RE-READING AFRICAN LITERATURE WITH FEMINIST EMPATHY: A GENDERED ANALYSIS OF SELECTED TEXTS BY CHINUA ACHEBE,CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE AND TSITSI DANGAREMBGA

By

PATIENCE ANIM

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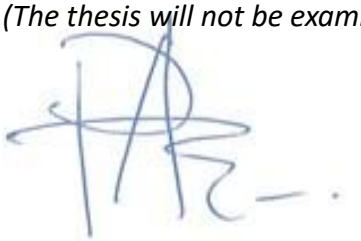

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"He has made everything beautiful in its time" (Ecclesiastes 3:11a).

John Donne (1624) points out that: "No man is an island, Entire of itself" (Lines 1-2). In relation to this, no major task and responsibilities can be accomplished on one's own or in totalisolation. My dissertation was no exception. It was made possible through the help of many people and I would accordingly like to express my gratitude to everyone who variously eithercontributed financial support or offered advice and (or) gave guidance and readership. Prominent among these is my Supervisor, Professor Jessica Murray. Her supervision, criticisms, suggestions, provision of materials and encouragement made the completion of thisdissertation possible. Thank you once again for your counsel and most importantly, your prompt responses. They were comforting which made the "tough PhD journey" a less tough one.

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Several African literary texts and the critical responses to these texts have engaged extensively with the varied ways in which men and women have been both complicit in and active perpetrators of gendered oppression and violence. Even though lives of female characters are often depicted as being impacted by such challenges, contemporary African literary texts consistently portray strong female characters who advocate for emancipation and empowerment while they make choices that allow them to flourish and lead rich, personally and socially meaningful lives. This study contributes to existing scholarly conversations by drawing on theoretical frameworks that are centered around feminist empathy and other discourses of feminism to reflect critically on the ways in which the selected African texts acknowledge, accept and recognise the pain and suffering of the female other marginalised through the practice of patriarchal norms. Through an examination of Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body*, I depict the disparities between the conditions of life, the socio-cultural identities, and the power dynamics of male and female characters within selected African patriarchal societies. The study further investigates the literary strategies employed to expose the effects of sexism, classism, racism, stereotyping and macho-masculinity on the lives of marginalised characters, predominantly, female characters. The research establishes methods adopted by revolutionary female characters to subvert patriarchy and assert a constructive image and role for women in the societies exemplified in the texts. Based on these findings, the study concludes that through the use of empathy as a conceptual tool drawn from the theoretical framework of feminist empathy, both genders can thrive in their mutual support and understanding of each other within a more progressive society.

KEY WORDS

Feminist empathy, feminism, intersectionality, patriarchy, masculinity, decommodification, agency, stereotype, mothering, motherhood

CHAPTER 1:

Introduction and theoretical framework

1.1 Background to Research

The body in pain is not a novel concept and its literary representation is certainly not unique to African literature. In different forms of world literatures, the body in pain is explored in various ways, amongst others as a "memory or wound or theory" (Norridge, 2012:1). As Susan Sontag explores in her 2003 essay "Regarding the pain of others", each person's pain is unique and cannot be compared to that of another (100-101). In African literature in general, the body in pain is expressed in diverse ways through visualisation and the acts of expression which may include voicing, crying and silent endurance. I thus argue that the attempt to grapple with experiences of pain by analysing literary representations of pain is an important scholarly exercise, and that Chielozona Eze's work can offer invaluable theoretical and conceptual tools in this regard. Eze's (2016) notion of feminist empathy helps us to imagine manifestations of pain as experienced by others within the context of African literature. Regarding the specific texts that I investigate in this thesis, Chinua Achebe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Tsitsi Dangarembga are among the best-known African writers today. They are recognised globally for creating awareness about the injustices African men and women, especially the latter, suffer in societies. Their characters suffer as a result of subjugation to myriad cultural tenets inherently rooted in patriarchal societies. These primary novelists' literary works bring into focus the social, political, economic, psychological, national and racial challenges confronting African men and women. Their works represent the patriarchal contexts in their various societies and the ways in which characters navigate challenges to resist their subjugation and to obtain positions of strength and independence. In order to explore how selected African authors engage with these gendered dynamics in their work, I have decided to engage with the work of these specific authors. Achebe is recognised as part of "the avant-garde of the first generation of African novelists" (Carroll, 1980: 156). Adichie is a "representative of the third generation of African writers" (Pucherová, 2022:56), as is Dangarembga. By consulting different generations of writers and writers of different genders, this thesis seeks to provide a more rounded picture of the realities of gender, issues of political power, human rights and pain (see for instance Kolawole, 2000; Jick, 2016; Zulfiqar, 2016).

In Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* (henceforth *Anthills)*, we are introduced to Beatrice Okoh as a major educated female character, who "is a Senior Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Finance" (75) and her friend, Elewa, is an illiterate female character. Each of these characters has a different level of understanding of the experiences of women, culture, marriage and sexual politics in Nigeria. Through their experiences, they battle with Major Sam, president of Abazon, Miss Cranford (White woman), Ikem Osodi, editor of the *National Gazette* and the old man, Elewa's uncle, respectively on their patriarchal, and racial treatment, and the latter male characters (Ikem and Elewa's uncle) acknowledge that women now have the opportunity to define their own bodies. In Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (hereafter *HYS)*, we are introduced to Olanna and her twin sister Kainene, all heroines, are well schooled from Universities in the United Kingdom. Their father, with their mother's approval, want Olanna to marry from a rich family in exchange for money and tenders. Olanna's constant rejection of these men and sticking to Odenigbo, a university lecturer with little wealth, brings out the fight for the right of women to choose their marriage partners. She stays firm to her decision and marries Odenigbo eventually, a sign of forthcoming victory for the Nigerian woman in patriarchal Nigeria who chooses to find a partner for herself, despite opposition from her parents. Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* (henceforth *TMB)* on the other hand, introduces us to this central protagonist, Tambudzai Sigauke, as "you". We are forced to look on at Tambudzai, following her like shadow. In the early chapters she is largely defeated and disappointed with the way her life has turned out, which is presented as a discrepancy between her education and employment prospects. This leads to her nervous breakdown, but she tries to ignore or diminish the psychological trauma that she and even other women (Nyasha, Mako and Mai Taka) have suffered from the horrors of domestic abuse in patriarchal Zimbabwe. Tambudzai hatches the plan of seducing one of Mai VaManyanga's sons, Larky, and marrying him for his wealth in order to gain status, economic support, security and acceptance. This strategy is also as a sign of forthcoming victory for the Zimbabwean woman in patriarchal Zimbabwe.

These novels, set in the colonial and postcolonial eras, articulate the place of women characters in the Nigerian and Zimbabwean societies respectively. Nigerian and Zimbabwean women in the novel face numerous challenges as they attempt to establish their place in the various societies, because of the practice of patriarchy. For instance, the protagonists, Beatrice and Elewa (*Anthills*), Olanna and Kainene (*HYS*) and Tambudzai and Mai Takai (*TMB*) are portrayed as objects and agents of sex. Elewa and Mai Takai are compared to "football" by their male lovers, Ikem and Silence, the guard (Achebe, 1988:34; Dangarembga, 2018: 157).

Also, Olanna's father who is a rich politician and businessman hosts high-level dignitaries in his home. He does not discourage his businessmen friends who expect sexual favours from his beautiful daughter, Olanna, in order to give him tenders, but rather attempts to convince Olanna to prostitute herself (Adichie, 2006: 38-41). These authors through their male characters Ikem, Silence, and Chief Ozobia, Olanna's father, show the causes of pain in women.

