather, Obi is a typical product of a weak hybrid culture of modernity and traditionalism. Obi has been shaped by the traditional Igbo culture of Umuofia, the Christianity of his father, the idealism of English literature, and the

corrupt sophistication of Lagos, but he is at ease nowhere. *NLAE* deals with a theme that is well-developed by Achebe, i.e. the exploration of the interaction between rapid modernization brought to Africa by colonial rule on the one hand, and tradition on the other. Achebe in this novel shows the deep and drastic changes which occurred in the society in Nigeria as colonial rule became established and how this change warped social relations in the country. Society in the colony is no longer something created and maintained by the native Africans, rather an imitation (or attempt thereof) of the colonial power's society. The novel also explores the challenges to democracy, corruption, gender relation in the post-colonial political and economic uneasiness in Nigeria. This dilemma clearly shows the conflict between the Western custom and the traditional custom.

Achebe, in this novel, wishes apparently to deal with the alienation such educated young men as himself felt in the new nation moving swiftly toward independence (Wren, 63). Upon their return, those who have been educated in England face different problems. They have to develop a different kind of worldview they never had before. Furthermore, local custom makes the 'been-tos' (natives who returned from studies abroad) feel uncomfortable. In the words of C.L Innes (1990), "*No Longer at Ease* is the story of a young man who, educated by the British, attracted by much of what British civilization has to offer, employed by the British, seeks to live up to a new inflated image created by his position, falls into debt, takes bribes, is caught, tried and convicted (42)". According to Simon Gikandi (1991), *NLAE* takes up the question of the exact authority of custom and what spaces sustained it, given the challenge posed by the forces of colonialism. As a result of this contest between the forces of colonialism and the authority of the indigenous custom, Obi constantly struggles to define himself in the two contending spaces, the

schizophrenic inherited space in Umuofia and “his transplanted locale”, Lagos, which is fully under the hegemony of colonialism (9-10). “The core of the novel” according to Killiam, “is the moral dilemma in which Obi finds himself. The education that Obi received and his exposure and training had given him the moral awareness of a modern educated young man, but he lacked the courage to sustain and practice it.” (50).

David Carroll describes the differences of these two cultures of which Obi is the hybrid product in these words, “To the Europeans it is inconceivable that someone who has had the privilege of a Western education should not adhere to the rules of conduct it enshrines. To the Africans of Umuofia, it is disturbing that their most learned offspring, who has been educated for the glory of the clan and to look after their interests, should be so incompetent in the elementary conventions of bribe taking (63). It is in this hybrid society that the female characters had to grapple with the pressures of modernity and the influence of their traditional beliefs. Compared to the female characters in *Things Fall Apart*, though the female characters in this novel have transitioned from illiterate housewives to become educated career women, they lack the strength the solidarity of the rural women. In short, the women in *NLAE* are portrayed as victims of the colonial process and one of such characters is Clara, Obi’s girlfriend.

3.1 EFFECTS OF MODERNITY AND EDUCATION ON WOMEN

Clara

In Achebe’s *NLAE*, there is a radical change in the representation of women due to the historical and political time the story was set. By the time the novel was written, women lived in modern societies and had access to (Western) education. The women of this period were working class

women and had careers such as nursing, businesswomen, teaching, civil service and other political affiliation. Achebe therefore reflected this shift in the position of women in the portrayal of his female characters. Achebe's female characters are now portrayed as educated career women and not just wives or assisting with farm work. Clara, for instance, is an educated young woman and a nurse by profession. However, despite her financial independence and social class, Clara has many flaws which results from an inner conflict between her Western education and her traditional beliefs. Rather than projecting her image of a modern female with Western education, Achebe portrays Clara as victim of the conflict between the traditional culture and the modern global culture. Her main role is her relationship with the main protagonist (Obi) and how the relationship leads him to take grave decisions which contributes to his eventful end.

In spite of all the problems in Obi's life, Clara is his one true love and does not add to his problems, as he expected other women to do. She is too independent and self-assertive to play games with him. Arndt (2000) claims that "the way a man treats you if you are independent is different from the way the man will treat you if you are dependent on him (717)." He continues his assertion that the more a woman was self-sufficient, the more there was a certain respect in the relationship, as was the case of Clara and Obi. Clara is a disciplined young woman who made Obi work to win her love. Obi admits that he never felt superior with her as he did with other women (63). She is not too forward, not flirtatious and presents herself as a woman of worth and integrity. This wins Obi over to her and throughout their relationship, he treats her with respect and dignity.

Clara is the kind of female character that Western Feminists advocate. With her sense of independence, education and decision to abort her pregnancy, she represents the woman who is educated, modern, having control over her own body and sexuality and the freedom to make her own decisions. Admittedly, this is a shift from the kind of female characters Achebe portrays in *Things Fall Apart* who are heavily dependent on men and have practically no voice. Clara, on the other hand, can afford to live without Obi. Postcolonial Feminists, however, have a different outlook on Clara's character. Mohanty (2003) has criticized this type of Feminism that focused on individualized and narrowly professional understanding of Feminism rather than a collective, theoretical Feminist vision that focused on the radical transformation of the everyday lives of women (6). When considered from many angles, Clara is one female character who Achebe used to represent the young generation of African women who are caught between replacing their old moral values with the Western education they have received. Achebe is unsympathetic towards Clara who loses her child and fiancée to the traditional culture of her past despite her modern global lifestyle. In order to avoid familial and social rejection, she not only breaks off her engagement to Obi but also aborts her child (135). It seems from the beginning Clara's romance with Obi was unstable. Symbolically they began their relationship on a turbulent and fluctuating sea, and Clara intuitively saw the consequences of the doomed relationship. However, her relationship with Obi is not just about her ill-fated love for him.

Despite Clara's education and experience in life, she still finds herself in the grip of her traditional beliefs. The belief in taboos is one of the traditional beliefs that are still being upheld despite the impact of Western civilization. Because of the mysticism and sacredness surrounding taboos, they have become embedded in people's consciousness and therefore exterminating them

totally may be difficult. One of such long-standing taboo tradition is the *Osu* caste system practiced in Nigeria and south Cameroon. Francis Onwubuariri (2007) defines an *Osu* according to the Igbo tradition and religion as a person or group of persons who are dedicated to a god as their property and do not have freedom like every other members of the society (6). Mesembe Edet (2007) in this same view makes the point that: “among the Igbos of Nigeria some communities distinguish between the ‘sons of the soil or freeborn’ and the ‘Osu’. An *Osu* does not enjoy the same rights and privileges which the other members of the community who are recognized as freeborn or true sons and daughters of the land do enjoy. Marriage to an *Osu* is a taboo and like the Hindu caste system, one cannot change his *Osu* status (28)”. The above words of Edet shows some of the social implication inherent in the *Osu* caste system which is similar to that of the Hindu or Indian caste system. In *NLAE*, Achebe touches on the effects of this age-long taboo on a modern day woman. In *Things Fall Apart*, the people of Umuofia are still coming to terms with the changes introduced by the Europeans. In *NLAE*, Achebe presents a society well-established and indoctrinated in the European way of life. Nevertheless, it seems that some traditional beliefs are too intrinsic for the people and cannot easily be shed off by the new religion. Clara is portrayed as an educated modern day woman whose pending marriage is suspended because of a traditional practice which she as a Western educated woman could have ignored. It is significant to emphasize that before the arrival of the Europeans and Christianity, the unequal relationships that existed between the *Osu* and those perceived as free borns was quite a normal thing (Adebayo and Akanmidu, 5). The *Osus* fulfil their lives in the communities by serving the deities. In return, they obtain a reasonable livelihood from the proceeds of offerings that poured steadily into the premises of the deities that they serve. *Osus* were originally regarded with respect and honor apparently because they belonged to the gods. This

unfortunately degenerated into social ostracism. Their number decreased and their status deteriorated dramatically, in that they became outcast, despised, ridiculed and abhorred (Adebayo and Akanmidu, 5). Clara despite her education accepts that she is an outcast and socially despised. Her belief in the traditional practices despite her Western education is an attempt by Achebe to pin her down. African Feminist such Ama Ataa Aidoo and Flora Nwapa have criticized such representation of the African woman. Nwapa (1992) questions the benefit of education if women still succumbed to such traditional roles and practices. Probably, Achebe wants to drive home the point that though modernity was slowly finding ground during this transitional period, the traditional beliefs and practices from the precolonial era were still prevalent. In *A Man of the People (AMOTP)* which is also set in the postcolonial period, Achebe once again portrayed Edna as a female character who is also a victim to the weak hybrid society of modernity and traditionalism.

Like Clara, despite Edna's advancement in the modern society as a student in college, she is also held back by the confines of her traditional beliefs. In Edna's case, her father is forcing her into a polygamous marriage. She has resigned herself to this and has accepted it as the fate of women but the zealous Odili does not understand how an educated woman would accept to be in a polygamous marriage (98). Strong-Leek (2001) notes that women are indoctrinated to envision the world from a patriarchal perspective and Edna is no different, despite her education. Notwithstanding his long speeches and profession of love, Odili sees Edna more as a conquest and a mode of revenge against the corrupt Minister Nanga. Though he eventually marries her, his main motivation of defeating Minister Nanga is not to win Edna's heart, but to prove to the minister that he (Odili) is not a weakling but a man in every sense of the word. Once again, a

woman is caught in a battle of two men proving their manhood to each other. Both Edna and Clara's education is not enough to merit them equal standing with the protagonist. Rather their education and the modern society they lived in influenced the women in general to be sexually immoral as compared to the traditional society which promoted chastity among unmarried women.

