The Representation of Women's Experiences in Eastern Nigeria as Portrayed in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's Trilogy

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DECLARATION

I, Oluwatosin E. Sawyerr, hereby declare that this dissertation for the Masters in English degree at the University of Venda, hereby submitted by me, has not been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other institution, and that this is my work in design and execution, and that all reference materials contained herein have been duly acknowledged.

Signature _____ Date: 26th May, 2014.

I hereby certify that the above statement is correct.

Supervisor: Dr. I. Manase _____ Date: 29/06/14

Co-Supervisor: Dr. E. K. Klu _____ Date: _____

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the Lord Almighty, who is the author and perfector of my faith. I give glory to his name for enabling me to achieve success at the end of my Masters programme.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my parents for teaching me to stand firm in the face of adversity and for always being my most influential source of education; your teachings and advice will remain with me for life.

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ABSTRACT

Women characters' agency and active roles in transforming traditional African societies have always been misrepresented in literary texts. This study investigated how women characters are presented in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones* (1996), *House of Symbol* (2001) and *Children of the Eagle* (2002). These novels have been selected to show the representation of women characters using her novel to negate certain patriarchal assumptions about women and also project the uncelebrated superior facets of female panache. Using African womanism theoretical underpinning to understand the characters through the eyes of the author, the study found out that Igbo women have always been active rather than passive members of the Igbo society, in comparison to previous literary works that under-representated women characters, it is argued that in pre-colonial times Igbo women were not actively involved in the affairs of the society. Adimora-Ezeigbo has been selected to show the representation of women character using her novel to negate certain patriarchal assumptions about women and also project the uncelebrated superior facets of female panache. The authors feminist discourses in her works seem to have been greatly influenced by the feminist critical outlook in the West of the 1970s which had sought to expose the mechanisms of patriarchy that is the cultural mindset in men and women which perpetuated sexual inequality. Thus, the study discusses the roles played by Adimora-Ezeigbo's female characters in the face of oppressive realities from the pre-colonial to the post-independent era in Nigeria. Recommendations for centering women characters in literary texts and further research on this subject are highlighted at the end of the dissertation.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents Page

DECLARATION i

DEDICATION ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii

ABSTRACT iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS v

Chapter 1 1

1.1 Introduction 1

1.2 Background to Feminism 1

1.3 Problem statement, methodology and theoretical framework 23

1.4 Conclusion 25

Chapter 2 27

2.1 Introduction 27

2.2 The exclusion of women from the public sphere as portrayed in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* 27

2.3 The effects of polygamy on Igbo women as portrayed in Achebe's *Arrow of God* . 43

2.4 African female writers bridging the gap in gender inequality 47

2.5 Conclusion 51

Chapter 3 54

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3.1 Introduction 54

3.2 Rewriting women into pre-colonial history 56

3.3 Man- woman relationships 66

3.4 Women as political activists 70

3.5 Conclusion 75

Chapter 4 77

4.1 Introduction 77

4.2 The role of women in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols* 79

4.3 Social harmony and cultural integration in *House of Symbols* 90

4.4 Conclusion 95

Chapter 5 97

5.1 Introduction 97

5.2 The place of daughters in Igbo culture 99

5.3 The recreation of characters from *The Last of the Strong Ones* in *Children of the Eagle* 103

5.4 Re-education on patriarchal assumptions by Eaglewoman's Daughters in *Children of the Eagle* 107

5.5 Preservation of the future in *Children of the Eagle* 115

5.6 Conclusion 120

Chapter 6 122

6.1 Summary and Conclusion 122

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References 129

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Chapter 1

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN EASTERN NIGERIA

1.1 Introduction

The central idea that informs this research is predicated on the literary representation of women's experiences in the Eastern part of Nigeria as depicted in Adimora-Ezeigbo's literary texts. The research focuses on the depiction of experiences of African women in Eastern Nigeria from a feminist social constructionist perspective and a post-colonial perspective. The study, therefore, takes into account the socio-economic, political and womanhood construction of the fictional women's personal experiences. African female-authored literature has generally received less recognition. The analysis of female-authored lierature has brought about terms such as womanism, a feminist theory propounded by Alice Walker (1983). She defined the term "womanism as a concept which encompasses marginalised women. Clenora Hudson-Weems (1994) expands the womanist concept by propounding, Aficana womanism, a concept foregrounded on the African cultural experiences and the struggles and needs of African woman. Adimora-Ezeigbo's literary work re-write a positive version on woman agency in comparison to conventional representation of women as subservient citizens in a traditional African society.

1.2 Background to Feminism

The study seeks to evaluate the nature of the Nigerian writers' depiction of their country's experiences. Oloko (2008) notes that after the second World War, many African writers were able to take a backward glance at conditions of human existence under severe

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conditions such as colonialism. As a result, some started writing critical essays and as Bhattacharji (2004) states, the Europeans' view of Africa as "primitive" and "barbaric" led to protests from some Africans. Writers such as Achebe confronted colonialism in their novels, showing that people and societies in Africa did not hear of culture for the first time from the Europeans and that they had their dignity, history and a cultural identity (Achebe, 1964:157).

Arndt (1998) further highlights, from an analysis of inter-textual dialogue by Jan Mohammed, Edward Said, and the authors of *The Empire Writes Back (2002),* that the socio-political categories of race and colonialism are the keys to understanding African authored literature. Nevertheless, their argument ignores the socio-political category of gender. African male writers, such as Achebe, challenge novels by European writers only as far as their presentation of African men is concerned, while their portrayal of women does not differ from those of the European writers. Women are marginalised or depicted in a stereotypical way; they are presented as mute characters who lack history, individuality and are often without names (Arndt, 1998). Worse still, colonialism resulted in a drastic deterioration of women's lives and their gendered conditions (Arndt, 1998:103). Achebe's portrayal of the history and culture of the Igbo society, as depicted in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), marginalised women and neglected their voice, as he tells his story from a male perspective.Busia (1989:86) describes this as the "voicelessness of the black woman".

Women are described as inferior, while men are superior; irrational, while men are rational; and as objects, while men are subjects. This deprived women of both their own history and any possibility of identification. Thus, women; like all colonised subjects, were relegated to

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the position of the "other" and, "colonized" by various forms of patriarchal domination (Ashcroft et al, 1995).

European patriarchal standards have led to colonial misreadings and misinterpretations of the position of the African woman. Therefore, the African woman is assigned the status of the "double negative", or "other" (Bhattacharji, 2004). As a result, the notion of "double-colonialization" is applied to the way women were oppressed by colonial laws in formerly colonised societies, and by the existing patriarchal beliefs.

Newell (2008:88) notes that in the two decades since the end of the United Nations Decade for women (1975-1985), Nigerian gender researchers have actively re-inserted women into history and argue that women have played a prominent role within West African "dual-sex" political systems. Newell points out that historians of gender have come to regard the assertiveness and outspokenness of some women, as confirmed by the recognition of individuals such as Madam Tinubu, and Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti. Madam Tinubu, is a West African woman who acquired wealth and power through participation in the Atlantic slave trade and later the European palm produce trade. She came into conflict with the British in the year 1851 when the British bombarded Lagos. She gained ill-reputation in the 1950s and 1960s because of her fierce opposition to British imperial policies in the town of Lagos (Oyewumi, 1997). Madam Tinubu was a defender of African interests and autonomy but she was eventually driven by the British out of Lagos into exile at Abeokuta, where she became influential in politics and was recognised as the *Iyalode*, the leading female chief in the town. Tinubu is significant historically for both her own activities and achievements. She is an example of a powerful pre-colonial West African woman (Ogunyemi, 1996). In addition,

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Fumilayo Ransome-Kuti is a feminist who fought for suffrage and equal rights for her country women long before the second wave of the women's movement in the United States. Ransome-Kuti also joined the struggle for Nigerian Independence as an activist in the anti-colonial movement. She was regarded as "The Mother of Africa" in her life time. Ransome-Kuti led a successful movement that helped abolish separate tax rates for women, and also founded the Federation of Nigerian Women Societies, which formed an alliance with the Women's International Democratic Federation (Johnson-Odim & Mba, 1997). Ransome Kuti created the outspokenness of women in Nigeria.

The above cited women are not outstanding exceptions to prevailing masculine leadership rule, but are ordinary women and inheritors to a long tradition of female political power stretching back through centuries of legendary figures such as Inikpi and Moremi (Awe, 1992). Inikpi was the beloved daughter of Ayegba Oma Idoko, the father of Igalas. She was sacrificed to appease the gods and also to give the Igalas victory in their war with the Benin kingdom. Igala is a Nigerian ethnic group. The Benin Army was on their way to destroy Idah, the seat of the king. The king had to consult a diviner and it was declared that the only way to avert the defeat of the Igala people was to sacrifice Inikpi who the king loved the most. She volunteered to be scarified so that her father's kingdom and his people would be saved from destruction.

Another legendary figure is Queen Moremi. She was the wife of Oranmiyan, the King of Yoruba. Queen Moremi was a woman of tremendous beauty and a zealous supporter of her husband and the kingdom of Ile-Ife. The Igbo tribe always raided Ile-Ife and Moremi decided on a strategy to make the biggest sacrifice to the deity if her plans were successful. She

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risked her life in a raid and was captured by the Igbo. Being so beautiful, she was given to the King, and with time, she won the trust of the King and the people. Moremi learnt the Igbo people's tactics, escaped one day to Ile-Ife and exposed their secrets to her people. This ensured that they conquered their enemies. Thus, Ile-Ife holds her in absolute high esteem up to this day (Ajayi, 2007). This demonstrates that African women have always been active members of the Nigerian society.

Nevertheless, the colonial conquest of Africa led to the ill-recognition of women in Africa. This has resulted in some African women writers taking up the challenge to correct this erroneous placement of women in society. These women writers have taken an interest in the plight of the marginalised. They have taken an interest in women's life and activities with the objective of ensuring that women are recognized by society. Shodipe (2008:242) asserts that the writings of African women often call for change. Ardnt (1998) states further that since the 1960s, African women writers have contributed to the dialogue of writing back (Ashcroft et al, 1989). The Nigerian writer, Flora Nwapa, was the first female novelist to enter this counter-discourse, with her novels *Efuru* (1966) and *Idu* (1970). From the pioneering zeal of Nwapa, followed female writers such as Zulu Sofola, Awa Thiam, Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo, Mariama Ba, Bessie Head, Ifeoma Okoye, Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo. Thus, various African women writers have taken up various ideological labels in a quest to deconstruct existing distortions of the African woman's image.

The quest for change in the way women are imagined is often expressed in the form of protest against various socio-cultural and traditional obstacles to the African woman's self-

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actualisation. These obstacles include patriarchy, economic and political subjection, and problems associated with intra-women conflict (Shodipe, 2008:243). Patriarchy rules in every aspect of the Igbo society. Through their customs and traditions which are modified to favour men patriarchy bestows absolute power on the male. Madoc-Jones and Coates (1996:3) state that patriarchal control refers to the power of men in relation to women which has resulted in the widespread oppression of women. The term "patriarchy" and its effects on the lives of African women occupy centre stage in feminist literature. According to Morris:

> It is important to recognize that the focus of feminist studies is this institutionalized male dominance, operation through social structures like the law, education, employment, religion, the family and cultural practices. None of these is to be explained simplistically in terms of conscious intent, of ill-will or conspiracy of individual men or groups of men. These self-sustaining structures of power, by means of which women's interest are always ultimately subordinated to male interests, constitute the social order of "patriarchy", a designation which applies to almost all human societies, past and present (1993:4).

Patriarchy, therefore, describes the totality of oppressive and exploitative relations which affect women.

Furthermore, patriarchy operates through all religions and cultures. Swart (1999:1) notes that "the belief that men are superior to women characterizes all the major religions of the world, including Islam, Judaism and Christianity". African feminists are thus concerned about the continued marginalisation of African women under the three-stripped banner of culture, tradition and religion (Nkealah, 2006). Women writers devote their creativity to issues that concern women and the crafting of theories that put into perspective the

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inclinations of both women and women writers. Therefore, women writers have been extricating women from the shackles of patriarchal bondage and the task in this dissertation is to examine the roles played by women and also whether they have succeed in the midst of patriarchy as depicted in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones* (1996), *House of Symbols* (2001) and *Children of the Eagle* (2002).

New developments have been made on how we understand literary texts, especially in the feminist approach to literary criticism. One of these is the analysis of literature as the product of social relations, which is central in feminist studies. Although, the study focuses on the post-colonial and womanist theorists, feminist approaches, such as Western feminism and African feminism, are also to be considered.

The term "feminism", which first came into use in the English language during the 1960s, indicates support for women's equal legal and political rights with men (Bryson, 1992). The growth of feminism began in Europe and America in the eighteenth century when women became conscious their oppression and took steps to uplift themselves. This prompted various of female writers across the globe to base their writings on issues pertaining to the rights of women in society. Feminism, thus, has its origin in the struggle for women's rights.

The concept of feminism has spread throughout the globe and has, as a result, come up with so many different definitions. Cuddon (1991:338) defines feminism as "an attempt to describe and interpret (or reinterpret) women's experiences as depicted in various kinds of literature". For the purpose of this study, the concept "feminism" is applied to the exploration of women's experiences, especially in marriages where women are usually seen as unequal, subordinate and oppressed. In the patriarchal arena, women become

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everything men do not want to be, hence the constitution of binaries where men are referred to as rational while women are seen as emotional, and men as active while women are passive (Gamble, 2001). Feminists, therefore, aim to deconstruct the established hegemonic male paradigms and to construct a female perspective which foregrounds the female experience (Sotunsa, 2009).

Some scholars have come up with different definitions of feminism and its quest for the emanicipation of women. Joseph (2003:161) believes feminism is a world ideological and political movement directed at changing the existing power relations between men and women in a patriarchal society. Mitchel (1998:426) is concerned about female creative imagination, hence, she postulates that feminism deals with female creativity, and women's ability to contribute their quota to literature and not live under the domination of men. She brings another trend to feminism. The feminist movement across the globe is known to be a counteraction against male dominance in all areas of life. It aims for equal opportunities amongst men and women. Ogini (1996) opines that the ideology of feminism has its origin in the West. She outlines how it came about as a struggle for equality and was promoted by the literary world. Western feminism identifies specific gender issues and recognises women's position, internationally, as one of a second class status and seeks to correct that (Maduka, 2009). The feminist movement counters the patriarchal social injustices on women across the globe. Feminism is a woman-centred description and explanation of human experiences and the social world (Belknap, 2001). Feminism, according to (Danner, 1991), seeks social change among the neglected and subordinated women.

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It is, thus, very clear that feminism means different things to different people. However, it revolves primarily around female experiences. Feminism, whether as a theory, social movement, or political movement, focuses specifically on women's experiences and highlights various forms of oppression which the female gender is subjected to in society. The movement organised itself around the need to empower women worldwide. Feminism is seen as an attempt to make intellectual sense of and to evaluate the subordination of women by men. It does not seek to reinforce or legitimise, but rather attempts to undermine, expose or challenge women's subordination (Stacey, 1993). Cudd and Andreason (2005:2) reveal women's subordination and the moral and political implications of that subordination. They also provide a lens through which ideas and social practices can be analysed. As a result, for them, feminism offers visions of liberation, of what life, persons and society would be like without the subordination of women. Belknap (2001) defines feminism as a woman-centered description and explanation of human experiences and the social world. Furthermore, Belknap (2001), in his comparison of patriarchy with racism and other forms of oppression, points out that for sexism to end, racism and other forms of oppression must end too. However, feminism seeks to remove all the barriers to equal social, political and economic opportunities for women and objects to the notion that a woman's worth is determined, principally, by her gender. The importance of feminism is to demonstrate the importance of women, to reveal that historically women have been subordinate to men, and, lastly, to bring about gender equity. Scott (in Zinsser, 1993:54), states that "gender" gives a meaning of gender that has been a systematically contentious issue for many people around the world. Zinsser believes that the term "gender" has been used to refer to the social, cultural and psychological aspects of maleness and femaleness.

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Gender is the perception in which a society has delegated the roles of each sex. For instance, women are portrayed as housekeepers, while men, are portrayed as the providers or protectors of the family.

Finally, feminism seeks to transform pre-existing gender relations to allow women and men equal rights and opportunities within a particular socio-economic framework (Drew, 1995). Chukwuma (2007:135), in her feminist philosophy, defines feminism as a method and discourse animated by a desire to reconstruct history, in order to constitute women as subjects. Feminism, in general, can be referred to as a movement aimed at establishing and defending equal political opportunities for women. African women have drawn their inspiration from western feminism, but believe feminism should be shaped by their environment.

Although, feminism, generally, provides the interests of women in patriarchal societies, some African women writers and critics cannot see the relevance of the Western feminist ideology in the African environment. They see feminism as "a malignant symptom of a world turned upside down" (Ndulue, 1996:11). As a result, some critics have challenged Western feminism for its perceived universalisation of women's experiences, racially-based constructions, and interpretation that is often anti-male, anti-culture and anti-religion in its theoretical framework (Nkealah, 2006). Anthias and Yuval-Davis, cited in Kolawole, (1999) assert that Western feminism is not only culturally and historically specific, but that it is an inherently middle-class ideology (Kolawole, 1999). The feminist movement is exclusively linked to the activism of bourgeois white women and not to the struggles for freedom, justice and equality initiated by blacks (Taylor, 2001). Because of these criticisms, it became

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imperative for African women to evolve a new feminist ideology that speaks to their social-culture and political conditions.

Having established that Western feminism paved way for African feminism, a discussion on African women's feminism becomes pertinent. African women critics have had to negotiate between feminism, womanism and humanism as an appropriate term for the interpretation of their works (Nkealah, 2006). The African feminist ideology has evolved mainly from the need to situate African women's struggles. In fact, African feminism recognises a common struggle with African men that are the removal of the yokes of foreign domination and European/America exploitation. African feminism can also be defined as the study of the treatment and representation of women in an African context, with particular interest to the specific historical, social, economic and political injustices African women faced as a result of, but not only restricted to, the effects of colonialism (Putter, 2011:11).

Consequently, many theorists who have rejected Western feminism advocate different views of feminism. One such critic, Ogundipe-Lesile (1994), substitutes feminism with stiwanism, an acroynm for "Social Transformation Including Women In Africa". Stiwanism explains the relationship between African women and men from an African feministic view as noted below:

> Wanted to stress the fact that what we want in Africa is social transformation. It is not about warring with men, the reversal of role, or doing to men whatever women think that men have been doing for centuries, but it is trying to build a harmonious society. The transformation of African society is the responsibility of both men and women and it is also in their interest. The new word describes what similarly minded women and myself would like to see in Africa (Ogundipe-Lesile 1994:207).

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Ekpa (2000:28) concurs with this assertion as noted in her postulation that African feminism seeks to give the woman a sense of herself as a worthy, effectual, and contributing being, while rejecting stereotypes of women that deny her a positive identity. An African woman should recognise her potential as a human being and be proud of the areas in which she excels in the home or at work. This would enable her to appraise others and be afforded dignity. Given the above understanding, it becomes important that we focus on the representation of women's experiences in Eastern Nigeria as portrayed by Adimora-Ezeigbo. Adimora-Ezeigbo states in an interview with Arndt (1998) that: "I am a feminist but of course guided by my culture, it differs from the American or European feminist". Thus, Adimora-Ezeigbo's feminism is not combative, but seeks to emancipate women in society so that they can contribute to the growth of their families and society. She refers to herself as a feminist, but this does not mean that she is anti-men. Instead, she is concerned about the oppressive situation that women find themselves in and yearns that these conditions be changed (Arndt, 1998). She also points out her perspectives, which locate her ideology in the discourses of womanism. She emphasised: "I don't believe that confrontation as you have in Western radical feminism will solve the problems of women. I believe in complementarity between men and women for the good of all" (Joseph, 1995:15).

The deficiencies of the universal noted in the way feminism is dominated by western women evoked a passion for black/African women to invoke womanism. Womanism postulated by Alice Walker (1983) in her essay "*In Search Of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*" argues that womanism gave black feminists a platform to express, identify and give relevance to their experiences. Acholonu (1994:106), the mother of motherism, describes the existing relationship between African men and women as complementary.

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Other African-feminists oppose the notion that complementarity does not exist yet and is still to be gained. Accordingly, complementarity is, by necessity, based on men's and women's equality in rights and status. Hudson-Weems (1993) has also expounded on the theory of Africana womanism. She also emphasises the complementary roles of women and men. In some African feminist view, complementarity is by necessity based on men's and women's equality in rights and status, where a transformation of existing gender relationships must inevitably come first. Complementarity would be brought about in performance with the men. This is the approach of Adimora-Ezeigbo and many other African feminists (Arndt, 2000).

Adimora-Ezeigbo advocates for "Woman Feminism" because it is closest to the lives of African women. She is a feminist who is guided by her culture and differs from the American or European feminists. Therefore, Adimora-Ezeigbo advocates for womanism because it is closest to the lives of African women. The womanist perspective is one of the various offshoots of the feminist ideology (Wood, 1993), which seeks to project the needs of the Black woman within the context of patriarchal, colonial and post-colonial experiences. Womanism is an alternate theory which puts both men and white feminists at different levels and aims to validate the formerly deprived women. Gaidzanwa (1985) notes that the womanist agenda seeks to retrieve the multiple meanings of gender within socially defined relations between women and men. Womanism is an attempt to better the lot of women through institutional changes in a patriarchy. It also advocates a complementary relationship between men and women.The term womanism was, coined by Alice Walker (1983) in her attempt to draw a line between western and black feminism. Walker(1983:xi-xii) defines a womanist as:

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> A black feminist or feminist of colour. A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as a natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or non-sexually, committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically for health. Traditionally universalist, loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the spirit. Loves struggle. Loves the folk. Loves herself. Regardless, womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender .

Thus, the term womanism establishes the place for the Black female literary experience. Walkers' definition of womanism suggests sexual relationships between women and men, while radical feminism advocates separation from men. Both concepts are challenging, but African womanism excludes such radical feminist ideas (Nkealah, 2006).

Womanism gives attention to both women and men to function harmoniously in building society positively. Okonjo (1985:25) observes that "Black feminism" is a philosophy that celebrates "Black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of womanhood". Women of colour were over looked in feminist movements towards the end of the second wave of feminism in the 1970s and on the eve of the third wave in the 1980s and 1990s. Kolawole (1997:13), in her book *Womanism and African Consciousness*, claims that those who reject the term feminism are looking for a terminology that is more specific to their cultural experience, and the most dominant concept acceptable to them is womanism or African feminism. Kolawole (1997:24), thus, defines womanism as "the totality of feminine self-expression, self-retrieval, and self-assertion in positive cultural ways".