Achebe, in *Anthills*, reflects this approach of presenting the experiences of men and women in Africa in their gendered roles and power relationships. This theme is also depicted by female novelists Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in her *HYS* and Tsitsi Dangarembga, in *TMB*. These three selected African novelists can be read as deploying a feminist empathy agenda to evoke empathetic responses through the portrayal of African women in their societies and by critiquing the aspects of their cultures that enable gendered oppression. This study seeks to re-examine African feminism, and to recommend feminist empathy as a theoretical framework that can usefully be applied to analyses of selected African Anglophone novels. Although Eze focuses on Anglophone novels, the framework can also be applied to critical analyses of texts in any number of languages. In this thesis, I am applying it specifically to African Anglophone novels, but this does not mean that it does not have the potential to be applied to other texts in different languages. Using Chinua Achebe's work *Anthills* (1988), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *HYS* (2006) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *TMB* (2018) as instances, it appears that the novelists utilise the tenets of empathy as political, social and emancipatory features which elucidate the pains and sufferings of African women in an attempt to improve the quality of human society and encourage a sense of empathy. In this thesis, I will be using the concept of pain in a broad sense to refer to physical, emotional and psychological suffering. The different forms of pain can also share interdependencies. For instance, physical pain can result in emotional and psychological pain. Yvonne Vera (2002) draws attention to the complexity of different manifestations of pain as she highlights the difficulties that language may have in distinguishing the one from the other. She articulates this complexity as follows: "A woman cannot point to the source of her pain saying it is here and there" (Vera, 1996: 162). In his engagement with Vera's work, Robert Muponde demonstrates how a female character's suffering is "everywhere", thus culminating in a "struggle to give voice to trauma integrated in her body and experience" (Muponde, 2007: 36). Gender injustice can cause physical pain as well as more abstract forms of suffering and all the different manifestations of pain shape the experiences of male and female characters in my selected texts. This research will offer a critical engagement with the ways in which the three authors of the selected texts explore issues of gender relations through feminist empathy. To conduct this study, I will draw extensively on Chielozona Eze's concept of feminist empathy as the central theoretical framework for my analyses. The conceptual and theoretical tools

of feminist empathy have not been adequately utilised in scholarly engagements with African literary texts. By analysing the selected texts through the rubric of feminist empathy, the study makes an original contribution to knowledge by allowing the emergence of new insights into representations of gendered oppression and resilience.

Chielozona Eze (2016) states that when men subject women to unwanted pain or suffering, they disregard their bodies as well as their civil liberties. Therefore, he affirms that writers, particularly female, narrate women in suffering and pain in order to induce readers to feel their experiences through imagining, and then identifying or empathising with them. According to Eze (2016: 7), this action to feel the particular sensations or emotions of a woman in suffering through imagination is feminist empathy. Thus, "the ability to feel oneself in the experience of a woman in suffering because of her gender" (7). He further posits that the "goal of empathy is to address the conditions that cause such suffering and therefore impede human flourishing" (7). In fact, scholars such as Cuff L. Taylor, Sarah Brown and Douglas Howat (2016) state that it is arduous to conceptualise empathy due to its contradictory definitions. For instance, Martha Nussbaum (2001:327) defines it as "the imaginative reconstruction of the experience of the sufferer". On the other hand, Simon Baron-Cohen (2011:12) sheds light on what it means to empathise with someone by stating that "being able to empathize means being able to understand accurately the other person's position, to identify with where they are at. It means being able to find solutions to what might otherwise be deadlock between incompatible goals". He further asserts that empathising allows us to view the other persons as valued, which enables us to feel their thoughts and to acknowledge and respect them (Baron-Cohen, 2011). It could then be deduced that empathy is a means through which literary writers "interrogate the human condition" of women in their various societies and "elicit responsibility from their readers" (Eze, 2015: 311; 2016: 7).

From these perspectives, empathy may be understood to be an important quality for the social validation of individuals, allowing them to flourish within the social order in which they find themselves. Empathy is also crucial when we read texts and attempt to make meaning out of them. This is because the reader empathises with the characters in the text. Such empathy has the potential to induce in a reader a change of mind-set, especially in terms of how men perceive women in society. Fritz Breithaupt (2019) however, states that empathy can be evoked temporarily; just for a short time. According to him:

> [F]iction provides another example of our preference for time-limited empathy. Most people are prepared to step into the shoes of a fictional character for a short time, even if that character undergoes the most terrible sufferings. Why is this? Because works of fiction have an ending, at which point we can withdraw our empathy (2019:92).

In line with this argument, male and female characters and their situations in *Anthills*, *HYS* and *TMB* may only have a temporary impact on the readers as a result of the effect of the concerns raised in the three primary texts. Endorsing Breithaupt's assertion, Suzanne Keen (2007:136) asserts that "empathy with characters doesn't always occur as a result of reading an emotionally evocative fiction. The capacity of novels to invoke readers' empathy may change over time. … empathy for a fictional character need not correspond with what the author appears to set up or invite". Keen also suggests that character identification often induces empathy, but it does not demand identification. From the above discussion, I agree with Keen (2007) that "character identification often invites empathy, even when the fictional character and reader differ from each other in all sorts of practical and obvious ways, but empathy for fictional characters appears to require only minimal elements of identity, situation, and feeling, not necessarily complex or realistic characterization". While this may be equally true for *Anthills*, *HYS* and *TMB*, a close reading of these texts reveals that the African societies represented in them invite readers to identify with that society through an effort to make it more recognisable.

Claudia Strauss (2018), however, argues that empathy is closely related to identification, which has two segments — cognitive and affective. Cognitive identification entails "awareness of another person's feelings, [while] the affective aspect is an emotional reaction to another another's feelings, in particular" (Strauss, 2018:434). This implies that empathy resonates with another's pain and suffering, making one feel physically or mentally uncomfortable. Strauss further argues that her explanation is "meant to rule out the kind of emotional response that psychologists have called *personal distress*, which is a feeling of personal discomfort caused by another's distress" (Strauss, 2018:435). A further explanation refers to the term "empathetic concern", which is adopted for the specific kind of empathy that consists of "feelings of sympathy and compassion for others" (Davies, 1996:57). Like Strauss, Georgia D. Barnett and Ruth E. Mann (2013:230) define empathy as "cognitive and emotional understanding of another's experience, resulting in an emotional response that is congruent with a view that others are worthy of compassion and respect and have intrinsic worth". All these descriptions are applicable to the ways that readers relate to characters and their experiences in the literary works which they read, including works that refer to women and girls. The representation of this gender in literary works attracts empathetic concern as a result

of the way they are defined by their relationship to men. Martin Hoffman (1993), on the other hand, argues that it is more likely for empathy to be realised in relation to individuals who appear similar to oneself than toward persons who seem dissimilar. In addition, it is more probable that empathy will be evoked by a person who is distraught at present than by an individual who is either absent or whose distress is likely to occur at a future time but is not distraught now (Hoffman, 1993). In an instance where one identifies with another person's situation, that individual is "likely to be carried along by one's sympathy and drawn into the other's projects regardless of the wisdom of doing so which pre-empts moral reflection" (Meyer, 1994:32).

In the light of the above discussion, I argue that the representations of African female characters in *Anthills*, *HYS* and *TMB*, encourage the reader to feel empathetic concern towards them. Achebe's, Adichie's and Dangarembga's texts are considered as African stories which provide "accurate account[s] of [African] women's lives" (Hoyt, 2007:412). I argue that these three primary authors endeavour to engage their readers by enhancing the credibility of their depictions of the socio-political experiences of their characters and making their narratives authentic representations. Additionally, the African settings of the novels immerse the readers in the world of the texts. Strauss (2018) observes, readers do not need to be feminists in order for them to experience empathy. However, from an empathetic feminist stance, readers are better able to discern how the patriarchal treatment and role of women in society discriminates against them on the basis of their gender and class. This concern reflects a dimension of intersectionality theory, which will be examined later in this chapter.