In *NLAE* and *AMOTP*, there are recurring scenes of sexual activities between unmarried couples due to the lifestyle of the modern society. Such escapades are not seen in novels such as *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* which are set in the precolonial period where the young women are required to be virgins until marriage and their mothers are presented with goats if the husband discovered his wife was pure during the consummation of the marriage (*Arrow of God*, 118). In trying to present a morally corrupt society as a result of Western culture, the female characters once again become victims of the changing society. Female characters such as Elsie and Barrister Agnes Akilo are portrayed as sexually corrupt women. Postcolonial Feminists have strongly criticized these negative stereotypes of women as sexually immoral and greedy. Bressler (1994) passionately rejects the stereotypes of women as angels, demons, saints, whores, brainless housewives or eccentric spinsters. In support of this point, Letherby (2003) also observes that women are considered naturally weak and easy to exploit and as the subordinate sex, women's psychological characteristics implied subordination. Thus, women have been perceived as submissive, passive, docile, dependent, lacking initiative and so on. In portraying these educated women as sexually corrupt and morally weak, Achebe reduces their accomplishments as enlightened independent women to bootlickers who succumbed to the pleasures of men to progress in life. It seems that though the women in the postcolonial society have evolved into

educated women with class and finesse, Achebe dents this evolution by portraying them as sexual tools of men. There are also instances of white women having affairs with black married men as in the case of Jean and Minister Micah (*AMOTP*, 42) to emphasize the fact that sexual corruption developed with the introduction of Western customs and lifestyles.

Ketu H. Katrak (2000) points out that most African male writers during the postcolonial period explore several conflicts between tradition (social custom, religion) and modernization and more often than not their female protagonist's self and sexuality are constructed and controlled by indigenous patriarchies and British colonial practices (232). In *AMOTP*, there are images of women playing traditional roles such as singers and dancers, or women adoring rich politicians like Chief the Honorable M.A. Nanga. Mrs. Eleanor John, a tough party woman and board member -- rich, independent, assertive -- lamentably is cast as a semiliterate businesswoman with no noteworthy role. We see Chief Nanga's wife, a beneficiary of the colonial, utilitarian education, dissatisfied with her husband's extramarital relationship and impending marriage to the young Edna. Mrs. Nanga complains to Odili, but when the latter sets out to unseat her husband, she reverts to her traditional role of helpmate fighting to retain her precarious social and economic position. Consequently, she remains a dependent, peripheral figure, deriving validity as a human being only from her husband.

Apart from the single young women Achebe portrayed as educated but sexually corrupt, the portraiture of the married women such as Hannah (*NLAE*) and Mrs. Nanga (*AMOTP*) was that of weak dependent women.

Hannah

Another victim of the colonial process, Hannah, is more of an abstract character who is mostly referred to than is actually seen in action. However, the few times she is active, her statements and actions are memorable and vital to some of the major themes of the novel.

Hannah's role in the novel is limited to being a wife to a catechist and a mother to her seven children. Achebe's representation of Hannah is a reflection of one of the aftereffects of colonialism. European colonialism states its mission as "civilising [... and] rescuing native women from oppressive patriarchal domination" (Loomba ,171). However, one of its negative consequences in traditional societies is to stimulate patriarchal hegemony. Women become more submissive whereas men turn out to be more tyrannical at home. Thus, the home and the woman are considered to be the emblems of men's national and "cultural purity" (Loomba, 168). This is the situation of Hannah. As the wife of a catechist, she strictly adheres to the rules of being a Christian wife and shuns her traditional values and beliefs to accommodate the new Christian faith of her husband. Chukukere (1995) affirms that the ideal female character created by male writers often acts within the framework of her traditional roles as wife and mother. So strong are social values that, the respect and love which a woman earned was relative to the degree of her adaptations to these roles. Hannah's primary role is therefore as a wife and a mother. Even as a minor character, Hannah is too often in the background and only speaks directly to other characters when she has something critical on her mind. Rhode (2003) points out that "Christian norms enjoin wives to sacrifice their personal and material interests to male requirements in marriage, where good wifehood and motherhood remain the primary source of women

identification (48).” Hannah fits in to the 19th century idealized woman described by Anne Scott (1930). The 19th century women appear to be silenced by cultural and religious prescriptions. These will always dictate women to remain silent in their marriages even though they are not happy. A woman in the 19th century, according to Scott, is a submissive wife whose reason for being is to love, honor, obey, and to bring up her husband’s children and manage his household. Physically weak, and formed for the less laborious occupations, she depends upon male protection. She is timid, modest, self-denying and given to suffering in silence.

Certainly, Hannah has a mind of her own and left to her alone, her children would have had a different upbringing than what she is forced to give them. A mother’s desire to narrate folk stories to her children and teach them the values of her people is denied her, and therefore she stays in the shadows as if she had nothing to contribute. The novel does not give any record of her having a social life apart from her marital duties, and her long illness also made her lethargic her for most parts of the story. Thus, even though she has children and a husband at her side, she is portrayed as very lonely and reclusive. Cornwall (2007) points out that sex-segregated spaces are seen as those in which women are able to be vocal, authentic and find the confidence and support to express themselves, and to act. Women have always depended upon the positive voices and healing powers of an extended family of sisters - women who instruct, assist and protect other women – for understanding, compassion, empathy, and truth in order to transcend threatening situations and achieve liberation from oppressive forces in their lives” (Umeh, 119). Perhaps, the hassle and bustle of the city life does not allow for such comradeship among women as there was no instance of solidarity among the female characters in the novel. The new urban

society does not afford women the luxury of establishing and maintaining relationships with other women as compared to the rural communities. As compared to the rural setting where women meet to catch up and share experiences, the urban setting is more nucleic and the wives' lives revolve around their work, husbands and children. Females find solidarity amongst others through female bonding. Women have always depended upon the positive voices and healing powers of an extended family of sisters - women who instruct, assist and protect other women – for understanding, compassion, empathy, and truth in order to transcend threatening situations and achieve liberation from oppressive forces in their lives” (Umeh, 119). A woman is seen as a unifier and a pillar to lean on, and the lack of such support system may have accounted for Hannah's gradual diminishing. Whatever the reason is, Hannah's remained virtually voiceless and passive till she finally passed away.

Despite her passiveness in the novel, Hanna's character embodied one very important subject matter in the novel. Hannah's character is a true representation of the invasion of a foreign culture and the slow but sure death of the native culture of the Igbos. And much more than that, it also deals to a large extent with the loss of personal identity. Though she is married to a man who “believed utterly and completely in the things of the white man (114)”, Hannah is a traditional wife in every sense of the word. The description of her room with items such as stool, pots and foodstuff (115) symbolises the fading out culture which she was trying desperately to hold on to. The fact that she still teaches her young son Obi folk stories (53) though her husband forbids her to do so attests to the fact that Hannah is not as assimilated into the new faith as her husband. One of the reasons why Hannah is a dormant character is because her husband does not

allow her to perform her role as a traditional wife and mother. He imposes his new found religion on her and expects her to duly act as a catechist's wife. Hannah, on the other hand, wants to please her son who loves to listen to folk stories. Buchi Emecheta, in *The Slave Girl* (1980) as cited by Parekh and Jagne (1998) attacks the Igbo man's insensitivity to women by suggesting that a woman is a slave to her husband. Emecheta, further argues that the society itself also projects women to be slaves of their male children as well as their husbands. Hannah is torn between disobeying her husband and pleasing her son. Nevertheless, her traditional identity is not exterminated as her husband expects. To further support this point, according to T.M.E Chukwumezie and Onyeka E. Odoh (2014), though Hannah does not feature prominently in the novel, she displays her bit of the on-going heterodox in the pessimism of resolving to patronize the native doctors instead of the seeming inefficacious orthodox medicine (20). When Hannah mentions that she had lost faith in the European and will like to try a native doctor (122), she is unconsciously rejecting the European system which she felt had not been beneficial to her. However, her untimely death represents the eventual death of the traditional culture and beliefs to make way for the new European way of life. Achebe brings in the picture of death to symbolize the death of a society that has been caught up in the dynamic world of change. The old order has certainly died making way for a new and transitional society, which is full of pitfalls, which the average man finds very difficult if not impossible to escape from, as is the case of Obi. Yet this is the transitional stage of a society that have witnessed the death of a decadent culture and the invasion of a powerful alien culture which is slowly assimilating itself into the ways of the Igbos. Hannah's reclusion and eventual death therefore is a picture of the fate of the old society in the modern world. Apart from Hannah, Mrs. Nanga (*AMOTP*) is another wife who represents the old system in a modern society.