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Interestingly, the agenda of black women activists became more expansive than that of women. It gave room for the tackling of specific social, economic and political issues facing black communities. All these were incorporated into a theoretical paradigm that is today called "Black Feminism". The term African womanhood has brought some confusion in distinguishing between "Black feminism" and "African feminism". As a result, many African women writers have embraced the definition of womanism offered by Hudson-Weens in her book *Africana Womanism* (1993:192):

> Neither an outgrowth nor an addendum to feminism, Africana Womanism is not Black Feminism. Africana feminism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture, and therefore it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires of African women.

Hudson-Weems (1993) relates 'womanism' to African women and their struggle against African patriarchy. *Africana Womanism* is a concept foregrounded on the African cultural experiences and the struggles and needs of African women. Western feminism had various types of feminism, which include Liberal feminism, radical feminism, and structural feminism (Woods, 1993). Womanism, according to Kolawole (1999), does not require compartmentalisation. It encompasses any woman who consciously identifies with the African content, women emancipation and self-realisation. Womanism differs from feminism because it recognises and seeks to fight the triple oppression of Black women along racial, classist and sexist grounds. Ogini (1996) points out the difference between womanism and feminism, in her statement that "womanism needs man" while "feminism shuns man". Umeh (2010) is of the opinion that feminism ends with the separation of the man and woman, whereas womanist novels are committed to the survival and unity of

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males and females. The womanist ideology supports both men and women, in order to redress racial and social injustices. Womanism is an alternate theory which puts both men and white feminists at different levels and aims to validate the formerly deprived women. hooks (1998) learned that some racist sparks are depicted in the white female fiction which induced inferiority complexes in the black counterparts. The Africana womanist theory critically examines the limitations of feminist theory and helps to comprehensively explain the ideas of and activism of some African women who have contributed to the womanist theory from differing ideological perspectives (Hudson-Weems, 2004). Womanism is rooted in Black culture which accounts for the centrality of family, community and motherhood. However, it is evident that womanism like feminism strives for a total liberation of women from religion and socio-cultural institutions that consign women to the margins. The uniqueness of the womanist approach is its traditionalistic aspects which show women as having society at heart, thus they cannot erase men from their lives in the manner associated with the western feministic approach. Therefore, the African perspective on womanism centralises womanhood, which is defined by the family and community.

Furthermore, womanism gives room for partnership between males and females. However, for this partnership to be achieved, men have to reconstruct their thinking on women's roles in society. Most African writers and critics advocate for a modification of culture, which prevents women from exercising the same rights as men within and outside the family. This is because culture is an inevitable part of human identity and an adaptation to international human rights standards which would empower women to function freely within a limitless space, without trespassing. As a result, African writers and critics, whether they are feminists or womanists, should be agents of transformation in their individual

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cultures. As such, Adimora-Ezeigbo embarks on a journey of role re-evaluation and redefinition of womanhood within the context of the Igbo culture. She follows Nwapa, the first Nigerian novelist, who in her works *Efuru* (1966) and *Idu* (1968) protested against the downgrading of the Igbo woman in society.

Adimora-Ezeigbo explores female experiences from their different African cultures in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial period. Most of Adimora-Ezeigbo's writing focuses on women's experiences. The trilogy is set in Nigeria, particularly in an Igbo society, with *The Last of the Strong Ones* describes the period of colonial intrusion and the establishment of Christianity in Igboland. *House of Symbols* describes the 1940s and 1950s experiences in colonial Nigeria when Christianity and Western education had taken root, while *Children of the Eagle* describe the memories of the pre- and post-Biafran war among the Igbos in Independent Nigeria.

In her novels, Adimora-Ezeigbo uses female characters who are intellectually and physically strong, as well as brave in the leadership of institutions where they act alongside their men. The women attain self-fulfilment and contribute to societal development in a patriarchal society. For example, the novels *The Last of the Strong Ones, House of Symbols* and *Children of the Eagle* reflect motherhood as an indispensable part of womanhood. This ideology effectively defines women simply as reproductive beings through whom men validate their manhood. That validation is, however, only achieved if a woman produces male offspring. If she fails to bear male children, she becomes an object of ridicule in society. Adimora-Ezeigbo questions this reduction of a woman's worth on the basis of the gender of her children. Her womanist vision constructs motherhood positively, but, to some extent, shows

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motherhood as part of the machinery that marginalises women, especially where motherhood is strictly tied to a specific gender of children. One can thus say that Adimora-Ezeigbo's novels are a response to the works by male authors that simply represent women as mothers and do not question the implication of that kind of representation on women's identities. The feminist or womanist approaches in the study are defined by role reversals against patriarchy. It is in this context that all the female stereotypes are altered and new ones are paged.

Referring to the nature of African women's writing, Brooks (2000:22) asserts that "rather than writing back to the Empire, it is writing back to African male authors on behalf of African women, reclaiming the voice that has been previously denied to them". It can be said that feminism and post-colonialism are interwoven in a way. Feminist discourse shares many similarities with post-colonial theory.

The feminist theory largely draws its revolting concepts from the post-colonial ideologies. In other words feminism can be read as a development or part and parcel of post-colonial theories though it alienates its challenges towards women. It consists of ideologies postulated by the post-colonial cadres of literature such as Said's (1978) 'othering' and Spivak's (1988) subaltanity. Like in the post –colonial aspects feminism operates the same way Rabaka (2003) perceives post-colonialism and the post-colonial society as still subjected to the neo-colonialist aspects of race and cultures, which he suggest that post-colonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction. It is in this post-colonial resistance and reconstruction that, feminism adopted. Among other post-colonial critics Loomba

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(1998) shows how sexuality has impact on the context of colonialism as she explores the intersection of the feministic concepts into post colonial ideology.

Feminism is perceived from the post-colonial angle chiefly because of the hegemonic structure posed by patriarchy over women and symbolises the colonizer and the colonized. Ashcroft *et al.* (1989:2) states that "Post-colonialism" is, however, used to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonialisation to the present day.The post-colonial did not just emerge to fill the space of language of political cultural analysis. Its spread was coincidental with and dependent on the eclipse of an older paradigm of the "Third World" during the late 80s. The "Third World" was coined in the 50s in France by Analogy to the third estate (the commoners, all those who were neither the nobility nor the clergy). The term "Third World" gained international currency in both academic and political contexts, especially in reference to anti-colonial movements (Afkzal-Khan & Seshadri-Crook, 2000).

Dirlik (1994:328) notes that post-colonialism began "when the third world intellectuals arrived in the first world academe". Said, a post-colonial theorist, moved the colonial into the first world academy and into literary and cultural theory. Said coined the term "Orientalism" (1978) which attempts to explain how European/Western colonisers looked upon the "other". The "other" refers to what is viewed as inferior and alien to the West. So many post-colonial texts such as *The Empire Writes Back*: *Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures* (1989) have defined it differently. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin define the term post-colonial as:

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> The literatures of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries and Sri Lanka are all post-colonial literatures. The literature of the USA should also be placed in this category. Perhaps because of its post-colonial nature has not been generally recognized. But its relationship with the metropolitan centre as it evolved over the last two centuries has been paradigmatic for post-colonial literature everywhere. What each of these literature has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonialism and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial (1989: 246).

However, post-colonial literatures written by women went against colonial writers and ideologies, which elevated men as the only ones whose voices had to be heard. Among other post-colonial critics Loomba (1998) shows how sexuality has impact on the context of colonialism as she explores the intersection of the feministic concepts into post colonial ideology.

Hutcheon writes extensively on both postmodernity and feminism. Hutcheon notes in an interview with O'Grady (1997) that feminisms (in the plural) were important for articulating a variety of political positions possible within the umbrella term of gender from liberal, humanist to cultural materialist. It challenged dominant discourses (usually through self-consciousness and parody), but it also re-instated those very discourses in the act of challenging them. Although there is a difference between feminism and postmodernism, both theories, according to Hutcheon (1989:43) do share a view of art as a social sign, inevitably and avoidably enmeshed in other signs in the system of meaning and value.

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> Feminisms have successfully urged postmodernism to reconsider - in terms of gender - its anti-metanarrative challenges to that humanist 'universal' called 'Man' and have supported and reinforced its' de-doxifying' of the separation between the private and the public, the personal and the political; on the other hand, postmodern parodic and ironic representational strategies have offered feminist artists an effective way of working within and yet challenging dominant patriarchal discourses (1989:43).

Both discourses, African feminism and post-colonial theory, are predominantly political and concern themselves with the struggle against oppression and injustice. Both reject the established hierarchical and patriarchal system, which is dominated by the white male; they strongly deny the supposed supremacy of masculine power and authority. The oppressed woman is, in this sense, similar to the colonised subject (Temale & Oloka-Onyango, 1995). Women were disadvantaged on the grounds not only of gender, but also of race, social class, and in some cases, religion.

Essentially, exponents of post-colonialism are reacting against colonialism in the political and economic sense, while feminist theorists are rejecting gender inequality. Rabaka (2003:96) points out that African women literature speaks back to the colonialists and constructed ideologies that define men's voices as the only ones that should be heard in society. Feminism is perceived from the post-colonial angle because of the hegemonic structure posed by patriarchy over women, and it symbolises the coloniser and the colonised. The kinds of narratives chosen by writers at the time of independence in Nigeria reflected this male-centred vision of national history. However, from the early 1970s, things began to change with the resurgence of the women's movement in Europe and the United

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States, bringing about the development of legal recognition, identity and rights on the basis of sameness (Paletschek, 2004).

The competing definitions of feminism, African feminism, womanism and post-colonial theory in African literary discourse have been carefully examined in this chapter. Feminist theory suggests a body of knowledge which offers critical explanations of women's subordination (Stacey, 1993). It also focuses on the exclusion and subordination of women in both public and private lives. There are different types of feminist theories such as Liberal feminism, Radical feminism, Marxist feminism, Psychoanalytical feminism, African feminism and Black feminism. The main goal of feminist theory is to analyse gender relations, how they are constituted and experienced (Flax, 1990). Therefore, the above theoretical concepts will be used to analyse women's experiences as depicted in Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy. However, the purpose of this study is to examine Adimora-Ezeigbo's fictional depiction of women's responses to patriarchy with particular focus on agency. What is significant about Adimora-Ezeigbo's novels is that her female characters do not simply resign themselves to their oppressive realities, but they are active agents in the re-ordering or re-structuring of their societies. Their actions elevate the status of women within their societies.

As earlier noted, the study considers how Adimora-Ezeigbo's novels act as a counter-discourse to the fictional silencing of women in pre-colonial Igbo society. In *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1964), Achebe depicts the effects of colonialism on the Igbo society, but does not problematise the marginalisation of women in Umuofia even before the advent of colonialism. What is strikingly absent in Achebe's novel is the voice of women

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as decision-makers, as well as their contribution to the political development of the Umuofian society. Diala-Ogamba (2004) notes that in Achebe's work, Achebe looks at women from the cultural perspective showing male chauvinism in a patriarchal society.The exclusion of the female presence in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* has been taken up by feminist critics because of the obvious disparity in the delineation of male-female relations. Quayson (1994:118) also criticises Achebe's portrayal of women, which she considers partial and limiting. Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy, however, foregrounds women as active political participants and decision makers in Umuga. Her representation of women in the Igbo society is essentially womanist in that she rewrites women into the history of the Igbo society from pre-colonial to post-colonial times. The research, therefore, examines Adimora-Ezeigbo's womanist vision and repositioning African women in history, culture and society.

1.3 Problem statement, methodology and theoretical framework

The major problem investigated in the study is the ways in which patriarchy oppresses women in the depicted Igbo society as portrayed in Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy, *The Last of the Strong ones*, *House of Symbols* and *Children of the Eagle*. The investigation examines social institutions such as marriage and the family, and how women have suffered marginalisation, degradation and manipulation within these institutions throughout history. The study also evaluates the effectiveness of strategies that were used by fictional women to resist colonialism. In this case, the issue of women's leadership in the public sphere will be examined against the backdrop of a hegemonic power. In conclusion, the sub-problems

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are: Patriarchy and its oppressive machinery in Igbo society, the impact of colonialism on Igbo women, and finally the effectiveness of Igbo women leadership strategies.

Regardless of how male writers have portrayed women in their early novels, Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy envisions her fictional women as citizens capable of agency and transformation rather than citizens entrapped in disempowerment. The writer also endeavours to evaluate the impact of reconciling different values, for example, between the western and indigenous culture, the traditional and the modern, all aimed at a positive transformation in the Igbo society. Adimora-Ezeigbo establishes, from a womanist discourse, how motherhood/womanhood is perceived. In addition, she evaluates the active roles played by female characters as they try to overcome their oppressive realities and become active agents in the re-structuring of their societies.

This dissertation is a literary study and, as such, Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy is examined using critical content analysis. Content analysis involves studying a body of work to establish patterns and themes that give the work its thread. In this case, Adimora-Ezeigbo's three novels, *The Last of the Strong Ones, House of Symbols*, and *Children of the Eagle,* which constitute the primary data, were subjected to an in-depth critical study.

The analysis also examines the degree of inter-textuality in the three novels and how that contributes to the framing of the writer's womanist vision. The trilogy was critically analysed, drawing on theoretical perspectives such as feminism, African feminism and womanism that are mostly located within feminism and post-colonial theory. Critics such as Walker (1983), Huddson-Weems (1993), Said (1995), Dirlik (1994), were referred to in this discussion. The theoretical approach used in this research work is feminism. However, post-

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colonial theory's concepts such as Othering by Said (1995) were also referred to because most events in the trilogy describe the marginalising effect of colonialism in Eastern Nigeria. Furthermore, the concept "womanism", discussed by Walker (1983), was considered in the analysis of women's experiences in Eastern Nigeria. Critical views about women's experiences postulated by different African writers are considered in the study. Those ideas are incorporated in the study of the representation of women's experiences in Eastern Nigeria as portrayed in Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy.

1.4 Conclusion

This introductory chapter takes the form of an overview which states the statement of the problem; it discusses how patriarchy as portrayed in Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy oppresses women in the depicted Igbo society and outlined the research questions that guide the study. Theories informing the study were also discussed and, finally, the methodology used in this study was described.

Chapter 2 evaluates the ways in which some African male writers have represented Igbo women in their works. The chapter illustrates the stereotypical representations characteristic of the writings of writers such as Chinua Achebe and other African male writers. I examine how these African male writings serve as the backdrop against which Adimora-Ezeigbo's novels are analysed, showing the clear distinction between her portrayal of women and the portrayals in earlier works by the cited male writers.

Chapter 3 analyses *The Last of the Strong Ones*. It seeks to show how Adimora-Ezeigbo privileges women's leadership roles in the fight against colonial domination. The analysis also focuses on four female characters whose involvement in the leadership structures of

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the Umuga society contribute significantly to elevating women's positions within this patriarchal culture. It also examines how Adimora-Ezeigbo re-writes women back into history, culture and the society.

Chapter 4 explores the changing phase of Igbo cultural heritage as it interfaces with aspects of western colonialism. This chapter also examines the Western attempt to destabilise the Umuga society and the strategies employed by Umuga women to counter such destabilisation. *House of Symbols* shows how women characters draw their strength from other women and make use of female networks to stage their resistance against foreign value systems.

Chapter 5 explores the author's recreation of the lives of characters perceived to have lived and interacted in the first of the trilogy, *The Last of the Strong Ones*. The study also examines the presence of a future envisioned and preserved in *Children of the Eagle*.

Lastly, chapter 6 offers a summative analysis of the central issues raised in the research.

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Chapter 2

MALE REPRESENTATIONS OF IGBO WOMEN WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART* AND *ARROW OF GOD*

2.1 Introduction

This chapter evaluates the ways in which Chinua Achebe's writings about the Igbo society represent women. It also examines the African male writers' perceptions towards women and gender in their literary texts. There is a sharp contrast between the first African novels set in the past and which were largely written by men, and contemporary ones, some of which were authored by women. This contrast has to do with the delineation of women in Achebe's novels *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1964b). The chapter illustrates the stereotypical representations of women in his works. The evaluation serves as the backdrop against which Adimora-Ezeigbo's novels will be analysed, showing the clear distinction between her portrayal of women and the portrayals in earlier works by male writers, such as Achebe.

2.2 The exclusion of women from the public sphere as portrayed in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Various representations in African literature project male dominance and inadequately plead the case of African women. Feminist critics attempt a re-analysis of gender relations in some literary narratives. According to Stratton (1990:98), female characters have been portrayed in ways that typify gender inequality and gender stereotypes. She states further that female characters are portrayed as mothers confined to domestic affairs and

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responsible for taking care of their households and husbands. She also notes that many early male writers in their literary texts have portrayed female characters as agents of moral corruption and contamination. The feminist novel in Nigeria, it can be argued was triggered off by Achebe's early novels whose portrayal of women was negligible and male heroism in the Igbo society.

Male authored texts such as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* and Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* condone patriarchy and marginalise women (Fonchingong, 2006:135). This chapter focuses only on Achebe and his representation of women in his novels. Achebe published four novels, from the year 1958-1966. The novels draw on the history of Nigeria from the pre-colonial era to the post-independent era. These novels, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), and *A Man of the People* (1966) focus mainly on the Igbo society. *Things Fall Apart*, the first novel, is set in Umuofia, a patriarchal society, whose value system favours men to the detriment of women. The novel depicts the Igbo society as it experiences the destruction of its African culture due to the intrusion of the European colonialists. Begam (1997) notes that Achebe's novel represents a particular transition moment in Nigerian history, which is referred to as the passing away of the traditional Igbo culture. In Begam's (1997: 398) view, Achebe's writing is an "adversarial history" against the colonialist discourse and the attitudes and assumptions of the colonialist writers.

Achebe's writing, at a time of nationalist ferment (Aduke, 1996), was motivated by a desire to restore the dignity and pride of the black person in his culture. Achebe attempts to recapture the strength of the African past, hence the stress on macho heroism and

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masculinity. This male-centred approach is reflected in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1964b). *Things Fall Apart* focuses on the macho power of Okonkwo, the protagonist in the novel. Okonkwo is angry with his son Nwoye who is more comfortable listening to his mother's stories of the "tortoise and its willy ways" than his father's "masculine stories of violence and bloodshed" (Achebe, 1958:42). Okonkwo wants his son Nwoye to grow into a tough young man who will be capable of ruling the household after Okonkwo's death (Achebe, 1958:42). Similarly, in *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu rebukes Oduche's mother over her displeasure at sending her son to the white man's religion as noted in his coquestion "how does it concern you what I do with my sons?" (Achebe, 1964b:51). This indicates how women were forced to envision the world from a patriarchal perspective. In so doing, Achebe clearly lives up to the claim of rehabilitating the dignity of the Igbo people, especially, the Igbo men and not women. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* indeed depicts a masculine literary work in which the status of women in Umuofia is very low. This is seen in the way Okonkwo was introduced into the novel: "He had a large barn full of yams and had three wives" (Achebe, 1958:5) while the women are introduced as first wife, second wife and third wife. Hence, Diala-Ogamba (2004) rightly notes that Achebe looks at women from the cultural perspective that shows male chauvinism in a patriarchal society.

The marginalisation of the female presence in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* has been taken up by feminist critics to highlight the obvious disparity in the delineation of male-female relations. Chukwuma, an advocate for African women's causes, comments that:

> The female character in African fiction is a facile lack-luster human being, the quiet member of a household, content only to bear children, unfulfilled if she does not, and handicapped if she bears

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only daughters. In the home, she was not part of decision-making but as a daughter, wife and mother even when the decisions affected her directly (2002:219).

Some feminists have reacted and are still reacting to the exclusion of women from the public sphere. Pateman (1983) notes that the dichotomy between the private and the public sphere is central to almost two centuries of feminist writing and political struggle; it is what the feminist movement is about. Feminist critics have pointed out that Achebe, in his early novels, ignored important gender issues by side-lining the post-colonial woman, in order to focus on post-colonial manhood which are so prominent in post-colonial African countries. The marginalisation of women's issue in his novels suggest "first things first", which implies that Africans deal with national problems before "less important issues" such as gender (Powell, 2008:167). The portrayal of female characters in post-colonial literature is clearly seen. Ogunyemi (1988:66) sees African literature by male writers and male critics as "phallic" and focusing more on the male character and his achievements. Female protagonists are portrayed as surbodinates to their male counterparts. Female characters are usually not accorded significant roles in male authored texts. This is seen in *Things Fall Apart*, where the women, except Chielo, are portrayed as wives, mothers and helpmates in the farms; they are not allowed to make important household decisions.

Agbasiere (1999:82) asserts that literary texts written by male writers portray stereotypical features of females that depict them as weak and unable to overcome their hardship. Critics have hoped for a more balanced representation of the African female in the novels, and thus have questioned the consistent pattern in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God*, *No Longer at Ease* and *A man of the People,* in which everything revolves around the men (Ohale, 2008). Feminist criticism of Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* did not start until the

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1990s. Critics perceive Achebe to be anti-women in *Things Fall Apart*. They criticise the portrayal of women such as Chielo, Nwoye's mother and Ekwefi only as occupying the spiritual, the maternal and the domestic sphere respectively, in a patriarchal society. Patriarchy rules in every aspect of the depicted Igbo society. Patriarchy bestows absolute power on men through customs and traditions which are modified to favour them. This is shown through the marginalisation of female characters. Ikemufuna is handed to Umuofia so as to atone for the murder of one of Umuofia's daughters. Okonkwo's house is expected to keep the boy until his death. Okonkwo does not consult his wives nor inform them; he just brings the boy home, and when his eldest wife tries to speak he angrily says "do what you are told, woman" (Achebe, 1958:24). This simply shows that a woman does not have the right to interfere with the affairs of the house, especially when the husband has decided, and regardless of how the decision affects them.