It is from such conceptualisations of empathy that the notion of feminist empathy evolves. As Eze (2016: 7) observes, feminist empathy is "the ability to feel oneself in the experience of a woman in suffering because of her gender". His definition suggests that men can empathise with oppressed women, and that all women can also empathise with those that are suffering. In the light of this discussion, the concept of feminist empathy requires readers of literary texts to put themselves in the position of the women in the texts and to imagine their pain. The dimension I add to Eze's conceptualisation of feminist empathy is that – equally − the reader is able to imagine women's experiences of joy and appreciate their resilience as well. Using this framework, I investigate what the implications are when women are reduced by their sufferings. Through empathy, the reader begins to understand that patriarchy hurts not only women but also men. I further explore how empathy helps the reader to share in the victories

of the female characters when the image of those women is uplifted in their moments of joy and demonstrations of resilience.

In spite of the fact that many male authors, such as Chinua Achebe, are recognised and celebrated as the pivots of African literature, it cannot be denied that women authors have also invariably contributed their quota to the long-standing positive image that African literature now enjoys. Long before the literary prowess of feminist novelists such as Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta and their contemporaries were recognised as highly significant to the development of the corpus of African literature (and particularly to African engagements with feminist ideas), women authors such as Efua Sutherland, Flora Nwapa and Mabel Dove Danquah had already made significant strides in establishing their names and achievements in the annals of history. Their literary texts contribute to imaginary understandings of the nation as a "construct that must be defended against the onslaught of the West" (Eze, 2016: 3). These writers are interested in the conditions of gender relations and women's bodies as violated entity. Susan Moller Okin (1999: 10) believes that "women should not be disadvantaged by their sex, that they should be recognized as having human dignity equally with men, and the opportunity to live as fulfilling and as freely chosen lives as men can." As far as this belief holds/goes, other African [women**]** writers and activists are in tandem with the same goal. In many parts of Africa, issues related to gender are vigorously asserted through opposition to the West together with Africa's several mechanisms of defiance and its sense of its own indigenous feminist thought (Ogunyemi, 1996). In this direction, some earlier women authors – Ama Ata Aidoo, Mariama Ba and Zoe Wicomb – have centred their writing on challenging abstractions rooted in culture, the notion of the nation as a masculine space, and the idea of Africanness that focuses on the female body as a symbol of Mother Africa (Eze, 2016). The discourses of suffering and pain that they narrate interrogate constructions of women and expose prejudices that cause them to perceive their bodies as objects of affliction that can be sacrificed in the process of anti-colonial struggles.

Eze (2016) recognises that the idea or concept of basic rights which has been expressed and implemented in almost all countries across the globe was initiated or engineered at the time of the European Enlightenment. It therefore follows that they reflect the prescribed standard order, aspirations and concerns of Western principles particularly, at a certain point of development in history. However, dominant feminist discourse in the 1980s and 1990s by women writers and feminist philosophers most of whom lived in Europe or the USA largely failed to take into account

the historical conditions out of which gender relations in postcolonial Africa have emerged, together with the many forces − psychological, political and social − that have driven them. Therefore, Eze (2016) probes if this feminist thinking integrates into the general discourse of feminist empathy. The current study intends to examine Eze's contribution to the discussion of women's writing in Africa, feminisms in Africa, and feminist ethics by mapping out a significant paradigmatic shift in the field which has happened since 2000 – the turning away from abstractions such as culture and Africanness toward the body as the locus of identity. Eze's feminist theory is appropriate to my study since African feminist theoretical approaches to literature focus on female characters and provide the opportunity of re-evaluating prevailing attitudes and misconceptions about women. Feminist critics commonly and particularly re-evaluate texts and study the traditional contexts in which writings have been produced. They examine female/male power relations that make women subservient, analyse women's conditions and suffering as well as the causes of their emotional and psychological pain. They work to abolish limiting stereotypes of women and seek to expose patriarchal premises and the prejudices they create. Eze's feminist empathy theory is strongly supportive of womanhood and gender equality. It therefore underpins my analysis of women's incapacitated bodies in the three selected texts and helps to answer the ethical questions concerning the writers' depictions of female and male characters. In subsequent paragraphs I discuss the justification for the selection of the novels; the problem statement; aims of the study; research questions; research objectives; rationale for the study; research methodology (data collection and data analyses); theoretical framework (feminist empathy in African literature, other concepts of African feminism, and intersectional theory); significance of the study; and the outline of all the chapters in this thesis.

1.2 Justification for the selection of the novels

The three primary texts chosen for this research are *Anthills* by Chinua Achebe (1988), *HYS* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2006) and *TMB* by Tsitsi Dangarembga (Dangarembga, 2018).

The selection of these novels was guided by the significance the authors placed on gender relations with respect to issues of equality, economic oppression, human rights abuses and the contribution of culture to gender oppression. The choice of novels was also based on the premise that the texts present African women from different historical periods − from the precolonial to the colonial and then the post-colonial − enabling the reader to trace the trajectory of the representation of women's oppression to the present time. These three novelists' different perspectives highlight the multivariate difficulties women experience in

their actions and inactions and their attempts to be acknowledged as persons with the right to define their own identifies and direct the course of their own lives.

Feminist empathy, as Eze (2016) explains it, is mainly about how readers, both female and male, respond to the plight of women in literary texts. By implication, it also encompasses the way in which male writers write about women, and whether or not they represent women with empathy. Thus, this study has chosen to analyse a novel by a male writer to assess the extent of his representation of empathy and its implications for feminist thought as represented in the selected text as well as two texts by women to investigate these issues. Many women writers write with empathy about women's pain because they "begin with their bodies. They do so in the belief that to be is to be a body" (Eze, 2016: 3). Ultimately, the three novels complement each other in showing how their sensitive representations of women's oppression provoke an empathetic response in the reader.

1.3 Problem statement

Although several studies have used African feminist theories to investigate numerous African texts, few have used the concept of feminist empathy to critically study African novels. As indicated earlier, Eze (2016) is one of the African scholars who has theorised this concept in his research. He has, however, focused largely on women's literature. J. Sangeetha (2019:51) defines women's literature as "writing done by women". Such literature classifies and creates an area for study for a class of people "marginalized by history [allowing them] to explore through their writing their lives as they were while occupying such a unique sociopolitical space within their culture" (Sangeetha, 2019). Similarly, Ian McCormick (2016:5) states that women's literature focuses on the "troubled self of a woman who rejects being contained by the society" and it offers avenues to "explore the injustice and cruelty endured by women, but also a space to imagine a different kind of society in which women's lives might be improved, and men's dominant role(s) contested". From Sangeetha's and McCormick's postulations, women's literature is relevant and important because it reflects real sociopolitical experiences, showing how gender has been constructed in the past and how it continues to be constructed in the present. Women's literature is a key component in this study. However, in agreement with McCormick (2016:5), I acknowledge that women's literature "need not necessarily be feminist". It is important to apply Eze's concept also in reading male-authored texts as the problem of gender oppression is largely one initiated and sustained by men. However, in addition to my extensive use of Eze's concept of

feminist empathy, I also draw on other critical theories such as intersectionality to interpret women's literature. This thesis, therefore, applies the concept of feminist empathy in analysing Chinua Achebe's *Anthills*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *HYS* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *TMB* in an effort to demonstrate that these novels make significant contributions to the development of African feminist thought. Even though novels such as *Anthills* and *HYS* have been widely critiqued, they have not been critiqued from the perspective of feminist empathy, which demonstrates that in order for humans to flourish, men and women must empathise with each other's needs. It is this gap in the literature that this study hopes to address.