Mrs. Nanga represents the old system which was being thrown out to make way for the rapid changing society. Again, Achebe portrays a critically flawed female character who represented the failed attempt of old (custom) trying to survive in the new (custom). While Mrs. Nanga sticks to speaking the local language (32), her husband and children speak impeccable English. Her husband also plans marrying a second wife who is educated young and refined so that he can parade her at parties. Though Mrs. Nanga is not happy in her marriage and repeatedly complains about her husband to Odili, she sticks to her traditional role of being economically and socially dependent on her husband. Consequently, she remains simple, unaccomplished and dependent on her husband. Mrs. Nanga's character is a stereotype which Postcolonial Feminist have strongly criticized, especially when there are educated female European characters (such as Jean, *AMOTP*) who are enlightened and modern. Mohanty (1991), for example, draws attention to the Feminist typology whereby the Third World woman was over-simplified as victimized, sexually restricted and exploited, poor, unenlightened and tradition-bound; while the First World woman is educated, sexually adventurous, modern and has freedom of choice. Mrs. Nanga mentions that her education had been cut short so she can marry Chief Nanga, because her family did not see how beneficial education was to a girl (88). However, she is comfortable and feels accomplished as the wife of a politician. She stands loyally by her husband when Odili attempted to overthrow him and abruptly ended her friendship with Odili. Like her husband, Mrs. Nanga's sense of morality is lost and she stays with her morally corrupt husband because she is financially dependent on him. It has been argued that African women have a tendency of being stuck in their role as traditional wives and can be the harshest critics of those who do not conform to a conventional role (Wilentz, 1992). For Nnaemeka (1997), the oppression of women is not merely

a “masculinist flaw but a woman-on-woman violence which results in hierarchical female spaces that make women victims and collaborators in patriarchal violence (19).” Mrs. Nanga is her own enemy and does not support other women like Eunice to fight for social justice, but supports her husband in his greed. Even Odili is surprised by her staunch support of her husband despite her knowledge of his activities. In short, Mrs. Nanga, apart from hosting her husband’s parties, does not achieve any substantial feat in the novel and after the military overthrows the government, Achebe does not deem it necessary to mention her fate after the incident, especially since she is totally dependent on her husband. In contrast to Mrs. Nanga, one female character who stands for justice and fights against corruption is Eunice. Unlike Mrs. Nanga, Eunice is a self-accomplished woman who stands by her fiancée to defeat corrupt officials like Chief Nanga

Eunice

Though Eunice is a minor character, she is one of the most heroic women in African Literature. She is a reflection of the new type of women that existed in the society during this period. She is a lawyer (77) and her fiancé Max is a lawyer too. She, together with other professionals, founded the Common People's Convention that opposed the corrupt chief Nanga. She displays a lot of intelligence and supports the men in strategizing ways to bring down corrupt officials in their independent country. She fights for the people and stands for what she believes in to the end. She is loyal to their fight to eliminate corruption and though she faces deadly resistance from corruptors, she is not deterred. She is fearless and shows extreme bravery when her fiancée was killed by Chief Koko's thugs. She takes an irreversible step which amazes many people. She shoots Koko twice in the chest (143) and though she is arrested, her action incites the people to continue the fight against corruption. Her role in the overthrow of the corrupt political regime is

great because she became a political figure who motivates the people to keep fighting when the leading men, Max and Odili, are not available to continue the fight. The uproar caused after the shooting and ensuing demonstrations leads the military to take over and arrest all corrupt government officials. She is characterized as a free woman with not only a sense of individual responsibility but also a social figure. Achebe's portrayal of Eunice is flawed in the manner in which she falls down on Max's body and begins to weep like a woman (143). This implies that she is weak at a point and could not sustain her strength during such difficult time. Achebe once again dents a female character's display of bravery with a show of weakness and emotional breakdown. Also, after she is released from prison, it is Max, her dead fiancée, who is pronounced a Hero of Revolution (148), and it seems Eunice's contribution to the revolution is forgotten. In support of this point, Chukukere (1995) notes that male writers who examined women also assisted in endorsing an institutionalized and one-sided vision of female heroism in African fiction. The African female heroine is not an all-round heroine and is often attributed a weakness to dent her bravery. Nevertheless, Achebe's effort in creating a female character who stands with men to fight a cause should be acknowledged, especially since his earlier novels did not have such female characters. Eunice's character is a foreshadowing of stronger female characters like Beatrice in Achebe's latter works.

3.2 CONCLUSION

Compared to *Things Fall Apart*, the story of *NLAE* shifts from domestic setting to focus more on the wider society and the changes that have occurred after colonialism. Thus the female characters have to deal with more socio-political issues as compared to the female characters in *Things Fall Apart* who face domestic and family related challenges.

It is evident there has been a remarkable shift in the roles of the women in the society, who due to the postcolonial regime, found themselves as Ministers, opinion leaders and career women. Their education and exposure offered them the opportunity to close the gap between a man's world and that of a woman. Therefore, Achebe's representation of women was a reflection of the change in the roles of women in the Nigerian society which may have been influenced by activities of Feminist Movements during the time he wrote this novel.

The Feminist Movement in Postcolonial Nigeria had its foundations in the unequal power relations and disproportionate distributions of women's privileges and rights throughout the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial eras (Abdul et al, 5). For instance, when the opportunity to educate girls became available, the apprehensiveness to educate girls often resulted in educated girls being married off (Ayandele, 180) as in the case of Edna.

While colonialism solidified a culture and system of patriarchy, Feminists struggle occurred in various forms in all parts of Nigeria (Abdul et al, 6) and this struggle led to the formation of different women's unions and societies to address the issues women faced through nationalization and into the postcolonial era.

Lisa Lindsay (2003) notes that the roles of women in the household have varied over the course of history; from tending to households and meals to independent market trading, women and their contributions to family and clan units have been at the heart of both contestation, but also

monumental change (138). It is therefore in reflection of these changes that Achebe represented liberated and financially independent women in this novel. However, in portraying them as victims of the colonial period, the evolution of the characters was not progressive as expected in comparison to the female characters in *Things Fall Apart*. Though living in a dominantly patriarchal society, the women in *Things Fall Apart* displayed more strength of character and resilience than the women in *NLAE*. Perhaps, for Achebe, colonialism with its education and modernity only heightened the challenges women faced even in the precolonial period, and because the modern society was new to the women, they were ignorant on how to address the issues that arose as a result of this new way of life.

CHAPTER FOUR

RETHINKING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN *ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNAH*

I can't tell you what the *new role* for *Woman* will be
I don't know. I should never have presumed to know.
You have to tell us.
We never asked you before.
And perhaps because you've never been asked you may not have thought about it;
You may not have the answer handy.
But in that case everyone had better know who is *now* holding up the action.
(*Anthills of the Savannah*, 98)

4.0 INTRODUCTION

By the time Achebe wrote *Anthills of the Savannah*, the transitional society in *No Longer at Ease* had drastically changed to a society characterized by chaos, military rule, and the reoccurring theme of ethno-religious or ethno-regional patronage. The Feminist activities which begun in the 1960s had catapulted into more vigorous crusades and rioting. Women organizations operated both in collaboration with and independent of other political organizations to work on issues such as sexual and reproductive rights, rape, the environment, domestic abuse, political marginalization, early child marriage etc. In this regard, the female characters portrayed in this novel, educated or illiterate, were vastly different from the women in the preceding novels discussed. This chapter will therefore assess the extent to which the representation of Beatrice and Elewa, the two major female characters in the novel, reflect the women in the society during this period.

The latter part of the chapter will address the socio-political and cultural factors that led to the progressive change in the roles of women from the housewives who had no voice to political activists who challenged powerful rulers and government officials.

4.1 BACKGROUND

Anthills is a portrait of the devastating effect and ugliness of African military dictatorship (Diamond, 1989). With regards to this theme, Diamond notes that *Anthills* took off from where *A Man of the People* stopped. Just as *A Man of the People* criticizes the corruption and frivolities of the civilian government, so does *Anthills* criticize the venality, irresponsibility and oppression of military rule (Diamond, 1989). Both novels are set in Postcolonial Nigeria.

A major theme of Postcolonial Nigerian state was the exploitation and marginalization of women in politics. This system was sustained by the logic of patriarchy, male chauvinism, and gendered political mechanics, which undermined democratization as well as undercut the expansion of the public sphere, a discursive space for democracy and good governance. In apprehending how the public sphere is narrowed in postcolonial Nigeria, it is crucial to understand the level of access women have in political participation. Political participation was an integral facet of the public sphere, a space for the institutionalization of alternative views and discourses needed for inclusive politics. It is in this space that women articulated “their own scripts which envision alternative ways of ordering political, public and private life (Tripp, 27).” In ensuring this, literature is cardinal in the process of deconstructing, rewriting, and reconstructing the political

history of Nigerian women. After all, the principal function of literature is to criticize and eventually bring about desirable changes in the society (Maduka,11).”

The contention put forward by Kunle Ajayi (2007) in his essay “Gender Self-Endangering: The sexist Issue in Nigerian Politics”, underpins sexist politics in Nigeria. The Nigerian woman has, since independence, been denied opportunities of assuming political leadership at all levels of governance in the nation’s federal set-up (137). As a result, Feminist writing was informed by the need to break the patriarchal mold which contrived discriminatory political roles to Nigerian women by assigning negative stereotypes. (137)

In women’s struggle for self-fulfillment, Nigerian Feminist writers have reconfigured womanhood, prioritizing female individualism and empowerment, thereby subverting the seeming powerlessness of women to political authority (Nwagbara, 2009). Following in the footsteps of early Feminist writers in Nigeria like Molara Ogundipe and Flora Nwapa, Chinua Achebe has engaged with Nigeria’s modus operandi of governance as well as the expansion of its public sphere for the consolidation of democratic ideals through Feminist aesthetics. Achebe’s aesthetic preoccupation with the expansion of the society and good governance finds resonance in the craft of *Anthills*, where he modifies his previous idea of women – thereby seeing them as political actors and people with a voice capable of changing gender relations through participation in the business of the public sphere. The diachronic transformation of Achebe’s women, from victims of a society regulated by patriarchal cultural norms and values (Fonchingong, 137) to independent, political conscious and self-assertive women - as we see in

Beatrice, instantiates Achebe's political and literary commitment to use empowerment of women as a means for the expansion of the society for inclusive governance.

