

**An evaluation of shifting gender  
constructions in selected works of  
Achebe, Adichie and Emecheta**

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Thesis accepted for the degree [Doctor of Philosophy in  
Languages and Literature with English](#) at the North-West  
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## DECLARATION

I, Adedayo Omoshalewa Odubajo, declare that except for the references cited in this text, this study represents my original work. I guarantee that no similar work has been submitted by anyone at any other university or institution of higher learning.

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this research to God Almighty who saw me through the completion of this study.

I also dedicate this research to my wonderful and supportive parents, Chiefs L.A. Odubajo and (Mrs) Susan Odubajo. May God bless you and may our B.V.M. continue to intercede on your behalf.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My utmost gratitude goes to God Almighty for His love and mercy, guidance and protection.

I immensely appreciate the efforts and patience of my wonderful supervisors, Professor L. P. Siziba and Professor Muchativugwa L. Hove, for their support and commitment to ensuring that I have an engaging and enlightening experience. E se pupo.

I also appreciate the kind words of support from Professor Paul Nkamta and his wife, Dr Sheila Nkamta – merci.

I am also grateful to the RULLSAC, headed by Professor Phil, for the support in ensuring that I finish this study in record time and special thanks to Ms Elsa Van Tonder and Ms Nicolene. Thank you.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to my parents, Chiefs L.A Odubajo and (Mrs) Susan Odubajo for their prayers, love and support. May God in His infinite mercy continue to bless you.

I also want to appreciate my siblings for the kind words of support and for pretending to understand even when you do not and cannot fathom why I find Spivak and Fanon's essays engaging. My handsome nieces and beautiful nephews, Tomiwa, Esther, Idunu, Demilade, Susan and Tishe, you all rock!

I also thank Professor Victor Ojakorutu, Professor Theophilus Mukhuba and Dr. Col. Omogbethai for their kind words of support.

Special thanks to Onaopemipo Fayose and Richard Akinkunmi for the words of encouragement and support.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge and thank all my 'Fathers in the Lord', Rev. Fr. Peter Abatan, Rev. Fr. Dayo Osinkoya, Rev. Fr. Stephen Ekerin and Rev. Fr. Dan Agbor. May our dearest Mother Mary continue to intercede on your behalf.

## ABSTRACT

The present research focuses on the literary narratives of Chinua Achebe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Buchi Emecheta, three postcolonial (West) African novelists who recapitulate the lived experiences of the Igbo people of the South-Eastern part of Nigeria in their narratives. The literary narratives selected for this academic study are Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood* (1979), Achebe's *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) and Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). The primary aim of this study is to unpack how Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie portray the concept of patriarchy and gender identity in the selected narratives. To achieve the aim of this study, I engage Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's African womanist theoretical framework. However, since Ogunyemi's Afrocentric lens is primarily reactionary, the textual analysis of the narratives also draws from the theoretical lenses of notable postcolonial theorists, Franz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, because each theorist, through their arguments on patriarchy, socialisation patterns and gender identity, provides lenses with which to study the genesis and impact of social norms on social actors. The social actors who also function as female protagonists in the selected literary narratives are Nnu Ego in Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood* (1979), Beatrice Nwanyibuife Okoh in Achebe's *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) and Ifemelu in Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). These female characters evolve from a state of voicelessness to one of agency. This study posits that through the adoption of unique literary techniques, Achebe and Adichie on one hand, lean towards activism and create characters who challenge patriarchy, while Emecheta on the other, explores how patriarchy stifles the Igbo woman. The conclusions drawn from the in-depth analysis of the narratives are that Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie are three (West) African novelists who articulate the challenges of patriarchy whilst envisioning a third space where interaction thrives through the precepts of complementarity and cohesion.

**Keywords:** African womanism; gender identity; patriarchy; socialisation; Western feminism

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## Chapter One: The African womanist ethics

### Introduction

The present research examines and interrogates the influence of social norms on gender identities of characters in selected narratives of Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie. The purposively selected works are Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood* (1979), Achebe's *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) and Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), based on their location in the Igbo habitus in postcolonial Nigeria. Achebe is a first-generation postcolonial writer, while Emecheta and Adichie belong to the second and third generations of postcolonial writers in Africa. Achebe has been described as the father of modern African literature and his *Things fall apart* (1958) is recognised as the first published postcolonial work in the English language. Emecheta, on the other, belongs to the second generation of postcolonial authors. Her first work, *In the ditch*, was first published in 1972. Adichie belongs to the third generation of postcolonial writers. Her first work, *Purple hibiscus* was published in 2003. With *Things fall apart* (1958), Achebe retells the story of the Igbo person, that is, the decentred native Igbo man who is a wealthy and titled polygamist who "ruled his household with a heavy hand" (Achebe, 1958:10). The Igbo woman, on the other hand, is placed in a zone of non-being, in a "position of marginality, an existential outsider whose physiological features render *cosmic persona non grata*" (Anyokwu, 2011:17). Even when placed in a position of authority as a Supreme one, the earth goddess who blesses her 'children' with bounty during the harvest season, Achebe still enables his male protagonist to be "provoked to justifiable anger by his youngest wife." In short, Okonkwo commits a taboo by beating his wife during the Week of Peace (Abe, 1958:23). Simply put, Achebe in *Things fall apart* (1958) portrays the woman as a voiceless social member who is marginalised and oppressed because of her gender identity

However, African feminists like Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta contest this view through the portrayal of their female protagonists, some of whom are Efurú in *Efurú* (1966) and Adah in *In the ditch* (1972). Achebe also retracts this patriarchal stance through the characterisation techniques that he adopts in his last published prose narrative, *Anthills of the savannah* (1988). In *Anthills of the savannah* (1988), Achebe presents a vocal and financially independent female protagonist, Beatrice Nwanyibuife Okoh, who knows how not to "keep all options open" (Achebe, 1988:73). Adichie develops this theme further in *Americanah* (2013) through the portrayal of a female protagonist, Ifemelu, who challenges patriarchy in peculiar ways, one of

which is engaging a large audience through her reverberating blog posts. Besides, Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood* (1979) makes for an interesting analysis, as she shows how the label of the second-class citizen materialises in the life of an Igbo woman. Interestingly, these women are all migrants, displaced nomads in search of an identity. This woman's predecessor is Nnu Ego in Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood* (1979) while her protégé is Ifemelu in *Americanah* (2013). Emecheta belongs to the second generation of postcolonial authors who like her predecessors expose how social constructs precipitate various forms of injustices and inequalities. Through the portrayal of the female protagonist in *In the ditch* (1972), Adah, Emecheta explores how society oppresses, marginalises and exploits the woman who is perceived as a second-class citizen because of her identity. It is Adichie who introduces the concept of the New Igbo woman as a full human being who is educated, financially independent, articulate and vocal in *Americanah* (2013).

Based on the thematic focus and characterisation techniques that Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie adopt in the selected narratives, this study posits that each novelist functions as a postcolonial novelist first and second as an African *bildungsroman* novelist. This is because the protagonists, who in this instance are all women, leave their homesteads in search of economic empowerment which they attain through the acquisition of formal education and in Nnu Ego's case, in the search of intangible fulfilment which materialises through her three sons. This assertion is foregrounded against the definition of the African *bildungsroman* as "a reflection on the possibilities of self-formation, through inherited culture, formal education and more autonomous *bildung*, within a specific set of historical context" (Austen, 2015:214). However, because Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie are products of a movement that clamours for women's emancipation, the female protagonists at the end of the selected narratives do not emerge from the attic as "madwomen" but rather, arise as new women who have developed their "sense of personhood, reclaiming wholeness, authority and female subjectivity, changing prescribed roles and structures" (Nadaswaran, 2011:19). This means that the other who is subjugated, oppressed, marginalised evolves into that which Bhabha (1994) refers to as an ambivalent, third or new being who can speak, think and act in a place far removed from the margin. In short, these characters experience a form of rebirth. In line with these arguments, this study posits that Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood* (1979), Achebe's *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) and Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) are also classified as African literary works.

African literature is categorised as a defining component of postcolonial theory. Go (2013:29) refers to postcolonial theory as “a loosely coherent body of writing and thought that critiques and aims to transcend the structures supportive of Western colonialism and its legacies” which undermined and continues to undermine African values of complementarity and cohesion. Since this newly discovered postcolonial space is framed by hybrid social components, then the form of expression is at once foreign and at the same time native. In analysing the experiences of the Africans in this postcolonial space, the postcolonial African critic thus embarks on a journey of rediscovery by challenging the Eurocentric notions of patriarchy which legitimise the principles of dominance and servitude.

Social propriety is ingrained in the psyche of the colonised subject through an engagement of the mechanisms of social subversion. To ensure concordance with colonial norms, the coloniser decentralises the native through cultural and language subjugation. Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie explicate the influence of cultural norms on social relations and simultaneously present realistic depictions of Africans in traditional and modern settings. These similarities inform Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie’s thematic concerns and characterisation techniques, as is evident in the peculiarities that inform character perceptions, interpersonal behaviours and intergroup relations in the selected texts. Set against the framework of the reflection theory, these authors mirror the lived experiences of the Igbo people through the adoption of one world language, that is, the English language. For Achebe, this is based on the fact that the country as a whole “was created by the British for their own ends” (Achebe, 1965:28), while for the literary protégés, this adoption of the English language seems a natural course. However, Achebe argues that his version of the English language is indigenous because it is “in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surrounding” (Achebe, 1965:29). This definition shows that language as a literary device moulds the meanings and symbols appropriated to other literary devices and elements that an author engages. By extension, this means that language encompasses the cognitive, behavioural and affective developments and activities of characters in literary texts. Each of these authors also recognises that the African whose story they tell is a hybrid (Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 1963), that is, one whose identity has evolved. In defining African literature, Achebe asserts that:

It is not one unit but as associated units, in fact, the sum total of all national and ethnic literatures of Africa. A national literature is one that takes the whole nation for its province and has a realised or potential audience throughout its territory. An ethnic literature is one which is available only to one ethnic group within the nation (Achebe, 1965:27).

Therefore, questions about the factors that influence socialisation are unpacked through an engagement with an Afrocentric variant of the English language, which becomes the medium of “communication of ideas or feelings *via* conventional signs, sounds or marks with distinguishable denotations and connotations” (Eme & Mbagwu, 2011:114) that situate human experiences accordingly. This study argues that Emecheta, Achebe and Adiche achieve the Africanisation of their experiences through the adoption of the indigenous philosophy, herein, referred to as Igwebuiké philosophy. Propounded by Anthony Kanu, this study concurs with the assertion that Igwebuiké philosophy “speaks of the modality of being, resting on the principles of solidarity and complementarity. Thus, to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation” (Kanu, 2017:426). A semantic analysis of the term, Igwebuiké, shows that it can be broken down into three words: *igwe* can be taken to mean a large population, *bu* is an Igbo verb that means is and *ike* means strength (Amadiume, 1987: Kanu, 2017). In short, Igwebuiké philosophy attends to the questions of identity and socialisation in Igbo society. This implies that the Igbo people interact as partners in the private and public spheres of their society before the colonial incursion. However, since Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie are postcolonial critics and writers who uncover the impact of colonialism, then this study asserts that Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie, through their narratives, elucidate the ills of colonialism, a major one being the loss of identity.

Identity here includes components such as gender, race, language, culture and religious practices. Within the context of this study, cultural practices are subject to changes that occur through social interaction. One of the factors that have affected social interaction in Africa is colonialism. Colonialism is a social practice that occurs when a dominant group imposes cultural practices on a subservient group. In this instance, the subservient group is categorised because of their language, cultural practices, customs and values. According to Nayar (2015:30), the colonial process is the “systematic administrative control by which we mean institutional structures of governance, legal apparatuses and military dominance over territories”. Just as dominance is a product of favouritism, subservience which leads to

marginalisation and precarity is a product of negative preconceived notions about gender, race and culture. Marginalisation deprives a social group of agency, presence and voice. Thus, social interaction pre-empts the -marginalisation of the inferior group. It is this process of marginalisation that Afrocentric critics challenge, as they seek to find the “subject place of Africans” (Marable, 2000:202) in African history. This challenge prompts the formation of experience within the third space, that which is placed at the periphery. For the displaced African, the space on the periphery represents the core of social reality, an ambivalent space of self-discovery. This thought pattern aligns with the Afrocentric proposition that the activities of social characters should be located at “the subject place ... in discourses of history, culture and society” (Asante, 2017:232). In this instance, the subject place is the centre which transforms into a hybrid and ambivalent space that permits the reconstruction of feminist identities. Therefore, for Africans in the postcolonial space, ambivalence comes into play through the integration of European and African cultural values.

As such, Achebe in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988), Adichie in *Americanah* and Emecheta in *The joys of motherhood* (1979) function as Afrocentric novelists who situate the motives, traits and activities of their characters within a third space, which enables them to redefine and reappropriate value, voice and agency as a subaltern group, also known as the other. According to Bhabha (1994:110), this act of reconstruction:

[I]s not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or exclusion of the content of another culture, as a difference once perceived. It is the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference.

In this third space, female protagonists like BB recognise that concerning the appropriation of roles to social members, “our tradition is faulty” (Achebe, 1988:233). This view prompts her to reconstruct her identity and redefine her role in the white man’s house. Also, Ifemelu in *Americanah* (2013) and Nnu Ego in *The joys of motherhood* (1979) resist patriarchy and oppression in their ways. For Ifemelu, resistance pushes her to rent a flat in Ikoyi beside “a grand colonial house” (Adichie, 2013:351) and transform this place into a democratic space where she and her divorced lover, Obinze, find themselves. Nnu Ego’s third space comes alive in the form of a shrine where, as a goddess like Uhamiri, she refuses to grant the wishes of all who pray “for children” (Emecheta, 1979:251). As stated earlier, Emecheta, Achebe and

Adichie question the interplay of tradition and modernism in the Igbo society through the engagement of the unique Afrocentric, African womanist method that promotes African voices and agency. This is an idea that Ogunyemi (1985) projects when she contends that no theory addresses all human challenges:

I think that most theories cannot explain everything. A theory will definitely leave something out, and so whoever comes after will have to develop an idea that will take into consideration that which has been left out. As for us, we cannot take the African-American situation and its own peculiarities and impose it on Africa, particularly as Africa is so big and culturally diverse (Ogunyemi & Muthoni, 2000:714).

Therefore, Ogunyemi proposes an Afrocentric lens with which to interrogate how social norms influence the patterns of socialisation in African social units. This is particularly important as it allows African novelists like Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie to appropriate voice and agency to their characters and by so doing, challenge the Eurocentric notions that ascribe power, privilege and agency to the coloniser and imperialist. The critical analyses of these selected narratives are set against the backdrop of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak's postcolonial theories of orientalism, hybridity and subalternity. The focal point of this study is to uncover factors that define and influence the patterns of social interaction in postcolonial African society. By extension, the study of the influence of gender constructs on the characters is set within the precepts of Ogunyemi's African womanist theory.

This theory provides an artistic and indigenous prism with which to assess the influence of patriarchal dictates on social relations in the selected literary texts. Social norms define the basis of human interaction in social units. According to Cislighi and Heise (2020:409), social norms are "rules of action shared by people in a given society or group; they define what is considered normal and acceptable behaviour for the members of that group". This means that social norms encompass the acceptable roles and influence the social reality of social members in each social group or society. In this study, social norms are seen as components of social constructs which are dynamic (Amadiume, 1987). These paradigms for human interaction in African society have over time metamorphosed from the dual-structure model that apportions values to men and women to the rigid-dichotomised structure that enforces patriarchal hegemony that appropriates superior values to men and inferior ones to women. Hence, there is a need to understand human relations and the enactment and conceptualisation of identities

of the characters in contemporary African societies, specifically the Igbo society from which all three writers emerge.

### **Contextualisation**

Literature mirrors the lived experiences of people in society. Megbowon, Lawal and Uwah (2017:9818) refer to literature as that which “reflects the various aspects of human life (social, political, economic, religion, culture and history) in literary form”. This means that the experiences that literary novelists recapitulate in their narratives are moulded by the social constructs and physiological assignments that modulate the activities and identities of the members. Bearing in mind that these experiences are mutative and transitional, this study seeks to unpack the various notions of social constructs that determine the patterns of social interaction in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria through the artistic lenses of Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie. Therefore, this study takes cognisance of the fact that literary texts are artistic constructs with a complex relationship to reality. Social constructs are products of entrenched cultural norms that prompt inequality, discrimination and bias in society (Leach, 2015). Cultural norms determine the culture and unique attributes of certain people. These cultural norms are shaped by religion, practices, beliefs and values. Thus, culture becomes the total way of life of a people, the schema that “marks them out distinctively from other human societies” (Idang, 2015:97). These distinctive schemas are made up of material and immaterial elements, such as language, identity and roles. Idang (2015) asserts that these schemas which are learnt and internalised through various processes of enculturation define the patterns of social interaction in human societies. The schemas which determine the patterns of social interaction between members of society also shape self-identity (Argyle, 2017; Young, 2015). Thus, social schemas, social interaction and self-identity inform the peculiar nature of any society, including the values, culture and language of that society. These norms inform the guidelines that are precipitated by stereotypes, prejudices and biases that breed social inequality.

Social inequality manifests through the unequal distribution of wealth, power and privilege (Haynie *et al.*, 2021) and thrives through the principles of domination and submission and leads to the social stratification of members. To dominate means to have absolute control over the members of a subordinate group. In the heterosexual space, as that where Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie situate their characters, the various mechanisms of subjugation through which the

principles of social inequalities are enforced include religion, education and commerce. Since norms define the essence of social existence, then the postcolonial theorist asserts that the impact of colonisation includes the loss of identity and the creation of the other. The other represents the one who through the process of re-creation becomes the “subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite” (Bhabha, 1984:126). With this new form of human identity, that is, the hybrid, individuals are displaced from the centre of their experience and placed on the margins. During the colonial era, marginalisation occurred through mental enslavement, one that robbed the natives of their agency and turned them into “baboons” (Emecheta, 1979:41). This form of mental enslavement occurs through language subjugation. According to wa Thiong’o (1981:11), language is “expressed in written and spoken words”. Thus, language in whatever form acts as a conveyor of culture that determines human relations.

According to wa Thiong’o (1981:11), language is “expressed in written and spoken words”. Thus, language in whatever form acts as a conveyor of culture that determines human relations. Thus, whether in written or verbal forms, language encompasses culture. Culture refers to the totality of human experiences. According to wa Thiong'o (1981:14), culture is an embodiment of “moral, ethical and aesthetic values, the set of spiritual eyeglasses through which they come to view themselves and their place in the world”. Thus, language and culture are integral components of society that influence perceptions and patterns of interaction. Mishra (2016) contends that gender is an integral component of self-identity that determines the motives, activities and traits of social beings. For the Afrocentric critic who is concerned with understanding the influence of social constructs on human relations, it is imperative to uncover the social structure, social constructs and social norms that define Africa. One such structure is the family. Idang (2015) opines that an integral social unit among the Igbo people is the family. The family is a heterosexual miniature social unit where roles are propagated through gendered processes.

In Igbo communities, marriage is the foundation of family units. Marriage takes different forms like early or child marriage, betrothals and widow inheritance. However, child marriage or betrothals are recognised after the payment of a bride price. Also, within the family units, some roles are fashioned by societal expectations. For instance, the woman's ability to procreate assures her of a place as the wife; “a woman without a child for her husband [is] a failed woman” (Emecheta, 1979:63). Thus, womanhood is equated to motherhood, procreation and subject-position. It is also imperative to state that *The joys of motherhood* depend on the

woman's ability to birth male children because it is the male children who ensure the continuity of the lineage, and female children are the financial security who fetch bride prices on behalf of their fathers. However, regarding the mutation of social norms, Amadiume (2015) posits that these laws are products of a cultural mutation triggered by colonial incursion that occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Amadiume (1987), Africans enjoyed a complementary, dual sex structure before the British colonial rupture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this colonial space, like Lagos, "men had to be the sole providers" (Emecheta, 1979:81). This robbed the woman of her agency and altered the cultural precepts of a precolonial flexible gender system that respected the "looseness of gender association" and instead enforced the colonial precepts of gender inequality. Ogunyemi (1985) asserts that together with the colonial incursion came the religious dogmatism that relegated women to secondary positions even in the civic and public social spheres. Thus, this study interrogates the influence of colonial social norms on African human relations and evaluates how Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie depict the dynamic nature of social constructs in Igbo societies.

Beatrice's character in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) reflects Chinua Achebe's evolving views about social cohesion and growth. The story is set in the fictitious Kagan, and the plot is driven by the relationship between Chris Oriko, Sam and Ikem Osodi and their female counterparts, Beatrice, Agatha and Elewa. This evaluative study focuses on the emancipation and growth of the Kangan woman represented by Beatrice, Agatha and Elewa, who defy traditional precepts in their capacities as human beings and are strong enough to become agents of social cohesion (Shamim, 2014). Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in *Americanah* (2013) inscribes the importance of identity through the characters of Ifemelu and Obinze. She plays this out when Ifemelu travelled to America and imbibed American styles like straightening her hair. She picks up an American accent and loses her African identity. However, she leaves all the *Americanised* lifestyle and relocates to Nigeria where she embraces her old self and reclaims her life. Obinze is another character who relocates. However, he is unable to fit in and is deported back to Nigeria soon after his visa expired. The author focalises on the role of identity in shaping dynamically inclusive human relations, both in the diaspora and in the home base.

Emecheta in *The joys of motherhood* (1979) questions the notion of womanhood, motherhood and self-identity among the Igbo of the southeastern part of Nigeria. The Igbo people connect self-worth and fulfilment with motherhood (Rani, 2020). Hence, a girl-child looks forward to

marriage for it is only then that she can start her family, one with a husband and children. Emecheta, through the experiences of Nnu Ego, probes the connections of womanhood with motherhood in Igbo society. *The joys of motherhood* (1979) tells of Nnu Ego's travails as a barren woman with Amatokwu (her first husband) and then as Nnaife's wife when she becomes the mother of healthy sons and beautiful daughters. Despite these joys of motherhood, Nnu Ego dies a lonely and miserable death on the roadside. *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) is Achebe's sixth book since his first published novel *Things fall apart* in 1958. In *Things fall apart* (1958), Achebe hyper-masculinises his main character, Okonkwo, while he silences and marginalises his female characters. However, Achebe changes tactics and sets a new agenda that gives his female characters the voice and the platform to be heard in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988). Zooming on the structures of *The joys of motherhood* (1979), Rani (2020) asserts that Emecheta captures the essence of a compelling story. According to Rani, the naming process among the Igbo people is definitive of the identities and roles of characters in Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood* (1979). For instance, Agbadi names his daughter, Nnu Ego, which means "twenty bags of cowries" (Emecheta, 1979:26), thus defining her future role as the one who would bring wealth to the family. Also, Ezekiel Odi in Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price* names his daughter Akunna, which means "father's wealth" (Emecheta, 1976:3) and as a child, Akunna is more interested in getting married to a rich man who could pay her bride price. Nnu Ego's name is inspired by her beauty but equally informs her essence and shapes her identity. The authors show that naming (and un-naming) is one of the models of socialisation that defines the identities of characters (Rani, 2020:57). However, Beatrice, the 'New Woman' breaks this chain of the male monopoly of wealth and agency in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988).

Using the characters in these literary texts as exemplars of ideal or deviant gender attributes, literary critics have established links between patriarchy, gender roles and gender identities using both Western and indigenous models. These models are the Western feminist, African-American and African feminist models. The Western feminist model of analysis has undergone epistemic changes since its inception in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, despite the varied timeframe, the Western model remains driven by the quest for gender equality and social cohesion. Judith Butler, Toni Morrison and bell hooks are Western and Black feminists who promote the notions of performativity, 'precarity' and intersectionality in their works. The term

‘gender precarity’ denotes the experiences of the members of society whose orientations fall within the gender spectrum. Butler (1990) situates the concepts of gender identity and social relations within the ideologies of performativity and ‘precarity’. According to Butler (1990), gender assignment is a tool of social constraint and gender, a social construct that is “manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylisation of the body.” In heterosexual societies, these acts inform people’s actions, motives and attitudes. Performativity represents a learnt act that defines the heterosexual normative principles of individual identity, that is, the totality of stylised actions:

It is a compulsory repetition of prior and *subjectivating* ones, ones which cannot be thrown off at will, but which work, animate and constrain the gendered subject and which are also the resources from which resistance, subversion and displacement are to be forged (Butler, 1993:22).

Based on normative principles, these learnt acts lead to the marginalisation and exclusion of some members. Thus, through the internalisation of these acts, social members represent, communicate and constitute actions that define identities. Butler foregrounds her argument against the existentialist proposition that a woman is not born but made (de Beauvoir, 1953) and as such, human activities are forged by society. While Butler (1990) views the impact of these prescriptions, that is marginalisation and exclusion with the Western lens, Morrison (2017) and hooks (2015) view these from different perspectives through African-American lenses. Morrison (2017) and hooks (2015) use African-American lenses because they replicate the experiences of a group of people, Africans, who through slavery have become decentred partakers of their narratives. hooks (2013:1) views social constructs as a component of the “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy.” According to hooks (2013:1), the imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy represents:

A political-social system that insists that men are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak ... and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. When my older brother and I were born ... patriarchy determined how we would each be regarded by our parents ... both believed in patriarchy.

hooks (2013) aptly argues that white patriarchy is a social disease that legitimises the notion that men are inherently superior to women, children and any member that is deemed to be inferior. Thus, like other social constructs, patriarchy constricts the capabilities of social beings and enforces the displacement of values. Western feminist opines that gender as a social construct stipulates the roles and activities of men and women based on their reproductive assignments as mothers or fathers. On the other hand, Morrison (2017) situates her arguments about human relationships and identities within the ethos of slavery. The ethos defined the hierarchical boundaries of interaction between the slave owners and the slaves. For instance, these slaves were considered as chattels, hence they had no rights and could not get married legally. The rights of ownership also meant that slaves could be traded at any time.

It is also imperative to state that these lenses challenge the notions of Western universalism which generalise human experience. As a Black feminist author, Morrison replicates these experiences in her novels. She situates her characters within a society that prohibits the formation of gender identities and ideal family units (that includes the father, mother and child or children) while focusing on the experiences of the marginalised Black woman who plays pivotal roles in instilling cultural and social values in their children. In cognisance of Morrison's (2017) arguments, hooks (2015) challenges the notion of Western feminist notion of universalism. hooks (2015) asserts that Western feminists exclude from their mental reservoir, the collective consciousness of Blacks and Coloureds. Although these concepts seem separate, they are complementary in their approach to gender representations in African narratives. Set against the backdrop of the notion of African ingenuity, the critics of African descent attempt to situate the challenges of social relations within their locale. Thus, while African Americans and Coloureds situate their experiences within the oppressive cycle of slavery, native Africans position their experiences within the cycle of colonialism.

During the colonial era in sub-Saharan Africa, the colonial masters strove to subvert cultural values and social norms through an indirect, non-settler method that resulted in the creation of the subaltern group within the Third space (Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 2015). The Third space is that which is away from the centre. Thus, for an African in the colonial era, the Third space represented a place of non-existence and was occupied by a group of subaltern men and women who had lost their voices and identities. However, the Third space in postcolonial times is now occupied by those who were once oppressed but who now strive to reclaim their lost identities.

This is evident in Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie's narratives as these writers locate their characters and narratives within the discourse of their locale in an attempt to situate and empower the marginal voices within the Third space, as identified by Bhabha and Spivak. Hence, within any society, some agents ensure that social actors conform to the prescribed societal injunctions about the patterns of social activities. These agents operate within family units and among peers and generally exist within the social structures - culture, religion, education and economy. Set against the backdrop of these definitions, thus a gendered society refers to one that operates the politics of social inequality.

In postcolonial literature, social inequalities are focalised through the politics of epidermalisation, orientalism, ambivalence and alterity. On the issues of epidermalisation, Fanon (1967) argues that concepts of subjugation, oppression and exploitation are set against the backdrop of colour binary where human values were appropriated based on skin colour. Fanon (1967:10) further argues that the natives exist in "a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born." Ideas such as these appropriate the blackness of the skin with nothingness, a focal idea in Conrad (1899) where he refers to the natives who:

Walked erect and slow, balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads ... black rags wound round their loins, and the short ends behind wagged to and fro like tails ... the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope ... they passed ... with that complete, deathlike indifference of unhappy savages (Conrad, 1899:19).

