THE NNEKA PRINCIPLE IN THE FICTION OF CHINUA ACHEBE:
A STUDY OF THE MOTHER ARCHETYPE IN HIS SELECTED NOVELS

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JUNE, 2014
DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my original work and it has not been presented for a degree award in any University.

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DEDICATION

To my mentors: Dr Greet Rietkerk and Eileen Hicks and all those women who have proved to be mother archetypes in the male dominated universe: My late grandmother Syuindo wa Musya, my Mum, Velesi wa Muneeni and my sister Mawia wa Kyalo.
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Special tribute to Professor Albert Chinualumogu Achebe who passed on while I was in the process of writing this thesis. I had hoped he would get an opportunity to read it someday. May the Almighty God rest his Soul in eternal peace.
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OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following are the meanings of terms as used in this thesis.

*Nneka:* This is an Igbo word which Achebe translates in *Things Fall Apart* (137) as “Mother is Supreme.” The term has been used in this thesis to describe women’s peculiar wisdom that enhances overall elevation of their roles in the society.

**Mother Archetype:** The term has been used in the study to refer to all the female characters who possess positive attributes that seem to elevate them above their male counterpart and therefore enable them to take up important roles in the society.

**Archetypal:** This term has been used in this thesis to refer to an established pattern of female characters’ similarities in the way they assert themselves in their role to outshine their male counterparts in different texts under study.

**Patriarchy:** It refers to a system of social structures that institutionalize male physical, social and economic power over women or put differently it is the male control of culture, religion, language and knowledge which tend to devalue female experiences and knowledge.
ABSTRACT

This study is a gender appraisal that employs the \textit{nneka} principle to explore literary creation of mother archetype with focus on one of the world’s renowned prolific writers and literary critics of African origin: Chinua Achebe. The study identifies patterns and critically analyses mother archetypes in Achebe’s three novels: \textit{Things Fall Apart} (TFA:1958), \textit{No Longer at Ease} (NLAE:1960), and \textit{A Man of the People} (AMOP:1966). \textit{Anthills of the Savannah} (AOS:1987) is introduced in ultimate chapter to augment the argument that its main character, Beatrice, marks the culmination of Achebe’s strong women series. This study argues that, by looking at the consistent successful accomplishments of women as they steer important roles in the society such as education, religion and justice, \textit{nneka} principle comes into focus as the enabling factor. The thesis hinges on the fact that not much has been done on mother archetypes in Achebe’s texts rather critics have considered all women characters together as an entity and lamented their misrepresentation. The question is what role does Achebe prescribe for \textit{nneka} principle to play in attaining total inclusion of women in day to day running of affairs in the world? The issue of whether masculine gender failure to recognize and respect \textit{nneka} principle has any effect has also been explored. In so doing, this work has sought to unearth the vision that Achebe, as the father of African literature, has for Africa and the world. The study has employed archetypal theory whose main proponents are Northrop Frye and Carl Gustav Jung to aid in tracing and analyzing the mother archetypal patterns across the novels being analyzed. The study is qualitative in nature, based on library research involving a close examination of primary and secondary texts as well as journals and internet sources where applicable. It employs critical works on African literature and the reading of the four novels as the main sources of data. The information gathered is synthesized and a detailed analysis is done to project the main arguments of the study. This thesis is configured in five chapters in line with the set objectives and the stipulated research questions. Chapter one details a comprehensive background of the study highlighting the problem, theoretical foundations, review of related literature, and overall conceptualization of the thesis. Chapter two surveys religion, education and judicial system as the societal mainstay roles that Achebe assigns to women characters and interrogates women’s effectiveness in accomplishing them. The third chapter explores the notion that the reason behind Achebe’s heroes’ tragic end results from their attempt to decenter \textit{nneka} principle. The author’s vision on gender is undertaken in chapter four whereby the author’s implied vision on gender relationships in African context is revealed. Chapter five contains the summary and suggestions for further
CHAPTER ONE

Conceptualization of Achebe’s *Nneka* Principle

The Author and his Profile

Chinua Achebe was born Albert Chunualumogu Achebe to Christian parents: Isaiah Okafo Achebe and Janet Anaenechi Iloegbunam, in Ogidi Nigeria on 16th November 1930. He stated his primary school in 1936 at St Philips’ Central School before transferring to Central school in Nekede in 1942. He sat for entrance exams in 1944 and proceeded to Government college in Umuahia. In 1948, he joined University of Ibadan, first as a medicine student but later switched to BA in English, Religion, and Theology graduating in 1953.

In 1954, he taught English briefly at Merchants of Light school, Oba before joining Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS) the same year, moving to Lagos. In 1958, he was promoted and put in charge of the network’s coverage in Eastern region. In 1960, he was promoted to the position of Director, External Broadcasting where he helped to found Voice of Nigeria, a dream he realized on 1st January 1962. In 1966, soon after the military coup, Achebe left NBS and founded a publishing firm – Citadel Press – with his friend Christopher Okigbo. He has also served as editor of Heinemann publishers and two magazines: Okike and Nsukkascope. In 1967 and the subsequent years during the war, Achebe joined his fellow writers – Cyprian Ekwensi and Gabriel Okara – to act as war ambassadors travelling in Europe and America where they visited over thirty college campuses and granted numerous interviews.

The year 1970 marked the beginning of Achebe’s academia work. He took a job at University of Nigeria at Nsuka. The same year, he moved to University of Massachusetts Amherst where he remained until 1976 when he returned to the former university and remained there before formally retiring in 1982. Soon after, he had a brief stint in politics but quit, citing the hypocrisy of political leaders. He concentrated on delivering speeches and attending conferences all over the world.

22nd March 1990 marked Achebe’s turning point when he was involved in an accident that paralyzed him from the waist downward, effectively confining him to the wheelchair. Later the same year, he became the Charles P. Stevenson Professor of Languages and Literature at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, a position he held until 2009 when he joined the Brown University faculty as the David and Marianna Fisher University Professor of Africana Studies.

Other than broadcasting and teaching, Achebe has distinguished himself as a novelist, children writer, poet, critic and essayist. He has also cut himself a niche as an editor and publisher. He has authored five novels, namely:

- *Things Fall Apart* (1958)
- *No Longer at Ease* (1960)
- *Arrow of God* (1964)
- *A Man of the People* (1966)
As a writer of children’s fiction, Achebe has published:

- *Chike and the River* (1966)
- *How the Leopard Got His Claws* (with John Iroaganachi) (1972)
- *The Flute* (1975)
- *The Drum* (1978)

Achebe also boasts of seven titles of Anthologies of Short Stories:

- *Marriage is a Private Affair* (1952)
- *Dead Men’s Path* (1953)
- *The Sacrificial egg and Other Stories* (1953)
- *Civil Peace* (1971)
- *Girls at War and Other Stories* (1973)

As a poet, he has also composed widely. Below are the Anthologies of Poetry he has published.

- *Beware, Soul-Brother, and Other Poems* (1971) (Published in the US as *Christmas at Biafra, and Other Poems*, 1973)
- *Don’t let him die: An Anthology of Memorial Poems for Christopher Okigbo* (editor with Duben Okafor) (1978)
- *Another Africa* (1998)

His published essays, criticism, non-fiction and political commentary include:

- *The Novelist as Teacher* (1965) – also in *Hopes and Impediments*
- *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s “Heart of Darkness”* (1975) – also in *Hopes and impediments*
- *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1975)
- *Hopes and Impediments* (1988)
- *Education of a British Protected Child* (2009)

Professor Achebe is the recipient of 41 honorary degrees from universities in England, Scotland, Canada, South Africa, Nigeria, and the United States. Some of the World’s distinguished Universities that have conferred him an honorary degree include: Harvard University, Dartmouth College, Brown University, Cape Town University, University of
Toronto, Stirling University, and the Open University of Great Britain. He has also been awarded the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, An Honorary Fellowship of the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1982), a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2002), The National Order of Merit (Nigeria’s highest order for academic work), the Peace Price of the German Book Trade (Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels); The Man Booker International Prize 2007, The 2010 Dorothy and Lilian Gish Prize and Doctor of Literature (Honoris Causa), Ebonyi State University (2012). He has twice refused the Nigerian honour Commander of the Federal Republic- in 2004 and 2011.

Achebe passed away on 21st March 2013 in Boston, Massachusetts United States after a short illness.
Epigraph

Those who do not read me as carefully as they ought to have suggested that this (Beatrice) is the only woman character I have ever written about and that I probably created her out of pressure from the feminists. Actually, the character of Beatrice has been there in virtually all my fiction, certainly from *No Longer at Ease, A Man of the People*, right down to *Anthills of the Savannah*β.

1.1 Introduction and Background to the Study

Chinua Achebe is one of the most prolific African writers whose texts span pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial settings in both Nigeria and imaginary countries of Africa. Achebe is also one of the most studied African scholars owing to his creative genius that has enabled him to contribute immensely in almost all genres of literature. The doyen of African literature has also been highly acclaimed as a literary critic with Doug Killam (1979) referring to him as “Nigeria’s best known novelist and possibly the best known writer of fiction in black Africa” (515).

For half a century since the publication of Achebe’s first novel, his works have remained the focus of many prominent critics. This however does not forbid more criticism as Walunywa (2006) observes: “[that] good creative works like Achebe’s continue to provide fertile ground for analysis regardless of how much criticism from scholars they have attracted since their initial publication” (36).

Undoubtedly, criticism of Achebe has taken different directions. The most prominent school of thought has been that Achebe is a patriarchal writer with no room for women in his earlier novels: *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964) and *A Man of the People* (1966) up to the time he published his later novel *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). Critics, according to Jerome Brooks, argue that Achebe’s major woman character and protagonist in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Beatrice, was created out of feminists’ pressure.

Scholars have shown interest in both cross-sectional and individual analysis of Achebe’s texts. Focusing on his masterpiece *Things Fall Apart*, Sekai Nzenza (1997) asserts: “...several feminist critics contend that Achebe has relegated women into the margins,
obscurring a valorization of patriarchal domination beneath the rhetoric of racial and cultural retrieval” (216). Florence Stratton (1994) in her essay urges African authors to refute or refuse Achebe’s gendered framework citing the systematic exclusion of women from all powers of the community in the novel. Keith Booker (1998) is opposed to the argument by some critics that historical accuracy was the driving force behind Achebe’s depiction of women as he did, opining: “he could have done more to question those relations” (73). Achebe, bearing the burden of presenting history as it was, chose instead to assign progressive involvement in day to day activities to women in line with what was happening outside the fiction.

Jonathan Culler (1982) decries the inhumanity meted on women under the iron hand of Okonkwo. To him, serious reading of the text “… must not only question a society that has no compassion for the brutality that is omnipresent in the lives of Okonkwo's wives but also the patriarchal notion that devalues women so much that their feelings are not significant” (47). Culler further argues that the women so represented “cannot find sanctuary within the confines of their own homes”. Ode Ogede (2007) views the opening wrestling match in the novel as a drama illustrating “male performance” and “female spectatorship” (41). To Ogede, therefore, from the onset of the novel, the dominance of men is fore grounded while women are pushed into the periphery.

In A Man of the People, Beth Kramer (2006) laments the degrading treatment of women on multiple levels which is meant “to facilitate male homosocial relations” (3). This is evident as Odili and his father journey to Edna's male relatives to make the marriage exchange. Odili’s decision to pay the full bride price is not based on heterosexual love but rather on the notion that he "did not want to go through life thinking that [he] owed Chief
Nanga money" (148). Kramer therefore laments A Man of the People's portrayal of women as objects. With the same regard, Kamau Kiarie in: Notes on Chinua Achebe's A Man of the People (2002), isolates Odili – the character and narrator in the novel – as having a cavalier attitude towards women (41). Kiarie further identifies women characters: Elsie, Edna, Jean and Mrs Akilo who, according to him, are portrayed as women of loose morals who succumb to various sexual overtures (45).

Chikwenye Ogunyemi (1988), in one of the most scathing attacks of Achebe's women representation describes him as “[a] phallic writer whose writings denigrate women” (60-61). He decries how men are put in the forefront of everything in Achebe’s novels while women are pushed to the periphery.

Apparently, the criticism of Achebe’s text has focused more on his female gender subjugation and elevation of male gender. Nevertheless, as Achebe mentions in both his first and last novels: Things Fall Apart (137) and Anthills of the Savannah (98) respectively, there is an overriding proverbial wisdom: nneka (Mother is Supreme) strictly associated with women which, despite the perceived negative portrayal of women in other areas, acts as the driving force for women’s excellence in some key areas. Achebe himself asserts the same in an interview conducted by Jerome Brooks in Chinua Achebe, 'The Art of Fiction' 1994. He emphatically stated that, the character of Beatrice, whom almost all critics agree is a strong woman character but claim it was the criticism from feminists that pushed him to create her, is visually in all his novels.

The notion that Beatrice as a female character epitomizes a powerful woman whose ability to deal with important societal concerns supersedes that of men is undeniable. Fonchingong’s assertion that the introduction of Beatrice in Achebe’s fiction is “[t]he
diachronic transformation of Achebe’s women from victims of a society regulated by patriarchal cultural norms and values to independent, politically conscious, and self-assertive women [...]” (137) is incontrovertible. The nneka principle is, therefore, manifested in Beatrice but so it is in other women characters that Achebe has created in his other fictional works. As the author himself asserts therein, critics have not been keen on analyzing the depiction of nneka principle in Achebe’s texts despite it being an aspect that cannot be ignored while engaging in holistic analysis of Achebe’s works.

This study explores this significant facet of Achebe’s works which has hitherto been ignored by scholars who have concentrated on his negative depiction of women.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The works of Chinua Achebe are among those that have enjoyed high attention for over five decades since the publication of his first African classic Things Fall Apart in 1958 that significantly shifted the world’s attention to African Literature. Gender representation has been among the fundamentals that have attracted a lot of criticism and counter criticism. Most critics have appraised Achebe as a writer who has depicted female gender negatively. Nevertheless, the nneka principle, a concept that seems to elevate women above their male counterparts is prevalent in basically all the novels by Achebe but critics have not focused much attention to its scrutiny. This study aims at filling this gap by focusing on Achebe’s selected works and affording them an in-depth analysis to establish whether indeed Achebe, deliberately, misrepresents women in his fiction.
1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study sought to:

1. Establish the role played by *nneka* principle in the execution of religious, educational and judicial duties as depicted in Achebe’s texts.
2. Discuss the consequences of masculine gender’s failure to recognize and uphold the *nneka* principle in Achebe’s texts.
3. Establish whether Achebe has a vision for co-existence of male and female genders in his selected texts.

1.4 Research Questions

The study answers the following questions:

1. What role does the *nneka* principle play in the execution of religious, educational and judicial duties as depicted in Achebe’s texts?
2. What are the consequences of failure by masculine gender to recognize the *nneka* principle?
3. How does the *nneka* principle in Achebe’s selected texts translate to his vision for the co-existence of male and female gender?

1.5 Research Assumptions

The study has been guided by the following assumptions:

1. The *nneka* principle guides female gender in executing religious, educational and judicial obligations.
2. The failure of masculine gender to recognize the *nneka* principle is responsible for the tragedies afflicting it.

3. Achebe advocates for space for each gender to play its role in order to create societal equilibrium.

1.6 Rationale of the Study

Achebe’s gender representation has attracted a lot of criticism most of which have cast him in the negative light. Critics have concentrated on the negative depiction of female gender without looking at his creation of mother archetypal pattern among his female characters, progressively assigning them essential roles to play in the society across his texts.

While scholars have been keen in isolating Achebe’s perceived misrepresentation of women in his texts, very few have given this very important aspect of his works any considerable attention. Traore (1997) only affords it a mention, decrying Achebe’s failure to create societal equilibrium by foregrounding the proverbial wisdom which is specific to women and encapsulated in *nneka* principle (50). Our study was motivated by the desire to explore Achebe’s creation of mother archetypes and provide an alternative appreciation of his text: that he does not entirely depict the female gender negatively rather he creates powerful mother archetypes who parallel the happenings outside the fictional world during which the specific text has been set.

1.7 The Scope and Delimitations of the Study

The study focuses mainly on three of Achebe’s novels: *Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease* and, *A Man of the People*. The fourth and the last in the series of Achebe novels – *Anthills of the Savannah* – is brought into focus in the ultimate chapter to illuminate the
culmination of Achebe’s progressive enhancement of women representation. These novels have been evaluated in line with the contemporary gender discourse which traces gender depiction to the pioneer African writers like Achebe. *Arrow of God*, the third novel of Achebe series, has been left out owing to the fact that it is set at the same period with *Things Fall Apart*. We chose the latter based on the fact that the study analyses women characters vis-a-vis the period in which they are created and the happenings outside the fictional world. Again, it being Achebe’s first novel, it provides an opportunity for a progressive analysis of women representation from the onset of his writing up to the last novel.

Even though our study is centered on the four novels, reference is made to other texts that are likely to enhance it. We restrict our study within the archetypal criticism framework. The debate on gender depiction of Achebe’s woman in his fiction greatly informed a big part of the literature review.

*Things Fall Apart*, which depicts the Igbo community as it was before the advent of colonization as well as the community’s reaction towards exotic culture is read with a view of divulging mother archetypal patterns and their unrivalled accomplishment of societal roles as illuminated in its female characters. *No Longer at Ease*, set in the eve of Nigerian independence, provides an insight into how women characters negotiate the important task of transition from traditional dispensation to Western civilization. *A Man of the People*, a scathing satire of post-independence incompetent leadership of an unnamed African country, most probably Nigeria, elucidates women’s input in the citizens’ corrective responsibility of combating the individualism and greed of the newly independent African leaders. *Anthills of the Savannah*, which has been lauded by critics as the blood, mind, and
voice of Achebe’s creation of Beatrice, an ideal woman, is incorporated into the study at
the conclusive juncture to demonstrate that her creation marks the culmination of
sequential import assigned to Achebe’s women characters. All the four novels aid in
crafting Achebe’s gender vision as.

In the course of this study we realized the most challenging bit was to isolate relevant
secondary materials from a wide range of Achebe’s criticism, essays, and interviews owing
to the wide criticism he has attracted for over half a century and his personal non-fiction
involvement. So much was available that it was not easy to sieve and incorporate only
what is relevant to the study in the literature review. Again, the wide range of criticism
available is not balanced as it mainly focuses on *Things Fall Apart* and *Anthills of the
Savannah*. *No Longer at Ease* seem to have been ignored save for a few critics who have
focused mainly on corruption and a clash of two civilizations.

1.8 Literature Review
1.8.1 Introduction

Owing to the breadth and dynamism of criticism directed towards Achebe’s works, both
fictional and critical, this thesis categorizes literature review into three distinct areas. Firstly,
it interrogates the interviews that Achebe has granted to scholars with focal point on gender
debate. Secondly, it reviews the criticism of scholars who have decried Achebe’s
misrepresentation of women. Lastly, we evaluate those who have applauded his women
(re)presentation. Given the diversity in critics’ points of view, the study crafts an approach
that agrees with some but also differs with others.
1.8.2 Published Interviews Granted by Achebe on Gender Debate

Achebe, riding on the status of a literary doyen of African literature, has been interviewed on numerous occasions by different scholars. The interviews have dwelt on a wide range of his concerns both as an individual and a writer. Among those concerns, gender has always cropped in as a subject. In one such interview published in Wilkinson’s book: *Talking with African Writers* (1990), Achebe asserts that there is actually a very deep respect accorded to women which is implied in such names as Nneka, “Mother is Supreme.” He cites the fact that women are buried with their people and not their husband’s people as a proof that “[a] woman belongs to her father’s people, [and thus] she is just like men” (53). Achebe points out to the two attitudes: one suggesting that women are really “oppressed and given very low status” and another suggesting that “they are given very high honour, sometimes even greater honour than men” as a proof of the ambivalent rather than the peripheral place women occupy. Achebe invokes Nneka as a name to make a veiled reference to *nneka* principle encased in the proverbial wisdom associated with the women characters whom he has created in his fiction.

Achebe augments this point in another interview he grants to Jarome Brooks in the *Paris Review - Art of Fiction* No. 139. Where he clarifies that it is lack of careful reading of his works that has made his readers and critics conclude that Beatrice is the only major character that he has ever created while in actual sense: “[t]he character of Beatrice has been there virtually in all [his] fiction, certainly from *No Longer at Ease, A Man of The People* right down to *Anthills of the Savannah.*” In line with Achebe’s assertion in the interview, it is prudent that Achebe’s fiction is (re)read in accord with his hint which is what this study has done.
In an interview Achebe grants to Bicknell on 9th March 2008, a few days before proceeding to celebrate fifty years since the publication of his magnum opus novel: *Things Fall Apart* in Town Hall at Manhattan, which has been published in Washington post under the title “Things Fall into Place,” Achebe is categorical that he has not misrepresented women. He says those who accuse him of creating the characters such as Okonkwo who keeps on beating women “have failed to read fiction.” He absolves himself from the negative portrayal of women tag by informing the interviewer that:

I want to sort of scream that *Things Fall Apart* is on the side of women. And that Okonkwo is paying the penalty for his treatment of women; that all his problems, all the things he did wrong, can be seen as offences against the feminine. Although Achebe’s reply here is specific to the character of Okonkwo in *Thing Fall Apart*, it opens up debate which is applicable across the rest of his novels because heroes who try to mistreat women end up tragically just like Okonkwo. We are, therefore, attempting to evaluate Achebe’s reaction to the accusation leveled against him. The study has dedicated the whole of chapter three in demonstrating the tragic end of heroes who have tried to mistreat and underrate female gender.

1.8.3 Critics Decrying Achebe’s (Mis) Representation of Women

Some celebrated critics have branded Achebe the tag of a crusader of masculinity and perpetuator of women subjugation. Solomon Azumurana (2010) in his essay “Marxism and African Literature: Commodification and Ideological Conditioning in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*” published in *LASU Journal of Humanities* opines: women have for a long time been used by men to provide necessary labour with which men acquire wealth and status for themselves. Ozumurana, narrowing down his focus on Chinua Achebe argues that women in Achebe’s texts, especially *Things Fall Apart*, have been commodified and ideologically
conditioned to enable men acquire wealth and maintain status. He views Okonkwo’s advice to Ezinma and Obiageli not to marry in Mbanta as a commodified relationship with exchange value in that, once Okonkwo goes back home, wealthy men will be able to marry his daughters hence enabling him to regain his lost socio-economic status in Umuofia. Furthermore, all the male characters in the novel commodify their wives in a bid to benefit themselves. Okonkwo, Obierika, Okoye, and Nwakibie all have many wives, with Nwakibie who has the biggest number of wives also having the most produce in form of three huge barns full of yams. In spite of the role women play in production, they share little or nothing from the proceeds of the commodity.

Achebe’s women characters, according to Ozumurana, have also been ideologically conditioned that men are biologically superior to women physically, intellectually and emotionally hence women only come and go with mounds of foofoo, pots of water, market baskets, fetch kola, and bear scolding and beatings. Azumarana qualifies the reason behind male characters’ ideological suppression as desire to maintain their grip in control and domination of the economic structure of the society through exercising authority over women. This thesis has sought to draw attention to mother archetypes in Achebe’s works and interpreted their accomplishments based not on commodification or ideological conditioning but on nneka principle.

Uzoechi Nwagbara (2009) in his paper “Changing the Canon: Chinua Achebe’s Women, Public Sphere and the Politics of Inclusion” Published in the Journal of Pan African Studies notes that, women have been relegated to peripheral tangential role of passive victim of masculine-based cultural universe. While examining women as represented by Achebe in particular, Nwagbara puts them into two categories; the “Old Testament” which includes
Achebe's women characters in the earlier novels right from Things Fall Apart down to A Man of the People and “The New Testament” as represented in Anthills of the Savannah in the embodiment of Beatrice. Nwagbara does mention the diachronic representation of women where he identifies Clara in No Longer at Ease and Chief Nanga’s wife in A Man of the People as characters who show tell-tale signs of attempting to emerge as characters with own opinions. This view is however not pursued further. Nwagbara’s criticism, therefore, imply a subjugation and relegation to the periphery of women by Achebe all through up to the time he creates Beatrice without giving attention to positive contribution of women characters belonging to what he christens “Old Testament” category. This kind of argument invites an alternative approach through identification and analysis of mother archetypes in both “Old” and “New” Testament books.

Charles Fochingong (2006) in his paper “Unbending Gender Narratives” published in Journal of International Women’s Study argues that the presentation of women is always sloppy and biased. The perpetuation of the bias, according to Fochingong, is by male writers examining women who assist in endorsing an institutionalized and one-sided female heroism of African fiction. Fochingong’s focus on Achebe, whom he describes as “[an] African novelist and Patriarch” (136) is critical of Achebe’s misrepresentation of women. Citing two incidences in Achebe’s two novels; Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God, Fochingong demonstrates that when children are involved in a malpractice, they belong to their mothers but belong to their fathers when things are going on well. For instance when Nwoye commits an abomination of involving himself with Christians, Okonkwo explores the possibility that Nwoye may not be his son after all expanding it to a belief that she (Nwoye’s mother) must have cheated on him and therefore deserves punishment. When Oduche
commits an abomination of imprisoning the royal python, Ezeulu asks his mother about the whereabouts of her son but reprimands the same mother for questioning the rationale of his sending Oduche to study the white man’s education, asking her what concerns her with what a man wants to do with his son (my emphasis).

Fochingong further points out that, women as represented by Achebe are reductive perpetuators of popular myth of female subordination citing incidences where Nwakibie’s wives drink dregs from their husband as well as where Okonkwo while beating his wife, his other wives only interfere with occasional remark that it’s enough said from a safe distance. These incidences are an indicator to the fact that women do support these myths in spite of the fact that they put them (women) in the negative light. Again, women are rewarded according to the way they provide boys who are potential perpetuators of patriarchy. Okonkwo slaughters a goat for Nwoye’s mother for giving birth to three boys in a row. Fochingong is therefore of the opinion that, Achebe just as he refers to him from the beginning, is a patriarchal writer whose representation of women is entirely negative.

Lyn Innes and Caroline Rooney (1997) in a chapter entitled “African Writing and Gender” published in the book Writing and Africa contend that, African writing may be said to start with Achebe, Ngugi and Soyinka. They however single out Achebe as a writer who, in an attempt to correct the misrepresentation of the colonized by the colonizer, ape’s the colonizers’ ills by representing men positively and women negatively. Just like Achebe whose core duty in his earlier novels has been to inform the colonizers that Africans did not hear about culture for the first time from the them, women writers have been prompted to take up the duty of writing back to Achebe and his ilk, to inform them that women did not hear about culture from men for the first time. The study’s incorporation of nneka principle
opens a window to engage in a holistic analysis of Achebe’s selected texts in an attempt to identify important roles assigned to and successfully accomplished by the powerful and intelligent women who can be qualified as mother archetypes thus differing with the duo’s view with regards to women presentation.