Achebe's aesthetic preoccupation dovetails with Ania Loomba's (2005) in her *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, where she argues that postcolonial women's position in the postcolonial experience was an unbroken imagining of the disparate levels and paradigms of liberation; a method of "re-writing indigenous history, appropriating postcolonial symbols and mythologies, and amplifying where possible, the voice of women (191)." In his "Chinua Achebe: New Perspectives", Umelo Ojinmah (1990) notes that in the novel, Achebe presents various perspectives on the problems of contemporary African nations, represented by Kangan, through the multiple narrative voices fluctuating between the first-person point of view and the third-person limited point of view (85). Echoing the strong voice of women in Nigeria during this period, Beatrice is given a voice to tell the story from the point of view of a woman.

4.1 BEATRICE

Beatrice is not in the same league as Achebe's other women in his earlier works, who are seen as "good women", passive, apolitical and politically unthinking (Udumukwu, 1). She represents the new class of educated African women who played a role in realigning Africa into a stable political and social continent after colonialism

Throwing away the image of the “good woman”, who is a passive wearer of the masculine straitjacket, Achebe uses Beatrice to illustrate his perspective on the new woman in postcolonial Africa— a departure from his previous refraction of womanhood. The new woman that Beatrice represents has the power to decide the direction her life should go, be it focus solely on career or focus solely on marriage, or find balance in both. The new woman actively participates in the politics of the nation and works with the men to move the country forward after colonialism. The new woman does not kowtow to the demands of men, family or society, but is an equal partner who shared her opinion and has a mind of her own. Achebe’s Beatrice is a prototype of the kind of African women that have evolved with time through the activities of Feminist movements.

On the topic of marriage, Beatrice does not remain in the mold of a “good woman” and develops a different mind from that of other girls who view marriage as their main accomplishment and measure of success, and therefore, find themselves defeated when this feat is not achieved. “Better to marry a rascal than grow a moustache in your father’s compound” (they would say); “better an unhappy marriage than an unhappy spinsterhood”; “better to marry Mr. Wrong in this world than wait for Mr. Right in heaven”; “all marriage is how-for-do; all men are the same (p.88)”. In Beatrice’s view, these utterances were “a whole baggage of foolishness (88).” This metaphor reiterates the extent to which she despises marriage. She sees marriage as an institution that demeans the value and honour of womanhood because her people believed, for instance, that “a totally reasonable wife is always pregnant (88).” For that reason, she decides to be totally unreasonable—that is, she rules out marriage from her life, thereby discountenancing pregnancy as utter nuisance (Aba, 2010). She elaborates on her position in this way, “I was determined from

the beginning to put my career first and, if need be, last.” Beatrice’s position on marriage echoes the views of Betty Friedan (1963) in *The Feminine Mystique*. Women now crave for something more than domestic life and Friedan identified that “something more” as careers. Feminists across the world have argued that women should have the choice to decide whether they want to be career women, mothers, or both, and whatever position the woman takes should be respected and acknowledged. A woman’s decision to be a career woman does not make her more “Feminist” than the one who decides to focus solely on motherhood. As Carol Ehrlich (1981) pointed out, “Feminism is not about dressing for success, or becoming a corporate executive, or gaining elective office; it is not being able to share a two career marriage and take skiing vacations and spend huge amounts of time with your husband and two lovely children because you have a domestic worker who makes all this possible for you, but who hasn't the time or money to do it for herself (109).” As Postcolonial Feminists have advocated, the Feminist ideology cannot be simply transplanted from one context to another. It must be reinvented to suit the needs of women who have to come to terms with multiple constraints such as patriarchal imposition, imperialism, and religious beliefs.

Secondly, Achebe’s view on the new Postcolonial African woman which he translates into Beatrice’s character is as a participant in the widening of the public sphere as well as a contributor in the political re-engineering of the postcolonial Africa. Fochingong (2006) observes that the portrayal of Beatrice in *Anthills* represents a woman shouldering the responsibility of changing the course of female emancipation. Thus, African women are playing active roles in their nations’ histories by resisting being pushed or tempted into accepting subservient or

degrading or decorative roles. Achebe does not stereotype Beatrice as a brainless housewife who does not have a voice in her husband's house. Like Clara in *No Longer at Ease*, Beatrice represents the educated female woman. Beatrice Okoh is portrayed by Achebe as a hybrid female character. Though born in Kangan, she graduates with first-class honours from the University of London and returns to Kangan to work as a Secretary in the Ministry of Finance. Beatrice inhabits the Postcolonial world of Kangan as the only person in the service with first class honours degree in English. She therefore represents a class of educated women in a lopsided system in which African men receive a well-rounded education while, like in the mid nineteenth century, African women receive only cosmetic skills in domestic science. Having transcended these barriers and the prevailing patriarchal European conception of women's purely domestic life, Beatrice earns respect from her male counterparts and joined the revolutionary elite combating the oppression inflicted by a military dictatorship.

Beatrice in *Anthills* openly challenges male chauvinism when she says "that every woman wants a man to complete her is a piece of male chauvinism bullshit I had completely rejected before I knew there was anything like the Women's Lib (88)." Beatrice is a woman who evolved as a symbol of development from childhood. Her epiphany as a Feminist and her desire to make her voice heard began in her father's compound where she noticed that the female teachers lived in the smallest of buildings whereas the male teachers had two rooms to themselves (84). She builds a wall against her father's oppression by blocking him out of her mind using her "*Uwa-t'wua*" rhythm. The male chauvinism in her father's house and her silent revolt against it prepares her for greater battles in her later life. When she got older, therefore, and armed with

Western education, it is not surprising that Beatrice fights to fracture the post independent masculinity which had alienated women.

One very important feature of the novel is the polyphonic narrative device employed by Achebe to give his characters an opinion and a voice to tell their story. The feminine narration represented by Beatrice highlights Achebe's evolving perspective on Feminism and is also a counter narration to the two male characters, Chris and Ikem. Thus, Beatrice is given the opportunity to tell her story from her point of view. She stands up to Sam, the President and refuses to be used and dominated. She also appears to be one of the forces who could stand up against the government. Beatrice's remark about Sam's detachment from the masses as a result of shrunken public sphere, illustrates the abysmal hiatus between the masses and the powers that be; it also brings out the malaise made of the Nigerian polity through impervious political leadership: "In the early days of his coming to power, I had gone fairly often to the Palace with Chris and sometimes Chris and Ikem. But then things had changed quite dramatically after about one year and now apart from viewing him virtually every night on television news I had not actually set eyes on him nor had any kind of direct contact for well over a year (70-71). Sam's refusal to go to Abazon and address the needs of the Abazonians shows his unwillingness to engage with the masses whose interests do not matter in the political and decision-making process of Kangan. Rather he entertains American women who do not regard his office as a president. When Beatrice is caught in the Desdemona complex at the presidential dinner, she expects the President to come to her aid. However, he accuses her of being racist because she speaks against a white lady taking his attention from the other guests at the dinner. Beatrice

realizes that she had two battles to fight, against men and white women. According to Ogunyemi (1985), “[b]lack women are disadvantaged in several ways: as blacks they, with their men, are victims of a white patriarchal culture; as women they are victimised by black men; and as black women they are also victimised on racial, sexual, and class grounds by white men (67).” It is against these oppressive political arrangements in which the women are the most hit that Beatrice seeks change.

The feminine activities therefore seek to mend the damage done by the failure of this ultra-masculine nation. Order is being restored by women; hence Feminism is important in building the nation. Achebe therefore hints that the masculine nation is not the ideal and the new woman had the ability to change the old order. The woman’s voice is never heard unless all alternatives had been explored. It is to this end that Achebe reasons that the political failure of postcolonial Nigeria is largely due to not incorporating the views of the politically marooned, such as the women. In *Anthills*, Achebe traces the malaise of the nation to “the failure of our rulers to establish vital links with the poor and the dispossessed of the country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation’s being (141).” In putting the Kangan social space in context, it is appreciable that Kangan women are walled off from the political apparatus in His Excellency’s government. In sidestepping the patriarchal universe that impinged on women’s rise from private to public sphere, Beatrice said: “But the way I see it is that giving women the same role which traditional society gave them of intervening only when everything else has failed is not enough, you know, like the women in the Sembene film who pick up the spears abandoned by their defeated menfolk. It is not enough that women should be the court of last

resort because the last resort is a damn sight too far and too late! (91-92).” Beatrice’s musing here prefigures Nigeria’s sexist politics and leadership failure, which needs to be overturned.

In changing the bitter history of women, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (1982) in her essay “Placing Women’s History in History”, reasons that Feminist consciousness places women at the center of history by recognizing their peculiar role in the structuring of history and political process (29). This attempt is what Beatrice sees as “pulling up one of those spears thrust into the ground by the men in their hour of defeat and left there in the circle of their last dance (83).”

Postcolonial Feminists endorse this imagery of the woman picking up from where the men left off. Ama Ataa Aidoo (1992) envisages a Feminist movement that would seek justice not only for African women but for all African people, suggesting an inclusive movement where every man and every woman should be a Feminist, and take charge of the burden of African development.

Going forward, since patriarchy consigned women to the home – by making them raise children as well as make them do mere housework, there was a need for women to transcend the limiting, chauvinistic walls of the private sphere, by transforming the dynamics of the society through their involvement particularly in political actions (Nwagbara, 2009). It is in view of this that Chinua Achebe’s vision of women translated into creating Beatrice Nwanyibuife – “A woman is also something (87).” Beatrice, Achebe’s prototype woman is “endowed with beauty, brains and brawn (118)” which is needed crucially for the transformation of the society. Achebe has given women’s contribution to democratic process a voice by his creation of Beatrice. Beatrice’s characterization/persona in *Anthills* ultimately evokes the hallmark of Achebe’s preoccupation

with the Feminist principle, which is an integral part of resolving postcolonial Nigeria's political mayhem.