Generally, colonialism built its systems around men; it empowered men economically and had the contrary effect on women. In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo celebrates the power of men in a traditional setting where men achieve their fame and social success through the victimisation of opposite sex. Okonkwo's personality and role are with violence or capable of attracting violence. He is said to "be tall and huge, and his busy eye brows and wide nose gave him a very severe look" (Achebe, 1958:2). Also, Okonkwo "was a man of action, a man of war....in Umuofia's latest war he was the first to bring home a human head" (Achebe, 1958:9). Here, Achebe empowers Okonkwo with so much fame and success and delineates women to just function at the domains of the home. Chukwuma (2002:16) contends that African "indigenous cultures had more regard for women in terms of the role they played" and notes further that culture has essentially served the purposes of men,

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especially during the colonial period. Women are confined to the domains of the home, child minding and farming. We are told that women weed three times at definite periods in the life of the yams (Achebe, 1958:27). This is an extremely important duty, considering that if this task is not carried out properly, the yam crops would not grow. As women's dependency on men increased, so were their passivity, voicelessness and marginalisation (Chukwuma, 2002:16). *In Things Fall Apart*, we see Okonkwo playing his role as head of the family, how he rules his household with a heavy hand, and the way his wives, especially, his youngest wife, live in perpetual fear of his temper (Achebe, 1958:11). At the slightest provocation, he beats his wives, and, according to the Igbo custom, this ill- treatment is condoned. Okonkwo's second wife, Ekwefi, cut a few leaves off the banana tree and, for that, she received a sound beating. Okonkwo leaves her almost dead after firing a gun at her. Despite this incident, the New yam Festival still takes place the next morning, and no attention is given to Okonkwo's wife (Achebe, 1958:30). As a result, critics such as Kolawole, (1997), Stratton, (1994), and Petersen, (2001) accuse Achebe of sexism. They note that Achebe celebrates male heroism, patriarchy and patrimony in his novel, but marginalises his female characters. In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo "had a large barn full of yams and he had just three wives. And now he was going to take the Idemili title, the third highest in the land" (Achebe 1958:5). Thus the women are mere objects for their men folks, and, as Mezu (1995:2) notes, in the society of *Things Fall Apart* "the man is everything and the woman is nothing".

Achebe depicts the lives of married women in Umuofia as very confined. There is a separation between the domestic and public sphere, where power is reserved only for men. Women are excluded from the positions which would give them titles. Achebe's women,

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such as Okonkwo's three wives, are relegated to the background and treated as outsiders. The exception is Chielo, the priestess of Agbala. This ill-representation of women stuck when Achebe was trying to present real heroes in Africa, different from the ones Joseph Conrad had portrayed in his novel *Heart of Darkness* (1988).

The overall picture of women in Achebe's novels; the overall picture of women in Achebe's novels is of weakness and self-effacement. The story begins with the portrayal of Okonkwo as a strong and vibrant character in an Umuofia society where women were relegated to the background of domestic chores and motherhood. Achebe's literary portrait of the history and culture of the Igbo society was limited to the extent that he marginalised women and neglected their voices. Achebe seems to imply that once a woman has been "purchased" from her family in marriage, she has no way of escape. This is seen when Mgbafo leaves her husband's house because she was physically abused by her husband. Her husband is not happy about that and, in his report to the egwugwu says "I married her with my money and my yam" (Achebe, 1958:72) and is thus surprised that his in-laws have taken his wife and children from him. Despite the fact that his wife had a reason for leaving his house, the egwugwu suggests that Uzowulu change his ways, and that he should beg his in-laws. Uzowulu is not given a proper or legal punishment for physically abusing his wife. Besides, the feelings and the voice of the wife are not heard. Finally, he is given access to his wife. This indicates that women did not have a say in this society. In Umuofia, women's main value is to serve their husbands and families. This is shown by the fact that giving birth to children is "a woman's glory" (Achebe, 1958:77). Quayson (1994:118) criticises Achebe's portrayal of women, which he considers partial and limiting. This is confirmed in the way Achebe portrays Okonkwo's wives as emotionally and physically weak. He assigns them

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feminine roles that mostly have to do with the nurturing of children and taking care of their husbands; he portrays them as soft and compassionate human beings (Diala-Ogamba, 2004). Female writers and critics challenge this portrayal because what is clear here is that Achebe tries to counter the colonial discourse about Africa, but in, so doing, ironically constructs the male/female hierarchy (Konate, 2006).

African women writers seek to establish feministic sensibilities in the African novel by casting female characters in a new light. Segun urges female writers to incorporate all aspects of women's achievements in their writing. This is noted in her affirmation that:

> There have been women activists such as those in the celebrated Aba Women's riots of 1929, who faced colonial guns to protest against what they considered an injustice the erosion of their traditional powers in the township councils, although the immediate cause of the riots was a rumour about taxation. There was also Funmilayo Ransom-Kuti's grassroots mobilization of Egba women in Abeokuta against perceived victimization by a despotic ruler whom they succeeded in driving into exile. But the impression given in our literature is that such women have never existed in our society (2001:298).

This confirms that women were not given a place in the literatures of early African writers such as Achebe (Segun, 2001). Stratton (1994) maintains that Achebe's post-colonial texts legitimise the exclusion of women from post-colonial politics and public affairs, through its representation of the pre-colonial Igbo society as governed entirely by men. Adimora-Ezeigbo (1996) also views Achebe as one of the male novelists who had formerly relegated women's experiences to the background. Aidoo castigates Achebe for allowing his

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protagonist Okonkwo to batter his wives while his other wives hover around whimpering. Powell states that:

> In his two historical novels, in fact, Achebe consistently side-lines the place of the postcolonial women in order to focus on postcolonial manhood. Women's lives often serve as little more than fodder for the exploration of masculinity. And because Achebe does hold such a high profile position in African studies, his gender-determined blind spots demand careful scrutiny (2008: 167).

Some feminists perceive Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as focusing on the masculine principle and a corresponding depreciation of the feminine. More importantly Andrade (1996:255) remarks upon "the category of the masculine" in Achebe's novel, which she says, "attempts to avoid the representation of colonial relations in gendered terms by inscribing an excessively masculine Igbo man". Andrade further observes that in the Manichean allegory of the anti-colonial struggle, the colonial/European side is characterised as "masculine", while the weak and disorderly native is necessarily "feminine". This relates to the way Okonkwo constantly evaluates his own masculinity through his ability to grow a sufficient number of yams to feed his family, something which is only accomplished by "a great man indeed" because "yam stood for manliness" (Achebe, 1958:26). Okonkwo is so much obsessed with status, to the extent that he believes that any man without a title, is a woman (Achebe, 1958:11).

Reading *Things Fall Apart* through a feminist lens shows that Achebe portrays the women as less important characters. Okonkwo's father, despite his worthlessness in society, was given a name Unoka, while Okonkwo's wives are introduced as the first, second and third wife, or

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referred to as the mother of Nwoye and his second wife Ekwefi. The wives are mentioned only briefly and examined only in relation to Okonkwo's actions or mentioned doing domestic chores like cooking, plaiting their hair, decorating their bodies, dancing, running away from the egwugwu and being given in marriage. Women are not seen selling their goods in market places, sitting in judgment on members of their community, or taking action alongside or against men.

Nevertheless, some women are the brains behind the laws and norms of Umuofia community. For instance, Chielo is a widow with two children, but she is also the priestess of Agbala, an important deity in Umuofia. Chielo is the only woman who is portrayed with authority, as the priestess. Mezu (1995) asserts that in Achebe's world, the only women who win respect are those who are beyond the ordinary societal bounds such as Chielo, the priestess. Her connection to the gods removes her from society, and it gives her a great deal of power. Thus, women associated with Gods are seen with greatness, and do not share the same class with other women.

In *Things Fall Apart*, women are viewed mainly as child-bearers and help-mates for their husbands. Men are empowered to the detriment of women, who are silenced. Okonkwo is described with so much fame: he was a man of action, a man of war, a man known throughout the nine villages and even beyond (Achebe 1958: 3). The female gender is described as weak. For example; when Okonkwo feels remorseful for the killing of Ikemefuna as dictated by the oracle, he scolds himself: "when did you become a shivering old woman, 'Okonkwo asked himself,' you, who are known in all the nine villages for your valour in war? How can a man who has killed five men in battle fall to pieces because he has

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added a boy to their number? Okonkwo, you have become a woman indeed" (Achebe, 1958:51). After scolding himself he regains a certain amount of peace and then walks to his friends' house, Obierika, and they end up talking about his son Nwoye who takes after his father Unoka. He states that he wishes his son would grow to be a strong and hardworking man. Thus, he states that if his daughter Ezinma had been a boy, he would have been very happy (Achebe 1958:52). In other words, women are considered weak and useless, and yet Ezinma is not. Therefore, Okonkwo believes Ezinma's character was given to the wrong gender, Okonkwo does not see Ezinma as one who can function in the society from a patriarchal perspective.

An analysis of the position of women becomes important. Mezu, emphasises the condition of African women with these words:

> For centuries, African women languished on the fringe of their universe—neglected, exploited, degenerated, and indeed made to feel like outsiders. They were not invited to stay when men were engaged in any discussions; they were not included in councils of war; they did not form part of the masquerades representing the judiciary and ancestral spirits (1995:2).

From the above quotation, it can be inferred that Achebe's female characters, such as Okonkwo's three wives are "voiceless, virtually inconsequential" (Mezu, 1995:2). Most of the women lack individuality and cannot assert their selfhood even in their homes. They are invisible. The invisibility can be seen during the egwugwu ceremony where the crowd gathered on the village ilo but "It was clear from the way that the crowd stood or sat that the ceremony was for men. There were many women, but they looked on from the fringe

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like outsiders" (Achebe, 1958:70). The women watch the trial from a distance, while the men occupy the front position, thus making it clear that the ceremony was for men and not women. In addition, every aspect of Igbo life is gendered. This is seen from the crops that men and women grow. On one hand, men are the planters of yam, a symbol of "manliness" and "greatness" (Achebe, 1958:19), on the other hand, women are not allowed to plant yam because it is seen as a man's crop and "king of the crops"; rather they are allowed to plant cassava, coco-yam, beans and maize. Achebe's women in *Things Fall Apart* are not supposed to be seen or heard. Therefore, no woman in Achebe's traditional novels features as a major character.

The dominant role for women, in a patriarchal society, such as the Igbo society, is to make a pure bride for an honourable man, be a submissive wife, and finally, bear many children. The men would then provide for the family and fight at battlefields. Furthermore, the women were maltreated by their husbands. Okonkwo's wife, Ojiugo, goes to make her hair at a neighbour's house, and when Okonkwo returns to find his food not ready, he beats her. Achebe's portrayal of women did not give value to them; they are beaten by their husbands. Chukukere (1995) affirms that the ideal female characters created by male writers often act within the framework of their traditional roles as wives and mothers. The respect and love which a woman earns is relative to the degree of her adaption to these roles. This is evidenced by the way Okonkwo slaughters a goat for one of his wives who had three sons in a row. This indicates that Igbo women are critical for bearing children, especially male children, who would carry their family name. This is mostly seen in a patriarchal society where the male child is considered more important than the female child.

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Interestingly, Okonkwo's brutality on his wives does not draw any attention from the elders. Attention is drawn only when he flogs his wife during "The Week of Peace", which is considered as a great offence in Umuofia. As a result, Okonkwo has to appease the goddess of the earth for himself and the community. Okonkwo's main principle is based on this patriarchal society whose hatred of women is a result of the phobia he developed in his childhood; he developed a hatred for his father who was referred to as "agbala".

> Even as a little boy he had resented his father's failure and weakness, and even now he still remembered how he had suffered when a playmate had told him that his father was *agbala* (Achebe, 1958:11).

In a patriarchal society, a man who does not measure up to the expected requirement is considered a woman. Therefore, men like Unoka are regarded as insignificant or referred to as weak or "women". Agbasiere (1999) asserts that a woman symbolises failure and inferiority; she is excluded from most gatherings and has no voice in public discussions. Okonkwo's life has been driven by the fear of failure and weakness, which lies deep within his soul. This inspires his overt show of male boldness. Okonkwo has never seen the positive influence of a woman. His disregard for women constitutes a devastating tragedy in which he not only dies, but is refused the embrace of the earth goddess. When Okonkwo dies he was not given a befitting burial as a titled man. He was thrown into the evil forest because he had committed suicide. Okonkwo's whole life is dominated by fear, the fear of failure, the fear of becoming like his father Unoka who died without a title (Achebe, 1958:7). His disdain for the female principle led to his downfall and tragic death. Okonkwo hangs himself, which is abominable, for "it is against our custom; said one of the men. It is an

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abomination for a man who commits murder will not be buried by his clansman" (Achebe, 1958:165). This experience was not encountered by any woman even the lowest man in the patriarchal world of the novel. Okonkwo's death is, thus, ironically, worse than any character's in the novel because he, a famous man, died just like a man without a title.

The fear of being seen like his father made Okonkwo hate everything his father Unoka loved such as gentleness and idleness. This resulted in Okonkwo taking his own life when he considered himself a failure in his society. Achebe's portrayal of Okonkwo does not embrace any aspects of femininity (Rhoads, 1993). Okonkwo's sense of masculinity and honour gives him a close relationship with his daughter Ekwefi. Nwoye is considered a source of frustration for his father due to his inability to fulfil the traditional role of masculinity expected of a young man in the Igbo society. Achebe reinforces the marginalisation of women in Umuofia when Okonkwo's mother is portrayed as nameless, which means she has no identity in the patriarchal society.

Achebe also restricts women to religion. Female characters are depicted in the traditional way as goddesses and priestesses. The narrator in the novel recalls that during Okonkwo's boyhood, "the priestess in those days was woman called Chika. She was full of the power of her god, and she was greatly feared" (Achebe, 1958: 13). The present priestess is Chielo, "the priestess of Agbala, the Oracle of the hill and the Caves" (Achebe, 1958:39). There is an episode during which Chielo snatches Ekwefi's daughter, Ezinma, away. The narrator describes that: "Okonkwo pleaded with her to come back in the morning because Ezinma was now asleep. But Chielo ignored what he was trying to say and went on shouting that Agbala wanted to see his daughter. The priestess suddenly screamed. 'Beware, Okonkwo!'

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she warned 'Beware of exchanging words with Agbala. Does a man speak when a god speaks? Beware!'" (Achebe, 1958:80). This shows the priestess' power; As a woman, she could occupy the role of a spiritual leader. Thus, such restriction undermines their physical prowess as members of society.

Another example of a woman restricted to religion is the representation of the earth goddess, Ani. Ani is described as playing a great part in the life of the people, more than any other deity. Ani's power is illustrated through her role in the yam harvest, where all members of the clan observe the Week of Peace prior to the harvest season, in order to "honour [their] great goddess of the earth without whose blessings our crops will not grow" (Achebe, 1958:24). This reveals the important role that Ani plays in the success of the yam crops. In *Things Fall Apart,* Ani is seen as the ultimate judge of morality and conduct in Umuofia. This is because of the fact that the yam is a male crop, which implies that the earth goddess has the power to either increase their crops or not because without her blessing their crops will not grow (Achebe, 1958:24). When the Week of Peace is broken by Okonkwo's beating of his wife, Ojiugo, Ezeani the priest of the earth goddess says "The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall all perish" (Achebe, 1958:24). Here, we see the powerful role a woman occupies in the land. The earth goddess represents conduct in Umuofia.

Achebe's novels portray a patriarchal society that has no compassion for the brutality that is all-pervading in the lives of Okonkwo's wives. The patriarchal society devalues women so much that even their feelings are not significant. Ojo-Ade (1983:158) states that women are

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"Dominated, Disadvantaged, Exploited and Excluded". However, there is only one woman, a young lady who captures the attention of everyone even her father Okonkwo. Ezinma, in the novel, represents intelligence, vitality, and fortitude. In her relationship with her mother, she exhibits what Okonkwo perceives as masculine tendencies. Ogbaa (1999) states that, women "may have been portrayed as less visible than men in Umuofia, but their roles were as important as those of men". Ironically, the female becomes Okonkwo's refuge. Okonkwo commits the crime of killing a clansman, a female crime, and so is forced to flee from Umuofia because it was a crime against the earth goddess. Okonkwo leaves Umuofia and seeks refuge in his motherland Mbanta. Uchendu explains:

> It's true that a child belongs to its father. But when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother's hut. 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 (Achebe, 1958:107).

Here, Uchendu draws our attention to the supreme position of women and that women are the constancy that can always be relied upon when things are not going well. Therefore, Okonkwo's maternal uncle, Uchendu, informs Okonkwo on the importance of the feminine principle in Igbo culture. Despite the fact that women have these spaces of social-religious power in Umuofia, Achebe did not give prominence to women because he was more concerned about the death of the Igbo culture in the face of colonial intrusion. More attention is given to the men in his fictional society.

Male writers, such as, Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi and Wole Soyinka have been labelled by some feminists, such as Ogundipe (1994), as chauvinists or as less sensitive to lot of the

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African women, who they portray as helpless, dependent and disparaged beings. The emergence of female writers, such Flora Nwapa, Bessie Head, Mabel Segun, Ama Ata Aidoo and Zaynab retrieved women from the back stage and put them on the centre stage. Chukwuma (1989:16) states that: "In every age and time there had been women who exhibited economic sense and resource management within and outside their homes even in the rural environment". African women have always had a legacy of achievement; Chukwuma affirms that African women writers should:

> Research into their herstories and tell women's lives and accomplishments; tell about the battered voiceless wife, also tell about the women of means who ruled their household.....tell about women because indeed there are some herstorical precedents whose stories will give hope to women. (1989:17).

The emergence of female writers resurfaced women from being at the background and began the portrayal of women as protagonists in their literary works.

2.3 The effects of polygamy on Igbo women as portrayed in Achebe's *Arrow of God*

Another major issue raised in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* is polygamy. Polygamy is still practised all over Africa and remains an obstacle to female emancipation. It marginalises women because it does not give women freedom and equity but brings about jealousy, rivalry and oppression. In Achebe's novel *Arrow of God*, polygamy promotes neglect, betrayal, envy and jealousy, as seen in the realtionship between Ezeulu's wives (Matefi and Ugoye). Davies (1986) notes that the custom of polygamy is deeply ingrained in many African cultures and that even though it is "oppressive to women," it is one of "the most difficult of traditions to eliminate". Polygamy has been in existence for centuries, even

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before the Europeans came into Africa, and its portrayal in Achebe's *Arrow of God*. Ezeulu, who is married to wives Matefi and Ugoye, is the protagonist of the novel. Polygamy, in *Arrow of God* seems to cause perpetual tension between women in the community. Some historians pointed out that colonialism just reinforced a patriarchal system that was already there in pre-colonial Africa. The novel begins with both wives quarrelling over whether the moon appears to have an evil "posture" (Achebe, 1964b:2). Rivalry is the order of the day as the novel progresses and it leads to physical confrontations between the wives and their children, much to Ezeulu's pleasure. The rivalry, jealousy and competition among women are expected and accepted and seen as inconsequential in Achebe's polygamous society. Ugoye tells her children throughout the novel about the troubled relationship of competing wives thus implying that her action to the other wife is only normal. In the novel, we see Achebe implying that competition between women are expected and acceptable in a polygamous society; this devalues women.

The presentation of women in Achebe's *Arrow of God* is basically that of rivalry and tension. Polygamy silences Matefi and Ugoye, and destroys their autonomy. Thus, polygamy as seen in the novel subjugates women to the needs and desires of men.

Arrow of God is basically about rivalry and tension between the coloniser and the colonised. Matefi and Ugoye are subordinated not only to the colonizing powers, but also to their husband. Polygamy, as portrayed in the novel, seems to breed a "male supremacist ideology", which hooks (1997:396) notes constructs the idea "that women are natural enemies, that solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot and do not bond with one another". Ezeulu regards rivalry between both wives as common and

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inconsequential. Ezeulu makes it clear that the relationship of rivalry between Matefi and Ugoye is of little significance to him. When Ugoye protests that Matefi has criticised her unfairly, Ezeulu says, "and if she did? Go and jump on her back if you can" (Achebe, 1964b: 29). It shows that Ezeulu takes pleasure in their rivalry and sees it as normal for co-wives to always have quarrels and fights. Thus, as seen in *Arrow of God* it is clear that polygamy dehumanises women.

In polygamous cultures, once a woman is married, she becomes the property of her husband's community. This is seen in the case of Obika and Okuata. Obika marries Okuata from a neighbouring Igbo community and her family gives her to her new husband and her people to live there for the rest of her life. "Okuata felt like an orphan child and tears came down her face" (Achebe, 1964b:117). This indicates that Okuata is not just given to her husband alone, but also to his family. She (Okuata) does not have a voice to reject this decision but she complies.

Women do not have a say in the raising of their own children. Ugoye protests against her son participating in a Christian missionary church, but Ezeulu tells her that what he does with his sons does not have anything to do with her (Achebe 1964b:46). This reaction suggests that, as a woman she does not have a right to decide what happens in the lives of her children. African feminists question the polygamous customs of Africa as they are represented in literature such as Achebe's, and as they exist in actuality (Powell, 2008:177). McLeer (1998:46) presents an alternative to reproducing the "Third World" Woman as the other. Furthermore, McLeer (1998) notes that we must "embrace notions of sisterhood and a global condition of women without erasing difference or negating other aspects of

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women's identity such as culture, ethnicity, nationalism and so forth". Women in post-colonial countries are silenced both by the traditional patriarchy under which many Africans construct their lives, and the legacy of colonialism. Some feminist scholars have avoided the issue of polygamy because they do not want to associate themselves with the Christian missionaries. These missionaries have taken it upon themselves to go to the extreme in eradicating polygamous customs among African converts (Kunhiyop, 2003:43). Kunhiyop further asserts that polygamy has frequently been considered by Christians "a state of adultery". When a polygamous man becomes converted to Christianity, he is required to choose just one out of the wives and divorce the rest. Those divorced go through a lot of trauma, some turn to prostitution or are unable to re-marry because of their cultural beliefs.

Achebe portrays in his novels that Nigerian cultures, especially the Igbo culture, were oppressively masculinist. Mezu (1995) explains that "in creating a masculine-based society, Achebe was merely putting literature to mimetic use, reflecting existing traditional mores". *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, dismiss important women's issues. Significantly, Achebe seems to dismiss the issue of African polygamy which is a major gender concern for feminists in the world. The conflict between Ezeulu's two wives (Matefi and Ugoye) seems insignificant to him and is referred to as trivial compared to the threat Ezeulu gets from the Christian missionaries. This shows that issues which concern women are seen as less important, while issues which have to do with men and the community are seen as more important in society. Ezeulu does not consider the argument between his two wives as important, he tries to stop the argument between his two sons by calling the "jealous wives" (Achebe, 1964b: 13). This implies that jealousy is not associated with men but women.