Florence Stratton (1994) in her essay: “How Could Things Fall Apart For Whom They Were Not Together”, a chapter appearing in her book *Contemporary African Literature and Gender Politics* is critical of women representation by male-dominated writers from Africa in general and Achebe in particular. Consolidating her concentration on Achebe’s classic, *Things Fall Apart*, Stratton, using Achebe’s own sentiments about the way Africans were represented by European writers such as Joyce Carey and John Conrad in *Mr. Johnson* (1939) and *Heart of Darkness* (1899) respectively, laments that Achebe does not tell women where the rain began to beat them, neither can a novel that valorizes feminine ideology be called a great work of art. Effectively, Stratton suggests that what Achebe has managed to do in the novel is to elevate patriarchy and push women to the periphery. All spheres of life in the society are dominated by men who not only dictate what to be done in what concerns them (men) but also what concerns women. Stratton identifies judicial, discursive and historical areas where she laments that, the arbitration of disputes is composed of only male gender and that neither do women discuss matters concerning the welfare of the society nor is there a historical figure in Achebe’s works in spite of the fact that, historically, women in Igbo society about whom Achebe writes did get involved in agitation activities whenever the society was inconvenienced.

Stratton qualifies the seemingly powerful women characters in Achebe’s work: Chielo, Ezinma and Nneka as feminine archetypes whose introduction in the novel is not to elevate
women but rather to highlight the flaws of feminine gender. Chielo is there to advance the view that “women in positions of power are depositic and destructive because they are emotional (31)”. Ezinma is juxtaposed against Nwoye to highlight the qualities of masculinity that Nwoye lacked while Nneka’s defection to Christianity is because she is a mother of twins. Her main concern in this discussion is Achebe’s failure to challenge the voicelessness of women in the society and his creation of equally voiceless women. This thesis has endeavored to highlight and foreground women characters in Achebe’s selected texts who not only raise their voice but also challenge that of the patriarchs’

Adewale Maja-Pearce (1992) in “The Fruits of Independence” a chapter appearing in his book *A Mask Dancing: Nigerian Novelists of the Eighties* decries the depiction of women as objects meant to satisfy men’s sexual desire. Citing the two white women in *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People* the unnamed character who felt like she had been attacked by a tiger after a sexual encounter with Obi and Jean on sexual encounter with Odili respectively, Maja-Pearce argues that, all women – both black and white – exist only for men to derive sexual pleasure from them especially given that, the two white women have been assigned no other role in their respective novels and disappear from the scene as soon as they have fulfilled their sexual duty. Furthering on this dissertation, Maja-Pearce is of the opinion that, *A Man of the People* could pass for a pornographic book owing to so many sexual incidences described in the book, all of them portraying women as helpless sexual objects, race notwithstanding. While Maja-Pearce identifies nothing positive about women as portrayed by Achebe, our thesis has isolated scrutinized *nneka* principle in the engagement aimed at unveiling the mother archetype in this seemingly patriarchal society.
1.8.4 Critics Views on Achebe's Balanced Representation of Both Genders

Undoubtedly, there is another school of thought in which critics have supported the conviction that Achebe has been fair in his representation of female gender. This conduit of criticisms forms the substratum on which this thesis is founded.

Traore Ousseynou (1997) in his paper “Why the Snake-Lizard killed his Mother: Inscribing and Decentering “Nneka” in Things Fall Apart” read in the book: The Politics of (M)Othering. Womanhood, Identity, and Resistance in African Literature, identifies the codification of names as a way of foregrounding the gender ideals and structures. Traore insinuates that two major name codes stand for the opposing strengths of the two genders. He argues that, Nneka (Mother is Supreme) is associated with female gender while Chukwuka, (God is Supreme) is associated with male gender. Consequently, every male elevation is effectively countered by a female elevation. He cites many examples of gender duality such as mosquito/ear, murder of Snake-Lizard’s mother/Snake Lizard’s suicide, Ezeani (a male priest) being the priest of a goddess (while) Chielo, is the priestess of Agbala (a male god).

In a nutshell, Traore’s proposition is: feminine gender has not really been marginalized rather there has been gender equilibrium in Things Fall Apart. He further hints that, it is patriarch’s attempt to push female gender to the periphery that results to the untimely and disgraceful death of Okonkwo, the patriarchal figure in the novel. To Traore, the novel is thus balanced in gender representation. Putting into consideration Traore’s argument on gender equity, this thesis has sought to advance the notion across Achebe’s other works.

Tanure Ojaide (1997) in his article “African Literature and its Context: Teaching Teachers of Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart” published in Women Studies Quarterly views Igbo society from which Achebe draws his materials to be subtle promoters of
androgynous, blending ideals of both male and female principles (172). Ojaide stops short of branding Achebe a neutral writer insofar as gender is concerned: neither promoting patriarchy nor elevating women. Any individual who comes out as being too masculine is, according to Ojaide, bound to fail. Okonkwo’s tragedy, according to this critic, is attributable to excessive show of machoism. Moreover, the woman’s place is not only in running domestic affairs but she is also obliged to be an active participant in running affairs of the society as is the case with priestesses Chika and Chielo who minister to their gods.

Ojaide’s standpoint on individuals as components of the community is that: a man should show some tenderness and a woman ought to possess toughness in order to achieve a balanced co-existence. Any form of deviation from this will court trouble. His point of view, therefore, contrasts with those who advance the belief that women have been subjugated in Achebe’s texts.

Julie Agbaisere (2004) in her essay: “Feminist Assertion in Achebe’s Novels: A Study of Things Fall Apart and Anthills of the Savannah” published in the book Emerging perspectives on Chinua Achebe, Omeneka the Master Artist: Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe Volume one offers a critical comparison of strong women characters in the first and the last novel by Achebe. Agbaisere remarks that “[t]raditional society does not always denigrate woman. It shows a certain level of ambivalence towards her” (360). She goes ahead to enumerate and expound on the incidences in Things Fall Apart where the writer, subtly, elevates women. She mentions the episode where the community is poised to go to war because of a woman who is murdered until it is compensated with a virgin and a boy, Ikemefuna. She also considers the attraction of the council of egwugwu to handle a woman’s case, Mgbafo, as a female assertion. Ekwefi’s personal decision to run away from
her first husband to Okonkwo is also qualified as a demonstration of an independent-minded woman. Ndulue and Ozoena are also, according to her words, “the quintessence of love, peace, harmony and companionship.” The male gender, therefore, compliments the female gender. This, contrary to Okonkwo’s expectation, does not make Ndulue effeminate as he is a first rate warrior, having led Umuofia to war in the past. Agbaisere attributes Okonkwo’s tragic end to his persistence offence to Ani, “the Earth goddess who reigns supreme in Umuofia, and metes out appropriate punishment on people” (361).

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, the female assertion is brought in as a debate between two major characters: Beatrice Okoh representing the female and Ikem Osodi, Achebe’s mouthpiece. Beatrice harps on a topical issue by accusing Ikem of having “no clear role for women in his political thinking” (91). She further complains that: “women don’t feature too much in his schemes except as, well, comforters (65). While Ikem digs into the traditional and Biblical myths: that of the Earth and the Sky and the biblical Adam and Eve counterpart together with the traditional Nneka – mother is supreme – with its biblical counterpart of Virgin Mary to show that the denigration of women is universal, Achebe seems to concede the need to represent women positively. Consequently, he fronts Beatrice as the first major female character with distinguished features: she is the advisor of male characters: Ikem, the editor of National Gazette and Chris, the commissioner of information to resolve their differences with Sam, the president of Kagan. When they fail to adopt her advice, they end up being assassinated. She also takes up the risky role of an opposition official in the dictatorial government. She chides the president himself for allowing the visiting American journalist, Lou, to treat him, his Chief of Army Staff and Director of State Research Council with flippancy and conceit. In presenting Beatrice as a leader, Achebe stresses the
importance of formal education as it instills confidence in women. Furthermore, Beatrice takes up the role of forging the new solidarity for women characters for if they are to gain in importance, there should be no divisive propensity. She reconciles the hitherto rivals: Agatha and Elewa and ensures they remain in comradeship. Beatrice also comes out as a revolutionist as far as old customs are concerned. She reverses the acceptable gender roles by taking up the responsibility of naming Elewa’s baby.

By picking the first and the last of Achebe’s novels and elucidating positive female gender representation comparatively, Agbiaere, indeed, proves that women representation in Achebe’s novels is not entirely peripheral. The study has reviewed and discussed this assertion in a bid to demonstrate positive women representation across Achebe’s fiction under study.

Oyekan Owomoyela (1991) in his essay “Chinua Achebe on the Individual and Society” published in the book *Visions and Revisions: Essays on African Literature and Criticism* argues that women uphold communalism in a society that respects the observance of republicanism. Owomoyela, advancing the notion that women acted for the interest of the community as opposed to individuals cites the incidence in *Things Fall Apart* where Chielo, the Priestess of *Agbala* comes for Edina the *ogbanje* child and takes her to her goddess as a gesture of a concerned woman to commit the child to the protective care of her goddess. Additionally, when a cow strays into the neighbor’s compound, women come in as a body to impose penalty on the cow’s owner. To Owomoyela, therefore, women – just like their men counterpart – are assigned clear roles in the society and they execute them effectively. This thesis has sought to expand this standpoint to other novels under study, thereby, highlighting them and giving them more meaning under the regulation of *nneka* principle. From the
readings of Achebe’s fiction, critics have left some fundamental questions unanswered: Does Achebe consciously misrepresent women in his earlier novels? Is there a pattern that can be traced across Achebe’s novels with regards to women representation? What gender vision does Achebe propose for gender complementation in Africa? Answers to these questions lie in identification and analysis of mother archetypal patterns in Achebe’s text as proposed by Northrop Fryre and Curl Jung in archetypal criticism theory.

1.9 Conceptual Framework
This thesis employs archetypal and feminist theories to critique Achebe’s work with regards to powerful women characters across the periods that Achebe sets his four novels in study namely: pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial. Archetypal literary criticism theory’s origins are rooted in two other academic disciplines: social anthropology and psychoanalysis which developed from archetypal psychology. Each contributed in development of the archetypal literary theory. George Frazer is considered the antecedent of social anthropology. Frazer, who mainly carried out comparative studies through extensive reading, mainly of the Classics (literature and history of Greece and Rome), the work of the early European folklorists, and reports from missionaries, travelers, and contemporaneous ethnologists helped to spread the ideas through publication of his book, *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion* in 1890 that analyzed similarities in religious belief and symbolism globally.

Archetypal literary theory further developed from the ideas of Carl Jung, a psychiatrist who is considered the father of archetypal psychology. Jungian archetypes are thought patterns that find worldwide parallels in individuals or entire cultures. As a boy, he started a small mannequin. Periodically he would come back to the mannequin often bringing tiny sheets of paper with messages inscribed on them in his own secret language. He later
reflected that this ceremonial act brought him a feeling of inner peace and security. Years later he discovered similarities between this personal experience and the totems of native peoples such as the collection of soul-stones near Arlesheim or the tjurungas of Australia. He concluded that his intuitive ceremonial act was an unconscious ritual that was practiced in a strikingly similar way in faraway locations that he, as a young boy, had no way of consciously knowing about. Thus his psychological archetypes that were later adopted into archetypal literary criticism had begun.

Anchored on the initial assumption that every work of literature can be categorized and fitted into a large framework that encompasses all literature, the Canadian literary critic; Northrop Frye in 1950s and 60s further popularized the theory. Frye focused on those patterns in a literary work that commonly occur in other literary works. In his book, *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), Frye is categorical that the axioms and postulates of criticism have to grow out of the art being dealt with. The first undertaking, according to Frye, is for critics to read literature to make an inductive survey of their field(s) and let their critical principles shape themselves solely out of their knowledge from that field (7).

Frye gives an example of the Egyptian tale of The Two Brothers where an elder brother’s wife attempts to seduce an unmarried younger brother who lives with them and when he resists she accuses him of attempting to rape her. He is forced to flee with the elder brother in hot pursuit. Bagging on his innocence, he prays to Ra who brings about justice by creating a crocodile invested river that separates the two antagonizing brothers. In proving his theory in archetypal patterns, Frye argues that, this is the source of the Potiphar’s wife story in the Joseph legend found in the bible (Frye, 135). He thus uses this example as a base to attest that there are archetypal patterns inherent in literary works.
In identifying and analyzing mother archetypes in Achebe’s selected works, we have proceeded bearing in mind that, Archetypal literary theory interprets a text by focusing on recurring myths and archetypes in the narrative, symbols, images, and character types in a literary work. The theory is built on the premise that, the critic works inductively by reading individual works and letting critical principles shape themselves out of the literature: that is the critic examines the individual work to ascertain the archetypes underlying the work.

An Archetype, as defined by archetypal literary theory scholars', is a generic idealized model of a person, object or concept from which similar instances are copied, patterned or emulated. In this sense, “mother figure” may be considered an archetype and may be identified in various characters with distinct (non-generic) personalities.

The Archetypal literary theory proved useful in affording us an opportunity to read across the primary texts with an express aim of identifying (mother) archetypes. Based on Frye’s school of thought that, patterns in a literary work commonly occur in other literary works, this thesis has identified three mainstay roles namely: religion, education and justice which Achebe has allocated to women characters in the three texts. By so doing, we have identified a relatively consistent pattern across the three texts in study with regards to mother archetypes and the roles allocated to them.

The Feminist Literary Theory has its origins from women’s movements in the United States and Europe in the 1960’s. Gill Plain and Susan Sellers (2007) note that feminist literary criticism did not emerge fully from women’s movements rather it culminated in centuries of women’s writing, of women writing about women writing, and of women and men writing...
about women's minds, bodies, art and ideas. Feminist Literary Theory has proliferated over
the years into many other disciplines.

Mary Eagleton (1991) brings on board the connection of the Feminist theory with others
when she posits that many feminists are engaged in debates with other critical theories such as
Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Poststructuralism, Postmodernism, and Postcolonialism (VII).
Virginia Woolf posits that Feminist Literary Theory has a long history in America and Britain
with its emphasis on social, political and economic reform. Woolf's general contribution to
Feminist Literary Theory is her recognition of gender identity as being socially constructed
meaning that it can be challenged and transformed.

Her contribution to Feminist Literary Theory has been a subject of criticism from other
significant feminists such as Toril Moi (1977). Moi advances a quite different interpretation
of Woolf's strategy. He argues that Woolf "is not interested in a balance between masculine
and feminine types but in a complete displacement of fixed gender identities, and that she
dismantles essentialist notions of gender by dispersing fixed points of view in her modernist
fictions"(239). Woolf, Moi argues, rejected only that type of feminism which was simply an
inverted male chauvinism, and also showed great awareness of the distinctness of women's
writing.

Ogundipe Leslie (1993) analyses the African women's cause to fight patriarchy and
comes up with six levels of emancipation, from colonialism and neo-colonialism, traditional
structures, backwardness, racial inferiority and negative self image. Theses six levels signify
multiple forms of oppression instigated on the African woman. The apogee of Leslie's
levels, the negative self image that the African woman tries to fight through black Feminist
literary thought is perpetuated through sexual oppression and denigration. Lois Tyson
(2006) notes that feminist literary criticism examines the ways in which literature and other cultural productions reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social and psychological oppression of women. Feminist and archetypal literary theory are intertwined in this study to analyze Achebe’s women as presented in his texts under study.

1.10 Methodology
1.10.1. Introduction

The methodology covers the following: Research design, population and sample selection, procedure for data collection and data analysis.

1.10.2 Research Design

In coming up with a research design, a researcher puts in place the methods required ie sampling procedure, data collection and analysis in order to fulfill the purpose of the research. This study adopted the qualitative research approach, building on the paradigm that our knowledge of reality, including human action, is a social construction and therefore multiple meanings must be accommodated. The choice was informed by the nature of the study topic. Since it is content-based, it warranted a method that gives room for an in-depth investigation in order to realize the objectives of the study.

1.10.3 Population Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to make the choice of the texts. The leading principle was the presence of common features in the selected texts which are in line with the objectives of the study.

1.10.4 Data Collection

Due to complementary nature of the study, it employs both primary and secondary methods of data collection.
1.10.4.1 Primary Data

A close textual reading of the three novels by Achebe forms the source of primary data, with the fourth one looked at in chapter four acting to reiterate what has been argued in the previous chapters with regards to the primary texts.

1.10.4.2 Secondary Data

Library research has been used extensively to gather enough secondary material used to validate information gained from primary data. Published scholarly interviews with Achebe, his essays, internet materials, journals, biographies and other published materials were extensively used to enrich primary data.

1.10.5 Data Analysis

A self-interpolative reading looking at the circumstances surrounding Nigerian society, especially the male-female co-existence during pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods, Achebe’s biography, and his numerous essays was explored in an effort to come up with a holistic study. Descriptions arising from passages, analyses and relevant literary arguments have been used to present the data. Analysis of research texts was also done with an aim of generating information for the study. Interviews with the author, especially those carried out by numerous scholars at Achebe’s different stages of creative writing were objectively examined within the objectives guiding the study.

1.11 Organization of the Study

This thesis is made up of five chapters. Chapter one introduces the thesis, demarcating the problem, specifying the objectives and capturing the limitations of the study. Also discussed in this chapter are: theoretical framework, justification of the study and methodology. In chapter two the research delves into the first objective by capturing mother archetypes in each of the three periods in which Achebe has set his books: pre-colonial,
colonial and post colonial.

In chapter three, again with the three periods of Achebe’s prose fiction in mind, we discuss how the three tragic heroes in Achebe’s prose fiction expose themselves to tragedy because of attempting to decenter *meka* principle. Chapter four has the author’s vision on gender discussed vis-à-vis the three periods. It looks at the progressive improvement of women participation and emancipation culminating into creation of a powerful character: Beatrice in *Anthills of the Savannah*. Chapter five recaps the major features of the thesis and gives recommendations for further studies.
CHAPTER TWO
Female Assertion as an Antidote to Male Dominance

2.1 Introduction
This chapter interrogates mother archetypes to whom Achebe has assigned important roles in the otherwise male-dominated society as presented in the universe of his texts *Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease,* and *A Man of the People.* As Ernest Emenyonu (2004) argues: “Achebe’s novels are thematically structured to follow the sequence of African historical development from pre-colonial to postcolonial. His imaginary characters act true to their settings, times and environment (xix). This chapter puts into focus exceptional women characters and analyses them in line with the period in which they are created.

The image(s) of mother archetypes and the position that they occupy are surveyed with a view of investigating whether *nneka* plays a role in enabling female gender to execute some of the most important tasks in the society. Despite the fact that the works under study are fictional and imaginative, their temporal and geographical setting may be deemed representative of the society due to the mimetic nature of literature. The notion that female gender is relegated to the periphery in Achebe’s works is also challenged through identification and cross-sectional analysis of mother archetypal patterns in each of the three texts under study.

The chapter identifies three vital roles assigned to women, namely: religion, education, and justice and presents a critical analysis of how women perform these roles. It further identifies and interrogates mother archetypes in each of the aforementioned responsibilities across the works under study and interrogates them within time during which they are created with a view to drawing attention to the fact that time dictates to a certain extent the position each gender can hold.
With regards to religion in *Things Fall Apart*, the chapter focuses on the exceptional accomplishment of Chika and Chielo, the two Priestesses of Agbala and Nneka. In *No Longer at Ease*, it puts into focus Hannah Okonkwo and Mary, her friend while in *A Man of the People*, the study admits that religion is not a major concern but revisits the religious invocation of the deity by a woman who is angered by Josiah’s behaviour to defraud a blind beggar of his walking stick.

On the other hand, the progression of education from informal in pre-colonial to formal in colonial and postcolonial periods is focused on with emphasis placed on the delicate task of transitional linkage of the two education systems. Ekwefi’s pedagogical skills and Ezinma’s educational receptiveness as presented in *Things Fall Apart*, is explored. Conversely, Okonkwo’s analogous skill as applied on Nwoye is juxtaposed against Ekwefi’s feat. In *No Longer at Ease*, Hannah Okonkwo’s ability to navigate through the tricky task of playing two leagues simultaneously by bridging the two educational systems without causing a stir, as well as Clara’s educational achievements where she makes it to Europe for further studies and her portrayal of unprecedented professionalism in nursing. Isaac Okonkwo and Obi Okonkwo’s below par performance is juxtaposed against the two mother archetypes. In *A Man of the People*, we scrutinize Mrs. Nanga’s educational consciousness and its influence on Edna, her co-wife to be.

On justice, the chapter incorporates the view that the earth goddess represents women in judicial institutions during colonial period in *Things Fall Apart*. In *No longer at Ease*, we consent that justice is mainly executed by the colonialist but still do focus on the only instance where women judge Obi through song composition meant to castigate his attempt to jeopardize their journey by trying to thwart the bribery attempt by the driver to the traffic
police. In a *Man of the People*, Mrs. Akilo, a Barrister who co-owns a law firm with her husband, is qualified as a participant in justice. Eunice, a lawyer and a co-founder of C.P.C together with her fiancé Max Kumalo and her execution of justice towards Chief Koko, the killer of her fiancé, is interpreted as an indicative of the fact that there are mother archetypes in Achebe’s fiction.

2.2 *Mother Archetypes in Religion*

Culture encompasses people’s religion, which is part and parcel of any people’s well-being. Thus, Achebe’s fiction that has been lauded as a rejoinder to what the British colonizers believe - that Africans did not have a culture of their own in pre-colonial period must - incorporate religion. In an acknowledgement of this mandate in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1975), Achebe asserts:

[…][I] would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past – with all its imperfections – was not one long night of savagery from which Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them. (35)

The preoccupation to disapprove this belief was an ambitious engagement spearheaded by not only by Achebe but, according to Owomoyela, other “… exponents of negritude and other like - minded cultural nationalists” as well (87). Owomoyela further describes this undertaking as:

[The] zeal to remove the time-enhanced layers of slander in which supremacist outsiders have enshrouded African cultures and to rid the embattled Africans of the self-doubt the slander has engendered. (87)

This statement is in reference to African culture which they (Africans) upheld prior to the coming of European colonizers who imposed their beliefs and traditions on the latter. Suffice it to say that in an attempt to rectify the perception of the West towards African culture, Achebe could not overlook religion because it is a component of culture. Arguably, one of Achebe’s aims of writing is to provide insight into the culture that Africans practiced during
pre-colonial period. Chinweizu, et.al (1983), while contrasting Achebe’s (re)presentation of true Africa with that of the Negritude movement posits:

Negritude chose to present us with the illusions of purity and sanctity, a blanket praise in retort to Europe’s blank condemnation of Africa but in so doing, it created an unbalanced picture approximating absurdity. Achebe on the other hand presents a realistic picture of African past and present in which the beautiful and the ugly converge and co-exist. He deals with the African past – intertribal wars, slavery and horrors of maladies. In dealing with present, it glossed over poverty, sickness, tribal turmoil and inhumanity to blacks. (257-8)

Achebe thus presents the Igbo community and Africa by extension as it was, with all its perceived imperfections.

The vital mandate of perpetuating religion has constantly been assigned to women characters in Achebe’s novels. Both the ancestral religion practised by Africans during the pre-colonial period and Christianity as introduced to Africans by the Europeans are entrusted to strong women who act as pillars. Achebe’s assignment of religious roles to women is a demonstration that women are accorded respect in the Igbo society from which he draws his data because as Georgiads Kivai (2010) asserts:

[the] role(s) and position of women within a body of literature can serve to systematically analyze that society and societal attitudes towards women. The duties and activities assigned to a particular gender can demonstrate its respective position in the overall power structure in that particular society. (32)

2.2.1 Religion in Things Fall Apart

A) The Agbala Priestesses

To begin with, Achebe’s first novel Things Fall Apart features both male and female characters who are assigned different tasks according to the dictates of the Igbo society from which the novel draws its data. The novel features some strong female characters who take up some of the most important responsibilities in the society. Among the strong characters are the successive priestesses of Agbala – Chika and her predecessor Chielo – who both embody the earth goddess, the provider of life. The importance of priestesses is affirmed by Nwagbara
(2004) who underscores the importance of this position: “Priestesses are [...] respected and even feared as exemplified by Chielo, the priestess of Agbala” (344). The two priestesses, therefore, draw respect and reverence from both genders owing to the importance of the roles they play in the community as a whole.

Ideally, the institution of Agbala holds a pivotal place in the lives of the Igbo people as it directs their lives. Consequently, the expectation is that, if indeed women’s place is at the periphery, then its link between the living and the deity is expected to be a patriarch. Contrastingly, a woman is assigned such a vital task and she becomes the only being with express permission to see this powerful deity: “No one had ever beheld the Agbala, except his priestess” (15). The fact that a woman stands out in a patriarchal community where she is given a role that brings about reverence - that is more pronounced than that of a patriarch - is a pointer to the significant role that nneka plays.

The first encounter that the reader has with the first priestess of Agbala (Chika) is when Unoka goes to consult her. The priestess in charge at that time “[is] full of power of her god, and she [is] greatly feared (16).” She is depicted as a powerful figure where ancestral religion is concerned. When Unoka’s yield proves unsatisfactory, the only option he has is to consult her on how to improve his produce. She readily provides a solution that will alleviate his suffering. This observation is in contrast with Florence Stratton’s view that: “Achebe failed to challenge the voicelessness in women and created equally voiceless women characters” (31). Chika is, in actual sense, not a voiceless woman.

Again, women as represented by Okonkwo’s mother and sisters grow crops considered to be of less importance in a community where yam occupied a very important place and, therefore, was linked to patriarchy. Achebe writes: “His mother and sisters worked hard
enough, but they grew women’s crops, like coco-yams, beans, and cassava. Yam, the king of crops was a man’s crop” (21). This assertion may be perceived as subversion of nneka principle because as Traore argues, women grow crops that are of less importance when compared with the yam, the king of crops that is grown by men (54). Nevertheless, Chika, the embodiment of nneka principle is full of knowledge on yam cultivation and is in hand to give counsel to men, the fact that women are not involved in their (yam) actual growing notwithstanding. This is demonstrated when Unoka comes to consult her about the persistently dismal yield from his farm. She informs him: “When your neighbours go out with their axe to cut down virgin forests, you sow your yams on exhausted farms that take no labour to clear... Go home and work like a man” (16). Traore’s argument about women inferiority based on the kinds of crops they grow is thus overshadowed by their ability to direct how it is done. Chika is without any doubt a powerful woman who directs issues and enjoys reverence and fear from members of both male and female gender in her own right.

The second priestess of Agbala, Chielo, who succeeds Chika is an equally powerful woman in the realm of ancestral religion. She presents herself as an indefatigable woman who is ready to exploit her sacred power to defend her fellow women against calamities. One of the notable actions she involves herself in is the snatching away of Ezinma, Ekwefi’s only surviving daughter at night and taking her to the Oracles of the Caves and Hills. Robert Wren (1980) describes this baffling action:

[One] of Chielo’s action is more than a little mysterious. She takes Ekwefi’s daughter to the god and returns her in unexplained but thoroughly frightening experience in the night [...] The most probable solution to the mystery [...] is that Agbala has already chosen Ezinma as Chielo’s successor, and the transition of priesthood has begun. (42) Wren’s argument, while not nonsensical, lacks prove because there is no major follow up event after this scene to demonstrate that Ezinma becomes Agbala’s servant in any capacity.
The observable result is that, Ezinma overcomes the *ogbanje* debacle and grows into maturity to become a beautiful woman who later attracts many potential suitors during Okonkwo’s exile at Mbanta, his mother’s village (157). A critical exposition of this scenario resonates with what Larson considers as Ezinma’s struggle for life, notably since it is preceded by the ritual of digging up her *iyi-uwa*. The author artistically chooses to inform us that Chielo is a business lady who shares a market stall with Ekwefi. She is very fond of Ezinma and she fondly refers to her as “my daughter” (42). Once when Chielo seeks to know about Ezinma’s health from Ekwefi, the latter, in response wonders whether Ezinma would die like her other children. Chielo offers reassurance that since she has reached the age of ten, she is likely to live. Furthermore, we are aware that Ekwefi has already lost nine children and is worried about losing her tenth and the only surviving child. When Chielo intrudes into Okonkwo’s compound and demands, on behalf of *Agbala*, to take Ezinma away, even Okonkwo cannot stop her. His attempt to protest at her taking of Ekwefi’s daughter at night and counseling that she should wait till morning triggers the former to invoke her powers through which she successfully subdues the patriarch.