Despite Achebe's acknowledgement of the role of women in assisting to resolve the political situation, he is still not clear about what specific role women need to play to bring about the needed changes. He is indecisive and admits through Ikem that men have never been sure what role they expect the new woman to play. Speaking through his alter ego, Ikem, Achebe acknowledges that the malaise Africa was experiencing resulted from excluding women from the scheme of things (Hungwe and Hungwe, 2010). Ikem attacks chauvinistic ideas that women are inferior and seeks to offer background information against the oppression of women. He uses the creation myths from both the Bible and the oral tradition of his ancestors. According to Ikem, women have been oppressed since the beginning of time; they have been accused of Man's great fall and shoved on to their 'corner pedestal.' Ikem therefore argues here that creation myths are not about the beginning of the earth; rather they are the beginning of men's oppression of women. Ikem continues his contention saying that Christian and traditional creation myths evolved in order to dilute men's guilt and adapt to changing cultural actions. In order to comfort men in their oppressing position of power, they adjust their myths, reasoning women to remain silent and subjected. After he admits the part men played in this oppression, he admits that:

“I can't tell you what the new role for Woman will be. I don't know. I should never have presumed to know. You have to tell us. We never asked you before. And perhaps because you've never been asked you may not have thought about it; you

may not have the answer handy. But in that case everyone had better know who is now holding up the action (98).”

Beatrice now becomes the symbol of hope in terms of the political situation in Kangan. *Anthills* shows that women will be forerunners in the journey towards recovery and the novel eventually re-valorizes women for this journey. Thus, through Beatrice, Achebe affirms the moral strength and intellectual integrity of African women especially since the social conditions which have kept women down in the past era are now largely absent. Urbanization and education have combined to broaden women's horizons. Achebe's newly envisioned female's roles are to be expanded, articulated and secured by women themselves, and the modern African woman is doing just that. Ikem now accepts that his former attitude towards women has been too respectful and idealistic. Achebe's clear vision of Africa is underlined in Ikem's love letter to Beatrice which advocates the empowerment of women to strengthen the continent.

Beatrice now stands as a deity or goddess with the moral responsibility to transform her country and rewrite the culture for the future. She is given the power to correct the wrongs caused by the male-oriented political system. In the novel, there is a palpable portraiture of women being conscious of the need to hold power for societal recognition. Women in this regard consider men's wielding of power as the basis for their historical denigration and oppression: In the beginning Power rampaged through our world, naked. So the Almighty, looking at his creation through the round undying eye of the Sun saw and pondered and finally decided to send his daughter, Idemili, to bear witness to the moral Nature of authority by wrapping around power's

rude waist a loincloth of peace and modesty (102). Beatrice therefore sees power as a means for the emancipation of women and the marginalized, who have been in men's thralldom; hence, power for her is not fixated; it is fluid, and can be used by any group to further their objectives, especially in the political process. Beatrice is absolutely unsatisfied with the tradition of "assigning women the role of fire-brigade after the house has caught fire and (has) been virtually burnt" (97). For her, women should be involved in the problem-solving process from the beginning because she has the capacity to do so and should not be an afterthought when all other possibilities have failed. The Idemili goddess is so highly trustworthy that the usual acclamation of her devotees is, "(a) deity who does as (she) says never lacks in worshippers (103)." Equally, her custodian is ranked above the common village priestess whose office as a sacred medium is undermined by her natural, workday role as woman-cum-wife. She "prophesies when her divinity rides her, abandoning, if need be, her soup-pot on the fire, but returning again when the (goddess) departs, to the domesticity of the kitchen or the bargaining market-stool... (105)." Chandra Mohanty (1991) refers to this scenario as the woman's "essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (56)."

Beatrice's own version of hope coincides with Achebe's insistence on the need for "a new set of values—a new frame of reference, a new definition of stranger and enemy" to eradicate the confusion of values which afflicts the new nation and also to explore the human condition. This vision is further reiterated by Elewa's uncle who united the hope for Kangan with the future of his niece: May this child be the daughter of all of us... May these young people here when they make the plans for their world not forget her. And all other children... May they also remember

useless old people like myself and Elewa's mother when they are making their plans. We have seen too much trouble in Kangan since the white man left because those who make plans make plans for themselves only and their families (228).

Symbolically, Beatrice's naming of Elewa's child, a role traditionally reserved for men is reflective of an image of women as pivotal in the new social and historical context of post-colonial period. The solidarity between Beatrice and Elewa despite the difference in educational level is proof of the feats that can be achieved when women of all levels work towards a particular goal. Elewa's friendship with Beatrice and her relationship with Ikem both shed light on some other important themes in the novel.

4.2 ELEWA

One of the significant characters of the novel is Elewa who symbolized a number of issues Achebe addressed in the novel. Elewa's character is analogous to Beatrice, but her story is told from the point of view of an illiterate woman. Secondly, her relationship with Ikem, considering their social and educational differences, is symbolic of the relation between the educated, civilized African and the uneducated African society. Achebe uses Elewa to represent the section of illiterate African women who did not have the privilege of receiving Western education as men were the ones who had most access to colonial education. The birth of her daughter is a symbol of hope and continuity for the new African society which is to be led by women.

Elewa and Beatrice have as much in common as they were different. In terms of personalities, both women were strong, outspoken and confident. However, Elewa is the uneducated crude version of Beatrice. Perhaps, Achebe wants to drive home a point that African women were intrinsically fierce and strong before the introduction of education. Despite her lack of book knowledge, Elewa is very intelligent and even identifies the part women have played in tolerating male chauvinism. "But na we de causam; na we own. If I no kuku bring my stupid nyarsh come dump for your bedroom, you for de kick me like I be football? I no blame you at all (34)." The language here is unrefined and impolite but Achebe makes no apology for it. The simile in this sentence is evidence of the fact that even Elewa the illiterate has recognized that male superiority has reduced women something similar to a football. Like Beatrice, Elewa does not mince words when she feels she is being maltreated and sidelined. It is no wonder that the two women become friends contrary to the perceived natural enmity among women. Women have been taught that they are "natural" enemies and that solidarity can never exist between them (hooks, 43). For hooks, such sexist ideologies must be unlearned to build a sustained Feminist movement.

The bond that exists between Elewa and Beatrice is not the same as the sisterhood ideology advocated by Western Feminists. Feminist sisterhood is rooted in shared commitment to struggle against patriarchal injustice, no matter the form that injustice takes (hooks, 15). The vision of sisterhood evoked by women's liberationists is based on the idea of common oppression. The idea of "common oppression" is a false and corrupt platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women's varied and complex social reality (44). According to their analysis, the basis

for bonding is shared victimization, hence the emphasis on common oppression. This concept of bonding directly reflects male supremacist thinking. Sexist ideology teaches women that to be female is to be a victim. Rather than repudiate this equation (which mystifies female experience- in their daily lives most women are not continually passive, helpless, or powerless "victims"), women's liberationists embraced it, making shared victimization the basis for woman bonding. This means that women have to conceive of themselves as "victims" in order to feel that Feminist movement was relevant to their lives (45). However, Beatrice and Elewa's friendship is not a bond against men, but a bond to protect their interest as women. Achebe's portrayal of the friendship between these two different women is to point out one of the objectives of Feminist movement, that is to transform woman-to-woman relationships, especially between women who are strangers to one another or from different backgrounds (hooks, 49).

While Elewa and Beatrice's friendship reflects the strong bond that can exist between two women, Elewa and Ikem's relationship is symbolic of the relationship between the "educated", "civilized" African and the "uneducated" African society. Ikem and Elewa's relationship is lively, tolerating and interesting to the reader. Despite Ikem's higher social standing, he respects Elewa and she accompanies him to meetings with his educated friends. The dialogues between the two lovers are humorous and yet filled with love and respect. Elewa always communicates in the local pidgin language and Ikem replies in the standard English language, yet they understand each other; Ikem does not wield his book knowledge over her. Elewa despite her ignorance does not feel inferior but rather speaks her mind at the least opportunity. The relationship that exists between Elewa and Ikem also suggests the fact that women do not need education to empower

them to end male oppression. hooks asserts that women must reject the notion that obtaining power in the existing social structure will necessarily advance Feminist struggle to end sexist oppression (90). Power may allow numbers of women to gain greater material privilege, control over their destiny, and the destiny of others, but will not end male domination as a system. The suggestion that women must obtain power before they can effectively resist sexism is rooted in the false assumption that women have no power. Women, even the most oppressed do exercise some power. These powers can be used to advance Feminist struggle (90). Women do not need to eradicate difference to feel solidarity or share common oppression to fight equally to end oppression (65).

Elewa through her power of motherhood is able to carry on Ikem's legacy after his untimely death. Ikem and Elewa's child, Amaechina, also becomes a symbol of hope in the advancement of the political situation in Kangan and in women as the possible hope in the reigning political status quo in the Kangan government. Women often are used to embody the nation and Achebe through Elewa stresses on women's reproductive role in the formation of the nation and national consciousness. Women are the mother of the nation who produced its next generation. Therefore, for Elewa's daughter, Beatrice proposes the name—Amaechina—meaning “May the path never close”, in the sense of the Old Testament “The remnant shall return (222).” This name is usually exclusive to boys, since a girl's body is not equipped for carving genealogical paths, let alone for keeping one open, but Beatrice insists that “girl fit answer am also (222).” This metaphoric name is symbolic of the fact that Amaechina is Ikem's only off-spring and, therefore, perchance, the only channel through whom his genes at least will be somewhat propagated. So, in the prevailing

situation it is the woman who can preserve a lineage. Achebe therefore allows the women to steer affairs and bring calm after the tumultuous experience. It is not by chance that in this novel Achebe's female characters are more forward and commanded recognition than his previous novels. His decision to portray such strong female characters was influenced by a number of social and political factors.