Said (1978), on the other hand, focalises appropriation through the oriental and occidental experiences. The orient is placed adjacent to the occident, an act which precipitates the notions of 'us' and 'them'; 'them' being the other. During the colonial era, the Eurocentric notion of subjugation played out through the subversion of indigenous cultural norms and the eventual acculturation of the natives. Acculturation occurs in a hierarchal, normative and patriarchal social system where the colonised constitutes a refinement in the ideology of nativity (Fanon, 1963). As such, based on the social binary principle of 'us' and 'them', the colonial process encapsulates all forms of subjugation, displacement and domination of the natives in their homestead. Fanon (1963) describes the colonial system as an invasive and violent social system that strips human beings of their individuality. Here, the "promising

adolescents ... are branded ... with the principles of Western culture” (Fanon, 1963:6). Thus, in the process of rebranding, the colonised are reduced to the:

Level of superior monkeys in order to justify the settler’s treatment of them as beasts of burden. Violence in the colonies does not only have for its aim the keeping of the enslaved ... at arm’s length; it seeks to dehumanise them; everything will be done to wipe out their traditions, to substitute our language for theirs and to destroy their culture without giving us ours (Fanon, 1963:14).

This occurs through the process of marginalisation. The colonised are also discouraged from carrying out their social duties, and this includes the worship of deities, an act that further marginalises the natives. By creating the marginal space, the coloniser ensures that the principles of dominance prevail. Using Tajfel and Turner’s social categorisation lens (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), marginalisation prompts the in-group and out-group categorisation paradigm of the coloniser. This form of categorisation is dependent on negative social perceptions such as the colour of the skin, the means of communication and the process of socialisation. The process of socialisation is an epistemic one through which the coloniser entrenches patriarchy in the colonised spaces. This process led to the creation of the third space, one which is outside the centre and somewhere on the margin (Said, 1978). These marginal spaces accommodate the other; the African man and woman have been displaced through cultural subversion and in postcolonial times are still subjects to the former coloniser through the continued imperialist paradigms.

Thus, the colonial ideology thrives through the deprivation of social identity and the economic exploitation of the colonised. Loss occurs through language and religious subversion and wa Thiong'o (1981) describes this as a process of mental enslavement. This is because the cultural values of the colonised Africans are projected as inferior and ‘dark’. This is evident in Achebe’s *Things fall apart* (1958) when he voices the intent of the coloniser who speaks through the white missionary:

All the gods you have named are not gods at all. They are gods of deceit who tell you to kill your fellows and destroy innocent children. There is only one true God and He has the earth, the sky and all of us (Achebe, 1958:47).

Bhabha (1994) asserts that through the process of ‘othering’, the *modus operandi* of the coloniser becomes entrenched in the master-servant relation where the ‘other’ becomes the displaced native. Displacement leads to (re)assignment, renaming and relocation to the space “outside the main body” (hooks, 1984:9), that is, a place that is away from the centre. However, in a bid to reclaim African identity, Afrocentric critics propose an engagement of various channels of decolonisation in the literary scene. It is imperative to state that Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie do not paint idyllic pictures of the traditional era, as the social activities represented are products of conflict and change and are shaped by social norms (Achebe, 1977). For instance, within the traditional Igbo socio-political system, social relations and human identities were defined by the caste system which recognises the freeborn and slaves (Mezie Okoye & Asike, 2019). The slaves are the *osus*, those who are alienated from social cycles because of their lineage. An *osu* is ostracised because he belongs to the lineage of slaves, those who are sacrificed to the gods of their owners:

Set apart - a taboo forever and his children after him. He could neither marry nor be married by the freeborn, and they in turn could not shelter under his roof. He would not take any of the four titles of the clan, and when he died, he was buried by his kind in the Evil Forest (Achebe, 1958:51).

For the native Africans, the experiences within the Third space are diverse. This diversity prompts the existence of diverse social experiences, an act that initiates the projection of divergent perspectives about the impact of norms on social experiences. The different variants of African feminisms are snail-sense feminism, motherism, negro-feminism and African womanism (Garuba, 2021; Nkealah, 2016; Oyekan, 2014). Each of the African feminisms contextualises the African experience with a different lens. However, the researcher through the lenses of motherism, stiwanism and African womanism focuses on the concepts of nature and nurture and how each affects social relations and the activities of members in particular social spheres. The researcher also engages the ideologies of the African womanist theorist who indigenises what she perceives to be the challenges of human interaction in her indigenous society.

Of interest to this study is the African womanist perspective propounded by Ogunyemi (1985). She proposes a framework that takes into cognisance her locale and situates the lived experiences of men and women within the confines of the identified area. She argues that the

African subaltern group should be situated within the liminal space that Bhabha (1994) refers to as the Third space. Within the Third space, the natives become a group of hybrids who do not only have a voice but are also empowered to challenge the erstwhile social norms that relegated them. Ogunyemi (2017) asserts that the postcolonial realities of the African womanist are predicated on Bhabha's (1994) argument of the transmutative features of cultural values and the social system and Spivak's concept of 'othering' (2015). 'Othering' here refers to the subversive practice and processes that the coloniser adopts while projecting negative views about the colonised. Using Bhabha's lens, the African feminist situates the experiences of the "been-to" group of people like Adaku in *The joys of motherhood* (1979), Beatrice in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) and Ifemelu in *Americanah* (2013) accordingly. Ogunyemi (1996:216) subscribes to the notion of the existence of Bhabha's Third space for it is within this space that the woman hybrid 'subaltern' finds her voice, which she describes as the Four Cs: "Collaboration, Conciliation, Cooperation and Complementarity". The adoption of these principles ensures tolerance and peaceful co-existence regardless of gender, ethnic or racial affiliations. The selected African authors also steer clear of the challenges faced by the transgender, queer and non-binary social members in the selected works by situating the experiences of their characters within the social gender binary classifications as men and women. From the foregoing review, it can be established that critical literary debates on patriarchy and gender are diverse and robust. This research proposes to fill the current gap in the study of gender constructs and social relations in literary texts without focusing on the rigid gender divisions prescribed by Western feminists but by interrogating the intersectionality of these constructs such that we glean the feasibility of the four Cs in re-imagining African womanism.

### **Statement of the problem**

This research examines and interrogates the influence of social norms on human relations to locate how Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie depict the dynamic impact of social constructs on members of the Igbo society. These norms impose regimented codes of conduct that shape the cognitive, emotional and behavioural matrixes of human interaction (Okafor, 2020). Amadiume (1987) asserts that contemporary social and gender norms are products of colonial precepts. Thus, by situating the experiences of the characters within the precepts of the African womanist theory, the study addresses and quizzes patriarchy and the impact exerted by these social norms on governmentality and the characters in the selected texts.

## **Research questions**

The research questions are:

1. How is patriarchy portrayed in the selected works of Buchi Emecheta, Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie?
2. How do the socialisation processes shape the identities of the characters in the selected works of Buchi Emecheta, Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie?
3. In what ways do the selected works of Buchi Emecheta, Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie articulate how gender constructions are in a state of constant flux within Igbo society across time to address social prejudices, injustices and marginalisation?

## **Research aims**

The aims are designed to:

1. Assess the portrayal of patriarchy in the selected works of Buchi Emecheta, Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie;
2. Examine the influence of the socialisation processes on the identities of the characters in the selected works of Buchi Emecheta, Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie;
3. Evaluate the ways in which Buchi Emecheta, Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's texts articulate how gender constructions are in a state of constant flux within Igbo society across time.

## **Thesis statement**

This thesis situates Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie's views about gender, human sexuality and voice within the contemporary African womanist representations in Igbo societies. The study is based on the hypothesis that gender identity is a social construct that determines the patterns of interaction among Igbo people. The African womanist posits that in traditional Igbo society, social interaction was primarily complementary. However, colonial incursion and colonial ideologies created a shift in the complementarity of gender relations within Igbo society and

African culture as a whole. It is this shift and re-imagining of gender constructs within the Igbo society as re-presented in Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie's works that the researcher seeks to explore. The study aims to interrogate the influence of social norms on human relations to locate how Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie depict the dynamic impact of social constructs on members of the Igbo societies. The researcher argues that African writers present gender as a defining social construct that determines human action, motive and traits. Thus, it is imperative to explore the re-presentation of the notion that gender is learnt through the socialisation processes within family units in the selected texts.

### **Theoretical framework**

Various Afrocentric theories have emerged over the years as tools for understanding and examining the interplay of social norms and social constructs in African societies. However, the African womanist theory has been selected for this study. This is because the African womanist theory appropriates and contextualises the social experiences of Africans and in the process, unpacks the various notions that act as social frameworks. The African womanist theory propounded by Ogunyemi refutes the universalist propositions of the Western feminists who marginalise the "specific problems of African women" (Ogunyemi & Muthoni, 2000:710) such as in-law problems, poverty, illiteracy and intimate partner violence. As such, this study uses the African womanist theoretical approach as the main frame of analysis. According to Ogunyemi (1985:72), African womanism, one of the variants of African feminism, allows the African womanist to celebrate:

Black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womandom. It concerns itself as much with black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates blacks. Its ideal is for black unity where every black person has a modicum of power and so can be a brother or a sister or a father or a mother to the other. This philosophy has a mandalic core; its aim is the dynamism of wholeness and self-healing that one sees in the positive, integrative ending of womanist novels (Ogunyemi, 1985:72).

In the selected narratives, Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie portray female protagonists who reconstruct their identities and become firmly rooted in the Nigerian/Igbo space. However, like many reactionary theories, African womanism is not a holistic theory devoid of weaknesses. It is in this light that the researcher uses an integrated theoretical approach by creating a

conceptual framework that draws strengths from various specific ideologies on gender and culture to complement the African womanist theory. Ogunyemi's African womanist theoretical framework captures the notions of social relations and social constructs in contemporary times and situates the activities of the African woman and novelist within the paradigms of this framework and its accompanying ideology. She describes the characterisation techniques, the underlying philosophies and the thematic concerns of the African writer, and she enjoins the African womanist writer to focus on the impact of "hunger, poverty or backwardness" (Ogunyemi, 1985:67) while creating characters whose experiences are relatable to the intended audience.

The African womanist ideology provides a purview to study the social constructions of gender and gender identity within Africa through the postcolonial and social constructivist lens (Ogunyemi, 1996). Like Amadiume (1987), Ogunyemi asserts that colonialism is the source of gendered injustices that the characters in the selected novels reject and on the other, prompts the creation of mutated characters who occupy the Third space. The 'Third space' and 'character mutation' are concepts that Bhabha proposes in his theory of hybridity. Here, Bhabha (1994:38) asserts that the:

The productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory [...] may open the way to conceptualising an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity.

This is linked to the space that allows the offshoot of modern ideologies which encapsulates growth, development, agency and voice. These hybrid cultural values define the basis of Ogunyemi's social constructivist notion of the African wo/man palava. The root words of the term palava are the Portuguese and English words palavar and palaver. The English translation is "a long parley between different levels of culture and sophistication" (Ogunyemi, 1996:93). Set against this background, the theoretical framework offers an indigenous purview with which to analyse the impact of social norms on gender relations in African societies. In the context of this research, various forms of palava are embedded within. Thus, the African womanist theoretical framework provides the literary template to analyse the impact of these social norms on the roles and identities of the characters in the selected texts. This study

recognises binaries of men and women in societies. However, these have to be re-imagined from an African womanist perspective that distracts traditional generalisations.

## **Research method**

Researchers within academic circles engage in different research approaches while seeking answers to the research questions. It is imperative to state that this study is interpretative, thus the selected literary texts are subjected to critical readings. The interpretations of these texts are situated within the paradigm of the psychoanalytic perspectives that opine that social conditions such as norms and values shape human activities, motives and traits. As such, this research adopts a qualitative approach by using the theoretical framework as a lens for analysing and critically evaluating the concepts under study. Creswell (2014:83) posits that data collection and analysis enable the researcher to explicate the core “pressing issues and concerns, such as the influence of culture on psychological development and its role in psychological interventions”. These pressing issues include the roles that social norms and cultural values play in defining human consciousness, identity, activities, experience and existence. For this research, the primary sources of data are the three selected postcolonial literary texts; Emecheta’s *The joys of motherhood* (1979), Achebe’s *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) and Adichie’s *Americanah* (2013). The theoretical conceptual framework underpinning this study is African Womanism. Also, information on social relations is garnered from secondary sources that centre on gender, identity and social interaction in African societies, particularly among the Igbo people of the southeastern part of Nigeria. As such, the critical analyses of the selected novels are subject to the African womanist theoretical lens with the intent to show how each author replicates the lived experiences of their people. The databases consulted for this exercise are academia, google scholar, JStor, Refseek and ResearchGate.

## **Chapter division**

Chapter One : The African womanist ethics

Chapter Two : Understanding the dynamics of gender through the lenses of selected African theorists

Chapter Three : The plight of the Igbo Woman in *The joys of motherhood*

Chapter Four : Beatrice - Voice of the voiceless in *Anthills of the savannah*

Chapter Five : Vision of a new world in *Americanah*

Chapter Six : Recalibrating African womanist ethics in *The joys of motherhood, Anthills of the savannah* and *Americanah*

## **Conclusion**

This study contributes to African literary scholarship in various ways. Firstly, the study draws on the need to adopt an indigenous lens with which to interpret the sociological concepts that shape the lived experiences of Africans, for how are African novelists expected to react when they realise “that Shakespeare’s illustrious sisters belong to the second sex, a situation that has turned them into impotent eunuchs without rooms of their own” (Ogunyemi, 1985:63). In lieu of this, this study is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is the introduction. Here, the researcher discusses the key concepts that inform the patterns of social interaction in African societies. The key concepts herein referred to are gender identity, gender roles, domination and subjugation. The researcher develops the conceptual and theoretical framework that builds on the propositions of postcolonial critics on the transposition of social norms. In the first chapter, the researcher also outlines the aims of the study, research problem and methodology. This background serves as the backdrop for the critical analysis of the selected texts in subsequent chapters.

The Second Chapter is a literature review of relevant studies. The third chapter deals with the actions of Emecheta’s women in the traditional Ibo and Lagos, a place where “any fool can be rich” (Emecheta, 1979:35). Through the portrayal of the characters, particularly Nnu Ego, the female protagonist, Emecheta explores the impact of social norms on human relations. Emecheta contends that social norms determine lived experiences, and these lived experiences are replicated through the socialisation patterns that determine the institution of marriage and family life. In essence, Chapter Three analyses the role that culture plays in moulding social perceptions and the impact on gender identity.

In Chapter Four, the researcher focuses on the concept of voice and agency and the relationship between gender identity and gender roles in Achebe’s *Anthills of the savannah* (1988). By building on the hierarchal structure of African societies, Achebe presents a political piece that exposes the ills of imperialism, one of which is the systematic subjugation of women. To drive home this point, Achebe creates a well-rounded, fully developed female character, Beatrice

Nwanyibuife Okoh, who re-appropriates voice and agency from the voiceless subaltern in her society. In Chapter Five, the study focuses on Adichie's vision of a new world. Through the portrayal of her characters. Adichie contends that human experiences and identities are products of fluid social norms that change people's ideas of identity and interaction patterns of socialisation. As such, as an African author, Adichie sets in motion the notion that there are no absolute truths or views about humans as the Western critics propose. The fluid social experience is reflected in the diasporic community in Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). As a social group, Africans in the diaspora and those in the native lands do not only share the same ancestry, but they also experience "past and present subjugation ... along with present-day ... control exercised over them" (Ogunyemi, 1985:64). The past and present forms of subjugation are underpinned by cultural and social subversion, inferior and superior group categorisation. By situating the other within the social space, Adichie focalises African perspectives about the totality of lived experiences through movement, and she generates new meanings to the concept of identity and interaction within and outside Igbo society.

Chapter Six is the conclusion, summary of the research findings and the articulation of new orientations in the reading and critique of Igbo sociocultural practices.

## **Chapter Two: Understanding the dynamics of gender through the lenses of selected African theorists**

### **Introduction**

This study aims to show how Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie reflect, refract and replicate the lived experiences of Igbo women in contemporary social units through the portrayal of female protagonists. Of all the social units that there are, the arguments in Chapter one show how the family plays an integral part in enforcing the norms and values of the social units where the female protagonists are located. The characters referred to are Nnu Ego in *The joys* (1979), Beatrice in *Anthills* (1988) and Ifemelu in *Americanah* (2013). To back up the arguments that shape the discursive contours in subsequent chapters, the researcher also introduced the philosophical voices of reactionary philosophers, some of whom are Ogunyemi, Said, Bhabha, and Spivak. While Said, Bhabha and Spivak are described as the members of the trinity in the postcolonial space, this study argues that it is Ogunyemi who provides the indigenous lens which authenticates these perspectives and situates them within the Igbo habitus. Furthermore, the researcher also introduced the voices of Western and Afrocentric feminists like hooks, Butler and even Morrison who explicate how the actions, traits and motives of the black-skinned woman are informed by experiences such as slavery, colonialism and imperialism.

Studies show that with colonialism came a change in the pattern of thinking of the colonised. One such change is the “loss of political and religious power by women” (Ezeigbo, 1990:149). In short, for the colonised African woman in Africa, the colonial ideology reinforced the principles of male superiority and female inferiority. However, with independence, African women embodied in Nnu Ego in *The joys* (1979), Beatrice in *Anthills* (1988) and Ifemelu in *Americanah* (2013) evolve and are empowered to challenge the social agents whose role is to ensure that they retain their position as the subaltern oppressed social members. By zooming in on the process of their ‘becoming’, the researcher introduces the view that *The joys* (1979), *Anthills* (1988) and *Americanah* (2013) are coming-of-age novels or African *bildungsroman* that pay particular attention to the formation of an empowered Igbo woman. As such, gender functions as a dynamic construct that is shaped by peculiar experiences. In this chapter, the researcher explores the relevant literature that provides a review of how the gendered Igbo woman has evolved into a being with voice and agency.

To understand how the researcher interprets the influence of patriarchy on socialisation in Emecheta's *The joys* (1979), Achebe's *Anthills* (1988) and Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), this chapter focuses on the scholarly materials produced by the foremost female novelists like Flora Nwapa and Mariama Bâ and juxtaposes this with Achebe's oeuvre. The aim of which is to show how these novelists perceive gender and patriarchy in the African space. By juxtaposing the characters of the protagonists in these narratives, the researcher focuses on how to achieve the aim of this study, which is to show how these novelists perceive gender and patriarchy in the African space. As such, the researcher considers this an academically vibrant choice as it allows the researcher to foreground the arguments in subsequent chapters where the researcher unpacks the changing gender constructs in postcolonial times.

### **(West) African feminism with the big *f***

Feminism is a social concept that advocates for gender equality in the social spheres of social life. The origin of feminism dates back to the earliest times when women advocated for voting rights. Currently, there are four waves of feminism and these are the first wave (1830-1920), the second wave (the 1960s), the third wave (the 1990s) and the fourth wave (1990s and beyond). In each of these waves, feminists fought for the equality of the sexes. In short, the ideologies propounded by the Western feminist depend on the wave to which she belongs. Studies show that an African feminist is reluctant to accept the label and radical ideology of Western feminists. Some of these include their radical views about men and sexual relations, and their view that human experience is heterogenous therefore universal (Ogunyemi,1985). In looking at human experience, the Western feminist alienates the African woman primarily because of racial differences and colonialism. Azodo (1997:201) further reiterates this point through the contestation:

A look at the situation in Africa, in the past and in the present shows that a univocal theory of global feminism does not address the special conditions in which African women find themselves. Rigid traditions discriminate against women, who are seen as perpetual children and second-class citizens.

This distinction is evident in the fact that the African woman neither hates men nor marriage but rather, fights for justice for all. Therefore, unlike the Western feminist, the (West) African feminist contends that because of the vastness and diversity of the continent, Africans need to particularise their social issues and address their problems in like manner hence the need for

African feminism. A more recent study supports this view through defining the role of the African feminist as one who “resists cultural imperialism by which the West undermines the philosophical ideologies and belief systems of African peoples” (Nkealah, 2016:62). Cultural imperialism occurs through the process of assimilation and assimilation leads to the loss of identity. The African feminist thus encourages the creation of indigenous frames and models with which to understand and analyse peculiar social problems which include illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, child marriage, child mortality and in-law problems and woman-to-woman oppression. These problems form the thematic concerns in African literary works, particularly the literary works that focus on the lived experiences of the African woman.

In reflecting, refracting and replicating the lived experiences of the African woman, the (West) African feminist takes into consideration the issues of interaction within and outside the private family sphere. As such, just as there are various experiences, there are also varying contestations about how these experiences should be reflected and analysed. First on the list of (West) African feminists whose voices drive this discourse as it concerns this research are Flora Nwapa and Mariama Bâ. These are also prominent female novelists who through the portrayal of their female protagonists show how social members in male-dominated societies perpetuate forms of social injustices on women primarily because of their gender identity. However, of the listed feminists, this analysis starts with Nwapa who has been described as the mother of modern African literature and the first Igbo feminist. As the progenitor of feminism, with a big ‘f’ (emphasis mine), Nwapa’s ideology “is rooted in resistance, a protest against the one-dimensional images of Nigerian women either as wives, mothers, *femmes fatales* or rebel girls.” This is evident in her characterisation because Nwapa whom Ohale (2010:3) describes as “Africa’s first female novelist [who] opened a new chapter by making women the central characters in her novels” allows her characters to tell her story. Therefore, the arguments in this section begin with an analysis of Efurū’s lived experiences in *Efurū* (1966). The aim is to show how Nwapa develops the theoretical framework of her strand of feminism.

### **Contextual analysis of Nwapa’s *Efurū* and Bâ’s *So long a letter***

Published eight years after the publication of Achebe’s *TFA* (1958), *Efurū* (1966) revolves around Efurū, the beautiful daughter of Nwashike Ogene. To her credit, Nwapa published other credible narratives, some of which are *Idu* (1967), *One is enough* (1981) and *Women are different* (1986). In each of her narratives, Nwapa not only re-constructs the identities of her female protagonists, but also develops her themes on marriage, family life, women

empowerment and autonomy. Today, she continues to garner accolades for her “sustained efforts...to include the African woman’s perspective in African literature” (Kalu, 2022: 17). This is evident in the portrayal of the female protagonist in *Efuru* who permits her to write her story in *Efuru*. First published in 1966 and set in the south-eastern part of Nigeria, *Efuru* (1966) revolves around Efuru and the different phases of her life, as a runaway daughter who elopes to meet her lover, Azidua - the lazy farmer, then as a circumcised wife and mother who loses her only child, Ogonim, a caring daughter-in-law and a successful and enterprising businesswoman. Efuru is the delectable and beautiful daughter of Nwashike Ogene. Nwashike is described as “the mighty man of valour...who single-handedly fought the Aros...and what is more, no man has ever seen his back on the ground” (Nwapa, 1966:7). Here, Nwapa praises the qualities of a titled, strong and wealthy chief. This is similar to Achebe’s portrayal of the male protagonist, Okonkwo in *TFA* (1958). However, unlike in *TFA* (1958) where the women are repressed and silent, Efuru is beautiful, determined, hardworking and vocal.

Efuru’s first rebellious act is her resolve to get married to a man of her choice, Azidua. To achieve her desire, Efuru elopes from her father's compound to meet her lover, a man who cannot even afford to pay her bride price. Then, she resolves to start a trading business rather than work on the farm. The lazy Azidua also abandons farming and joins his wife in her burgeoning trading business. As a young bride, Efuru decides to take the ‘bath.’ Among the Igbo people of the south-eastern part of Nigeria, the ‘bath’ is an integral rite of passage that must be performed on unmarried girls. According to Ossai, Azidua’s mother and Efuru’s mother-in-law, “a young woman must have her bath before she has a baby...it is better that way, it is safer really” (Nwapa, 1966:6). Culture prescribes that the bathing ceremony should be performed only after the father and husband have been informed. However, Efuru subverts cultural practices again by only informing her husband. Soon after her traditional ‘bath’, Efuru conceives and gives birth to a baby girl, Ogonim, who later dies. Azidua, like his father, also abandons both his wife and his mother. Efuru returns to her father’s house and thereafter meets Gilbert Eneberi, who woos her and later marries her according to custom. As Eneberi’s wife, she fails to conceive. She plays her part as a dotting wife and she ensures that Eneberi marries the troublesome Nkoyeni as his second wife. Despite her commitment to her husband, Eneberi, Efuru is accused of adultery. This causes her to move back to her late father’s compound where she continues to worship Uhamiri. By moving back to her father’s compound after his death, Nwapa propagates an African feminist ideology that women can reconstruct their identities when they disrupt the patriarchal structures that impede them. The first structure is the marriage

ceremony which according to Walby (1986) is the pillar that supports the patriarchal frames, and the second is the social expectation that comes with producing male heirs. It is this backdrop against which Nwapa's strand of feminism stands.

In short, this study concurs with the assertion that Nwapa responds to male authors who in their bid to reclaim Africa's lost glory published fictional narratives such as *TFA* (1958) and *The concubine* (1966), narratives which present "an unbalanced picture of African rural life, ignoring the important roles that women have played and continue to play in African society" (Ohale, 2010:1). To reclaim the unacknowledged glory of the African woman, Nwapa emphasises that an economically beneficial relationship exists between the woman of the lake, Uhamiri, her husband, Okita, with whom she shares a complementary relationship. One is not above the other, but rather, "both governed different domains and nearly always quarrelled" (Nwapa, 1966:255). In short, Uhamiri, the beautiful goddess embodies power, beauty and accomplishments and offers her ardent worshippers the chance to manifest her wholesomeness in the physical realm. This view is foregrounded against the proposition that:

The undisputed nature of the lake as part of every person's economic resource is further magnified by the community's assertion of the existence, in the lake of Uhamiri, the woman of the lake who further enables access to that resource as a path to economic freedom for women without biological children...Nwapa's intertextual engagement of *TFA* makes it possible to see Efurū as having Uhamiri's authorisation to the visible and female access to personal wealth and success (Kalu, 2022:18).

Placing Nwapa's Uhamiri in *Efurū* (1966) side by side with Achebe's *agadi nwayi* (whose title is written in small letters) in *TFA* (1958), shows how the patriarchal male constructs view women, particularly the one who tries to make an impact on her immediate society. However, Nwapa remains an advocate who pushes for the recognition of women's autonomy in Igbo society. In the analysis of the two texts made above, it is prudent to deduce that the lived experiences of the characters are defined and determined by patriarchal dictates. The impact of these norms manifests in the socio-cultural activities of the people, one of which is the marriage ceremony. In *Efurū* (1966), Nwapa mentions the bathing rite which precedes the marriage ceremony, however, this is not a predominant theme in the primary texts selected for this study. Of importance, however, is the issue of marriage and the woman's role in her social unit. Among the Igbo people of the south-eastern part of Nigeria, the marriage ceremony is an important rite that must be performed before a man and a woman can start a family. Before a

union is recognised, the groom must pay an agreed amount in cash to the father of the bride and in his absence, the oldest man in the bride's family. The marriage ceremony culminates in the payment of the bride price. Of the various types of marriages that there are, polygyny is an accepted form in Igbo society. Polygyny is a polygamous relationship where the man is married to two or more wives. Recent studies show that:

Polygamous women are genuinely at risk of experiencing psychological and emotional distress. For example, one study found that women in polygamous marriages are at a higher risk of low self-esteem and depression...on a bright side, polygamy also demonstrated positive impacts. Childless wives are willing to have legal and valid polygamous marriages...to obtain offspring and descendants for their husbands (Bahari, Norhayati, Hazlina, Aiman and Arif, 2021:2).

In the quotation above, Bahari *et al.* (2021) fail to take into cognisance the idea that woman is conditioned by society to be willing to accept a second wife else she is labelled "a bad woman who wants her husband to herself" (Nwapa, 1966:62). Apart from Nwapa (1966) another female novelist who explores the theme of polygamy is Mariama Bâ. For this analysis, I focus on the epistolary novel, *So long a letter* and Bâ's portrayal of how a woman perceives polygamy and manages the psychological impact of polygamy on women.