Another way to interpret this event is as Owomoyela asserts: to understand it as unquestionable concern of a good friend and neighbour who has access to divine favours (98). As a mother archetype, she takes it upon herself to ensure that her friend suffers no more while she is in a position to help. Furthermore, the intrusion appears strange and threatening given that it happens at night without any forewarning. Chielo’s protective motherly intention is, however, first revealed through her kind words to Ekwefi: “Ekwefi, *Agbala* greets you, where is my daughter? *Agbala* wants to see her” (89). After receiving Ezinma, she, in a
motherly soothing tone, tells her: “Come my daughter, I shall carry you on my back. A baby on its mother’s back does not know the way is long.” (90)

Undoubtedly, the closely knit gender understanding between Achebe’s female characters is of significance here because Ekwefi heeds to Chielo’s intention without any fuss, after only enquiring about the place where Agbala wants to take Ezinma. As a concerned and caring mother, her only unspoken hesitation stems from the fact that Ezinma has been unwell and thus may not be strong enough to endure the night escapades to which she is about to be subjected. That Ekwefi supports Chielo’s trip is evident in that she reassures her daughter and offers her a dried fish to keep her mind off the fright. Ekwefi’s offer to accompany them rather than take Ezinma to Agbala herself underscores the comradeship and trust between the mother archetypes.

Ekwefi, after a short meditation, dashes after the pair and informs her husband that she is following Chielo. This act is understandable because she is a doting mother to her only daughter on whom her life is tied. Hers is not an attempt to ensure the safety of her only daughter since she has full trust in Chielo’s ability both as a friend and priestess of Agbala. She follows them as a mother whose only source of hope is gone and therefore has no other business remaining at home. This view is further augmented by the fact that throughout the journey, she keeps a safe distance and does not at any time attempt to interfere with Chielo’s mission.

Okonkwo, his credentials notwithstanding, is unable to intervene in health matters pertaining to the children born to his favourite wife. A record nine of them have died at an early age and the tenth (Ezinma) is under threat. His only notable attempt to save her is to
consult a witch doctor to help trace where she buried her *iyi-wua*, a ritual that is repeated with all suspected *ogbanje* children.

On the contrary, Chielo in one swoop is able to plead with *Agbala*, the goddess she serves for the safety and health of her friend and fellow business woman’s child, a feat that saves her the agony of burying yet another child. Not even Okonkwo’s matchet, the symbol of manhood, is able to interfere with Chielo’s work when she decides to take charge. She is thus a mother archetype who soars above the patriarch in her communal duty.

**B) Nneka the Name and Nneka the Philosophy**

The temporal setting of *Things Fall Apart* cuts across both pre-colonial and early colonial period in Igbo community hence there is introduction of Christianity by the colonialists at some point. Though the new religion is initially viewed with suspicion, and those who embrace it are considered to be the weaklings of the society, a woman named Nneka fully immerses herself into it with a noble mission. Nneka the character represents women power and their unflinching efforts to ensure the safety of the children as demonstrated with the other mother archetypes: Chika and Chielo. She courageously devices a way of saving twins from societal cruelty as opposed to her male counterparts, such as Obiereka, who admit there is a problem but do nothing to alleviate it.

Evidently, one of the perceived flaws enshrined in the culture of the Igbo people is the throwing away of twins into the evil forest. This practice is a thorn in the flesh for mothers and patriarchs, old and young. Obierika, one of the most progressive patriarchs, immediately after partaking in the burning of Okonkwo’s homestead following the earth goddess’ decree that all his possession be destroyed after inadvertently gunning down Ezeudu’s son, sits down to reflect on his community’s traditions. He carefully reflects on not only the unfortunate
situation in which Okonkwo finds himself but also what had happened to his own family sometimes back:

When the will of the goddess had been done, he sat down in his obi and mourned his friend’s calamity. Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently? But although he thought for a long time he found no answer. He was only led to greater complexities. He remembered his wife’s twin children whom he had thrown away. What crime had they committed? (113-114).

Obierika, whom Meja-Pearce has elevated to the status of “… [a] local intellectual, the Socrates of Umuofia…” (14) apparently, is a sane patriarch who uses reason rather than macho to critically analyze issues. Throwing away of twins as questioned by Obierika, whose intellect is not swayed by the presumed acceptable dictates of the traditions, proves that the people are conscious of this flaw enshrined in their tradition. However, because the ritual that is as old as the community’s ancestors cannot be directly questioned, progressive people such as Obierika can only reflect upon the issue in their thoughts.

Nwoye too, despite his tender age, finds himself twice entangled in philosophical reflection of this thorny issue. He cannot understand the rationale behind throwing away the twins to suffer and die in the forest:

He had had the same kind of feeling not long ago, during the last harvest season... they were returning home with baskets of yams from a distance farm across the stream when they had heard the voice of an infant crying in the thick forest. ...Nwoye had heard that twins were put in the earthenware pots and thrown away in the forest. ... A vague chill had descended on him and his head seemed to swell, like a solitary walker at night who passes an evil forest on the way. (16)

This first encounter leaves Nwoye with questions about the unkind treatment the innocent twins must undergo, while the second instance is triggered by the newly introduced Christian religion. The arrival of the missionaries in Mbanta village becomes a turning point for him, especially since it attempts to answer his earlier question about the twins:

[The] hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul - the question of the children
crying in the bush... he felt relief within as the hymn poured into his perched soul.

(134)
Eventually, he forsakes his father and the ancestral religion and joins Christianity. His action is more of an attempt to save the execution of twins than a climax of violence meted on him by his cruel father. He, however, has no means through which he can accomplish the salvation.

It is worth noting that despite Obierika's intellectualism and philosophical insight into the plight of the twins, he holds no power whatsoever to save them. His concern does not go beyond philosophizing about the problem. Nwoye too is incapable of effecting any change as far as the situation is concerned. Clearly, the patriarch as represented by the two: Nwoye and Obiereka, have their consciousness pricked by this act but are incapacitated. Their patriarchal position in the society lacks effect on the ancestral constructions of how to change things for the betterment of the community.

Undoubtedly, there is need to arrest this perennial problem that has constantly endangered the lives of twins for a long time. Nneka takes advantage of the shift of religious emphasis from ancestral to Christianity to make an attempt at resolving the problem. Her achievement of this important feat does not come on silver platter more so because there is an attempt to exclude women from Christianity until much later when it becomes inevitable. The missionaries, having made considerable inroads into the IgboLand, establish their government and introduce Christianity that necessitates requirement for land on which to build a church. The elders, led by Ezeudu, have given them (missionaries) evil forest where they have built themselves a church and contrary to the elders' expectation, the ancestral gods have not harmed them after the maximum seven market weeks that the gods allow anyone who has disrespected them to live. It is against the backdrop of this perceived ancestral gods' inertia
that the Christian religion wins a handful more converts among them a woman of substance, Nneka:

[...for] the first time they had a woman. Her name was Nneka, the wife of Amadi, [who] was a prosperous farmer. She was very heavy with child. Nneka, had had four previous pregnancies and childbirths. But each time he had borne twins and they had been immediately thrown away. (137)

This bold step taken by the first woman ever to join Christianity is not at all accidental, neither is it a show of desperation since Nneka is a wife to a prosperous farmer and farming is the scale with which successful people are measured among the Igbo community. While we may ask ourselves about the rationale behind her joining this strange religion to which many have shown resistance, including all women, it is to be concluded that, like Chielo, she is extremely conscious about the well being of children. Chielo turns to the Oracle of the Hills and Caves and successfully secures the life of an ogbanje: Ezinma. With the shift of focus from ancestral religion to Christianity, Nneka becomes the saviour of both her unborn child and the twins who will be born in future because Christianity is critical of twins’ execution.

Achebe thus artistically fuses the name with its philosophical undertones and the character subsequently acts in line with the name’s philosophy. Nneka, therefore, is unveiled as a character who is ready to “sacrifice” herself in the new religion in order to save the twins. Tellingly, this is a clear demonstration that mother archetypes are not only identifiable among the ancestral religious women as pointed out earlier in the cases of Chika and Chielo but also with the newly introduced Christian religion as reflected in Nneka. Their aim converge at the same thing: saving the lives of children where the patriarchs have no ability. Through the three mother archetypes: Chielo, Chika and Nneka, Achebe demonstrates that in this fiction, there are identifiable mother archetypes who act for the welfare of the society. Though dominated by patriarchs like Okonkwo and Obiereka, women play a key role in religion not
with the aim of enhancing themselves but for the welfare of the children who hold the future of the community.

2.2.2 Religion in No Longer at Ease

No Longer at Ease, the second novel by Achebe was initially meant to be part of Things Fall Apart but it got its independent status after his corrections as Ohato-Ezenwa, author of Chinua Achebe, a Biography points out. The second novel is, expectedly, historically and contextually interconnected with the first one and it presents the changes that the Igbo community has to contend with after "the thing that held them together has fallen apart" in the hands of the colonialists. The fiction represents transition in all the spheres of life, from tradition to civilization. Most informal sectors in the first novel are formalized in the second and the subsequent ones. Religion, education and justice systems are among the sectors that are caught up in imminent change. Just like in Things Fall Apart, women characters in this fiction continue to shoulder the three mainstay tasks and they do carry them out to a successful conclusion.

A) Mary the Pillar of Christianity

There is no doubt that No Longer at Ease presents a clash of two civilizations: Western civilization and African traditions. Enshrined in these two civilizations is religion, a component of culture. As previously pointed out, towards the end of Things Fall Apart, Christianity has started to take root among the Igbos and the first woman, Nneka, has been converted. In the second novel, more female characters undergo conversion with Mary a friend of Obi’s mother, Hannah Okonkwo, emerging as the staunchest of Christian women characters in the novel. She has been presented as a powerful woman whose dedication to church matters is incomparable to patriarchs’. She is a mother archetype who is devoted
towards helping mankind through her intercessions early in the morning. She arrives ahead of the catechist for morning prayers. Achebe expounds her Christian credentials:

[She is one] of the most zealous Christians and a good friend of Obi’s mother, Hannah Okonkwo. Although [she] lived a long way from the church - three miles or more - she never missed the early prayer... In the heart of the wet season, or the cold harmattan, [she] was sure to be there. Sometimes she came as much as an hour before time. (8) The fact that Mary is never deterred by rain or cold harmattan foregrounds her as a character who has immersed herself into the new religion with the kind of zeal it requires at its formative stage. Apparently, Morning Prayer is an activity conducted by an individual on behalf of all other members of the church in particular and the community at large. Mary’s action of intercession for the whole community is comparable to Chielo, the mother archetype in Things Fall Apart, whose action of taking Ezinma to Agbala, the deity of her time, to plead with him to spare her is informed by her desire to serve humanity. Both women use their position, time, and ability to plead with the divinity to help the community of which they are part.

Mary is also in a position to appropriately use proverbs, initially a preserve of patriarchs and a mark of wisdom. As pointed out earlier, the society is in transition and thus oral aspects are carried on to the new religion. Until this time, use of proverbs is a preserve of patriarchs and is symbolic of male wisdom. The prayer said by Mary, which appropriately incorporates proverbs proves to the contrary: that female gender possess wisdom as well:

Oh God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob... You have the yam and you have the knife. We cannot eat unless you give us a piece. We are like little children who only wash their front when they bath, leaving their back dry... She went on and on reeling off proverb after proverb and painting picture after picture. (8) Mary’s effective utilization of proverbs is a marker of shift of wisdom from male gender and by extension wisdom empowers her female counterparts to possess this coveted attribute.
Buoyed by her prayerful nature and an active character, she outshines all the others, both male and female, and leads with a song meant to encourage Obi in his Whiteman’s sojourn. She proves to be both good singer and also creative individual by manipulating the words in the song so as to suit the situation:

Leave me not Jesus, wait for me,
When I am going to the farm...
When he is going to the White Man’s country,
Leave him no behind Jesus, wait for him. (10)

She is therefore comparable to Okoye in *Things Fall Apart* who, despite being a singer, is also a successful farmer as well as husband of many wives and father of many children. Mary is thus a bridge between the patriarchs and female gender.

**B) Hannah Okonkwo: The Success behind Father and Son**

The success associated with Isaac Okonkwo as a catechist and father is attributable to her wife’s hard work. Unlike women in Achebe’s first novel, Hannah is emancipated and has voice in the way the affairs of her household are run. She partakes in the success behind the economic status of her family. About the same, Achebe writes: “They had never relied on his father’s meager pension. She... made soap from leaching of palm ash and oil and sold it to the villagers at little profit” (55). Her inability to contribute to the family’s economy occasioned by both her old age and sickness has far reaching effects in the family set up which has previously not entirely relied on her husband’s money earned from the pension he gets after retiring from catechism when she was healthy. Obi is therefore prompted by his mother’s incapacitation to shoulder the burden of financial provision. Despite his education, patriarchal orientation, and a “European post” which is associated with good salary, he fails where her mother - without his advantages - had succeeded.
Her interest in economy also empowers her to challenge her husband on matters of extravagance as demonstrated during the big feats that Isaac Okonkwo prepares during the farewell party to see Obi off (9). This autonomy to question the rationale behind her husband’s actions is in total contrast with Okonkwo’s wives in Things Fall Apart who have no guts to confront their husband who is at liberty to do what he feels like without checks and balances. Hannah’s ability to raise her voice in economic matters means she is at the centre of the family financial affairs and thus she is out to ensure wealth is well utilized for the welfare of the household.

In a notable authorial intrusion, Achebe foregrounds the nneka principle through highlighting the origin of the extraordinary position that Hannah holds in the management of the family unit which, conventionally, is the duty of patriarchs. The narrator elucidates: “Whenever he was faced with a problem, Isaac only weighed and measured it and ended up postponing action. He relied heavily on his wife in such moments” (150). That Isaac Okonkwo’s family is presented as a transitional link between the ancestral and Christian religions is not in doubt. Hannah’s unprecedented acquisition of the senior partner status in their marriage in an African setting is attributable to Christian religion’s way of determining who the leading spouse in a marriage should be by having the couple cut a cake simultaneously. In so doing, “[w]hoever cuts the cake first becomes the senior partner. On Isaac’s wedding day, Hannah had cut the cake first” (150).

With regards to religion, Hannah does not waver even when her action endangers both her as an individual and the Christian religion as a whole. She is steadfast in dealing decisively with a rogue he-goat that has been dedicated to Udo, one of the great gods in Anita. The goat had been a menace, resting and leaving droppings in the church as well as destroying the
catechist's yams and maize crops. His complaints to the priest of Udo had yielded no results in terms of restraining the he-goat. Instead the Udo priest made fun of the whole situation, telling him the goat was free to roam anywhere and that its decision to rest in his shrine [church] shows that their gods are friends. The culmination of the beasts menace comes in when it invades Hannah’s kitchen and eats the yams that she is preparing. Immediately she takes a machete and hews off its head (151). Her quick decision to decapitate the he-goat is a psychological overflow of emotions resulting from her husband’s inertia even when Udo crosses his path. This is Ezeulu’s remark in Achebe’s *Arrow of God* that: “For until a man wrestles with one of those who make a path across his homestead [the] others will not stop?” in action. She thus takes up the patriarch’s responsibility of wrestling the man who has been crossing her husband’s path to the ground and does it so perfectly that others do stop.

Hannah is thus a diehard crusader and defender of the new religion. Isaac Okonkwo may be the catechist, at least by title, but he would be totally immobilized without her support in propagating the new religion. She can be viewed as a reincarnation of Ozoemena; Ndulue’s wife in *Things Fall Apart*, who was so central in her husband’s life that he could not do anything without telling her (62).

The *nneka* principle is therefore fully manifested in Hannah’s action just like it is in other women characters in Achebe’s texts who demonstrate great accomplishments in their endeavours to uphold the welfare of the community through religion.

### 2.2.3 Religion in *A Man of the People*

Achebe’s fourth novel, *A Man of the People* is a post - independence political satire that frowns upon the bad governance characterized by selfishness, assassinations and plunder of national resources by the greedy African leaders who have taken over leadership after
independence. As Achebe points out in an interview with Tony Hall: "A Man of the People was not a flash in the pan; this is the beginning of a phase for me in which I intend to take a hard look at what we in Africa are making of independence" (23). The novel, being a reflection of the failure by the African leaders to whom the much sought independence was bequeathed does not feature religion as a major concern largely because it is no longer the major issue in the Igbo society. Actually, at the temporal setting of the novel, the conflict between the two religions: ancestral and Christianity has almost been resolved.

Sunday Etim (2004) enumerates corruption and greed in high places as the major thematic concerns with disillusionment, betrayal, twisted love, political violence, thuggery, intolerance of opposition and materialism as sub-themes (294). Unlike the three novels preceding A Man of the People which have conflict between the western civilization and the Igbo traditions as one of the major thematic concerns, this fiction deals exclusively with corruption. Perhaps the absence of major religious concern in the novel is attributable to the contrasting nature of the two: religion on one hand and social decadence, represented mainly in corruption, on the other.

Despite its minimal inclusion, religion cannot be entirely ignored since it is a component of people's culture. In the wake of the abomination that sees Azoge the blind beggar experience the inhumanity of having his walking stick taken by Josiah with an aim of making juju with it to make his buyers "blind," religious invocation is witnessed. A woman, perhaps perplexed by the weight of the matter, re-thinks her ancestral religion. She ominously curses Josiah for exploiting Azoge's misfortune to enrich himself. The narrator draws the audience's attention that: "I saw one old woman swing her hand in a gyre round her neck and jerk it towards Josiah's shop, a most ominous sign" (84).
The perceived Josiah's customers then gang up against him in a show of solidarity against his unacceptable behaviour which contrasts with both ancestral and Christian religions' ideals.

2.3 **Mother Archetypes in Education System**

Education is an important component of any people's lives. It comes in two different forms: informal, which is largely a kind of training without classroom set up, and formal which is an official teaching set up with a clear identifiable teacher(s) and student(s).

Achebe's novels interrogate pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial educational systems starting with informal in pre-colonial and moving on to formal in the subsequent periods. Prior to the coming of the Whiteman, informal education along with African traditions was largely practised among the Igbo community.

### 2.3.1 Education in *Things Fall Apart*

*Things Fall Apart*'s temporal setting cuts across pre-colonial and the early colonial periods in Igboland. During the pre-colonial period, the community practices informal education characterized by oral features such as oral narratives, proverbs and apprenticeship where both male and female individuals receive it from the respective elder members of their gender. With the coming of the Whiteman, there is a marked shift from informal to formal education as the colonialists impose their culture on Igbo's.

Western civilization encounter with African traditions and the result of the same has been a major pre-occupation of Achebe both as a novelist and an essayist. In both informal and formal educational sectors, there are women characters who emerge as pillars thus acquiring the mother archetype status which is under focus in this study.
A) Ekwefi the Ardent Educator, Ezinma the Intelligent Student

As pointed out earlier, *Things Fall Apart* is a (re)presentation of the lives of the Igbo people before the encounter with Western civilization and partially during the encounter itself. During the pre-colonial period, institutions are not yet formalized thus one of the most significant ways used to propagate education from one generation to another is through oral narratives with morals which would thus shape the students approach to complexities of life in a communal setting. Women characters have been elevated as major partakers in these narrations, and subsequently the major educators. Ekwefi, the third wife of Okonkwo and mother of an only daughter: Ezinma, narrates an etiological narrative to her daughter and also allows her to narrate hers, a practice equivalent to tests given by teachers in formal education to their students to gauge their understanding. The narrative about Tortoise and the Birds is meant to impart knowledge into her young mind through the moral lesson that it enshrines.

The tale Ekwefi narrates to her daughter can be synopsized as follows: there is once a famine in the land and the birds contribute feathers to fashion wings for Tortoise so he might accompany them to the feast in the sky. Instead of showing some gratitude for the neighbourly spirit the birds have shown, Tortoise decides to hog the best of the feast for himself; he tells his benefactors, the birds, that according to the tradition of the hosts, each of the guests must assume a new name for the occasion, and his new name shall be “All of You”. When the host presents the guests with the feast, Tortoise asks for whom it is meant and the host replies, as expected, “For all of you”. The stratagem not only enables Tortoise to satisfy his greed but it also infuriates the birds enough for them to take back their feathers. Tortoise is consequently compelled to come down to earth the hard way. The conclusion of the story is that: “That is why the Tortoise’s shell is not smooth” (87-90).
Owomoyela attaches a lot of importance to this narrative, referring to it as “... a story designated to illustrate the basic tenets for human relations in the community, a story whose moral is the moral of the novel itself” (96). This study reads this narrative metaphorically as struggle for dominance between the female gender and the patriarchy. Thus the Tortoise represents the male while the birds stand for the female gender. The “all of you” declaration by the Tortoise which paradoxically turns out to be “I alone” since it is fashioned to help the Tortoise eat the scarce food alone – a feat he achieves – is the attempt by the patriarchy to dominate the whole scene of life, pushing the female gender to the periphery. This greedy act makes Tortoise be punished through losing his borrowed feathers and falling down on a hard surface where he suffers major injuries. He thus becomes helpless, his patriarchal orientation notwithstanding. He is saved from death by his wife’s intervention; who sends for a great medicine-man to gather the bits of shells and stick them together. Thus the story’s moral is a veiled warning against patriarchal tendency to elevate itself at the expense of the female gender. It is the same reason that facilitates the much hyped total failure of the hero and patriarch of the novel, Okonkwo, his grandson Obi in No longer at Ease and the self styled politician Chief Nanga in A Man of the People as they endeavour to subvert the nneka as will be demonstrated in chapter three.

An expanded moral lesson to this narrative as opined by Owomoyela (97) is the view that, birds – perhaps representing female gender – act in the interest of the communalism, banding together to help the less fortunate, while Tortoise exploits the others for his own selfish intentions. In the process, he suffers a fate that discourages emulation of his way while by implication upholding the bird’s way. The moral lesson is that, no individual should place his or her interests above those of the group and no individual can or should ever attempt to be
“all of you” (I alone). This teaching is a very significant moral that the young generation is in need of as they struggle to tackle the communal challenges ahead. Presumably, its learning and internalization is the reason behind Ezinma’s exceptional performance that nearly melts the stone-hearted patriarch: her father Okonkwo into submitting to the *nnëka* power as he constantly wishes she were a boy.

Our opinion as to why Ezinma’s hyper performance is projected in both family and communal matters which earns her father’s admiration puts us in contrasting opinion with Stratton who views her significance as a character as that of juxtaposing her (Ezinma) against Nwoye to highlight the qualities of masculinity that Nwoye lacks (31). Stratton’s further argument that suggests Ekwefi’s and Ezinma’s primary function as that of revealing Okonkwo’s well-hidden capacity for tender feelings hence ensuring that despite his violent temperament, he retains the sympathy of readers is an outright under estimation of the function the informal education plays in an individual (29). She views Ekwefi and Ezinma’s gain of affectionate interest in the first instance from uncompromising Okonkwo as resulting from the characteristics they exhibit which are atypical of their gender as conventionally defined by Okonkwo.

By positing that, Stratton seems to forget the major feats that Ezinma accomplishes, her gender and position in the family notwithstanding. After seven years in exile in his motherland, Mbanta, Okonkwo’s eyes are set on restoring himself as the indisputable king and one of the leading *egwugwu* in his fatherland, Umuofia. To achieve this, he needs to ensure his arrival causes a stir akin to biblical “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem that Jesus had. He has already devised elaborate stratagem to aid in recapturing his lost status: rebuilding his compound on a more magnificent scale; a bigger barn and huts for two new wives, initiating
his sons into *ozo* society and then working towards taking the highest title in the land (155). Furthermore, he considers having beautiful ladies accompanying him to act as a center of attraction as an elaborate stratagem meant to attract wealthy suitors. He has this potential in the personage of Ezinma, who has grown into an incomparable beauty, earning the name “The Crystal of Beauty” together with her step-sister Obiageli. With two grown-up daughters, he hopes his return to Umuofia will attract a considerable attention with future sons-in-law being men of considerable authority in the clan (157).

Okonkwo, despite the power he wields as a patriarch and his extreme show of macho, can only advice rather than direct her two daughters not to accept a hand in marriage from the suitors in Mbanta:

Many young men and prosperous middle-aged men of Mbanta came to marry her. But she refused them all because her father had one evening said to her: “There are many good and prosperous people here, but I shall be happy if you marry in Umuofia when we return home”. That was all he had said. But Ezinma had seen clearly all the thoughts and hidden meaning behind the words. And she had agreed. (my emphasis, 157)

Ezinma’s education under the tutelage of her mother – to avoid being individualistic and be accommodative to others – comes in handy in ensuring her father’s desire is achieved. She fully understands her father’s aim and effectively influences her half-sister, Obiageli, in favour of his wish. Clearly, this is a manifestation of a lady who exhibits the characteristics of an educated woman, never mind her education is informal. She is able to invoke the education she received from her mother to deduce the meaning of her father’s words without any need for further prodding. No wonder her father wishes on several occasions that she were a boy. Her mother’s tutelage also explains why she wields strong influence over her half-sister, Obiageli to whom she plays the counselor despite the fact that they are age-mates. Ezinma thus easily solves Okonkwo’s dilemma and restores hope to his mission of becoming a
formidable personality in Umuofia once he and his family goes back home after seven years in exile.

This opinion contrasts with Ozumurana’s Marxist analysis of the same episode. He views Okonkwo’s advice to his daughters not to marry in Mbanta as a commodified relationship with exchange value in that, once her two daughters go back home, wealthy people will be able to marry them hence enabling him to regain his socio-economic status (20). In so arguing, Ozumurana seems to ignore the fact that, the central figure here, the one in control of events is Ezinma who represents *nneka* rather than her father, a representative of patriarchy. She is so perfect in her duties that he, unable to accept the significance of feminine gender exploits due to his patriarchal extremes, keeps on wishing that she were a boy. This constant wish is symbolically an attempt to accommodate *nneka* into patriarchy in recognition of what education passed on to Ezinma by her mother Ekwefi achieves. The fact that the intended accommodation does not go beyond a wish is attributable to both Okonkwo’s rigidity as an individual and the dictates of the Igbo customs to which strict adherence is demanded. Nevertheless, *nneka’s* factor as personified in Ezinma cannot be wished away.

Another exceptional feat that Ezinma exhibits is her self-driven initiative aimed at ensuring that her father and the other elders arrested by the colonial administrators following the destruction of the church are released. She is the only character in Okonkwo’s big family whom we see making an attempt to secure the release of the patriarch: “His daughter Ezinma had broken a twenty-eight day visit to the family of the future husband and returned home when she heard that her father had been imprisoned, and was going to be hanged” (177). Marriage does not water down the effects of education passed on to her rather she outlives the women weakness tag and fully participates in the family emergency. The fact that she gets
satisfied only when she learns that something is being done by Obiereka is a pointer that she was prepared to go all the way and act accordingly. The question that begs to be answered is: where are Okonkwo’s sons whom he intended to initiate into ozo title on his return from exile during this family crisis? Have they lost their superiority and scampered for safety in the wake of this family crisis? We may excuse Nwoye because he has already denounced his father and the ancestral gods but surely we expect his younger brothers to be in the forefront in solving the family crisis. The sons’- the representatives of patriarchy - apathy give way for nneka’s active participation thus elevating it to the fore. Ezinma thus takes up the headship of the family in the absence of his farther insofar as problem-solving is concerned.