4.3 FACTORS ACCOUNTING FOR MAJOR DEVELOPMENT IN ROLES OF WOMEN

It is evident that Achebe's social vision in this novel differed from his earlier works and many factors could have accounted for this change. For this paper, I propose three main related issues which may have led to Achebe's decision to feature women more prominently in this novel.

Firstly, Achebe may have been influenced by his familiarity with the twenty-first century radical woman which he embodied in the character of Beatrice (Olusola, 2015). In addition to this, as far as gender is concerned, Achebe's portrayal of Beatrice and her role in the novel is an attempt to ingratiate himself with the fast growing Feminist movements at the time the novel was written, and the measure of his success was Feminists' frequent citation of *Anthills* as a work informed by a progressive attitude towards gender relations, in contrast to his earlier works which they saw as suffused with patriarchal subjugation of women (Owomoyela, 2002). Thirdly, the production of Achebean Feminist narrative resonated with interrogating Nigeria's overarching, patriarchal dominance of women in politics, which negates the expansion of the public sphere. By allowing women's voice to be heard in the deafening clatter of male universe, Achebe has redefined the very language of their identity and political participation (Nwagbara, 2009).

As stated above, Achebe may have been influenced by the emerging twenty-first century radical woman whom he embodied in the character of Beatrice. In the postcolonial African society women were not the one imaged by the Western writers in their colonial masterpieces like *Heart of Darkness* (1899) or *Mister Johnson* (1939). The postcolonial woman was one who received education from the prestigious universities within and outside Africa, and grew both educationally and intellectually to the level of men. These women also started participating in serious affairs of the country like nation building, diplomatic missions, thus giving a new role to women in the development of the country in the years to come. In such an evolving political and social milieu, it would have been a serious blunder to create a female character who still succumbed to the whims of men and had virtually no voice in decisions affecting her. Hence the Beatrice character.

She was the blood, mind and voice of Achebe's new women (Owusu, 1991). The portraiture of Beatrice found expression in Achebe's preoccupation with creating new women, who will be part of Africa's (Nigeria's) transformation process. Achebe's new women were in contradiction with the fabled good women, who were being kept in reserve until the ultimate crisis arrived and the woman was called upon to make things right (98). It should be noted that Achebe moved from the peripheral role women assumed in the earlier novels to play a central role in shaping and mediating the realms of power in *Anthills*. Beatrice is the fulcrum of social change right in the nucleus of socio-political schema. The portrayal of Beatrice represents a woman shouldering the responsibility of charting the course of female emancipation (Fonchingong, 45). The new

woman was defiant, self-made, experienced and moved at her own pace, not at the dictates of her family or the men in her life. Chris described Beatrice thus:

“... She had a style and above all a pace that I decided from the very beginning to respect. Sometimes when he thought of her, what came most readily to my mind was not roses or music but a good and tastefully produced book, easy on the eye. No pretentious distractions. Beatrice was the perfect embodiment of my ideal woman, beautiful without being glamorous. Peaceful but very strong. Very, very strong. I love her and will go at whatever pace she dictates (64).”

This characterization of Beatrice sums up Achebe's new woman. Here is finally a woman who creates her own path and will not compromise her principles for a man. Hitherto, this character would have attracted beatings and abuse, but in this case, Chris respects Beatrice for her charisma and strength, and is willing to adjust to her rhythm. The twenty-first century woman did not emerge out of nowhere. One of the factors which influenced her evolution was the vigorous activities of Feminists around this period which Achebe wanted to be a part of.

The numerous Feminists movements in Africa during the period the novel was written were not lost on Achebe. There were various Feminists and Feminist groups who actively fought for the inclusion of women in politics and government. Feminists such as Flora Nwapa, Maryam Babaginda, Flora Azikiwe, Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie among others were very influential in criticizing gender biased systems in Nigeria. For instance, Ogundipe-Leslie vehemently advocated for the rediscovery of women's role in Nigeria's social and political institutions. Flora Nwapa was the first woman commissioner - and Nigeria's first woman novelist – to be appointed in 1970 by the civilian administrator of East Central State during the military government of

Yakubu Gowon (Mba 1989). During this time, women were not allowed to even vote. It was not until 1979 that the Obasanjo military regime was able to introduce universal suffrage for women. Flora Azikwe, wife of the first Nigerian Governor-General Nnamdi Azikiwe, not only hosted the wives of other heads of state and accompanied her husband on numerous tours and duties, but also saw women as having important roles to play in national development. She campaigned tirelessly for women's education at school, college and university levels, at a time when she was one of the very few women with university education (Mama, 1995). Apart from these individual efforts, there had arisen various women groups who were propagating the need for women to be more vocal on international and national forums. Such groups include the Women in Nigeria (WIN) and the National Commission on Women and Development (NCW). African women not only hosted the Nairobi Conference at the end of the UN Decade (1975-1985), but were highly articulate and active in both the governmental and non-governmental organizations that participated in the Decade. By the end of the decade, several regional structures had been put in place: The African Training and Research Centre for Women (ATRCW) was set up in 1975, designed to be a focal point for women and development activities in the ECA secretariat. The ATRCW was to be supported by the African Regional Coordinating Committee for the Integration of Women in Development (ARCC) and by sub-regional organs in the five ECA Multinational and Operational Centres (MULPOCs). By the end of the decade, 51 African countries had set up national machineries such as the women's ministry with a mandate to promote the full integration of women into development and to eliminate discrimination on grounds of sex. In light of all these activities, Achebe noted the shift in the role of women from docile, submissive wives to educated career women who voiced their opinion at every turn. Equipped with education, resilience and the will to survive, these females placed no limitation on

their capabilities and Achebe expressed this dynamic shift through his character Beatrice. Beatrice therefore represent Feminist such as Nwapa and Ogundipe-Leslie who fought to be heard in a room full of power-drunk men.

The final point under this sub-heading is that Achebe, through his prominent female characters, questioned patriarchal dominance of women in Nigerian politics and nation building. A perfunctory reading of the novel revealed his attempt to incorporate the female principle—thereby invoking his ideological and artistic commitment to contribute to wider debate about bettering the leadership of postcolonial Nigeria, and Africa by extension. This approach was in tandem with Ngugi's (1981) position that “every literature is a commitment to a specific political ideology, and every writer is a writer in politics (12).” The portraiture of women in *Things Fall Apart* gauges the heartbeat of a nation embroiled in machismo politics and sexist culture: “It was clear from the way the crowd stood or sat that the ceremony was for men. There were many women, but they looked on from the fringe like outsiders (85).” This is an endocentric world where the man was everything and the woman nothing. In his sophomore novel, *No Longer at Ease* (1963), Achebe therefore offers a modification of his female characters, which culminates in Clara, Obi Okonkwo's fiancée, who is seen as being self-assertive and daring. Unlike the image of women relayed in *Thing Fall Apart* – docile, submissive and unthinking- Clara stands her ground in her refusal to marry Obi in order to avoid defying her customs. Although she fades away in the novel, Achebe presents to us the image of a changing group, who have been at the lower rung of the societal ladder. In his third novel, *A Man of the People* (1966), Achebe refracts a more commendable characterization of women. In the

novel, we saw female characters like Eunice who stood on equal grounds with men to fight corruption and bad leadership.

There is a major paradigm shift in his refraction of womanhood in the creation of Beatrice, one of the protagonists of the novel – the true spirit and heart of the novel – and a quintessence of Achebe's radical thinking on the political roles of women in postcolonial Nigeria (Africa).

In the novel, Achebe illustrates a culture in which women must save the country from its downfall. When the men – Chris, Ikem and Sam – have fallen while fighting to outdo each other, the women- Beatrice, Elewa- are left standing to take up the challenge and continue the fight by righting the wrongs of the men. Achebe therefore reiterates the point that the task of nation building was not the responsibility of only men. Women should be considered in nationalist decision-making. Elda Hungwe and Chipso Hungwe (2010) notes that nationalist movements rarely took women's situation as their point of departure. On the contrary, nationalism often suppressed women's concerns or put them aside until the more important issues of the nation's fate are decided. Hence Enlore Molande, (2004) concluded that nationalism typically springs from “masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope (44).” Achebe therefore is challenging the masculinized nation which failed as it was always associated with coups and political unrest. Chris Oriko himself on page 119 refers to Sam's governance as a “gathering tornado which may rage overhead carrying away rooftops and leaving them battered and alive”. This metaphoric statement shows that the male characters themselves foreshadowed the effect of the power play among the themselves. The irony here is that Chris does not know it will cost them their lives. At least he knows that the war ahead will shatter lives and leave them desolate. Achebe reflects how these masculine aspects promoted

corruption, selfishness and greed which give birth to issues of bad governance, denial of rights as well as military coups which are violent. Achebe is therefore disregarding this concept of a nation in *Anthills* and calling for a revolution with women being more than just the last resort. Achebe shows in his novel that women will be forerunners in the journey towards recovery with the youth, workers, and peasants as trusted lieutenants. Achebe's vision is the inclusion of all social classes in matters of the state with women on the forefront on the road to freedom. In contrast, men are presented as a fragmented lot who jostle each other to win favor with the dictator against the preferable scene of women in solidarity. *Anthills* exposes the challenges of a gender-biased government in postcolonial Africa which through military governance ruled like warrior.