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Polygamy is deeply rooted in many African cultures even though it is oppressive to women. Kunhiyop (2003:14) states that "It is evident that polygamy is not dying out as argued but rather is still present and needs serious attention". The Igbo society Achebe portrays reveals polygamy as part of the custom of many cultural groups in Africa. Despite the fact that some African women are not happy with their roles in polygamous homes, they are unable to voice this out. Spivak (1999) suggests that women in post-colonial countries are silenced by both the traditional patriarchy and legacy of colonialism. This has led to some African women writers treating women's issues in their fictional works in an effort to restore women's pride.

2.4 African female writers bridging the gap in gender inequality

Contemporary female writers have made efforts to re-define the one-sided presentation of African women in African literature. Some have written back to correct aspects of female marginalisation. Women's experiences are a major focus in female written novels like *Efuru* (1966) by Nwapa. *Efuru* describes the experiences of the character Efuru who stands out because of her beauty and is also a skilled business person in her community. Despite all these, her only child dies. Nwapa overrules the notion that childbearing is the only characteristic valued in African women, by portraying her protagonist Efuru living life to the fullest and gaining reverence from other women. In addition, the political activities of women's organisations created positive imaginative novels as noted in Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy. Here, the trilogy portrays women who fit into the political sector of their community, Umuga, and organise groups in order to resist colonialism. In the 1960s, African literature was male-dominated and only a few female writers, such as Nwapa, were

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recognised. Women are currently recognised as authors across the African continent, and they have been joined by some male writers in giving realistic characterisation and an all-rounded perspective of the female gender (Fornchingoing, 2006).

Post-colonial literature written by women is fundamental in the process of deconstructing and rewriting the political history of women. African women scholars are interrogating gender concepts to construct ones that are acceptable to the African context. Most African feminist critics are trying to redeem the image of the female gender in contemporary writings by creating women with leading roles, particularly in the political sphere. According to Sylvester (2005:14) in *Understanding the Writings of the Nigerian Women*, "a primary goal of women's literature has been to correct and redirect attention to their own ideals, world view and to significance of the feminine element". As noted in the above examination of Achebe's early novels early fiction written by men depicted women as mere objects. There is no wonder that women have been relegated to the back seat of Nigerian literary tradition, misunderstood and misrepresented (Nnaemeka, 1989).

Some scholars have recognised the need to re-visit gender concepts in an effort to redefine and re-envision what feminism means to African women (Kolawole, 2004). Ogunyemi (1988) says that female concerns have become a very important aspect of literature now. Contemporary female writers such as Adimora-Ezeigbo and Buchi Emecheta focus more on themes such as self-actualisation, early marriage, political leadership and love. This enables the tackling of gender problems. African women have been treated as individuals without a voice for a very long time, but this image is changing gradually. Emecheta, for instance, in her novel *Joys of Motherhood* (1980), provides a dimension that challenges the myth that

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motherhood is synonymous with female self-fulfilment. Nnu Ego who labours all her life nurturing several children is deserted by them. Here, the author points that motherhood in itself does not guarantee a life of self-fulfillment or recognition.

Emecheta and some other African female writers reveal that even when females are faced with oppression and subordination, they strive to assert themselves. Some female writers create female characters who struggle against patriarchy, male domination and social custom. The experiences of women have become an integral part of African literature. Chukukere (1995) contends that male writers also assist in endorsing an institutionalised and one-sided vision of female heroism in African fiction through the way women are examined. She points further that African writers such as Cyprain Ekwensi, are pre-occupied with female characters defined along preconceived stereotypes, such as prostitution versus motherhood and wifehood. Chukukere (1995) asserts that Ekwensi's presentation of female gender is mostly biased because in his writing he ignores the complexities of women's lives; this partially constitutes a problem. In many instances, African women writers are marginalised by their male counterparts, but some female writers have strongly criticised this false characterisation.

Writers such as Emecheta, Nwapa and Adimora-Ezeigbo are among those African writers who have filled the gap between male and female characterisation. Nwapa, the first female novelist to counter the discourses portraying women as voiceless and passive, in her novel *Efuru* (1966), portrays women who are assertive and dignified in the struggle to remedy their plight. Ogundipe-Lesile (1994) notes that a female writer's commitment is portrayed in the representation and re-enactment of the role of the African woman. The marginalised

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role assigned to the female characters in some male writers' works gave Nigerian women writers the collective consciousness of their gender, and made them realise that they are endowed with resources that could help transform society.

Women writers such as Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Adimora-Ezeigbo raise the consciousness of gender transformation in society. Women writers define the female within the economy and portray her as an achiever. New liberating myths were constructed by women writers in Nigeria to liberate women from the limiting female gender constructs of the society. Okereke (1997) points out that Nigerian women writers have succeeded in making gender and women the centre of discourse in and beyond the academy. Baird (1997:56) strongly believes that the neglect of female artists in literature has been an unfortunate omission because females offer self-images, patterns of self-analysis, and enormous general insights into the female situation, all of which are ignored by, or are inaccessible to, male writers in general. The common thread that runs through all African feminism is the struggle to extend human rights to the female citizens of the continent, and African feminists consider the effects of patriarchy in their representations of women.

Critics such as Omoyele, Mezu and Osei-Nyame have noted that Achebe does attend fully to the positions of African women in his later novel such as *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). Mezu (1995:1) states, "Achebe's newly envisioned female roles are to be expounded, articulated and secured by woman herself". Mezu (1995:1) further notes that Achebe goes so far as to "acknowledge that the malaise the African party is experiencing results from excluding women from the scheme of things". Here, Achebe portrays the importance of women in society.

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Furthermore, according to Petersen (1981:93), the African writer who has done the greatest justice to female existence in his writing is the Somali author, Nuruddin Farah. Farah depicts the progress which women have made within the constricting African social landscape. He portrays them with their achievements and challenges, which they are confronted with. Farah is described as "the first feminist writer to come out of Africa in the sense that she describes and analyses women as victims of male subjugation" (Petersen, 1981). Farah's struggle for the cause of women is part of his crusade against the victimisation of women, and the denial of their legitimate rights, socially and politically, privately and publicly. His first novel *From a Crooked Rib* (1970), discusses women's plight and how the traditional Islamic cultural environment weighs women down. Hernton in (Braxton and McLaughlin, 1990:205) states:

> For the first time, the status of black women writers is no longer regulated below the status of males. Black women constrained by and secondary to the literature dominance of black males, the literature of women is expansive and liberating. Unlike the past, when women were supposed to be seen but not heard, the women today have become recognized writers in all fields and genres.

The above quotation portrays the significance of African female writers and their contribution to literary production. The African female writers indicate the significance of the female characters, whom they make equal to their male counterparts in literature.

2.5 Conclusion

So far, this study has explored critics' reactions to Achebe's portrayal of women in his fictional works. It is clear that a lot still needs to be done by African female writers with r

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begards to empowering women. It also shows that the social status of females in the Igbo community is conditioned by traditional and cultural norms. Segun (2001) asserts that women must have a strong voice in civil society, considering that they form more than half the population. Women's social organisations should act as pressure groups to end male domination, not only in the cultural and social spheres of life, but also in the political arena.

Ogunyemi (1996) asserts that gender consensus and collaboration form part of the essential factors in communal and nation building. With the feminist movement and their attempts to re-constitute the erroneous image of the female gender, most African male writers, such as Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiongo and Ousmane, are revisiting their earlier approaches by representing women in an all-encompassing perspective. Achebe moves away from the peripheral role he presented women in his earlier novels *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* to roles in which women shape and mediate the realms of power in *Anthills of the Savannah* (Fonchingong, 2006). The protagonist Beatrice brings a change in the socio-political sphere. She becomes a source of motivation, inspiration and encouragement, and as a professional woman; she operates on the same level as the most powerful men in the land. Thus, Achebe makes amends for his treatment of women in his novels *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God.*

Female writers like Emecheta, Mariama Ba, Nwapa and Adimora-Ezeigbo have argued against the negation of motherhood and against patriarchy, polygamy, female subordination and enslavement in society. There is need for women to move beyond the limiting walls of the public spheres by transforming the dynamics of the public sphere through their involvement, particularly in political actions. African feminist critics, such as Walker (1983), Hudson-Weems (1994), and Ogundipe-Leslie (1994), advocate for a social

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transformation that accommodates women as equally important in their relations with their male counterparts. Some African female writers, thus, use their works to portray the injustices against women, especially since the colonial period. Adimora-Ezeigbo (1996a), for example, asserts that female writers should research into the lives of Africa's great women of the past and explore how they struggled and triumphed in a male-dominated society. She further points out that "we need more and more women to speak out in public" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996a:16). The next chapter focuses on how Adimora-Ezeigbo empowers her female characters by portraying them as women leaders who benefit their communities.

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Chapter 3

REWRITING WOMEN'S PRESENCE INTO HISTORY AND THE SOCIO-POLITICAL SPACES OF PRE-COLONIAL EASTERN NIGERIA IN ADIMORA-EZEIGBO'S *THE LAST OF THE STRONG ONES*

3.1 Introduction

Adimora-Ezeigbo has published so many novels, short stories including critical works like *Facts and fiction in the literature of the Nigeria civil war* (1991) and *Gender issues in Nigeria A femining Perspective* (1996a). But her recent novels includes *The Last of the Strong Ones* (1996b), *House of Symbols* (2001), *Children of the Eagle* (2002) and *Trafficked* (2008). In all this works of Adimora-Ezeigbo, the ideas and the message in them are the same; she condemns patriarchy by making women the central characters of the novels.

Ezenwanebe (2006) in his critical review of the Adimora-Ezeigbo's works, writes that Adimora-Ezeigbo's aim has been a search for and a recreation of a female Okorigwe (an Igbo legendary warrior) who signifies the heroic strengths of women and a celebration of their indomitable spirit in the face of socio-cultural oppression. Ezenwanebe added that Adimora-Ezeigbo's novels are social issues or criticism and epic dimension in its treatment of social issues which includes that criticism or religion as a tool of exploitation, the horrifying effects of Nigeria civil war, the reality of gender inequality and the female oppression that exists in Nigeria and Igbo society in particular.

Furthermore, this chapter analyses the novel *The Last of the Strong Ones* (1996a) in an effort to show how Adimora-Ezeigbo privileges women's leadership roles, especially in the fight against colonial domination. It examines the way and significance of the author's

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reconstruction of the social realities of the Umuga community, as well as her portrayal of women in active leadership roles alongside their male counterparts. The analysis focuses on four female matriarchs, Ejimnaka, Onyekozuru, Chieme and Chibuka, whose involvement in the leadership structures of the Umuga society contributes significantly to elevating women's positions within this patriarchal pre-colonial society. Even though the Umuga society, within which the novel is set, is traditionally a patriarchal one, these women resisted all forms of male domination and social and colonial oppression to become models of strength, resilience and an epitome of honour.

The chapter also examines how Adimora-Ezeigbo re-writes women back into history, culture and society. Adimora-Ezeigbo's women are vibrant and vocal individuals with powerful female genealogies. Women's organisations, such as "Umuada", the association of daughters, caters for the social and familial well-being of women in Umuga, and the "Alutaradi", the association of wives, monitors the interests of the wives in all fronts. Both organisations constitute strong female bonds and also cater for the well-being of women in the depicted community. Therefore, *The Last of the Strong Ones* re-enacts the evolution of modern Nigeria from the colonial period, while giving priority to the women who played a role in the making of the nation's history.

Thus, the chapter examines the ways in which *The Last of the Strong Ones* explores, from a womanist view, the values and roles of women in the described pre-colonial society. A number of questions are addressed in an effort to discuss ways the portrayed African women face chanllenges, shuch as patriarchal domination, political subjugation and intra-women conflicts, as well as the search for an improvement of their conditions and their

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society's. These questions are: What roles did women play in the socio- political sectors and historical developments of the portrayed pre-colonial society? How has Adimora-Ezeigbo portrayed women as agents of transformation under both traditional and colonial patriarchy?

The next section examines the roles that Igbo women played in the socio-political sectors and historical developments of Adimora-Ezeigbo's pre-colonial Umaga.

3.2 Rewriting women into pre-colonial history

Adimora-Ezeigbo reclaims the Igbo woman's place in the pre-colonial history of her fictional Eastern part of Nigeria. She also rewrites what she sees as the erroneous placement of the Igbo woman in the socio-political sphere of the Igbo society. *The Last of the strong Ones* is used to establish a woman-centred tradition to draw positive and strong role models that would positively impact on contemporary women. In *The Last of the Strong Ones*, Adimora-Ezeigbo recasts the Igbo society as a direct act of speaking back to Achebe's portrayal of male heroism in *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Adimora-Ezeigbo reappraises and rewrites history to include a female presence through the four female characters, Oluada Ejimnaka, Onyekozuru, Chieme and Chibuka. She allows pre-colonial women's voices to dominate the text. Thus, her depiction, here, symbolises some form of counter discourse that attempts to replace the dominant gender stereotypes which Achebe overlooks in female characters such as Nwoye's mother, Ekwefi and Ojiugo in his novel *Things Fall Apart*.

The novel shows the author's insistence that women have not been silent participants in history or in the narration of history. Her entire composition shows that West African women have, in the words of Carol Boyce Davies, been speaking "incessantly without fully

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being heard" (Davies, 1986:3). Oloko (2008:1) notes that Adimora-Ezeigbo wrote the trilogy because "She wanted to re-write what was already written from the male point of view from a female perspective". Her main priority is on "the role of women in the making of national history" (Oloko, 2008:1). She rewrites the history of the colonial encounter through the portrayal of multiple voices of four vibrant and strong women leaders who are also leaders in the community and who represent symbols of cultural agency.

Through the narrative of each woman, Adimora-Ezeigbo explores several issues which plague women in patriarchal societies. Ejimnaka, the leader of the women's wing, the Oluada, is a female protagonist and the most radical one. She is a pacesetter in her community, a representation of everything positive in terms of upholding the tradition and culture of her community. She is highly respected member of the community. Her life story is one of heroinism and celebration of womanhood. She is one of the listening ears of the Umuga community who always leaves personal engagements to answer the call of duty. She marries a man old enough to be her father just because she wants to be independent and never be any man's appendage. After her marriage to her first husband, Alagbogu, which did not last more than two years, she finds a lover and friend in Obiatu. A courageous woman, Ejimnaka decides to do something about her strong desire for the man who she loved. "Ejimnaka was not one to desire anything and not go in search of it" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b: 32). She finally wins the heart of Obiatu and their marriage became a reference point for successful marital union.

Onyekozuru, another member of the Oluada just like Ejimnaka, participates in the activities of the women. Onyekozuru plays a good role in the development of her village and

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achievement of peace. Onyekozuru opens her tale with the words: "Marriage and motherhood are the greatest goal of every woman in Umuga" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b: 50). At the age of sixteen, she was given in marriage to a man chosen by her parents. She did not even know the name of her suitor until she had come for the "coco-nut giving ceremony" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b: 52). She was a second wife, like her mother, but she enjoyed being married because the first wife was old and did not give much trouble. Things changed for Onyekozuru when he husband died and, not to long after even before the first wife, Udumaga, could complete the mourning rite for her husband, she died. According to tradition a meeting was called to persuade Udoye, the eldest son of Onyekozure's dead husband to take her in "as tradition allowed" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b: 58). She refused claiming she did not want any more children.

With Chieme, Adimora-Ezeigbo raises the issue of barrenness in the life of one of her female characters who lived during the era that defined womanhood solely through marital success and procreation. This is seen in Onyekozuru's speech "marriage and motherhood are the greatest goal of every woman in Umuga" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b: 50). Chieme could not conceive after many years of marriage. Her husband became impatient and sent her out to enable him to bring in a new wife, who would bear him children. Chieme is declared by her husband as neither a male nor female as noted in his statement that "My ancestors know I have tried. I do not want to continue to live with a person whom I cannot say is male or female" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b: 107). She returns to her parents' home heartbroken, later starts a kola-nut business and lived her life in full. Chieme later decides to be a chanter "my desire was to be the best chanter, not only in Umuga but also in the towns far and

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near" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b: 113). She excels in her career and becomes an oluada, a voice and leader of women.

Chibuka is the fourth and last member of the Oluada. At the age of seventeen she was given in marriage to Iheme, a very cruel husband. Despite the difficulties that she faced in her marriage, she "refused to wear [her] unhappiness on [her] face" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b: 142). She remains with her husband, until his death and, as a result, Chibuka is a "great survivor", who would "find her way out of crippling situations" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b: 142). Adimora-Ezeigbo sets out women who scaled diverse obstacles in their private lives to emerge as leaders of women. The four heroines were, nevertheless, neither victim nor entirely conforming to the society; they sought their own path (Arndt, 2000). There is something that unites them all, and that is their strength, vitality and aspirations for a self-determined life.

More than her predecessors, Nwapa and Emecheta, Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy focuses on the transcendental heroism of the Igbo woman's place in a patriarchal and socio-economically complex society. Both Nwapa and Emecheta concern themselves with the plight of the women in society, but neglect vital female heroism. Some Igbo women writers, such as Adimora-Ezeigbo, have emerged to dispel the stereotyped depiction of women in male writings. Adimora-Ezeigbo (1996a:13) states that "Igbo women of Eastern Nigeria were among the first to gain the attention of researchers as a group distinct from Igbo men". Adimora-Ezeigbo's women, such as Ejimnaka, Onyekozuru, Chieme and Chibuka, are determining factors in society as they form socio-political pressure groups, such as the Oluada (top women representatives), Umuada (association of daughters) and Alutaradi

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(association of wives) for the benefit of Umuga. Ejimnaka, Onyekozuru, Chieme and Chibuka, as part of the "Oluada refused to cooperate with any power or anyone that planned to undermine the culture, the traditional judicial system and the economic well-being of Umuga" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b:12). Thus, in reaction to the traditional belief that women are powerless, Adimora-Ezeigbo relies on the historical assertiveness of women to point out that women have the power to resist oppression and that they are not passive beings.

In accordance with the womanist tradition, Adimora-Ezeigbo also sets out to delineate portraits of assertive women who scaled diverse obstacles in their private lives. Each of the women is made to recount her story by herself. The author draws on vital personal resource which includes belief in one's self, individual strength, courage and boldness. Ejimnaka, Onyekozuru, Chieme and Chibuka defy aspects of culture by forming a political organisation for the well being of their community. They are also shown at the fore-front of leadership institutions where their voices are heard alongside their men. They are members of the Obuofo, the inner council committee alongside powerful men like Obiatu, Abazu and Nnaji. These women stood for self-definition and self-actualisation. Therefore, the *Last of the strong ones* captures the presence of women during the colonial imperialist (Kosiri) invasion and subjugation of Igbo land in the Eastern part of Nigeria. The novel also revisits and re-narrates iconic movements in Nigerian historical and contemporary experiences using women as the central frame of reference. Adimora-Ezeigbo's vibrant and strong female characters, such as Ejimnaka, Onyekozuru, Chibuka and Chieme, are a counterpoise to Achebe's (1964b) portrayal of female characters, such as Nwoye's mother, Ekwefi and Ojiugo, who are depicted as weak and unable to make decisions on their own. She portrays

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her female characters as women of substantial influence, and they are also a part of the decision-making body in society. The four Oluada have a voice in the male-dominated society, because their roles and interests were vital issues of concern to their communities. Their activities in the society helped to advance members of the community. The novel opens with the assertion "all was not well with the land" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b:1) and the land needed both men and women to confront this crisis. So the four Oluada joined the traditional council, Obuofo, the highest ruling body in Umuga to make decisions for the community. In addition, Adimora-Ezeigbo's protagonists and the narrator are women; this does not mean the author banishes men from the novel. Womanism for the African woman, thus, involves a redefinition of the values and roles of the woman in contemporary society. It emphasises the complementary roles of both women and men. Therefore, Adimora-Ezeigbo seeks to define the relations between women and men, by showing them working together in an attempt to disrupt colonial intrusion into Umuga.

In addition, the women portrayed in *The Last of the Strong Ones* are mothers, wives and daughters, but they are not restricted to these social roles alone. Women, such as Ejimnaka, Onyekozuru, Chieme and Chibuka have an identity that is defined from more than just their roles as mother and wives. They are active members in the struggle against colonial intrusion into Umuga. This also shows that women must fight to gain their place in society. Adimora-Ezeigbo's female characters are, thus, not confined to the domains of the domestic spheres, but are also seen to be involved in the political sector.

In *The Last of the Strong Ones,* Adimora –Ezeigbo is concerned with gaining freedom for women and writing African women back into history, culture and society. Her female

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characters are active, self-confident and [illegible]. They also play a decisive role in shaping the social processes of their community. The women's thoughts, feelings, and experiences are voiced in the novel, as shown in the voices of Ejimnaka, Onyekozuru, Chieme and Chibuka when they narrate their life stories. In Adimora-Ezeigbo's first of the trilogy *The Last of the Strong Ones* (1996b), the author attempts to de-authorise the Achebean versions of history and identity (Osofisan 2004: 27) and inserts the female figure in the history of the pre-colonial Igbo society. Adimora-Ezeigbo inserts the female into the political space through her fictional characters by making women as agent of history, thereby redeeming women from the position of perpetual victim hood (Okereke, 1997). Adimora-Ezeigbo shows that women have always been recognised by their male counterparts at different levels in the traditional Igbo society as pointed out by Chukwuma, Anderson and other feminist critics and writers such as Sembene Ousmane and Nuruddin Farah concur with this point of view (Diala-Ogamba, 2004). She uses the past in her novel *The Last of the Strong Ones* to establish a woman-centred tradition to draw positive, strong role models for contemporary women.

Adimora-Ezeigbo portrays fictional female characters, such as the four Oluadas, as prominent, and even compares them with the male characters in her novel. Adimora-Ezeigbo's men, in contrast with the men in Achebe's fiction, are insignificant. Ejimnaka's husband, Obiatu is not as prominent as his wife. Women contribute in meaningful ways in the affairs of the society just as the men. As a result, Adimora-Ezeigbo in her work *The Last of the Strong Ones* shows the different levels of recognition of and contribution by women in the society. The authors' representation of female characters emphasises their roles as assertive leaders, conquerors and survivors. Chukwuma (2012) asserts that Adimora-

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Ezeigbo's intention is to show that women always been regarded highly in the Igbo society. Therefore, her story revolves around bringing out the events where women play active roles to the benefit of society.