Considering Ezinma’s incomparable accomplishments, it is conclusive that, Ekwefi distinguishes herself as a competent teacher who uses the available curriculum in the form of oral narratives to educate her daughter on community values. She, on the other hand, emerges as an apt student whose challenge to patriarchal constructs is attributable to education received from her mother. The teacher-student females combine the power of education of their time to outmuscle patriarchs in their own dominion. The two are thus mother archetypes whom nneka principle guides to attain much in the family traditionally dominated by the patriarchs.

2.3.2 Education in No longer at Ease

Achebe’s second novel No longer at Ease’s temporal setting illuminates the outcome of the colonizers’ continued inroads into the Nigerians’ lives on the eve of independence although it is punctuated with flashbacks to colonial period. During this time, education is in its transitional stage from informal to formal dispensation. It, together with general
enlightenment brought about by western civilization, buoy women characters in rising above the patriarchal tendencies and steering important tasks with which they are entrusted.

Both male and female characters are partakers of education system in the capacity of educators and recipients. However, female characters who take up the responsibility of educating their own demonstrate unequivocal attitude in the undertaking. The same case applies to their counterparts who readily receive education, which emancipates their thinking to an extent that they no longer rely on patriarchs to direct their actions.

A) Hannah Okonkwo, the Linkage between Formal and Informal Education

Observably, formal education does not set in to the Nigerians abruptly rather it is a gradual process. Thus the informal training offered to children by the elder members of their gender is not abandoned overnight. A case in point is where Hannah involves herself in apprenticeship education by having two girls: Joy and Mercy her distant relatives sent by their parents with an express aim of benefiting from her expertise in housekeeping skills (122). This kind of apprenticeship happens despite the fact that her son, Obi, has already taken up formal education up to University level which signals the adoption of western civilization. She is also ever ready to train her daughters on the best and acceptable way to navigate the difficult task of parenthood. Her keen observation on one of her daughters, Agnes, touching on her immaturity despite having been married with her own child is proved by her behaviour when she is called upon to carry the children, who are already asleep to bed:

   Agnes grabbed the first child by the wrist and pulled him up. “Agnes! Agnes!” Screamed their mother... “I have always said your head is not correct, how many times must I tell you to call the child by name before waking him up?” (56)

There is, undoubtedly, an importance of balancing the informal and formal institutions during this crucial time of transition but the patriarchy as an entity does not take it upon itself to train its male characters informally in readiness for adoption of formal structures. This failure
manifests itself later on when Obi proves to be unable to follow the acceptable dictates to get himself a decent lady to betroth. The female gender projects itself as a bridge more so through Hannah who effectively navigates her trainees through the transition.

The protagonist in *No Longer at Ease*, Obi, is undoubtedly one of the Umuofian pioneers of formal education owing to his success in it, a feat that earns him an automatic scholarship from Umuofia Progressive Union (U.P.U). In successive flashbacks, Achebe points out Obi’s difficulties in trying to travel the difficult journey to academic excellence; which range from his water phobia in the morning before leaving for school to an accident that her mother suffers while doing his laundry, courtesy of his neglected razor-blade in his clothes (66-68). The most pronounced of all is the humiliation he suffers before his classmates for failure to narrate a story during “Oral” lesson. The resulting derisive laughter from his classmates reduces him to tears. It is apparent that, if not curbed, this humiliation would have been a psychological setback in his pursuit of education.

His inability to participate in story narration like his colleagues is traceable to his family’s conversion to Christianity and the subsequent banning of all heathen activities, including narration of folk-stories by Isaac Okonkwo. His father had stated the reason to his mother clearly: “We are not heathens, … stories like that are not for the people of the church” (52). This act is definitely an inconsiderate attempt to adopt a quick transition from informal to formal education which is tied to the transition from ancestral to Christian religion. Such an approach is bound to be hurting to the learners because of the obvious reason that any change, if it’s going to be beneficial, must be gradual.

Having foreseen this problem, Hannah consciously tries to bridge this gap by perpetuating the practice of informal education through telling her children folk-stories more so her eldest
daughters before her husband forbids her. The decree against folk-stories by Isaac Okonkwo means Obi, almost the last born in the family, does not benefit from this educative enterprise. It is therefore inescapable for him to suffer humiliation in a school setting that is forced by transitional period to combine both oral and written literature in a bid to be accommodative to the two equally overbearing cultures. It is against the backdrop of this situation of inadequacy that Hannah proves a beacon of hope to the young desperate Obi. She opts to take risk of doing what her husband had forbidden: telling folk-stories to their children in a bid to rescue the besieged young man. She seizes the opportune time when her husband leaves for evening prayers to narrate to Obi a folk-tale that he effectively narrates in school two weeks later when he is once again called upon to make a second attempt. That way, he restores his status as an exemplary student, the “dictionary” as his classmates used to call him (32).

The patriarchy in the personage of Isaac Okonkwo once more fares badly in resolving the eminent crisis of educational transition. Isaac Okonkwo is not only unable to facilitate the necessary ingredient of education but he also forbids it and by so doing threatens it with inhibition. That way, the patriarch is exposed as lacking in knowledge, being insensitive, and unable to comprehend the necessary steps to be taken in order to achieve the inevitable integration of the two education systems. So skewed to one side it is that it is blinded into believing that all is well when it is actually not.

Hannah’s ability to overturn an imminent crisis for better where the patriarch has shown open aloofness projects mmeaka as an indisputable pillar of educational accomplishment. She thus doubles up as both a religious and an educational mother archetype in the novel.
B) Clara, the Embodiment of Women Emancipation

With the formalization of education system, both genders get an opportunity to acquire education, a privilege that enables female gender to emancipate itself from the domineering nature of the patriarchy because with formal education, one is able to acquire formal employment, title, and status. For instance, Esther, Obi’s elder sister, is no longer referred to as merely Esther but Miss after acquiring education which has given her status as a teacher (54).

The female character whose acquisition of formal education attests to the amount of emancipation it affords an individual, regardless of gender, is Clara, daughter of Joseph Okeke who is also an osu. Education affords her an opportunity to study both in her native country Nigeria and in England, a feat that equates the success of the female gender to that of male since Obi has also been to England for further studies. The nursing education which she receives in England is not in vain because she exhibits a practical approach to issues related to her profession whenever an opportunity presents itself. For instance, when she meets Obi in the boat on their way to Nigeria at the Harriton Dock in Liverpool, she shows her nursing professionalism. She is careful enough to notice Obi’s malady and to undertake curative measures on him: “I noticed you were not feeling very well,... so I brought you some tablets of Avomine” (21). Contrastingly, Obi’s education is nothing but a failure as he is not enthusiastic in helping other young people to benefit from government scholarships and uplift the education standards in his country when he is eventually offered scholarship secretary job by the government. In a clear show of failure to uphold the professionalism, he engages himself in corruption and sexual exploitation of young innocent girls - the aspirants of government scholarship - actions that culminate into his eventual downfall.
Curiously, Obi, despite his education which has earned him a “European post,” finds himself in financial quagmire prompted by his inability to manage his finances effectively. His boss, Mr. Green, forewarns him about the insurance payment that he will have to honour every year. Nonetheless, the first letter demanding for his insurance renewal finds him broke: “He spreads the insurance renewal letter before him on the table. Forty-two pounds! He had just a little over thirteen pounds in the bank” (87). To rescue himself from the imminent shame of having to abandon his car because of failure to meet its requirements, he secures a bank overdraft. Obi is afraid of telling Clara about his dealings with the bank but when they meet, she proves irresistible. On being informed, Clara prods him further, wishing to know why he did not inform her before making the decision. Her question proves the undeniable presence and perhaps control in his life. “Why didn’t you tell me... you don’t think I should be told when you are in difficulty?” (92). Because of failure to be involved in Obi’s decisions and difficulties, they differ that evening, making Obi leave her house in a huff and to spend a night full of psychological torture. The following morning, Clara sends a ward attendant with an envelope in which fifty pounds is enclosed with express instructions that Obi should “go straight away to the bank and cancel that overdraft” (97). Thus we are in full support of Mary Kolawole’s (1997) assertion that:

In Clara and Obi’s Mother, we have women who have moved from the initial social space and traditional conditioning created by Achebe... His representation of Clara and Obi’s mother is closer to a slice of reality (114).

This is a clear demonstration of how formal education has liberated the female gender. Clara is able to work and earn her own money for which she has overall decision on how to spend. Through her, the female gender shifts into the male domain of being the provider and seems to do better. The willingness and the practical indulgence of Clara to Obi’s predicament is indicative of *nneka* in action.
2.3.3 Education in *A Man of the People*

In this post-colonial fiction which critics bad leadership in post-colonial African countries, formal education has already been incorporated into the lives of both genders. Various characters are educated up to different levels because of various prevailing circumstances. The novel, being a political satire, Achebe appears to be satirizing every situation which is connected to Chief Nanga, the protagonist and symbol of bad leadership.

**A) Mrs. Nanga, the Embodiment of Education through Conscience**

Mrs. Nanga is the wife of Chief Nanga, the protagonist of the novel and minister for culture. While she confesses to Odili that she is not very educated and therefore she is not eligible to join her husband on trips overseas: “[H]ave you ever heard of a woman going to America when she does not know ABC?” (87), she is regretful of the situation which she attributes to her minor age at the time she unwillingly got married:

I passed the entrance to a secondary school...but Eddy’s father and his people kept at me to marry him, marry him, and then my own parents joined in; they said what did a girl want with so much education? *So I foolishly agreed. I was not old enough to refuse* (my emphasis, 88).

The assertion therein shows an attempted emancipation through education, which is aborted by her tender age at the time she is exposed to the demands of parents to have her married off. The melancholic mood in which she narrates it is evidently a show of her thirst for education as she is aware of its significance. She is a new crop of women who understand the need for education among women as opposed to her old-fashioned parents who cannot see the need “for so much education to a girl.”

Hers is thus a conscious educational emancipation as she does not get an opportunity to get enough of it to enable her to become professionally and financially liberated. Her education, albeit indirectly, plays a key role in instilling consciousness in Edna, the young girl to whom
Chief Nanga is engaged. Naturally, she is unable to communicate her sentiments directly to Edna as that would be interpreted as an animosity towards her prompted by her husband’s intention to bring her in as a co-wife. She however unconsciously communicates her thoughts to her indirectly through Odili the narrator who, in his endeavour to wrestle Edna from chief Nanga, ends up acting as a communication link between the two: “Edna is falling in the same trap. Imagine a girl straight from college not allowed to teach even for one year and look around” (88). The contents of Odili’s first missive to Edna trying to persuade her to free herself from Chief Nanga’s chain of marriage is evidently Mrs. Nanga’s sentiments being aired through a different avenue. Her education (or lack of enough of it) plays a significant role in persuading Edna not to fall into the same trap that she was exposed to at her formative age.

Undoubtedly, Mrs. Nanga plays a key role in ensuring there is equilibrium in the kind of education their children receive, which is important in salvaging them from total alienation. She takes the children to the rural home at least once every year to socialize with their extended family’s relatives. In so doing, she takes up the role of a moral teacher comparable to her counterpart, Ekwefi, who teaches morals to Ezinma through an oral narrative. Hers is however a practical approach of a mother who is educated enough to understand English, the mark of sophistication in her current generation. She is quick to discipline little Micah when he calls her mother “a dirty bushman” by “slapping okoro seeds out of his mouth” (38).

She thus emerges as a concerned mother to not only her biological children but also to Edna whose lack of experience is bound to expose her to undesirable servitude of the patriarchs.
B) The (Re) emergence of Edna from Circumstantial Victimhood

Edna Udo, the Chief Nanga’s intended parlour wife who becomes the centre of competition between him and his friend-turned-foe Odili, after their fall out orchestrated by Chief Nanga’s unwarranted takeover of his girlfriend: Elsie, is a victim of circumstances (86). Born in a poor family to a greedy father at a time when formal education is the only way to unshackle oneself, Edna is forced to accept her father’s way of doing things: that Chief Nanga pays her school fees and offers him other goodies in exchange for a hand in marriage once she is through with college. The narrator’s description of her, on our first encounter, reveals to us a victim of circumstances that forces her to be in a company to which she doesn’t appear to belong:

Next to her sat a beautiful young girl... I did not catch the two of them exchanging any words or even looks. I wondered what such a girl was doing in that tough crowd; it looked as though they had stopped by some convent on their way and offered to give her a lift to the next one (14).

It’s ironical that the perceived “covenant” is Chief Nanga’s matrimonial bed where she is bound to become a co-wife to Mrs. Nanga. She fully understands the importance of education; education for emancipation but to borrow from Shakespeare’s famous paradox in Much Ado About Nothing, “[she has] to die in order to live.”

She accepts that she is besieged in that her greedy father would kill her if she opts out of the arrangement. She even informs Odili - when he breaches the issue about her being educated and therefore it not being advisable for her to accept the second wife status - “[that] that is the world of women” (98), an assertion which Odili terms as rubbish especially from an educated woman. Her resignation to fate is evident in her reply to Odili’s first missive:

I have noted what you have said about my marriage. Really you should pity poor me, Odili. I am in a jam about the whole thing. If I develop cold feet now, my father will almost kill me. Where is he going to find all the money the man paid on my head? So
it is not so much that I want to be called a minister’s wife but a matter of can’t help. What cannot be avoided must be borne (110).

She, in a way, has practically become P.I.V (poor innocent victim) like the drunken relative of Chief Nanga at the Christmas party who humorously describes himself as such.¹⁰

Interestingly, at one point she appears to readily accept her victimhood and dismisses Odili in an unkind manner, calling him “[an] errant boy and Mr. Gossiper and even threatening him with dire consequence should he dare come back to their home again” (129). That it results to Odili writing her a very harsh massive referring to her education as “no more than lower Elementary” (133) is expected of a man who has, unexpectedly, received such taunting from a woman he has fought so hard to rescue (if not to exert his revenge). Although she appears besieged, she is conscious of her predicament and acts like a caged bird which is constantly fighting to regain its freedom. Her freedom manifests itself when the competition for parliamentary seat between Chief Nanga and Odili escalates. The bravado that Odili exhibits in dealing with her father earns him a place in her heart: “…the way Edna had looked at me when she said bye-bye showed plainly that my fearlessness had not been lost on her…” (108). Henceforth, she appears to be leaning towards Odili – who in a way is her choice. This crucial decision to go for her choice acts as the base for her to slowly gain her liberation.

The turning point comes in when Odili, out of sheer curiosity, decides to attend Chief Nanga’s political rally in disguise. On being discovered, everybody descends on him except Edna who attempts to save him. Although her effort – desperately exhibited in patriarch dominated episode – doesn’t bear fruits, it is a pointer to her free thinking. When Odili is eventually hospitalized, she voluntarily spends her day and night with him in the hospital. When he comes to, after days in coma, she informs him she did not at any time want to marry
Chief Nanga: “to be frank with you I did not want to marry him... it was only my father...” (145).

The fact that Edna stands out from the crowd to save the person she consciously admires marks a start to her re-emerging from the bondage of the patriarchs. The culmination of her freedom from victimhood is attained when she is able to settle on Odili as her suitor. Apparently, the full emancipation only becomes a reality after Chief Nanga’s death which is symbolic of the death of patriarchal dominance.

Edna emerges as a mother archetype who struggles through victimhood and eventually emerges victorious to take up her position as a free educated woman with the ability to choose her suitor.

2.4 Mother Archetypes in Judiciary

Justice is one of the most sought after yet elusive pillars of human life that grants an individual a sense of belonging and promotes inclusion. The Igbo macrocosm as presented in Achebe’s fiction deals with justice at different levels. Since his fiction traverses three distinct periods, namely; pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial, each period has women participation in their judicial system however less pronounced it is at the first period.

2.4.1 Justice in Things Fall Apart

A) Justice at Spiritual Realm
The pre-colonial society that Achebe writes about in his first novel is characterized by a very thin line separating the living, the ancestors, and the anthropomorphic deities. The ancestors have to be revered while the deities must be appeased in order to offer protection to the living. Their (deities’) gender is also revealed and is instrumental in determining what role they are assigned in the Igbo macrocosm.
One such deity is the earth goddess, Ani, whose prophet is Ezeani. Though the goddess has no direct interaction with the living, she directs the happenings from her abode and interacts with mortals through her prophet, Ezeani who is at the helm of ensuring that among other duties, justice does prevail among the living. In line with the fact that women characters are not much involved in the judicial system, she fully represents and protects them. This is demonstrated in the two instances that Okonkwo uses his gun against the living who, incidentally, belong to the two different genders.

The first instance is when he attempts to shoot his second wife whom he has just given a thorough beating after accusing her of destroying a banana tree. His anger stems from her murmuring that his gun never shot (35). The fact that he misses her at close range behoves the investigation to establish the mystery behind her protection as anybody would have expected the shot to kill, or in the least wound her. Indubitably, the truth lies in the fact that Ani, the earth goddess, is female and she upholds the protection of her fellow female characters especially given that they are not fully included in the judicial process spearheaded by their male counterparts. This view is in line with Maja-Pearce’s (1992) observation that the killing of Ezeudu’s son demonstrates an incident in which Okonkwo succeeds accidentally where he had failed intentionally (13).

This incident is juxtaposed against the second one in which Okonkwo’s gun goes off and unintentionally shoots down Ezeudu’s sixteen-year-old “... son who with his brothers and half brothers had been dancing the traditional farewell to their father”[.] (113). This happening bespeaks the preferential treatment that Ani accords the female gender. The subsequent action against Okonkwo’s family that decrees he should flee from the clan for the
next seven years and the destruction of his homestead—termed as justice of the earth goddess—shows that there is involvement of feminine gender in the execution of justice.

Indisputably, the earth goddess protects her counterpart at all cost from execution aimed at her by Okonkwo’s gun but she fails to protect the killing of the patriarch and uses the living to vent justice against him for killing the teenager. This is a show of solidarity of the female gender in judicial system though executed in the spiritual realm. This stance resonates with that of Maja-Pearce who views the incident in which Okonkwo succeeds accidentally where he had failed intentionally as an act of women battle for justice extended to the spiritual realm:

How much is one to read from this...[t]hat the goddess shielded a woman from the masculine wrath... Ani, after all represents the female principle in the cosmic life of the community just as surely as Okonkwo represents the male principle in the secular world (13).

The patriarch’s perceived attempt to exclude women from judicial system is thus defeated at the spiritual sphere. This critical analysis, however, contrasts with Straton’s opinion that “women are [also] systematically excluded from the political, economic, the judicial and even the discoursal life of the community (emphasis added, 25). Men’s attempt, and near success, to exclude women in the judicial system is compensated at the spiritual dominion where the female deities fully participate in ensuring justice for women is upheld.

B) Justice among Women and for Women

Women characters are also involved in justice among themselves in areas that are considered to be of women concern. While preparing the feast for Obiereka’s daughter, a stray cow comes their way. In such an instance, it is imperative that all women join in returning the beast to its owner. They are also mandated with fining the owner for letting it
astray. Women in unison exercise this justice without prejudice and this shows their involvement in their own justice and their ability to execute it.

While it cannot be denied that, to a certain extent, there is an attempt to exclude women from sharing judicial platforms with their male counterparts, it is observable that it does not mean their interests are not catered for. This is verified by the war emissary that is prompted by the killing of a woman, wife of Ogbuefi Udo at Mbaino market (11). That a woman is important to a point of threatening the whole village to go to war is enough evidence that despite their limited participation, any injustice against them triggers a reaction akin to that of a patriarch, perhaps even more. In support of the same, Julie Agbasiere (2004) observes:

[T]radition does not, however, always denigrate women... the very society that has little regard is poised to go to war because of a woman. The war-like Umuofia is so incensed by the murder of its daughter and wife of Ogbuefi Udo in Mbaino that it hands down an ultimatum to the people: a boy and a girl as compensation or war. (360)

Notably, the kind of compensation that the Umuofia people get from Mbaino: a virgin and a lad Ikemefuna, shows the reverence attached to women. That when justice is applied without bias decrees that a woman is worthy a man and a woman to bet attests to gender equilibrium and cements women importance in the community.

Furthermore, women import is amplified by the fact that when Ozowulu persistently beats his wife, Mgbafo, the highest council of egwugwu that administers justice under the leadership of Evil Forest summons the complainants to the hearing (82). After engaging both parties, the case is determined in favour of Mgbafo. Agbasiere, in reference to this incidence, argues:

Although wife battering goes on from time to time, society does not consider it the norm. When Mgbafo is brutalized by her husband, Uzowulu, her brothers intervene, beat him up and take their sister and her children to their father’s house as a protective measure. When the case is being tried, the eldest of the seven spirits, in his ruling, emphasizes that, “it is not bravery to fight with a woman.” (360)
This incident is a clear indication that though in some instances, women are not always involved directly in some of these judicial matters, there is no bias in case determination. Their perceived exclusion is thus a strength rather than weakness.

2.4.2 Justice in No Longer at Ease

The major judicial system that we are exposed to in the novel involves Obi Okonkwo’s prosecution following his involvement in corrupt activities later in his career as higher education loans board secretary. The prosecutor involved is not, speaking in strict sense, a male person but a European, a colonizer. This is understandable because the country has not yet freed itself from the yokes of colonialism. The court Justice, as we know it, is still a preserve of the Whites.

Undoubtedly, Obi Okonkwo’s first exposure to justice, albeit an indirect one, before he is judged by the magistrate for involving himself in corruption, is executed by women. Obi, on returning to Nigeria after obtaining his degree from England sits for an interview and decides to visit Umuofia as he waits for the results. He boards a mammy wagon; God’s Case No Appeal. On the way, he unsuccessfully tries to thwart the policemen’s intention of receiving a bribe from the driver’s mate by looking at one of them threateningly. While this is ironical since Obi is later to be prosecuted for involving himself in the same corruption he is trying to prevent, it invites the wrath of women – the fellow passengers – in the wagon who change the theme of their songs to criticize ‘too know’ young men in an obvious reference to Obi (38). The song they sing acts as their way of meting judgment to an individual who is out to spoil their journey and business. They may not have an opportunity to attack him physically or take him to any prosecutor for the supposed offence but they use what they have to execute justice on their perceived wrong doer.
The driver and his mate, despite their patriarchal orientation, can do nothing when confronted with Obi’s “offence”. The only dissatisfaction the driver shows is remaining mute and sullen. “For the rest of the journey, the driver said not a word more to him” (NLAE:40). His inability to confront Obi exposes his weakness as a patriarch and paves way for women to push men to the periphery as they foreground the female gender. These women traders who attack Obi’s unacceptable behavior can be viewed as an embodiment of nneka principle which outclasses its masculine counterpart in judging an offender in the most effective way that is at their disposal in the prevailing circumstances.

2.4.3 Justice in A Man of the People

Achebe has brought to the fore women characters as players of important role in the judicial system. Their participation in justice is buoyed by judicial education which affords them a chance to become lawyers. They thus participate in curbing the patriarchs’ extremity in injustice.

Mrs. Akilo is the first woman lawyer that we encounter in Achebe’s texts. Though it does not escape our notice that she is presented as a cheap harlot whom Chief Nanga sleeps with for money, we already do understand Achebe’s satirical approach in the novel to laugh at the immorality and ineptitude of the post-independence leaders. The only best way the author could reveal leaders like Chief Nanga’s incompetence is through showing how loose he is with regards to his relationship with women. Mrs. Akilo’s efficacy in the novel is partly to cast Chief Nanga and to a greater extent the crop of leaders manning post independent Nigeria in particular and African countries in general in a negative light, as well as demonstrate the level of independence that women have been able to gain in Achebe’s later fiction. This viewpoint concurs with Chinyere Nwagbara’s (2004) contention that:
While the story of *A Man of the People* focuses on men, there are still some women characters that cannot be ignored. Though Mrs. Agnes Akilo is not put centrally in the book, she cannot but be noticed. Her physical outlook is compelling. Her beauty and sophisticated outlooks are enabling. *She is a successful lawyer [who] owns a successful firm of solicitors with her husband.* Chief Nanga admits that she is “She” who must be obeyed. (my emphasis, 346)

Indeed this assertion puts Mrs. Akilo in the limelight as a competent partaker in justice especially since she is a successful solicitor. It further augments our earlier declaration that women’s portrayal as sexual perverts, chief among them Mrs. Akilo, is an avenue of satirizing the rot in morals of the caucus of post independence political leaders rather than demeaning them. Thus the presentation of Mrs. Agnes Akilo as a powerful woman is indicative of Achebe’s gradual increasing elevation of women in his fiction which is informed by changing roles of women outside his fictional world.

This analysis thus differs with Kamau Kiarie’s (2002) who opines that women in the novel are presented in a negative light as they easily succumb to men’s sexual overtures (45). Kiarie identifies Mrs. Akilo among other women such as: Elsie, Edna and Jean. The fact that she is learned and takes law as her profession is enough proof that she is involved in justice and even co-manages a law firm with her husband, a patriarch, demonstrates women eventual elevation to the same level with men.

As women’s roles continue to receive elevation, Eunice, Max Kumalo’s fiancée oversees the culmination of justice by female gender. The explanation we get from the narrator on her first remark foreshadows her challenge to the dominant patriarchy... “and the unemployed of course” said the young lady with that confidence of a *beautiful woman who has brains as well which I find a little intimidating*” (my emphasis, 78). Odili Samalu the narrator admits that he, and therefore patriarchy, is intimidated by the *nneka* embodied in Eunice which is manifested in her wisdom.
The *nneka* foreshadowed earlier by Eunice’s ability to stand out to be counted over and above the patriarchs comes to maturity when she single handedly avenges his colleague in C.P.C, a fellow lawyer and a fiancé: Max Kumalo. While all the patriarchs with whom Max had associated himself with during the formative stages of the party and subsequent campaigns are inactivated by the cruel death meted on him by Chief Koko when one of his jeep runs over him, Eunice does not join their inertia but rather she acts, and by so doing avenges his colleague posthumously. The narrator informs us:

Eunice had been missed by a few inches when Max had been felled. She stood like a stone figure, I was told, for some minutes more. Then she opened her handbag as if to take out a handkerchief, took out a pistol instead and fired two bullets in Chief Koko’s chest... (142)

She can therefore be equated to Hannah Okonkwo in *No Longer at Ease* who comes out as the stronger partner between her and her husband; Isaac Okonkwo. Her hewing the Idemili’s he-goat’s head to symbolically defeat the predominant traditional way of life and usher in Christianity is comparable to Eunice’s shooting of Chief Koko to symbolically trounce corruption which is predominant in newly independent Nigeria in particular and Africa in general.

This viewpoint is augmented by summative authorial intrusion where the author seems to be emphasizing on justice as executed by Eunice: “...I say you died a good death if your life had inspired someone to come forward and shoot your murderer in the chest-without asking to be paid” (149). Such credentials definitely thrust her to the fore as a daring enthusiast in socio-political arena, more pronounced than any other character, male or female.