1.4 Aims of the study

This research aims to explore the ways in which representations of women and men in the three selected texts evince feminist empathy – an empathy which ultimately projects the idea of feminism as ethics. I will be assessing feminist empathy as demonstrated by male characters towards female characters in the novels and by the authors in their depictions of gender relations. I will also be engaging with their literary texts to assess the extent to which their representations can be understood through the theoretical lens of feminist empathy.

1.5 Research questions

My study will be guided by the following three main questions:

How does Achebe as a male writer portray women and men with feminist empathy in his work?
How does Adichie as a female writer portray female and male characters with feminist empathy in her novel?

How does Dangarembga as a female writer represent male and female characters with feminist empathy?

Answers to these main questions will be developed by answering some subsidiary questions:

Considering that a writer who is male occupies a privileged position in society with regard to his gender and race, to what extent is it possible for a reader to experience empathetic engagement with the female characters depicted in a male writer's text?
Does feminist empathy mean that women must always be depicted as suffering and oppressed?
Are women writers necessarily empathetic towards their female characters just because of gender sameness? What about cultural differences? How do they negotiate these differences
in writing with empathy?

The above questions are posed in order to explore the nuances in the conceptualisation of feminist empathy.

1.6 Research objectives

Based on the research questions, the study has three main objectives:

To explore whether Achebe portrays both genders with feminist empathy in *Anthills*.

To demonstrate how Adichie's male and female characters in *HYS* are constructed from a feminist empathy perspective.

To explore the means by which Dangarembga depicts female and male characters with feminist empathy in *TMB.*

Since this research has subsidiary research questions, it follows that there should also be supplementary objectives. The purpose of these is:

To ascertain the extent of Achebe's feminist empathy in *Anthills*

To determine if some degree of stereotyping takes place as a result of the writers' attempt to be seen as empathetic to women

To investigate if the selected female writers are always empathetic towards their female characters, irrespective of differences relating to culture or ethnicity.

1.7 Rationale for the study

This study is motivated by the paucity of critical inquiry using feminist empathy as a theoretical construct in engagements with African literary texts. As Eze (2016) points out, the question of feminism as ethics is one that needs deeper investigation, especially at this time when African literature continues to highlight various forms of gendered violence. The principal rationale for this study, therefore, is to enrich the scholarship on feminist empathy in African literature by revisiting well-known texts through the lens of empathy.

1.8 Research methodology

This research employs close reading to investigate how the authors of the three primary texts under study demonstrate feminist empathy in the way they represent both women and men in their novels. Close reading creates a thorough understanding of the phenomenon under study, and it thus helps "to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text" (NGA & CCSSO, 2010: 10). As a literary examination, the approach will entail a close critical reading of the selected primary novels from the viewpoint of feminism. The guiding school of thought and theoretical compass will be feminist empathy as theorised by Eze (2016). In other words, feminist empathy will be the lens through which this study will examine all three selected texts. This research will be conducted by means of a close critical reading of the selected texts to unravel the ways in which the writers reveal the need for feminist empathy in response to women's oppression across cultures and political spaces.

1.8.1 Data collection

For this study, the data will be produced through a critical engagement with the selected novels. Because the investigation is focused on the analyses of novels, the primary data for the research are the three primary texts. These will be complemented by secondary data in the form of critical material that engages with the novels and sources that offer insight into the thematic concerns raised in the texts.

1.8.2 Data analysis

The researcher intends to use the major method of analysis and critique. My analysis will be shaped by my engagement with the literature in the relevant scholarly field and by my application of the selected theoretical framework. I will conduct a critical scoping of the selected texts using the research questions and objectives as a guide. This critical scoping will enable me to delve in-depth into the texts from which I will extrapolate deep insights relating to themes and concerns as I trace connections among them. Through close intensive reading, I will make annotations where relevant themes or concerns emerge in order to gain a thorough understanding of the selected texts. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001:464), "intensive analysis usually begins with the researcher reading all of the data to gain a sense of the whole". Such intensive reading and scoping will enable me to draw out instances which provide evidence of feminist empathy demonstrated by the writers in their depiction of the characters. In the final step of my scoping, I will analyse each text in a separate chapter so as to engage fully with its feminist politics.

1.9 Theoretical framework

For the purpose of analysis, I present a critical review of feminist empathy, Anglophone African theories of feminism and intersectionality. In the later part, I discuss patriarchy, masculinity, gender and stereotyping which are used to analyse the issues raised in the three selected novels.

1.9.1 Introduction

Patriarchy propagates age-old attitudes towards women which are mostly unflattering and relegate women to an inferior position in society (Offiong, Eyo & Offiong, 2021). In traditional patriarchal society, in relationships between women and men the former are defined by their relationship to the latter. Such patriarchal treatment of women has been depicted in some African literary works as in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Why are we so Blest* (1973); Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* (1975); Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1989); Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* (1974)*;* Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1995); Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good will Come* (2004). These works, published around the late 20th and early 21st centuries, were mostly authored by women. According to Evan Mwangi (2009), these

women writers as well as other contemporary African texts generally engage in self-reflexive discourse. These scholars and literary works have not drawn much attention from the West. Uma Narayan (1998) indicates that the difference between Western and third-world feminism is due to historical changes and internal complexities in Western perspectives. The notable feminist scholar, bell hooks (2001), explicates that during the second and third waves of feminism, the struggles that black women experienced were mostly marginalised and the Western feminist movements were reserved exclusively for the experiences of white women. However, these Western scholars respond differently when focusing on third-world contexts. Narayan (1997) postulates that because of the disparities in tradition between Western and African societies, critics and scholars have suggested the importance of multiplicity of feminist theories. For the reason that western feminists discount women's situations unique to African societies leading them to respond differently from how I will respond to the primary texts in this study. African women's identities invite a special gaze, not catered for by Western feminism. On this basis, I use feminist empathy which provides a theoretical avenue through which African women may achieve equal status to men within the existing social structures.

As mentioned earlier, in several African scholars' writings and literary works they generally engage in self-reflexive discussion (Ashcroft et al. 19890). This, therefore, presupposes that contemporary African literature has been concerned with the self rather than fixing its focus on the West. Similarly, Femi Ojo-Ade (1983), a male critic of African feminism, refutes the perception that feminism is a Western import which has no relation to African gender relations. Additionally, he posits that feminism is adopted by some class of women progressives to strive to be men (Ojo-Ade, 1983). The above-mentioned celebrated Afrocentric female scholars and authors – Emecheta, Ba, Head, Darko, Adichie and Atta– are mostly interested in speaking about the African woman as a subject, and making their "self-description the nucleus to challenge the uniform generalizations by many male authors" (Harrow, 2002:15). Thus, they deal with African gender politics and the appalling human rights condition of women. Such generality epitomises masculine practices and postures toward African women.