Achebe's view of women is also reflected through the names Nwanyibuife ("A female is also something") and Amaechina ("May the path never close"). Achebe's vision is that women were equal stakeholders in the nation as males; therefore, they should be viewed as interested parties and responsible participants in the road to self-redemption. Achebe advocates for the inclusion of females in the nation-building. When they have been given their rightful place, then the road to self-redemption and recovery may never close.

4.4 CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, it is obvious Achebe's portrayal of Beatrice is a reflection of the evolving modern woman at the time the novel was written. In keeping with the changes in the

society, he therefore creates the ideal female character who defies society's standards for a woman and becomes the voice of emancipation for both women and eventually men.

Notwithstanding the assertive and dynamic portrayal of Beatrice Okoh, Achebe uses the mask of Ikem to shatter the high Feminist prospect. He accomplishes the damage through Ikem's copious essay on the woman in traditional and Judeo-Christian myths. Though Ikem takes this to be an "insight" he had gained from Beatrice and also a self-revaluation of his understanding of the female gender, it is an attempt to apologize and acquit himself of Beatrice's charge of prejudice. His biblical allusion to the Fall of Man and the folktale of the Woman and the Sky serves to show that the issue of female oppression has been an age-long issue which should not be blamed on a single group. To further damage his ideal of the role of the new woman, Achebe through Ikem, states that the oppression of women was not the only world crisis to be given attention. There are other larger groups such as black people who are being oppressed and the magnitude of that oppression was greater than that of women (98).

In additions to these, Achebe's portrayal of Beatrice may look sufficient on the surface, but that is all it is. Beatrice is a sufficient character as long as the main players are a step higher than her. For instance, Beatrice is well educated with an Honors degree and she is the only person with such a qualification in her community. However, she is a simple secretary who only took a leading position after Sam, Ikem and Chris' deaths. Beatrice had the opportunity to name Elewa's baby because Elewa's uncle did not arrive on time. These may suggest that, for Achebe, women can only perform some roles so long as the men are not there. In most African societies,

the personality of the individual woman is significantly interwoven with cultural factors from birth to death and as such, the individual cannot escape the impact of his or her cultural experiences. This implies that the process of socialization may be a hindering factor for those male writers who are trying to add their voices to the fight for the emancipation of women from the yoke of patriarchy through literary works (Odetola 1983). Notwithstanding this, there is the need to move beyond this effort and trust women to be given an equal opportunity even with the availability of men. The Feminist movement should clarify for women the powers they exercise daily and show them ways these powers can be used to resist sexist domination and exploitation. Recognition of that power is a step women can take together towards liberation (hooks, 93).

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.0 FROM *THINGS FALL APART (TFA)* TO *NO LONGER AT EASE (NLAE)*

The story of *TFA* to *NLAE* is a continuous narration of the Umuofia society before, during and after the arrival of the Europeans. Though *Arrow of God* was written in between these two, *NLAE* is a continuation of the story Achebe begins in *TFA*.

TFA (and *Arrow of God*) reflects Achebe's interest in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century history of the Igbo people, their religious, cultural, and political traditions, and the catastrophic effects of their encounter with the Europeans. While *TFA* explores the historical forces which incessantly and inexorably undermined precolonial Igbo society, *NLAE* reveals the struggle of the Igbo society to adapt to the new culture imposed by the Europeans. Achebe pragmatically deals with the necessity and the inevitability of change in *NLAE*, a change which he personally experienced. The son of a retired Christian teacher and the grandson of one of the first men in his region to embrace Christianity, Achebe was the product of three distinct eras of Igbo history. As a child, he lived in a community where traditional practices still flourished; as a youth, he experienced life in a colonized society; and, as an adult, he reached maturity during the era of Nigerian independence.

Achebe's novels can be considered as a sequence of connected works exploring the changes which have occurred in Igbo society—from the initial contact between the Igbo and the British depicted in *TFA* to the satiric portrait of contemporary Nigerian society in *Anthills*.

The cultural situation of *TFA* is vastly different from the situation in *NLAE*, and so are the female characters. The traditional society of Umuofia, as portrayed by Achebe is a well-defined one with laid down roles for males and females. The decision-making, law-making and judicial body of the society comprise only men. The women's role are more domestic; taking care of their husbands and children, attending to visitors, helping their husbands on the farm and selling farm produce to generate income. These women are heavily dependent on their husbands financially and emotionally.

Though the society is dominated by the men, the female characters in the novel do not allow their circumstances to intimidate them. Female characters such as Chielo, Ekwefi and Ezinma stand out as women who Achebe used to balance the contradictions of the Umuofia society. Ezinma for instance displays the qualities of a “son” that Okonkwo expected from his male children. When faced with a dangerous situation, Ekwefi exhibits more courage than Okonkwo who embodies Umuofia's standard of masculinity. Despite this show of strength of character and resilience, these women are financially dependent on the men and therefore tolerate all forms of abuse from them. Besides as women of the precolonial era, their main function is child bearing, the primary objective of marriage. Silence is a virtue because she needs no voice to bear children or perform domestic work.

The society have no time to waste with the womenfolk whose significant contributions to communal matters center around singing and dancing during ceremonies. The women did not fit much into the heroic cadre of the society at that time and, therefore, were not subject of literary imagination or creativity. Indeed, in such a society, being a woman was like being sentenced to a life of insignificance and subsidiary existence.

The British introduced education which was an avenue for women like *Clara*, *Edna* and *Eunice* in *NLAE* to have careers and professions unlike the women of *TFA* who are limited to helping on the farm and selling at the market. Women were also afforded the opportunity to sit with men in government and make policies for the nation. Some of these women were into trading and exporting of goods. Thus the women in *NLAE* had a broader horizon and many possibilities available to them than the women of *TFA* who are limited to the village. The introduction of towns and cities, cross-country trading and scholarship to study overseas all gave these women the opportunity to meet new people, create new relationships and gain experience into diverse cultures across the world. However, Achebe presents these women as if to say that the modernity and education was not as enlightening and liberating as the Europeans made it out to be. Though we see women equally engaged with the men in the pursuit of Western education, rather than study to become doctors, Clara and Gloria for instance both study nursing. Beatrice with her “walloping honours degree in English from London University (62)” is a Senior Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Finance, though “she is the only person in the service, male or female, to have a first class honours in English (75).” Thus the females are equipped with just

enough education to enable them play the roles of girlfriends of the male protagonist or good-time girls which eventually becomes their ultimate destination.

In fact, these educated women succumbed to a negative effect of modernity which the women in the remote village of Umuofia did not exhibit. For instance, Clara gets pregnant for a man she is not married to and eventually aborts the baby when she realized it was a taboo for her to marry. The introduction of the character Mrs. Eleanor John by Achebe in *AMOTP* is another example of the debilitating effect of modernization on women. Mrs. John is introduced as an influential party woman from the coast who had come in the Minister's party. From Odili's comparison of the heavily painted and smoking Mrs. John to the beautiful innocent girl sitting by her on the podium (12), Achebe seems to imply that the acquisition of knowledge or professionalism makes a woman like Eleanor materialistic and vain, unlike the innocence and perhaps ignorance of the 'village' girls. Achebe follows up this distasteful view of the professional woman with the introduction of Barrister Mrs. Akilo of whom Odili expressed nonchalantly that he felt she would sleep with Chief Nanga, though she was more educated than the Chief and was married. The implication of this is unconcealed. Even while superior to the man in knowledge, the woman seems to fall prey to him. Yet Achebe does not criticize man's preoccupation with sexual prowess and immorality. The women are however severely condemned for being promiscuous and materialistic, and modernity is believed to have impacted them with these negative traits.

Modernity and education could not however completely eliminate polygamy and other traditional beliefs such as the *osu* caste system. Achebe does not touch on the polygamous trend

in *NLAE* unlike the world in *TFA* in which patriarchy and polygamy intrude oppressively into every sphere of existence. In the modern society of *NLAE*, “Titles are no longer great, neither are barns or large numbers of wives and children. Greatness is now in the things of the white man. And so we too have changed our tune. We are the first in all the nine villages to send our son to the white man's land (54).” This is to say that power and greatness is now through education. It is no more through the criteria of the Okonkwo's society-with many wives and children. However, Achebe drops subtle hints in *AMOTP* to show that polygamy had not been as totally eradicated as it may seem. Though women such as Edna are educated, they have accepted polygamy as part of a woman's world. Achebe may have been simply communicating the existence of some traditional practices despite the introduction of education and modernity. Clara's inability to marry the man of her choice because she is an *osu* also attests to this. Mrs. Nanga's family and Edna's father all had a say in the choice of husband for their daughters. This is to say that though modernity has overshadowed some traditional cultures which were explicitly displayed in *TFA*, there are still traces of the fading out custom which the people have not been able to wean themselves out of. Wilentz (1992) stressed that “as upholders of tradition, women are powerful figures, economically secure and socially vibrant, yet they are limited in their choices by the restrictive cultural milieu (7).” This is the situation for women like Hannah, Clara and Edna who live in a modern society and have access to all the benefits of modernity, yet are still restricted by the dictates of their customs.

5.1 FROM *NO LONGER AT EASE* TO *ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNAH*

The socio-political setting of *Anthills* is not very different from that of *NLAE*. Both novels are set in Postcolonial Nigeria. However, between the dates the two books were written, that is from 1960-1987, a lot of feminist activities and literary revolution have taken place. For instance, women were actively involved in politics and government, for instance Flora Nwapa accepted the cabinet position of a Minister of Health and Social Welfare between 1970 and 197. Various feminist movements across Africa held international conferences and took decisions which affected the political and social structure of many African countries.