For the social critic, in this instance, the feminist of African descent, the bride price increases the pressure on the bride to fulfil her role as the mother of many children, preferably sons. Stratton (1994) argues that the payment and collection of the bride price results in the enslavement of the bride. However, Uwasomba (2007:25) counters this argument claiming that among the Igbo people of the south-eastern part of Nigeria, the "man is made to pay substantially as a way of showing value of what he seeks." A deconstructive analysis of this argument shows that the bride (and the members of her age group who are conspicuously absent during the negotiation of the amount to be paid to the father of the bride or the eldest surviving male) is objectified and seen as an inanimate object, for why would Uwasomba (2007) refer to a hu (wo) man with 'what'. This argument further supports the proposition that:

The female in [male-authored] African fiction is a facile lacklustre human being, the quiet member of a household, content only to bear children, unfulfilled if she does not and handicapped if she bears only daughters (Ohale, 2010:1).

As such, the woman is pressured by society to bear many sons for her husband. A barren woman is regarded as a waste and a man will casually ask his barren wife “to move to a nearby hut” (Emecheta, 1979:29) before a new wife comes in. This shows that in Igbo society, marriage is a contract between families that is solidified by births. Another African female novelist and critic who speaks on how the male-dominated society constructs and constricts the woman is Mariama Bâ.

Mariama Bâ is a Senegalese feminist and the author of *So long a letter* (1981). Originally written in French and titled *Une si longue lettre*, Bâ's *So long a letter* is an epistolary novel which takes the form of a letter is an exchange between two best friends, Ramatoulaye -a widow and Aissatou- a divorcee. By engaging the readers through an epistolary form, Bâ allows her readers to gain psychological insights about the impact of polygamy, the injustices perpetuated against widows, the mistreatment of women and the need for female empowerment. Ramatoulaye recounts the unfair treatment that her husband, Modou Fall meted on her while he was alive. Modou and Ramatoulaye had been married for twenty-five years and had twelve children together. However, after twenty-five years, Modou decides to marry a second wife, Binetou, Ramatoulaye's daughter's friend. Modou makes the arrangement neither informing his wife nor his children. Ramatoulaye only found out about the marriage on the Sunday when the Imam brought home the young bride. They act as Modou's mouthpiece claiming that:

Modou...says it is fate that decides men and things: God intended him to have a second wife, there is nothing he can do about it. He praises you for the quarter of a century of marriage in which you gave him all the happiness a wife owes her husband. His family, especially myself, his elder brother, thank you. (Bâ, 1981:38).

Modou dies shortly after and despite not having a loving relationship towards the end of his life, however, Ramatoulaye is expected to cater to the needs of mourners and observe the widow rites. Aissatou, Ramatoulaye's best friend also disintegrated and ends in a divorce but Aissatou goes back to school and finishes her degree “which led to [your] appointment into the Senegalese Embassy in the United States. You make a very good living. You are developing in peace, as your letters tell me” (Bâ, 1981:32-33). This brief synopsis shows how Bâ explores the ills of patriarchy, polygamy and illiteracy in African spaces. However, Bâ like Nwapa also enables her female protagonist to evolve and in the process create a new space where she can develop as an autonomous being. To appreciate Nwapa and Bâ's

effort in redefining the place of the woman in her society, the next section is a brief contextual overview of *TFA* (1958). The aim is to show how male novelists compared to their female counterparts depict their female characters.

### **The gendered woman of Umuofia in Achebe's *Things fall apart***

The father of postcolonial African literature, Chinua Achebe published his first literary narrative *Things fall apart* in 1958. *TFA* (1958) has been described as a counter-narrative and response to Conrad's racist depiction of the native African in *Heart of darkness* (1902). Achebe re-writes the history of a people waiting to be weaned "from their horrid ways" (Conrad, 1902:15) by the coloniser. Das (2022:249) argues that Achebe with the publication of *TFA* (1958) reclaims the uncelebrated glory of the Igbo people by "providing a picture of indigenous culture and traditions from the point of view of an insider." This includes the cultural celebrations, values, beliefs and norms that inform the ways of life of these people, However, the African feminist notes that in a bid to reclaim the lost values, Achebe celebrates African masculinities and relegates the African woman. Achebe achieves this through the characterisation technique where he celebrates Okonkwo's achievements as "the greatest wrestler in the nine villages...a wealthy farmer [with] two barns full of yams [who] had just married his third wife. To crown it all, he had taken two titles" (Achebe, 1958:2). Okonkwo is a wealthy and fearless polygamist who rules:

[his]s household with a heavy hand...his wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children. Perhaps down in his heart, Okonkwo was not a cruel man. But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure...the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father...Okonkwo was ruled by one passion, to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was weakness" (Achebe, 1958:4).

The quotation above speaks on how maleness as a social construct is formed and this serves on a more primal level as to what informs gender identity in traditional social units. However, Achebe relegates the Igbo woman, portraying her as a silenced and invisible appendage in a polygamous space. This woman like Anasi, Nwakibie's first wife is "a middle-aged woman, tall and strongly built...there was authority in her bearing...she wore the anklet of her husband's titles, which the first wife alone could wear" (Achebe, 1958:6) who must always

honour her husband's call. Anasi only appears once in the narrative at her husband's request without uttering a sound.

There are other female characters like Anasi, nameless women like Okonkwo's mother and sisters and first wife, Nwoye's mother. For instance, despite being married to the lazy Unoka, Okonkwo's mother was not permitted to plant "yam, the king of crops...a man's crop" (Achebe, 1958:7). In short, these women are oppressed and victimised by men because of their gender identity. Achebe touches on this with his description of the relationship that exists between Okonkwo and the members of his immediate family. Besides beating an erring wife even during the Week of Peace, everyone is subjected to some kind of manual labour "during the planting season [as they] worked daily on his farms...he was a very strong man and he rarely felt fatigue but his wives and young children were not so strong and so they suffered" (Achebe, 1958:4). However, of all of Okonkwo's wives, it is Ekwefi who challenges patriarchy by absconding from her husband to live with Okonkwo as one of his wives at a time when he could not afford to pay her bride price. Perhaps, this is the reason why she "suffered a good deal in her life...she had borne ten children and [all] of them had died at infancy" (Achebe, 1958:24). The only one who survives is her 'ogbanje' daughter, Ezinma. A character analysis of *TFA* (1958) shows Achebe portraying Okonkwo as the epitome of the male archetype and his silent, ugly, incapacitated woman as a female archetype, thereby reinforcing the notion that an Igbo woman is a subalternally oppressed and marginalised (non) being.

## **Conclusion**

Going back to the aim of this expose', which is to show how Nwapa articulates her views about social norms, socialisation and the new woman and in essence, speak of Nwapa's feminism with the big *f*, I offered a brief synopsis of Achebe's *TFA* (1958) emphasising Achebe's central characters and his nameless, decentred women who remain silent through the course of the narrative. These women who are patriarchal products do not vocalise their thoughts nor do they speak about how patriarchy marginalises them. Nwapa creates a counter-narrative and in the process opens up channels for women to discuss and articulate their views about how the actions of "the agents of exploitation and repression" (Spivak,1985:68) inhibit them. By so doing, Nwapa accedes voice to Achebe's silenced female characters and recapitulates the experience of the woman in traditional Igbo society.

## **Chapter Three: The plight of the Igbo woman in *The joys of motherhood***

### **Introduction**

Buchi Emecheta recapitulates the lived experience of the traditional Igbo woman in *The joys of motherhood* (1979). This woman is displaced and silenced primarily because of her gender identity. As such, Chapter 3 uncovers how social norms and cultural beliefs informs the traditional Igbo woman's actions and motives. It is imperative to state that because of her gender identity, Buchi Emecheta experienced oppression because of her gender categorisation at birth. This genderised naming act was reinforced through her given native forename, Onyebuchi, which means 'one who is like God?' As with forenames, the name Onyebuchi reflects her parents' feelings of resignation at the birth of their girl-child. Emecheta also experienced gender oppression after her father's death as she, her brother and their mother became inherited chattels. Emecheta also experienced gender oppression in her marriage to her ex-husband. She also suffered various forms of abuse as a wife and later as a single black mother in a foreign land. In short, the trajectories of Emecheta's life enable her to artistically craft and trace the "woes of Igbo women due to repressive patriarchal norms that condemn them to the prescribed fate of subsistence and subjugation" (Umeh, 1998:150) into her fictitious narratives. Some of these narratives are *In the ditch* (1972), *Second-class citizen* (1975), *The bride price* (1976) and *The joys of motherhood* (1979).

### **Contextual analysis of *The joys of motherhood***

First published in 1979 and set in the colonial period, Emecheta in *The joys of motherhood* (1979) is centred on Nnu Ego, a female protagonist whose experience charts the course of this discourse. *The joys of motherhood* (1979) tells the tragic story of Nnu Ego. Nnu Ego whose name means "twenty cowries" (Emecheta, 1979:26) is the only daughter of Nwokocha Agbadi and his mistress, the impetuous and troublesome, Ona. Agbadi is "a very wealthy local chief [...] a great wrestler" (Emecheta, 1979:10) and a hunter of wild animals, including elephants, while Ona, whose name means 'gold', is a male daughter in Obi Umunna's household. Agbadi is particularly fond of Ona and treats her more like a wife than a lover. During one of his hunting expeditions, Agbadi is involved in an accident and is seriously injured by an elephant. It is interesting to note that this man who is married to seven wives is only nursed back to health by Ona, his mistress, because as Agbadi arrogantly puts it, his wives and slaves are "too much in love with me to see me in pains" (Emecheta, 1979:16). Soon afterwards, Agbadi's

first wife, Agunwa, the quiet and easy-going mother of Agbadi's grown sons dies. Having died as a "complete woman" (Emecheta, 1979:22), Agunwa is given a befitting burial which culminates with the final rite where the personal slave is buried with her mistress.

In Ibuza, a good slave accepts her lot and "jumps into the grave willingly" (Emecheta, 1979: 23). But in Agunwa's case, her beautiful personal slave kept begging for her life, much to the annoyance of the many men standing around. The slave girl's pleas fall on deaf ears and she is forcibly buried with her mistress. However, the slave girl reincarnates as Agbadi and Ona's daughter and is named Nnu Ego. Ona passes on a couple of years later and while on her death bed, Ona wishes that Agbadi will allow Nnu Ego to choose her path in life. Ona's burial is not talked about because she dies as a failed woman and mistress who did not produce a male heir. Among the people of Ibuza, failure and incompleteness are social constructs that are determined by several factors, some of which are celibacy, infertility/barrenness and the inability to produce male heirs either as a male daughter or as a wife. In Ona's case, failure is set by her status as a disrespectful concubine who moved in with her lover without her late father's consent and as a male daughter who did not produce the "wanted son" (Emecheta, 1979:27) in her father's house. As such, Ona's reward is a pitiful end and an unceremonious burial. Death is considered an acceptable rite of passage for those who die under normal circumstances at an acceptable age. The circumstances are defined by the age, gender and status of the dead individual. According to Nwokoha (2020:68):

Death features prominently among the other three traditional rites of passage (i.e. birth rite, puberty rite and adulthood rite. Age, [gender] and status of the deceased as well as the cause of the death are some indispensable conditions that determine the appropriate rite and rituals for the deceased.

Studies show that in Igbo society as well as in other African societies, dying from natural causes at a ripe old age is preferable. This is because death caused by strange illnesses is not celebrated. After all, such sicknesses are abominations "to the earth and so the victim could not be buried in her bowels" (Achebe, 1958:13). Hence, he is left to die in the evil forest. It is interesting to note that in Achebe's recollection of the death and funeral rites in *Things fall apart* (1958), there is no mention of dead or dying women. However, Emecheta addresses this in *The joys of motherhood* (1979) through the deaths and funeral rites of three female characters, Agunwa, Ona and Nnu Ego. In Agunwa's case, there is mention of how the funeral

rite of the late wife of a wealthy, accomplished chief is celebrated, while in the case of his mistress, a mistress with no son, there are no significant activities set aside to usher her to the great beyond. Thus, Emecheta's use of the concept of death further reinforces the secondary position of a woman in her social space.

Ona's death leaves a gap in Nnu Ego's life, and she is raised by her father, Agbadi, a patriarch who had inherited four of his wives and married three the traditional way. Agbadi is a patriarch and a polygamist raised in a society that permits to own women and their children. This is evident at the point when Agbadi asserts his authority on the day old Nnu Ego. According to him, "she is priceless [...] and she is mine" (Emecheta, 1979:26). This open declaration of ownership is set against the backdrop of the patriarchal ideology that institutionalises the principles of domination and subjugation over women. As such, Nnu Ego grows up as a patriarchal product who believes that "when one grows old one needs children to look after one" (Emecheta, 1979:38). Hence, she chooses to get married and bear sons who will ensure the continuity of their father's lineage. Agbadi's actions are reflective of how society oppresses women through the practice of polygamous marriage. In such situations, a man is permitted to have more than one wife:

[A]nd then neglect them for years, apart from seeing that they each received their one yam a day; he could bring his mistress to sleep with him right in his courtyard while his wives pined and bit their nails for a word from him (Emecheta, 1979:36).

The quotation above shows that in Emecheta's society, polygamy is one of the social tools with which men oppress, exploit and subjugate women. In the context of this study, polygamy refers to a situation where society permits a man to have sexual relationships with different women solely for procreation and self-assertion. The woman, on the other hand, is denied this right and any woman who dares to take this bold step is compared to a prostitute, one who "would [...] be socially snubbed" (Emecheta, 1979:171). However, regardless of the form of union that precedes the relationship, polygamous marriages are tantamount to enslavement. Based on this proposition, this study contends that polygamy in Igbo society is a social tool/mechanism that society uses to "facilitate the abuse, subjugation and oppression of women" (Nyanta, Ankah & Kwasi, 2017:10). In concurrence with this assertion, this study posits that the polygamous Igbo man cares less about his partner's feelings but rather cares about asserting himself as a man in his society.

Asides from Agbadi, other male characters act as heads of polygamous families in Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood* (1979). These men are Amatokwu and Nnaife. Amatokwu is Nnu Ego's first husband, the one who Agbadi chose for a daughter who had internalised the norm that "when one grows old, one needs children to look after one" (Emecheta, 1979:38). A couple of years after Nnu Ego reaches maturity (using the yardstick of tradition), Agbadi marries her off to Amatokwu, as an "unspoiled virgin" (Emecheta, 1979:31). Amatokwu's people return with full kegs of palm-wine to thank Agbadi for giving them "a bride who has not allowed herself to be tampered with" (Emecheta, 1979:31). An unspoiled virgin is a chaste and pure maiden who is treated with respect in her new home because it is believed that she will face no challenges bearing children for her husband. Thus, chastity and motherhood are the yardsticks with which an Igbo woman's respectability is defined. However, an Igbo maiden is not just an angel in her husband's house, she is also:

A source of pride to her family and was treated with respect and admiration, an incomplete bride (that is, a new bride found to have lost her virginity before marriage) suffered considerable approbation (Ogunjuyigbe & Adepoju, 2014:344).

As such, among the Igbo people of Ibuza, virginity, chastity and virtue are synonymous concepts that are used to describe a respectable maiden. To celebrate his daughter's chastity:

Agbadi and his lifelong friend allowed themselves to be really drunk. There is nothing that makes a man prouder than to hear that his daughter is virtuous. I don't like visiting families where the wedding kegs are half-filled telling everybody that the bride has allowed herself to be tampered with [...] when a woman is virtuous, it is easy for her to conceive (Emecheta, 1979:31).

The two excerpts above underscore the importance of an Igbo maiden preserving her virginity until marriage, as it becomes the moral conduit by which a maiden is assessed. On the other hand, great punishment is meted on the 'spoilt bride', as she is either made barren by the gods or has trouble conceiving. However, for the spoilt bride whose bride price is not paid, even when she conceives, she would die like Akunna, Emecheta's female protagonist in *The bride price* (1976), the girl who did not accept Okoboshi as her husband, who eloped with Chike Ofulue, the slave boy and who never survived "the birth of her first child" (Emecheta, 1976:85). Initially, the young couple, Nnu Ego and Amatokwu are happy. However, when it becomes obvious that Nnu Ego is barren, Amatokwu's countenance towards his wife changes, and he

marries a second wife because he has “to raise children for my line” (Emecheta, 1979:32). Amatokwu’s new wife conceives immediately. For Amatokwu, his new wife’s pregnancy is a confirmation of his manliness. Since Nnu Ego has failed to be a complete woman in Amatokwu’s household, she returns to her father’s compound dejected. In turn, Agbadi returns her bride price and this concludes a chapter in Nnu Ego’s life. Through Amatokwu’s re-marriage, Emecheta establishes the fact that marriage in Igbo society is not contracted based on love, rather, it is primarily driven by procreation.

On the other hand, Nnu Ego cannot imagine herself as a failure to her father and her society, hence, she strives “to marry and get [children] male children to express her womanhood to the full”. The basis of marriage among Africans implies the transfer of a woman’s fertility to that of the husband’s family group (Ngcobo, 1988:142). To live up to societal expectations, Nnu Ego agrees to re-marry. However, this time her father chooses a man, Nnaife Owulum, who works in the city of Lagos. Nnaife is not like the men of Ibuza who till the soil, plant yams and kill elephants, rather, Nnaife is a short, potbellied man with pale skin who “washes women’s underwear” (Emecheta, 1979:49). Nevertheless, it is the emasculated Nnaife that makes Nnu Ego experience *The joys of motherhood*, no matter how ironic this turns out to be. As Nnaife’s wife, Nnu Ego gives birth to nine children, but two die at birth, hence, she raises seven children, three boys and four girls. The names of Nnu Ego's sons are Oshiaju, which means “the bush has refused this” (Emecheta,1979:80), Adimabua, which means “now I am two” (Emecheta, 1979:112) and Nnamdio, which means “this is my father” (Emecheta, 1979:155). Her two sets of twin girls are Taiwo and Kehinde whose names mean first and second and Obiageli and Malachi whose names mean “she who has come to enjoy wealth” and “you do not know what tomorrow will bring” (Emecheta, 1979:186). However, it is Oshia, Adim and Nnamdio that validate Nnu Ego’s presence in Nnaife’s home as a ‘complete woman’.

As tradition prescribes, Nnaife inherits his late brother’s wives, Adankwo and Adaku and starts a polygamous family with four wives and many children. However, of the two inherited wives, it is the ambitious Adaku who relocates to Lagos with her daughter Dumbi. Adaku later gives birth to another girl who remains unnamed throughout the narrative. In Lagos, Nnaife, his wives and children live in abject poverty. However, to the traditional Ibuza person, Nnu Ego is regarded as a wealthy woman because of her sons. Driven by this thought, Nnu Ego works herself “to the bones” (Emecheta, 1979:186), as she strives to make ends meet and ensure that Oshia and Adim go to school. However, the girls, Taiwo and Kehinde, are not treated in like

manner. In fact, Nnu Ego constantly reminds them of their lower stations as girls, male appendages, whose duty it is to cater for the needs of their brothers, “so that they will be able to look after the family. When your husbands are nasty to you, they will defend you” (Emecheta, 1979:176-177). However, despite having three boys, Nnu Ego is depressed by the birth of her last twin girls, Obiageli and Malachi, whom Nnaife refuses to name and the death of her last child, an unnamed girl who dies at birth. It is at this point that she realises that:

Men [...] were interested in male babies to keep their names going. But did not a woman have to bear the woman-child who would later bear the sons? “God when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody’s appendage [...] After all, I was born alone, and I shall die alone. What have I gained from all this? Yes, I have many children, but what do I feed them on? On my life. I have to work myself to the bone to look after them, I have to give them my all and if I am lucky to die in peace, I even have to give them my soul they will worship my dead spirit to provide for them: it will be hailed as a good spirit so long as there are plenty of yams and children in the family, but if anything should go wrong [...] my dead spirit will be blamed. When will I be free?” (Emecheta, 1979:186).

The internal monologue technique allows Emecheta to venture into the African woman’s consciousness and explore her inner thoughts about her plight as a woman and as a mother. This consolidates the proposition that Nnu Ego experiences “the awaking of self to the inequities in Igbo cultures, such as son preference, polygamy, rigid sex roles and a glorification of motherhood which all render a woman powerless” (Bazin, 1985:155). As such, the mind serves as an escapist mechanism through which the character (Nnu Ego) analyses the impact of patriarchy on her personhood/personality/character. It is important to recognise that of Nnu Ego’s older twin girls, Kehinde “she who came second” (Emecheta, 1979:135) takes up the mettle of leading the young girls of her age group into the new age as new women. This is because Kehinde rebels and challenges patriarchy by rejecting her father’s choice of a husband who “would have paid a big bride price because she was brought up in Lagos” (Emecheta, 1979:215). Instead, Kehinde elopes to live with her Yoruba lover, Ladipo, the butcher’s son. This causes Nnaife to react aggressively, an action that leads to his arrest and imprisonment. However, it is not only Kehinde who challenges social norms and patriarchy. There is also Adaku, Nnu Ego’s co-wife, who gradually evolved into an independent woman. Adaku challenges patriarchy by moving out of Nnaife’s house and renting a place on Montgomery

Road where she takes charge of her life and defines her essence as a “dignified single woman” (Emecheta, 1979:170). Adaku does this in the hope of raising financially independent and educated girls who will grow up to become teachers.

Towards the end of her life, Nnu Ego moves back to Ibuza but stays in her father’s compound. This is not because she is an ‘incomplete’ woman but rather because she bore sons who never bought the white man’s gin for their father, hence, she is “branded a bad woman and had to go and live with her own people [...] she had expected this knowing full well that only good children belonged to their father” (Emecheta, 1979:223). However, Nnu Ego is satiated by the idea that “she had brought up her children when they started out with nothing and that those same children might rub shoulders one day with great men of Nigeria” (Emecheta, 1979:202). The children here are Oshia and Adim, her sons who had relocated to the United States and Canada to further their education. As such, Emecheta recognises the value of education and harps on this throughout the narrative. Unfortunately for Nnu Ego, these same ‘boys’ abandon her and it is her girls, Taiwo and Kehinde with the assistance of their husbands, Magnus and Ladipo, that care for Nnu Ego towards the end of her life. However, because of her social conditioning as a traditional woman who believes that she is a male appendage, she is heartbroken by the fact that her sons do not keep in constant touch and the pain turns her into a senile old woman who dies by the side of the road:

Thinking that she had arrived home, she died quietly there with no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to her [...] when her children heard of her sudden death, they all came home [...] she had the noisiest [...] second burial and a shrine made in her name so that her grandchildren could appeal to her should they be barren” (Emecheta, 1979:224).

However, Nnu Ego never grants prayers for children and in death, thus she is labelled a bad spirit. As such, Nnu Ego becomes the silenced other who finds her voice in her head and respites on the side of the road. In death, Nnu Ego transitions into the realm of the spirit. To those living, she becomes an agbadi nwanyi of sorts who is supposed to keep watch over her children at all times and bless them with children and wealth. However, Nnu Ego never grants the prayers for children and because of this, she is labelled a bad spirit even in death. For Nnu Ego, death comes twice. The first time, death manifests through loneliness and poverty. This sort of death is orchestrated by that which Balavatbai (2020:11) refers to as “colonial patriarchy

and capital politics”, ideologies that promote the marginalisation and oppression of women in the private family space and the public workspace. The oppressed women like Nnu Ego because of their impoverished states “have no money to buy food, let alone abadas in which to attend meetings and church” (Emecheta, 1979:185). In *Ibuza*, Nnu Ego dies a second and final time, as she is ostracised by Nnaife, the members of his family and even the sons whom she made sacrifices. As such, through marriage, unemployment, illiteracy and death, Nnu Ego becomes the silenced other who finds her voice in her head and respites on the side of the road.

Set against this backdrop, the study of Emecheta’s *The joys of motherhood* (1979) focuses on the lived experiences of a woman during the colonial period. To articulate her views, Emecheta concentrates on how society perceives the woman whose activities are influenced by patriarchal social norms that force women to “aspire for children or die” (Emecheta, 1979:187). Primarily, these norms which ascribe power, privilege and agency to men play out through the propositions about marriage, family life and gender roles. This is in concurrence with such assertion as that made by Ezeifeka and Ogbazi (2014:115) that “literature mirrors human authentic experiences through discourse [...] which functions as a medium of expression, of representing experiences, worldviews and enacting social relationships.” These social experiences include cultural practices such as child marriage, widowhood inheritance, illiteracy and unemployment, poverty and intimate partner violence that are enforced and endorsed by social norms.

Within the context of this study, marriage takes three forms, and these are child marriage, marriage between adults and widowhood inheritance. As the name implies, child marriage is a social marital practice that either involves two illiterate lovers, such as Nnu Ego and Amatokwu or in Taiwo Owulum’s case, a young semi-literate girl and an older partner, Magnus (Emecheta, 1979). In each instance, the young bride is married off to a man who can afford to pay the required bride price to her father or the oldest male member of the family. However, it is important to note that in striving to “preserve the value of virginity [...] reduce promiscuity of the girl-child” (- Kyari & Ayodele, 2014:582), the patriarchal agents who impose and justify these practices fail to put into consideration the impact of these practices on both the girl-child and society as a whole. Some of the negative impacts of early marriage are early and teenage pregnancies, stillbirths and even miscarriages. Another form of marital practice is widowhood inheritance. This form of ‘marriage’ occurs when a widow is inherited by an eligible male member of the late husband’s family. In Emecheta’s *The joys of motherhood* (1979),

Nwokocha Agbadi and Nnaife Owulum are two male characters who inherit widows. As such, this study argues that child marriage and widowhood inheritance are some of the social practices with which society continues to subjugate and oppress the members of the feminine group.

In line with this proposition, Emecheta explicates how the aforementioned patriarchal constructs influence the lived experiences of Igbo women through the portrayal of characters like Nnu Ego, the female protagonist, Adaku, Nnu Ego's co-wife/Nnaife's inherited wife who migrates to Lagos from Ibuza, Adankwo, Nnaife's inherited wife who remains in Ibuza, Taiwo and Kehinde, Nnu Ego and Nnaife's oldest semi-literate twin girls, on the one hand, and on the other, Agbadi Nwokocha, Nnu Ego's father, Amatokwu, Nnu Ego's first husband, Nnaife Owulum, Nnu Ego's second husband and Magnus, Taiwo's husband. Besides from being a realistic depiction of the social reality of the Igbo woman, Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood* (1979) is described as a sequel to Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966). Nwapa is a first-generation female novelist who explores the issues of identity, marriage and bride price, motherhood and financial liberation through the portrayal of her female protagonist, Efuru, the female protagonist who wonders why women worship Uhamiri, "the woman of the lake [...] who gave women beauty and wealth" (Nwapa, 1966:281) but never children. Emecheta, on the other hand, depicts the unhappiness and travails of a traditional woman, Nnu Ego whom society labels as a "wicked woman even in death" (Emecheta, 1979:250). This is because like Uhamiri, Nnu Ego refuses to make barren women fertile. Thus, through Nnu Ego's tragic life and lonely death, Emecheta articulates how patriarchy ensures the continued perpetuation of oppressive and exploitative practices against women in her society and most importantly weighs the notion that motherhood and marriage are a woman's source of joy.