Generally, in view of delineating African women as subjects, the emotional state and experiences of African women, how they identify the world, and their pain and pleasure are part of comprehending African women fully. However, the central emphasis of the argument about African feminism is largely on African postcolonial discussion, which is mainly driven by the need to counter the West's attempt to affect the African women's image positively in their discourses. Also, it is the necessity to correct the erroneous thoughts of Euro-American feminism. Quite the contrary, "postcolonialism offers feminism [and, by extension, feminist empathy] the conceptual tool box to see multiple sites of oppression and to reject universalisms around

gendered experiences of both men and women" (Parashar, 2016: 371) (for more on the relationship between these two bodies of critical scholarship, see Castaing, 2014; and Ashcroft, 1989). Feminist empathy collides with postcoloniality "on the understandings of the 'third world women' and the overruling of gender hierarchies in racialized spaces" (Parashar, 2016: 371). In addition, drawing from the words of W.D. Ashcroft (1989) I postulate that postcolonial feminist empathetic women and men writers "tend to concentrate heavily on the social and political oppression of women" (Ashcroft, 1989: 23). Carole Boyce Davies (1986:8) affirms that any work on African feminist writing should "come to grips with issues such as the treatment of women characters and the growing presence of African women writers". Mary Kolawole (1997:27) makes the point that African feminism is grounded in African traditions. Thus, the notion of "group action by women, based on common welfare in social, cultural, economic, religious and political matters" is the focus of feminism, and she further highlights that it "is indigenous and familiar to a majority of these women." Similarly, Chielozona Eze deals with a new dimension which accepts, acknowledges and understands the woman in Africa for whoever she is: "a person with unique dreams, desires, fears, aspirations, and a consciousness that deserves the total attention of society and those she lives with" (Bazin, 1985:33). This new order shapes the African woman's image, and so corrects the negative perception of the role and treatment of women in literature.

Zoe Norridge (2012) asserts that African literature is also a literature of the self. The major distinguishing feature in these contemporary African writers is the experience of pain that the African female bodies undergo in their various societies because of their gender. For example, Ranka Primorac (2006) highlights the way Zimbabwean texts deal with the Zimbabwean women's bodies. As far as the suffering that the bodies of women undergo, these contemporary female scholars and authors: Ranka Primorac (Zimbabwe), Leila Aboulela (Sudan), Buchi Emecheta (Nigeria) and Amma Darko (Ghana), despite their diverse origins accomplish the same purpose. Eze (2016: 1-2) argues that the above-mentioned female authors "secured their positions in African letters […] and rose to prominence" for this reason. Besides, Eze (2016: 2) affirms that they:

> are more interested in exploring the human condition in their local spheres than in addressing the world from the perspective of the colonized and oppressed. Whereas earlier generations of African writers presented Africa to the world by countering colonial Manichean allegories, these contemporary African writers raise questions of immediate ethical relevance.

From the above, it is deduced that this generation of writers − all from Anglophone countries − neither hesitates nor fears to project negative images in addressing pain in African literature. It is important to address the way we comprehend the unique concerns of this crop of contemporary writers and the exact relation between their feminist ideals and those of their precursors in Africa. Treating the subject of feminist empathy, Eze broadens the Western description of feminism and thereby increasing its importance to the struggle of Africa and African women. What then, is feminist empathy, and how can it open up new understandings in scholarly engagements with African literary texts?

1.9.2 Feminist empathy in African literature

Agboadannon Alfred Djossou Koumagnon (2018:14) has interrogated "whether a man can be a feminist in the real sense because they benefit from a social and cultural organization that gives them all sorts of privileges over women''. Another point of view on this issue by Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson and Peter Brooker (2004) is that throughout its historical evolution, feminism focuses on "women's conscious struggle to resist patriarchy". Although it may appear from these arguments that men cannot be feminists, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a famous feminist critic and author, in her *HYS*, one of the texts this study focuses on, agrees with Ama Ata Aidoo during her TEDx Talk (Adichie, 2013a), that a "feminist is a man or a woman who says yes, there is a problem of gender as it is today and we must fix it to better it". Pursuing the same line of thought, Dobrota Pucherová (2022a:58) highlights Adichie's feminist inclination as "to seek freedom and happiness away from the oppressive systems of their [postcolonial women's] own conservative cultures". She further explains that feminism "is a genre that displays a focus on the themes of …, explorations of otherness, … as counterpoints to patriarchal nationalism, [and] colonialism". Drawing from Pucherová's highlights on Adichie, it appears that a feminist is either a male or female writer whose work explores the suffering and oppression of others (women and men), but especially women. That is, the latter are "the primary victims" (Pucherová, 2022a) of oppression. Such work emancipates and empowers the victims to free themselves from oppressive and patriarchal systems within their cultures. Adichie gives a new impetus to gender struggles and gets rid of its challenges. Thus, she refuses to be defeated by its challenges which requires men to play a role in feminist agency and become a part of emancipation and empowerment of women as "men probably bear more of the responsibility for ending oppression of women since patriarchal men have been the main perpetrators of that oppression" (Koumagnon, 2018: 13). In addition to Koumagnon's position as a male feminist ally, Eze also offers crucial insights into what it means for a man to

write about women or to read about women's pain. A male feminist ally is empathetic and vocal about women's issues. A feminist ally is one who holds and supports "the belief that women should not be disadvantaged by their sex, that they should be recognized as having human dignity equally with men, and the opportunity to live as fulfilling and as freely chosen lives as men can" (Okin & Susan, 1999:23). In an interview, Audrey Gadzekpo (2015: 18), a Ghanaian feminist scholar, shares a similar view with Okin. She is of the opinion that "a feminist is one who sees inequality between men and women and wants to do something about it". Based on these definitions, the different African writers and activists can pursue similar feminist objectives, regardless of whether they are men or women. The male feminist ally, Eze, just like the above-mentioned female critics, has recognised a gendered challenge and the necessity for an affirmative change. Eze asserts that feminism is advocating for equal rights for men and women, but especially for the latter. Consequently, he is a male feminist ally, because he is empathetic, vocal about women's issues and furthers the common interests of women. He may therefore be associated with Adichie's (2013a) proposal that all open-minded or objective individuals ought to be feminists, "show[n] in understanding the significance of womanhood" (Adichie, 2013a).

Eze notes that feminism in contemporary African literature is also concerned with self. Briefly, the history of the self goes back well before the 1980s when the need to oppose the West in African literature dominated the literary scene. The term "writing back" as proposed by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1989), reveals that African writers focus on themselves and the African world. Thus, they are no longer obsessed with literature of the "grand past" or those of former colonised cultures.

In the background to research, I explained that Achebe is a first-generation writer while Adichie and Dangarembga are third-generation writers. Some other third generation writers include: Lola Shoneyin, No Violet Bulawayo, Taiye Selasi, Yaa Gyasi, Veronique Tadjo and Yvonne Vera. Gazelle Mba (2023) states that the first-generation writings are between the 1950s and the 1970s. They include Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Kofi Awoonor, Cyprian Ekwensi and Gabriel Okara, to name a few. "They were mostly male writers, with the exception of a few women such as Adaora Lily, Flora Nwapa [and Ama Ata Aidoo]" (Mba, 2023: unpaginated). Mba further asserts that predominately, these writers "wanted to challenge the designation of … Africans as primitive, without history or culture." On the other hand, the third-generation writers, such as Adichie, Dangarembga and others came into the literary world "between 2000s and 2013" (Eze, 2016: 1-2). These groups of writers "had a received idea of the duties of the [African] writer" (Mba, 2023). So, they followed a precedent that had been set by earlier group of writers; except that "they are more

interested in exploring the human condition in their local spheres than in addressing the world from the perspective of the colonized and oppressed" (Eze, 2016: 2). Tanure Ojaide (2015: 19), observes that

> contemporary Africa conflates the literary works of three major generations of writers that include the first generation of Sembene Ousmane, Chinua Achebe, … Ama Ata Aidoo, … and the third generation consisting of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Sefi Atta, … and other younger writers. [However] This generational periodization is not rigid because it tends to take into consideration when a group of writers are in vogue and not when the writers stopped writing at some specific times. [Because] Some of the first-generation African writers are still writing and many …are as prolific as those in the third generation.