Eunice, like other mother archetypes in Achebe’s fiction, represents the elevation of *nneka* principle. She accomplishes great exploits where the males seem to have been unable to act.
2.5 Conclusion

Women characters have demonstrated exceptional exploits in the three roles under study, namely: religion, education and justice. Undoubtedly, these three roles are the backbone of communal interrelationships. In *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *A Man of the People*, it is undeniable that women exhibit more zeal than their male counterpart in their obligations.

Irrefutably, religion has always been, and still remains, one of the mainstay communal undertakings which define mankind. In elevating women to overseer status, Achebe implies the important position they hold in the community. The chapter highlighted strong women characters both in ancestral and Christian religions where Chika and Chielo come into scrutiny as pillars of ancestral religion who are inexorable in both its defense and propagation. Nneka demonstrates her martyrdom dedication when she becomes the pioneer Christian woman in order to integrate the Christian values into the community’s practices and thus save the hitherto endangered twins. On the other part, Hannah Okonkwo projects herself as the much needed linkage between ancestral and Christian religions which must have a smooth transition for the peaceful co-existence and realization of the benefits brought about by the so-called Western civilization. Mary, Hannah’s friend, plays a pivotal role in sustaining the new religion which is in need of an enthusiastic individual to nurture it to maturation. In the postcolonial period represented in the study by *A Man of the People*, the study concluded that there is little prominence in religion.

Equally important is education which goes hand in hand with religion. Owing to the fact that the texts under study cut across three distinct periods, education, just like religion, is in transition from informal to formal spearheaded by the Western civilization. Women characters distinguish themselves as the major educators both in formal and informal
education. The study concludes that in pre-colonial period, women educate their children through folktales as is the case with Ekwefi and her daughter Ezinma. During colonization which necessitates the gradual transition, women – through Hannah Okonkwo – demonstrate their ability to negotiate between informal and formal education in order to link the two systems. Furthermore, women who benefit from formal education exhibit high level of professionalism in contrast with their male counterparts as is the case with Clara and Obi. In postcolonial period, education has fully liberated the progressive women thus enabling them to achieve equal status with their male counterparts and fully participate in politics, a preserve of patriarch as is the case with Eunice.

The study establishes that, justice is not a preserve of either gender. While the male gender fronts itself in the pre-colonial period through the egwugwu council, it is countered by Ani the female gendered goddess who presides over justice at the spiritual realm. Equally, Eunice partakes in the single most important activity, handing in the much sought after justice to the disgruntled voters by eliminating the root of corruption, inept leadership, and injustice embodied in Chief Koko. Symbolically, Eunice – singlehandedly – ushers in a new chapter for justice to the oppressed citizens.
CHAPTER THREE
Where the Rain Began to Beat the Masculine Gender

3.1 Introduction
One of the most widely quoted Igbo proverbs which most Igbo writers, including Achebe in *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1984), and Obioma Nnaemeka in her essay: “From Orality to Writing: African Women Writers and the (Re) Inscription of Womanhood” have incorporated into their works is “Onye amoro ebe nmili si welu maba ya adighi ama onye nyelu ya akwa ka owelu fichaa aru (One who does not know where the rain began to beat him/her will not know who provided the cloth with which he/she dried him/herself) (137). This proverb fits perfectly with regards to Achebe’s tragic heroes as there is need to establish what causes their tragic end so that patriarchs may know how to manoeuvre their ways.

Most of the heroes in Achebe’s fiction end up failing miserably in their endeavours despite putting a spirited fight to accomplish their undertakings. Okonkwo, the hero in *Things Fall Apart* is presented, from the word go, as a man who admires macho and despises femininity. He is also extremely inflexible and not ready to accommodate change. Earnest Emenyenu (1978) remarks that:

Okonkwo remains consistent... throughout the novel and as the narrative progresses the reader sees increasing evidence that Okonkwo’s temperament and in particular his inflexibility may lead him into a tragic situation (112). True to Emenyonu’s observation, Okonkwo dies tragically by hanging himself rather than allowing himself to be enslaved by the Whiteman and watch the Igbo traditions being eroded.

Obi Okonkwo, the hero in *No Longer at Ease*, is presented as an intellectual who excels in academics and secures a scholarship to study in the Whiteman’s country – a rare achievement during a time when education to Africans is in the verge of formalization. After returning to Nigeria, he vows to fight corruption but he ends up tragically in jail, imprisoned because of
engaging in the same corruption that he had vowed to root out. His engagement to Clara, an
*osu*, and subsequent attempt to change the age old tradition does not succeed as she leaves
him at the crucial moment. The break up, combined with death of his mother, contributes to
Obi’s adoption of a nonchalant attitude which leads to his tragic end.

Chief Nanga, the hero in *A Man of the People*, emerges from being a miserable
elementary school teacher to becoming an established Member of Parliament and later a state
minister, thus he is self-actualized within a short time. Despite all these achievements, his
life ends up tragically when he is shot dead as he tries to flee the country following a flawed
election which necessitates a coup in Achebe’s fictional country.

The question that begs to be answered is: why are all Achebe’s heroes tragic? This chapter
attempts to examine these heroes vis-a-vis their relationship with female characters in an
attempt to establish whether the cause of their tragedy stems from their attempt to overshadow
female gender.

3.2 The Pre-colonial Hero in *Things Fall Apart*

Okonkwo’s relationship with female members of his family and the men he considers
effeminate such as his father Unoka and his son Nwoye is characterized by unparalleled
harshness. His attempt to belittle female characters forms the basis of his tragic end as opined
by Traore (1997):

Okonkwo’s suicide, the closing event of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, is in
many ways a direct result of the hero’s attempt to displace or decenter the Nneka
principle in his private and public life. Nneka or “mother is supreme” is an ideal
clearly inscribed at the center of the symbolic universe of Okonkwo’s people (50).
Being unreasonably harsh to effeminate members of his family is, therefore, ideally, going
against the tenets of Okonkwo’s people either consciously or unconsciously.
3.2.1 Okonkwo’s Discomfiture with his Parents and Offspring

Just like Amalinze the cat whose back never touched the ground and whom Okonkwo threw in a wrestling match (1), Okonkwo’s “back” never touched the ground when it came to bending his diehard stance to accommodate women’s perceived weakness in any sphere of life. He is, in essence, a full practicing patriarch bent on pushing both literal and metaphorical women to the periphery. He seems to have internalized this fact, as Joseph Walunywa (2006) reminds us that:

Patriarchy is a double-edged sword that cuts both ways and if it is pushed beyond limit, it becomes dangerous not only to the women it is intended to subjugate and control but also to the men who wield it themselves. (36-37)

If this is the case, then Okonkwo’s tragedy is attributable to his “pushing patriarchy beyond the limit” in a bid to let patriarchy subjugate femininity, which he detests.

With regards to Okonkwo’s exaggerated macho, Eustace Palmer (1992) argues that:

Okonkwo is what his society has made him, for his most conspicuous qualities are a response to the demands of his society. If he is plagued by fear of failure, it is because his society puts premium on success; if he is obsessed with status, it is because his society is preoccupied with rank and prestige [...] (53)

While we do not differ with Palmer’s observation, we nonetheless take issue with Okonkwo for spilling over the fight against the weakness tag to women characters. He deals ruthlessly with women and any man who demonstrates effeminate tendency, thus predisposing himself to eminent danger. Okonkwo fails to create room for gender co-existence and complementation leading to his eventual downfall.

Okonkwo’s predicament begins during his childhood when he is enraged by the revelation made by a playmate that his father, Unoka, is an Agbala, a metaphorical reference to a man who had not taken any title. Driven by this anger, he subsequently dedicates all his energy in fighting the image of his womanish father which, essentially, is metaphorically, a fight against women. This fight results in the identification of another father figure in the name of
Nwakibie who meets the Igbo manly standards. His resolve to hate all what his father loved (13) is a decision to hate and thus push women at the back of his mind, an attempt that can be nothing more than a prelude to tragedy.

It is interesting how the image of Unoka keeps on nagging him throughout the novel, first through Unoka himself and later through his son, Nwoye, a replica of Unoka in terms of effeminacy as seen through Okonkwo’s eyes. The measures he employs to re-orient them to Igbo acceptable manly standards are however different, considering that his relationship with both is informed by different prevailing circumstances. For his father, the driving force is the fear of becoming a failure like him while for his son, it is the desire to ensure patriarchy which he embodies is advanced through his first born son. He deals with his womanish father through identifying and incorporating an alternative father figure in the name of Obierika, while for Nwoye, he resorts to constant threats and beatings.

Unfortunately for Okonkwo, the two effeminate images of failed patriarchs refuse to go away and keep on crawling back to him, to his chagrin. Unoka, up to the time he passes on is ever present, even attempting to offer him advice which he would rather not listen to owing to the resentment he exhibits towards him for his failure to meet manly standards. It again pricks his consciousness since he advices him about failure which, according to Okonkwo, he embodies (22). Worse still, he is under obligation to feed him as he feeds his mother and sisters despite his failure to provide him (Okonkwo) with the most vital inheritance of the time: a barn, a title and a young wife (17).

It is disastrous that, even in his father’s death, Okonkwo is not relieved. His son Nwoye, as far as he is concerned, fits perfectly into his (Okonkwo’s) father’s shoes prompting him to punish him constantly. He seems to be disgraced by his inability to sire a man, a patriarch
who fits into the Igbo manly standard despite himself being referred to as a “Roaring Flame” (139). Even his long time friend and ally, Obierika, observes quietly that Nwoye is actually a replica of his grandfather, an anomaly that Okonkwo is committed to correcting (60).

Tragically, while attempting to correct what he considers to be an anomaly in Nwoye’s effeminate behaviour, he – due to his intense reactions especially of hating to be thought weak and therefore womanish – ends up destroying what he has all along been trying to nurture. Nwoye is unable to relate with him in the way that a son ought to interact with his father. When he tries to expose him to stories of war and bloodshed, he does not learn the moral lesson enshrined in them rather, he prefers his mother’s stories of tortoise and his wily ways and those of eneke-nti-oba the bird who challenged the whole world to a wrestling match but was thrown by a cat (48). Achebe artistically foreshadows Okonkwo’s downfall using eneke-nti-oba whose challenge to the whole world is equitable to the challenge of nneka. In other words, Nwoye recognizes and upholds the nneka wisdom enshrined in his mother while his father, the presumed leader of the household, does his best to quash it. At the end, the son survives while the father perishes.

This exposure to violence and force reaches its climax when Nwoye finds refuge in the new religion of Christianity. Nwoye’s action is a disgrace to Okonkwo who has been striving all along to bring up an ideal patriarch to take over from him. So when he learns that Nwoye has been attending church meetings, he exposes him to the most violent beating whereupon he leaves never to come back (138). Worse still, Nwoye exposes his father to the biggest disgrace when he categorically denies him before his long time friend and ally, Obierika, when he unexpectedly sees him among the missionaries in Umuofia (131). This denial is significant because he is the firstborn son who is expected to be in the forefront in
propagating the patriarchal tendencies. He has, thus, in the eyes of the ancestral religion’s adherents led by Chika, become an *elfuelfu*, one among the worthless empty men or the excrement of the clan whom the mad dog (the new faith) has come to eat up (130). In the eyes of his father, he is no longer a man but a woman and thus a candidate for harsh treatment.

Okonkwo’s predicament brought about by Nwoye’s failure to propagate patriarchy is worsened by Ezinma’s unprecedented demonstration of what Okonkwo considers to be manly propensity, prompting him to wish on several occasions that she were a boy. Because the constructs of the Igbo community do not allow females’ elevation to share in patriarchs’ status, he can only wish instinctively. Ezinma’s attempt to reach the coveted patriarchs’ status climaxes when she offers to carry his father’s chair during the wrestling match which is symbolic of commencing the apprenticeship of inheriting Okonkwo’s patriarchal position. Okonkwo is at pains to explain to her that she is not fit to do so because “that is a boy’s job”.

Owing to Ezinma’s exceptional character which is atypical to what Okonkwo considers ideal for females, her father goes out of his way to display affectionate emotion towards her. This uniqueness earns her fondness from the otherwise stern father: “Okonkwo was specially fond of Ezinma. ... But his fondness only showed on very rare occasions” (41). While Ezinma’s father spares her his characteristic cruelty towards females, he directs the same to Nwoye with much intensity in a bid to rescue him from what he considers to be lack of efficacy. To Okonkwo, Ezinma is all that Nwoye should be and thus he must be attuned to his rightful character through correctional measures which includes violence and taunts.

The question that begs to be answered here is: why is Okonkwo so cruel to both his first born son and any other individual who exhibits womanish tendencies according to his judgment? The answer lies in what Walunywa terms as “the wrestling match between
Okonkwo and his father Unoka (39)”. All along, Unoka’s image, which exposed him to so much suffering during the painful revelation by a playmate that he was actually a son of an Agbala, repeatedly peeps its head to Okonkwo. His perceived mistreatment of men who lack manly standards is, thus, the tough wrestling match between himself and his father. When he exposes Nwoye to severe training in a bid to orient him into patriarchy, he is metaphorically trying to apply the wrestling tactics to his father with whom he is wrestling.

That he includes other men who try to contradict him in the wrestling match as is the case with the man whom he calls a woman through implication by stating that the meeting they are holding is exclusively for men (24) shows how serious he takes his wrestling match with the image of his father. This is so especially considering that what prompts him to make that remark has something to do with the man’s failure to have taken any of the possible four titles, just like his father around whom the battle revolves. Okonkwo thus treats men who lack patriarchal tendency collectively as he tries to win the wrestling match against his father.

Sadly for him, his father emerges the winner when Okonkwo – unable to accept the fact that a knife has been put between the fabric that previously held things together and that they have fallen apart, or in other words what he could refer to as “women kingdom” in reference to Christianity and the general installation of imperialism into the once close-knit traditional Umuofia society has taken over – commits suicide. The consequence of this abominable act is that he must be thrown away in the evil forest just like his father. Walunywa, whom we fully agree with in his argument, views this as a win for the ongoing wrestling match in favour of Unoka (59).

Okonkwo does not spare his mother in this relegation as he hardly remembers her existence. He only makes reference to her once, in a disapproving memory of an etiological
narrative she had once narrated to him explaining why the mosquito keeps on singing close to
the ear: “When he was a child, his mother had told him a story about it. But it was as silly as
all women stories (my emphasis, 72).” The overall moral lesson of the narrative can be
summarized as meant to inculcate the knowledge that one should not look down upon others
regardless of their perceived physical and psychological weakness as Ear does to Mosquito
thus earning herself a nag of her lifetime. It is what is embodied in his mother’s only narrative
that Okonkwo rejects – an equivalence of Nneka’s rejection that plunges him into his tragedy.
Presented with choices of according his mother her deserved respect by embracing the moral
in the only narrative she manages to narrate to him, he chooses to ignore it just like he ignores
anything that comes from women, with severe consequences.

When circumstances force him to seek refuge in his motherland, Okonkwo remains aloof,
unhappy and disenchanted. His maternal uncle, Ucheudu, from whose home he has been
accommodated is prompted to mollify his anger in the second day of his arrival. Ezeudu
exposes Okonkwo’s ignorance of such an important communal obligation of recognizing and
upholding the fact that “Mother is Supreme.” For lack of such vital knowledge Ezeudu refers
to his nephew as “a child, my child (121), and emphatically advises him against showing any
sorrow because of having been forced by the prevailing circumstances to live in his
motherland. He seems to be informing him that he is actually safer in his motherland since it
is where his mother is buried and is there to protect him “Your mother is there to protect you.
She is buried there” (122). Apparently, Okonkwo, driven by the peripheral place that he
relegates women to, ignores his Uncle’s counsel. Though he bends a bit to name his firstborn
Nneka “Mother is Supreme,” the narrator is quick to point out that he does this “... out of
politeness to his mother’s kinsmen (148).” This assertion is confirmed when he names his
son, born two years later, “Nwofia – Begotten in the Wilderness”, a demonstration that he
doesn’t recognize the role played by his mother as far as his safety is concerned. To him, his
motherland is a “wilderness” rather than a place from where he can derive protection from as
counseled by Ezeudu.

These disrespectful acts imply that, Okonkwo respects neither his mother nor his
“womanish” father. He seems to forget that his success is indirectly pegged on his father as it
is his (father’s) friend, Nwakibie, who offers him yam seeds on loan which forms the base for
his success. Again, it is only his maternal people who can provide him with refuge when he
commits an ochu – a female offence. This hospitality indirectly originates from his mother
whom he tries his best to push to the periphery. Failure to recognize this nneka principle is
thus a major contributor to his tragic end.

3.2.2 Okonkwo’s Excessive Machoism towards his Wives

Indeed Okonkwo’s intolerance to women is not restricted to his parents. All other women
with whom he interacts with are under constant fear of his highhandedness, more so his
wives. At least the three of them have been exposed to his wrath at one point or another.

Nwoye’s mother – despite the important position she holds in the household as the first
wife – does not enjoy respect befitting her status from her husband. For instance, when she
innocently enquires from him about the length of time Ikemefuna is bound to stay with them,
she receives an unnecessary loud roar from Okonkwo: “Do what you are told, woman,”
Okonkwo thundered, and stammered. “When did you become one of the ndichie of
Umuofia?” (14). She thus takes Ikemefuna in and asks no more questions. This expletive
response underscores the kind of relationship existing between Okonkwo and his first wife.
Although she is not exposed to battering like her colleagues, her husband does not share with
her the decisions and aspirations of the family and the community to which he is a revered individual.

The contrasting nature of the two is further exemplified by the kind of treatment Ikemefuna receives from the two surrogate parents especially in his formative days in Okonkwo's family. While Okonkwo is cruel to Ikemefuna and does not hesitate to come into the hut with a big stick to force him to eat whenever he shows signs of homesickness, Nwoye's mother is accommodative as the narrator remarks: "Nwoye's mother [is] very kind to him and treats him as one of her own children" (25). After eating yams under Okonkwo's stern threats, he vomits painfully upon which Nwoye's mother adoringly places her hands on his back and chest. The divergent treatment that the two individuals expose Ikemefuna to illuminates Okonkwo's failure to support his wife's cause, even her benevolent endeavours. Apparently, she is the one on the right path because Ikemefuna needs kindness at this stage as opposed to cruelty meted on him by Okonkwo.

When at last the Oracle of the Hills and Caves decrees that Ikemefuna should be sacrificed, the two individuals react differently to the news. Nwoye's mother - on learning about the decree from her son Nwoye - is so distraught that "She immediately drop[s] the pestle with which she [is] grinding pepper, fold[s] her arms across her hands and remark[s] "Poor child." (52). Although Okonkwo is also at loss as demonstrated by the way he sits still for a very long time supporting his chin with his palms, he does not abandon his cruelty. He beats Nwoye heavily for crying when he learns of Ikemefuna's planned departure home. Despite the warning by Ogbuefi Ezeudu, the oldest man in the village, against taking part in the actual execution, Okonkwo goes ahead to strike the blow that kills Ikemefuna.
Subsequently, he sinks to a low emotional level that makes him wonder whether he has “become a woman” (59).

Okonkwo’s actions demonstrate that although he does not expose Nwoye’s mother to physical violence like his other two wives, he still does not consider her ideals worthy supporting. He tries his level best to subjugate all the ideas she propagates thus accelerates his tragic end.

Ekwefi’s marriage to Okonkwo is informed by her true love as demonstrated by herself driven decision to abandon his first husband – Anene. Consequently, the natural expectation is that Okonkwo should reciprocate by avoiding physical assault on her. Although she retains her audacity, she is not spared the wife battering that is characteristic of Okonkwo. Worse still, she is exposed to a life threatening act when he attempts to shoot her.

The incident when Okonkwo exposes Ekwefi to brutal violence is notable because it happens on the eve of The New Yam Festival. Furthermore, it lacks justification because as the narrator informs us: “Okonkwo, who had been walking aimlessly in suppressed anger, suddenly found an outlet”. The outlet turns out to be giving her a thorough beating for allegedly killing the banana tree which “[a]s a matter of fact [is] very much alive” (35). Ekwefi’s explanation that she had only cut a few leaves off it to wrap food falls on deaf ears as Okonkwo beats her heavily. His anger satisfied, he sends Ikemefuna to fetch his gun upon which she mumbles something about guns that never shoot. What follows is more dramatic and more dangerous as Okonkwo rushes for the gun and attempts to shoot her unsuccessfully.

Walunywa views the reference to inability of the gun to shoot as having a symbolic meaning – that her saying that it never shot was tantamount to devaluing and belittling manhood – an action which pricks Okonkwo’s consciousness to the core, considering that he
is the custodian of patriarchy. Owing to his excessive macho, the apparent insult becomes insufferable. To him, perhaps, Ekwefi is trying to hide behind the festival to underestimate his manhood, an act he is never prepared to entertain. That his intolerance is only restricted to anyone who disrespects patriarchy is evident since he carries his duty indiscriminatively:

In spite of this incident the New Yam Festival was celebrated with great joy in Okonkwo’s household. Early that morning as he offered sacrifice of new yam and palm oil to his ancestors he asked them to protect him, his children and their mothers in the New Year (36). As illuminated therein, it is, therefore, clear that Okonkwo’s insurmountable death threat towards Ekwefi does not stem from hatred rather it is as a result of the feeling that patriarchy has been underestimated.

The third wife, Ojiugo, also gets her share of beating when she goes to pleat her hair, leaving Okonkwo and her children under starvation. When his anger is provoked, he does not care about the Igbo customs that demand that peace must prevail during the Week of Peace. Even his eldest wife’s attempt to mollify him by lying that Ojiugo had made prior arrangements to have her children fed in her absence fails to change his resolve to punish her.

According to Okonkwo’s point of view, when Ojiugo’s goes to plait her hair before providing him with his afternoon meal, she, symbolically attaches more importance to beauty, which is feminine, at the expense of the males. Consequently, in her action, she creates an avenue for women to gain more importance than men, something that is unacceptable to Okonkwo. With the patriarchal instinct pricked to the core by this act, he forgets that he is a stickler of the Igbo conventions.

Okonkwo’s cruelty is therefore not restricted to his parents rather it incorporates any female being whom he considers a symbol of weakness. His intolerance is thus spread across
any female being because to him, a female is synonymous with weakness, an attribute that he abhors.

3.2.3 Okonkwo’s Subjugation of the Earth Goddess

The zenith of Okonkwo’s disrespect for women, the cultivation of his imminent downfall, comes in when he crosses the mortal boarder into spiritual realm and offends the earth goddess on matters considered sacred in what seems to be an attempt to lump all women, both human and deity together. The place Ani the earth goddess occupies in the cosmos of the Igbo community is well captured by Killam (1982) that she is: “a powerful female principle that pervades the whole society of Umuofia and sits in judgment of events in the community” (19-20). With Ani holding such a vital position, it goes against everybody’s expectation that one should dare cross her path. On the contrary, Okonkwo offends the earth goddess a record three times as he attempts to bury the weakness tag. Though fully aware of the dire consequences of his actions, he considers it a safer bet as opposed to allowing the feminine weakness of his father to overtake him.

Okonkwo’s beating of one of his wives during the Week of Peace for her lateness in the preparation of his evening meal is a direct offence to women fraternity in general and Ani, the earth goddess and the representative of women at spiritual realm, in particular. This prompts the visitation of Ezeani, Ani’s priest, who reminds him of the consequences of such transgression. His (Okonkwo’s) attempt to offer him kola despite the offence is a pointer to the respect he accords his fellow patriarchs, which is juxtaposed against the contempt he demonstrates against women. To him, a woman is a woman whether a wife, a neighbour or a goddess. His insensitivity towards women is contrasted against that of Ezeani, a fellow man,
who does not succumb to his (Okonkwo’s) overtures but who rather opts to serve the goddess dedicatedly:

Take away your kola nut! I shall not eat in the house of a man who has no respect for our gods and ancestors... 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. (27-28)

Ezeani prescribes a number of items for sacrifice to atone for the offended goddess which Okonkwo avails without much ado. This action confirms that he is a stickler of the Igbo conventions but would rather break them and rectify later than allow a woman to challenge (or rather appear to challenge) his patriarchal authority.

The second time Okonkwo offends the earth goddess is when he participates in the ritual killing of Ikemefuna, the boy whom, together with a young virgin, has been given out by people of Mbaino to atone for the killing of Ogbuefi Udo’s wife. Two years before the incident, the boy had been entrusted to Okonkwo’s care as the clan waited for the Oracle to decide his fate. During that time, he had become like a brother to Nwoye and consequently enlivened the otherwise aloof boy. Their closeness was informed by his vast knowledge of nature:

He could fashion out flutes from bamboo stems and even from the elephant grass... he knew the names of all the birds and could fashion clever traps for the little bush rodents. And he knew which trees made the strongest bow. (26)

Ikemefuna had also become like a son to Okonkwo who, despite his extreme patriarchal orientation which did not allow him to show any other type of emotion apart from anger, had started admiring him secretly: “Even Okonkwo himself became fond of the boy – inwardly of course” (26). With Ikemefuna’s closeness to both Okonkwo who had become his father and his son Nwoye, to whom he had become a brother; it is natural that Okonkwo should not take part in his ritual execution when the Oracle finally decides it should be done. The elders
reasonably enough exclude him from participating in the execution. The eldest man in the village, Ucheudu, also counsels him against participating in the ritual:

That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death. Yes, Umuofia has decided to kill him... They will take him outside Umuofia as is the custom and kill him there. But I want you to have nothing to do with it. He calls you father.” (51)

Okonkwo, afraid of being thought weak and therefore feminine, does not heed his counsel. He not only accompanies the delegation going to execute Ikemefuna but also strikes the fatal blow: “Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down.” (55)

The consequence of Okonkwo’s action which is informed by his fear of being thought weak has far reaching effects: it threatens the whole society. This is revealed in the conversation between Okonkwo and Obiereka about his abominable action. Although he vehemently defends himself, it is clear that his action is informed by his fear to be thought weak, a trait which he associates with women. His friend does not hesitate to inform him of the impact that his action has on the society: “What you have done will not please the earth. It is the kind of action from which the earth goddess wipes out whole families (61).” Just like the first offence, Okonkwo is not remorseful for disrespecting the earth goddess. He would rather be on the offensive than expose himself to an action that may make him to be considered weak or “feminine.”

The third time that Okonkwo offends the earth goddess is when he kills Ucheudu’s son, albeit inadvertently and therefore it being categorized as a female offence, [an] ochu. Palmer refers to this third incidence as “the most serious of a number of acts motivated by his temperamental violence and restlessness which are themselves the consequences of failure” (55). The episode happens so quickly and so unexpectedly that one is unable to foresee its devastations:
It was as if a spell had been cast. All was silent. In the centre of a crowd, a boy lay in a pool of blood. It was the dead man’s sixteen-year-old... The only course open for Okonkwo was to flee the clan... It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman... the crimes were of two kinds: male and female. Okonkwo had committed the female, because it had been inadvertent (113).

This time, he has no escape route as the dictates of the clan are very clear. The earth goddess whom he has offended forces him to flee and the only destination open for him, incidentally, is his motherland. The irony here is that, Okonkwo has to content with the fact that, mother, or a woman in that matter, has the capability of rescuing a besieged patriarch. It is also interesting that, at his motherland, his maternal uncle attempts to inculcate knowledge into his nephew on mother’s supremacy but he (Okonkwo) once more opts to ignore it.