*The joys of motherhood* (1979) is a literary text that is set in two places - the traditional Ibuza and the newly evolving colonial Lagos. This bifurcated setting aims to show how social norms influence gender identity and socialisation patterns formed in patrilineal societies. In this instance, the patriarchs are either purely bred native Ibuza men or ideal men like Agbadi, Idayi and Amatokwu, who "smell of burning wood and tobacco" (Emecheta, 1979:44). These men are authentic patriarchs who ensure that they give their wives babies and food. In short, these men through their actions echo the social norms that promote the traditions of masculine hierarchical control. On the other hand, there are emasculated men like Nnaife, "a horrible-looking man" (Emecheta, 1979: 44) who hated farming but washed and knew "how to bleach

sheets white, knew the correct amount of blue to add to a shirt [...] and never overstarched his master's khaki shorts" (Emecheta, 1979:85). This is a typical blend of traditional and European cultural values. However, despite his lower station as compared to Ibuza men in Ibuza, Nnaife is still highly placed and respected because it is he who makes Nnu Ego and all his other women, Adaku, Adankwo and the unambitious Okpo, mothers. In short, Emecheta extends this to demonstrate how these patriarchal norms impede the development of the woman into a full human being in *The joys of motherhood*. Thus, this study commences with a definition of a 'full human being' in Igbo society and unpacks this through the contextual analysis of gender identity and gender roles. Based on the orientation and focus of this study, the full human being is an Igbo person, traditional man like Agbadi, Amatokwu and Nnaife who give their wives children and food. In this analysis, these men are categorised into two groups, and these are the ideal and emasculated men. To buttress these points, this study analyses an excerpt of Uzoma's (2019) academic work where he adopts the patriarchal term 'man' in his description of who a full human being is. According to Uzoma (2019:136), a full human being is a man who "is believed to be next to the spirits and ancestors [...] he is both spirit and matter, possessing body and soul, both corporeal and incorporeal" (Uzoma, 2019:136). By adopting the generic term 'man' in the ontological research of who or what constitutes a full human being, this study contends that within the Ndigbo purview, a woman is an invisible, marginalised and silenced second-class citizen. In essence, a woman's quintessence is defined by the presence of men in her life. In line with the arguments above, the study asserts that the Igbo people, like most Nigerians, are patriarchal and by extension, practice the patrilineal system. As such, a woman is conceptualised and essentialised into the other, "the carrier of stigmatising attributes [...] and [...] the wretched of the earth" (Ezeifeke & Ogbazi, 2014:115) who does not function as a person with agentic capabilities but a voiceless and invisible appendage.

In line with this argument, this study posits that through the portrayal of her characters, Emecheta asserts that by enforcing oppressive social norms, African patriarchal constructs turn the African woman into the other. These play out in Nnu Ego and Adaku's lives. For Nnu Ego's life, this is evident in her travails as a barren first wife in Amatokwu's household, and, also as a poor first wife in Nnaife's household, the one whose position and wealth are determined by the number of male children she bears for her husband. In short, according to Eke and Abama (2019:97), "Emecheta spares no effort in portraying [...] Nnu Ego as a woman whose sacrificial love for her [...] children see her wallowing in abject poverty, wants,

misfortune and ridicule”. In Adaku’s case, we see an enterprising and hardworking woman who is further relegated because of her inability to produce healthy, living sons. Nwakusor, a patriarchal social agent and Nnaife’s friend reminds Adaku that in Ibuza:

Our life starts with immortality and ends with immortality. If Nnaife had been married to only you, you would have ended his life on this round of his visiting earth. I know you have children, but they are girls, who in a few years’ time will go and help build another man’s immortality. The only woman who is immortalising your husband you make unhappy with your fine clothes and lucrative business. If I were in your shoes, I should go home and consult my chi to find out why male offspring have been denied me. But instead, here you are quarrelling (Emecheta, 1979:179-165).

The quotation above shows that in patriarchal African social spaces, womanhood is intricately tied to motherhood and more importantly, male children. As such, the Igbo woman lives as a lonely eunuch without a room of her own. Adaku’s fate is similar to Ma Blackie’s fate in Emecheta’s *The Bride Price* (1976). Ma Blackie is a woman who only bore one son for her first husband, a man who paid “double the normal bride price” (Emecheta, 1976:2) for her hand in marriage. In short, Ma Blackie, like Adaku, is considered a failure because of her inability to bear a healthy male child for her husband, and for the latter, because of her inability to conceive and bear more sons for her husband. Thus, through a trajectory of events and experiences, Emecheta portrays how social norms and cultural values influence the patterns of interaction in social environments. This assertion is premised on the proposition that “the Nigerian society is patriarchal in nature which is a major feature of society. It is a structure of a set of social relations with a material base which enables men to dominate women” (Makama, 2013:115). Starting with the family unit in Igbo society, Emecheta shows that the material base or foundation of any family unit is put in place by the men who engage in paid labour, strong farmers and hunters like Nwokocha Agbadi, Amatokwu and other Ibuza men like Nnaife who “washes women’s underwear” (Emecheta, 1979:46). These men (regardless of their stations) occupy a higher position on the social hierarchy ladder and as such, empowered by society to provide financial and economic support in their homes. The women, on the other hand, are characters like Ona, Nnu Ego and Adankwo, women who are financially incapacitated, as they are expected to attend to the immaterial needs of the family members.

Using Cooley's (1983) looking-glass lens, these social members belong to the primary and second groups. Examples of the primary and secondary groups in Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood* (1979) are the family, peer groups, village groups and church. The social activities of the members of these groups are monitored by social agents, men like Nwokocha, Agbadi, Nnu Ego's father and Ona's partner, Obi Umunna, Ona's father, Amatokwu, Nnu Ego's first husband and Nnaife Owulum, Nnu Ego's second husband who ensure that social members comply with the patriarchal social norms. This assertion is corroborated by the experiences of Ona (who died after moving in with her lover, Agbadi) and Nnu Ego. Based on this assertion, Emecheta shows how the patriarchal social structure appropriates and privileges the men who are labelled as superior and dominant while at the same time marginalising and oppressing the women who are labelled as inferior and passive other. With the knowledge that the other, woman in this social space, is first, a product of cultural norms, the arguments in Chapter 4 are driven by the need to unpack and analyse how Emecheta in *The joys of motherhood* (1979) conceptualises the woman. Set against the backdrop of these propositions, this study seeks to unpack how culture influences the lived experiences of the Igbo woman through the portrayal of the characters in Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood* (1979).

### **Conceptualising the family structure in *The joys of motherhood***

In *The joys of motherhood* (1979), Emecheta portrays family units as minute polygamous social units that comprise the father, mothers, mistresses and children. This is in accordance with the social norm that permits a man to:

Take wives and then neglect them for years, apart from seeing that they each received their one yam a day; he could bring his mistress to sleep with him right in his courtyard while his wives pined and bit their nails for a word from him (Emecheta, 1979:36).

As such, in *The joys of motherhood* (1979), family units are the primary spaces where acts that qualify as social injustices are perpetuated and condoned. Also, the children born into such units internalise the appropriate behaviours, and these also influence their ideology as boys and girls who evolve into men and women. It is such patriarchal views that cause Agbadi to ignore the feelings of his wives with regards to his philandering attitude. For the woman or Africanising the term, angel of the house which was coined by the Victorian poet, Coventry Patmore, to be a good or respectable woman is to be married as a chaste bride, to be an unambitious mother of many sons, permit the husband to marry other wives and most

importantly, act as “the spiritual and natural mother of [the] household” (Emecheta, 1979:123). For this woman, these social expectations form the frames of precarity that stifle her ability to live as a Full Human Being.

In short, gender is “constantly created and re-created out of human interaction, out of social life and is the texture and order of social life” (Lorber, 1994:112). This means that perceptions about gender identity are constructed through the interactions that occur between the social agents and social members of a particular social environment. As such, gender construction is seen as an activity that starts at birth. Obijekwu, Enemu and Aghamelu (2020:73) further assert that gender refers to the “socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women”. As such, gender serves as the yardstick with which social members are labelled, roles are assigned and societal expectations are formed. These arguments show that gender functions in various capacities, firstly, as a social system and secondly, as a social institution:

As a social institution, gender is a process of creating distinguishable social statuses for the assignment of rights and responsibilities. As part of a stratification system that ranks these statuses unequally, gender is a major building block in the social structures built on these unequal statuses (Lorber, 1994:115).

In the quotation above, Lorber asserts that gender is created through certain processes, and the basic one is through social interaction. In line with this assertion, the study contends that patriarchy serves as the premise on which Igbo people exploit, dominate, marginalise and oppress Igbo women. As such, the actions, traits and motives of Emecheta’s characters in *The joys of motherhood* (1979) are tailored by patriarchal constructs. Patriarchy is a system and a structure of male domination and oppression. According to Bain and Arik (2017:1), patriarchy “refers to social structures governed by hierarchal power relations that privilege masculinity over femininity and permit the domination, oppression and exploitation of women”. Here women are the other subjects, the silenced and incapacitated others who submit to the authority of the “agents of exploitation and repression” (Spivak, 1985:66). This means that in patriarchal societies, men are placed at the helm of affairs, and they control the social-economic space while women are deprived of agentic capabilities and set on the periphery as male appendages. As such, a patriarchal system is a hierarchal system and structure that permits the constant domination, oppression and exploitation of women by the men in their lives.

This means that the traditional Igbo woman whose experience Emecheta projects in *The joys of motherhood* (1979) is the voiceless subaltern who is a product of cultural collision. In describing the concept of the other, as is depicted in Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood* (1979), this study subscribes to Said's proposition that the marginalised woman exists because society has forged a patriarch who lives with the "will to dominate for the purposes of control and external domination" (Said, 1994: xiv). As such, the other becomes the exploited subject who is simply the product of negative stereotypes. Emecheta sets this woman in Ibuza and the newly evolving colonial Lagos. This means that regardless of where the Igbo woman is, whether in her indigenous space or not, the patriarchal ideology of masculine superiority and feminine inferiority functions as the social concept and system that defines the injustice that pervades lived experiences of women. In short, Nnu Ego and the other female characters, regardless of their location, are seen as patriarchal products who exist only "through her relationship with her husband and children" (Ngcobo, 1988:148). To illustrate this point, this study pays particular attention to Emecheta's narrative and characterisation technique because Emecheta articulates her idea about gender identity, perception and patterns of interaction through the dialogues and activities of the characters in *The joys of motherhood* (1979). Hence, the characters like Nnu Ego, Nnaife and Adaku migrate from the rural area, Ibuza to the urban, metropolitan Lagos. However, while Nnaife migrates in search of greener pastures, Nnu Ego and Adaku migrate as Nnaife's wives in search of male heirs.

Set against this backdrop, through a unique characterisation and narrative technique, Emecheta in *The joys of motherhood* (1979) throws more light on how the full human being is conceptualised within the family unit and by so doing explores how social factors influence the construction of gender identity. This means that gender identity is defined by social norms, which in turn influence social reality. To understand how Emecheta integrates these concepts into her narrative, *The joys of motherhood* (1979), the study starts with a synoptic review and contextual analysis of the narrative. This is because the context-based analysis enables the researcher to explore how Emecheta articulates her views about the lived experiences of the women who are categorised into two groups and these are the respectable mother of male heirs and the ambitious mother of girls. The experience of the first type of woman is replicated through Nnu Ego's character, Nnaife's chief wife and the "mother of three sons [...] who was supposed to be happy in her poverty, in her nail-biting agony, in her churning stomach, in her

rags, in her cramped room” (Emecheta, 1979:167). In consonance with this assertion, Ogunyemi develops an argument that women:

[A]re disadvantaged in several ways; as blacks they, with their men, are victims of a white patriarchal culture; as women they are victimised by black men, and as black women they are also victimised on racial, sexual and class grounds by white men (Ogunyemi, 1985:67).

This means that the experiences of women stem from the peculiar cultural norms of their social environment. However, to unpack how these social factors influence the lived experiences of Emecheta's women in *The joys of motherhood* (1979), I engage the philosophical views of postcolonial philosophers like Spivak and Butler and sets them against Ogunyemi's indigenous Afrocentric framework. The aim of engaging these lenses is to show how Emecheta challenges the “patriarchal nations of Igbo culture that hurt women, but she also questions, just as ardently the import sexism of colonialism” (Willey, 2000:156). This academic engagement shows that Emecheta is an authentic African feminist. In defining her authenticity, Emecheta describes herself as an African feminist with a small *f* who recapitulates the experiences of the other in her society. Consequently, this view allows Emecheta to tell her story from an authentic Igbo woman's perspective. This includes:

The little happenings of everyday life. Being a woman, and African born, I see things through an African woman's eyes. I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African women I know. I did not know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist then I am an African feminist with the small *f*. I write about families [...] I write about women who try to hold their family together until it becomes impossible. I have no sympathy for a woman who deserts her children, neither do I have sympathy for a woman who insists on staying in a marriage with a brute of a man, simply to be respectable (Emecheta, 1988:175).

For the female characters in *The joys of motherhood* (1979), respectability provides a moral compass that guides their motives and actions. In line with this proposition, the Igbo woman is the other. As such, this study subscribes to the notion that Emecheta functions as an African novelist cum critic who explores the impact of patriarchal social norms on the Igbo woman and recapitulates these in her narratives. As such, the arguments in this study are set within the contested notions that propose that gender is a patriarchal social construct that influences social

perception. For this study, patriarchy operates within the frames of stigma power. Link and Phelan (2014:1) refer to “instances in which stigma processes achieves the aims of stigmatisation with respect to the exploitation, control or exclusion of others”. Stigma here is associated with the identity and perceived weakness of the woman. This means that Emecheta in *The joys of motherhood* (1979) articulates her views about the lived experiences of a traditional woman through the portrayal of Nnu Ego, the female protagonist who is oppressed, marginalised and victimised by her father, husband and sons. Marginalisation leads to displacement. As such, patriarchy acts as the mechanism by which the impoverished state of the other woman is reinforced in her social environment, an act that leads to displacement.

This forms the premise of discourse for the African feminist with the small *f*, which holds the view that the basis of contention about social injustice and inequality does not tally with that of the Western feminist who is more concerned about equality. In short, like hooks (1984), she argues that Western feminism displaces the African woman from the centred position and instead (dis) places her and leaves her on the margins where she exists as the silenced other. One of the ways in which (dis) placement occurs is through the appropriation of relevance to issues of equality and sex. However, Emecheta asserts that, unlike the Western feminist, African *feminists* (emphasis mine) “do not make [it] sex the centre of our being” (Emecheta, 1988:176). Rather, the issues of poverty, motherhood and infertility, polygamy and wife rivalry, woman-to-woman oppression and man-to-woman oppression drive the discourse for the African feminist with the small *f*. In short, the African *feminist* seeks to uncover how the social structure impedes the full development of the female child into an emancipated, empowered and liberated woman who is financially independent and literate. In short, these restrictions show that the Igbo woman is placed in precarious situations where:

Gender performativity does not necessarily presuppose an always acting subject or an incessantly repeating body. It establishes a complex convergence of social norms on the somatic psyche, and a process of repetition that is structured by a complicated interplay of obligation and desire, and a desire that is not one’s own (Butler, 2009: xi).

Situating the above quotation within the Igbo space and integrating this into Nnu Ego’s experience, womanhood and motherhood become the mechanism with which a woman performs her roles and abides by societal norms. This is because, from an early age, girls are

constantly reminded that they should aspire “to rock their children’s children” (Emecheta, 1979:29). Set against this backcloth, a family unit is a precarious social structure that functions as the smallest social unit where social members internalise and learn social norms through role play and imitation. According to Onwuatuegwu (2020:17), in *The joys of motherhood* (1979), a family unit comprises “a man, his wife/wives, children [...] in-laws, uncles, cousins, nephews, distant or near, or even maids and servants”. However, depending on social constructs like gender, age and position, these family members are either categorised as patriarchs or the other. This implies that within social units, there are teachers and learners. The teachers are the fathers - in Nnu Ego’s case who mould their child, Nnu Ego into a patriarchal construct. This is why even after the humiliation that Nnu Ego faces as Amatokwu’s barren first wife, she “promised herself never again to load her father with her own problems [...] I will not return to his house as a failure either, unless my husband orders me to leave” (Emecheta, 1979:33). In other situations, this is the case with Nnaife’s household where the parents within each family unit act as the primary agent of socialisation who monitor the indoctrination process of their young ones as they are taught their peculiar social norms. This is evident in the methods of parenting that Nnu Ego adopts with her male and female children. The boys, Oshia and Adim “have the evening off for their stupid lessons and they’re let off from going to fetch the wood that we have to sell to feed us” (Emecheta, 1979:177). In turn, the young ones learn to internalise these norms through role-play and imitation.

The Igbo people of the South-Eastern part of Nigeria are patriarchal. In patriarchal Igbo society, the woman is taught to see herself as a male appendage, one whose social reality is defined by her father, her husband and her sons. The woman’s dependency on the man’s ability to make her into a respectable woman is what causes a character like Nnu Ego to:

Work herself to the bone to look after them, I have to give them my all. And if I am lucky enough to die in peace, I even have to give them my soul. They will worship my dead spirit to provide for them; it will be hailed as a good spirit so long as there are plenty of yams and children in the family, but if anything should go wrong if a young wife does not conceive or there is famine, my dead spirit will be blamed (Emecheta, 1979:186).

As shown above, this feeling of nothingness and dependency is reinforced through the gendered socialisation process which Nnu Ego also practices as a mother who sees to it that

her first two boys, Oshia and Adim, are given the opportunities to be educated. However, these boys evolve into self-centred patriarchs who abandon their mother and leave her to run mad. The gendered socialisation process herein referred to according to Anah and Okere (2019:68) enables social members to learn and internalise “the culturally acceptable behaviour, values, beliefs and skills for males and females”. Therefore, social norms can be described as the primary components of culture that prescribe and dictate how people behave within their social units. Culture is the “sum total of the peculiarities shared by a people” (Idang, 2015:97), that is, the totality of the way of life of a group of people. In short, culture comprises material and immaterial elements, some of which are language, dressing, food, values, beliefs and norms, which are fluid and subject to change. For this reason, social norms are the frames that hold social structures and systems together and in short, reflect the way of life of a people. This means that one of the ways of ensuring that social members comply with social norms is through gender labelling, role appropriation and hierarchal social positioning.

Gender is a dynamic social construct. Even though there are arguments that counter the premise that gender is neither an African nor an Igbo term and that men and women once shared complementary roles (Amadiume, 1987), an ontological and epistemological study shows that gender constructs and gender designations have always existed in Africa. As such, men have always occupied higher positions within the social-economic space (Krishnan, 2014). Emecheta replicates this through the characters of Agbadi, Amatokwu and Nnaife, men raised in a society that permits them to oppress the women in their lives. These men expect their women to manage the home front and bear them children, particularly sons. Despite these impositions, the traditional woman still shares some complementary roles with her husband, such as that which allows her to be engaged in some forms of paid labour outside the home and financially capable to “make [contributions]” (Emecheta, 1979:81) in the home. However, colonial Lagos restricts this woman, which turns her into an impoverished voiceless being. Achebe emphasises this voicelessness in his early literary works like *Things fall apart* (1958) where he appraises the pattern of socialisation between traditional Igbo men and women. In Adichie’s *Umuofia*, the woman is either a nameless being like Okonkwo’s mother or an ugly old woman, like Agbadi Nwanyi with one leg who hops about in the centre of Umuofia after dusk or a widowed priestess, like Chielo. On the other hand, the man is a handsome, virile, wealthy, titled and farmer with full barns of yams, a warrior with many human heads and a hunter of elephants.

However, since Ogunyemi provides an indigenous premise with which to uncover the basis of interaction in an indigenous African space, this study (re) conceptualises Butler's views about performativity and Spivak's propositions about the subaltern and situates these within the Igbo space. As such, through the engagement of an indigenous womanist lens with a particular interest in the themes and identities of the characters, this study seeks to unpack how Emecheta articulates her views about how patriarchy influences gender construction and socialisation patterns in *The joys of motherhood* (1979) (1979). To understand how patriarchy influences gender construction and socialisation patterns in *The joys of motherhood* (1979) (1979), this study begins with a synoptic review and contextual analysis of the narrative. In short, this study posits that Emecheta in *The joys of motherhood* (1979) (1979) presents:

[A] graphical representation of the ordeal of women and women-related issues as it obtains in a patriarchal society. The novel centres on the myriad of problems besetting women in a male-dominated society. The story captures the pathetic and grim condition of a woman who, despite her struggles and determination to survive in life ends up dying in ignominy. Her efforts, hopes and aspirations come to nought (Oso, 2017:3).

Oso's quotation above attests to the fact that through her unique narrative technique, Emecheta provides a bird's eye view of how the Igbo patriarchal cultural norms influence gender construction and the patterns of socialisation among social members. One of the ways in which Emecheta articulates her views about gender construction is through the unique characterisation technique.

### **The joy and ironies of motherhood in *The joys of motherhood***

To understand how patriarchy functions in Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood* (1979), this study is structured against the trigonometric frame of Nnu Ego's life, firstly, as the love child of a wealthy village chief, Nwokocha Agbadi and his beautiful mistress, Ona, a male daughter in Obi Umunna's household, then as a failed wife and an incomplete woman in Amatokwu household, and secondly, as a complete woman in Nnaife Owulum's household. As such, patriarchy turns women within and outside the local environments into eunuchs, prisoners of their flesh and blood; firstly, their fathers, secondly, their husbands and lastly, their sons (Emecheta, 1979). Nnu Ego's experience in the newly-evolving metropolitan Lagos in the mid1930s shows that gender and indeed human identity are fluid social constructs set against

the backdrop of idiosyncratic propositions. This is further reinforced through the notion that Nnu Ego represents the traditional Igbo woman “who unquestionably believes that the essence of her life remains in her capability to beget (male) children for her husband” (Kashyap, 2021:343). As such, Emecheta uses Nnu Ego’s transition to show that the woman is a social construct that is moulded by society and placed on a pedestal where she either exists as an angel of the house or as a proud and ambitious Madonna who leaves the “stinking room [...] to live with those women in Montgomery Road [...] to make some of our men who return from fighting happy” (Emecheta, 1979:168). This shows that whether as daughters, chiefs or cowives or mothers, Emecheta’s women are the subalterns who are doubly oppressed because of their gender and ethnic identity.

The synoptic review also shows that the plight of the traditional Igbo woman stems from the cultural principles and dogmas that reinforce feminine inferiority. Therefore, this study evaluates the various ways Emecheta articulates how the patriarchal cultural norms influence gender construction and patterns of interaction among the south-eastern people of Nigeria. Because the study focuses on firstly, how gender is constructed and secondly, how gender constructs influence the socialisation patterns in these family units, it is significant to privilege how Emecheta foregrounds resilience in her narrative. To understand how patriarchal ideologies intersect to produce unequal social relationships in Emecheta’s society, the arguments in this chapter are hinged on Ogunyemi’s Afrocentric womanist frames. However, since Ogunyemi provides an indigenous premise with which to establish the basis of interaction in an indigenous African space, this chapter (re) conceptualises Butler’s views about performativity and Spivak’s propositions about the subaltern and situates these within the Igbo space. As such, through the engagement of an indigenous lens with particular interest in the themes and identities of the characters, this chapter seeks to clarify how Emecheta articulates her views about how patriarchy influences gender construction and socialisation patterns in *The joys of motherhood* (1979). In essence, this chapter is an academic undertaking that explores and analyses how social members interact in social environments with peculiar cultural values and traditions. In line with this assertion, the chapter contends that these biological and sociological frames serve as the premise on which Igbo people exploit, dominate, marginalise and oppress Igbo women. To further justify this argument, this study contends that although:

Patriarchy takes different forms in different cultures, its belief is the same. The man is superior by nature, born to rule in all works of life, the woman, an inferior, born to be ruled and to serve the man (Ifechelobi, 2014:17).

This means that patriarchy influences social perception. In short, the patriarchal ideology of masculine superiority and feminine inferiority functions as the social system that defines the injustice that pervades the lived experiences of women. To illustrate this point, this study pays attention to Emecheta's narrative and characterisation technique because it articulates her idea about gender identity, perception and patterns of interaction through the dialogues and activities of the characters in *The joys of motherhood* (1979). In short, Emecheta functions as an African novelist *cum* critic who examines and explores the impact of cultural norms on the Igbo woman. These cultural norms stem from the patriarchal ideology which promotes the principles of male dominance and female passivity. For Emecheta, one of the ways through which a woman can (re) define her identity and (re) mould her reality is through educational empowerment which is gained in formal institutions of learning:

School, the Igbos never played with that! They were realising that one's saviour from poverty and disease was education. Every Igbo family saw to it that their children attended school [...] boys were usually given preference, though (Emecheta, 1975:9).

The case is different for girls at the initial stage. This is because their enrolment in school was a means to an end for their brothers and fathers, as a partially educated girl fetches high bride prices which in turn, is used to fund the boys' education. However, in the case of a progressive thinker like Adaku, education for her girls means empowerment and security. As such, one of the ways in which gender is constructed in Igbo society is through the process of socialisation.

The synoptic review of Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood* (1979) shows in a heterosexual and patriarchal society as with Emecheta's *Ibuza*, the structure of the family unit is informed by certain idiosyncrasies, one of which is either the presence or absence of at least a male child. This is because Igbo people ascribe significance to the presence of a male child in any family unit and enforce this by promoting the idea that a male child, together with his father, defines the humanity of the woman. To further support this view, Nwokocha (2007:219) contends that among the Igbo people of the south-eastern region, "male children are perceived as sustainers of lineage, holders of central and often important positions of authority and inheritors of immovable properties" while the female child is brought up as a male appendage. As such,

girls and women are the ‘other’ who live in the shadow of their fathers, husbands and sons. The husband, sons, daughters and wives form individual family units. In Igbo society, a family unit is only recognised after a marriage ceremony has been conducted. Ebo (2022:1) posits that:

Marriage among Ndigbo is a powerful institution in which two genders involved have their respective culturally designated roles. These roles are usually not left to individual fancies because there are strong taboos regarding defaults [...] it is in performing these roles that the couple fulfil their identity as husband and wife.

These prescribed roles are reinforced by the patriarchal social norms that appropriate power and privilege to men and subjugate and oppress women. This shows that for the Igbo person, marriage is a contract not just between the man and woman, who take up the titles of husband and wife but also the members of the extended families who ensure that the newly-weds perform their roles. In short, the marriage institution “is not regarded as an optional institution but a necessary rite of passage” (Ebo, 2022:3) into adulthood. This rite of passage takes various forms but the most common, which Emecheta addresses and scripts in *The joys of motherhood* (1979) are early marriage, widowhood inheritance and the normal marriage between two adults. For early and normal marriage, the union is only legalised after the payment of the bride price to the father of the bride. For a first marriage, in cases where the bride is “found virtuous” (Emecheta, 1979:216), the father of the bride also gets full kegs of palm wine. Hence, the foundational tenets of a patriarchal Igbo family are defined by practices that reinforce the subordinate place of the woman. This does not happen in the case of second marriages where only the bride price is paid to the bride’s father and for widowhood inheritance, where the widow and her children are inherited by the husband’s brother. As such, marriage is a social institution and one of the main “constellations of social power relations” (Walby, 1989:220) which triggers unequal gender relations between the husband and the wife.

Asides from marriage practices, there is also another form of union that is institutionalised by the social system, and this is called concubinage. Onwukwe (2020) refers to concubinage as a form of a sexual relationship between a man and a woman where one of the parties, in most cases the female, is unmarried. The participants here engage in this sort of relationship for various reasons. However, of concern to this study is the “engagement term [...] which includes the social-cultural goal of perpetuating the male line” (Onwukwe, 2020:34). This further

reinforces the preference for a son or sons. In Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood* (1979), the concubine is Ona, Obi Umunna's male-daughter who failed to produce an heir maternal who would immortalise his maternal grandfather and inherit his obi. It is pertinent to note that in a social environment that places high value on female chastity and a married woman's fidelity, a father, Obi Umunna, backed by culture causes his daughter's alienation from the cycle of complete women, and the daughter is Ona. This is because Ona is the male-daughter who is encouraged to have many lovers for the sole purpose of birthing a son, who will, in turn, immortalise his maternal grandfather.

However, in traditional Igbo society, if say Adaku, a woman chooses the path of 'social depravity', she is ostracised by members of her society. As such, the notions of respectability further promote a woman's subordinate position in her society. Thus, through her narrative, Emecheta counters with the views that women are supreme beings as Achebe proposed in *Things fall apart* (1958) rather when women are presented as sexual objects whose fundamental duty is to remain 'untampered' until marriage and then produce heir(s) in their husband's home while vying with the co-wives for their husband's attention. This is evident in *The joys of motherhood* through Nnu Ego's lived experiences as a traditional woman whose duty is to get married and give birth to "good-looking healthy sons" (Emecheta, 1979:159). Inequality is further emphasised through the principles of respectability. Unlike Ona, who is a failed woman, Nnu Ego is brought up in a space where she internalises the principles of respectability. Here, she is constantly reminded about her social role as a mother who will "live to rock your children's children" (Emecheta, 1979:26). These notions are set up against preconceived notions about the woman as the other "who carries dark traits such as stigmatisation, subjugation, domination, socio-political or cultural misrepresentation" (Abubakar, Hassan & Azmi, 2021:1534). These notions are reinforced through gender assignment which occurs at birth and then reinforced through the naming process.