Thus by the time Achebe wrote *Anthills* in 1987 after his long break from 1966, a “new” African woman had replaced the once docile voiceless woman he portrayed in his previous novels. Achebe noted the shift in the role of women from submissive wives to educated career women who voiced their opinion at every turn. Equipped with education, resilience and the zeal to survive, these females placed no restraint on their capabilities and Achebe expressed this dynamic shift through his character Beatrice. Beatrice therefore represents the new breed of African woman who is not intimidated by “power-drunk” men. Gone are the Hannahs, Claras and Ednas whose life are predetermined by men and society. The Beatrice of present times is fierce, assertive and makes no apologies for her way of life. Though not the ultimate standard that feminists advocate, Beatrice is a far cry from the woman who is beaten and cowed into submission by her husband. She becomes a source of motivation, inspiration and encouragement to Ikem who represents the social conscience and to Chris who represents the political conscience (Kolawole, 1997). In Beatrice, Achebe attempts to amend his treatment of women in

his earlier fiction by presenting a professional woman who somehow matches up to the most powerful men in the land. From patriarchal worlds of Okonkwo in *TFA* and Ezeulu in *Arrow of God*, Achebe has journeyed on a progressive gender course in *Anthills*. The portrayal of Beatrice represents a woman shouldering the responsibility of charting the course of female emancipation. The above point is driven home forcefully in the following quote “You have to tell us. We never asked you before. And perhaps you’ve never been asked... you may not have thought about it; you may not have the answer handy (90).”

5.2 EVOLUTION IN THE ROLES OF WOMEN FROM PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD TO PRESENT DAY

It is not as if women’s consciousness of their restricted position in a patriarchal society such as Nigeria commenced with female literary writing after colonialism. Several women’s organizations have been in existence even in the pre-colonial era. According to Amadiume (1994) in “Gender, Political Systems and Social Movements: A West African Experience”, “right from the pre-colonial era, women’s associations have existed as distinct and autonomous units for organizing social relations, productive works, and even ritual and religion” (1). The arrival of the Europeans however was as Achebe put it in *NLA* “a bath of palm wine on incipient measles” (82), bringing the ugly truth of female marginalisation to the surface.

Male writers from the pre-colonial era to 1970s engaged in creative literary works to counter European stereotypes of Africa and to reflect new social realities. The reaction towards the

European notion about Africa informed the thematic concern of the early Nigerian writers. The issue of gender never came close to their thematic focus. The literary writing in this period was characterized with female stereotypes due to their biological construct and traditional placement and role in the society.

Feminism and gender sensitivity in Nigerian literature is a later development in terms of thematic development. The subjugation of women continued for several decades till about 1980s when feminist writing started emerging gradually. Women grew discontented of patriarchal oppression, misrepresentation, suppression and stereotyping of female characters. Most female writers reacted to this. According to V.M Sylvester (2005) in ‘Understanding the Writings of the Nigerian Women’, “... a primary goal of women’s literature has been to correct and re-direct attention to their own ideals, world view and to the significance of the feminine element (41).” From demanding for WTC (World Trade Center) for women in 1921 to equal pay for equal work at the YWCA (Young Women Christian Association) conference at the University College, Ibadan in 1954 (48), the more forceful imagination among them began to direct their energies to the production of poetry, journalistic and polemic pamphlets from which women’s fiction was a major beneficiary (49). The experiences of women influenced their imaginative activities. The harsh conditions of women’s lives in the rural setting, at work and in the family gave rise to novels like *Efuru* (1966) and *Ada* (1978).

Gender consideration started infiltrating into Nigerian literature gradually and Female writers like Flora Nwapa (1966), Buchi Emecheta (1979), Chikwenye Ogunyemi (1984) and Molar

Ogundipe-Leslie (1985) came into the scene with their landmark publications such as *Joys of Motherhood* (1979) etc. Their writings marked a significant turning point in the history of African literature and transformed the received meaning of feminism in the Western world. The female writers of this period wrote on unique themes, such self-actualization, political leadership, early marriage and its aftermath, the themes of death, press freedom, political oppression, love, etc. The growing trend gave rise to new discoveries and new modes of tackling gender problems.

The activities of women's organisations and political involvement also created a positive imaginative force as seen in Nwapa's *Wives at War* (1992), Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982), Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle* (2002) and Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003). Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle* (2002) and *The Last of the Strong Ones* (2006,) and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) depict a progression from women as victims to women's access to power and power distribution within the socio-cultural and political realities of the 21st century. The novels focus on subject areas such as marriage, children, barrenness and customs fixating women within culture, and position and roles showing how female characters balance and bridge the gender gap they encounter.

Eventually male authors like Achebe realized the necessity of empowering women, exercising free exploration of feminine potentials and its contributions to societal development. Hence, the emergence of multiple roles of women in male authored work such as *Anthills* at different levels of growth, exposure and success. Male authors presented female characters in a positive manner

to counter the negative conclusion of patriarchy. From housewives who had no voice in their husband's house to political activists who defied Presidents and made life choices that went against their status quo, female characters have gradually evolved into charismatic and outspoken characters who effected social change and restored order.

The current trend in the evolution of female characters is even more remarkable especially from the early 2000s to date. Through their writing, male authors in this period have introduced innovations that cut the boundaries of patriarchy, boycotted obnoxious cultures that constitute hindrances to women and created modern women in outlook. Tanure Ojaide is a notable male fictional writer of this period who explores the full potential of his female characters. He gives women voice and freedom in his fiction. This is evident in his portrayal of Ebi and Mrs Taylor in *The Activist* (2006), Anna in *Sovereign Body* (2004), and other female characters in his collections of short stories titled *God's Medicine Men* (2004) and *The Debt Collector and Other Stories* (2009). *The Activist* (2006) is a novel that deals with post-independence disillusionment about oil politics, ethnic marginalization and environmental predation in Nigeria. The role of the Ebi and Mrs. Taylor in the organization of the nude protest is one of the greatest form of activism in the portrayal of female characters. Perhaps Ojaide's view on feminism is echoed in Ebi's words, "We need to act now before it is too late. We have all seen how each day matters get worse. Our lives cannot be one long story of being victimized. We have to put a stop to being victimized in order for us to live happy and contented lives. It is a fight for survival. No matter what happens, we shall be victorious because our cause is just (245)."

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

It is sufficient to conclude that analysis of the three novels, that is *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Anthills of the Savannah* have answered the research questions raised at the beginning of the study. To begin with, the study has effectively traced the changes in the roles of women before and after colonialism. Women's roles changed from housewives and farm helps to educated business and career motivated roles. The society which previously prevented women from participating in social and economic ventures gradually shifted to accommodate a woman's voice in decision-making even at the highest level of authority. Secondly, the study has attributed the changes in Achebe's representation of women to the changes in the society at the time the novels were written. Achebe therefore reflected these changes in his novels to accommodate the evolution of roles of women in the African society.

Though this study has successfully contributed to literary by providing further insight into the study of feminism, there is still a lot more work to be done in relation to feminism in male authored literature. Some aspects of the female characters selected for this analysis were not discussed but would make for a good research study. One such aspect is the flaws in the portrayal of female characters. For instance, though the Beatrice character represents the "new" African woman who is independent and is a contributor in the politics of the society, she has domineering relationship with her house help, Agatha. While Beatrice strived for her voice to be heard in the male dominated political sphere, she is often disrespectful to Agatha and does not respect her opinion in many instances. Beatrice's fight for female emancipation is in contrast to her constant verbal and emotional abuse of Agatha. Again, in the portrayal of the Clara character,

despite her education and exposure to Western culture, she does not question her status as an *Osu* and easily gives in to the demands of tradition. Here again, her acceptance of her traditional status as an outcast is in contrast to her education and exposure. Other female characters discussed in this study such as Edna and Eunice have similar flaws. It will make for a good research study to assess why despite the shift in the roles of women, they have flaws which conflicted with their personality.

Another recommended area of interest worth studying is a comparative analysis of Ezinma in the traditional society and Beatrice in the modern society. Though the two characters are portrayed in two distinct societies, both embody a form of feminist ideal which needs further analysis. Ezinma embodies the type of son Okonkwo envisions and at the end of the novel, she is one of the few people left to carry on the legacy of Okonkwo. Similarly, Beatrice violates all stereotypes of a daughter and at the end of the novel, she is one of the few women left standing. It will therefore be interesting to compare the two characters against the different cultural settings of the novels.

5.5 CONCLUSION

There is a clear transformation of the evolution of female characters in African literature. Gender consideration that was absent in early African literature has become dominant especially in postcolonial literature. The evolution in African literature based on analysis of the three Achebe novels can be classified as: male writers with chauvinistic characters (*Things Fall Apart*), male writers with stereotyped female characters (*No Longer at Ease*) and male writers that are

typically feminists (*Anthills of the Savannah*). Gender, a socio-cultural variable, has been and is still undergoing changes for better advancement of African literature and globalized societal development.

It is appropriate to commend efforts made by second generation and contemporary writers for the positive shift in women's roles in our literatures from the traditional portrayal of the status of women as persons relating always to others and depending on others, especially the men, for every decision, to the 'new woman' image who possesses a well-controlled determination to get what she wants through her own articulations. It is heart-warming, therefore, that this generation of writers have seen the significant contribution of women to society as to want to break historical, cultural and mythical barriers as to represent them in their proper perspectives. Women are no longer accepting representations in our literature as a mere biological species but as a social class to be reckoned with. Finally, as women and men with sympathetic feelings to the feminist movement continue to recreate the image of women, and the female voice which took a while to be developed, will not be silenced.

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