This relocation to Mbanta has a bearing in his eventual tragedy since his stay is characterized by discomfort of having to endure the “womanly” clan of his motherland which makes him believe that the same could not happen in his fatherland, Umuofia (145), an exposure that shapes his perceived overreaction towards the colonizers in general and the messenger – kotma – in particular when he goes back to Umuofia after seven years in exile. The view that his mother’s clan is womanly stems from his underestimation of anything associated with women. Ironically, once he relocates to Umuofia after seven years in exile, which he, by the virtue of being associated with patriarchy, elevates over and above his motherland, he learns, to his chagrin, that Umuofia has lost its valour. In the culmination of this realization, he laments that “worthy men are no more” as he decries the time when “men were men” (180). The single act of unreasonably decapitating the messenger has a psychological bearing of what he witnessed in his motherland: the deterioration of war-like clan into subverted beings who must now sway to the will and dictates of the Whiteman. He thus has to defend patriarchy at all cost lest it embraces the female gender’s weakness.
The earth goddess is seen to triumph over Okonkwo’s conceit towards her since she eventually subdues him into total submission – that of strangling himself. Furthermore, she also denies him a chance into her bowel, having died of an abominable act. It is ironical that the status he has been fighting so hard to attain has been lost, and he has to be thrown away like a reject. By extension, his disrespect for nneka by assuming that he could use his patriarchal tendencies to lord over female gender – the earth goddess included – with no consequences, results to his tragic end.

3.3 The Colonial Hero in No Longer at Ease

Obi Okonkwo, a grandson of Okonkwo, the protagonist of Things Fall Apart, whom Odokwu refers to as “… Ogbuefi Okonkwo come back… Okonkwo kpom-kwem, exact perfect (49)” takes after his grandfather in numerous aspects, especially the ones related to attempt to subvert women. Consequently, just like his grandfather, he ends up tragically. Augustine Okere (2004), in agreeing with this view, remarks that: “both Ogbuefi Okonkwo of Things Fall Apart and Obiajulu Okonkwo of No Longer at Ease find themselves in conflict [ing] situation that destroy them.” (156)

One of the distinct areas in which he demonstrates resemblance to his grandfather is disrespect for nneka principle. Obi lives at a time that may be termed as an epicenter of transition. Unlike his grandfather Okonkwo in Things fall Apart whose preoccupation is to resist change, his is an attempt to negotiate through it with an aim of emerging successful in the midst of a changing universe. This is a feat that requires total inclusion of female gender which, just like him – the representative of patriarch – has embraced change.
3.3.1 Obi Okonkwo's Underestimation of his Mother

As per the expectation, the two members of opposite gender who shape his life enigmatically are his mother Hannah Okonkwo, and his fiancée, Clara Okeke. Both have embraced change in their own right, with his mother having adopted Christianity which she is playing a pivotal role in spreading to the Igbo people, and Clara is a pioneer in women education: through getting a chance to study abroad, a feat that equals the patriarch’s embodied in Obi.

Naturally, these are the two women with whom Obi interacts closely and who have the bearing of either shaping or breaking his destiny. His tragic end in form of imprisonment is traceable to his attempt to rally his patriarchal influence against these feminine individuals whose importance can only be assumed to his own peril considering the position that they hold in his life. The way they resist his attempt to ensure the exclusion of their power is the underlying reason behind his psychological downfall which leads him to act contrary to his anti-corruption principles as revealed earlier in his stream of consciousness as he proceeded home aboard God's Judgment, No Appeal, triggered by the corruption he witnesses in the transport sector (40). Palmer presents an eye-catching description of the newly returned Obi:

(At first) Obi refuses to identify himself with the new Nigeria, behaving instead in genuine humility and sincerity. He is not a philanderer like Joseph and Christopher, nor is he as extravagant as the latter; he is not a parasite fattening himself on his country’s labour like the Honourable Sam Okoli. On the contrary, he has the highest principles and states these bluntly whenever the opportunity arises. He is genuinely against bribery, corruption, incompetence and nepotism [...]. (66)

This kind of description, which we are totally in agreement with, befits a fearless virtuous person who must be at peace with his undertakings. Considering that Achebe, through use of flashback, introduces us to the novel with an imminent tragedy where Obi is being tried in a court of law, we are forced to ask ourselves: what drives him into losing his virtues as
enumerated by Palmer herein? The answer lies in the way he relates with the already identified important female personalities in his life – his mother and his fiancée.

Obi survives under a lot of pressure originating from two avenues. He is, or rather he tries to become an agent of change of a lifelong tradition by attempting to contradict the belief that an osu is an outcast, together with his or her offspring forever. By so doing, he finds himself in conflict with both his parents and his osu fiancée: Clara Okeke. In the characteristic patriarchal tendency of his grandfather, Obi, faced with the challenge of convincing his parents to allow him to marry the love of his life, he underestimates his mother’s bearing in his life – choosing to tackle her after he is through with his father, the patriarch. In his heated conversation with Joseph pertaining to his impending marriage, Obi, perhaps accidentally – reveals his bias against his mother even as he wonders about the rationale behind the condemnation of the osu¹³ caste:

'It was scandalous that in the middle of twentieth century a man could be barred from marrying a girl simply because her great-great-great-great-grandfather had been dedicated to serve a god, thereby setting himself apart and turning his descendants into a forbidden caste to the end of Time. Quite unbelievable. And here was an educated man telling Obi he did not understand. 'Not even my mother can stop me' he said as he lay behind Joseph (my emphasis, 65). The inclusion of his mother in making the crucial decision of who to marry reveals the ambivalence that Obi has towards her. While he does recognize her influence in his life, he does not hesitate to dismiss (or assume) her authority over him. Achebe in his characteristic forthrightness of never attempting to romanticize Africa uses the narrator to castigate the tradition that, seemingly, is unfair to the osu caste. Achebe further pivots the castigation through Obi, whose stubbornness is only comparable to that of his grandfather. Faced with the enormous task of convincing the people who are opposed to his marrying an osu otherwise,
he, wrongly, identifies his mother as the weak avenue through which he can easily propagate his plans.

Additionally, in his conversation with his friend and host Joseph immediately after formally engaging Clara, Obi once more demonstrates his belief that his mother is weaker and therefore easy to convince to let her marry an osu. Their conversation goes like this:

"Are you going to marry the English way or are you going to ask your people to approach her people according to custom?"
"I don’t know yet. It depends on what my father says"
"Did you tell him about it during your visit?"
"No, because I hadn’t decided then."
"He will not agree to it,’ said Joseph. ‘Tell anyone that I said so."
"I can handle them,” said Obi, 'especially my mother. ” (my emphasis, 67).

These two instances clearly demonstrate Obi’s disrespect for nneka embodied in his mother with regards to parenthood. While his father is elevated in both conversations, there is an attempt to display the perception that his mother is the custodian of weakness.

Obi’s attempt to subvert nneka proves futile and becomes a major contributor to his tragic end. The verge of the ultimate tragedy is when he eventually meets his mother who is ailing and already has had an opportunity to catch wind about his intention to marry an osu. The engagement with his father about the intended marriage draws a lot of excitement, especially because for the first time he gets an opportunity to reason with his father whom he has always viewed as: “[a] patriarch, [a] giant hewn from granite (122).” Even when his father refuses to buy his idea drawn from the scripture that he professes: “[that the] Bible says in Christ there are no bond or free (120)”, after the conversation, while on his bed he feels that “though [his] father has not been won yet, [he] has clearly been weakened.” (121)

Armed with the excitement of having almost won the patriarch, he approaches his mother early the following morning, hoping to win her easily since he has always considered her to be weaker and even “[he] used to speaking to her like an equal, even from his childhood”
His is thus an assumption that he has started with the difficult task, and he is going to finish off with the easier one – the feminine. What he encounters from his mother however proves to be the contrary. She is patient enough and lends him her ears up to the end of his narration. Unlike his father whose reply gives out room for contest, she communicates her protest in form of a dream she had that had foreshadowed the abomination that her son was about to engage himself in even before she was formally informed by Obi’s father. The dream, pitting termites that eat up her bed, mat, and white cloth thus forms the basis of his mother’s vehemence with which he resists the idea that her son moots – that of marrying an osu.

By the time she concludes by telling Obi in a matter of fact that his marriage to Clara will prompt her to commit suicide, he is sure that he has lost the battle hands down. Unlike his father, the patriarch, whose reply about the same gives a window for appeal, hers is final and cannot be challenged. He realizes, too late though, that the patriarch embodied in his father is weaker than the feminine represented by his mother at least insofar as his marriage issue is concerned. As he lays down on his bed thinking about the turn of events, he wishes something could trigger another argument with his father that is more violent than the first. The narrator, apparently, invokes the Igbo proverb: “when a coward sees a man he can beat, he becomes angry for a fight. He had discovered he could beat his father” (124). That the reason behind shifting the focus on whom to convince from feminine to patriarch, albeit a little too late since it is triggered by the realization that his mother, hitherto assumed to be an easy target, won’t be moved a single inch on her firm decision, disorients Obi and lays the foundation for his tragic end is no doubt. So heavy is the blow that henceforth he starts behaving strangely.
Palmer, who is unable to comprehend Obi’s overall sudden erosion of ideals, queries the rationale behind it:

Is it possible that the idealistic Obi could have succumbed so easily to temptation? Although his financial position was desperate, and many a nobler man before him has been unable to resist temptation, one would expect, at least, an agonizing inner struggle. But there is no such inner torment. He merely sinks into corruption, and continues to take bribes even after his financial position has improved. (69)

What seems to escape Palmer’s scrutiny here is his inability to realize the weight and shock associated with sudden realization that the female gender embodied in his mother is not as easy to manipulate as he had hitherto assumed. This realization has the bearing that the game is over in favour of his opponent. He is however not ready to accept the results, that he, a patriarch, has been beaten hands down by a female.

The subsequent events that ensue prove the influence that the mother wields over the son. In fact he suffers from depression and self-denial that makes him behave strangely. He alienates himself from friends and acquaintances who visit him while at home, refuses to show up for evening prayer and even rebelliously sleeps while looking up, the way he had been warned against doing as a child (124). He also cancels his stay at home though he is on leave and leaves almost immediately, driving at supersonic speed from morning to evening thus plunging himself to a near fatal accident. Though he survives, it is an accident that leaves the eye witnesses perplexed at how he makes it (128). The accident serves as an awakening moment that sobers him up a bit, enabling him to drive the remaining miles to Lagos without another incidence. However, once in Lagos, he continues to behave strangely and his behaviour eventually culminates into an erosion of the principles he previously held which accelerates his imminent tragedy.

A summative interrogation of this abrupt change of behaviour by Obi leading to degradation of his sobriety attests to how mistaken he had been in expecting his mother’s
unsolicited support for his intended marriage to an osu. That the realization on the contrary exposes him to a state of stupor shows how important his mother is in his life. All the subsequent actions that Obi partakes on his way to his tragic end are borne out of realization that his mother, femininity notwithstanding, holds both the “knife and the yam” in as far as his plans, especially pertaining to marriage, are concerned. All the other engagements after this visit home are informed by the depression resulting from this disillusionment.

Observably, all the individuals to whom Obi tries to advance his idea of changing the osu custom through his intended marriage to Clara fault his rationale behind the idea. As Palmer comments, his close friends Joseph and Christopher and his parents voice their dissatisfaction with Obi’s proposition:

Christopher and Joseph are both modern young men, but they are horrified at the prospect of Obi’s marriage with an osu. The normally peace loving Mrs. Okonkwo threatens to commit suicide if Obi marries Clara during her lifetime, and Mr. Okonkwo, who in his day had rebelled against his own father and tradition, has now become a set in his ways that he fails to see that Christianity is opposed to all forms of discrimination. (67)

Notably, all the aforementioned individuals’ reactions are geared towards dissuading Obi from his planned abominable act. However, it is Mrs. Okonkwo’s suicide threat that melts the determination of Obi to indulge in the marriage with an osu, instead dealing him a blow from which he is unable to recover. By the time she dies, Obi has already been completely disoriented from his former life by his mother’s strong opposition to the proposed marriage. Killam (1969) luminously captures this scenario:

Obi’s moral resolution capable of resisting the pressures to which he is subjected in his professional life, cannot withstand more powerful conviction of his mother... shortly after this his mother dies and paradoxically his European morality (40). His mother’s importance in his life is vital as her absence from the scene results to a life without direction. We consider Arthur Gakwandi’s argument in reference to Obi’s sudden change of behaviour to be fallacious. Gakwandi (1977) argues: “(Obi) takes bribe merely to
keep up appearances as a member of the affluent elite who are busy maintaining their cars and paying back loans for their education” (28). By so arguing, Gakwandi seems not to have internalized the events leading to Obi’s erosion of the ideals he had previously fronted as an individual. The reason behind his abrupt abandonment of his principles has its basis in the frustrations resulting from the realization that his mother was more important and more influential than he had previously thought.

Conclusively, one of the major contributors to Obi’s downfall is orchestrated by his attempt to undermine the nneka encapsulated in his mother.

3.3.2 Obi Okonkwo’s Cavalier Attitude towards his Fiancée

As observed in the previous chapter, Obi, from the first encounter with Clara in a dance all the way to the last time she literally flees from him, seems to be playing second fiddle to her. His entire life, both financially and socially, is embedded on hers despite the fact that he is better educated with a superior honours degree to her nursing certificate.

In the characteristic patriarchal inclination, Obi is not ready to recognize Clara’s superiority or rather nneka’s elevation enshrined in her. Just like is the case with his mother, he tries as much as he can to subjugate Clara’s perceived superior tendencies. However, Obi’s subjugation of Clara, unlike that of his mother, is quite unconscious especially because it is only when he loses her that he seems to realize how important she had been in his life.

Indeed while Obi is still hopeful he will eventually marry Clara, he has the courage to stand up like a man and resist any kind of push for him to act contrary to his principles. He courageously dismisses Mark who has come to the office with an aim of offering him a bribe on behalf of his sister who is seeking a scholarship to study in England. The act of winning the battle hands down elates him so much, especially because he appears to have proved those
who had termed winning the war on corruption impossible. He actually feels strong, like a tiger. (80)

Later when Mark’s sister, Elsie Mark, visits Obi herself in his house and states categorically that he should help her since she is ready to do whatever he asks, her avoidance of his eyes giving a cue that she means to offer her body in exchange for scholarship, Obi once more emerges victorious. He states in a matter of fact that he cannot make any promises (84). Even though Clara interrupts them in the middle of their conversation, it is clear that Obi has set his eyes on coming out of the furnace: the exposure to the corruption steam, without a scald. He is forthright enough to narrate to Clara, the source of his motivation, both instances: his previous encounter with Mark in the office and his attempt to offer bribe in monetary form. Clara sarcastically comments that offering money is better than offering one’s body, a statement aimed at pricking Obi’s conscience (86).

These acts of courage derive their motivation from the psychological security that Obi enjoys, having Clara as her fiancée. He feels whole, stress free and indefatigable when it comes to propagating his principles. He is incorruptible, whatever devices the perpetuators of corruption try to apply. There appears to be a need to remain “clean” in the eyes of the community represented by Umofia Progressive Union (U.P.U) in order to soften the stance with regard to her osu status. This perhaps is what prompts Obi to refuse the four months grace period on offer before starting his loan payment.

Things start going against his expectations when he does not involve Clara in his overwhelming financial obligations which he finds himself in after returning from England. He has to pay his ailing mother’s hospital bill, pay school fees for his young brother John, repay the loan he had been lend by U.P.U and maintain the kind of life associated with an
individual in a “European post.” Instead of enlisting the help of Clara who has so far been the pillar of his life, he opts to seek help from the bank, securing an overdraft. This act in itself fronts patriarchal penchant that Obi possesses since he does not want to come out as having been helped out of his financial abyss by a woman. His attempt to underrate *nneka* in this act marks the beginning of his problems.

The fast paced events that ensue after this decision merge with those emerging from the realization derived from the encounter with his mother to plunge Obi to his destiny. Clara is so upset with Obi’s decision of securing an overdraft without informing her that she ends the visit abruptly, having invoked her “bad” upbringing to reveal the sensitivity of the matter at hand. Obi, perhaps in an attempt to cover up his grave mistake of attempting to decenter the *nneka* inherent in Clara seeks escapism in A. E. Houseman’s *Collected Poem* where he accidentally chances on a piece of paper on which he had composed a poem about Nigeria (93).