They concentrate more on African gender politics and the challenges to the basic rights of women. Dobrota Pucherová (2017:269) however states that when we carefully read these African writers, we are bound to appreciate that they "deeply engage with the question of what it means to be African in the contemporary world" and that they "are more interested in exploring the human condition in their local spheres than in addressing the world from the perspective of the colonized and oppressed" (Eze, 2016). I agree with Pucherová on Eze's assertion that disregarding the gaze of the West may be important "in reassessing cultural issues that have been the source of conflict between African and Western feminists". They advocate understanding and recognition in the relations between females and males. Particular features in their works include interrogating the fundamental human rights of gender, especially the rights of women, African sexism and African bodies (See, for instance, Egya, 2018; Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 2006; Andrade, 1995; Coly, 2015; Murray, 2015; Baingana, 2017, 2005). As indicated earlier, these two generations, particularly the third, are more interested in the woman's body as a violated entity. They see their bodies as "homes to their individual selves" (Eze, 2016: 3). They, therefore, call for fairness and justice in the dealings and relationship between women and men.

Raymond Mar and Keith Oatley (2008:173) hold the view that in literature, especially fiction, empathy "creates a deep and immersive simulative experience of social interactions for readers. This simulation facilitates the communication and understanding of social information and makes it more compelling, achieving a form of learning through experience". This description is also useful for understanding a specifically feminist iteration of empathy. Similarly, through feminist

empathy, the reader becomes deeply immersed in the experiences of the characters, thus gaining a full appreciation of lives and events the characters experience. This implies that such "simulative experience" enhances empathetic engagement. Mar and Oatley (2008: 173) go on to explain that "engaging in the simulative experiences of fiction [al] literature can facilitate the understanding of others who are different from ourselves and can augment our capacity for empathy and social inference". In the light of Mar and Oatley's point of view, Achebe's *Anthills*, Adichie's *HYS* and Dangarembga's *TMB* attempt to highlight two core issues in the relationship between literary works as "simulative experience" and their readership. First, "consumers of literary stories experience thought and emotions congruent with the events represented by these narratives" (Mar & Oatley, 2008: 173), and second, the narratives depict reality and experiences as lived out in the social environment. These two aims to evoke empathetic engagement with characters, especially female characters in that they immerse the reader in the African female experience. As Sahar Mustafah (2021) observes [in her interview with Berrebbah]:

> [W]hen we share stories [,] we just tend to get closer and we are very voluntarily going on this journey with these characters and that's a beautiful thing. I think, inevitably, we are going to feel empathy. I think, even writing is an act of empathy, so even [Achebe, Adichie and Dangarembga] as fiction writer[s] had to be in a place of empathy […] Empathy is absolutely necessary to break down barriers (Berrebbah, 2021) (Sahar Mustafah, 2021) (Interview with Ishak Berrebbah).
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Within this context, these primary African novelists can be read as deploying a feminist empathy agenda to evoke empathetic responses through the portrayal of African women in their societies and by critiquing the aspects of their cultures that enable gendered oppression. As posited already, the two core issues in the relationship between literature as a simulative experience and their readership help to immerse the reader in the diverse experiences of African female characters. Eze (2016: 3) counters that when third-generation African female writers write on "polygamy, female genital excision, rape, spousal abuse, or other forms of gender discrimination, they do so because they are acutely aware of these bodies as exclusively theirs,

not as belonging to society or their culture." That is, these writers describe accounts of women's bodies in pain specifically to confirm their subjectivities.

Feminist empathy as a gendered perspective is concerned with careful self-examination of the phenomenon of pain in the bodies of women. It depicts pain such as injustice, privation, unfairness, displeasure and physical distress which are directly or indirectly effected by most cultural practices that disadvantage women. Pucherová's (2022a) discussion of Eze's feminist empathy asserts that "the concept of pain disallows us to defend cultural traditions that oppress women". Unlike many members of the older generation of African feminists, contemporary African feminist writers mostly "see their bodies not as symbols or allegories of something else, but rather as homes to their individual selves" (Eze, 2016: 4). Feminism in contemporary African literature gives us the conceptual tools to critique these types and sources of physical and psychological pain inflicted on women, giving a clear picture of the inner consciousness of these female characters. What is regrettable is that they tend to be often in conflict with their male counterparts, and sometimes with their fellow women. In their attempt to resolve conflicts within and without, they end up causing pain to either themselves or other characters. It must be noted that common emotions such as anger, sadness, surprise and fear characterise these female characters, leading them to react and respond to issues in unexpected ways. For instance, in Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body*, Tambudzai, a female teacher at Northlea High School, undergoes pain when she abruptly terminates her appointment after losing her temper with one of her pupils, Elizabeth Chinembiri, which leads her to use a T-square to hit her so hard on the head that the girl loses her hearing. Norridge (2012) postulates that "there is hesitancy among academics to address questions of pain in African literature due to the fear of deepening undesirable stereotypes about Africa to the outside world". Miriam Tlali, a renowned South African writer, asserts her identity when asked in an interview: "In this period of 'isms' and deconstructed canons, what label would you like for yourself?" Her response was: "I identify myself as a black woman writer. In South Africa, we live under a pyramid of power, so I regard myself as the voice of the African woman who is oppressed politically, socially and culturally" (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997:8). This is how this female writer presents the plight of women in Africa in her writing.

In exercising empathy, a character's actions or inactions are judged if they are fair and just. This is because "most people will respond to physical hurt in the same way, regardless of their cultural context", and − as already mentioned − "the concept of pain disallows us to defend cultural

traditions that oppress women" (Pucherová, 2017: 269). According to Eze (2016: 3), one way or the other, feminist empathy leads to "feminism as fairness and as justice". His definition of fairness is "the quality or condition of being fair. Being fair is identified as acting "equitably, honestly, impartially, justly" (Baingana, 2003:48), "Fairness" connotes equitability and honesty. For Eze (2016), it is supposed when living with other characters that one must always put oneself in the victims' position and then make a moral judgement of their actions and inactions from that particular perspective. The ability to do this shows that fairness and justice have "[come] to fruition when we switch perspective with a woman experiencing unfairness, injustice, or oppression because of her gender" (Berrebbah, 2021). The woman suffers due to her class and gender to which society has forced her body to conform. Eze (2016), therefore, establishes that the system has to be fair and just to girls and boys, not only to boys if justice is to thrive. For it is expected that the system should "first of all recognize them [daughters] as individuals with distinct wishes and dreams that ought to be taken seriously just as it does those of boys" (Eze, 2016: 48). The system is fair and just when the "condition in which the people [characters] live are free, equal, rational, and [they] are able to make choices about the principles that would guide their lives" (Eze, 2016: 49). Eze provides an African point of view on ethics and female-male relationships with feminist empathy. As indicated earlier, patriarchy has relegated women to the background and this is seen in the treatment and roles of women in the three chosen novels. I use Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* as an example, it shows that Beatrice, the educated female and heroine, her unnamed illiterate mother, and Elewa, who is not formally educated or traditionally trained and Beatrice's closest ally, are marginalised and subjugated in the cultural structures which establish inequitable relations between the two genders. Eze provides an African point of view on ethics and female-male relationships with feminist empathy. I recognise that gender is a fluid construct that changes over time. However, I am not engaging with gender fluidity as it does not serve the analysis of texts where clear gender boundaries are represented. As indicated earlier, patriarchy has relegated women to the background, and this is seen in the treatment and roles of women in the three chosen novels. I use Achebe's *Anthills* as an example, it shows that Beatrice, the educated female and heroine, her unnamed illiterate mother, and Elewa, who is not formally educated or traditionally trained and Beatrice's closest ally, are marginalised and subjugated in the cultural structures which establish inequitable relations between the two genders. Achebe projects the absurdity of these traditions and customs that have subjected married, unmarried, educated and uneducated women to the pain of unfairness which emanates from their social construction as women. I am using pain in a broader sense which, in this instance, denotes emotional suffering. These female characters'

experience demonstrates that sexist discrimination characterises women as inferior, weak, submissive and voiceless, indicating the persistent need to continue fighting female discrimination and marginalisation which cause women ongoing pain. For this reason, Achebe focuses on specific iniquitous interrogations like the treatment of female by male characters.