The female characters in *The Last of the Strong Ones* are portrayed differently, but positively. The story revolves around bringing out the active roles that women play for the benefit of the society. The tribal society is surprisingly democratic and all matters are decided through social consensus. Women have a powerful voice in all matters - social, economic and political. Adimora-Ezeigbo portrays this through Ejimnaka, Onyekozuru, Chieme and Chibuka who are eloquent characters forming the Oluada group (Egya, 2011). This is a social group which struggles towards the emancipation of Umuga from external aggression. The women are also involved in the mapping of the everyday problems, political processes and planning on how to react to British colonial power. Egya (2011) notes that Adimora-Ezeigbo is a self-professed feminist who engages in the basic problems of women in Nigeria, but draws her attention to the pre-eminent importance of women in emancipating the society from its socio-political contradiction. Newell (2008) also notes that Adimora-Ezeigbo's sympathies in *The Last of the Strong Ones* differ radically from that of her Igbo female compatriots such as Nwapa in *One is Enough* (1981), which is noted for its affirmation of single motherhood outside the marriage. Hence, none of the women in *The Last of the Strong Ones,* is presented as a passive victim of male oppression. Rather, they are shown as having strong qualities in their relationships with men, in marriage and in their quest for independence and self-realisation.

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Adimora-Ezeigbo also asserts that Igbo women in the pre-colonial days, had always risen and fought to defend their right, or enforce decisions taken in their social and political organisations. They did this through forming of organisations such as the "Association of Daughters" and the "Association of Wives", which existed in the community. The "Umuada" or "Association of Daughters" caters for the physical, emotional, intellectual, economic, social and familial well being of women in Umuga. Umuada are "the custodians of Umuga's history and secrets" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b:46). Both associations of daughters and wives support their society in moments of crisis. This is evidenced by the way the Umuada would give support to Obuofo ".....if war broke out. Umuada gave total support to Obuofo and would take charge of purchase and preparation of food for the fighters" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b:182). The "Association of Wives" or "Alutaradi" is central to the position of wives in Igbo land. The Alutaradi is organised in such a way that they can discipline themselves and protect their members from the tyranny of bad husbands and in-laws:

> We organised the women against Egwuagu when he unjustly drove his wife away and threw her belongings out into the courtyard. We descended on him like a swarm of bees, with the full intent to sting sense into him. We turned ourselves into human litter, occupying every available space in his *ngwuru*. A day later, he indicated his willingness to talk with his in-laws (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996:71).

Here, Adimora-Ezeigbo speaks of the role of the "Association of Wives" as that of cross-checking and controlling the excesses of a patriarchal cult. Several women's organisations have indeed been in existence in the pre-colonial era. Amadiume (1994: 1) confirms in *Gender, Political Systems and Social Movements: A West African Experience* that, "right from the pre-colonial era, women's associations have existed as distinct and autonomous units for organising social relations, productive works, and even rituals and religion". Mba

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(1982:36) notes that the strength of Igbo women in the traditional society lay in forming organisations where they "controlled their own affairs and possessed political influence on the basis of their collective strength". The representatives of this council spoke on behalf of the women they represented. The council dealing with matters concerning women would not make decisions relating to women without the consent of the Oluada council. *The Last of the Strong Ones* shows that the status of a woman is much more than that of a mother and wife, as shown in the way the four Oluada form organisations in Umuga whose success benefited other women and the community at large.

The top women representatives narrate their life experiences and in the process portray their heroic roles as women. This narration is made through the eyes of the strong women, Ejimnaka, Onyekozuru, Chieme and Chibuka or the representatives of women or of the wives in "alutaradi" or in the daughters of "umuada" or in the "Obuofo". Unlike Achebe who largely denies women a voice and does not even name them, Adimora-Ezeigbo names and gives a voice even the most despicable Igbo men in the novel. Historical women such as Madam Tinubu, Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Queen Moremi, discussed in Chapter 1, played a major role in Nigeria's political development. Adimora-Ezeigbo, thus, forges a continuous chain linking female narrators of the past with those of the present.

The author allows pre-colonial women's voices to dominate the text. Senior women narrate their marital life-stories to two female historians who have been given the task of recording data before colonialism penetrates their village. For example, the four Oluada adapt themselves to the patriarchal social structure which has socialised them not to be victims or to entirely conform to their society. They have different experiences in marriage and with

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men. Ejimnaka narrates her marital experience with her first husband Alagbogu. When she realises that this marriage is no guarantee she leaves her husband and then marries Obiatu. Onyekozuru narrates her experience in marriage and how she has slaved herself to make others happy. Chieme narrates her desire to have a happier marriage than her mother. However, she later realises that she could get a fulfilled life and happiness without both a husband and children. Of the four Oluada, Chibuka suffers the most from the conventions of patriarchal society because her husband beats and insults her. Adimora-Ezeigbo lets these women describe their life experiences to explore the scope of negotiation provided by the society and to push for freedom. The narrator says "We were a group chosen to work together with sixty men to preserve our tradition and guide our people back to our way of life before kosiri infested us with their presence" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b:2). Therefore, Adimora-Ezeigbo constructs a pre-colonial African heritage in which women occupy a sphere seeking to break the injustice that women went through.

Adimora-Ezeigbo does indeed display the process of female empowerment and the ways in which these female protagonists claim agency and independence in *The Last of the Strong Ones*. The novel corrects the stereotypical male representations of Igbo women. It shows how the author has re-written women back into history and culture, as well as highlights the Igbo woman's self-expression and self-assertion.

3.3 Man- woman relationships

According to Osofisan (2004:39), Adimora-Ezeigbo seeks complementarity rather than equality. Her goal is "negotiation, compromise, reconciliation". This study postulates that the womanist ideology improves women through changes to institutions like patriarchy. It

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also advocates for a complementary relationship between man and woman. *The Last of the Strong Ones explores* the author's womanist view by representing the reality of female experience in a more encompassing way that brings together men and women. Successful marriages portrayed in Adimora-Ezeigbo's fiction are characterised by mutual respect between husband and wife. Marriage, in her fictional works, becomes a project in which the contributions of husband and wife are equally important, regardless of whether women are to be considered "equal" to men or not (Olufunwa, 2008).

Adimora-Ezeigbo's portrayal of her female characters establishes harmonious relationships between men and women in the public and private domains. This reflection of the womanist ideology is shown in the lives of Ejimnaka and her husband Obiatu. Ejimnaka and Obiatu's marital success is based on the strong and mutual love they have for each other. Adimora-Ezeigbo shows that womanism, as discussed in Chapter 1, approves of men and women coming together to promote the well-being of mankind. The married couple is even admired by the Umuga community as confirmed by the affirmation: "if you want to know how a good marriage works or tastes go to the home of Obiatu and Ejimnaka" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b:127). In addition, the Oluada and the Obuofo, who represent the leaders, have both women and men of the land working in complementary roles. This in a way is reflective of the womanist complementarity between men and women. The author indeed portrays an accommodationist type of feminism, which she articulated as "complementarity" that is located within the socio-political structures of an African realism (Ladele, 2009:75). The Obuofo Association comprises both men and women of Umuga community, thus showing that despite the gender differences, the men and women of Umuga are able to join forces as they did in their common resistance to colonial power.

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Therefore, it is clear that Adimora-Ezeigbo believes that men and women have to work together to solve various problems in society.

The four strong ones believe in building a home, family and working together with men to raise their children. Adimora-Ezeigbo's women characters experience gendered relationships, wounds from men and love and support. Obiatu, Ejimnaka's husband, embodies the willingness to work hand in hand with his woman. This symbolises the desired complementarity. This was not seen in Chieme's and Chibuka's husbands. Unlike Obiatu they do not belong to the Obuofu and Chibuka's husband Iheme, who destroys the life of his wife, dies in the novel. The author used Iheme's death metaphorically to assert that this type of man will "die out". On the contrary, the happy Ejimnaka and Obiatu live in a marriage which is nourished by the idea of complementarity. Thus, *The Last of the Strong Ones* emphasises that the complementarity of men and women is indispensable if they have the same interests (Ardnt, 2008).

In *The Last of the Strong Ones*, Adimora-Ezeigbo notes that colonialism worsened the women's situation. This is represented in the way the old power structures of Umuga are replaced by new ones that served colonial interests. The taking away of the council of elders in Umuga and the bringing in of new rulers, the warrant chiefs, symbolises the end of the traditional democracy and the power of the women. Without the men, the life of women, such as Ejimnaka, who believe in complementarity, loses its meaning. This is portrayed in the case of Ejimnaka who states, when the male elders, her husband included, are taken and never to return: "Should I say I am not well?" 'I am well and happy as a slave should be..... Hmm...Ezeukwu's daughter.....a willing slave to kosiri. Where are all the men? To live

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to see these days is a heavy burden" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b:202). Immediately after this, the son of a warrant chief enthroned by the colonial powers steals some fruits from a tree. When he was asked whose son he was, he replied, "I am the son of Uzuegbu, the warrant chief. Nobody can stop me from doing what pleases me in Umuga" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b: 203). Ejimnaka tries to stop the young boy and lead him back to the traditional paths of Umuga but she falls from the tree. Arndt (2008) notes that the fall symbolises how one of the last of the strong ones has fallen silent. Nevertheless, Chibuka and Chieme are the last of the strong ones who remain alive and live up to their responsibility in that "they are gathering the remnants of umuada and strengthening the knots that hold us together. Their courage beckons all of us to renewed work in our land, as they chastise the elders and inspire and guide the youth" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b:211).

At the end of the novel, the men are gone and never to return. The future of Umuga lies in the hands of the women. The only woman, Ejimnaka, who did not suffer as a result of marriage, dies and the two women, Chibuka and Chieme, who suffered in their marriage take the future of the land into their hands. They are the last of the strong ones who are still alive. Nevertheless, Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones* thus depicts the coexistence of men and women and a transformation of gender relations which is pursued by women in cooperation with men. It is also free from the discrimation given to women in the Igbo society. *The Last of the Strong Ones* emphasises that the complementarity of men and women is indispensable because in many respects both have the same interests, as aptly shown in their reactions to the threat posed by the colonial masters in the Umuga community.

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The Umuga community is portrayed in the novel as a troubled community. The author states: "All was not well with the land" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b:1). As we read further into the story, we notice women taking centre stage in tackling the crisis that the community faces. The Umuga community is facing a threat from the Kosiri, the white colonialists. A group of women, led by the courageous Ejimnaka, decides to map out ways to fight against "the stranger who came to desecrate our home and steal our land" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b:6). The novel begins with the meeting of Oluada, the representatives of the Umuga women, which is called to discuss the women's position in dealing with Kosiri and his warrant chiefs, especially Okwara. Ejimnaka's statement clearly states this meeting's significance here:

> Obuofo will meet tomorrow to discuss the stubbornness and uncooperative attitude of Okwara, the warrant chief. This is why we are meeting this morning to agree on a common viewpoint. In our meeting with the men, tomorrow, we shall muster one voice. Oluada will stand together (Adimora-Ezeigbo,1996:8).

The above quotation confirms that the decision made at the Oluada meeting, carries a lot of value because whatever is decided at the women's meeting is delivered to the Obuofo, the inner council, for further action. The novel's four vibrant and courageous women opt for war against the colonial masters, although they do not win at the end. Adimora-Ezeigbo creates female characters whose identities are continually modified as they relate to their condition.

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The women's transformation and agency is also witnessed when they each gain freedom from their respective marriages and join the alutaradi (association of wives), obuofo (inner council committee), umuada (association of daughters) or oluada (top representatives). Therefore, the power which Adimora-Ezeigbo's Igbo women possessed originated from the two strong women's organisations in the community. According to *The Last of the Strong Ones*, the concept of organised female protest against oppressive and exploitative power structures was not new in Igboland. In the year 1929, the militant nature of Igbo women resulted in mass demonstrations that were both peaceful and violent, and which caught the colonial British government off guard. The Women's protests finally led to open war with the colonial British government.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones* shows female characters that are vibrant, vocal, politically conscious and with powerful female genealogies. The top women representatives or Oluada are members of the Obuofo, the inner council of Umuaga committee. Since the Oluada are chosen from the four villages of Umuga, it means the women representatives are the voices of the women in the community. The four top representatives, the Oluada, make their powerful presence felt in the socio-political sphere through their fight against any power that tries to undermine the culture, tradition and well-being of Umuga. At one of their meetings, the Oluada:

> agreed to participate more intensely and vigorously in Obuofo and to continue to represent the women actively in the political body. Oluada resolved to support the removal of Okwara as warrant chief if he continued to obey kosiri and disregard Obuofo and its reforms to improve Umuga as a whole. Oluada refused to cooperate with any power or anyone that planned to undermine the

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culture, the traditional judicial system and economic well-being of Umuga (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996: 11).

Thus, the women leaders decided to support their tradition instead of allowing the new culture introduced by the European invaders, the Kosiri.

Adimora-Ezeigbo creates a sense of historical continuity through her novel. *The Last of the Strong Ones* fills pre-colonial history with local female mentors. It depicts women's capacity for self-empowerment within existing social constraints and by retrieving "strong" pre-colonial women (Newell, 2008).

Furthermore, Adimora-Ezeigbo creates a strong feminine character who by participating in the depicted associations, transcends the boundaries of male/female and domestic/public dichotomies which oppress women. The four Oluada take the centre stage and they perform their roles significantly and influentially for the well-being of their homeland, Umuga. The female characters are determined to make their voices heard in their community, despite the fact that they are faced with their own personal challenges. In this way, Adimora-Ezeigbo's women are not portrayed as decorative accessories (Sylvester and Mba, 2010), for the four Oluada, as stated earlier, have a voice in this male-dominated society. Furthermore, their activities advanced their communities' interests, especially in the fight against colonialism. Therefore, Adimora-Ezeigbo uses *The Last of the* Strong *Ones* to rewrite women back into history because women have for long been portrayed in male writings as passive and silent in society (see discussion in Chapter 2).

Adimora-Ezeigbo uses the lives of these women to showcase the fact that traditional African women have not always been relegated to the background. The author made the four

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eloquent characters form the Oluada and showed how they helped in the struggle towards emancipating Umuga from external aggression. Hence, as Nwajiaku (2011) states, Adimora-Ezeigbo is firm in her belief that a woman can overcome any impediment encountered in life if armed with the right attitude. The women in the novel are depicted as very strong and vocal. They even see themselves at the same level as their male counterparts, and there is also a mutual respect between the men and women of the community. During the war against the colonialists, the women mobilise themselves and render supportive roles in cooking for the warriors. Adimora-Ezeigbo (1998: 483) notes the significance of these women's duties:

> From the numerous factual and historical accounts written about the civil war, especially by those who were in Biafra during the fighting, one could see that women remained consistent with their age-old role of providing support services, food and sustenance to their families and the fighting men. It is rather disappointing that most male writers who recreated the events of the war fiction neglected this aspect of women's contribution but chose to highlight and exaggerate women's moral laxity.

The above quotation notes that women have always been supportive of their male counterparts, but most male-written novels do not recognise these supportive measures shown by women.

Adimora-Ezeigbo portrays female characters realistically. She empowers her women but at the same time does not portray images of perfect women. She shows her characters as only human and capable of many weaknesses. This is shown when Ejimnaka plots revenge against Ijeoma who hurt her. Ijeoma is the wife to Obiatu's uncle, but is a widow who thought Obiatu would marry her according to Umuga tradition. As a result of this, Ijeoma hit Ejimnaka's pregnant goat which gave birth prematurely to two kids that did not live.

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Ejimnaka furiously nursed her pain and, a m[illegible]t week after, she beat Ijeoma. Here, the author shows that Ejimnaka is only human and capable of some weaknesses.

The four heroines pass through the stages of motherhood with the enduring desire to contribute positively to humanity (Nwajiaku, 2011). None of the women in *The Last of the Strong Ones* is presented as a passive victim of male oppression. Every life story contains a "strong one" relating to men, marriage, independence and self-discovery. In the novel, the word "choice" occurs in the autobiographies of those who are abused in marriage by their husbands. For example, Chibuka comments that, "my marriage was a disaster, but I chose to do nothing about it" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b:141). She goes further to state "I emerged from that period of my life a stronger person" (Adimora-Ezeigbo,1996b: 149). Ejimanaka also notes that "My first taste of marriage was with a man old enough to be my father. But it was a choice I myself had made" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b:26). Ejimnaka dies at the end of the novel because she could not stand the new developments being introduced by the colonialists into her community.

The villagers could not resist the superior strength of the colonial army and, as a result, were forced to surrender after a futile war. In the end, "the last of the strong men" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996b:195), the eleven most revered men of Umuga, are taken away by colonial masters without protest from any quarter. Nevertheless, *The Last of the Strong Ones* depicts women's historical capacity for self-empowerment by retrieving from memory strong pre-colonial women.

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Thus, Adimora-Ezeigbo's womanist idea puts women at the fore-front of leadership institutions where their voices are heard alongside their men. The Umuga women use feminine solidarity to maintain all forms of positions in the socio-political sector.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Adimora-Ezeigbo reflects the message of change and stimulate women in her society to work for a better future. It has also shown how the author views some traditional values in her society and how women boldly assert themselves by acting as catalysts of change. The central concern of the first of the trilogy, *The Last of the Strong Ones*, is to highlight a peculiar women's heroic status which the Nigerian male writers have traditionally side-lined. Therefore, Adimora-Ezeigbo portrays the presence of female heroes in her novel by showing their achievements and their involvement in the resistance against traditional patriarchy and European colonialism.

The author also portrays the African woman as actively interested in the future of her society. This is shown through her depiction of women who are ready to join forces with other fellow women against oppressive forces or structures in their societies. The women, at the same time, accommodate men in an effort to build a stable society where no one is oppressed. Therefore, Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones* is concerned with re-writing women back into history and treating various spheres of women's life and their efforts to make their society a better one. The author is convinced that when men and women join forces they will go a very long way in securing society's future.

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Adimora-Ezeigbo creates a society in which women are central to establishing new modes of existence. She portrays female characters that are resourceful, determined and resilient, as noted in the experiences of Ejimnaka, Onyekozuru, Chieme and Chibuka. Each one triumphs in adverse situations which have much to do with their being women in a patriarchal society. The author also emphasises the collective consciousness of women, aimed at protecting their rights. This is noted in their formation of groups such as Oluada, Umuada and the Alutaradi. All these groups are a source for strength and liberation. Thus, *The Last of the Strong Ones* describes the inevitability of change and how it influences the lives and social status of women. It is, however, told from a womanist perspective that traces Igbo women back to history through the voices of the four top representatives of Umuga: Ejimnaka, Onyekozuru, Chieme and Chieme.

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WOMEN AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION IN *HOUSE OF SYMBOLS*

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the ways that Adimora–Ezeigbo privileges women during Eastern Nigeria's subjection to colonial domination as represented in the novel *House of Symbols* (2001). This chapter also explores the changes affecting the fictional Umuga society's Igbo cultural heritage as it interfaces with Western colonialism. The characters' reaction to colonial cultural intrusion is mixed. Characters such as Okwudiba, a great storyteller and historian of Umuga's religion and culture, and the traditionalist Amaala, perceive colonial instrusion with revulsion. Others, such as Ezenwanyi, a prophetess in Umuga, believe that it can be harnessed for the benefit of the people, while society remains still connected to its traditional practices. *House of Symbols* also describes Western attempts to destabilise the Umuga society and the strategies employed by Umuga women to counter such destabilisation. *House of Symbols* (2001), thus, shows how female characters draw their strength from each other and use their networks to stage their resistance against colonialism and the spread of foreign value systems.

The chapter also examines the author's reconstruction of the social realities of Umuga community, and women's leadership roles alongside their male counterparts. The analysis focuses on the life of the central character in the novel, Eaglewoman, Ugonwanyi. Eaglewoman is the granddaughter of Ejimnaka who is one of the strong ones in *The Last of the Strong Ones*. She is married to Josiah, also known as Osai. Eaglewoman is both a

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matriarch and protagonist as noted in the way the author speaks of her: "Eaglewoman is a solid rock that gathers moss. Around her, green and yellow moss blossoms in a thick furry mass at all season. People obey her and dance to her tune" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001: 99).

However, even though the novel is centred on the life of the central character, Eaglewoman, it also highlights the significance of the depicted harmonious past and the present. This chapter indeed explores how the author positions women in the community as embodiment of the symbolic harmony of both the present and the past. Through this portrayal, the author demonstrates the pivotal role women play in the constitution of societal cultural harmony and peace. The chapter, therefore, examines the ways in which *House of Symbols* explores, from a womanist perspective, the importance of a complimentary role that both men and women can play in a contemporary African society. One central question addressed in the examination of this novel's reconstruction of an egalitarian society is: How did Adimora–Ezeigbo postion women in the novel in an attempt to create a balance between Western and indigenous culture in Umuga?

House of Symbols, though, cannot be read in its own right and understood on its own. It is important to state that the novel is the second of Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy, which describes the generations of Umuga women spanning over a hundred years. Preceding this novel is The *Last of the Strong Ones* (1996) and it is followed by *Children of the Eagle* (2002). The three novels are interrelated, featuring major characters, largely female, who belong to the same genealogy, but represent different prongs of the battle against traditional and colonial patriarchy. In other words, it is 'her story' told in the three eras of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial settings.

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Adimora-Ezeigbo's reconstruction of the role of women in the novel will not be fully grasped without first examining the system that was in place before the advent of colonial rule. The novel *House of Symbols*, just as its predecessor, *The Last of the Strong Ones*, highlights the entrenchment of colonial rule in Umuga. Tradition and culture in society empowered men while women were rendered voiceless. *House of Symbols* describes a society where the female is respected, encouraged and honoured according to her own merit. Patriarchal domination has traditionally been viewed as a way of life that, if deviated from, would lead to the demise of the culture and moral fabric of society. This same view is indicated in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* by Okonkwo's close friend Obierika when he said: "Now the colonial masters have won our brothers and our clan can longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart" (Achebe, 1958:53). The cultural, religious and traditional values that held the community together mostly favoured men, while women were just seen as subordinates in society. Thus, men in the community view the erosion of these structures that uphold the masculine status as a major blow to the cultural norms of the whole community. It is this patriarchal dominance that Adimora-Ezeigbo challenges by assigning prominent roles to her female characters in the novel.