Interestingly, the poem, contrary to his actions, seems to be a patriotic call for both genders to work together in harmony with an aim of building a progressive nation. While stanza one is dedicated to men, stanza two includes women, therefore, striking the equilibrium for both genders:

```
God bless our fatherland
Great land of sunshine bright,
Where brave men chose the way of peace,
To win their freedom fight.
May we preserve our purity,
Our zest for life and jollity.

God bless our noble countrymen
And women everywhere.
Teach them to walk in unity
To built our nation dear;
Forgetting region, tribe or speech,
But caring always each for each (94).
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Obi’s escapism is therefore not sustained rather it is diluted as he finds himself face to face with a poem whose theme, that of gender inclusiveness, elicits a smile from him, although it does not seem to soften his stance. It is akin to the Biblical Jonah’s journey to Tarshish instead of Ninevah as instructed by Jehovah and the subsequent return to the place to which he was sent through the belly of a fish. Unlike Jonah, however, the theme embedded in the poem, unfortunately, does not translate to Obi’s change of his mannerism. It is not until Clara breaks the engagement and leaves Obi alone and lonely that he realizes how important she was as this, coupled with the death of his mother whom he had also attempted to devalue, makes him become a “beast of no nation” as a fellow countryman describes him in the hospital waiting room. Innes and Rooney (1997) agree that, this negative image cast on Obi is as a result of his determination to overshadow women with patriarchy:

Obi abandons women and the feminine principles they represent, leaving [him], “a beast of no nation,” as a fellow countryman describes him at the doctors waiting-room, when he and Clara are waiting to arrange the abortion of their child, an abortion that can be read symbolically as the premature killing of the embryonic nation. (198)

While we are in agreement with Innes and Rooney on the consequences of Obi’s abandonment or attempt to abandon women, we view the symbolism of abortion as Obi’s desire to shake off the *nneka* principle together with all that it stands for and embrace patriarchy wholesomely. Although the abortion succeeds, it has repercussions that have a lifelong impact on Obi – the individual who orchestrates it. The unprecedented total separation of Clara and Obi where she literally flees from him never to come back, to us, is symbolic of his failure to shake off the *nneka* principle as he would have wished to since doing the same is tantamount to breaking the gender equilibrium and, therefore, the balance that holds the society together.
It is thus understandable that, when the two important women in Obi's life are out of it: that is following the death of his mother and Clara walking out of his life, he stops caring about the world around him. The narrator posits:

Mercifully, he had recently lost his mother, and Clara had gone out of his life. The two events following closely on each other had dulled his sensibility and left him a different man, able to look words like "education" and "promise" squarely in the face (2).

Indeed the importance of the mneka principle and the consequences of ignoring it are encapsulated herein. Without the two women in his life, the fabric that held Obi together, that which directed him to observe ethics, that which made him sensible, is broken leaving him a shell of his former self – capable of doing anything under the world without caring about the perception people will have against him especially given that he is educated and therefore should act as a role model to others.

3.3.2 Obi Okonkwo's Rebellion against Christianity

Obi, by virtue of being born in a Christian family, is by default a devout Christian at least during the period he is being nurtured by his parents. He is not only a frequenter but also a participant in the church matters. This dedication suggests that his mother, who has the biggest bearing in his life, has been playing her role effectively.

Once he leaves for England for his studies, he gets brainwashed and plunges himself into the "sweetness of the flesh" against the warning he had been given earlier by Mr. Ikedi during the festival prior to his departure (9). He indulges himself into immorality – practicing sexual perversion without care because he is out of his mother's view and guidance. His peak of immorality actually leads him to sexual involvement with a white woman, an act that would leave the entire Umuofia village in disgust, especially since he had been warned against it.
Further to his crumbling of Christian ethics, he commences a relationship with Clara on his way back to Nigeria.

Things do not turn out any better when he returns to Nigeria after graduating with BA in English and securing a senior post in the public service. His engagement to Clara is not modeled on solid rock of Christianity which prohibits fornication and other related evils. He not only involves himself in pre-marital sex with his fiancée which culminates in an abortion and subsequent unprecedented break up (131) but also frequently attends secular dances considered to be an evil undertaking according to the dictates of the new religion. On his visit home, he consciously rebels against the Christianity when he is called upon to participate in the family daily portion where the family gathers every evening to read the bible. He wonders what could happen if he were to tell his father that he no longer believed in his God, which is actually the truth as demonstrated by ungodly activities in which he involves himself. He is unable to read the bible effectively. To reassure his inquisitive father, he lies to him that he has been reading the bible in English while in England (51). Effectively, we conclude that he neglects the acceptable morals of Christianity the moment he leaves home. Worse still, he succumbs by temptation of exploiting the innocence of potential girls seeking scholarship for overseas study. This in itself is a form of bribery as seen in the discussion between Christopher and himself (110). It marks the genesis of corruption per se as he receives money from different clients, an act, which eventually lands him into trouble when he receives marked money.

Considering the closeness that Obi enjoyed with his mother during his formative years, the ideals that she has all along been trying to inculcate in her son and the moral standing that she stands for, we can conclude that, the behavior that he exhibits while in England and
when he comes back is a total rebellion towards Christianity and, therefore, his mother. While she had done everything possible to ensure his son is nurtured into a morally upright individual, he veers off the path and rebels against her teaching.

Just like his grandfather in *Things Fall Apart* who shows no respect to the “God” of the time – the earth goddess – simply because he has no respect for *meka*, Obi’s disrespect revolves around the same: lack of respect for godly morals perpetuated by his mother.

### 3.4 The Postcolonial in *A Man of the People*

*A Man of the People* is Achebe’s fictional response to evils exhibited by the African post-independence leaders. To advance his thematic concerns effectively, he creates a hero – Chief Nanga, who is a subject for ridicule. Bernth Lindfors uses strong words to summarize his negative deeds:

Chinua Achebe’s Novel, *A Man of the People*, details the rise and the demise of Chief the Honourable Dr, M.A. Nanga, M.P., LLD, a corrupt, wheeling-dealing, opportunistic semi-literate who elbows his way to a lucrative ministerial post in the government of an unnamed independent African country, uses his power and newly acquired wealth to ensure his re-election, and is shaken from his lofty, befouled perch only when a group of idealistic young military officers topples the fat dripping gunny, “eat-and-let-eat regime” by launching a certain coup d’état (277).

As readers, our first encounter with Chief Nanga is when he is already a minister of culture. Through flashback, the narrator informs us of his humble beginning as an elementary school teacher where as the dictates of his low social echelon demands, humility is his guiding principle. More light is shed to us on how he becomes a minister: with change of government regime, he is elected an MP and through personal lobbying, he later manages to get a ministerial appointment. Though we don’t get an opportunity to know how he relates with his mother as the first woman to interact with like other Achebe’s heroes, we do have an opportunity to interrogate him vis-à-vis his wife and other women with whom he interacts. Again, he is not presented as a religious individual. By all means, wealth is his religion. Once
he is elevated to high social status, disrespect for *nneka* principle sets in, prompting his gradual downfall. The tragedy that befalls him towards the end of the novel is largely attributable to his disrespect for *nneka*.

### 3.4.1 Women as Seen from Chief Nanga’s Perspective

Chief Nanga is arguably the worst character whom Achebe has ever created with regard to women treatment. He is the custodian of corruption and immorality. The readers frown upon his insensitivity towards women especially because the novel is set in post-colonial time where we expect the progressive women empowerment already started by such female characters as Clara and Mrs. Okonkwo in colonial period to be evident. Indeed the fact that the novel itself is a severe sarcasm of the post – independence African leadership does not escape our notice. However, our interest in this study lies in the way Chief Nanga treats women as an entity and the way this treatment turn out to be his undoing.

This self – styled minister for culture treats all women he interacts with contemptuously, his wife who sacrificed her education to marry him included. He brings women home and proceeds to sleep with them in their matrimonial bed. A case in hand is Elsie, Odili Samalu’s girlfriend who supposedly visits Odili in the absence of his wife and Chief Nanga proceeds to keep her belongings in his matrimonial bedroom and later in the night goes ahead to sleep with her to Odili’s chagrin. Chief Nanga, in his conversation with Odili, had initially referred to her as a *Kabu-Kabu* woman (59), a derogatory term depicting her as a cheap woman to be used for nothing more than to provide sexual pleasure to men. Indeed, this derogative term dogs him throughout the novel, where it is not just said but acted out.

Interestingly, it is this single act that may simply be seen as an act of betrayal on Odili’s part but which in actual sense gestures towards disrespect for *nneka* principle which triggers
the bitter competition between Odili and his benefactor-turned-foe, Chief Nanga leading to his (Nanga’s) downfall. Having left the comfort of Chief Nanga’s bungalow in a huff, Odili opts to take up two actions aimed at revenging against him for his disrespect. The first action is to join his friend and college mate Max Kumalo who has just founded C.P.C party with an express aim of getting an opportunity to wrestle the parliamentary seat from Chief Nanga. Secondly, Odili decides to pursue Edda Odo – Chief Nanga’s parlour intended wife, with an aim of marrying her instead. While the former does not succeed directly as Chief Nanga recaptures his parliamentary seat albeit through use of unethical means, the latter undertaking thrives.

That notwithstanding, it is the tragedy that befalls Chief Nanga and its origin that needs scrutiny in order to establish the consequences of ignoring the nneka principle in his life. As pointed out earlier, Odili had no intention of vying for the parliamentary seat before Chief Nanga exposed him into ridicule by snatching his girlfriend when she visited him (Odili) in Chief Nanga’s home. While Chief Nanga had, at no time, thought he could face a challenge from Odili – his former pupil in the elementary school and whom he had literally picked from the village where he was teaching and brought him to the comfort of the town – Odili decides to give him a run for his money.

Analytically looked at, this anathema results, partially, from his constant sharing of stories with Odilli that are meant to demean women. In reference to this, Odili the Narrator asserts:

I suppose what happened was that Chief Nanga and I having already swopped many tales of conquest I felt somehow compelled to speak in derogatory terms about women in general. In fact I had already told the story of my first meeting with Elsie without however identifying her. Naturally Chief Nanga had five stories to every one of mine. (59)

This derogative reference is indicative of the fact that Chief Nanga lacked moral standing where women are concerned an implied pointer to disrespect of nneka principle. His
insensitivity of the generational gap existing between him and the young man, Odili, makes him vulnerable. Based on the numerous exposures pointing to Chief Nanga’s weakness, especially where women are concerned, Odili gets a loophole through which he strikes two successive blows: entering into politics to contest for the parliamentary seat in what has previously been perceived as Chief Nanga’s constituency and also formally starting to lay down strategies aimed at wrestling Edna Odo, chief Nanga’s betrothed “parlour” wife, from his formal engagement.

It is worth noting that, the competition originates from a woman, Elsie, whom Chief Nanga takes for granted by intending to use and dump her like he has always done with other women. Curiously, the competition revolves around another woman, Edna Odo, whom the two men are competing for – one driven by desire to revenge and the other driven by desire to acquire a learned woman with whom he can comfortably visit overseas. It is thus a true observation that, Chief Nanga’s predicament and eventual tragedy originates from his attempt to undermine and underestimate the *meaka* principle embodied in these women.

There cannot be traced affectionate feelings whatsoever in Chief Nanga’s intention to marry Edna rather it is the desire to have an educated woman that drives him into the engagement. That he sleeps with women indiscriminately, ranging from professionals like Mrs. Akilo to married women like the one he proudly narrates his exploits to Odili about, the one who could not remove her brassiere, is a testimony to that fact.

These acts of demeaning women perpetuated by Chief Nanga come to haunt him later when everything seem to turn against him, leading to his downfall.
3.4.2 Chief Nanga's Sinister Reward to his Wife

The relationship between Chief Nanga and his wife, strictly speaking, does not provide an ideal family under the vows of matrimony. His exaggerated preoccupation with government affairs deny him an opportunity to interact closely with his wife as he is always on the move. The marriage no longer has flavour like it used to have when they were a young couple in the village elementary school when he was a teacher. He instead involves himself with women outside matrimony, which, perhaps shows his wife no longer enjoys the benefits that come with marriage. His disrespect for their matrimonial bed is evidenced by his defiling it in his wife’s absence by keeping Elsie’s bag in their bedroom in her absence. The readers frown upon such behaviour as it goes against the dictates of matrimony. Additionally, the fact that Chief Nanga intends to marry a “palour” woman, Edna Odo, for the chief reason that he aims at having an educated woman with whom he can have company to overseas trips is ironical especially since he is the one responsible for his wife’s dropping out of school when he insisted on marriage against her wish.

Mrs. Nanga is literally the one who shoulders the burden of bringing up the children especially the nurturing responsibility. Chief Nanga is too busy pursuing material wealth and women out of wedlock that he does not care about offering parental care to his children. While he does recognize the importance of his children visiting the village once per year so that they are not totally alienated, the responsibility of taking them there rests squarely on the shoulders of his wife. Furthermore, given that he does not accompany them to the village, their absence acts as a stratagem because he seizes the opportunity to go against the dictates of matrimony. He turns her absentia in their matrimonial town house into an opportunity to perpetuate social decadence by bringing home other women for sexual pleasure.
Additionally, Mrs. Nanga is charged with the responsibility of entertaining his husband’s guests in his absence. He does not concern himself with them rather he bestows that responsibility to her as he busies himself with other issues that are not meant for the good of familial progress. Whether the visitors are genuine supporters or just drunkards in pursuit of more beer like the Poor Innocent Victim (P.I.V), it is her business to provide and entertain them.

With all these responsibilities heaped on his wife, Chief Nanga does not show any appreciation towards her as a life partner. He relegates her to domesticity as he propels himself into the limelight of politics in which he endeavours to exclude her. Even when it becomes necessary for him to have a woman close to him because he has succeeded politically and is thus in need of a lady to accompany him to overseas trips, he opts for a naïve young girl, Edna, who looks as if she is from the convent, at the expense of his supportive wife.

On the other hand, Mrs. Nanga, from whom Odili, her husband’s rival constantly seeks support to enable him accomplish his two key missions: wrestling the parliamentary seat from his husband and snatching his fiancée, Edna, remains steadfast. She continues to be firmly loyal to her husband and the traditional values of the day. It is upon this bedrock, the *nmeka* encapsulated in Mrs. Nanga that Chief Nanga manages to survive for that long despite his escapades which point towards unethical conduct.

Odili’s recognition of the important role that Mrs. Nanga is capable of playing and his subsequent attempt to enlist her support in dismantling Chief Nanga’s territory attests to the importance of the *nmeka* principle that she encapsulates. That she is the only one with the capability of helping him in defeating her husband attests to the import attached to her
position. Chief Nanga – the third in the series of Achebe’s heroes under study – just like other heroes engineers his own failure by failing to recognize the *nneka* principle.

### 3.4.3 Misconceived Underestimation of Women in Politics

At the time that Achebe writes *A Man of the People*, his major concern is no longer how the Nigerians negotiate through the burden of myriad of changes chief among them Christianity, formal education, and the new system of government brought about by the imperialists. The dust has already settled and these changes have already been incorporated into the native’s system during the period of colonization. By the time the colonizers leave, there are citizens who are educated enough to run their own government. The major concern in the novel, as mentioned earlier, is the kind of government system that the African leaders to whom independence was bequeathed after the imperialists left Africa have adopted. *A Man of the People* is thus a scathing sarcastic attack on the leadership of the day in a fictional country presumably an African state which represents Africa in general. The major players of the government Achebe puts through a microscopic eye include Chief Nanga and his fellow ministers. Our chief interest is to establish how the National leaders uphold or undermine the *nneka* principle embodied in women who have entered into politics.

There is minimal positive women involvement in the beginning of the novel up to the time the mismanagement of resources reach its peak, prompting a group of young university graduates to engage in politics in a bid to arrest the problem. Principal among them is lawyer Max Kumalo with his colleague and fiancée Eunice, a graduate from the prestigious London school of economics, who form a party: Common People’s Convention party (CPC) to counter that of the government stalwarts – Chief Nanga and his ilk. Odili joins them later with a different mission – to revenge the alleged injustice meted against him by Chief Nanga, his
benefactor. Eunice emerges as a pillar in the party owing to her confidence and intelligence which the narrator describes as “a little intimidating” (78). As has become the norm with Achebe’s heroes in the previous novels, Chief Nanga, who collaborates with state minister Chief S.I. Koko, seems to ignore the power of nneka encapsulated in Eunice whom, owing to her immense intelligence, contributes to the strategic planning of the party that is aimed at dethroning him and other ministers.

Firstly, Chief Nanga underrates the ability of his rival in the parliamentary seat, Odili, and treats his entry into politics with contempt. Odili, who has benefitted from Eunice’s brains since she is an insider in the party, has an elaborate strategy that is capable of defeating the hitherto indomitable politician. It is true that Chief Nanga attempts to apply subterfuge on his competitor directly, offering both money and scholarship which are at his disposal to lure him into stepping down. He claims that, the main reason behind this is to enhance the government acceptance to the populace that can be demonstrated by being elected unopposed while in actual sense he is afraid of the imminent defeat.

Secondly, Chief Nanga, in cahoots with other incumbent state ministers, collaborates to steal votes from the voters. As an entity, the incumbent are determined to use all possible unorthodox means to retain their parliamentary seats. In their endeavour to ensure they emerge victorious, they ignore the potential capability of the nneka in quashing their plans. It is no wonder Chief Koko the parliamentary aspirant competing against Maxwell Kumalo does not see any threat in Eunice, Kumalo’s fiancée and co-founder of the C.P.C party. Thus he traps himself unknowingly when he uses his jeep to run over Kumalo, who has come out to investigate the alleged discrepancies in voting. Since the males underestimate feminine, Chief Koko considers the threat taken care of in the absence of Kumalo, the man.
Major among the reasons why the incumbent politicians do fail to succeed in their manipulation of elections that they are involved in is their attempt to ignore the *nneka* principle in the personage of Eunice. Once Kumalo is no more, the assumption is, the game is over in favour of patriarchy. Nevertheless, the revenge emanates from the unexpected quarters where the feminine, Eunice, shoots Chief Koko thereby setting the stage for lawlessness which culminates into an overthrow of the government and subsequent dismantling of the patriarch’s grip on leadership. Juxtaposed against the patriarch, Eunice comes out as a more aggressive, more forceful and more concerned with the elimination of the misrule of the current leadership which has been a thorn in the flesh of its citizens. She emerges, singlehandedly, to set the precedence for the achievement of the C.P.C. party aspirations even in the absence of her key supporter in the spheres of life: Maxwell Kumalo.

The elimination of Chief Koko, a patriarch by Eunice, a female which again sets the stage for subsequent elimination of all other unethical leaders, including Chief Nanga himself can be read symbolically as an elimination of the subversive powers that the patriarchs have been using against the feminine in a bid to subjugate them. Men have to content with the fact that Eunice is crowned the major player in bringing sanity or rather attempting to bring sanity to a rather chaotic African leadership. The reason she attains such coveted glory is because the hitherto uncontestable leadership spearheaded by patriarchs has blundered in underestimating the power of *nneka* which she encapsulates.

### 3.5 Conclusion

The heroes in Achebe’s three novels under study: *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People* whose temporal setting transcends the three distinct periods in African cosmos: pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial are indeed tragic. The major reason
behind their tragic end is their attempt to attain the impossible: having the notion that women are synonymous with weakness and using all the structures available to them to advance that notion.

Okonkwo, the pre-colonial patriarch views any kind of weakness from either gender as presence of “womanish” behaviour. Subsequently, his father who possesses womanish penchant, his oldest son Nwoye who takes after his grandfather and his three wives live under threat. When missionaries and later western brand of government come to Umuofia, Okonkwo associates their religion with effeminate weakness and vows to resist them using all the available means. On realizing that his clan is not in league with him in eliminating the discretion of having to live with individuals who exhibit feminine propensity, he opts to take his own life rather than tolerate the humiliation.

Obi Okonkwo, the patriarch during the colonial period in *No Longer at Ease* is under siege because of his determination to change the *osu* caste tradition which is as old as the clan itself. In his desire to marry his fiancée, Clara, an act that is bound to attract resistance from all quarters, he underestimates the bearing that his mother has in his life, considering her weak in decision making and therefore easy to convince to back his bid. When things turn otherwise as she threatens suicide, he suffers from a lifelong depression which pushes him to adopt a nonchalant attitude which in turn exposes him into corruption leading to his arrest and prosecution.

Chief the Honourable Nanga, the postcolonial period patriarch does not demonstrate any feeling that in the strict sense can be considered to be love for women. He delights in using them as sex vessels from where he amuses himself at will. It is out of this inhumane act of snatching Odili’s girlfriend that triggers Odili to give a run for his money. Odili teams up with
another woman, Eunice, whose ability Chief Nanga underestimates to deny him and his ilk the helms of government they had fought so hard to continue controlling.

Indeed the tragic end of the three heroes result from their tendency to expose the *mneka* principle enshrined in the female characters to ridicule. When the *mneka* principle forcefully emerges from the periphery where the patriarch has attempted to force it to, the patriarch is unable to withstand its force.
CHAPTER FOUR
Achebe’s Gender Vision

4.1 Introduction
A close analysis of Achebe’s fiction, essays, and interviews all point to a visionary writer and essayist pertaining to both genders. His vision revolves around the duties which need to be taken up by both genders because the bulk of his characters are drawn from both.

This chapter makes a recap of the already identified mother archetype’s exploits in a bid to divulge Achebe’s vision for peaceful co-existence and inclusion of both genders in socio-political activities.

The Chapter identifies Ezinma in Things Fall Apart as the first of the Achebe’s women characters who sets the precedence for other women by showing signs of independent thinking. It further explores Clara in No Longer at Ease and interrogates the marked increase in her autonomy. It then focuses on Eunice in A Man of the People and qualifies her as a woman who dares to tread where men fear. The chapter posits that, the climax of women total inclusion in socio-political arena is reached when Beatrice, in Anthills of the Savannah, is created. Through these and other exceptional women in the four fictional works, the study crafts Achebe’s gender vision in his works through what it fronts as a kind of a relay where each mother archetype hands the baton to the other in the next novel after gaining some progress in terms of independence. It builds from the premise that gender complementation rather than exclusion is the leading principle behind Achebe’s fiction.

4.2 An Overview of Transitional Proceedings
Chinua Achebe’s fictional works as analyzed in the previous chapters reveal a predictable pattern in terms of progressive increase in women participation in the social institutions under scrutiny namely: education, justice, and religion. This shapes Achebe’s vision for women in
Nigeria, Africa, and beyond: that their roles ought to be in tandem with the prevalent culture in a given period.

Achebe’s vision is accommodative of the dynamic nature of human existence which results from interactions with exotic cultures that transform African traditional, and to a greater extent, informal sectors through adoption of technology. For instance, in *Things Fall Apart*, set in Umuofia village, the Igbo people, due to their ignorance pertaining to technology, consider a bicycle to be “an iron horse,” but in *No longer at Ease* Obi Okonkwo and Honourable Sam Okoli afford an opportunity to own and drive their own cars though it is during colonial times. Likewise, women participation in mainstay roles in the community increase progressively in tandem with the changing structures of governance and technology.

It is noteworthy that the three periods, which this thesis focuses on namely: pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial which are characterized by transition in all spheres of life have female characters’ roles gaining in importance in order to align themselves with both the challenges and demands of a given period. In each novel, there is a character whose burden is to shoulder the vision and successively relay it to another bearer in the next novel. While still examining other characters in these works, the study puts more emphasis on Ezinma in *Things Fall Apart*, Clara in *No Longer at Ease*, and Eunice in *A Man of the People* as the progressive female characters who act as pillars in shaping Achebe’s gender vision. The creation of Beatrice Nwanyibuife Okoh in *Anthills of the Savannah* achieves the culmination of the vision that Achebe has been building chronologically in his other novels.

In the first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, whose setting depicts life as it was in Umuofia village and its environs before the advent of colonization and partially during colonization itself, women characters’ participation is restricted to the spheres of life which are specific to
that period, a period that may be said to be “landlocked” characterized by inter-village interactions both during times of peace and war. Such villages as Umuofia, Mbanta and Abame are always interacting for different reasons. Worth noting is that, the community so represented is closely knit together and, therefore, lays its emphasis on communalism. During this time, the traditions and customs of the Igbo community from where Achebe draws his material is intact. Consequently, the roles of each individual as a component of the community are meant to better the community. Individualism comes second in order of importance. This inclusivity provides a good platform for both genders to participate in the important communal activities.

Thus Achebe’s vision for gender co-existence in *Things Fall Apart* is fronted through the assignment of various roles to be executed on the basis of gender. As Rose Ure Mezu argues: “the treatment of women is often the gauge of the development of any society” (33). Mezu’s statement seems to imply that, women occupy a pivotal position in community’s cultural identity, and any analysis of the culture, whether such analysis focuses on cultural preservation or erosion, cannot ignore the status of women. The culture that Achebe fronts is that of total inclusion where each gender has a clear obligation to fully participate in the communal cosmos.

As previously observed, patriarchs are concerned with growing of “male crops” like yams, protecting the society through fighting in tribal wars, building of houses and barns and getting involved in competitions such as wrestling matches. Success in these activities, coupled with taking titles catapults an individual to the limelight as an icon in the society as is the case with Okonkwo. Perhaps the culmination of the patriarch’s success is demonstrated in being entrusted with such delicate duties as acting as an emissary for the clan when it is threatened
with war (12) and acting as an egwugwu in the council of jurisdiction (81). While the aforementioned can be summarized as Achebe’s vision for male gender, he has as well built a clear path for the female gender by creating mother archetypes across all his novels whose tasks are paramount in the perpetuation of communalism before western civilization sets in and destabilizes village life.

Achebe’s two out of the four identified mother archetypes in the novel: Chika and Chielo, the prophetesses of the earth goddess, who are revered for their roles as representatives of one of the most powerful deities in the Igbo universe, mark the beginning of successive creation of mother archetypes. Chielo’s unassailable dominance seals the position of religion as women domain by going beyond her assumed duty of acting as only a prophetess of Agbala without having personal initiative. She is the initiator of the life-saving meeting between Ezinma the ogbanje and Agabla in her (Agbala’s) abode in what we have previously qualified as an effort to seek her intervention to ensure the child lives to maturity. This act in itself is incomparable to that of the patriarch as the only effort by Okonkwo is an attempt to boil herbs and call a witch doctor, acts which have not been known to tame the ogbanje menace. By analyzing Chielo from a different dimension, Francis Ngaboh-Smart (2004) comes close to recognizing this vision that Achebe is fronting but veers off the path when he fails to see it as it is: a vision for gender co-existence that Achebe has crafted for his fiction. He instead qualifies it as “a micro-social world, the repressed conscience of the dominant epistemology... constituted by the feminine principle in Achebean criticism” (19). Ngaboh-Smart who identifies, among other areas of women strength, Chielo as the controller of “one of the hermeneutic forces in the clan, the Oracle of Hills and Caves” erra when he qualifies this important underpinning of Achebe’s vision for female gender as a metaphor for “women
that are always hovering at the margins of some of the momentous gatherings...” instead of what it really is: A vision for strong female gender that has been started in pre-colonial period and that is continued in other novels.

Through Chielo, Achebe’s vision for women is built on the premise of selflessness as women are presented as individuals whose action is geared towards promoting societal continuation and sustenance. This vision is demonstrated further by Chika when she instructs Unoka on how to clear and plant yam on his farm, a feat meant to ensure there is plenty of subsistence food for family propagation. There is thus an interface between religion and communal continuity and sustenance propagated by women characters in Achebe’s first novel.

That women will, in future once the emancipation is fully achieved, be partakers in religion for the benefit and welfare of the community as a whole and safety for their children is demonstrated by Nneka who joins Christianity in its early introduction in order to save twins in the second part of the novel where colonialism has started making inroads. The ancestral and Christian religions are therefore bridged, with both converging at the importance of ensuring children’s safety. Her husband Amadi, though successful in farming has not been able to act in order to safeguard the endangered twins rather he indirectly participates in their execution by failing to raise a finger to this brutal practice.

With regards to security, it’s noteworthy that, the “physical” patriarchs’ security detail does not, strictly speaking, encompass the female characters. The patriarchs are charged with the duty of protecting the communities, fighting in the wars that arise and solving disputes both from within and without the community. Putting into consideration that the pre-colonial period is characterized by traditions where traditional doctors and the Oracle of the Hills and
the Caves demonstrate influence in the people’s lives, it is clear that women are also participants in communal security albeit indirectly. It is as a result of the presence of the active war-medicine principle, *agadi-nwayi*\(^{14}\) for instance, that all the other villages are afraid of engaging in war with Umuofia (11). This has an implication that, though women don’t get an opportunity to take part in the literal battlefields, they are party in determining its outcome. Thus Achebe is foreshadowing that in future – when institutions are formalized – women will partner with men in the security docket. It is thus true that the vision that Achebe crafts includes both genders in all spheres of life.

As for the personal initiative that will make the male gender to re-think and revise the marginalization of female gender which is informed by baseless gender bias, the vision is encapsulated in Ezinma, the icon of female characters whose exploits are incomparable to any other female character before the introduction of colonial structure, the only one to melt Okonkwo’s heart and make him keep on wishing constantly that she were a boy. Achebe yet again foreshadows powerful women who will change the misconception of the patriarchs that female gender deserves exclusion from community’s major activities based on the mere belief that their work is confined to domestic and household chores. She emerges as an individual capable of adopting the lifelong skills which her mother inculcates into her as she grows up and as such a complete opposite of Nwoye who exposes his father as handicapped when it comes to the capacity to indoctrinate good morals to his children. By being so understanding, exhibiting exceptional beauty, and showing independent reasoning when she attempts to seek solution to the family crisis after his father and the elders of Umuofia are arrested, she foretells a state of affairs where future women will be able to stand on their own rather than as subordinates to their husbands or boyfriends.
4.3 The Vision in Colonial Time

The second novel under study: *No longer at Ease*, has its temporal setting in colonial Nigeria which coincides with colonization of African states in general and ends in the eve of independence. It features the hero – or anti-hero\(^\text{15}\) – the patriarch Obi and his father Isaac Okonkwo against mother archetypes Hannah (Obi’s mother) and Clara, his long time fiancée whom he never gets to marry. There is a marked increase in women participation particularly in playing the pivotal role of perpetuating and enhancing the embrace of the new cultures – Christianity and formal education. Achebe’s representation of the two genders – which is dictated by the temporal setting of his novel – is thus both objective and accommodative to dynamism in the society brought about by the exotic forces.

In order to review this vision, the study has identified two generations in which both genders are represented. The first one pits Hannah against her husband catechist Isaac Okonkwo while the second pits Obi, the England educated Bachelor of Arts in English graduate against Clara Okeke, an England trained nurse.

4.3.1 The First Generation

The first generation, comprising of Isaac Okonkwo and his wife Hannah, is village-based in that, it does not get an opportunity to travel to the urban centers. It is however exposed to alien forces within the village in form of Christianity, formal education, and structured government as missionaries penetrate into the interior of their villages. Both genders acquire education up to a level of functional literacy which affords the respective representatives ability to read the bible independently. The head of the family, Isaac Okonkwo, is converted into the new religion and he holds a key position in it – a catechist – thus the family matters must be run in conformity with the dictates of the new religion.
Formal education has also been introduced, thus in this transitional period, it is in the process of hedging out traditional informal education. The upbringing of children, at this heightened transition, where both the children and their parents must content with both traditional (informal) and formal education proves to be a very delicate affair that must be approached with great caution. This delicate duty rests squarely on the shoulders of Hannah and she emerges to be one of the strongest mother archetypes owing to her exceptional accomplishments in relation to the way she approaches transition in religious and educational sectors. She carries on Achebe’s vision on gender-based roles already identified in other mother archetypes who align themselves with the period before colonization by shouldering the burden of steering the children through transition. The knowledge and ability to foresee upcoming tragedies that Achebe bestows on her, arguably, transcends the threshold of a misrepresented individual, as critics have wanted us to believe – that women are misrepresented by Achebe. However, like the puff adder that Achebe describes in *Arrow of God*, that exercises patience until its last fang is unleashed, she treads carefully in all her actions.

Firstly, the mother – daughter educational concern which idealizes Achebe’s vision already identified between Nneka and Ekwefi in pre-colonial period is enhanced even more in colonial period. Hannah Okonkwo, one of the undisputed mother archetypes in this period dedicates herself to educating her children especially girls with the kind of education prevalent in the time. However, given that there is a lot of dynamism in the community which, through mimetic aspect of literature, informs Achebe’s fiction, education is no longer restricted to mother - daughter only but it adopts gender inclusivity. For instance Esther, under the tutelage of her mother becomes a teacher and therefore professionally emancipated
She also educates other girls brought to her for the purpose of benefiting from her expertise in family management.