In Africa, names are not just arbitrary concepts, but rather, names are labels that "often address a kaleidoscope of issues which may include the collective history and life experiences of the individual name bearer and the people surrounding him or her" (Makoni, Makoni & Pfukwa, 2010:197). As such, names invariably become the labels that define the identities of the bearer. For Emecheta, whether personal names or praise names, these ascriptions play integral roles in the formation of her characters' identities. This is because each label announces the identity of the bearer and determines his or her traits and justifies the actions and activities in which the

bearer participates. In line with these arguments, the study posits that gender identity is constructed in family units through the gendered process of internalisation. Using the conventional lens of heterosexuality, the man and the woman can only start their family units after a marriage ceremony and the institutionalisation of the union imposes on each family member a set of rigid, dogmatic principles where the man as the head ensures compliance. As such, the principal socialising agent in this instance is the father who ensures that members internalise the social norms and by so doing fulfil societal expectations.

The arguments above show that among the Igbo people whose lived experiences Emecheta projects in *The joys of motherhood* (1979), the patriarchal ideology holds that women are inferior beings. This ideology plays out through the names given to women and is then reinforced through the gendered role appropriation process. The actions of the social members in the family units are monitored by the patriarch who is expected to rule “his family and children as if he were a god” (Emecheta, 1979:15). Even in *Things fall Apart* (1958), we are told that Okonkwo ‘ruled his household with an iron fist’: he is a demigod whose word brooks no rebuke. As such, because his gender and position are respected, the family patriarch feared and revered. In turn, the patriarch also provides for and caters to the needs of his family members whom he “owns [...] just like God in the sky owns us” (Emecheta, 1979:218). This shows that the traditional Igbo family is led by a patriarch while the rest of the family members, especially the feminine members are individually labelled as the other. Thus, othering stems from stratification and domination and justifies the principles of inequality. The unequal status assigned to family members is further reinforced through the tenets of “nkali, a noun that loosely means “to be greater than another” (Adichie, 2009a). As such, the hierarchal structure in traditional Igbo society is set within the semantic field of nkali, the greater power of man.

In traditional Igbo society, a woman’s gender identity is associated with her ability to bear children, not to daughters who “will help build another man’s immortality” (Emecheta, 1979:165) but rather to healthy male heirs whose sole duty is to immortalise the patriarch of the family into which they are born. Since these ills stem from gender discrimination, this study confirms that Emecheta vocalises her views about gender construction. As such, Emecheta’s narrative destabilises the negative perceptions about the woman and in its place works to reconstruct new possibilities within the cosmological limitations of rites and rights. Nnu Ego is a traditional woman whose life dream is to live up to the social expectations of her patriarchal society. Hence, Emecheta portrays Nnu Ego as a male appendage and a second-class citizen

whom society conditions her to believe that “when one grows old, one needs children to look after one. If you have no children, and your parents have gone, who can you call your own?” (Emecheta, 1979:38). In short, Nnu Ego lives in societies where patriarchal ideologies and dogmas legitimise gender inequality and other forms of social injustice. Hence, through the portrayal of her characters, Emecheta explores and analyses the impact of social norms on social members.

As such, social norms function as the frames against which social systems and structures are set. Social norms, social systems and social structures are the primary components of the culture of a people. Essentially, culture influences the code of conduct of the social groups in any society, the cultural code of conduct in Nigeria, particularly among the Igbo people of the south-eastern region which is patriarchal. Dogo (2014:263) asserts that patriarchy is a social system and structure that appropriates power and privilege to men, an act which results in the “unequal gender relations which cast women in a subordinate position.” One of the ways of ensuring that social members comply with social norms is through role appropriation and social positioning. Here, men are placed at the helm of affairs, and they control the social-economic space while women are deprived of agentic capabilities and set on the periphery as male appendages. By placing Nnu Ego in two places, Emecheta subscribes to the notion that regardless of the location, patriarchy is a cultural component that emasculates women and turns them into “eunuchs without rooms of their own” (Ogunyemi, 1985:63). As such, the woman becomes the other, the subaltern who is subjugated, marginalised, oppressed and discriminated against because of her gender and ethnic identities.

Emecheta seeks to show that, unlike in Iboza, as well as in other traditional societies where women are permitted to supplement their husband’s contribution by planting cocoyam and beans (Achebe, 1958), in Lagos, Nnu Ego had to depend on Nnaife’s meagre salary because she was “in a white man’s world where it was the duty of the father to provide for his family” (Emecheta, 1979: 81). As such, despite giving birth to nine children for her husband, which in Iboza translates into wealth, Nnu Ego and her children lived in abject poverty in Lagos. Thus, poverty serves as the subset of patriarchy which deprives the woman of voice and agency and instead, turns the woman into an introspective being who can neither speak nor function as an active social member. By creating these characters, Emecheta functions as a literary historian who explores the “predicament of women as a result of the imprisonment between the traditions of society and the modernity brought by colonisation” (Halely, 2016:71). The traditions herein

referred to are embedded within the cultural norms that propagate the notions of inequality and injustice within the social system, and social structures are represented by Ibuza and the newly evolving Lagos colony.

## **Conclusion**

The gendered connotations of man and woman in Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood* (1979) serve to legitimise the discrimination, oppression and marginalisation of the social members. In line with this argument, through the portrayal of the female characters and in particular, through Nnu Ego's character in *The joys of motherhood* (1979), Emecheta exposes the negative impact of patriarchal social norms on women. This is portrayed through the characters of Nnu Ego, the tragic female protagonist and Adaku, whom I label as the New woman. This is because Adaku leaves an unhappy marriage with her two daughters rather than "be turned into a mad woman because [I] she has no sons" (Emecheta, 1979:169). However, Adaku and Kehinde belong to the school of progressives, as each challenges patriarchy, emerges unscathed from the attic and reintegrates herself into a social environment where she provides for and empowers her daughters. Thus, Nnu Ego, Adaku and Kehinde act as the foremothers of Beatrice in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) and Ifemelu in *Americanah* (2013) whose actions open up discourses about womanhood and motherhood in modern times. In conclusion, through Nnu Ego's tragic life and lonely death, the patriarchal social order with its prescribed social norms oppresses and marginalises women, primarily because of their gender identity.

## **Chapter Four: Beatrice - Voice of the voiceless in *Anthills of the savannah***

### **Introduction**

The previous chapter explored relevant literature on the cultural values that influence the construction of gender identities from the Afrocentric perspective of Achebe, Adichie and Emecheta. Social factors like family, education and religion determine people's perceptions of gender, gender roles and social interaction. This fourth chapter delves into how Achebe conceptualises gender identity in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988). Achebe was born on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 1930 in Ogidi, a town in the south-eastern region of Nigeria. He was christened Albert Chinualumogu Achebe. He is described as the father of modern African literature and a first-generation postcolonial author. Achebe has described himself as a British-protected child who grew up to become a British protected person and then into an Igbo man who seeks to uncover the impact of colonialism on his African/Igbo brothers and sisters (Achebe, 2009). In short, Achebe is described as a social critic who creatively captures his feelings about one of the most turbulent periods in Nigeria's history. It is imperative to note that because of Achebe's thematic interest and his simple *albeit* chronological or complicated techniques, Achebe's writing resonates with the readers regardless of their race, gender, ethnicity or social status. To accommodate the peculiar issues in his contemporary society, Achebe creates Beatrice Nwanyibuife Okoh, the one who evolves into the voice of the voiceless in the fictitious Kangan. Based on Beatrice's character in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988), this study concurs with the various assertions that Beatrice re-presents and reconceptualises the modern woman as an agent of change and a ray of hope in a decadent social space.

### **Contextual analysis of *Anthills of the savannah***

To fully appreciate Achebe's literary prowess and understand how he articulates his views about the changing roles of the new woman in the postcolonial space, this section contextualises the events that make up the plot of the narrative. First published in 1988, Achebe's *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) is set in the fictitious Kangan. Kangan is an underdeveloped West African state under a military dictatorship. In the academic cycle, researchers continuously refer to this period as an "era of blood, tyranny, oppression, brutal killing, terror" (Asika, 2011:276) and untold hardship. In fact, through the portrayal of the characters in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) with particular emphasis on Sam - The Excellency and his male-dominated cabinet that:

[T]he trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character [...] the Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which are the hallmarks of true leadership (Achebe, 1983:1).

It is the indiscipline, total disregard for law and order and the negative impact these have on social cohesion and development that Achebe unravels in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988). The narrative opens with a meeting on a Thursday between His Excellency and twelve “intelligent, educated men” (Achebe, 1988:2) who would rather scurry to their ant holes than oppose ‘The Excellency’. This scene mimics the last supper in the Holy Book where Jesus shares a meal with his twelve disciples. However, Sam is no messiah. Rather, he is a callous leader who was trained in Sandhurst and who has evolved into an unsympathetic leader who silences and punishes all who oppose his government. In short, Sam is a colonial product who takes the reins of power as a colonial puppet (Fanon, 1963). His tyrannical attitude is established early in the narrative when Sam vehemently refuses to grant the people of Abazon who “want personally to invite [His Excellency] to pay them a visit and see their problems” (Achebe, 1988:16) audience. Through this act, Achebe sets the pace for the events that inform the plot of the narrative, which is driven by four major characters, the activities and experiences of Sam - The Excellency, Chris Oriko - The Minister of Communications and Ikem Osodi - The editor - in - chief of *The National Gazette* and Beatrice Okoh, friends and citizens of Kangan, the capital state of Abazon.

Kangan is an unstable polity under the control of the military government that is led by Sam. Sam (also called His Excellency) represents an illegitimate structure that rejects all forms of opposition while perpetuating corrupt activities. Here, Achebe sets the pace of the events that inform the plot of the narrative. These events are similar to those that threatened the peace, stability and development of the former British-West Africa colonies in the years after independence. It is interesting to note that although Achebe does not specifically name any particular country, the title of the narrative *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) clearly shows that Achebe is referring to the turbulent and unstable sub-Saharan African nations in the years after independence. One of these countries is Nigeria, the giant of Africa. The peace, stability and development of the country are threatened by corrupt government officials and also by the military. In the course of this narrative, the military as the protectors transforms into the fiery sun “the great carrier of sacrifice to Almighty, single eye of God” (Achebe, 1988:30) that

shines without respite. They suck up the wealth of the nation, and this accounts for the extended drought condition in Abazon. In short, these military rulers are corrupt and insensitive to the plight of the people. For this study, corruption is seen as an “indigenous disease that is the result of a grievous fault within Africa and the cause of the continent’s development problem” (Apata, 2019:45-46). In Apata’s view, corruption refers to a “cancerous ... phenomenon” that continuously impedes social and economic development. This is evident in Abazon, also known as the “land of drought” (Achebe, 1988:126). After the Abazonians refused to support His Excellency’s dream:

[T]he Big Chief is very angry and has ordered all the water boreholes they are digging in your area to be closed so that you will know what it means to offend the sun. You will suffer so much that in your next reincarnation, you will need no one to tell you to say yes whether the matter is clear to you or not [...] So we came to Bassa to say our own yes and perhaps the work on our boreholes will start again and we will not all perish from the anger of the sun. We did not know before but we know now that yes does not cause trouble. We do not fully understand the ways of today yet but we are learning (Achebe, 1988:127).

The socio-political upheavals also affect the three friends and the relationship between this group of friends, “the trinity who thought they owned Kangan ... three green bottles” (Achebe, 1988:191). This trinity is, however, fraught with tension and culminates in bloody and choreographed deaths. At the end of the narrative, readers are left to ponder on the implications of this sad occurrence - does Achebe, through the death of the three friends, speak about the Igbo-Biafran cause or does he speak about the hope for a united and stable Kangan country?

Amidst the political turmoil, Elewa gives birth to a baby girl, and in the absence of the father, Ikem, Beatrice takes to organising the naming ceremony and also takes charge of the event itself. Beatrice is a progressive and contemporary woman unlike the traditional Nnu Ego in *The joys of motherhood* (1979) who refuses to organise her second son’s naming ceremony in the absence of his father. Beatrice names the child Amaechina. The birth signals a new chapter and a corporeal hope for a better tomorrow. However, it is important to note that Beatrice only performs this role because “the man who should have done it today is absent [...], the man is not here although I know he is floating around us now, watching with that small-boy smile” (Achebe, 1988:222). To reiterate these points, Achebe adopts satirical and metaphorical

literary devices that allow the artistic rendition of details and a unique narrative structure. He abandons the structure of his previous narratives, that is, the division into parts and the dependence on European poems and adopts a strictly first-person narrative structure with each of the other two major characters, Chris and Ikem, taking turns to narrate their lives at some point in the fabric of the text. The focal point, however, is driven by Beatrice, the “senior Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Finance” (Achebe, 1988:75), the one whose voice is audible enough to be heard. Thus, this statement situates Beatrice as Achebe’s first and only fully developed and well-rounded character, one with a name and a surname, a presence, a voice and the ability to act and according to Sam, Beatrice “is one of the brilliant daughters of this country” (Achebe,1988:75). By ascribing such values to Beatrice, a female character, Achebe presents a new woman, a new being who refuses to subscribe to the norms of corruption and ineptitude.

There is a way also in which the corporeality of Beatrice exudes the double-voicedness that Mikhail Bakhtin (1986) privileges to cater for the multilingual repertoires that she embodies. It is also this double-voicedness that Achebe exploits by way of making Beatrice speak for and on behalf of the female agentive body. It is essential to note that being a satirical commentary about the ills of military rule in the post-independent years, Achebe situates the agenda of gender identity within the conceptual framework of socio-political conflicts. As such, the arguments that inform this study take root in the socio-political conflicts that threatened the peace and stability in Igbo society. Through the replication of the lived experiences of Igbo people in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988), Achebe weighs in on the negative and positive impact of Western ideology on the people. In Achebe’s view, the negative impact is the introduction of individualism, an ideology that complicates the principles and peculiarities of Igwebuikracy. Individualism is taken as a subset of colonialism, that is:

[A] decadent civilisation [...] a stricken civilisation [...] a dying civilisation, the fact is that the so-called European civilisation [...] as it has been shaped by two centuries of bourgeoisie rule, is incapable of solving the two major problems to which its existence has given rise the problem of the proletariat and the colonial problem.” (Césaire, 1972:31).

Hence, decolonisation and independence are façades. This is because colonialism is an economic and social system that legitimises exploitation and social ills and ultimately creates

a culturally-hybrid individual. Tracing the concept of colonialism and civilisation back to Fanon (1963), it is evident that the post-independent Igbo person is a culturally-hybrid individual. On one hand, these individuals, like Sam, have the semblance of the “hired kinglets, overlords and a bourgeoisie sham from beginning to end ... go-betweens” (Fanon, 1963:7), who oppress those perceived to be members of the inferior social group. These are the military who perpetuate social injustice and prejudice through the legalisation of corrupt social policies. On the other hand, there are individuals, the proletariat who have been displaced from their central position. However, it is imperative to state that given the African colonial history, the members of these social groups have experienced displacement at different times, firstly through the activities of the coloniser in the colonial era and then through the activities of the native leaders in post-independent Nigeria. The post-independent Nigerian state is a cultural hybrid space on the margin where individuals discover themselves and in so doing, (re)appropriate value to their identity. One such individual is Beatrice Nwanyibuife Okoh who recognises these intricacies and works towards achieving them.

This means that social factors like family, status and peer group act as the progenitors of inequity and injustice while education acts as the major factor that helps re-define gender identity in contemporary Igbo society. To re-define one’s identity, Achebe recognises the fact that the individual must re-assess and re-conceptualise their identity. This, in Achebe’s view, will only occur through the process of cultural re-appropriation. However, for Beatrice, this process starts with the re-appropriation of value, an act which she engages in through re-naming and appreciating her feminine attributes. These attributes are the products of the informal and formal modes of learning. The informal mode occurs within the family unit and acts as the primary space for socialisation while the formal mode of learning occurs outside the home. However, it is the learning institutions outside the home that enable the gendered identities to challenge patriarchal norms and ideology. As such, Achebe through a unique modality of characterisation creates a female character who articulates her grievances against the government, challenges patriarchy and (re)conceptualises her gender identity in an evolving society. Beatrice is the type of woman who refuses to give share with Lou that which Sam terms the “woman’s angle” (Achebe, 1988:75). Rather, Beatrice focuses on projecting the real, unbiased image of the impact of socio-economic policy on the proletariat. Beatrice also acts as the harbinger of goodwill, as she accommodates and feeds the ‘others’ regardless of their levels of enlightenment in the “whiteman house” (Achebe, 1988:227). The white man’s

place represents a place outside the centre but never quite on the margins. In presenting the concept of gender identity, Achebe emphasises the role that social perception plays in informing this social and political identity-formation process. In Beatrice's case, that perception plays an integral role in shaping her childhood. Achebe also narrates the events that surrounded Beatrice's birth and emphasises this through the naming process.

Set against this background, it is imperative to state in this chapter that these notions of human experience are within the Afrocentric paradigm of Achebe that emphasises the roles of Igbo men and women as agents of change and social cohesion. These men and women are labelled as subaltern subjects who are doubly oppressed because of their gender identity and ideology. On the issue of ideology, the characters on the other side of the social divide, Chris, Ikem, Beatrice, Elewa and the other Abazonians reject the rigid dual-structure model that appropriates superior statuses on men and inferior ones to women. This is because marginalisation results in the perpetuation of corruption and poverty and other social vices that contaminate human interaction. In this study, social injustice is set within the space of what Ogunyemi refers to as African wo/man palava. These peculiar experiences are shaped by the "past and present subjugation of the black population along with present-day subtle (or not so subtle) control exercised over them by the alien, Western culture" (Ogunyemi, 1985:64). In short, social injustice is the product of social palava, which in this case centres around the colonial influence on gender construction within the postcolonial space.

### **Reappropriation and reconstruction of voice and agency in the postcolonial space**

Beatrice Nwanyibuife Okoh is Achebe's first fully developed female character who vocalises and challenges patriarchy and the limitations it places on the marginalised other. In Beatrice's case, Achebe emphasises this with her middle name, Nwanyibuife', which means "a female is also something" (Achebe, 1988:87). As a child, Beatrice resented the name not only "because it seemed fudged" (Achebe, 1988:87) but also because of the restriction that the 'Nwanyi' places on her:

Perhaps it was the nwanyi, the female half of it that I particularly resented. My father was so insistent on it. "Sit like a female!" or "Female soldier", which he called me as he lifted me off with his left hand and gave me three stinging smacks on the bottom with his right the day I fell off the cashew tree (Achebe, 1988:87).

From the above paragraph, Achebe essentially communicates that Igbo people place immense value on the male, whereas the female who is ‘also something’ only acts as an appendage to the dynamics of representation and belonging to the Igbo cosmos. By raising this point, Achebe draws attention to the fact that within familial spaces, names play huge roles in defining the identities of social members. These societal expectations are ingrained in the minds of Igbo people right from childhood through the gendered socialisation process. The internalisation of these patriarchal social norms leads “to the low participation of women in government and politics” (Epounda, 2019:285), an act that translates into economic disenfranchisement and the continued perpetuation of various forms of social injustice against the others. For this analysis, the ‘other’ includes women and all those who are oppressed:

Women [...] the biggest group of oppressed people in the world and, if we are to believe the Book of Genesis, the very oldest. But they are not the only ones. There are others, rural peasants in every land, the urban poor in industrialised countries, Black people everywhere ... the oppressed inhabit each their [own] peculiar hell (Achebe, 1988:98).

As such, Achebe posits that there are two categories of social members in the fictitious Kangan, and these are the haves and the have-nots. The haves are the leaders like Sam who share semblance with the “hired kinglets, overlords, and bourgeoisie” (Fanon, 1963:7), who oppress the members that are perceived inferior. On the other hand, there are the oppressed who are silenced by the institutionalised social structures that evolve from the social norms that influence the belief systems and precepts of society. Based on these propositions, this study describes the Igbo woman as the other who is oppressed because of her ethnicity, gender and social class by agents like Sam, His Excellency and Lou Cranford. While Sam acts as the tyrannical and dogmatic leader who is “condemned to serve [the people] of Kangan for life” (Achebe, 1988:5), Lou Cranford, a representative of the American United Press, acts as the agent of the imperialist superpower who maintains indirect control and domination of the once colonial subject. Sam and Lou do not care about “the people and their basic needs of water, which is free from guinea worm, of shelter and food (Achebe, 1988:73). However, of all those labelled as the other in Achebe’s *Anthills of the savannah* (1988), it is Beatrice Nwanyibuife Okoh, a female who reconstructs her identity, evolves into BB, the voice of the subalternly oppressed and challenges patriarchal structures.

To present his case, Achebe adopts a unique naming system in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988). There is Beatrice Nwanyibuife Okoh, whose given name within the private family space and the adopted name within the public (work) space, Nwanyibuife, Miss Beatrice Okoh/ Miss Okoh reflects her secondary and marginalised position as a patriarchal construct. By raising this point, Achebe draws attention to the fact that in social spaces, names play huge roles in defining the identities of social members. For instance, in the private family space, Beatrice is the fourth surviving girl-child and the fifth girl-child born to her parents. Her forename, Beatrice, is derived from the Latin word, *Beatrix* also spelt *Beatriz*, which means “she who makes people happy.” This defines her role as a woman because for the Igbo woman who is likened to an “imperfect man” (Chris *et al.*, 2020:6), then her existence is dependent on her ability to attract wealthy men who can afford to pay exorbitant bride prices, get married to these men and deliver sons for him. Hence, happiness has a subjective undertone that is directly tied to a woman’s ability to fulfil these societal expectations. It is these societal expectations that justify the woman's secondary position within the social space. These societal expectations are ingrained in the minds of an Igbo person right from childhood through the gendered socialisation process (Idang, 2015). As earlier stated, this process starts with the gender assignment at birth and is reinforced through the naming process which occurs through the gendered learning and naming process.

Names are comparable to labels that determine human identity, activity and value in society. According to Olaluwoye (2016:25), names are “symbols of identity” and transmitters of values that project the bearers’ identity and the experiences surrounding the birth of the child. There are different types of names, and these are:

Official names, nicknames, first names and institutional/titular names. Official names are conceived here as names, which, of necessity involve surnames, and which are used in formal ...interactions; first names are individuals’ personal names which do not include surnames; nicknames are names evolved from traits or attributes of characters ... unlike surnames and first names which extend to all the names in the text, nicknames strictly apply to names of characters; institutional/titular names are those associated with particular religious or social organisations and those related to traditional titles (Odebunmi, 2008:53).

The personal name which includes the fore and middle name reflects the worldviews, cultural values, societal expectations, experiences of the parents and their expectations for the child. While the surnames at the other end of the spectrum are the “aftermath of personal and baptismal names; they evolve in order to distinguish people into groups, such as by origin, occupation, parentage and clan” (Eze, 2020:62). This means that surnames in whatever form, albeit patronymic, matronymic, occupational, toponymal and pseudonym forms, refer to the last names that immediate family members share. In short, in Igbo society, surnames are the social yardsticks with which the domesticated and repressed frames of women are enunciated.

Still, on names, nicknames are coined by the members of one’s age group, and these allow the bearers “to express themselves [as] forms of critical resistance to [the] stereotypical images” (Mensah, 2016:184) created by society. Thus, nicknames become the paradigms of social resistance against the patriarchal norms that prompt the marginalisation of some social members. This means that regardless of the forms, names are subsets of the culture that shape identity and determine the patterns of social interaction. In Beatrice Nwanyibuife Okoh’s case, her forename and middle name mirror her as ‘something’ as such, her birth is an uneventful one. The feeling of dejection is evident in the choice of names given to her by her parents. Beatrice shares some similarities with Adah in Emecheta’s *Second class citizen* (1974:1), the girl who:

[H]ad arrived when everyone was expecting and predicting a boy, so since she was a disappointment to her parents, to her immediate family, to her tribe, nobody thought of recording her birth. She was so insignificant.

In short, girls are configured as insignificant objects through particular gendered socialisation patterns. The reference to an earlier published narrative reaffirms Achebe’s position that in patriarchal Igbo families, male children are the only guarantors of the joys of motherhood. However, this is not the case in Okoh’s household as Beatrice’s parents had given birth to five girls even after her mother had prayed fervently to give her father a son. These feelings of inadequacy are reinforced by the patriarchal dictates that privilege boys and men. A semantic analysis of the meanings of Beatrice’s name shows that within the civic space, Beatrice is seen as a passive character who is incapacitated and can neither act, think nor speak. This inactive state is the product of her gender assignment as a girl-child, that is, one whose relevance is tied to the payment of a bride price and her role as a mother and a wife (Emecheta, 1976; Nwapa,

1966). In short, it is these feminine activities that define her corporeal being within the civic space. This is reinforced in her middle name, Nwanyibuife, which means “a female is also something” (Achebe, 1988:87). Thus, through this naming process, Achebe emphasises the ideological load of the average Igbo person with regards to the gender of a child. This implies that names are one of the schemas that define gender identity and social relationships.

Thus, in Achebe’s fictitious space, identity takes a Marxist-African womanist form. This means that in Kangan, there are two social groups and these are the bourgeoisie and the proletariat social groups who are led by Sam and Beatrice respectively. By pegging the actions of these group members side by side, Achebe shows that the perceptions of gender change with time. In analysing Beatrice’s motives and traits, this study adopts Ogunyemi’s ideological African wo/man palava stance. In this instance, palava encompasses the social ills that threaten social cohesion in Igbo society, the major one being gender prejudice. However, to combat these social ills, Beatrice becomes the gender activist who, according to Eesuola and Mpho (2017:8588), seeks to “reverse and change the *status quo* in which men in society are deemed to be superior to women in certain issues and have more opportunities to do certain things than women.” Within the context of Achebe’s *Anthills of the savannah* (1988), Beatrice recognises her human capabilities, and this enables her to challenge various policies that legitimise social injustice, prejudice and marginalisation in post-independent Igbo society. These social ills are fanned by the patriarchal ideology that ascribes superior values to men and masculine roles and inferior values to women and feminine roles. Hence, to fully conceptualise the ways Achebe articulates the changing gender constructions in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988), the arguments are driven and amplified by the conceptualisations of social injustice and gender identity in contemporary Igbo society.

Gender refers to “the socially and culturally constructed roles for men and women” (Makama, 2013:118). This means that gender as a social construct refers to the human attributes that project masculinity and femininity. It is these perceived notions that shape the precepts of western patriarchy. Essien and Ukpong (2012) posit that patriarchy in Igbo society is the offshoot of colonialism and that it is a colonial ideology that has permeated the social system. Hence, the social factors that shape the realities of the marginalised persons in Igbo society are the imported cultural principles promoted and valourised during the colonial era. These include corruption, poverty and social conflict. Within the Igbo political system, patriarchy is “seen as a structure of a set of social relations which enables men to dominate women. Therefore,

women are discriminated against from, in most cases, acquiring formal education” (Makama, 2013:115). This definition points to the fact that patriarchy is a deeply rooted principle that justifies the subjugation of women by men. Jaiyeola and Aladegbola (2020:7) iterate this point by arguing that patriarchy ensures that women continually “operate behind the scenes-not seen in public spaces, further making men act superior and isolating women from roles and decisions.” This means that women are silenced and deprived of their fundamental human rights. Some of these rights are the right to good health, paid employment, education and the right to vote and be voted for. As such, this study posits that the plot of the narrative is driven by two categories of social actors, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This translates into the social space of the family where the agents of socialisation are fathers, mothers, older siblings and other members of the extended family (that is, the *Umunna* and the *Umunne*) who monitor the gendered indoctrination processes of the children born into their family and ensure that the tenets of the particular social units are adhered to.

Being a patrilineal society, this study posits that the precepts of perception and the principles of interaction in Igbo society are set within the frames of hegemonic masculinity. In talking about hegemonic masculinity, Afrocentric Igbo critics contend that gender and the gendered socialisation processes are products of an ideology that displaced the communal principles of socialisation. This is evident in the fact that hegemonic masculinity prompts the perpetuation of “oppressive, degrading and discriminatory social practices ... such as legalised wife battery or chastisement ... marginalisation of women’s rights ... female disinheritance ... son preference syndrome” (Ifemeje & Umejiaku, 2014:18). In Igbo society, there is a strong preference for sons for their roles as fathers and secondly, for their inherent potential to inherit landed property and thirdly, because it is believed that they are destined to care for their aged parents. Achebe touches on the impact of this son-preference syndrome in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) during Beatrice’s reflective introspection on her childhood. In this specific episode, Beatrice discusses the impact of gendered socialisation on her development. Beatrice’s turning points are when she realised that her mother bore her a huge grudge for being born a girl as she recounts to Chris:

I didn’t realise until much later that my mother bore me a great grudge because I was a girl - her fifth in a row though one had died and that when I was born she had so desperately prayed for a boy to give my father (Achebe, 1988:86).