House of Symbols portrays strong women who challenged the existing social, cultural and political hegemony. Their strength is presented in the story of Eaglewoman, the protagonist of the novel. Eaglewoman is portrayed as one of the pillars of both the family and her community. The author highlights the pre-modern Igbo society in which the achievements of males and females are celebrated. As a result, women such as Eaglewoman, Okwudiba

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and Ezenwayi were given free reign to belong to society, not as appendages of the men, but in their own right. Women were the mouth piece of the gods and goddesses. Representatives of the gods, such as Ezenwanyi, and Okwudiba's authorities were not questioned by anyone in the community. The women in *House of Symbols* are more spiritually empowered than the men. The diviners and the priestesses among them are able to summon people, both male and female, to discuss issues that affected their existence. This is noted in the statement: "Ezenwayi wishes to see you, your husband and child you are nursing" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001:4), which was made to Eaglewoman and Osai, with regards to their child, Nnenne. The feminist access to power does not, however, undermine the role traditionally assigned to men as leaders of the home.

In representing the female gender, Adimora-Ezeigbo portrays women as an epitome of purity through whom the gods speak. She encapsulates her keen thoughts of the changing times and seasons in Umuga in the person of Ezenwayi. She is the prophetess in the novel, who, through her recollection of the past and foresight of the emerging changes in the land, is able to stand as a bridge between the past and the future taking shape in Umuga. There are men in society who would have been used as the mouthpieces of the gods but the gods, chose her. Furthermore, Ezenwayi delivers her message to both men and women in society. Ezenwayi's strength is described by the author through the Eaglewoman's puzzlement over this remarkable personality: "Tell us more about the work you do", says Eaglewoman. "You seem to establish a link between people and between the living and the dead" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001: 41). Ezenwayi is portayed by Adimora-Ezeigbo as a "rebuilder" and this is evident in the role assigned to Ezenwanyi as a link between the living and the dead.

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Adimora-Ezeigbo also shows Eaglewoman's success in business and the domestic sphere in the novel. Eaglewoman is portrayed as a successful character that inspired other members of her society. The Umuga community indeed looks up to Eaglewoman for help: "They say you are a wizard of medicine and a godfather to the poor,' 'the sick man said, 'you can see I have a disease that needs cure and I have come to you to receive it" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001:248). She also handles her victories and commercial successes in a humble way. Eaglewoman is presented as a rounded character. She is resourceful, radiates love and relates with people around her in the most cordial way. Adimora-Ezeigbo apparently portrays Eaglewoman as a model of the ideal woman. The author's female characters are people with an advanced consciousness. The only counter image to this positive portrayal of female characters is Soronje who fails to lead because of her shallow-mindedness and selfishness. Soronje was a one time friend of Eaglewoman but business activities made her a rival and competitor.

Adimora-Ezeigbo also portrays the evil of a non-consensual marriage. This is one of the womanist issues she brings out in the novel. She frowns at the forced marriage forced on a child from a very early age. Nathaniel Okeke was the man Eaglewoam was bethroth to in the novel. Eaglewoman escapes the sexual desire of Nathaniel Okeke who wanted "to take with violence what appeared to be about to elude him after years of waiting, after all the sacrifice- school fees, clothes, ornaments and other gifts" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001:15). Nathaniel Okeke realised that he was about to lose her, so he did everything he thought would bring her back to him, and also attempted to rape her, but she espaced narrowly. Adimora-Ezeigbo uses Eaglewoman's husband, Osai, as an agent of deliverance for Eaglewoman from the evil intentions of Nathaniel Okeke. Eaglewoman is set free from

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cultural bondage. Osai, with his social status does not in any way undermine the vibrant Eaglewoman; he is accommodating. Adimora-Ezeigbo, through her portrayal of women, implies that women should be given the privilege to choose who they want to spend the rest of their lives with and not be forced, according to tradition, to marry someone they are betrothed to from birth. Eaglewoman was betrothed at the age of eight to Nathaniel Okeke who was the first and higgest bidder for her body. She grew up and was stunned by the knowledge that she had been betrothed to a man she was not aware of his existence since her childhood. When she realised she had been betrothed to a man she did not know, despair and resentment became her constant companion until Osai arrived and changed things around in her life.

Adimora-Ezeigbo portrays Eaglewoman as a model of an ideal woman. The author sees an ideal woman as one who is fully empowered in all respects. She should be able to survive on her own, if necessary, and to live harmoniously with her man. In the novel, the author upholds the womanist ideology where the female can live harmoniously with her male pa rtner. The women in *House of Symbols* have a high spiritual sensibility and this is displayed in their roles. Ezenwayi's gifts of healing were discerned by people from various locations:

> People came looking for me, searching me out in my parents' home as early as when I was fourteen [...] They were all saying one thing: they brought news about my calling. They revealed to me the work I'm destined to do (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001:28).

Ezenwayi's calling is indicative of a mythical heroine who is supposed to have a divinely assigned role, usually that of a deliverer or a healer. Umuga men and the other nearby villages respect any woman who has a high spiritual calling: "Umuga men, as you know,

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would not usually fear a woman, but when it comes to spiritual matters, a woman who has divine power is dreaded and respected. Feared, even" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001:30). Ezenwayi possesses the fierceness of a character like Chielo, the priestess in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) who orders the much feared Okonkwo out of her sacred grove. Thus, Ezenwayi has the attribute of mythical heroines and she presents it in her community.

The author goes beyond the positive representations of females through her major female characters, such as Eaglewoman, Ezenwanyi, Nnenne and Okwudibia. In the novel, men are also recognised and not left out. For example, Adimora-Ezeigbo describes the female messenger's body-guard as "a sturdy, healthy-looking and attractive young man" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001:5). Although the prophetess has male messengers, she uses a woman to deliver the message from Ezenwanyi to see Eaglewoman, Osai and their daughter, Nnenne. The male messenger serves as a guard of the female messenger in case of danger. However, men are recognised as the ones to give protection when needed: "the young men were there to give us protection on the way" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001:26). The men in the novel are seen as individuals who offer protection and support to their women. The author also portrays some minor male characters in *House of Symbols.* Aziagba's twins, Chiedoche and Nnamdi, are represented as reincarnations of the strong men of Umuga. Okoroji, the father of the twins, is a war commander and Obiatu, Aziagba's father is one of the respected Obuofu of Umuga in the first of the trilogy *The Last of the Strong Ones*. Thus, Adimora-Ezeigbo does not just set the men aside in her novel; she also mentions them despite the fact that they are minor characters in the novel.

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In addition to acknowledging these essential roles played by women in society, the author goes a step further to give the female characters a voice, a place of honour and respect in her novel, *House of Symbols*. This she achieves with the special role she assigns to two prominent women who serve as custodians of the past and the present form of administration in the community in the novel. These women are Okwudiba and Ezenwayi. In traditional Igbo communities, men are usually the custodian of the people's customs, traditions and culture. These men hold and keep the history and cultural ways of a people or community by passing them orally down to the next generation, in order to preserve them. But Adimora-Ezeigbo places this unique role on the shoulders of Okwudiba. She is described as the wordsmith of the old tradition and ways of life. The novel opens with Okwudiba's oratory skills that are reflected in her intricate lamentation of the erosion of the old way over life by the new religion and ways of the white men:

> I, Okwudiba, remember with a storyteller's infinite memory. I have lived too long to see a generation in a haste to abandon the ancestors and trample on age-old traditions. To live to see this sight is a punishment to the soul (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001: 3).

Okwudiba's keen sense and imagination of the culture, traditions and beliefs in her community earned her this exalted position in the land. She represents a link with the past and history of the people and their ways of life before the establishment of colonial rule in Umuga. Thus, Adimora-Ezeigbo uses this character to challenge the traditional role assigned to women.

Women are often depicted, stereotypically, as gossips and busy bodies in the community given to petty talks and confined to the house. Okudiba's image shows that women can be

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custodians of the valuable treasures of a people's culture and traditions. The author aptly describes her thus, through Ezenwayi:

> This woman was the greatest storyteller and historian of Umuga before the white people's culture and religion cast their shadow over Umuga's religion and culture. Hei! You do not know Okudiba who wove words into a colourful cloth only fit for the blessed, the wise? The wordsmith, the wordmonger who hypnotized spirits and humans by the sheer power of her eloquence? Tell me, who does not know Umuga's Third and Fourth eyes: Memory and Imagination? Let word take root and live forever: that's the meaning of her name Okudiba (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001: 37).

In addition, Adimora-Ezeigbo does not just confine women to the past and forgotten ways of life in the novel through the character of Okwudiba, but she also depicts and establishes women as progressives who are forward looking and willing to embrace change. Okwudibia is the rememberer of the society "the old historian and poet of Umuga" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001:65). The history of the community rests in her good memory and her recalling of the community's history. Okwudiba's vision and dream explains the connection between reincarnation and the Chi, the Igbo word Chineke which means God. Okwudiba emphasises the point that the migration of the body and the renewal of the soil are divinely ordained. This is seen in the fusion and co-existence of the old ways with the new ones; it is a fusion which is central to Adimora-Ezeigbo's narratives. It acknowledges female relevance and implies that no character can afford to be isolated because each is important in the making of history. Adimora-Ezeigbo recalls Ejimnaka's admirable values in the ancient Umuga society through Umuga's "Third and Fourth eyes: Memory and Imagination" known as Okwudibia (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001:37). Ejimnaka's prowess is the central story in *The Last of the Strong Ones,* which is followed by *House of Symbols.* Thus, Adimora-Ezeigbo

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establishes a woman who is a major link between the past, present and future form of enlightenment.

The author endowed women with the ability to seek knowledge and break free from the traditional roles and perceptions often associated with women. Women, in the novel, as indicated through Ezenwayi, are also a source of knowledge and healing, and they are pivotal to people's achieving of their dreams. Ezenwayi describes herself and the job she does this way:

> Acting as a bridge between the living and the dead or reincarnated souls is only one aspect of the work I was chosen to do. I am able to foresee events long before they occur, I see them clearly in advance and warn people, especially if they are negative or harmful occurrences. I can also help schoolboys and girls particularly when they are preparing for their examinations. I assist people to translate their thoughts into deeds (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001: 41).

Ezenwayi thus symbolises the enlightened and strong women who serve as a link between the present and the future and, ultimately, shine as beacons of hope and light to the next generation.

In their quest for enlightenment and freedom, women have had to embrace the new religion, in order to save the lives of twins who had traditionally been seen as an abomination. In traditional Igbo culture, twins were often seen as an evil omen, and so they were either killed through sacrifice or thrown away to avert evil in the community. In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, women formed the larger number of converts in the newly established religion in the community Nneka fled for refuge under the new religion in order

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to protect the life of her twins. Adimora-Ezeigbo also strengthens this stance in *House of Symbols*:

> Aziagba acted on impulse, resorting to a blind and unplanned flight in the waiting arms of the new religion, into its strange ways, its mysteries which the lost had rejected vehemently and died resisting (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001: 62).

Eaglewoman's mother Aziagba had to run into the waiting arms of the new religion in order to save her twins, Chiedoche and Nnamdi, from being killed. The Umuga society threw twins into the evil forest because they were considered an abomination to society. That is why Aziagba decides to join Christianity which offers her twins protection from this Umuga tradition.

In *House of Symbols* Adimora-Ezeigbo changes the rivalry over a man that exists between women to that of competition in the space of business. In most male writings, such as Achebe's, women are often pitted against one another in the home as they fight for the attention and affection of their husbands or supposed suitor. Adimora-Ezeigbo admits though that there can be rivalry between women, but it should not be over the affection or attention of a man. She achieves this through the role she assigns to the central character, Eaglewoman, who is highly enterprising and prosperous in her bakery business. Eaglewoman learnt to make bread from the white colonialists and realised that there was a great demand for bread in her community. Eaglewoman's success in business and the domestic sphere are major concerns in the novel. It is to her that families bring their children for training in bread making and morals, while her rival and former friend, Soronge, finds it difficult to achieve such a feat in hers:

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> With the past swimming before her with the brightness of a gold fish, Soronge steals a look for the umpteenth time at Eaglewomen's busy shed. Tortured by what she sees, her eyes harden. No matter how hard she tries, she cannot keep her gaze or her self-imposed rival's success. Her frustration at her own failure in the business mounts by the day, turning her into a bitter woman (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001:163).

Having established that rivalry does exist between women, the author discourages the issues of polygamy by ensuring that all women or at least most of the women in the novel, starting with the central character, are married to one husband. Eaglewoman attributes her agency and success to her peace of mind in her husband Osai's house. In fact, Eaglewoman made a bold statement for monogamy during her political campaign speech. She pointed out that those seeking to be elected into leadership positions in the country should be married to one husband. She praises the political aspirant Clement thus:

> A school principal of note, a seasoned administrator loved by pupils, teachers and parents; She tells them that the whole community of Umuogasi where he was last located before his retirement six months ago wept when they learnt he was leaving the school he headed for ten years. She calls him a selfless man, a generous man, a compassionate man. A man of integrity; a kind father and a devoted husband of one woman (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001: 427).

Thus, Adimora-Ezeigbo confronts polygamy headlong and establishes a new order women can find peace and have the capacity to aspire to be whoever they want to be while in partnership with an understanding and loving husband.

In patriarchal societies, men are often endowed with the ability to be industrious, prosperous and exalted in the community either due to their educational prowess or masculine ability. One such elaborate emphasis on masculine achievement is captured in

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Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Killam illustrates and analyses these traits in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* by looking at the central character Okonkwo both as an individual, and as an embodiment of the values of his society:

> Okonkwo was 'one of the greatest men of his time', the embodiment of Ibo values, the man who better than most symbolised his race... (And) the premium which is placed on wealth, courage and valour among the Igbo people. Okonkwo was clearly cut for great things but he earned his reputation, as a wrester (he brought fame to himself and the village); as a warrior (he had taken the approved symbols of his prowess, the heads of five victims by the time he was twenty-one years old); as a man who had achieved personal wealth symbolised by his two barns full of yams, his three wives and, of great importance, the two titles he had taken, titles which can only be acquired when wealth has been achieved and quality proven (Killam, 1973:17).

Adimora-Ezeigbo, however, debunks this claim that success, fame and reputation can only be achieved through the display of masculinity. She posits that anyone can achieve greatness by being enterprising, a visionary and disciplined as symbolised by her Eaglewoman's success in the novel. Eaglewoman towered above her peers in business and stood as a source of comfort, help and hope for most people in the community. The author describes Eaglewoman's success in business this way:

> It was not difficult for her to swing back to the rhythm of managing her impressive conglomerate – by Atagu standards – which has grown bigger: the bakery whose products reaches every nook and cranny of Atagu County; the shop where she spends hours sewing, cutting, shaping and reshaping cloth; the wholesale and retail trade in salt; and last but not least, the snuff trade. Her snuff remains the mother of all snuff in Atagu County, especially in Umulobia and Umuagulu. Eagle Bread finds market even in the remotest villages and towns: its new flavours of nutmeg and vanilla ensnare consumers who will go to any length to buy it (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001: 409).

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This shows that women can be highly enterprising and industrious just like their male counterparts if given the right encouragement by their husbands and the community at large. Adimora-Ezeigbo portrays Eaglewoman as a character who has the Africana womanist cultural consciousness and belief in family, her people and society. Thus, Adimora-Ezeigbo re-writes the role of women in the society by breaking them free from the oppressive hold of patriarchy emphasised in previous novels written by some African male authors.

4.3 Social harmony and cultural integration in *House of Symbols*

Adimora-Ezeigbo also examines the way female protagonists can stand as the voice of peace in the face of strained relationships and religious conflicts. One such character that stands for cultural integration and harmony in Umuga community is Ezenwayi. She is a perfect balance in a situation where both traditional religion and Christianity (introduced through colonialism) find abode. Her voice captures this thus: "This vision later led me to believe that my destiny instructs me to combine both Christian and traditional religious practices in my ministry. And this is what I have done" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001: 31).

In her quest for balance and knowledge, she reads the Bible to gain understanding of the new religion and ways of the land of Umuga. This is unlike contemporary Nigeria, where there is widespread bloodshed all in the name of religious differences and the absolute rejection of Western education by the Boko Haram sect. Adimora-Ezeigbo comments thus:

> One way is by searching diligently. Ezenwayi stretches her right hand and draws a straw bag from under a chair close by opening it, she takes out a book: a Bible. Eaglewoman sees that it is a translated version in Umuga language (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001: 44).

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She went a step further by relating the unity in religion intricately links to a perfect understanding that should exist in the world between religions. She even extends this harmonious link of God to the relationship that should exist between men and women. Explaining that men and women are both sides of the same coin when it comes to the knowledge of God, she asserts:

> Chukwu is Man Woman fused together in pure essence. In spiritual form. Man and Women are two sides of Chukwu at the point of creation. Hence, Chukwu is both Father and Mother. The two rolled into one. Being the essence of Man and Women, Chukwu is thus genderless. God has no gender though today different people and cultures represent the Creator as male (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001: 47).

Ezenwanyi's advocacy of a de-gendered or a co-gendered God-head presents a curious paradox that most male African writers reflect in their writings. The women are portrayed as female spiritualists with supernatural powers in the mould of Chielo in, *Things Fall Apart*. On the contrary, male African writers easily expend the social and political worth of women in generic terms (Ekemezie, 2008). It is this act that Adimora-Ezeigbo attacks in her fictional works.

House of Symbols is a feminist tale contending with strife, rivalry and violence as a result of the division and integration constructed by colonial administration in the first book of the trilogy *The Last of the Strong Ones*. In the novel, there is a clash of two bodies, the religious and the ritual practices in Umuga. The novel shows the dilemma of African women as they struggle to reconcile cultural norms, an act which may be seen as progress to modernity. The emergence of these Western patterns certainly played a role in the decline of women's supportive bases of resistance in the post-colonial society. In the novel, women's

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experiences break the convenient separation of old and new, the traditional and the modern.

Colonial intrusion into Umuga and political conquest disrupted the traditional life style of the Igbo people and its environs through the introduction of Western education and Christianity. Some Amaala, the traditionalists, see the abandoning of their traditional religion and way of life as an act of violation. Ezenwayi, the prophetess of Umuga, explains to Eaglewoman and Osia how the colonial masters have caused various distortions in Umuga through their new religion:

> The white people who converted our people to their own religion. They and their followers called our ancestors pagans or heathens who have no knowledge of the Supreme Creator, Chukwu or Chineke the name that became increasingly used by the converts. What a distortion! (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001:47).

The above quotation indicates the level of erosion affecting Umuga people's way of life.

House of Symbols nevertheless, portrays aspects of Igbo traditional life and how it interfaces with colonialism. Ezenwayi, the prophetess combines both Christian and traditional religious practices in her ministry. She is one of the gatekeepers of Umuga traditional practices. She is also seen as a rebuilder of the breaches on the walls of traditional life. As far as Ezenwayi is concerned, Christianity and traditional religion should exist side by side. This implies a harmonious co-existence. She also believes that our morality and conscience should compel us to lead decent and productive lives. Ezenwayi also believes that pursuing the contrary path, will lead to systemic failure and spiritual

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disorientation (Ekemezie, 2008). Ezenwayi is portrayed by the author as a saviour of innocent souls from wicked ones. She states:

> The envious and greedy ones do nothing creative or constructive. They unleash destruction on innocent and unwary souls. This is where I come in to clear the murk. I can exorcise such wicked spirits and free their bodies, redirecting them to creative paths. I am to come against them by destroying their power even as I save them from themselves (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001:43).

Ezenwayi thus represents the physical and moral agent of regeneration in this modern African society.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols* clearly seeks to achieve creative harmony between traditional religion and Christianity in the communities of Atagu, Umuga and other neighbouring villages and towns. Adimora-Ezeigbo's mission aims to bring about conciliation between Christianity and traditional religion. Ezenwayi brings together both Christianity and traditional religion as noted in her assertion that:

> I stand in the middle of these religions, building bridges. Only bridges can save the world from itself. From disconnection and destruction. Two religions co-exist here without ease. My destiny is to bridge them, pull them together and nuture something new which draws strength from both (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001:49).

It is evident in the above quotation that Ezenwayi believes in embracing the new culture and religion to repossess all that is valuable in it. This will be fused with what is of benefit to the society. Umuga cannot remain the same after the encounter with the white colonialists. As a result, Ezenwayi notes that members of the community should embrace the new culture and religion that were introduced by the European colonialists in an effort to protect their

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future and to shape their tomorrow. The prophetess is, however, not in support of neglecting one's traditional culture and religion for the white man's culture and religion. She believes in merging both Christianity and traditional religion. *House of symbols* captures the agony and spiritual unease felt by Okwudiba, the mystic rememberer and the conscience of her people in Umuga. She awaits the appearance of the Lioness (Ejimnaka) who comes in the form of her granddaughter Nnenne, Ugonwayi's (Eaglewoman) and Josiah's (Osai) daughter. Okwudiba notes, upon seeing Eaglewoman's daughter:

> you who return on purpose to weave a new destiny. You come to speed me on my way, to send me to the place where I should have gone before now. *Ndewo*! Long have I waited to limp away (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001:90).

Thus, Ezenwayi facilitates the healing of Nnenne by linking both Eaglewoman and Osai with Okwudiba who has for long awaited the arrival of her old friend Ejimnaka in the person of Nnenne. Adimora-Ezeigbo also portrays some characters, such as Aziagba the daughter to Ejimnaka and Obiatu in *The Last of the Strong Ones*, as people who find Christianity as a saving grace from the traditional culture and religion. Aziagba encounters problem when she is declared pregnant with twins by the midwife. This is because the gods of Umuga forbid the birth of twins. Aziagba cannot afford to leave one of the twins to die in the evil forest. As a result, she finds shelter in Christianity which permits the birth of twins. Those who reject the Umuga tradition are always humiliated by the community. Osai's family is also ridiculed because he is a warrant chief, and because his father sent away four of his wives at the bidding of the new faith which does not accept polygamy. Osai notes: "After all he had married them all according to Umuga tradition long before his conversion to Christianity. Surely, God would understand" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001:62). Instead, Ezenwayi

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counsels people to reject unwholesome traditions and accept only those that are life-sustaining and valuable. Ezenwayi, thus represents the physical and moral agent of regeneration in a modern African society.

Therefore, *House of Symbols* becomes the symbolic vessel through which personal and public development and transformation are examined, and differences in religious beliefs are portrayed and realigned.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter examined Adimora-Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols* by paying particular attention to the different roles she assigns to women in the text. The author uses her fictional women to challenge existing traditions and beliefs that are prevalent in Africa.