Eze broadly defines ethics as "a science of morality" (3). Eze's (2016: 3) description of morality "deals with what is good or bad, permissible or forbidden". This view is upheld by Philip J. Nel (2008:35) who states that: "[m]orality is the sense and view of what is right and wrong and that which constitutes an absolute reference for character and behaviour. It is an authoritative code of conduct in matters of right and wrong". From this observation, morality centres on obedience to rules in the community; virtue in a life and a desire to seek the welfare of humanity. Hence, it draws attention to the quality of an individual's relations with others.

Bodies of women which are violated incur pain, and Eze (2016) additionally states that to incur pain and suffering is gratuitously inhumane. This in effect incapacitates women's bodies, and thus signifies an abuse of their rights. All these militate against moral equality between the sexes and therefore prohibit fairness and justice. According to Eze (2016: 44), moral equality "requires that men and women be held accountable for their actions as adults... one has to act without coercion". For instance, when Adichie in her work *Half of a Yellow Sun* narrates that the daughters, Eberechi and Olanna are pushed by their different parents to either marry or have illicit sexual intercourse with men in order for each of the two families to achieve socio-economic benefits. Also, later Adichie fleshes out the violent sexual scenes of the Biafran war where different types of men – white mercenaries, reverend fathers, soldiers or boys conscripted into the army – rape the young and defenceless girls and later dump them. Fundamental ethical questions concerning the relation between the African woman and the African man are what Adichie focuses on. She echoes notions of unequal relationships and power between the female and male characters as explored by Aidoo in *Changes* (Aidoo, 1991) as well as Emecheta in both *The Joys of Motherhood* (Emecheta, 1976) and *Second Class Citizen* (Emecheta, 1975). For instance, in *Changes*, the protagonist, Esi, is unhappily married to Oko, with whom she has a daughter, Ogyaanowa (Aidoo, 1991: 8). Often Esi and Oko fight about their marriage and specifically, over their assumed gender roles within the relationship such as Esi's refusal to bear more children and also to cook for the family (8-9; 11). Angrily, Oko rapes her, and this assault leaves Esi devastated and isolated from family, neighbours and friends (13), because marital rape is not a widely recognised phenomenon in her African patriarchal culture. Thus, it was not legally recognised at all at the time Aidoo was writing. This is due to the fact that rape in some parts of that society is regarded as a husband's right. Finally, Esi

divorces Oko and chooses to be in a polygamous marriage with Ali, where she feels she is independent. In a similar context, Buchi Emecheta in *Second Class Citizen* tells the story of Adah and her struggle in Lagos and the United Kingdom. She is uneducated, unlike her younger brother Boy, so she sneaks into a Methodist school. Later, the narrator states that "the longer she stayed at school, the bigger the dowry her future husband would pay for her" (Emecheta, 1975: 23). So, her paternal uncle, like Eberechi's and Olanna's parents, educates her in order for the family to gain this socio-economic benefit. Again, she, like Esi in *Changes,* is unhappily married to Francis. While they are in the United Kingdom, Francis proves he is not the ideal husband as he physically abuses her, shirks his responsibility to get better care for his children and even burns Adah's writing. Eventually, she − like Esi − also leaves the marriage to become an independent woman in the United Kingdom. Adichie, Aidoo and Emecheta are all part of a generation of writers whose texts can fruitfully be read through a theoretical lens of feminist empathy.

By means of a close reading of the selected primary texts, I study not just the authors' representations of gender but also the temporal and spatial contexts within which gender is constructed. This uncovers the results or causes of the issues being examined for "pain is often either a result or a cause of the denial of another person's voice" (Eze, 2016: 5). Moreover, the goal of empathy "address[es] the conditions that cause such suffering" (Eze, 2016: 7). Apart from using feminist empathy in analysing the three chosen novels, I will also draw on aspects of intersectional theory. This dwells on the assertion that intersectionality (which will be discussed later) offers insight into how the gendered challenges in a society are often shaped by socio-political and economic factors. I expand on Eze's view of empathy by looking at how writers evoke empathy for their female characters, thereby also promoting ideas of feminist empathy in their texts. However, I also question the complexity of the representations of the characters in the texts since Eze (2016: 17) claims that "empathy is not passive."

Susan Z. Andrade (2011) highlights that the works of feminists are indebted to their precursors; therefore, emerging feminist concepts should be appreciated within the scholarly trajectory from which they result or ensue. In this regard, I examine selected African female scholars and writers connected to African feminism. It is my conviction that feminist empathy and other concepts such as Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's and Mary Kolawole's "Womanism", Catherine Obiaanju Acholonu's "Motherism", Molara Ogundipe-Leslie's "Stiwanism", Obioma Nnaemeka's "Nego-feminism", Chioma Opara's "Femalism" and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's "Snail-Sense", seek to redefine feminism to suit African conditions, especially the African woman. As Buchi Emecheta (2007: 554) says, African feminism "tends to be much

more pragmatic." More importantly, "African feminism, unlike Western feminism, does not negate, demonize or exclude men, rather it accommodates them. Men are central to their lives and so their continuous presence is assured" (Maduka, 2009: 10). However, the contrasts between these concepts come from the different angles from which scholars identify and understand topical women's issues and how they believe these could be addressed. Additionally, as earlier indicated, I refer particularly to the intersectional feminist theories which are of relevance to this research. Again, these theories are utilised in my examination of Achebe's, Adichie's and Dangarembga's chosen texts. I suggest that these theories are tools by which these primary texts draw attention to the state of female characters in their societies in order that readers can put themselves in those characters' positions. In the same vein, I argue that all these feminist strands have a commonality, in that they all agree on the complementarity of women and men. From the above discussion, it is clear that there ought and must be "diversity in feminism that is responsive to the different needs and concerns of different women and defined by themselves" (Arndt, 2002:59). In what follows, I study each of the concepts of feminism mentioned above by selected African and Western scholars.

1.9.3 Other conceptual tools of African feminism

The word 'feminism' often has negative connotations in Africa and the West. For instance, Ogundipe-Leslie (1994: 11) comments that "many of the African female writers [Bessie Head, Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo] like to declare that they are not feminists, as if it were a crime to be a feminist". Some scholars such as Eze (2016: 7) label feminism as "a hot-button term" which gives rise to controversies and ambivalences (Nkealah, 2016). As a result, most scholars suggest that it is easier for African females to simply evade feminism, in order to "avoid distractions attendant with the [term]" (Ogunyemi, 1996). Therefore, African women describe their agendas literally with their own labels (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2012a; Nnaemeka, 2003; Ogunyemi, 1985, 1996). Kolawole (2002:95) argues that "[t]he most acceptable alternative [name to feminism] appears to be womanism." "Womanism" has three different detailed explanations. First, Alice Walker (1983), an American novelist, poet and social activist, explains womanism as the struggle to liberate "all women; women of color; working class women; poor women; disabled women". The individuality of black women in particular ought to receive close attention in Western feminist discourse, where it has been neglected.