Obi benefits even more as a student since his mother does his laundry for him and prepares him for school, constantly, reminding him about his possible lateness and subsequent punishment. But most importantly, she nurtures Obi’s academic brilliance by helping him negotiate through the curriculum a demand which requires one to combine both literacy and oral skills. It is out of her expertise, narrating to him a folklore that is needed to break the stalemate, that Obi negotiates out of the siege and soldiers on to become a pioneer scholar in Umuofia village. This is a noble undertaking that saves a desperate situation enabling Obi to emerge successful.

Secondly, the female gender through Hannah emerges as a focused entity ready to make and implement its decisions, a virtue that propels it to the fore. Incidentally, Hannah is her husband’s irrefutable pillar in his two core endeavours: evangelizing and upbringing of their children. Although she does not physically stand on the pulpit to preach, she remains the key figure behind the scene. Cleverly, she remains the bridge for the new culture which encompasses the new religion and education without blindly embracing either rather she plays the watchman of both, retaining the radiance of the African traditions and fitting in as a wife of a catechist. She can thus be described as an ambivalent individual insofar as approach to the new ways of life is concerned which is the best option at this formative stage of internalization of the new culture. Achebe asserts:

Isaac Okonkwo was not only a Christian; he was also a catechist. In the first year of married life he made Hannah see the grave responsibility she carried as a catechist’s wife. And as soon as she knew what was expected of her, she did it, sometimes showing more zeal than even her husband. (my emphasis, 53)
This assertion confirms our earlier observation that though as a catechist’s wife she shows more zeal in Christianity than the catechist himself is enough proof that she is a dedicated individual in all what she does, she still retains the ambience of African rich heritage as demonstrated by the way she carries on with the tradition of telling folktales that inculcate moral lessons to her children, thus retaining her obligation of nurturing them through the transition. Obi, out of ignorance of the importance of his mother’s perceived duality in religious orientation wonders whether left alone she would continue to be a devout Christian and again in her deathbed when she tells him, perhaps to his amazement, that she has lost confidence in western medicine and that she is ready to try a Native doctor (122).

It emerges, therefore, that Hannah does not immerse herself into the foreign culture thoughtlessly like the proverbial empty headed people who lose their head into a new saying (44) as opined by one of the men who had attended the celebration of Obi’s return from England in reference to Isaac Okonkwo’s perceived total alienation in Achebe’s No Longer at Ease. She is wise enough to approach the imminent transition gradually, cautiously, so that she does not lose her head into a culture that she does not fully comprehend and therefore must tread on carefully.

Arguably, Hannah is way above the two patriarchs she interacts with: her son Obi and her husband Isaac Okonkwo, in terms of ability to discern issues. The two unlike her, immerse themselves into their endeavours blindly – Isaac Okonkwo embracing the new religion holistically even to a point of denouncing his father and the traditions. His blindness also makes him forbid folk stories in the family; a move that if not checked is bound to hurt a smooth transition.
Obi on the other hand persists on his decision to marry Clara, an *osu*, even when he is sure of opposition from all quarters, ending up in depression on failing to succeed. He also comes out as lacking in terms of practicality: while he vehemently criticizes the rot in form of corruption that is prevalent in Nigeria, he succumbs to the same after a few instances of enticement.

### 4.3.2 The Second Generation

The second generation is represented by been-tos: individuals whose indulgence in formal education has paved way for them to travel far and wide. Unlike in the pre-colonial period where women are confined at home as well as the first generation where people had an opportunity to learn only functional literacy, the second generation, whose actions are intertwined with the gains of Western civilization affords its members an opportunity to move out of the village to urban areas within Nigeria and even abroad for further studies. Agbasiere makes a brilliant observation in regard to this situation when he notes that:

> As the characters move from rural to urban setting, they tend to become bolder and more assertive. Ironically, traditional society contains germs of feminism which mature and blossom in an urban environment (359).

Subsequently, the exposure they get begets sophistication and liberation from the shackles of village life which is characterized by confinement and total adherence to traditions. The colonial government has also opened up the hitherto “landlocked” village to outside world through offering relevant infrastructure to facilitate transport for individuals thus enabling them to interact with outside world and therefore learn from without the village. Both genders are afforded an opportunity to travel not only to Lagos – the capital city of Nigeria – but also abroad in pursuit of further studies.

In the second generation, Achebe’s vision for gender comes out more clearly through an England educated pioneer woman in the name of Clara Okeke. She perpetuates the nurturing
duty to Obi commenced by his mother during the time he was growing up in the village. She nurtures him health wise, thus upholding her professionalism to the letter through discerning Obi’s perceived infection and nursing him in the ship on their journey back to Nigeria. She also takes up the financial nurturing obligation when Obi finds himself in financial quagmire which forces him to secure an overdraft from the bank. Despite the fact that Obi is better educated with a “European post” while Clara is just a mere nurse, she emerges as financially stable with enough for herself and more to share. Obi, in his characteristic fault-finding tries to justify his financial deprivation by consoling himself that Clara does not have a loan to pay.

Further through Clara, female characters have stamped themselves in the new status that absolves them from the previous bondage insofar as maternal obligation is concerned rather they demonstrate a considerable amount of freedom to decide when to procreate. On the same, Nwagbara remarks that: “[Clara] proves her good nature and consideration of others when she decidedly refuses to blackmail Obi into marrying her, even as she is carrying her baby” (345). With acquisition of education, they are no longer at the mercies of their husbands (or boyfriends) when it comes to issues of procreation. Clara does not enlist Obi’s opinion in making decision to abort their child, having decisively broken their engagement. Obi is just thrown into confusion when he is forced to meet the cost of an abortion he did not order in the first place. The prize he pays out for this act is: being denied audience by Clara after she breaks the engagement. She also flees away to Lagos and by so doing exposes him to loneliness.

Arguably, Clara, the representative of female gender demonstrates unequivocal dedication to the professionalism they indulge in compared to the man whom she interacts with. She immerses herself into her profession with a lot of zeal in response to the call in her training
unlike his male counterpart, Obi, whom once given a chance to facilitate the scholarship of young countrymen, takes advantage to sleep around with young desperate girls in need of scholarship and worse still destroys his career through involving himself in corruption. It is even more ironical to considering it was through scholarship that he on had been able to study and secure such high profile job.

Clara’s emancipation is enabled by education hence it, more than any other undertaking, serves to project Achebe’s vision for gender. The second generation as pointed out above has women represented by Clara gaining even more freedom facilitated by education. Notably, the two genders are almost at neck-to-neck in terms of educational achievement because their progressive female representative, Clara and Obi have been to England for their further studies. Perhaps the female gender is just one rung behind the male owing to the fact that, while Obi has attained a degree in England, Clara obtains a certificate in Nursing from the same country. That notwithstanding, Obi’s life remains embedded to that of Clara throughout their interaction. This is in line with Chinyere Nwagbára’s assertion that:

Obi’s mother is another female whom Achebe depicts with a mind of her own in the story. As for Clara, she is not placed peripherally as her story is delicately interwoven with Obi Okonkwo’s and some strength of character is revealed in her. (345) Nwagbára thus supports the view that we have been advancing: that rather than depict women like Clara negatively, Achebe intertwines their lives with that of their male counterparts putting into consideration that outside the fictional world, women have not yet gained independence in totality.

The relay, started primarily by Ezinma and buttressed by others like Chielo and Ekwefi, therefore, continues with Clara taking the frontline. The receipt of the baton from Ezinma by Clara acts as a continuation for the gender vision initiated in Achebe’s first novel: *Things Fall
Apart. In a nutshell, Achebe’s vision for gender during the colonial period can be summarized as progressing towards gender inclusiveness and equity.

4.4 Achebe’s Gender Vision for Post Independence Period

There is a marked continuation of the vision already initiated by the aforementioned mother archetypes as it continues to manifest itself in his post independence fiction represented by his fourth Novel: *A Man of the People*. It is indeed true that the novel mostly illuminates the failure of African leaders just a few years after gaining independence. In the manifestation of the evils that the leaders indulge in and the attempt by the citizens to free themselves from the muck, women get incorporated into the great effort.

As pointed out earlier in the chapter, the constructive representation of women, which forms the basis for the author’s vision, has all along been increasing progressively with each novel he publishes. In line with this, Achebe creates Eunice in this fiction who is a fiancée of Maxwell Kumalo and a co-founder of the CPC party. As the masses whose resources have been embezzled by the leaders for a long time and who now must rise against the injustice meted on them by their greedy leaders rise up to register their disdain, a woman (Eunice) is thrust into the limelight. The underlying proposition by the author that intellectuals in postcolonial Africa such as Odili Samalu and Maxwell Kumalo should come out and take over leadership from the old illiterate goons like Chief Koko and Chief Nanga further helps to bring her in the forefront especially since education has secured her a berth among the intellectuals.

Eunice’s outstanding intelligence and dedication draws admiration from Odili, the narrator, in two instances. He remarks that: “[She had] confidence of a beautiful woman who has brains as well which [he] finds a little intimidating” (78) and again after the campaigns have intensified: “Seeing them so confident and so well-equipped was for [him] the most
moral-boosting... [he] envied Max, his beautiful, dedicated girl; some people are simply lucky” (121). Her dedication proves to be lifelong when Max is felled by his competitor - Chief Koko. Out of the so many supporters who have been working with him to bring the corrupt regime down through the C.P.C party, men included, she is the only one who avenges him.

Again, earlier on in this chapter, we had pointed out that Clara in No Longer at Ease is just one rung behind the patriarch: Obi Okonkwo who has earned himself a degree from England while Clara is contented with a certificate from the same place. In this fiction, Max Kumalo the patriarch and Eunice the woman are at neck-to-neck achievement. As the narrator informs us, both are graduates from London School of Economics where they first met. (77)

Viewed cumulatively, in the three texts covered so far, female gender inclusion in the most important spheres of life including education as shown by Clara and Eunice and politics as shown by Eunice is representational. Perhaps we can make an observation that the number of men in almost all important aspects of life is more than that of women but at the least the women’s voice and presence is felt. Hannah compliments her husband in spreading the gospel and bringing up their children in his absentia, Clara compliments her fiancé Obi by rescuing him from the financial abyss while Eunice compliments his fiancé Max by helping in initiating the C.P.C party and symbolically rooting out the corrupt government that he has died fighting by shooting Chief Koko. Achebe’s gender vision up to this level can thus be described as that of gender inclusion and complementation where both co-exist to complement rather than exclude each other. None of the two genders attempt to build its own cocoon rather each intermingles with the other and in so doing brings about harmony in life
4.5 The Culmination of Achebe's Gender Vision

The creation of Beatrice Nwanyibuife Okoh, popularly known as BB in Achebe's last novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, has received much acclaim from critics with all admitting that indeed Achebe has at long last consciously recognized and put women in the center-stage in the socio-political arena. Kolowale (1997) affirms that:

> Whereas a re-reading of Achebe’s earlier works reveals some efforts to focus on the female, he does not give women a definitive meaningful role until Anthills [of the Savannah]. His attitude remains ambiguous, sometimes ambivalent and ironic before this novel. (118)

Owusu has also added his voice in celebrating Achebe’s creation of an all round woman character, describing Beatrice as: “[the] blood, mind and voice of Achebe’s new woman” (468).

While this study does not differ with the above critics’ allegations, it views it from a different perspective: an opportune time for Achebe to bring to climax the progressive women representation he had initiated in other novels. With regards to the same, Nwagbara posits:

> Due to Achebe’s positive portrayal of women in *Anthills [of the Savannah]*, Ben Okri adjudges the novel to be Achebe’s “most complex and his wisest book to date”. This is probably because Achebe in this text is more attuned to gender in response to the global attention given to it. (347)

Nwagbara’s argument, which the study agrees with, can also be viewed vis-à-vis the temporal setting and the reality outside the fictional country, Kangan, he creates in his text. Considering that the novel’s temporal setting and publication date is in 1987, a whooping twenty one years after the publication of his immediate other novel: *A Man of the People*, it is obvious that so much water has gone under the bridge as far as women achievements in the world outside fiction is concerned. The progressive positive women representation and the resistance to romanticize any life aspect is thus a major contributor to the much acclaimed re-writing of women characters in this novel.
That Beatrice's life is an elevation of other major women characters whom Achebe has created in his earlier fictions cannot be denied. However, she emerges as more or less an elevation of Clara and Eunice though achieving the culmination of an affirmative representation of women which has been enhanced to a level of overtaking the male counterparts. Nwagbara again emphasizes on this exceptional accomplishment by remarking: "her strength of character, self confidence and superior intellect stand out even among men" (348). Among the exceptional qualities is her impeccable credentials that even attract the attention of Kangan head of state who avows that she is one of the brilliant daughters of the country as he presents her thus:

Beatrice Okoh... Seniour Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Finance – the only person in the service, male or female, with a first class honours in English. And not from a local University but from Queen Mary College, University of London. Our Beatrice beat the English to their game. We are proud of her. (75)

To qualify our argument that Beatrice's hyper-performance is Achebe's way of climaxing the already started positive women depiction, the above educational achievements can be viewed alongside those of other educated women in his other texts. Clara, the first of his women characters to receive formal education manages only a certificate in Nursing. However, the fact that it is achieved in England places her among exceptional achievers at a time when formal education is just taking root. Eunice, the second major woman manages a degree from London University of Economics hence going one degree higher. When it comes to the last of the Achebe women characters series – Beatrice – she graduates with first class honours in English, the highest achievement one can ever attain and for that she is held in high esteem.

Another area that Achebe focuses on – especially in his later novels – is ineptitude, corruption and oppression by the government of the day. Beatrice, still maintaining the status
she has been bequeathed as the peak of Achebe’s women characters, becomes a participant in trying to curb this menace. About the same, Nwagbara remarks that:

Though Achebe does not create powerful women who have a collective will to protect the society from the oppression by the government, he has given the duo, Beatrice and Elewa a formidable role in mobilizing opposition to the corrupt Kangan government. (349)

Observably, the role that Beatrice takes up in this novel is more or less a replica of what Eunice does in a *Man of the People*, that of being in the forefront in cushioning the citizen from a corrupt and inept regime. Beatrice’ role however is more inclusive, more defined than that of Eunice so as to be in tandem with the position she holds among Achebe’s women characters. Perhaps the reason as to why Clara is not involved in such struggle is attributable to the fact that the country is still under the shackles of the colonialists.

In a shift from *Things Fall Apart* where Nwoye’s mother was rewarded for giving birth to three boys in a row, an implication that only boys are afforded recognition, Beatrice’s is highlighted from birth. She is recognized as “somebody” from the word go with her mother who had expected a boy instead of her adding another name to register her satisfaction. Beatrice, the narrator informs us:

I didn’t realize until much later that my mother bore me a huge grudge because I was a girl – her fifth in a row... but I must mention that in addition to Beatrice they had given me another name at my baptism. Nwanyibuife- a female is also something. (81) The naming of female characters to appreciate their utility where the parents expected a male among the Igbo nomenclature is not new in Achebe’s fiction as we see the same happening in *No Longer at Ease* where Isaac Okonkwo’s wife having been blessed with four daughters in a row, had named the fourth one Nwanyidinma – a girl is also good (6). However, Beatrice Nwanyibuife goes ahead to prove that a girl is indeed “something” through propagating and upholding the ideals of leadership in women in the patriarchal – controlled
community. The creation, assignment of major tasks and elevation of Nwanyibuife to the fore thus marks Nwanyidima’s (women’s) graduation from just being “good” to being “something” or rather somebody who is independent.

The women’s task of prophesying has also been re-written in Achebe’s new novel. While the Priestess in Things Fall Apart, Chielo, is a woman, she is not fully bestowed with her own authority as mostly she acts as a facilitator where the god she serves is concerned. Achebe re-visits this institution in his later novel and reconstructs a woman who not only appears independent in carrying out her prophetic duties but also does so with an aim of saving men from imminent danger. Beatrice points to the fact that she feels like she is a reincarnation of Chielo the Priestess in Achebe’s first novel, Things Fall Apart, the first woman to show signs of asserting herself among men with regard to this institution. In reference to the same, Chinyere Nwagbara remarks:

She knows what she wants. She dictates her relationship with Chris, her lover. She has a lot of insight and foresight. The analogy of Chielo the priestess and prophetess of the Hills and Caves is apt. (350)

Nwagbara’s remark here is in reference to Beatrice, who doubles as a narrator, when she asserts that she does feel like Chielo in the novel. She says: “It comes and goes. Imagine yes. It’s on now. And I see trouble building up for us. It will get to Ikem first. No joking, Chris. He will be the precursor to make straight the way. But after him it will be you” (114). True to her prophesy, it happens that Ikem is assassinated first followed by Chris. The ability to prophesy accurately the events to befall the two is indicative of Achebe’s entwined women roles in his fiction with a considerable increase in participation as indicated earlier with Chielo who had been bestowed with ability to prophesy, the revision of the same being that Beatrice derives her power from within herself rather than from a god as is the case with Chielo.
To augment this view, Achebe re-visits the mythology in Igbo cosmology and belief systems where Idemili, daughter of god and goddess of wealth whom men wishing to pin eagle’s feather by buying admission into the powerful *ozo* must present themselves at her shrine to inform the “Daughter of the Almighty.” Regarding the title seeker and involvement of Indemili, Achebe writes:

His first visit is no more than to inform the daughter of the Almighty of his ambition. He is accompanied by his daughters, or if he has only sons, by the daughter of a kinsman but a daughter it must be. This young woman must stand between him and the daughter of the Almighty before he can be granted a hearing. (104-105)

This elevation, again, is akin to the abode of the goddess of the Hills and the Caves in *Things Fall Apart* where only women were allowed to see the inside of her shrine. It is therefore a re-writing of women’s role in enhancing the interaction between human beings and the deity where the woman is asserted as the only person who can act as the bridge between the two individuals.

Achebe again revises women strength and valour which appears not to have fared well when it was first conceived in *A Man of the People*. While joking about Chief Nanga’s new name that he is about to acquire after being conferred a Doctorate degree where the journalist suggest his new title as: “Chief D.M.A Nanga, M.P., L.L.D.”, Odili tries to suggest that a woman be considered for the same status and name. He poses: “What about ‘Chief Dr. Mrs.’?” The suggestion is vehemently opposed by the minister who says: “that one no sweet for mouth” (19). This statement is tantamount to an attempt to lock women out of any elevation that attempts to place them at the same level with men. This elevation whose first attempt is thwarted by the minister comes to maturation in Beatrice as Agatha observes: “Madam [Beatrice] is too strong”, then seemingly having not accepted this new development adds that: “To be strong too much no de good for woman”. In a quick rejoinder, Elewa –
herself an individual whose attachment to Beatrice has made her internalize female power notes that: "[S]trength no good for anybody whether na man-o or na woman-o, na the same thing" (230). Effectively, through Elewa Achebe recommends equilibrium for both genders, which is a culmination of what Odili had tried to hint earlier in the previous novel.

Achebe also alludes to the freedom of women to make their own choice of whom to love as long as they have provisions to take care of the family in *Things Fall Apart*. Incidentally, Ekwefi has already chosen Okonkwo as her ideal husband after showing his prowess in wrestling. However, because he is too poor to take care of her, she waits until after two years and runs away from her husband — Anene — to Okonkwo whom she has always loved. However, the act of love making remain the prerogative of the man as demonstrated by what follows after Ekwefi knocks on Okonkwo’s door in the early hour of the morning. He just proceeds to feel her loose loin cloth meaning the woman is at the behest of the man and not a partner in the act. Achebe revisits this by depicting Beatrice as the one in total control in their love making act between herself and her lover Ikem. There is therefore a kind of reciprocity in which Beatrice becomes the one in control in their love making encounter with Ikem. The narrator describes it thus:

[S]he said: “come in.” And as he did she uttered a struggled cry that was not just a cry but also a command or a password. From there she took charge of him leading him by the hand silently through heaving groves mottled in subdued yellow sunlight, trending dry leaves underfoot till they came to streams of clear water. More than once he had slipped on the deep banks and she had pulled him up with such power and authority as he had never seen her exercise before. Clearly this was her grove and these her own peculiar rites over which she held absolute power (114).

As much as there is symbolism inherent in this description, both the symbolic and the literal undertones converge at the same: that women are no longer objects to be trampled upon in
what has previously been described as commodifying women. Teresa Njoku (2004) gives this act a vivid expository in her review that:

Beatrice (also) commands and controls sexual act and direct what happens. The authority she commands enforces obedience and influences action. In sexuality, Beatrice thus holds absolute power and Chris is like a child cradled in her arms and breasts her eyes watching over him anxiously. (338)

This effectively removes the earlier belief that qualifies women as sexual objects to be used by men to provide pleasure. It also redefines woman as capable of taking control over a man.

In a nutshell, the vision for African women that shapes itself out of the creation of Beatrice, therefore, can be deduced from the above discussions as that of women who are omnipresent in all the communal institutions unlike her counterparts in other novels whose influence is only felt in limited fields. Beatrice thus acts as a facilitator through whom Achebe accomplishes the distinguished women roles started earlier with other women characters in his earlier fiction.

Apart from accomplishing what women had started in other novels, Beatrice also demonstrates her prowess by showing success where men had tried and failed. Agbaisere observes that:

Achebe has dismissed the role of Nneka myth as not being good enough for the modern woman (Anthills [of the Savannah], 91-92). He therefore creates his own myth by projecting Beatrice as a new leader in a society where men have failed” (362).

Thus through Beatrice’s outstanding feat, Achebe advocates for total rather than partial inclusion of women’s power in solving the political problem in Africa where men such as Odili and Max in A Man of the People have tried and failed, only coming close to success when Eunice guns down one of the perpetuators of the failed government. Regarding to this view, E. L. Agukwe (2004) observes:

Achebe believes that the solution to the endemic problem of political instability in Africa could be resolved through “the female principle.” In the new political order,
the African women should assume centre stage if progress has to be made. [He] advocates the invocation of female principle and de-emphasizing of male dominance in the political affairs of African states as a necessary step towards political polity. (354)

Achebe deliberately excludes Beatrice from the cabinet position in spite of being placed in politics owing to the fact that they are toothless and serve at the mercies of the president. Rather than lose focus in what he had started in re-writing the African woman, he opts to assign her the opposition docket as Agbasiere observes: “Although Beatrice is not a member of the President’s cabinet, she nevertheless is interested in political situation and feels committed to upholding the honour of her nation at all cost” (362). Achebe, in *The Trouble with Nigeria*, defines her as “[a] patriot.” (15) thus distinguishing her from the male characters like the president and his ministers who do not have the interest of the country at heart.

Perhaps Idemili’s mythology that Achebe fronts more than anything else encompasses the de-emphasizing of the male dominance to pave way for *meka* principle to dominate. Her contempt for man’s unquenchable thirst to sit in authority symbolizes woman’s modesty and sincerity in her approach to politics and governance. Without a doubt, the political arena which is meant to fight the dictatorship is enhanced through her as the narrator informs us she stands firm in the struggle unlike the male politicians who retreat “like frightened animals backwards into their holes”.

The new image of African women, who are ready to rectify the men’s mess, is also demonstrated through the prophetess quality, especially the ability to juggle between the work as a prophetess and domestic chores that Beatrice possesses. Achebe points out at them early in the novel through Chris, the Commissioner for Information:
Sensing the village priestess who will prophesy when her divinity rides her, abandoning if need be her soup-pot on the fire but returning again when the god departs to the domesticity of her kitchen... (95).

That the prophesy she makes is of National import wraps up Achebe’s vision: that the new African woman re-created will combine both total participation in politics as well as introspection to rescue the failing leadership in Africa.

Beatrice also acts as the “husband” of the orphaned Elewa, the girlfriend to Ikem when she is orphaned after he is brutally killed. She not only takes her in and takes care of her but also acts as the “father” of the newborn baby whom she names converse to the prevailing traditions that such an undertaking is a preserve of men. Teresa Njoku argues that: “Beatrice names [Elewa’s] baby girl and thereby assumes a prerogative which is entirely male” (355).

By so doing, she challenges this lifelong practice through acting to the contrary and thus Achebe, through the narrator, seems to be in support by posing: “I think our tradition is faulty there, it is safest to ask the mother what her child is or means or should be called (225). She thus goes ahead to name her Amaechima – may the path never close. As Njoku points out: “In Igbo onomastics, [Amaechina] is largely a male name and a principle of primogeniture. Beatrice deliberately subverts this” (355). In addition, the fact that the child she “fathers” turns out to be a girl adds strength to Achebe’s emphasis in the inclusion of the meka principle as a necessary factor in the political affairs of Africa. Amaechima is obligated with partnering with her “father” Beatrice who must now pick from where Ikem and Chris left to continue with the struggle aimed at rescuing the country from the bungling leadership.

Beatrice is also a distinguished civil servant, the first in Achebe series, whose service to the government is much acclaimed. Ikem, the editor of the National Gazette observes that Beatrice has style and face worthy of respect while his Excellency the president of Kangan State recognizes her as “one of the most brilliant daughters of this country.” Again, she
occupies a very pivotal role in the civil service and proves to be an influential person in making government decisions and later trying to ensure the government is devoid of corruption and incompetent leadership, an area that men have propagated instead of rectifying.

The creation of Beatrice, without doubt, not only accomplishes the positive representation of women that Achebe had started in his earlier works but also goes beyond men accomplishments as she is able to realize the initiatives that they had failed to achieve.

4.6 Conclusion
Achebe all along has demonstrated a clear vision for both genders which is built on complimentary platform. His writings, in spite of being set at different levels of civilization in parts of Nigeria as well as some imaginary countries demonstrate a considerable parallelism of what is happening outside the fictional world with regard to increasing women elevation. It is true that in the late eighteenth century which represents the temporal setting for Things Fall Apart for instance women are neither politically active nor independent both in Achebe’s fiction and the real world. That not notwithstanding, he presents some powerful women such as Ezinma who act as a precursor for liberalization of female gender.

The next exceptional female character, Clara, in No Longer at Ease fully exploits the colonial structures that offer female gender an opportunity to attain autonomy by embracing a formalized education system which is devoid of gender discrimination. Consequently, the gender vision is thus presented progressively, with publication of each novel showing some remarkable increase in bringing women to the fore in what we have qualified as a kind of relay where the woman character hands over the baton to the other in the next novel. In the third novel under study – A Man of the People – Eunice furthers the relay by achieving equality with patriarch in terms of educational achievement and political participation,
perhaps the women’s only disadvantage being that they are outnumbered by their male counterpart in the political arena. The grand finale of the relay is reached through creation of Beatrice in *Anthills of the Savanna*. The metaphorical victory in the race is achieved by her bettering educational achievement to achieve the best. She is also at the forefront in opposition politics, a feat that is meant to rectify the mess created by patriarchs who have hitherto dominated politics while in public service; her exemplary performance is recognized by the president himself. To crown her exceptional accomplishments, she takes up responsibilities designated for men such as child naming, acting as the “father” of Elewa’s child. These among other outstanding tasks that Beatrice accomplishes offer an opportunity to women to overtake the patriarchs in the relay.

The fact that each of the four female characters who have been singled out in the four fictional works co-exist alongside a male character(s) where each is embedded to the other in one way or the other helps in shaping Achebe’s gender vision. Drawing from the progressive increase in participation of women in all spheres of life and the parallelism of women accomplishments outside fictional world, Achebe’s gender vision outlines itself as a call for inclusiveness and gender complementary where they co-exist peacefully to help each other in carrying out their respective tasks.
CHAPTER FIVE
Summary and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction
In this final section, we make a recap of the major issues that have emerged during our study and isolate possible areas for further study.

5.2 Summary
This study affirms that, indeed nneka principle plays a key role in execution of religious, educational and judicial duties in Achebe's texts. Chapter two analyzed the powerful women across the three works under study who have exhibited exceptional zeal in carrying out the major duties assigned to them in educational, judicial and religious sectors. The study christened them mother archetypes owing to the important role they play in the community at large and fronted nneka principle as the contributor to their success.

In chapter three, the study has cross-sectionally analyzed the tragic heroes in the three fictions vis-à-vis the powerful women characters whom they try to subvert, thus qualifying their attempt to subjugate women as the cause for their tragedy.

Chapter four explored the writer's underlying vision for women. This study revealed that the writer has a clear vision for women in the society but considering that he is a stickler for forthrightness, he does not romanticize any institution: neither gender nor Igbo community rather he represents women in a progressive manner. This kind of representation parallels women increasing participation in activities previously considered a preserve of men outside the fictional world. The writer's vision for women is, metaphorically speaking, implanted in his first novel and once it germinates, it grows progressively, budding and flowering until it bears fruits in his last novel where women epitomized by Beatrice Okoh have, arguably, equaled or even outdone men.
Further this study contested the much-maligned proposition that, Achebe has pushed women to the peripheral position. The study identified and analyzed female characters across Achebe’s fiction whose exploits challenge this belief. By so doing, it set the precedence for re-thinking and reviewing the nearly universally accepted position that fronts Achebe as anti-women in his fiction. This approach can be adopted through considering the position taken by this thesis because it has proved that indeed Achebe has fronted an inclusive representation of both genders where each is duty bound to complement the other.

5.3 Findings
The first and the main objective was to establish the role played by nneka principle in the execution of religious, educational and judicial duties as depicted in Achebe’s text. The research established that women have indeed been entrusted with the aforementioned vital roles in the society across all the texts under study and they carry them out diligently.

The second objective set out to discuss the consequences of masculine gender failure to recognize and uphold the nneka principle in Achebe’s works. The study found out that the tragedy afflicting Achebe’s heroes can, to a large extent, be traced to their spirited efforts geared towards subjugating women. Their effort lead them to tragic end since women have a clearly defined role to play.

The third objective set out to establish the kind of vision Achebe has crafted for male and female genders in his texts under study. The findings point out to the fact that, Achebe’s vision for both genders is that of co-existence and inclusion carrying out societal duties.
5.4 Conclusion

The exceptional feature of this work is that it provides a platform for the parties interested in gender equity to expand their knowledge of the roles that can effectively be played by each gender to ensure peaceful co-existence.

The study also proves useful to the academia in that, it provides a new appraisal to Achebe’s texts under scrutiny through identification of mother archetypes thus demonstrating that Achebe does not entirely depict female gender negatively.

5.5 Recommendations for Further Study

This study limited itself to *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *A Man of the People* and only incorporated *Anthills of the Savannah* to aid in the evaluation of Achebe’s gender vision. The author of these novels has also written extensively in other genres: namely anthologies of short stories and poetry. We therefore recommend research on his other creative works to help in shedding more light on his overall representation of women.

The study has been done on the standpoint of archetypal and feminist literary theories and as such, future studies on Achebe’s women representation can be projected on other theoretical frameworks.

Further, we suggest that a comparative study be conducted between Achebe’s works and other pioneer authors such as Ngugi wa Thiong’o whose temporal setting of their creative works progressively cuts across pre-colonial, colonization period, and the period after independence of any other African country to establish whether their women representation strikes resemblance with that of Achebe. Such research will expand gender scholarship since this research was limited to only one prose fiction author.
We also recommend that a comparative study be conducted to relate the use of language by women characters as opposed to the same by men in Achebe’s fiction. By so doing, it will be possible to establish whether the language used by either gender depicts its position in the society.
Notes

1 Ogbanje. Wicked children among the Igbo community who were believed to enter their mother’s womb to be born again when they died. (see Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* page 70)

2 Mimetic nature of literature. Reference to literature being an imitation of real life situation as stated by Ernest Emenyenu. (see Emerging perspectives on Chinua Achebe. Emeneka: The master artist page 212)


4 Obierika’s words in reference to culture erosion brought about by encroaching of colonialists into the Igboland. (see Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* page 160).

5 Okoye is successful male character who is also a musician (see Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* page 6)

6 A proverb that has been used by Achebe in another novel: *Arrow of God*, which is comparable to Mrs. Okonkwo’s reaction (see *Arrow of God* page 160)

7 The Ozo title was the third and the second highest title among the Igbo society that put an individual in high esteem among his peers (see Achebe’s *Thing Fall Apart* page 63).

8 A paradoxical statement by Shakespeare that fits into Eddah Odo’s situation of having to suffer first before succeeding. (see *Much Ado About Nothing* Act 4, Scene 1, page 11)

9 An acronym used by the drunken man in Achebe’s novel to refer to his predicament which is applicable to the situation Edna Odo finds himself in (see Achebe *A Man of the People* page 96)

10 egwugwu. The highest council of jurisdiction in the Igbo community who were believed to be ancestors. It consists of only high achievers in the community (see *Things Fall Apart* page 13)

11 indichie. The council of elders that made vital decisions in the community. (see *Things fall Apart* page 16)

12 osu. A group of people in the Igbo community whose members are not allowed to marry from amongst non osu. It’s the group to which Clara belongs hence the resistance from Obi’s parents against marrying her. (see *No Longer at Ease* page 68)

13 agadi-nwai. The female principle in form of an old woman that was responsible for Umuofia village’s valour in the war against other villages (see *Things Fall Apart* page 19)
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