This grudge on her mother's part and the indifference felt by her father is expressed in the choice of name that they give to Beatrice. Firstly, she is the harbinger of happiness, a feeling that is attached to her bride price and her ability to procreate male children for her husband, thus, her societal expectation as a wife and a mother is the source of her happiness. This shows that the first source of gender prejudice and social injustice in Igbo society is the assignment of specific roles, obligations and chores. The second source of gender prejudice in Igbo society within a family unit is the gendered socialisation process. This occurs through the gendered learning process where the boys are trained as providers and the girls as caregivers. Thus, the assignment of roles within the family unit acts as the first form of social injustice that precipitates gender prejudice, bias and marginalisation against the members who are classified as the 'other.'

As stated earlier, the 'other' also refers to the displaced social members, men and women who fall within the lower rungs of the social strata. These are the people who feel the brunt of social injustice, which includes, "its dismembering effect is felt in our revered cultural values ... its concomitant effect is evident in the collapse being experienced in various nature and degree" (Egbule, 2019:129). Consequently, the dismembering effect leads to the stratification of social members and the creation of the 'wannabe' bourgeoisie men, products of a "stricken civilisation (Césaire, 1972:31), who maintain control of the socio-political space. In Achebe's *Anthills of the savannah* (1988), the bourgeoisie group is led by the military head of state, Sam, who acts as the major perpetrator of social injustice. This shows that the two main social parameters that determine the pattern of social relationships in Achebe's Kangan are gender and class. Kangan is a place on the margins where a character like Beatrice is empowered to build a fortress and through her action "put the world where it should sit" (Achebe, 1988:227). Hence, Beatrice re-defines the basis of socialisation in her society. Based on this characterisation technique, Achebe creates a character who challenges the tenets of western patriarchy not with her muscles but with her voice. She instantiates the subaltern who can speak, following Gayatri Spivak's enlightening study on voice, precarity and marginality. However, it is imperative to note that the fictitious Kangan is a "backward West African state" (Achebe, 1988:144) under a military rule. This means that the stability and development of this state are threatened by the military intervention, corruption and bad governance. According to Onwuka (2018:156), military rule "engenders abuse of power, loss of liberty, brutality, oppression, intimidation, fear and insecurity in society." In short, the despotic and

commandeering policies of the military government are the indices of injustice that threaten social stability and development. As such, the conceptual framework of this study is set against the backdrop of patriarchal hegemony, as defined within the military structure and ideology. The ideology of militarism takes root in the proposition that the military is equipped with the mechanism with which to revolt against “the misrule and mismanagement of corrupt civilian politicians, against the loss of national glory and pride resulting from the greed, corruption ... and ill-discipline of civilian leaders” (Achebe, 1976:118). However, rather than alleviate the plight of the deprived ‘others’, the military patriarchal elite enforces the social policy that legitimises corruption, ill-governance and other forms of social injustice. As such, the ‘other’ in Achebe’s *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) are not just women but other Abazonians who rebel against unjust government policies.

Set against the aforementioned categorisation model, the proletariat ‘other’ represents those who are marginalised and displaced because of their class, ethnicity, ideology and gender. Also, this study posits that social injustice is propagated through social ills, some of which are poverty and marginalisation. As such, the arguments in this chapter point to the fact that patriarchy prescribes and proscribes the activities of social members. Set against these observations, this study reiterates the notion that gender is a dynamic social construct while society functions as a conglomerate of agents, structures and systems. Hence, to answer the research question posed in the first chapter, this study posits that gender as a contemporary social construct accommodates the vast range of capabilities of men and women. These men and women collectively referred to as the ‘other’ evolve from the marginalised state to a stance of oppositional resistance where they “put the world where to sit” (Achebe, 1988:220). This means that within this contemporary space, individuals are not defined by their class, ethnicity or gender but by their human capabilities.

Beatrice Nwanyibuife Okoh’s gender assignment at birth caused a strain in the relationship she shared with both parents. Thus, even as a child, Beatrice Nwanyibuife suffered various forms of physical and psychological abuse in her civic space. The forms of psychological abuse are evident in the coinage of her nicknames. To her parents, she was just something, an appendage to Buife and her siblings, especially to her older sibling, Alice, Beatrice was nicknamed, salt and The Goat. Achebe’s naming and characterisation technique amplify the limitations of gendered feminine names. However, this study posits that gender is a social phenomenon that is constructed by society but re-constructed by the bearer. Hence, the reconceptualisation is

initiated through formal learning. In Beatrice's case, formal learning prompts the reconceptualisation of her identity, as she evolves into a woman who refuses to leave all her options open. In essence, through the dogmatic socialisation process within the civic space, the woman as a girl-child is taught to be passive, shy and docile, a product of patriarchy. However, change occurs through the formal learning process which takes place outside the home. One of the basic features of a character is the name. Set against this backdrop, this study posits that one of the ways Achebe articulates gender construction in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) is through a unique naming process from which the forename, middle name, surname and nicknames evolve. By giving Beatrice (who would have otherwise been nameless, uneducated and poor) a full-blooded name, Achebe contends that even though the social structures and strictures do not permit the activities of the displaced human beings, each individual is still equipped to re-write her story.

In Achebe's view, Beatrice evolves into the vocal woman who embraces her femininity while recognising her human capabilities. Beatrice's evolution is triggered by formal education. Hence, formal education in Achebe's view is the platform through which resistance and change occur. Formal education is defined as an exclusive learning process that involves the instructor and the learner. This form of learning takes place in the school where there are structured and hidden curricula that stipulate the norms and objectives of learning. This includes the development of enlightened, creative and innovative individuals who will contribute to social development and cohesion (Jayeola-Omoyeni, 2013; Wekwete, 2014). This means that formal institutions, through structured engagement with learners within and outside the classrooms, inculcate in learners the positive attributes required for socio-economic growth and stability. The agent of change is Beatrice Nwanyibuife Okoh. Therefore, this study posits that one of the factors that trigger the change in people's perception of their gender identity is formal education. In line with this proposition, this study explicates the role that formal education plays in the gender construction of Igbo people.

Formal education allows the re-naming and re-appropriation of new and progressive values. Re-appropriation starts with the identification of the modalities of marginalisation. Through Beatrice's childhood experiences, the first mechanism of marginalisation is gender. This is because gender assignment serves as an outlet for the propagation of stereotypes, that is, negative perceptions about people because of their gender, class and status. For this study, the concept of growth is taken as one that is synonymous with growth, that is, the result of formal

education. From the foregoing proposition, Achebe ascribes immense value to formal education. However, to appreciate the value of formal education as it concerns gender constructions in Igbo society, Achebe's view of the pros and cons of formal education comes to the forefront. In line with this assertion, Uğur et al. (2015) posit that formal learning equips the learner with the tools that enable them to function as creative social members who recognise human potentialities. This means that formal education acts as the precursor of social growth. For Beatrice, the acquisition of formal education equips her with the human capabilities with which to function as a vocal member of her society. In Achebe's view, subscribing to wa Thiong'o extreme position on colonialism, the language and norms of the coloniser, is like "in rejecting evil, we throw out the good with it" (Achebe, 1965:28). Thus, through Beatrice's activities, Achebe sieves the good from evil by creating a character who sets out to achieve the good.

In Achebe's view, one of the social factors that triggers the change in gender construction in Kangan is formal learning. As stated earlier, formal learning is intended for the development of enlightened and innovative individuals who will contribute to the socio-economic development of an egalitarian state. As such, these individuals are also taught to respect human rights and hold their leaders accountable for their actions. In so doing, these learners eventually contribute to social development and cohesion. This is evident in Beatrice's character who rises from the position of Assistant Secretary to that of a woman who is overseeing the naming ceremony of the new-born, Amaechina. In short, unlike the female characters in his earlier novels, from Ekwefi, Okonkwo's second wife in *Things fall apart* (1958) who absconded from her husband's house to live with Okonkwo, to Chielo, the widowed priestess, Beatrice refuses to be "defined through the notions created by male consciousness" (de Beauvoir, 1953), which restrict her to the home space, rather, she evolves into "one of the most brilliant daughters of this country" (Achebe, 1988:75). In this sense, formal education equips Beatrice with the qualities that she needs as a member of society to challenge the preconceived and negative stereotypes.

By emphasising Beatrice's roles at this point, Achebe counters the arguments of critics like wa Thiong'o who adopts a radical perspective of the decolonisation process. In his view, why tolerate the component of an exploitative system of government that was originally tailored to function as a cultural bomb? According to wa Thiong'o (1981:3), the colonial rules were meant to:

Annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves ... [It] makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement ... it makes them identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves, for instance, with other people's languages.

Simply put, these rules were products of a system that claims superior value based on the principles of universal human experiences. Hence, the world is represented within a Cartesian binary model of good and bad, white and black. In short, formal education triggers the social production of an artificial space that is far removed from the centre. For the social beings who exist in this space, formal learning prompts the development of voice and agency. Voice and agency are the social characteristics of resistance and empowerment that enable them to reappropriate value to themselves, an act that leads to the evolution of self-awareness. According to Morin (2011:808), one is self-aware when "one actively identifies, processes and stores information about the self." Thus, self-awareness refers to how an individual knows and understands feelings, interests and desires. This proposition serves as the premise against which Achebe emphasises Beatrices' growth from the not-so-timid girl-child who used "to roll [myself] in a mat on the floor and inside my dark, cylindrical capsule play my silent game" (Achebe, 1988:95) to the vocal adult who works as the Senior Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Finance. Here, Beatrice evolves into a character who re-creates within the marginal space, a social agent who in Achebe's view challenges patriarchy, social prejudice and social injustice in his society. This agent of interest whose activities and motives drive the argument in this study is Beatrice Nwanyibuife Okoh.

However, for Achebe, (re)conceptualisation starts with the recognition of the benefits of colonialism, one of which is the introduction of a world language that "gave [them] the colonised a language with which to talk to one another. If it failed to give them a song, it at least gave them a tongue" (Achebe, 1976:77). Tongue is the organ that articulates speech, hence, the tongue here aids the vocalisation of the experience of Igbo people told from the perspective of an enlightened Igbo woman. The acquisition and mastery of the English language enable Beatrice to break the glass ceiling, and she returns to her homeland to serve in the capacity of a:

Senior 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 (Achebe, 1988:75).

This means that by acquiring formal education, Beatrice develops a personality that allows her to forge a new concept of womanhood and femininity. No longer is she the timid girl who is scared to play in the rain, live and express her fears and ideas, but she grows into a woman who is equipped to re-define her existence and challenge western patriarchy. Hence, colonialism (from where formal education and the English language spring) takes the form of a double-edged sword, one that takes and gives. Achebe creates a woman who masters the English language, an imperial language and articulates her perception and critical insights into English, yet she is Igbo at the core. This manner in which she takes up ownership of the language creates a complex amalgam of the two languages living in her. As such, she grows to embody the same complex duality that her creator, Achebe exhibits. Achebe (1965) speaks of how he intends to use the English language in a local context to carry the cultural nuances and tempo of the Igbo universe. In this way, Beatrice becomes the embodiment of this ‘localisation’ of the English language, as she disrupts the political chicanery of the corrupt government officials. Through Beatrice’s character, Achebe subscribes to the idea that formal education is one of the social factors that can trigger a dramatic social change in the fictitious Kangan and contemporary Igbo society. Hence, Achebe argues that formal education plays an integral role in redefining gender identity in Igbo society and as such calls for the reconceptualisation of the *modus operandi* of this social mechanism.

The appropriation of the audible voice allows Beatrice to become the one who acknowledges the ills of colonialism and at the same time clamours for an unadulterated version of an Igbo woman, who harnesses the strengths, abilities and inadequacies of the female characters in the Achebe’s literary archive of published novels: Ezinma and her mother, Ekwefi, Chielo, the priestess of the Cave and the Hills and Agbadi, the protector of Umuofia clan, Okonkwo and Nwoye’s nameless mothers in *Things fall apart* (1958) and Clara Okeke, Obi Okonkwo’s fiancée in *No longer at ease* (1960). It is from this lineage that Beatrice becomes the “perfect embodiment of my ideal woman, beautiful without being glamorous, peaceful but very strong” (Achebe, 1988:63-64). In short, Beatrice is the replica of a culturally hybrid individual, a queen, and a provider who leads the other to find the voice, either on the margins or further

away from the margin. Still, on the roles of names in informing self-identity, Achebe ascribes deific powers to Beatrice whom he compares to “a priestess ... a prophetess” (Achebe, 1988:114). As such, she becomes the modern-day Idemili, the daughter of the Almighty who was at the beginning of creation sent to “bear witness to the moral nature of authority by wrapping around power’s rude waist a loincloth of peace and modesty” (Achebe, 1988:102). She also becomes the Agbadi, who hops about the market square at dawn and like the Idemili and Uhamiri goddesses who position themselves in ways that allow them to focalise social issues.

As such, Achebe empowers Beatrice with the vocal ability to challenge social norms and Özgürel (2020) contends that Achebe appropriates agency to Beatrice through a naming process and most importantly, the re-naming process. This way her forename and middle names take up new meanings. For instance, Beatrice’s perception of happiness does not rest on the shores of motherhood, where the concepts of the mother and a woman take up new meanings. She challenges patriarchy by not having a husband but a partner. She also takes charge of her life by having her home and then organising and giving the newborn girl-child a boy’s name. Amaechina is the modern Igbo woman who is ready to take charge, cohabit and interact in the public space and must be ready to tow that path that never closes. As stated earlier, the contention is that novelty in resistance and the charting of new spaces reside in what Begum (2007) refers to as the ‘New Woman’ incarnate in Beatrice. The term newness here encapsulates the benefits of formal education, one of which is the reconceptualisation of gender identity. As such, this study posits that it is through the process of reconceptualisation that Beatrice finds her voice, defines her agency and challenges social injustice. Social injustice within the patriarchal unit takes a gendered form, that is, boys are taught by their fathers to be aggressive, rough, loud and handy while girls are taught to be passive, quiet and shy. For this reason, western patriarchy is the major mechanism of social injustice in Igbo society. This contrasts with the principles of Igwebuikocracy which defined the socio-economic space of Igbo people before the colonial incursion.

In line with this argument, this study contends that the primary structure of patriarchy wherein the primal forms of social injustice are perpetuated is the family. However, since cultural practices due to colonial incursion have now become adulterated, Achebe in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) prescribes an indigenised system of reconceptualisation that places at the core the tenets of peaceful co-existence and social justice. Social justice is an integral component

of Igwebuikocracy, a social concept that promotes communalism and complementarity. Kanu (2019:35) refers to Igwebuikocracy as “an indigenous democratic government designed by the people, for the people ... that puts into consideration their peculiarities and particularities.” Hence, social justice recognises the idiosyncrasies of social beings and informs their perceptions of identities, interactions and capabilities. To achieve social justice, Achebe creates Beatrice, a subaltern subject who focalises the experiences of the Igbo people. To analyse the various ways Achebe articulates the construction of gender identity in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988), this study posits that through a series of processes, some of which are re-naming and enlightenment, Beatrice establishes herself as an independent woman who can speak, think and act. The foregoing arguments show that the first social factor that influences gender identity is the social principle of patriarchy, the second is the naming process and the third is the gendered learning process. The arguments above show that the first act of social injustice is perpetuated through the process of gender assignment which occurs at birth. These, in Ifemeje and Umejiaku (2014), are the paradigms of patriarchy as a discriminatory practice. However, Achebe questions this perceived view about the roles of a boy within the home through the birth of a female child, Amaechina, Ama for short. The girl who bears a boy’s name, Amaechina plays a significant role in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988), and this is evident in the choice of her name, her gender and her naming ceremony.

In Achebe’s analysis, corruption is the bane of socio-economic underdevelopment and in his bid to curb the spread of this social illness, he creates a mouthpiece to condemn the corrupt activities of the government which inaugurates social instability. As such, the ‘trouble with Kangan’ in Beatrice’s view is foregrounded in the government’s corrupt practices. This also incorporates within it the government’s rebuttal of its reprisal on the part of the masses. Thus, Achebe engages Beatrice, a woman as a mouthpiece that criticises the military government of the day. This mouthpiece forewarns others about future occurrences and the impact this would have on them:

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. We are all in it, Ikem, you, me and even him. The thing is no longer a joke (Achebe, 1988:114).

Her 'new' name bears great significance to the character's role in the narrative, and firstly, it starts with the structural arrangement with the placement of the native name in the middle. This shows an agreement with Ogunyemi's proposition about defining literary elements of any African narrative, as he situates the characters in the middle of the narrative. In furtherance to this argument, Achebe also ascribes supernatural values to the modern woman, and this signifies a change in Achebe's perception of womanhood and femininity.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter interrogates and explores how Achebe articulates his views about how social identities are constructed and re-constructed in the politically unstable Kangan. The activities of the characters in the fictitious Kangan are satirical representations of the actual events that threatened peaceful cohesion and stability during the military period in Nigeria, and by extension, other sub-Saharan West African states. Through the unique characterisation technique, Achebe shows how social constructs, particularly the name, race, ethnicity and status intersect. However, Achebe focuses on the woman, who in addition to the afore-listed construct is also defined by her gender identity. It is interesting to note that in the contemporary space, the contextual analysis of *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) shows that Achebe who was once described as the male author who silenced women and depicted them as objectified, docile non-beings brings into the contemporary space, a woman like BB and a girl-childlike Amaechina who through re-birth become pacesetters in their social units.

## **Chapter Five: Vision of a new world in *Americanah***

### **Introduction**

The arguments in the fourth chapter are grounded on discussions of how Achebe constructs gender in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988). This study posits that in Achebe's view, cultural factors such as language and societal beliefs play significant roles in the formation of gender identities and socialisation patterns. To back up these arguments, Chapter four focused on Achebe's portrayal of Beatrice who, through the process of reconceptualisation, evolved into an assertive and voiced character. Also, using the onomastic lens, the arguments in the previous chapter were framed by the proposition that names function for the processes of conceptualisation and reconceptualisation. To reiterate this point, the study posits that Achebe in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) focuses on names and social status to advance a novel agenda where (un)naming becomes a significant trope of characterisation and agency. As is evidenced in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988), human identity is initiated at birth through gender assignment and naming of the newborn while the process of reconceptualisation is started by other social agents outside the family unit. These social agents, which include peers within formal educational and religious structures, act as the policing agents that ensure the conditions of social interaction are adhered to. Thus, the arguments in this third chapter are driven by an intention to clarify how Adichie describes the ways in which social factors and social agents influence gender constructions in contemporary Igbo society. Chapter Five focuses on how Adichie projects the dynamic nature of gender identity and also how these influence social relations in a new world where the social members interact based on the notions of cooperation and equity as projected by Adichie in *Americanah* (2013).

### **Contextual analysis of *Americanah***

*Americanah* (2013) is Adichie's third published novel. It is a love story with a satirical undertone that exposes the impact of poor governance on socio-economic development and cohesion. In this study, examples of socio-economic barriers are corruption, inadequate infrastructure, conflicts in the forms of protests organised by students and lecturers, low standards of education and high rates of unemployment. Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) is also about the reconstruction of social identity, a narrative that Idowu-Faith (2011:23) describes as a "melting pot where love and romance collide and comingle with hair politics and the shifting

meanings of skin colour”. Hence, this study posits that Adichie, in this diasporic narrative with a romantic undertone, recognises the socio-economic barriers that impede human development.

*Americanah* (2013) follows the intricate journey of two lovers, Ifemelu and Obinze, who met during their secondary school days. After their secondary school education, Ifemelu and Obinze proceed to the University of Nsukka in Enugu state to further their education. However, due to the corrupt practices and mismanagement of funds which result in poor infrastructural maintenance and non-payment of staff salaries, students’ bodies, and academic and non-academic staff unions organise intermittent strike actions and protests. Because of the incessant strike actions and protests organised by the members of the Academic Staff Unions and students’ union bodies, Ifemelu migrates to the United States of America on a partial scholarship to further her education. Therefore, Ifemelu becomes one of the young immigrants who relocates to the United States of America to pursue their studies. However, in a bid to survive, Ifemelu strives to integrate herself into the American milieu and system by taking on new meaningless names like “Goz”. Ifemelu meets Curt, the superficial “rich, white guy from Potomac” (Adichie, 2013:194) who serves to integrate the nomad into a social institution where the white-black binary is well-defined. After Ifemelu ends her relationship with Curt and on the day she decides to embrace her ‘authentic’ self, she meet Blaine, the meticulous college professor with “a firm reed of goodness in him” (Adichie, 2013:306). However, she eventually breaks up with Blaine. Ifemelu’s relationships did not work out because she did not connect with these men the way she connected with Obinze:

Her first love, her first lover, the only person with whom she had never felt the need to explain herself. He was now a husband and a father, and they had not been in touch for years, yet she could not pretend that he was not a part of her homesickness or that she did not often think of him, sifting through her past, looking for portents of what she could not name (Adichie, 2013:13).

The above quotation reflects the value of formal learning and financial emancipation. This is because it was after Ifemelu completed her fellowship at Princeton and had become a successful ‘anonymous’ blogger that she starts to miss Obinze and Nigeria. As such, this study posits that education and wealth are the social tools that help Ifemelu re-conceptualise her identity and expunge the “rolling [her] r” (Adichie, 2013:178) from her speech. Obinze, on the other hand, completes his university degree at the University of Nsukka and graduates with a

second-class upper degree. However, he is neither able to get a job because he does not have the proper connection nor get an American visa because of the pervasive and stereotyped notions about foreign young men being terrorists (Adichie, 2013). This is the product of implicit bias spread through the single story that labels all young foreign men as terrorists. Obinze eventually travels to London with his mother, the unnamed Professor, on a six-month visa but ends up spending two years. This is the beginning of his immigration palava, which eventually leads to his deportation back to Nigeria. Back in Nigeria, Obinze's business-oriented cousin, Nneoma, who has "many business interests, she travelled to Dubai to buy gold, to China to buy women's clothing ... distributor for a frozen chicken company" (Adichie, 2013:30), introduces Obinze to Chief, the embodiment of corruption, from whom Obinze perfects the art of hustling. Thus, Obinze, like Obi Okonkwo in Achebe's *No longer at ease* (1960), becomes a part of the corrupt system. Obinze tries to maintain a humble disposition, as he becomes a successful businessman, a father and a husband.

Obinze marries Kosi whose full name is Kosisochukwu, a name that means "God's will or as it pleases God" (Adichie, 2013:401). Kosi is a virtuous woman whose wish is to bear sons for her husband. Again, set in a compact and solid patrilineal lineage, we fathom why Kosi would make such a wish for male children. Despite his success, Obinze feels "bloated from all he had acquired ... and would from time to time be overcome by the urge to prick everything with a pin" (Adichie, 2013:28). In Lagos, Ifemelu reconnects with Obinze and becomes the pin that Obinze uses to poke the façade that he had come to represent. Obinze moves to Parkview where he intends to chase Ifemelu "until you give this a chance" (Adichie, 2013:463), which she does. Thus, at the end of the novel, Obinze moves the 'ceiling' to Ifemelu's place. The 'ceiling' is properly placed in a newly created space that is further away from the margin. In this new world, she becomes Ifem, the achiever or pacesetter who constructs the norms in her world. By referring to Obinze as the 'ceiling', Ifemelu and Obinze create a new world that is devoid of the hypocrisy and façade of the corrupt society that emasculates social members because of their identity and ideology. The foundational blocks for this new world in *Americanah* (2013) were set earlier by Achebe in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) through the creation of Achebe's first vocal and assertive character, Beatrice. As such, the path to this new world which in Adichie's view is further away from the periphery is occupied by enlightened women whose forebearers BB and Ama are Achebe's creations. Achebe's Beatrice as BB in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) performs very masculine roles like giving a girl-child a boy's name,

Amaechina, “may the path never close ... the path of Ikem” (Achebe, 1988:22). BB also gives the child a feminine nickname, Ama, which means compound. By implication, BB and Ama are Ifemelu’s forebearers who through their actions, traits and motives carve the pathway for the attainment of Adichie’s vision of a new world. This new world is one where men and women act as co-partners who make the effort to create a new structure in both territorial and psychological space.

The new world that Adichie envisions in *Americanah* (2013) is far from the margins of the contemporary social system. By being placed far from the margins, Adichie creates a socially cohesive society that thrives on the principles of equity, complementarity and cooperation. According to Schiefer and Van der Noll (2017:595), social cohesion is:

A descriptive, multifaceted and gradual phenomenon attributed to a collective, indicating the quality of collective togetherness. The essential features of social cohesion are [...] the quality of social relations, identification with the social entity and orientation towards the common good.

In short, social cohesion is a complex social phenomenon that is concerned with the activities and patterns of socialisation in human society. The definition given above shows that social cohesion as a social concept is relatively connected with harmonious living and co-existence. This means that in a socially cohesive society, social members cooperate to survive and prosper. This form of cohesive interaction leads to social growth and development, and this can only be when social beings answer the clarion call and come together to build mutually “complementary relationships” (Chukwuma, 2021:132), which are devoid of negative preconceptions. Within the Igbo context, the tenets that shape these forms of relationships are defined by the principles of Igwebuikocracy. As such, to understand the particularities of this new world that Adichie envisions, it is pertinent to grasp the operations of the current social system in which the narrative is set. The primary patriarchal agents in Adichie’s contemporary space in *Americanah* (2013) are the corrupt military rulers and the democratically elected government officials who engage in various nefarious activities. These nefarious activities, which include the embezzlement of public funds, giving and collecting bribes and the pervasive inflation of contracts, are the vices that undermine social cohesion. This means that through corrupt practices, those in power perpetuate social ills, which in turn lead to conflict, instability and socio-economic underdevelopment in their societies.

For a Nigerian author like Adichie who was born during the military regime, the experience which informs her ideology is reflective of a politically unstable period that was marred by poverty, unemployment and social conflicts. This is evident in her published narratives, *Purple hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a yellow Sun* (2006) and a short story, *The thing around Your neck* (2009) and another narrative, *Americanah* (2013). Hence, this study posits that through the portrayal of the experiences of her characters, Adichie in *Americanah* (2013), firstly, exposes the impact of corruption on the lived experiences of the Igbo people and secondly, examines the factors that influence an individual's perception of his or her gender identity. In uncovering the impact of corruption on the people, Adichie asserts that inadequacies of the illegitimate and corrupt government pave the way for the plethora of problems, such as constant strike actions which:

...were now common. In the newspapers, university lecturers listed their complaints, the agreements that were trampled in the dust by the government men whose own children were schooling abroad. Campuses were emptied, classrooms drained of life. Students hoped for short strikes, because they could not hope to have no strike at all (Adichie, 2013:94).

Thus, Adichie views corruption as the bane of progress because it leads to an economic brain drain with skilled workers and students constantly "checking out" (Adichie, 2013:213). However, as Adichie asserts, migration comes with its challenges, some of which are discrimination and loss of self. In line with this proposition, this study posits that Adichie in *Americanah* (2013) articulates the impact of voluntary displacement on the lives of black Igbo migrants. In the context of this work, these migrants are Igbo men and women who refute the rigid hegemonic policies of the corrupt and illegitimate government. As discussed in the synopsis, this form of migration to developed countries is triggered by push factors which include corruption and deprivation. However, according to Ighile and Oseghale (2019:1):

The crossing of transnational borders and entry into the receiving country present various challenges which an immigrant has to contend with. In the assimilatory process, identities are reshaped and reformed into something that is not quite the same.

This means that voluntary migration results in the triple displacement and alienation of immigrants in the host countries because of their race, status and gender. The immigrant evolves into a performative construct whose identity is firstly defined by skin colour and whose

survival is dependent on the ability to maintain the prescribed position on “America’s race ladder” (Adichie, 2013:202).