She further uses her female characters to serve as an important link that bridges the divide existing because of religious differences. The female characters provide a balanced society where varying views and religious practices can thrive. She also explores the ideal form of relationships that should exist between a husband, wife and children, thus exalting monogamy in Africa. Adimora-Ezeigbo's depiction of female experiences also seeks to emancipate women from patriarchal stereotypes of Igbo women. These go a long way in establishing a voice for women in the society. The overall point seems to be that if women are given an enabling environment, both in the home and in the society at large, they will stand alongside their partners in bringing about the lasting peace, harmony and fulfilment, which Africa desires. Spender (1980:32) supports the notion of female agency which rejects oppression by males. This is noted in her statement that: "Feminism seeks a subjective identity, a sense of effective agency and history for women which has hitherto been denied

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them by dominant (male) culture." Male exploitation of women often involves suppressing female abilities and capabilities. Instead, Adimora-Ezeigbo's women are depicted as strong characters that do not give way to patriarchal designated stereotypes placed on them by some male authors. As a result, she joins forces with the likes of Emecheta, Walker and Clenora Hudson-Weens who prefer to call their gender discourse Womanism in this novel. Adimora-Ezeigbo, therefore, underscores the pre-modern gender structures and portrays an Igbo society where the female gender is given free access to participate in every sector in the community.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's representation of women in the novel metaphorically suggests that women are honourable and brilliant enough to excel in various sectors of life as presented in the characters of Eaglewoman, Okwudiba and Ezenwanyi. These contribute immensely to society's progress and will always be willing to do more if patriarchy offers them the opportunity. *House of Symbols* becomes the vessel through which personal, public development and transformation are examined. Healing processes, the strengthening and purgation of institutional structures, and the cleansing of the psyche do take place in the novel. In Adimora-Ezeigbo's view, purgation of emotions will not be complete without a redefinition and a realignment of the modes of social, political and spiritual relations in African society.

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THE RETURN OF THE STRONG ONES IN *CHILDREN OF THE EAGLE*

5.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle* (2002), which is the last of the trilogy of her novels which focuses on the different generational struggles of women in Eastern Nigeria's Umuga community. *The Last of the Strong Ones*, *House of Symbols* and *Children of the Eagle* are interrelated, featuring major characters, largely females, who belong to the same genealogy, but represent different prongs of the battle against patriarchy. Thus, it is the same 'war of the sexes' running over generations, each generation faced with its challenges that the author focuses on. In The *Last of the Strong Ones*, Adimora-Ezeigbo depicts the centrality of women in the core of Umuga traditional existence before the coming of kosiri (the white man). This time, the four daughters of Umuga – Ejimnaka, Onyekaozuru, Chieme and Chibuka – through their activism, become members of "Obuofo" (custodians of the ancestral staff, ofo), which was largely a male prerogative. In *House of Symbols*, a daughter of one of the four "strong ones" called Ugonwanyi (Eaglewoman) is both the matriarch and chief protagonist. The author describes her thus, "Eaglewoman is a solid rock that gathers moss. Around her, green and yellow moss blossoms in a thick furry mass at all seasons. People obey her and dance to her tune" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2001:99). In the last novel of the trilogy, *Children of the Eagle*, Eaglewoman is still alive but aged, her five daughters are focused on.

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The chapter explores how the author re[illegible]tes the lives of characters and personages perceived to have lived and interacted in the first novel of the trilogy, *The Last of the Strong Ones*. The study also examines the presence of the future envisioned and preserved in "Children of the Eagle: the Return of the Strong Ones". Here, the role of Eaglewoman's five children in their communities is analysed using a womanist perspective.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle* recreates the heroic strength of women and a celebration of their indomitable spirit in the face of socio-cultural oppression. She achieves this by creating female characters such as Eaglewoman, and her five daughters. Ogonna the first child is a school teacher and a trader, Nnenne is a University lecturer, Obioma is an evangelist, Amara is a journalist and Chiaku is a medical doctor. The novel tackles social issues related to the effects of the Nigerian Civil War. The issues treated prominently here are women, gender inequality and female oppression that exist in the Eastern part of Nigeria. The focus of the novel is on Eaglewoman's five daughters who form its central characters. The daughters are ambitious and determined women, who are proud to identify themselves as women and are ready to stand out in a crowd. These women have distinguished themselves in their various professions and are determined to move higher up the social ladder, in spite of the barriers imposed by men in a society where women are marginalised.

Therefore, *Children of the Eagle* is examined in relation to the womanist point of view that was reviewed in chapter one of this study. The analysis of the novel is based on the assumption that the author uses different women characters to portray different feminist

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viewpoints in an effort to place women in the human society and protest against the injustices suffered by women.

5.2 The place of daughters in Igbo culture

Children of the Eagle portrays the cultural mores and traditional practices that marginalise women in the represented fictional Eastern part of Nigeria, as well as their struggle for freedom and survival. The Umuga community is patriarchal and, as a result, the social and traditional practices are organised in favour of men. The novel describes Umuga's preference for the male child, the attachment of importance to male children, the non-recognition of women's achievements, and incidents of the rape and sexual harassment of women. The author exposes social issues that marginalise women in the Eastern part of Nigeria, as well as celebrates the women's struggle for freedom and survival.

The family lineage of Umuga kinship is through the male. As such, the absence of a male child in the family of Osia and Eaglewoman, prior to the birth of Nkemdirim, is a source of anxiety and worry to the Okwara lineage. This is inspite of the presence of the five diligent women. The importance attached to the male gender is more prominent in the portrayed Igbo land, where Umuga is located. Osia's brother Reuben reminds him that he has no heir when he asks Osia to sell Osia his plots of land in Enyimba city because women are not allowed to inherit land. The reason behind this practice is that women get married, and as the novel suggests, it is considered an abomination for a woman to carry her father's wealth to her husband's house.

The author places, on the lips of the five daughters of Osai and Eaglewoman, the message of a new redemption, which can only occur when women and the larger society are re-

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educated to enable the former to enjoy a more qualitative existence. It needs to be pointed out that Adimora-Ezeigbo's passion with placing umuada (daughters married outside Umuga, the kin-group) and alutaradi (women married into Umuga) at the centre of her feminist discourses is certainly due to the fact that the two categories of women can be both weak and strong at the same time, depending on the nature of the organisation, education and information at their disposal. Umuada are virtually silent, occasionally thought to be expendable, and often regarded as potential foreigners. Yet, in families without a son like the Okwara family, a daughter could give birth to the male heir just as Obioma does – though inadvertently – for her family.

Similarly, whether as umuada or alutaradi, the women of Umuga can exert sufficient force, as a pressure group, when they join together and confront improprieties or misdeeds being perpetuated by men. It is this potential that Adimora-Ezeigbo discovers and explores in each of her novels. Understandably, women of the period rose to fill the place with sufficient pomp and grace, achieving considerable impact. One of the earliest Igbo writers on Igbo culture, remarks as follows:

> The African woman regarded as a chattel of her husband, who has made a bride wealth payment on her account, is not an Igbo woman, who enjoys a high socio-economic status. She can leave her husband at will, abandon him if he becomes a thief, and summon him to a tribunal, where she will get a fair hearing. She marries in her own right and manages her trading capital and her profits as she sees fit [...] [Women] can have leasehold, take titles, and practice medicine (Uchendu 1965: 87).

The reason, for citing these specialists on the Igbo culture is to show that women in Igbo land have not always been a helpless gender.

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As indicated above, women, as a collective group, constitute a formidable force in the politics of any Igbo clan. One can argue that Adimora-Ezeigbo in her novel compelled Okwara daughters to return to Umuga with a view to righting some of the wrongs against women in their natal domain. Although the Okwaras had returned for a few days to mark the fifth anniversary of Osai's death, and to honour Eaglewoman, their mother, on her birthday, the task the author sets them to do, is that of re-education. The death of Osai exposes the Okwara family to the greed of neighbours who capitalise on his absence, in order to acquire land. For instance, it is after the death of Osai that the sons of Umeaku try to reclaim a piece of land that their father sold to Osai. Umeaku's sons are so confident that there is "nobody" in the Okwara family to challenge them since the grown children are women, and the only son born into the family lives in London. This shows that the Umuga structure is patrilineal and the continuity of the family lineage is through the male. The land settlement is compounded by the fact that Ogunano Ezeala, the highest decision-making body in the land, does not deal directly with women. Pa Joel, an elderly man in Umuga, represents the Okwara family at the highest decision-making body, Ogunano Ezeala, and it is only then that the daughters of Eaglewoman realise that it is a misfortune to have a family populated with women. The family, however, rejoices when one of the daughters of Eaglewoman, Obioma, gives birth to a son called Nkemdirim. Nkemdirim's birth is considered a birth of hope and continuity. It is clear that Umuga values people not for their achievements but for their gender and that is why Nkemdirim's, prsence though he is not seen in *Children of the Eagle,* is felt throughout the novel.

Adimora-Ezeigbo acknowledges the women's constitution of survival techniques. In *Children of the Eagle* the identification that enables a woman to share in patriarchal power is

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portrayed in the novel. Eaglewoman having experienced the voicelessness of women in Umuga, admits: "I am a prey to every roaming hyena because I do not have a husband anymore. Because I have no grown son to speak for me" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:49). Eaglewoman realises that it is only when there are men in the family that she can speak within the patriarchal environment of Umuga. The birth of Nkemderim embodies the power that she Eaglewoman lacks in Umuga's socio-cultural environment. Oloko notes that in Adimora-Ezeigbo's fiction:

> What emerges effortlessly and convincingly is the position that to challenge Igbo patriarchy, and transcend its stifling authority successfully or even to express herself well and initiate the crucial dialogue of change in Igbo society, Adimora-Ezeigbo had to understand the need to cooperate with patriarchy (Adimora-Ezeigbo1990:10).

This is evident in Eaglewoman's construction of her grandson as her own son. Thus, even though the community Adimora-Ezeigbo yearns to see is one that is free from gender inequality, she realises that this is impossible in the Igbo socio-cultural environment. She, therefore, uses Eaglewoman and her five daughters to advocate a way in which a woman can rebel and, at the same time, cooperate and participate in patriarchal power and authority. Eaglewoman's definition of Nkemderim as her own son, enables her to regain the voice which has been denied her. Therefore, Adimora-Ezeigbo shows us women not smarting under the burdens of western imperialism or the traditionalism of Umuga. Instead, we see great women empowered not by a male society, but by themselves to create a society where they are valued for who they are.

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5.3 The recreation of characters from *The Last of the Strong Ones* in *Children of the Eagle*

Adimora-Ezeigbo's creation of the place of women in contemporary Nigeria spans beyond the present and situates itself in the past. It also envisions a future where women play a pivotal role in the unfolding social, economic and political landscape of the world, Africa in particular. She recreates this unique position in *Children of the Eagle* through a thread that runs from the past into the present and looks into the future. *Children of the Eagle* is a mirror image of the first and second war of the struggle in Umuga community of this fictional Eastern Nigeria. This mirror image is traced through the lives of the central characters in the novel. Eaglewoman's children are central to the recreation and re-education of society on the role and importance of women in the emerging shapes of Africa. It is vital, therefore, to take a closer look at each of her children, Ogonna, Nnenne, Obioma, Chiaku and Amara, in an effort to trace this dramatic link of the past, present and future that is depicted in the novel.

Ogonna is the eldest of Eaglewoman's children. She is a role model of the family and to all of her siblings. She is expected to shine as a star that beams the right path for others in the family to follow both in character, lifestyle and, more especially, in marriage. She briefly drives this notion home in her own words, "It is true that first born of the family are looked up to in order to set lasting examples for their younger ones" (Adimora-Ezeigbo 200:313). Ogonna is a teacher at a secondary school where she teaches Biology and has four: children two boys and two girls. She also buys and sales clothes to people from her community.

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Ogonna is the one who took after her mother's business expertise she stumbled into the trade in an effort to improve her family's conditions as noted below:

> In desperation she said, I turned to trading in cloth to make extra money. With the money I realized from trading and the wages from my job as a biology teacher in a secondary school, I was able to take proper care of my needs and family's (Adimora-Ezeigbo,2002: 313).

Chiaku, on the other hand, is the third of Eaglewoman's children. She is a trained medical doctor by profession, residing and practicing her work in the United Kingdom (UK). She moved to the UK after attaining her certificate examination in the country. According to Nnenne:

> Chiaku stumbled upon one of the scholarship schemes floating into the country after the war. She passed the interview and soon flew out of the country for her medical studies in England (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002: 401).

Though these two Ogonna and Chiaku differ in personality, temperament, profession and world view, their area of similarity is in their marriages. Ogonna and Chiaku's similarity stems from their choice of marriage partners. Ogonna married her husband, in order to please her mother's cultural sentiments. She laments her ordeal thus: "In other words, I married him to please my mother. Doesn't that sound stupid?" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:308). Chiaku also got married for reasons other than love. She got married to someone she barely knew despite the disapproval and discouragement of her parents and siblings. Nnenne narrates her story thus:

> She met Mossey Kwesi and married him after graduation. It was a whirlwind courtship and romance that ended in marriage. We all felt Chiaku should wait so as to know the man better before plunging into marriage, but she thought differently (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002: 401).

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Adimora-Ezeigbo recreated these two characters to expose the challenges faced by today's women who get married or go into a relationship for reasons other than love.

She advocates, through these characters, that parental, cultural or emotional sentiments should not be the reasons for one to rush into marriage. She succinctly posits that such relationships or marriages do not last, and, even if they do, it is always in an atmosphere of mistrust as shown in Ogonna's experiences. She also recreates these characters to mirror some of the central characters in *Last of the Strong Ones*. In *The Last of the Strong Ones*, Ejimnaka and her husband Obiatu were described as role models when it came to marriage in the community. However, the other two strong ones, Chieme and Chibuka's marriages were not as successful as hers. Adimora-Ezeigbo recreates Chieme and Chibuka through Ogonna and Chiaku to bring to light that if right choices are not made before marriage the same problems that plagued marriages in the past will be prevalent in the present. Thus, Adimora-Ezeigbo promotes a relationship based on true love and not rush decisions.

Another set of characters recreated by Adimora-Ezeigbo in *Children of the Eagle* through the life of Nnenne and Obioma are Ejimnaka and Eaglewoman. She did this through the success of their respective marriages. Nnenne and Obioma's marriages are built on dialogue, mutual respect and genuine love for one another. Nnenne remarks thus about the importance of communication in a marriage and how that has made a huge difference between her and Obioma's marriages and those of her sisters:

> I smiled as I thought about the name Afam gave to our first child, Nkolika. The name means 'Dialogue is supreme'. I often tell myself that this is the principle that guides Afam and me in our marriage. It works. Dialogue is the secret of a successful relationship. Keeping the communication line open at all

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> times is important. It works like magic. Among my sisters, Obioma has this magic in her marriage. It is lacking in Ogonna's. Chiaku never really had it; her marriage packed up like an overworked machine that was never serviced (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002: 401).

This was the same communication dynamics that Ejimnaka and Eaglewoman had in their relationships and marriages and which made them a model in their times. This shows that Adimora-Ezeigbo believes that a marriage should be characterised by dialogue and complementary roles by both husband and wife if they are to succeed. Adimora-Ezeigbo seeks complementarity rather than equality. Her goal is "negotiation, compromise, reconciliation" (Osofisan, 2004:39). The successful marriages portrayed in Adimora-Ezeigbo's fiction are characterised by mutual respect between husband and wife, with each one demonstrating a clear awareness of the importance of the other. Marriage in her fictional works becomes a project in which the contributions of husband and wife are equally important, regardless of whether women are to be considered "equal" to men or not (Olufunwa, 2008). Nwajiaku (2011) notes that Adimora-Ezeigbo's portrayal of female characters assists in the establishment of harmonious relationships between men and women, in the public and private domains.

Adimora-Ezeigbo recreates the past characters in the present to stress the importance of communication, complementarity and love in a marriage for it to last long. The survivalist model of African womanhood illustrated in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle* corresponds to the dominant trend in the African womanist discourse. The discourse comprises of complementary, negotiation and reconciliation. The complementarities model has been projected in womanist discourse as a rejection of western feminist postulations and a projection of African gender perspectives. The story of the four daughters in *Children*

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of the Eagle also focuses on their relationships with men, and how they have sought, in their individual ways, to redress gender inequality. The women are confident and independent individuals who have attained appreciable economic and social statuses. The position and location of these women in the various professions is a deliberate strategy by the author to ensure that they are viewed, first, as citizens making the mark in the socio-economic landscape of their country and communities. Gender inequality is inherent in the treatment of divorcees and their daughters compared with the treatment of men and their sons. The fear of social stigma makes Ogonna, Eaglewoman's eldest daughter stay in a bad marriage. The daughters of such women are no exception either "they say such girl cannot make happy homes" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:126). This discriminating social attitude makes marriage a cage that traps and enslaves women while men are given license to do whatever they dim fit.

5.4 Re-education on patriarchal assumptions by Eaglewoman's Daughters in *Children of the Eagle*

Eaglewoman's daughters overtly and covertly confront some of Umuga's patriarchal assumptions because they believe that they should not exist. The daughters experience these assumptions, challenge their illogical substructure and, thus, compel us to examine these assumptions. The first of the assumptions is that brute strength matters. The daughters take up the challenge of destroying such an assumption. The uprooting of boundary markers by Umeaku's sons between their land and Osai's show that they believe that brute strength is supreme. Eaglewoman narrates the episode of how the sons of Umeaku came onto the land that had been sold to Osai by their father earlier on. "That

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evening," Eaglewoman reports to her daughters, "they stalked this piece of land like beasts of prey, killed and uprooted all the markers. Their shouts of abuse filled the air, some of it directed at me personally, the rest at my departed husband" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:71). The Umeaku sons had done this because there was no male in the Okwara family strong enough to challenge them. In a tone of helplessness, Eaglewoman, now ageing, laments: "What could I do? I have no husband or grown son to fight for me?" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:71). However, the Okwara amazons take up the challenge. We are informed that "Nnenne bites her lips in an effort to suppress her rising anger" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:72). Ogonna, the eldest daughter, "clenches her hand as if preparing to punch someone" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:72). On the part of Obioma, she shakes "her head in disgust at the sight before them, wondering how anyone could commit such a senseless act" while Amara is said to have shouted 'Hey' twice "in utter disbelief" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:72). These gestures show how injustice can be, whether it is directed at a male or a female, whether one has sufficient physical strength to fight it or not.

Another assumption is that "women are not permitted to approach Ogunano Ezeala directly or address the council" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:73). Ogunano Ezeala is the highest decision making body in the land. It does not deal directly with women and, as such, if a woman is confronted with a problem that needs to be solved by Ogunano Ezeala, it has to be conveyed by a man. Eaglewoman expresses this fear in front of her children who are bent on calling the Umeaku sons to order. Eaglewoman may have been an adventurous woman in her younger days, particularly with respect to economic independence, but she seems to have turned male-centric in her old age as noted in the way she pleads for calm and readily turns the other cheek as it were. However, the "children of the eagle" challenge her new

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frame of mind. They reject their mother's view and turn down the suggestion that Pa Joel represent them before Ogunano. Amara cries: "At this time and age women are not allowed to approach a group set up to keep peace in the town?" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:74). Nnenne insists that "we must direct our grievance straight to these men" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:74). Soon an idea is struck; they construct a letter, which ensures that "we'll communicate with them directly, as well as have a record of our petition and our demand for justice in case we need to go beyond the council to seek justice at a later date" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:74). Earlier, Nnenne had said to the other siblings, "I assure you that if justice fails to materialize at this level [Ogunano], we'll take the case to court" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:74). Much later in the story, their letter wins them a permanent solution to the land matter between them and the Umeakus. The solution, as suggested by the Okwara daughters in the letter to Ogunano Ezeala, was to erect permanent markers on the boundary between the two lands. Thus, the claim by one of the representatives of Ogunano that the five sisters "acted like men" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:315) is faulty; instead they acted like women! The reason is that men would have first resorted to the use of strength rather than intuition before settling for a compromise in the end.

The Okwara sisters also fought against the view that a land case must be presented before men for it to be resolved. This patriarchal claim is debunked at the erection of the permanent pillars on the disputed lands where a representative of Ogunano insists that Nkemdirim, the male heir to the Okwara family, be present. When the representative learns from Eaglewoman that "my son has not returned home yet," he retorts: "He should be here while the markers are being erected" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:315). The daughters' dissatisfaction is noted in Nnenne's speaking on behalf of the other sisters that: "He's only a

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child and there are five of us present to represent the family" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:315). However, as far as the emissary of peace is concerned, this is not enough. For him, not even ten women are equivalent to a man as noted in the statement that: "Your brother may be a child but he is a male. The land in question belongs to him: it is his inheritance. Whoever hears that land issues are settled in the presence of women in Umuga?" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:315). Eventually, the representative quickly accepts the exit provided by Pa Joel with his smooth speech: "Ogunano Ezeala knows and you too know that there is no difference between the Okwara family and my own family. I have been like a father to all his children since Okwara rejoined the ancestors. I represent them in everything and have often spoken for them in the meetings of Ogunano Ezeala, especially as the only son of the family is still a minor" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:315). The representative's quick acceptance of Pa Joel's suggestion indicates that patriarchy is losing out. Thus, the compromise that "you (Pa Joel) will act as the family's representative, as well as Ogunano Ezeala's is only a face-saving device" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:316). Thus the "children of Eagle" are portrayed in the novel as female characters who do not allow gender-based discrimination to weigh them down. Instead, they stand up to fight for their rights.

Patriarchy assumes that a son is more valuable than all daughters added together. As mentioned earlier on the peace mission of Ogunano Ezeala, the verbal as well as body language of its chief representative is that on land matters, a son is more important than many daughters put together. However, the fretting by Eaglewoman over Nkemdirim's non-return to participate in the family year end celebrations seems to insinuate that a son is more valuable than daughters. For instance, on hearing that Nkemdirim had been involved in a motor accident even if not fatal, "Eaglewoman slumps sideways: her head falls against

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the arm of the chair" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:373). Yet Nkemdirim is still an adolescent schoolboy. The expectation of the family is that the future fortunes of the family rest with his survival and long life. Thus, the news of the accident involving Nkemdirim is a big blow to Eaglewoman, in particular, as she thinks of the family inheritance. Ironically, Nkemdirim is the biological son of one of the Okwara sisters, adopted as it were by Eaglewoman as one of her direct children, having deceived the people or so she thought.