These negative stereotypes are fuelled by a single story. As such, the focus of this study is on *Americanah* (2013) and how Adichie, through the portrayal of the experiences of her characters, replicates the lived experiences of the black Igbo people, both in their local spaces and in the diaspora. Set against this backdrop, this study seeks to examine the ways Adichie in *Americanah* (2013) interprets how social agents influence the formation of gender identities and patterns of interaction in contemporary Igbo society. Consequently, each of Adichie’s characters in *Americanah* (2013) experiences the impact of corruption and reacts accordingly. One of these characters is Ifemelu, the female protagonist who migrates to the United States fights racism through her blog posts and returns as an Americana who has a voice and a presence. Hence, this study posits that the plot of the narrative is driven by the activities of the characters. However, being a contemporary narrative, Adichie creates strong female characters who challenge and speak up against patriarchy and corruption. One such woman is Obinze’s mother. Obinze’s mother is a widow who single-handedly raises her only son, hence, through Obinze’s mother, Adichie reconceptualises the family structure showing that a woman, in the absence of a man, can also act as the “political, moral and spiritual head of the [...] family” (Ajaegbo, 2014:18). Her capabilities as a parent are evident in her ability to raise a son who is composed, diligent and respectful. However, Obinze’s mother also stands out as a vocal and upright professor who once challenged a corrupt professor. The professor slapped her because “he could not take a woman talking to him like that ... she told him she could not slap him back because he was stronger” (Adichie, 2013:58) but then demanded a public apology which she got. Through Obinze’s mother, Adichie establishes that in contemporary society, there are women who are empowered to challenge patriarchal authority both on the home front and in the public space. Thus, there is a difference between Obinze’s mother and the docile Beatrice Achike in *Purple hibiscus* (2003) whose duty it is to act as the subservient partner in the home. Another such woman is Auntie Uju who migrates to the United States with her only son, Dike, after the death of her rich and married lover, The General. As an immigrant in America, Auntie Uju single-handedly fights both the patriarchal and supremacist structures that oppress and exploit blacks. Her refusal to “get back” (Adichie, 2013:171) earns her a job as a family physician in the United States of America.

As such, *Americanah* (2013) is a diasporic narrative that features the experiences of Hispanics, Asians, Jews and Blacks, connected clusters of people residing either permanently or temporarily in foreign countries. However, for the characters of black origin on whom Adichie focuses, the black experience entails the quest for identity and the fight for survival in a country where they would not be “a wonderful fit [if they wear their] thick, kinky, God-given halo of hair, the Afro” (Adichie, 2013:189) or their braids. To back up this argument, this study adopts the definition of the diaspora as a group of migrants who leave their homelands to go “in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambition” (Cohen, 1997:57). The colonial ambition simply refers to the continued perpetuation of social injustices on people of other races by the white supremacists. However, to survive, these people mimic the actions of the members of the host countries, and this leads to the loss of identity, the reconstruction of identity and the evolution of the hybrid self.

Since *Americanah* (2013) falls within the spectrum of diaspora narratives, this study also posits that Adichie acts as an Afrocentric social-womanist who “along with her consciousness of sexual issues [...] incorporates racial, cultural, national, economic and political considerations into her philosophy” (Ogunyemi, 1985:64) and by so doing, project the vision of a new world at the end of the narrative. Adichie, through the portrayal of her characters in *Americanah* (2013), proposes a culturally hybrid society that takes into cognisance the values of justice, equity and equality, complementarity and cooperation. As such, the new world that Adichie envisions in *Americanah* (2013) is far from the margins of the contemporary social system.

Within this new world, an arsenal of checks and balances is put in place to ensure that social members regardless of their gender, class, race or ethnicity enjoy equitable access to free and quality education, peace and security, affordable and quality healthcare services and employment opportunities. To understand the particularities of this new world that Adichie envisions, it is pertinent to grasp the operations of the current social system in which the narrative is set. First published in 2013, *Americanah* (2013) is set in a military era. This means that Adichie situates the social experiences of her characters within a militarised framework of the dictatorial political regimes in Nigeria. As such, this study posits that Adichie focuses on the social experiences of the average Nigerian in the years after the Nigerian-Biafran civil war that ended in 1970. Social critics posit that the Nigerian-Biafran civil war, which ended in 1970, paved the way for a plethora of problems that ranged “from extreme violence between religious groups to government corruption and an unstable economy” (Bhattacharjee & Tripathi,

2017:435), which were precipitated by the inadequacies of the democratically elected government. Hence, this became known as an era of socio-economic instability because of the incessant coups organised by the armed forces. However, rather than maintaining a redemptive disposition and ensuring the alleviation of hardships, the military government also became a replica of despotism, rife with corruption and the perpetuator of social injustice. These corrupt acts and practices include the embezzlement of public funds, giving and collecting bribes and the pervasive inflation of contracts, all of which are vices that undermine social development and cohesion. These practices evolve from the ideology of corruption which refers to the “use of entrusted power for private gain” (Pozsgai-Alvarez, 2020:433). In simple terms, this means that through corrupt practices, those in power perpetuate social ills, which in turn lead to conflict, instability and socio-economic underdevelopment in their societies.

### **Ifemelu as the agent of change in *Americanah***

The in-depth analysis of the narrative, *Americanah* (2013) is anchored on Ogunyemi’s African womanist theoretical framework. Since the narrative also captures the lived experiences of Igbo people in the diaspora, the textual analysis also employs the analytical lenses of Bhabha and Fanon. As stated in the introductory chapter, these postcolonial theorists through their arguments about identity and othering provide lenses with which to analyse the basis and impact of social categorisation, labelling and perception on the people. In *Americanah* (2013), Adichie recapitulates the lived experiences of social members firstly, within the localised and militarised space where social activities are gender- and class-based and secondly, within a diasporic space where the basis of social relations are determined by the colour of the skin. It is imperative to note that even though characters migrate for economic reasons, they become the invisible other in the host countries. Their invisibility, which is tied to their race, leads to their marginalisation and placement on the periphery. As such, at once, race becomes the adjunct of inferiority and invisibility. This makes Adichie’s *Americanah* (2013) a diasporic narrative that captures the lived experience of the black migrant in the host countries.

However, the main character whose action propels change and moulds the pattern of interaction in the new world is Ifemelu, also known as Ifemesco. Ifemelu is the protagonist who transitions from a child that is “singled ... out at school where you are known for insubordination” (Adichie, 2013:57) into an adult, a black immigrant who learnt to voice her thoughts through social media and then an assertive Americana who defined the basis of her relationship with

her childhood lover, Obinze. An analysis of the factors that trigger the transformational changes is required to understand the dynamics of the new world that Ifemelu and Obinze create in *Americanah* (2013). It is imperative to state that like her previous novels, *Purple hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a yellow Sun* (2006) and *The Thing around your neck* (2009), Adichie in *Americanah* (2013) focuses on the themes of race and gender and the impact of corruption on social cohesion.

Corruption undermines the ability of government officials to provide basic amenities, such as quality education, employment for jobseekers and equitable platforms for social interaction. Thus, the major impact of corruption is the socio-economic underdevelopment where the citizens are deprived of the basic amenities and treated like “sheep” (Adichie, 2013:68). Among the Igbo people, the sheep is seen as a foolish and docile animal, in short, “to be addressed as a sheep [aturu] is another way of saying that one is a fool” (Okebalama, 2019:429). However, as seen through the actions of Adichie’s characters, the Igbo person rejects the connotation of docility, an act that results in their migration to more developed countries like the United States of America and Britain. The form of migration described above is referred to as international migration. International migration is referred to as a “reaction to a crisis that has economic, political and socio-cultural dimensions” (Duru, 2021:181). In short, international migration is motivated by factors such as joblessness, poverty and strike actions. In this instance, the migrants in Adichie’s *Americanah* (2013) are reacting to the social injustice that is continuously perpetuated on them by the unconstitutional government. These migrants are professionals and students who opt for the chance to learn in conducive conditions, such that Ifemelu is introduced to well-coordinated reading centres that seemed like a “sinful decadence” (Adichie, 2013:138). These arguments reaffirm Adichie’s proposition that corruption is a social ill, and that is the major perpetrator of social inequality and social injustice.

Adichie inscribes and insists that these forms of social injustice, in turn, lead to the migration of Nigerian youths and skilled workers to foreign countries, youths like Auntie Uju’s classmates in the University of Ibadan who were “talking about going abroad to take the American medical exams or the British medical exams because the other choice was to tumble into a parched wasteland of joblessness” (Adichie, 2013:45). In short, this study concurs with the proposition that the root causes of underdevelopment and instability in the country are traceable to bad governance. This sets Adichie within the precinct of social critics who act as:

The voice of conscience whose role it is to champion the goal and task of leading the people unto a glorious and prosperous future ... the one who reflects the hard socio-political as well as religious and economic realities of the people ... who hope ... to redirect society unto its ... unity (Asika *et al.*, 2021:108)

This means that Adichie narrativises the social experiences of Igbo people through the trigonometrical relationship that exists between tertiary institutions, workers and learners. Within the educational system, the two principal parties who challenge the government and engage in protests, which result in the closure of universities, are the staff unions and the students' bodies. In the case of the staff unions whose members fall within the demography of the proletariat, the reasons for their actions border on the intent to register their dissatisfaction and "to protest their grievances on a particular issue which often leads to temporal withdrawal of their services in order to achieve their particular goal" (Ajewole, 2014:76). These grievances border on issues such as non-payment of salaries, review of welfare package and poor funding of the universities. The students' union bodies, on the other hand, protest the mismanagement of funds which leads, to a lack of well-equipped libraries, poor maintenance of infrastructure and non-provision of basic amenities like water and light. These protests and strike actions result in the protracted closures of schools (Solomon, Jacob & Jegede, 2020). This act defeats the purpose of establishing these institutions, as stipulated in the national constitution and instead results in encouraging learners to engage in nefarious activities and also "become armed robbers" (Adichie, 2013:95). These lead to a major brain drain, as the country loses qualified skilled workers and brilliant students. Creative and innovative social members herein referred to in Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) are students and highly skilled immigrants who migrate for work and study. For the people in contemporary Igbo society whom Adichie describes as sheep, this reaction results in their search for greener pastures in foreign lands like the United States of America and Britain, such as we witness in Auntie Uju. However, of particular interest are the experiences of Ifemelu and Obinze firstly, as local immigrants in Nsukka and later as Black emigrants in the United States of America and the United Kingdom respectively.

Adichie also addresses the impact of migration on socio-economic development and asserts that the mass movement of skilled workers and prospective creative thinkers truncates cohesion, impedes socio-economic development and negates the principles of equity within a socio-political system. Adichie declares that students' migration is triggered by the activities

of corrupt government officials, and this culminates in the transformational change where the characters either conform with the tenets of their society or they are deported back to their home countries to ‘find’ themselves. Using Ogunyemi’s social psychological lens and integrating within her frames, Bhabha’s concept of mimicry, this move also translates into a progressive journey for each of the characters who share close ties with Ifemelu, the assertive Igbo woman. Ifemelu is empowered through (western) formal education thus given the voice with which to challenge the patriarchal dictates. Through the acquisition of formal knowledge within and outside Nigeria, Ifemelu evolves into an authentic but culturally hybrid character who sheds the cloak of imitation and:

On an unremarkable day in early spring ... time had transfigured her doubts, she looked in the mirror, sank her fingers into her hair, dense and spongy and glorious and could not imagine it any other way. That simply, she fell in love with her hair (Adichie, 2013:196).

Through Ifemelu’s transition, Adichie challenges the patriarchal dictates that shape gender identity and influence the patterns of interaction. As such, this journey allows the characters led by Ifemelu re-discover their essence and ultimately re-define the essence of interaction in a new world. These arguments act as the backdrop against which the propositions made in this third chapter are set. Also, it is important to state that through an artistic display of artistic ingenuity, Adichie interweaves the complexities of gender and socialisation with the theme of corruption. This is evident in *Americanah* (2013), as Adichie evaluates the causes of corruption in the local social system and the persons who become immigrants. By paying attention to the characters of Ifemelu and Obinze, Adichie emphasises the ways preconceived notions about a person’s identity influence social relations and human identity. As such, names, skin colour, accent and hair texture are social constructs that exert a significant and integral part in defining and (re) defining the social experiences of the characters in *Americanah* (2013). In analysing Ifemelu’s character, it is essential to reiterate that Ifemelu’s actions and motives throughout the narrative are geared towards creating a new world order. As such, the themes of gender identity within a newly created space take an integral position in this study. This justifies the notion that gender identity is a dynamic social construct that reflects the norms, peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of one’s society. Adichie in *Americanah* (2013) achieves this through the creation of characters who challenge the various forms of social injustice within their contemporary settings. Contemporary spaces herein referred to are the metropolitan cities of

Lagos, Nsukka and in Ifemelu's case, the United States, and the injustices perpetuated evolve from a single story that creates the 'Other'.

As is evidenced above, this is reflected through the transformational changes that occur in characters like Ifemelu, Ginika, Emenike, Auntie Uju and Obinze. In line with this argument, Tunca (2018) posits that like Achebe, Adichie also acts as an activist who condemns corruption and other forms of injustice. Still, in line with Tunca's proposition, Adichie rejects the universalism of human experiences promoted by European writers but pushes for an indigenous Afrocentric ideology (Adichie, 2009a; Tunca, 2018). This includes the rejection of the western principles of hegemonic masculinity, which is a patriarchal concept that attaches superiority to men and inferior positions to women. By rejecting the western supremacist principle, Adichie adopts an indigenous perspective that is premised on the principles of Igwebuikocracy. This local ideology situates the Igbo person - man and woman and child - at the centre of the experience. In Adichie's view, this centred position is in that place, which as earlier stated lies further away from the margins. Within this space, men, women and children evolve into focal beings who are permitted to assert themselves, challenge patriarchy and reclaim spaces of participation. By integrating the socio-political angle into her narratives, Adichie is labelled as the maestro:

The pre-eminent storyteller who uses her tales to give meaning to the totality of the world as she perceives it, producing in effect, narratives that seek to shape a new world of understanding as they give expression to realities people know and human commitments and awareness they need to know (Emenyonu, 2017:1).

These social agents and social institutions are the governments, families, schools, peer groups, religious institutions and the mass media (blog). As stated earlier, the military government in Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) is illegitimate and corrupt, which deprives the people of their fundamental rights. In essence, it is a government that rationalises social injustice. The notion of social injustice is contextualised through the experiences of Black immigrants who are subjects of one single story. It is interesting to note that Adichie, through Ifemelu's blog known as "Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes)" creates a medium through which the oppressed and marginalised others can challenge the white supremacist notions about their identity. However, in line with Spivak's projection that the social structure mutes the voice of the subalternally oppressed, the medium of vocality

for Adichie becomes an invisible space where she anonymously challenges the White supremacist notions about the inferior status of the black person who regardless of the qualifications is condemned to live on the periphery.

It is pertinent to note that through the portrayal of the experiences of a character like Ifemelu in *Americanah* (2013), Adichie posits that migration, on the one hand, offers the window of opportunity for Igbo people to escape the hardships meted on the citizens by the corrupt government and on the other hand, migration reinforces the principles of othering and displacement. However, despite the causes of cross-border migration, it also functions as a phenomenon that borders on negative preconceptions which are pronounced through the propagation of a single story. Adichie asserts that “the single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but they are incomplete” (Adichie, 2009a). Their incompleteness forces them to the periphery where they become invisible beings. Hence, for the black migrants, racial stereotypes about their blackness justify their exclusion from the social space, and they are relegated to “the doomed tunnels that [fed] feed into the earth” (Adichie, 2013:226). Within these spaces, the black migrants are forced to take up menial and degrading jobs such as cleaners, security men and prostitutes and are forced into an invisible space where:

People refuse to see me, they only see my surroundings, themselves or figments of their imagination. Indeed, everything and anything except me ... the invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact (Ellison, 1952: n.p).

Thus, the Black migrant becomes invisible, marginalised and alienated because of their identity as Black men and women. Simply put, this study situates Ifemelu, Obinze, Aunty Uju and Emenike’s experiences within the framework of racial discrimination and by so doing, shows how peculiar social factors influence gender identity. Aunty Uju, who is Ifemelu’s paternal cousin, is the first black migrant who experiences racial discrimination in the narrative. Aunty Uju graduated from the University of Ibadan as a qualified medical doctor. However, after graduation, Aunty Uju like other graduates becomes an unemployed medical doctor who later becomes The General’s mistress. As The General’s mistress, Aunty Uju gets a job in the military hospital in Lagos. In her view “the problem is that there are many qualified people who are not where they are supposed to be because they won’t lick an ass. I’m lucky to be

licking the right ass” (Adichie, 2013:45). Auntie Uju in Nigeria is a product of societal conditioning, as she only sees herself through the eyes of her male provider, that is, The General. As The General’s mistress, Auntie Uju lived like:

Many young women [...] with Unknown Sources of Wealth. They live lives they can’t afford. They have only ever travelled business class to Europe but have jobs that can’t afford them a regular flight ticket [...] these women define their lives by men they can never truly have, crippled by their culture of dependence, with desperation in their eyes and designer handbags on their wrists (Adichie, 2013:375).

Through Ifemelu’s voice, Adichie questions the Igbo cultural norm that promotes the ideology of female subservience and female dependency. To reiterate this point, Adichie portrays The General as a “village man” (Adichie, 2013:76) who preferred to have women depending on him. Besides from his mistress, Auntie Uju, he also has a wife who had given up her law career “to raise their four children” (Adichie, 2013:81). This is a reaffirmation of the notion that within the local space, the principles of male dominance and female subservience influence gender and patterns of interaction. However, through the process of migration, Adichie also creates women who become financially equipped to challenge these patriarchal norms. However, with liberation comes another form of domination, which in this case occurs through racial discrimination. Like gender, race is a socially constructed grouping that is used to categorise people who share certain physical characteristics like skin colour, accent, language spoken and texture of hair. Even though these traits reflect the shared cultural heritage of a people, they also provide the mechanism with which to emphasise the superior-inferior binary that influences social interaction between the white majority and the black minority in developed countries. Hence, in the diaspora, these physical differences serve as the basis through which social injustice is perpetuated. Adichie refers to this form of injustice as racial discrimination.

Racial discrimination is the act of treating people differently because of their race. According to Chou *et al.* (2012:74), racial discrimination refers “to the differential treatments of members of an ethnic or racial group due to negative attitudes or feelings about the minority group”. Using the postcolonial lens, this study posits that racism is perpetuated through the othering process, one which classifies the members of the inferior group as outsiders and reaffirms the principles of (white) superiority) and (black) inferiority. The outsiders are classified as the others, the antithesis of whiteness. As such, racial discrimination encapsulates the experience

of the other, ‘them’ who are so classified because of their race. Egbung (2018:148) contends that racial discrimination:

Arises from race-based stereotype where the dominant race views other races as crude and barbaric; forming a negative opinion about all the members of that particular race when in reality not all the individuals from the stereotyped race conform to the attributed characteristics of that race.

This means that racial discrimination only happens when there are two people or groups of people who belong to different racial groups, ‘us’ and ‘them’ or the other. The other becomes the product of a single story and whose “inferiority comes into being” (Fanon, 1967:83) when placed with the white supremacist. As such, the other suffers various forms of oppression and is marginalised because of their skin colour, accent, hair texture and even name. The other here is Ifemelu, the black student migrant who sits “on a lone armchair at the end of the room” (Adichie, 2013:123) silently observing the mannerisms of her assimilated comrades, one of whom is Ginika. It is apparent to Ifemelu that over the years, Ginika who “had come to America with the flexibility and fluidness of youth” (Adichie, 2013: 123) and had become the real American who said the right things the right way and laughed as if on cue at the American jokes. The same is also true of Emenike, Obinze’s friend who as Georgina’s partner evolves into a “Brit” (Adichie, 2013:249). Thus, through Ginika and Emenike’s lived experiences, Adichie reflects on the pressure that immigrants face as they try to navigate through the structures of their new social systems. This pressure is well-defined by Adichie who sets Ifemelu side by side with Cristina Tomas, the one with the “rinsed-out look, washy blue eyes, faded and pallid whitish tights that made her legs look like death” (Adichie, 2013:125). Adichie imagines clothing in supremacist terms and uses this to emphasise Ifemelu’s inferior position as that other who cannot communicate fluently in English. This encounter with Ifemelu to learn to speak and sound American marks the birth of the culturally hybrid Ifemelu who sounds American (Adichie, 2013). Ifemelu learns to “take great pains” (Fanon, 1967:11) to mimic the Americans.

There is also Aunty Uju who has to mimic the speech acts of the Americans if she is to get a job as a family physician. She has also been advised to texturise her hair if she is to be taken seriously by any potential employer:

“I have to take my braids out for my interviews and relax my hair [...] if you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional”

“So there are no doctors with braided hair in America?” Ifemelu asked.

“I have told you what they told me. You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed” (Adichie, 2013:111-112).

This conversation shows the injustice and unfair treatment that immigrants are exposed to in these ‘new’ spaces. This change is what Bhabha (1994) refers to as mimicry. In Bhabha’s view:

Mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation, a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which appropriates the other as it visualises power (Bhabha, 1994:86).

Based on this definition, there are two groups of social members, and these are the imitator (who doubles as the oppressed other) and the white supremacist who stipulates the laws that guide the patterns of interaction. These laws are set against the framework of stereotypes and these in turn reinforce the notions of inferiority in the other, the second-class citizen on the periphery. As such, the other becomes the product of a single story. The single story “creates stereotypes and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are incomplete. They make one story the only story” (Adichie, 2009a). Consequently, these stories which are told in fragmented forms reinforce the socio-economic structures of racial differences.

In short, the impact of the single story is manifested through the perpetuation of negative stereotypes that reinforce racial differences. In turn, this promotes the black/white dichotomy that informs the diasporic experience of black people. According to Fanon (1967:82-83), “inferiority comes into being through the other”, thus racial discrimination is emphasised through the physical differences between social members. Fanon (1967) interrogates the impact of racial discrimination on the oppressed within the diasporic space through the portrayal of the characters of Ifemelu, Obinze, Auntie Uju, Dike and Emenike. For instance, it is as a black student migrant that Ifemelu realises that she is black and this affects her as a person. In America, Ifemelu’s friend tells her “I’m supposed to be offended when somebody says half-caste. I’ve met a lot of people here with white mothers and they are so full of issues

... I didn't know I was even supposed to have issues until I came to America" (Adichie, 2013:115). These preconceived notions about race act as the premise of Adichie's thematic concern in *Americanah* (2013) where she uncovers the ways stereotypes influence the behavioural patterns of the characters like Ifemelu, Obinze, Aunt Uju, Dike and Emenike.

As a black immigrant, Aunt Uju, a Nigerian-trained medical doctor is unemployed. She attempts the medical examination multiple times, not because she is not smart but because "she was studying and working three jobs" (Adichie, 2013:103) just to make a living and care for her son. She eventually passes the examinations and then has to change her identity. Aunt Uju's friends had told her that success in her interview was dependent on taking out her braids and relaxing her hair because "if you have braids, they will think that you are unprofessional" (Adichie, 2013:112). Thus, hair and accent become the social components that the black Igbo person has to refine to enable him/her survive in a "country that is not your own" (Adichie, 2013:112). As a medical practitioner, she encounters further discrimination from the patients who do not trust her to treat them. Like the other children of the black Igbo migrants, Dike also suffers from identity crisis, and this is because there is a disconnection between these children and their culture. For instance, Aunt Uju stops Ifemelu from speaking Igbo to him because "two languages will confuse him" (Adichie, 2013:103). However, it remains a wonder how one's language, the component of one's identity will confuse the speaker of that language.

Ifemelu also passes through the same experience of loss of identity, as she is forced to relax her hair before her interview for the position of public relations officer. Ruth, her friend, advises her to take out her braids and straighten her hair which she does. However, Ifemelu's experience comes at a cost, "a slight burning at first but as the hairdresser rinsed out the relaxer, Ifemelu's head bent backwards ... needles of stinging pain shot up from different parts of her scalp" (Adichie, 2013:188). However, this pain is not just from the burn that Adichie describes here; it is also the pain that accompanies the loss of self-identity. Ifemelu gets the job but wonders what would have been her fate had she retained her authentic African identity. After she finds her footing, however, she rebels first by accepting that her naturalness defines her. Obinze, who is in Britain, is also subjected to various forms of racial discrimination. Firstly, he is denied an American visa multiple times because all foreign, black men are automatically profiled as terrorists. He is eventually issued a six-month visa to accompany his mother, a Professor to Britain as a Research Assistant. He stays back in Britain after the expiration of his visa. To get a green card, he gets involved with two Angolans who help him organise a sham

wedding and Vincent Obi, the one whom he impersonates as a menial worker. Vincent exploits Obinze and insists on collecting 35% of Obinze's earnings. After a while, he insists on a raise which Obinze refuses; the whole thing gets messy, and Obinze is deported to Nigeria. Using Fanon's psychoanalytical lens, this study interrogates the ways Adichie articulates how racial stereotypes affect gender identity.

As is evident and recounted through the omniscient voice in *Americanah* (2013), the black Igbo migrant learns and internalises the social norms of the white minority group. These social norms are enforced through the assimilation of the cultural practices and language of the white supremacist. Black migrants like Emenike "had become a person who believed that something was beautiful because it was handmade by poor people in a foreign country or whether he had simply learned to pretend so" (Adichie, 2013:248) follow the rules to the latter and so does Auntie Uju who refuses to communicate in her native tongue with Dike because "two languages will confuse him" (Adichie, 2013:103). In Auntie Uju's case, the confusion that accompanies the loss almost results in Dike's death as he goes into depression and attempts to commit suicide in the basement of their apartment. Through the portrayal of Auntie Uju's action with regards to the language of communication, Adichie concurs with wa Thiong'o who asserts that "language carries culture, and culture carries [...] the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world" (wa Thiong'o, 1981:16). In *Americanah* (2013), Adichie encapsulates these as the social experience of the black migrant, a member of the inferior racial category who meets with the other blacks "in the basement of Wharton Hall, a harshly lit windowless room ... who adopt an American accent" (Adichie, 2013:130-131).

However, it is imperative to state that women are doubly oppressed because of their gender and race. Adichie addresses this issue through the portrayal of Auntie Uju, the one for whom gender, ethnicity and race become performative acts as she, a qualified family physician, is expected to conform to patriarchal social norms as Bartholomew's partner and wife:

He wants me to give him my salary. Imagine! He said that is how marriages are since he is the head of the family [...] all he wants is for me to hand over my salary to him and cook peppered gizzard for him on Saturdays (Adichie, 2013:200).

Thus, not only does Adichie present a character who even after passing her medical examination faces discrimination at work because of her black skin, but this same character is constantly oppressed by the Khaki-wearing boyfriend, Bartholomew, who tries to assert his

authority as an Igbo patriarch. This is a reaffirmation of Achebe's proposition that "women [...] rural peasants in every land, the urban poor in industrialised countries, Black people everywhere ... ethnic and religious minorities and castes in all countries" (Achebe, 1988:9697). Hence, labels are used to enforce dominant and subservient roles in society. These preconceived notions are products of stereotypes and prejudice, which in turn serve as the basis through which various forms of social injustice are perpetuated. This implies that the proletariats are the inferior and passive social group with members who are regarded as "impotent eunuchs without rooms of their own" (Ogunyemi, 1985:63). It is pertinent to note that like her literary predecessor, Achebe (1930-2013), Adichie asserts that her female characters can (re) define themselves through a process of (re)conceptualisation which is initiated through formal learning. A perfect example of such character is Auntie Uju who leaves her partner, Bartholomew, the divorced accountant who bleaches and acts "like a special prize that Auntie Uju was fortunate to have" (Adichie, 2013:108) after she passed her medical licensing examination. Later on, as an independent and assertive female doctor, Auntie Uju meets Kweku, "a divorced Ghanaian doctor [who] treats [her] like a princess" (Adiche, 2013:271). Through Auntie Uju's lived experience as The General's mistress and as Bartholomew's partner, Adichie shows how patriarchy inhibits the Igbo woman from becoming independent and vocal.