The daughters are all accomplished: they erect a building at the Osai compound and install a generator, drive their own cars and ensure luxury all around them. It is expected by patriarchy that women must not nurture individual character, it is in fact a factor of their subservient places in their family that the alutaradi (women married into Umuga) "bunch together, wear the same clothes, hoping that sheer number might do the trick" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:101). In other circumstances already pointed out above, bunching together would work, but in a calm, peaceful climate of everyday life, Nnenne, the voice currently criticising Umuga women for dressing alike. Women's low self-esteem, coupled with their low education, makes it difficult for them to acknowledge self fully. For instance, they hardly knew the best way to "cook vegetables without losing the vitamins" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:94). Ogonna, the eldest of the Okwara sisters, teaches some Umuga women how best to prepare vegetables. The poor life-styles of Umuga women are responsible for the way they look. In the presence of the five daughters of Okwara whose looks are clearly different, one Umuga woman could not help but remark "Take a look at your bodies; they exude oil. Not a wrinkle on any of your faces" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:102). Another Umuga woman observes: "Take a look at my kpakiri-kpakiri skin; it is hard and rough like the bark of a tree" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002: 102). The five sisters educate the village women on how to eat

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healthily and exercise regularly for "the body to remain youthful" since if the "body is well cared for, it rebuffs the attack of invading diseases" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:110). Therefore, Adimora-Ezeigbo educates the women of Umuga on how they can enhance their self esteem while dealing with men through the daughters of Eaglewoman.

Adimora-Ezeigbo sets herself the task of disproving the argument that it is a man's prerogative to enjoy sex. She does this through the re-education of women on the principles of sexual enjoyment. Nnenne advises the rural women to be sure that in bed none must allow her husband "to grab all the pleasure" because "the pleasure is not all his. You have a right to some of it. You should ensure that you get it, or there should be no business at all" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:108). One woman confesses of her own experience whenever she is in the act with her husband: "my spirit stands aside to watch like the ghost of a newly dead person watching the funeral rites" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:108). As Obioma puts it, in her own address to the alutaradi "Woman needs to occupy the rightful place God reserved for her: beside man, not behind or before him" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:88). A heart-to-heart talk takes place between the Umuga women and the "daughters of Obidiegwu Okwara" on how to improve sexual enjoyment within marriage. The women's vote of thanks rendered by the vocal Akuoma is evidence that some re-education has taken place: "We thank you again for what we learnt today. Tonight, when I throw my right leg and then the left one at my husband, and reach out to him with my arm, I will be properly armed to defeat his astonishment or disapproval. I may even go further than that and lick his lips" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:117). An additional part of the re-education is the emphasis the five daughters of Eaglewoman place on women's economic independence: "We urge each one of you to find something to do to generate income for yourself so that you can take care of

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yourself and your children" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:118). This is because, as Aziagba would say: "a woman who waits for a man or a husband to supply her needs, ends up cooking only water in her pot" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:119). Of course, with economic independence, a woman can easily assert total control over her body.

Another assumption is that when a man dies, it is the wife that should be held accountable. The patriarchy in Igbo land believes that once the man dies, it is the widow who would have arranged for it, in order to benefit from the wealth he would have left behind. That is why, in spite of her having lived happily with her husband, Eaglewoman is asked to perform the demeaning widowhood rituals. For instance, she is expected "to perform the three-day ritual lament at cockcrow, after the burial". During this time she is supposed to howl "like a hyena for three days." However, her daughters intervene wondering "why on earth" Umuga should "want to sustain such a horrible custom" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:164). Ironically, it is the umuada (ex-maidens married out of Umuga) that insist on Eaglewoman performing the "horrible custom". For more than two weeks, the umuada descend on the bereaved family "eating and drinking in my house at my expense, without giving a thought to my agony or depression." Not only are they guzzlers, "they complained that the food given them was not big enough. Sometimes they rejected the food, threatening to desert the funeral rites and rituals" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:165). For Eaglewoman, it is real torture. The umuada eat and drink at the widow's house for more than two weeks at her expense, without giving a thought to her agony or depression. Adimora-Ezeigbo exposes the oppressive cultural traditions and social mores in Umuga. She portrays the degree of the inhumanity inherent in Umuga by concentrating on the pain experienced by those at the receiving end of such cultural practices.

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Finally, the other assumption is that no woman is worth her achievement unless if she surrenders her body in exchange for progress or promotion at work. Even when such women show evidence of some acumen, their promotion in the job place is often predicated on the amount of sexual gratification they are willing to grant their male superiors. This is Adanna's case, even in a university setting where promotion is supposed to be largely based on intellectual productivity. Nnenne reminds her other sisters as they take a march round the village, "You remember Adanna had to leave her university job to form a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). Her action was a result of the harrowing experience she went through in her university, especially in her department" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:216). Adanna's formation of her NGO called Gender Equity Watch (GEW) which "promotes qualitative research into gender issues and the dissemination of that research to government and its agencies, to industries and the private sector, in general" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:222) indicates commitment to the fight for gender equity. Here, the struggle for women's rights can be seen in the activities of Adanna's NGO.

Generally, it is the Eaglewoman's daughters who actually take clear feminist positions and are ready to fight against male domination. They are not prepared to sit on the fence and endure the injustices meted on women in the community. Most of their actions are in protest against male domination and gender discrimination.

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Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle* brings to bear a unique perspective to role of women in society. Previous novels in the trilogy looked at the past and the present and situated women in the consciousness of a patriarchal society of both periods. *Children of the Eagle*, however, has the strength of hindsight, insight and foresight. It recreate the past through characters, such as Nnenne, Obioma and Adanna. The present condition of women is recreated through the development of characters like Ogonna, and Chiaku. The novel went further to preserve and creates a future in which the writer envisions a positive status for women in the twenty-first century and beyond.

One overriding vision in the novel is the issue of female freedom and the creation of a voice for women in the society. This quest for freedom has been the unifying factor that runs through all feminist writings. Adimora-Ezeigbo, despite being a womanist who seeks complementary roles between women and their male counterparts, subtly envisions a future where women have the liberty to choose who to marry or whether to walk out of any marriage they find unbearable. The liberty of choice in marriage is brought to light through the life of Eaglewoman's last daughter, Amara.

Adimora-Ezeigbo portrays Amara with all the traces of liberty and as a symbol of the strong voice of women in the future. Amara, as the Eaglewoman's last daughter, holds a unique position in that she represents women who will emerge in the future. Unlike Ogonna, Nnenne and Obioma who have significant interaction with their cultural roots, Chiaku and Amara do not have such a relationship with the culture and traditions of their people. Amara grew up hating everything her culture stands for, especially its valuing of traditional

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and cultural consciousness over the liberty of the individual and women. She also became more and more estranged from the tradition and culture of her people as she grew older. She voices out her criticism of the culture's conservatism thus:

> As years rolled by, I became increasingly estranged from my home town Umuga. My soul revolted against some of the unjust traditions practiced by people. Why should so much importance be attached to male children to the detriment of their female siblings? (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:184).

Amara'a statement openly describes a generation of women in the future who will increasingly disassociate themselves from their traditional roots because of their rigidity. These women will continue to challenge and revolt against traditions in the African society that seek to subjugate women at the expense of their male counterparts. They are a breed of women who, through out their lives, live to challenge cultural practices that make women immaterial in the community. Indeed, Amara grew up challenging the tradition of Umuga:

> I was not satisfied with things as they stood, as they stand. I grew up challenging, in my heart if not openly, a culture that sought- still seeks – to subordinate and humiliate my sisters and me (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002: 184).

It is this feeling of dissatisfaction that Adimora-Ezeigbo portrays as the catalyst that will embolden and serve as a driving force for women in future to seek new grounds and opportunities outside the confines of their immediate society or country.

Amara also expresses her willingness to part ways with the community of Umuga if it continues to subjugate women in the future. This is pointed out in her statement that:

> If Umuga continues to cling to some backward customs like disinheriting her daughters because they are not sons, then a time will come when I will stop my pilgrimage even to my ancestors' graves. If

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mama rejoins the ancestors, then there will be nothing to take me to or detain me in the town (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002: 185).

Some of these women, just as Amara pointed out, are still tied down by some factors beyond their control. They are willing to cut all ties with their roots and never look back, as confirmed in Amara's statement above. Adimora-Ezeigbo's creation of this character goes beyond the representation of women's attainment of freedom, as it also gives these women a voice in the society. Amara, is also a journalist working with one of the leading newspaper houses in the Eastern part of the country. This goes to show that women can occupy positions of influence and prominence where their voices will be heard as they champion the cause of justice and freedom.

Adimora-Ezeigbo also explores the concept of female emancipation from conservative patriarchal ideals by creating a future in which women have the right to walk out of abusive and unfulfilling relationships. She foresees a future in which women can choose whom they want to marry and even determine their sexual orientation. She creates this future through the life of Eaglewoman's fourth daughter, Chiaku. Chiaku, the medical doctor in the Okpara family, gained admission into a foreign university through a scholarship. After her graduation, she fell in love and married a young man from Ghana, called Mossey Kwesi. The relationship was frowned upon by her parents and the siblings, but she would not have any word of it. Nnenne captures this episode thus:

The marriage lasted about three years. None of us met the man whom she met in London. When she wrote to tell us about him, she introduced him as Mossey Kwesi, born of a Ghanaian father and a Togolese mother. Papa and mama were not happy about the relationship, but there was nothing they could do. It was a whirlwind courtship and romance that ended in marriage. We all felt Chiaku should

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wait so as to know the man better before plunging into marriage, but she thought differently (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002: 401).

This unwillingness to heed the advice of her parents and siblings is a narrative metaphor that Adimora-Ezeigbo uses to create a future in which women are free to make their own decisions and choices. After the collapse of her marriage, Chiaku took a dramatic turn that not only surprised the family but also introduced a new concept into the outlook of women in the future. This new outlook is subtly inferred through the relationship that exists between Chiaku and Emma. Emma is the girlfriend that Chiaku met after she found out the duplicity of her husband. The relationship that exists between them seems somewhat suggestive of lesbianism, as implied from her conversation with younger sister Amara:

> I nodded and continued: "Please, tell me, this American woman you live with, what is she to you?" Chiaku sat up, giving me a searching look. "What do you mean?" she asked. "I mean, what is your relationship with her?" "She's my friend, a close friend. Why do you ask?" "Is she something more than a close friend?" I hesitated. "I mean, more than a good friend in the ordinary sense? (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002: 192).

Chiaku at first tried to evade the question posed by her sister, but eventually admits though indirectly, that the relationship that exists between her and Emma goes beyond the ordinary form of friendship that should be among women. She drives home her point with these words, "Nobody should turn in his grave on account of me. My life is my own and I will live it as I wish, do you hear that?" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002: 192). This firm assertion from Chiaku indicates that women in the future will be free not just in the choice of whom they marry, but also in their sexual orientation or preference.

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Also, strengthening this notion of women's freedom of choice is Adimora-Ezeigbo's portrayal of Amara's choice of a husband, a man who hailed from a totally different country. Amara met and fell in love with a whiteman called Nicholas Thomas. Amara's choice of Nick brings a fresh perspective. It shows that women will not only marry whom they like, but also that such a person can be from any country or outside their racial group provided they both love and appreciate each other.

It should be pointed out before concluding the chapter that *Children of the Eagle* also raises the issue of the effects of the Nigerian civil war on society. Some of the effects of the war, as depicted in the novel, include poverty, and starvation. For instance, during Obioma's experience as a student, her once-prosperous parents became financially unstable due to the tragic war. As a result, she falls into the trap of sexual exploitation by a Nigerian soldier, Lanre Roberts, through the collaboration of Obioma's fellow student, Florence. Florence herself is also a victim of the same sexual exploitation by another Nigerian soldier, Major Ibrahim. Obioma is later confronted by an unwanted pregnancy. She refuses to carry out an abortion and eventually gives birth to a child, who becomes the only son of the Okwara family – the much guarded family secret which must not be exposed even in the family book that Nnenne wants to write. Obioma's son, Nkemdium becomes the hope of the family. Also, as a result of the war, Ogonna lost her heartthrob, Harry Ozoemena, and was, thus, denied a compatible life partner. Her marriage to Uzoma, an incompatible partner, left her with nothing but psychological trauma.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle* is connected to the emancipation of fellow women and the enlightenment of men. In the novel, the author uses the five daughters as vehicles

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to debunk patriarchy in Umuga community. The four daughters enjoy sisterhood and, with it, they launch a quiet reform of retrogressive traditions in Umuga. With the exception of Nnenne, each of these women may have had their own marital problems, but they, however come to Umuga for a few days, put behind their problems, in order to unmask patriarchy and its assumptions.

The five daughters of Eaglewoman create the impression that so much can be achieved by women to weaken patriarchy and raise the consciousness of rural women to challenge and confront non-progressive customs, as well as enrich the material and sexual lives of women. Adimora-Ezeigbo portrays this through her implementation of the feminism of re-education. Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle* suggests that African women need to be placed within a specific time framework within which to conceptualise and analyse their roles, images, identities and status.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter examined Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle,* paying particular attention to how she recreates the past and also creates a future where women will eventually participate in patriarchal power and authority in their communities and societies at large.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle* is a balanced novel because it is directed at both men and women. *Children of the Eagle* is most importantly a novel of social reconstruction. The author does not only expose the social crimes against women, but also demonstrates, through the lives of the main characters, the ways out of such degradation. The five daughters of Eaglewoman do not just sit and watch the state of Umuga women, but they map out strategies that change the condition of women in the community. *Children of the*

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Eagle teach women how to survive in a man's world while fighting for equality and justice. For instance, the five daughters of Eaglewoman do not just get involved in a fight with Umeaku's sons, nor are they discouraged by the fact that they cannot deal directly with the highest decision making body in the land as women. Instead, they find means to directly reach the decision-making body through a letter, and the case is resolved.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's feminism is basically African; it is referred to as "womanism". Womanism explains the male/female alliance and it also emphasises the male-female relations as complimentary. It is considered paramount in life. She also strives to protect the aspects of African culture, as expressed in the Eaglewoman's statement that "all that is wholesome in our culture should be protected and preserved" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002:319). This belief is shown in her love for African communal life.

The chapter also examined some patriarchal assumptions and the re-education of women in the society through the agency of Eaglewoman's daughters. Each one of them is described playing a significant role in shaping the future of women. Thus, Adimora-Ezeigbo's literary prowess here lies not just in the re-creation of the ideal roles played by women in the past, but in her ability to envision and situate women in the emerging shapes of the future in Africa. She succeeds in creating bold, assertive, diligent and courageous women as portrayed in the lives of Eaglewoman and her daughters who are constructed as models for women's struggle.

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CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter provides a summative view on each of the issues discussed in this dissertation. It summarises and concludes on issues related to the struggle of the different generations of women depicted in Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy. This study drew on literature from the feminist movement and ideologies to analyse Adimora-Ezeigbo's portrayal of women's experiences in Eastern Nigeria. Adimora-Ezeigbo created strong female characters in her trilogy to challenge male dominance. The study, thus, incorporates feminist ideologies such as womanism and Africana feminism which were propounded by African critics such as Acholonu, Ogundipe and Hudson-Weems. The concept of womanism and African feminism suits the African expectation. Although African women have drawn their inspiration from western feminism, they believe feminism should be shaped by their environment, tradition and culture.

The trilogy represents women's experiences under patriarchy. The author describes how these women characters were able to maintain a balance in a male-dominated society. Adimora-Ezeigbo challenges the patriarchal Igbo society and shows that Igbo women have always been active and also they had a voice in their society from the pre-colonial, to the post-colonial era.

Chapter one reviews the feminist theories that inform the study. Generally, feminism is defined as a movement against patriarchy. It seeks to give the woman a sense of self as a

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worthy, effectual and contributing human beings. Emphasis is given to the African feminist point of view and theoretical frameworks that underpin this study. The African feminist point of view was drawn from the general feminist views initiated by European women. The growth of feminism began in Europe and America in the eighteenth century when women became conscious of their oppression and took steps to uplift themselves. This prompted various female writers across the globe to base their writings on issues pertaining to the rights of women in society. Although, feminism generally seeks to promote the interests of women in patriarchal societies, some African women writers and critics cannot see how the western feminist ideology reflects the African environment. They believe feminism should be shaped by its environment. In particular, African feminism recognises the condition of African women and describes the need for freedom and self-expression among women in society. The theories used for the study is Hudson-Weens' (1993) womanism and Africana feminism and also post-colonialism. The major concern of the African feminism movement is the transformation of the position of women in African societies. Finally, the chapter concludes with the provision of a statement of the problem which points to the oppression of women as depicted by Adimora-Ezeigbo in her trilogy.

In chapter two, the study evaluates how women have been represented in the society through a close examination of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. It also examined the African male writers' perceptions about women and gender issues in literary texts. The rationale behind the examination of some of Achebe's works was to illustrate the stereotypical representations of women in his early works. The chapter also explored critical reactions to Achebe's portrayal of women in his works. Having done a thorough evaluation, the study used these views as a stepping stone for the analysis of Adimora-Ezeigbo's novels.

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Adimora-Ezeigbo uses her trilogy to show a clear distinction between her portrayal of women and the portrayals in earlier fictional works by male writers such as Achebe. The chapter concludes by asserting how Adimora-Ezeigbo empowers her female characters as all round character who emerge as women leaders for the benefit of their community.

Chapter three of this study provided an analysis of Adimora-Ezeigbo's first novel in the trilogy, *Last of the Strong Ones*. The analysis shows how the author privileged women with leadership roles, especially in the fight against colonial dominion, in the social reality of Umuga community. The analysis focused on the roles played by central characters such as Ejimnaka, Onyekozuru, Chieme and Chibuka in the struggle against foreign domination in the community. The chapter, thus, examines how the author, Adimora-Ezeigbo, re-writes women back into history, culture and society and, provides a reversal to Achebe's assignment of predominant roles to male characters in his novels.

Chapter three also reveals the vital relationship that should exist between women and men. In Adimora-Ezeigbo's view, there should be complementary roles between men and women that leads to the ultimate good of the society. Adimora-Ezeigbo's womanist perspective makes her literary views conform to the image of African male-female relations as compliments. As a womanist, Adimora-Ezeigbo portrays women as mothers and also as citizens involved in the political sector of their society. As women, Ejimnaka, Onyekozuru, Chieme and Chibuka are political leaders of their society. The women's agency points to equality among the sexes. I indicated that women can also be perceived as leaders in society regardless of their marital status. The leadership roles played by the four oluadas in the novel equate them with their male counterparts. Therefore, Adimora-Ezeigbo transforms

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the stereotyped portrayal of women to show them playing significant roles alongside their male counterparts.

Chapter four analysed the second of Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy, *House of Symbols.* The analysis focused on the protagonist Eaglewoman and examines her experiences in the country during the colonial era. The study went further to highlight the significant roles that women played in the community in positions of leadership. It also discussed the exemplary lifestyles that women can play by being role models in the society as shown by Eaglewoman, Ezenwanyi the prophetess of Umuga and Okwudiba, the historian of Umuga's religion and culture. Women were given a free hand to belong to society, not as appendages of the men, but as human beings in their own right. Women were the mouth piece of the gods and goddesses. The chapter also explores, from a womanist perspective, the complementary relationship that should exist between man and women in the community. The author shows the womanist perspective where Eaglewoman lives harmoniously with her husband Osai. Adimora-Ezeigbo states that if women are given an enabling environment, both in the home and in the society at large, they will stand alongside their partners in bringing about lasting peace, harmony and fulfilment that Africa desires. In closing, the chapter shows how the author uses her female characters to serve as a link that bridges the existing divide created by religious and traditional sentiments.

Chapter five of this study provided an analysis of the last instalment of Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy, *Children of the Eagle*. Close attention was paid to how the author recreatesd characters and personages perceived to have lived in the first novel of the trilogy: *The Last of the Strong Ones.* This was achieved through a closer examination of the lives of the

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daughters of Eaglewoman, namely Ogonna, Nwanne, Obioma, Amara and Chiaku, and their significance in the struggle for women's emancipation in the country. Adimora-Ezeigbo defines re-education in the novel as a means to enlighten women about the cultural myth of keeping women in inferior positions. Thus, the four daughters of Eaglewoman enlighten the community's women on the message of a new redemption that can only occur when women and the larger society are re-educated. The chapter went further to show how the author uses her trilogy not just in the re-creation of the ideal roles played by women in the past, but in her ability to envision and situate women in the emerging shapes of the future in Africa. Finally, the chapter closes with a conclusion that captures the significance of Adimora-Ezeigbo's literary prowess in shaping the consciousness of women to rise and be true champions of their own destinies.

It is, thus, clear that Adimora-Ezeigbo recognises the unique position that women play in the creation of an egalitarian society in the African context. She advocates for a complementary role in the relationship between women and their male counterparts. This is unlike radical feminism which advocates a total alienation of all forms of relationships with the opposite sex. Adimora-Ezeigbo preaches the need for both parties to seek a balance, in order to achieve the needed harmony the continent of Africa deserves.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's method has been to give women a voice in her writing, by challenging the existing stereotypical views portrayed by Achebe. If one looks at characters like Ejimnaka, Eaglewoman and her daughters in the trilogy one will notice that, the common thread that runs through each generation of women is the need for freedom and self-expression. This I, believe, is the ultimate quest of all humans, whether male or female. It is

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these quests that drove our heroes, both male and female, in the past, to clamour for the emancipation of the country from colonial domination.

All in all, the study examines women's experiences as depicted in Adimora-Ezeigbo's novels, especially their efforts towards achieving gender equality in their society. Adimora-Ezeigbo shows in her fictional works the negative effects of patriarchy on the female gender. Thus, she creates a counter discourse, in order to bring African women back into history, culture and society in the same manner as their male counterparts in society.

Adimora-Ezeigbo does not suggest solution to all the problems of women but she stimulates the women to rise up to the level of self-economic dependence and to be involved politically in the society. Also, it is discovered that female have refused to sit back and let their men occupy all the important postions in the society. Women are rising to the position where they can not allow men trample upon them or dictate to them what should be done.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy is geared towards a redefinition of African womanism. The stereotypical portrayal of women as silent, passive beings has given way to new perspectives which portrayed women as strong and articulate. Thg image of women has shifted from being referred to as object to subject. Many writers especially women have given their female characters agency.

Major findings of the study, the issue of equality of sexes have been an important topic in feminist writing. Judging from the recognition which is being accorded to this organization in many quarters one would agree that feminism has come to stay. Gradually, women are breaking the traditional position of male supremacy in all spheres; the roles of women are being recognised and felt all over the world today. Women are now qualified to fit into

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those positions that were once regarded as exclusively for men. Therefore, women have risen to occupy positions in the private and public sector.

Furthermore, some works still needs to be done by women writers they have to present the positions of women in all its aspects.

Finally, this research has provided an avenue for the redefinition of women by challenging the existing stereotypical views portrayed by previous literary texts.

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