In line with Ogunyemi's precepts, Adichie recognises the peculiarities of the Nigerian system and sets this up as a backdrop against which she carves the identities of her characters in *Americanah* (2013). This approach allows Adichie to create an engaging narrative that Africans, particularly Igbo people, home and abroad can relate with. As such, the 'gamut' of Adichie's narrative is defined by social discrimination, a concept that evolves from the single story. However, it is the premise of this single story that justifies the implicit and explicit forms of racial discrimination and prejudice that black immigrants are exposed to in the host countries. The assertions about the state of the nation and the experience of Igbo people in these developed countries make *Americanah* (2013) a "testament on the travails of race and a chronicle of the excruciating experiences of Africans in the diaspora" (Asika *et al.*, 2021:106). In this case, these Africans, the Igbo people in their search for a better life, are marginalised from the centre of human existence, an act that results in the loss of identity.

Marginalisation is the unequal treatment of people who are deemed different because of their race, colour of their skin, texture of their hair, accent and names. Nwanyanwu (2017:391)

succinctly refers to marginalisation as a “transcultural move between a periphery and a dominant metropolitan centre in which the migrant must struggle through marginalisation.” This attests to the fact that those who migrate from their home base as a way of revolting against an unjust government must (re) define their identities in the new space, however far from the centre this is. The periphery is defined in Kimberly’s house when on their first meeting Kimberly said of Ifemelu’s name “what a beautiful name [Kimberly said] does it mean anything? I love multicultural names because they have such wonderful meanings, from wonderful cultures” (Adichie, 2013:149). Through this singular act, Kimberly draws an invisible barrier between her and Ifemelu and establishes the fact that Ifemelu is the ‘other’. Laura, Kimberly’s sister, is another interesting mix in the matrix. Laura establishes herself as the superior master and Ifemelu as the inferior other through her actions and conversation. She is also focused on the negative stories about Nigeria and showing an “aggressive and unaffectionate interest” (Adichie, 2013:165) in the other. This results in the need to reassert her presence and (re)shape her identity which has already been eroded through the corpus of a single story. As such, marginalisation is reinforced through the naming or re-naming process. It is imperative to note that to an Igbo, one of the most significant components of identity is the name. As stated in the previous chapter, names are not just labels of recognition, they are stories and mirrors that reflect societal expectations. This is evident in the meanings of the names given to characters like Ifemelu and Obinze at birth.

Being a girl, Ifemelu is a love child whose name means “made in good times or beautifully made” (Adichie, 2013:73). She is a vocal child who shares a close-knit relationship with both her parents. On the other hand, Obinze Maduewesi is the only son of his unnamed widowed mother, who is a professor. Of the two characters, Ifemelu is the more vocal one. However, at some point as a black immigrant, she takes on a new name, Ngozi, which is shortened to Goz by a prospective white employer who never calls Ifemelu back. Besides name changing, these black immigrants are offered low levels in their search for jobs. Obinze (as Vinny boy) is reduced to a toilet cleaner and a labourer in a warehouse while Ifemelu was at a point paid a hundred dollars to “help” a corrupt-eyed tennis coach relax (Adichie, 2013:147). According to Ifemelu, “I [came] come from a country where race [was] is not an issue. I did not think myself as black and I only became black when I came to America” (Adichie, 2013:288). It is as a black student immigrant that Ifemelu comes to understand the dangers of a single story that perpetuates racial discrimination and the implications of racial disparity. Thus, through

Ifemelu's experience, Adichie questions the notion of blackness, invisibility and existence, as these negatively preconceived notions form a vicious cycle that entrenches social disadvantages in the system.

In this study, (re) naming takes two functions. According to du Bois (1903), using the racial conflict lens, the assumption of new names and new looks no matter the immediate gratification still leads to marginalisation. For instance, Ifemelu becomes 'Goz' and tries to texturise her hair and ended up with "scabs on her scalp" (Adichie, 2013:205). Obinze becomes 'Vinny Boy' but still gets deported. These experiences re-affirm Benston's (2017:669) position that:

Allotting to black people the brand of "nigger" indicates a desire to void the possibility of meaning within the "blackened" shell of selfhood, thereby reducing substance to the repetitive echo of a catharsis. 'Nigger' is a mechanism of control by contraction; it subsumes the complexities of human experience into a traceable sign while manifesting an essential inability to see ... the signifier.

The label, nigger, represents the identity of the black person, the one who remains invisible, regardless of the efforts made to integrate him- or herself into the system. This emphasises that racial discrimination is entrenched in the social system of the host society. The second function, however, is a more positive one because it emerges as a component of a new world, as such, (re)naming. In the preceding chapter, a name was referred to as a label of identity. Names also serve as mirrors that reflect the social experiences that occurred around the time of the bearer's birth. It is pertinent to note that within Adichie's purview, the process of re-naming triggers social change. Since, for an Igbo person, the name is a story on its own, the loss of identity is initiated through the process of (re) naming. As such, through the process of (re) re-naming, characters evolve as part of the new world. This process leads to the creation of new identities in a new world. This new world in Adichie's view is the re-defined space where social members appropriate value to selves. These new versions of selves are evidence of the dynamic social constructions. This process involves when an individual re-conceptualises his or her identity. Through an emphasis on Ifemelu's experience, Adichie posits that an individual gains clarity once he or she becomes empowered and independent. Through Ifemelu's relationships, Adichie contends that Curt and Blaine in their unique ways enabled Ifemelu's evolution into a more vocal and assertive female who over time learnt to embrace her femininity and womanhood. This is the basic requirement that allows one to exist in the new world. The second

step that Ifemelu takes is going back to embrace her roots, where once again she struggles to find her voice. Ifemelu refutes the ostentatious lifestyle of the “native bourgeoisie, sham from beginning to end” (Fanon, 1963:8) and finds her voice again through her blog which she names The Small Redemptions of Lagos. The blog with the “dreamy photograph of an abandoned colonial house on its mast head” (Adichie, 2013:373) features posts where she constantly questions the notions of identity and human interaction in an evolving contemporary society that is represented by Lagos.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter focused on how Adichie articulates her views of the new world that is the product of various social paradigms that overlap to form a hybrid and ambivalent space. This translates into the view that newness stems from native and foreign constructs. However, to have a new democratic space or society where men and women, regardless of their race, ethnicity or class can interact and socialise as partners, it is important to identify and discard the single story. This is because the single story justifies the stereotypes and prejudices that frame the *modus operandi* of a social system that oppresses and exploits social members because of physical and physiological differences. By focusing on the reconstruction of identity and projecting the vision of a new world, Adichie shows that men and women, regardless of their race, ethnicity or class have different angles and lenses from which their stories can be told and re-told.

## **Chapter Six: Recalibrating African womanist ethics in *Anthills of the savannah*, *Americanah* and *The joys of motherhood***

This chapter is an overview of the various studies on how the Igbo people of the south-eastern part of Nigeria (re)construct, (re)imagine and (re)enact gender within and outside their local space. As an interpretivist and Afrocentric research, the study unpacked the concepts of gender, re-presentation, agency and culture through an engagement with the selected narratives of three postcolonial West African novelists, Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie. The selected narratives which served as the primary reference materials for the study are Achebe's Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood* (1979). *Anthills of the Savannah* (1988) and Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). The arguments in the study show that despite the temporal gap in the literary productions of the selected narratives, Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie, through the portrayal of their female protagonists, explore the roles that culture, alongside its constructed agents and institutions, play in the constitution and performance of gender. To understand how culture influences gender performance and construction, this study interrogated three research questions. The first question asks how patriarchy is portrayed in the selected literary narratives. The second question explores how patriarchal social and political constructs influence gender identities while the third question revolves around understanding how Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie articulate their views about changing gender constructions in Igbo society. To answer these questions, this study undertook a comprehensive analysis of the female protagonists in the selected narratives. The female protagonists, Beatrice in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988), Ifemelu in *Americanah* (2013) and Nnu Ego in *The joys of motherhood* (1979) are the principal voices and embodiments of feminist prototypes that this study assessed. To evaluate how Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie articulate diverse views and performances of gender in the narratives, I partitioned the study into five chapters, and these are:

- Chapter One - The African womanist ethics
- Chapter Two - Understanding the dynamics of gender through the lenses of selected African theorists
- Chapter Three - The plight of the Igbo woman in *The joys of motherhood*
- Chapter Four - Beatrice - Voice of the voiceless in *Anthills of the savannah*
- Chapter Five - Vision of the new world in *Americanah*
- Chapter Six - Recalibrating African womanist ethics in *Anthills of the savannah*, *Americanah* and *The joys of motherhood*

While the introductory chapter was devoted to an interrogation of the workings of Ogunyemi's African womanist theoretical framework, the second, third, fourth and fifth chapters zoomed in on the views of Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie on how gender identity is constructed and enacted in Igbo society. The choice of an African womanist theoretical framework was guided by the following: firstly, the Afrocentric ideology affords an in-depth analysis of that which constitutes the experience of the Igbo woman in her local space and in the diaspora, secondly, the Afrocentric ideology provides the literary tools with which to explore and understand how these experiences are formed. As such, the Afrocentric ideology enables the researcher to contextualise and interrogate the social experience of the Igbo woman. This aligns with the researcher's stance that Ogunyemi's African womanist theoretical framework proposes an authentic and indigenous perspective towards characterisation techniques that engage and centralise the reality of the native character. As stipulated by Ogunyemi, authenticity (a fetish though it could be read) is an integral component of literary works and for an African novelist to be labelled as authentic, they must repackage the African experience appropriately. This is only possible through the portrayal of characters whose lived experiences mirror the social reality of the people that they represent. Therefore, the choice of an African theoretical framework for this study is guided by the intent to show how Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie articulate their views about gender constructions and re-constructions in specific social spaces.

The reference to the notions of construction and re-construction in this study shows that the African womanist theoretical framework enabled the researcher to interrogate, examine and understand how Igbo women have at different times and in different ways challenged the workings of the hierarchal structures that subjugate and treat them unequally. The arguments in the study show that in Igbo society, inequality stems from preconceived notions about individuals, who in this instance are Igbo black women. Inequality takes different forms and these are gender, race, ethnicity and status inequalities. In short, the arguments showed that inequality is a social vice that stems from an interplay of preconceived notions about women. In turn, these preconceived notions justify and consolidate the perpetuation of social injustices. I argued that stereotypes primarily reinforce the norms of inequality in Igbo society. Therefore, my arguments suggest that gender, race and ethnic identity intersect to influence the patterns of interaction and socialisation in the social system in which they find themselves. To support this proposition, I advanced that one of the recurring themes in the selected narratives by Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie is the negative impact of patriarchy on social members. Thus,

the arguments in Chapters three, four and five show that patriarchy justifies the perpetuation of social injustices in Igbo society because of the aberrant notions about gender and social class identities of members.

To understand the premise of the patriarchal ideology and how this influences gender construction in Igbo society, I engaged the lenses of favouritism and bias, as propounded by Tajfel and Turner, Said's concept of positions and Spivak's and Bhabha's theory of hybridity. Patriarchy is a social concept and organisational fulcrum that anchors and generates inequality and power imbalances that inform the patterns of socialisation among the Igbo people of the south-eastern part of Nigeria. In Igbo society, patriarchy allows the enactment of male domination and female subjugation and plays out through son-preference, marriage tokens and ineluctable motherhood. Patriarchy permits men to hold positions of power in both the private family sphere and in the public, social and political space. In short, patriarchy triggers a form of power dynamics that emphasise the non-existence of women as Full Human beings. To understand how the power dynamics of the patriarchal social system influence the patterns of socialisation in the selected narratives and by extension, Igbo society, I brought to the fore the role that literature plays in exposing the vices that impede stability, development and cohesion. In my opinion, literature enables novelists to recapitulate the lived experiences of people in their social environments with the intent of teaching and expounding on patterns of interaction.

In chapter two, I discussed relevant literature on studies previously done on the dominant themes in the selected narratives. This served as the frame against which the arguments in subsequent chapters were set. In line with this, I offered a contextual analysis of Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood* (1979), Achebe's *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) and Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) in Chapters three, four and five respectively.

Chapter three takes a historical analysis of Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood* (1979), a narrative that is set in the colonial period. In Chapter three, I travel back in time to the colonial period to illustrate that gender is indeed elastic. To further develop my argument, I focus primarily on Nnu Ego's character, the beautiful but unlucky daughter of the wealthy Agbadi and the stunning but impetuous Ona. Nnu Ego comes through as a patriarchal construct whose social experiences are set within the frames of motherhood. This is because she is brought up in a patriarchal household where her father teaches her to internalise social precepts and functions within the marginalised space that permits women to be sexually objectified and

economically stratified. Thus, throughout her life, Nnu Ego strives to fit into the social frames preserved for women who fetch high bride prices for their fathers and bear healthy sons for their husbands. However, in striving to belong, Nnu Ego loses herself, becomes poor and is ostracised by her society because she bore sons who decided against buying ‘the white man’s gin’ for their fathers and a daughter who refused the man that her father chose for her. I argued that Nnu Ego’s ill-luck is an offshoot of patriarchal constructs that conflate womanhood with motherhood and invisibility. In short, by juxtaposing Emecheta’s Nnu Ego in *The joys of motherhood* with characters like Beatrice in Achebe’s *Anthills of the savannah* and Ifemelu in *Americanah*, I sought to show that gender is a social construct that is fluid, elastic and transmutative.

In Chapter four, I analysed Achebe’s *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) with the singular intent to understand and explore how Achebe articulates his views about the various forms of injustices meted out on social members because of their identity as civilians, proletariat men and women. These adjuncts of identity reflect the peculiarities and particularities of the social system wherein Achebe situates his characters. Set in the early years after the Nigerian-Biafran civil war which started in 1967 and ended in 1970, Achebe situates his characters in the militarised social-economic space that was at different times controlled by an array of military governments. These are the major perpetrators of corruption and social injustice. Corruption is a social vice that complicates and disrupts social development and cohesion as portrayed in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988), corruption leads to the perpetuation of social injustice by military leaders who see civilians as lesser beings. In *Anthills of the savannah* (1988), Achebe replicates the social experiences of people who are marginalised, exploited, oppressed and silenced by corrupt military leaders. These corrupt leaders embezzle funds and subject the citizenry to various forms of physical and social injustice. As such, I argued that Achebe in *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) mirrors the lived experiences of men and women who are marginalised because of their gender, class and ethnic identities. In Nigeria, the military government through their ineptitude, corrupt nature, and lack of empathy and understanding of the conditions of the Nigerian citizens killed the ‘freedom fighters’ and instilled fear in the minds of the citizens of the country. However, rather than silencing the voices of the masses, these actions furthered their resolve to counter attack through consistent and persistent protests. The voices of the freedom fighters are replicated through the voices of characters like Chris,

Ikem and Beatrice. However, of these three, Beatrice refuses to be silenced. Through her actions, Achebe redefines the roles of the Igbo woman in a contemporary social space.

I explored this point further through an analysis of Beatrice's character. Beatrice Nwanyibuife Okoh is a first-class graduate of the English language who challenges the hegemonic and hierarchal power structures of her society. To challenge these social structures, I argue that Beatrice moves outside her primary patriarchal space, that is, the family. Outside this space, she evolves and becomes BB. I argue that through movement, Achebe reinscribes the point that the oppressed social members can redefine and re-present themselves in the re-constructed marginal spaces. Thus, as a returnee, Beatrice becomes BB, the one who unconsciously internalises the attributes of the fearless Chielo (the priestess) and Idemili (the goddess) of Achebe's earlier novels and habitus. Consequently, my arguments show that education and financial independence enables Beatrice to define her relationship with Chris. This is because she creates a space where she is not pressured by society to conform as a docile wife and mother, but rather, she operates in her zone as an educated and empowered partner who has a voice. It is interesting to note that even though Chris is the Commissioner of Information, it is BB who 'informs' him about the looming doom. With Ikem, BB also shares her "gift of insight into the world of women" (Achebe, 1988:154), while in Elewa's case, Beatrice is the Queen Bee who provides a safe space for her and her unborn child, Amaechina. By taking up these roles, BB takes the messianic position of leading the fight against corruption and other forms of social injustices in the fictitious Kangan. Through BB's character, I contend that Achebe recognises firstly, the roles of women in nation-building and secondly, the integral role of education in combatting the alienation of women in the social and economic space.

Through the characters, I reiterated the point that patriarchy can function in a purely hegemonic form. I traced the concept of patriarchy and dominance back to Gramsci and his propositions about social relations and social reality. In Gramsci's view, in every society, there are the oppressors and the subalternly oppressed. While the oppressors (who in this instance are military men, members of a masculine hierarchal structure), there are on the other side of the divide, emasculated civilian men and the doubly oppressed women. This social division signals instability and rift. As such, I contend that through a unique narrative and characterisation method, Achebe explores the negative impact of military rule on social cohesion and development. One such negative consequence is corruption. In addition, I further argued that women are doubly oppressed because of their status as civilians and also because of their

gender identity, actions which also trigger instability and disintegration. Consequently, my arguments show that Achebe functions as a postcolonial Igbo novelist who articulates the social injustices that are perpetrated by military leaders and civilian men in the militarised Nigerian state. To achieve this aim, I showed how Achebe conceptualises gender identity in the fictitious and politically unstable Kangan.

In Chapter five, I focused on Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), a diasporic novel that mirrors the lived experiences of the main protagonist, Ifemelu. Set in the latter years after the Nigerian Biafran civil war, Adichie recapitulates the lived experiences of a people who refused to be treated as docile and biddable by the corrupt military government that ruled at various times. The narrative revolves around Ifemelu, the one child and only girl of her parents who later becomes the student immigrant who charts her way through the economic glass frames and evolves into the empowered black woman who struggles to find herself with the bewildered Blaine. Ifemelu eventually embraces her ingenuity as an empowered and hybrid Igbo woman, breaks up with Blaine, returns home to vocalise her musings about Lagos and reunites with Obinze, her true love. I argued that in Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), social reality, social constructs and lived experiences are instantiations of gender and race. Hence, race and gender in Adichie act as the major telos of identity, constructs that are interrelated to the construct of gender.

In Chapter five, I interrogated how Adichie articulates her views about gender identity and the patterns of socialisation among Igbo people in modern-day society. This society exists in two geographical spaces. Firstly, there is modern-day Nigeria and secondly, the fetishised Western societies, in this instance, the United States and Britain. Adichie portrays the experiences of social members in a corrupt, unstable social and political space. In her view, it is the instability and injustice perpetuated by the corrupt military government that leads to the mass migration of citizens to western countries. These citizens who migrate are Igbo men and women who refuse to be treated as pliant citizens. As such, Adichie shows how gender is in a state of constant flux. In the native local space, gender is defined and entrenched in local laws and customs. However, it is imperative to note that through older characters like Obinze's mother who is a professor at the University of Nsukka, Adichie creates a space where educated women challenge the *status quo* and refuse to be tagged as silent, marginalised beings who cannot speak up against wrongs. There is also Ifemelu's mother who at some point stands in to support

her family. Curiously from such a writer who claims to offer an alternative to the single story of patriarchy, these women remain nameless in the narrative.

In short, the arguments in Chapter 5 are driven by how Adichie articulates gender construction in contemporary society in *Americanah* (2013). In this coming-of-age African *bildungsroman*, Adichie captures the lived experiences of the oppressed and marginalised characters who are so classified because of their race, social status and gender identity. In short, gender, race and class are the components of peculiar and particular social norms that stipulate social roles, activities and actions. Through the portrayal of her characters, Adichie reaffirms the notion that oppressive norms stem from the interplay of peculiar social perceptions about race, social status and gender identity. Adichie also articulates how society empowers characters to challenge patriarchal constructs. In Adichie's view, empowerment occurs through the acquisition of formal education. To back up these arguments, this study contends that Adichie engages the themes of displacement, alienation, oppression and cultural representation in *Americanah* (2013). In line with these propositions, the study asserts that through the portrayal of her characters, Adichie shows that gender, race and class are the offshoots of the social norms that influence the actions and motives of social characters. Therefore, this study posits that Adichie creates a baseline on which a better understanding of the dynamics of gender identity in contemporary Igbo society is set.

My contentions revolved around the idea that negative stereotypes and bias stem from patriarchal dictates of an illegitimate and ethnic-based government. This is because, on the one hand, the illegitimate and corrupt government in the home country treats their citizens like subjects, while the government of the host countries that these members migrate to pass laws that implicitly and explicitly apportion power, privilege and presence to their members because of their racial affiliations while marginalising the migrants. As such, the seven-part novel in this study is divided into three parts where the experiences of the characters are sectioned as the local experiences, the diaspora experiences and the returnee experiences. Adichie's narrative comes with a twist, as she creates female characters who attain the voice to challenge the normativity of repressive and marginalising bureaucracies.

Set against this frame, I argued that women were doubly marginalised in the selected narratives. In my view, Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie function as African and specifically Igbo novelists who complicate, subvert and question the tenets embedded in Ogunyemi's Afrocentric

womanist literary theory. This is because, for each novelist, the Igbo woman at the centre focalises on the African experience. To further this interpretation, I argued that these social constructs neither existed nor operated singly but overlap and function concurrently to legitimise the unjust actions of patriarchy and its purveyors. However, to tackle the issues of inequality, injustice, marginalisation and discrimination, I posited that Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie situate at the centre of the selected narratives, female characters who start as products of patriarchy. Firstly, there is Nnu Ego in *The joys of motherhood* (1979) who is conditioned by society to be perpetually silent. Secondly, there is Nwanyibuife in Achebe's *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) who is only tolerated by her parents because she is at least some lesser being. Lastly, there is Ifemelu in *Americanah* (2013) who is taught to censor her thoughts, in short, stay silent even when she does not want to conform.

To achieve the aim of this study, I set the characters, Nnu Ego in Lagos and Iboza, a town in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria, Beatrice Nwanyibuife Okoh in the fictitious Kangan and Ifemelu in Lagos, Nsukka and in the United States, as replications and iterations of patriarchal social spaces. Through my analysis, I demonstrated that the characters in each of these settings experience a subversive version of patriarchy. However, these characters evolve into empowered beings who find their voices and rearticulate new possibilities. In this instance, the evolution of consciousness is tied to the acquisition of formal knowledge and social consciousness. Thus, as a London-trained linguist, Beatrice transitions into BB, the goddess and priestess who challenges patriarchy in the private family space and public workspace. Through this transitioning process, Achebe shows the important role that education plays in the process of identity (re)construction. The same can be said for Ifemelu in *Americanah* (2013), who as an immigrant firstly discovers her voice through an almost intangible medium, in the blogspace of an American returnee or Americana who discovers both her voice and presence. In the case of the protagonist in *The joys of motherhood* (1979), Nnu Ego redefines the concept of death. This is because it is by dying that Nnu Ego (re)constructs her identity as a person and not just as a mother of healthy and smart male children.

To understand the narrativisation and characterisation techniques of the African and Igbo novelist, it is imperative to understand how they perceive social reality in Nigeria. As such, throughout my analysis of how gender is constructed in Igbo society, I insisted on patriarchal social norms as an offshoot of the patriarchal ideology that privileges men and places them at the pinnacle of authority. However, I argued that by engaging in certain social activities, one

of which is formal learning, these three female characters, Beatrice, Ifemelu and Nnu Ego evolve into empowered characters who through their actions re-define the structure of the social-economic space. This is a reaffirmation of the proposition that gender is a social construct that remains in a state of flux in Igbo society. Still, on how gender is constructed, I paid particular attention to the meanings attached to the consortium of words that make up the identities given to Igbo people.

For the study, I categorised these labels under personal names, surnames, nicknames and praise names. Gender-sensitive names like Nwanyibuife and Nnu Ego show that a girl-child is only regarded as an appendage who is meant to find and fulfil her purpose through the men in her life. In short, a girl-child is regarded as lesser than a boy-child. Such societal ascriptions and expectations are set against the backdrop of a patriarchal ideology that apportions power, privilege and agency to men while relegating women to the margins. The premise of the arguments is that culture, which influences people's actions and perceptions, is neither static nor immutable. To interrogate the role that culture plays in the construction of the gender identity of an Igbo person, I also posited that gender identity is shaped by other social factors, such as ethnicity and race. To further these arguments, I relied on the philosophical propositions of Fanon, Said, Spivak and Bhabha. For instance, Fanon's binary system of the self and other, Said's postulations about the orient and occident, Spivak's conceptualisation of the subaltern and Bhabha's views on mimicry, hybridity and ambivalence drive the course of discourse at different points in the study.

In Said's view, the 'us' and the 'them' occupy different spaces and these are the orientals and the occidentals, where one is the antithesis of the other. For Spivak who recognises the integral role of language and meaning, the other is the subaltern who cannot speak because they are silenced and invisibilised. Silence is enforced through the actions of the social actors, who in this instance are the main drivers of an oppressive social system. As such, the other or in Spivak's words, the subaltern is the voiceless (non) member of the social system who is marginalised. To be marginalised means to be the orient and by being the orient, Bhabha extends this into concepts of hybridity and posits that the subaltern can transition and (re)create an anthill in the savannah whose *modus operandi* is the reframing of cohesion, complementarity and development. In extending this positionality, I also engaged the philosophical lenses of Butler, Morrison and hooks, as each theorist explicates firstly, how identity is constructed and secondly, how social factors condition social processes of

becoming. The social factors that I focused on are family, education and mass media, and I was determined to show how these influence gender (re)construction. Said, Spivak and Bhabha are the holy grail of postcolonial literature, whose theoretical lenses of orientalism, subalternity and ambivalence allow a fuller understanding of the power dynamics embedded in power and powerlessness within the social system.

In my view, Butler provides lenses with which to scrutinise how gender is constructed and how these constructions define human identities. According to Butler, human beings are gendered in the sense that their identities are defined at birth through gender assignment and are reinforced in the family through the internalisation of social norms and stylised repetition of actions. On the other hand, hooks opened new ways in which to evaluate patriarchal actions within family units. The engagement with Fanon shows the rationale for binarising self and other, underscoring the more militant projections of Tajfel and Turner. This double consciousness of one existing as the 'sub' of another is a common denominator in the works of other postcolonial philosophers already assessed in this study. In my analysis, I support my arguments by unpacking the narrative techniques that Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie engage in the selected narratives. The major one is the language, which I have discussed in the chapters.

I notice certain similarities in the writers' patterns of thinking. Firstly, there are commonalities in the views about social constructs and the ideologies that inform these constructs. As such, society defines a man or a woman to allow certain authority and power to each according to gender. This starts at birth through the process of gender assignment. Gender assignment is determined at birth through an examination of the physiological makeup of the newborn. Thus, the process of socialisation is initiated at birth through the process of gender assignment and continues throughout the life of the individual. The next step is the naming process. To articulate the views on names, as it runs in Emecheta's *The joys of motherhood*, Achebe's *Anthills of the savannah* and Adichie's *Americanah*, I engaged the onomastic lenses of critics like Pfukwa and Mensah. I deduced that within the African, particularly Igbo space, names are not simple and arbitrary labels of identity but rather, markers of identity that tell a story, mirroring the experiences and feelings of the parents at the birth of the named child. In patriarchal spaces like those projected in the selected narratives, names represent the bearer's essence.

I argue that Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie, through the portrayal of their characters, show that names act as the mechanism with which society accentuates gender roles. This is evident in the meanings of the names given to each character. For the female characters, there are names like Nwanyibuife, which means a female is also something, Ifemelu, which means beautifully made and Nnu Ego, which means twenty bags of cowries. However, when juxtaposed with their male counterparts who bear names like Obinze and Adimabua, one recognises the immanent toxicity of masculinities. Obi is the father's hut, and it is usually placed at the centre of a courtyard, so literally, Obinze is the physical manifestation of his late father, an individual who immortalises his father while Adimabua means now I am two. As such, a woman's lower place in the hierarchy is reemphasised in her naming. The female characters in the selected narratives, apart from Nnu Ego, transition into empowered beings who are doubly empowered in formal institutions to (re) name themselves. In all, this study sought to show how Emecheta, Achebe and Adichie articulate their views about how the gender identities of Igbo women are constructed in particular social units. The experiences of these women are defined by patriarchal ideology.

The raised arguments show that within the African womanist space, patriarchal ideology triggers the perpetration of various forms of social injustices against women. These include gender inequality, an act that justifies the lack of representation in the political and economic spaces. However, rather than adopt the Western feminist approach, Achebe, Adichie and Emecheta demonstrate an abiding fidelity per Ogunyemi's African womanist proposition that asserts that the negative impact of social injustice in Igbo society can be checked through collaborative and cooperative engagements between Igbo men and women.

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