Second, like Walker, the Nigerian academic and literary writer Ogunyemi (1985, 1996), emphasises that African womanism focuses on the liberation and independence of women, just as

feminism does. Like Walker, Ogunyemi also stresses that African womanism focuses on the emancipation and self-reliance of women, in a similar way to feminism. Howevesr, these two concepts differ in exactly how each views patriarchy and then advances towards change.

Ogunyemi (1985) reiterates that the struggle for womanism must consider issues of culture, tradition, racism, sexuality, ethnic discrimination, nation building, politics, poverty, illiteracy and linguistic segregation. Susan Arndt (2002: 35), drawing on Ogunyemi, endorses the relevance of womanism in that: as a woman writer with her own peculiar burden, knowing that she is deprived of her rights by sexist attitudes in the black domestic domain and by Euro-American patriarchy in the public sphere; as a member of a race that feels powerless and under siege, with little esteem in the world − the black female novelist cannot wholeheartedly join forces with white feminists to fight a battle against patriarchy that, given her understanding and experience, is absurd. So she is a womanist because of her racial and sexual predicament.

This view is upheld by the Nigerian literary critic Kolawole (Kolawole, 1997), who holds that the consciousness of the womanist should speak about problems of gender, and matters of race and class. She also posits that the womanist should strive to "change the status quo, interrogate patriarchy, imperialism and western feminism" (Kolawole, 1997). Primarily, the goal of the womanist is to "liberate African women, change their consciousness and recreate a positive self-perception to enhance progress" (Kolawole, 1997). Therefore, the quest for self-assertion, self-respect, self-esteem, dignity and new moral values in a search for redefinition is very significant in womanism. This augments Mawuli Adjei's (2009) assertion that female writers will use tropes and literary resources to construct assertive, capable female characters who do not suffer social inequalities as passive victims, but as women who make their societies take note of their creative force. The dominant ideology in womanism is that the African woman is made to show care, concern and reflect more than her Western counterparts in the sense that they are made to contend with imperialism, capitalism, and racism. However, Ogunyemi (1985) believes that African women should not distinguish themselves as independent entities with no regard for their male counterparts. According to this line of thought, womanism as feminism should take account of the African culture of *palava*, which is a continuous discussion. Kolawole's and Ogunyemi's delineation of women changing the status quo through a continuous negotiation in marriage, imperialism, formation of sisterhood and patriarchal hegemony inform my discussions on feminist empathy.

Acholonu holds the belief that "motherism" is preferable to feminism and ought to be the fundamental principle directing African women's and even men's lives. Acholonu (1995:110-111) explains that "Africa's alternative to Western feminism is motherism and motherism denotes motherhood, nature and nurture". That is, "cooperation with Nature is paramount to motherism and the task of the motherist is that of healing and protecting the natural cohesive essence of the family, child, the society and the environment" (110-111). Acholonu (1995: 3) illuminates that motherism could be used to describe either a woman or a man in that it "has no sex barriers because at the core of motherism is partnership, cooperation, tolerance, love, understanding, and patience". In addition, motherism is clearly centred on African culture, and therefore, there is the need to "be anchored on the matrix of motherhood which is central to African metaphysics and has been the basis of the survival and unity of the black race through the ages" (Acholonu, 2002:110). Social change and innovation will be achievable when women are focused on all aspects of societal development. Here, what Acholonu argues is that motherhood is the central stance in guarding and guiding African women's lives. While such an argument is problematic in the sense that it presumes to equate women and their rights with their status as mothers, it is still valid that women as mothers often serve as pillars of survival and unity between the genders. This is because Acholonu (2002: 110) affirms that motherism should "be anchored on the matrix of motherhood which is central to African metaphysics and has been the basis of the survival and unity of the black race through the ages." Acholonu's concept of motherhood informs my discussion on feminist empathy to the extent that it promotes love and forbearance while eschewing violence and conflict between women and men.

Motherism has resonances of Chioma Carol Opara's (2005) "femalism", both of which terms conceptualise female power at the intersection of motherhood. Opara explains femalism in the following way:

> By virtue of its analysis of living experiences focused on the body, femalism is as phenomenological as it is heuristic and composite. Drawing parallels between the politically scarred African nation and the socioculturally battered female body, femalism effects a nexus between the freedom of woman and that of the African continent. The female nurturing body is considered to be analogous to Mother Africa − an embodiment of Mother Nature. The Metropolitan manipulations of a jolted African nation in the course of its

> economic and historical trajectory are likened to the flagrant, patriarchal abuse of the female body and mind in the quest for a holistic existence (Opara inaugural lecture, 2016).

Like Acholonu's "Mother Nature", Opara's femalism places emphasis on the African woman's body and illustrates an emotional link between the liberation of African women and African nations at large. Opara's ideas inform my analysis of feminist empathy to the degree that they allow an insightful perspective on how the life of the African woman is shaped by the care work they do in relation to the family, community or society and the nation.

For Ogundipe-Leslie, the African substitute for Western feminism ought to be "Stiwanism". This is more communal than racial, and she also argues that:

> 'STIWA' is my acronym for Social Transformation Including Women in Africa.... This new term STIWA allows me to discuss
>
> the needs of African women today in the tradition of the spaces and strategies provided in our indigenous cultures for the social being of women... 'STIWA' is about the inclusion of African women in the contemporary social and political transformation of Africa. …Women have to participate as co-partners in social transformation" (2002: 50).

It is deduced from the above that Ogundipe-Leslie (2007) posits that issues of gender must form part of the social transformation and restructuring in order to achieve success. Besides, she is of the opinion that her new concept of African feminism woulds "deflect energies from constantly having to respond to charges of imitating Western feminism" (Ogundipe-Leslie, 2007: 229) and, in this way, converse those energies, to avoid being distracted from the real issues of the conditions of women in Africa (Ogundipe-Leslie, 2007). Like Ogunyemi, Ogundipe-Leslie's concept is solely for African women. In the next segment, I briefly examine Obioma Nnaemeka's theory, "Nego-feminism".

Obioma Nnaemeka proposes the term "nego-feminism". She pleads for recovery of what is indigenous to Africa. Thus, recovery is grounded in complementary and collaboration to resist patriarchy, re-examine Africans traditions and cultures in order to draw from them the right tools for empowering

women and enlightening men. Similar to other regions and cultures, this intends to improve the material conditions of women, thereby repossessing their dignity, acceptance and recognition, which is indigenous to Africa. The repossession is grounded in negotiation so Nnaemeka (2003:360–361) explains first that "nego-feminism" is the feminism of negotiation; second, "nego-feminism" stands for 'no ego' feminism and is structured by cultural imperatives and modulated by ever shifting local and global exigencies." Nnaemeka (2003:361) posits that African feminism works by knowing "when, where, and how to detonate and go around patriarchal land mines". The culture of negotiation to combat patriarchy, gender inequalities and suppression of self-esteem will enhance the complementary role between women and men for, especially the woman's benefit. Although these thoughts are included in the postcolonial discussion on identity and nation building, African women have still been playing the role of an object in nation building. The following questions need to be pondered: are the desires and necessities of motherhood satisfied? What about the differences between women in providing care?

Adimora-Ezeigbo (2012b), another Nigerian scholar, coins the term "snail-sense feminism". Olushola Ayodeji Akanmode (2015:1) clarifies that "snail-sense feminism":

> adopts the habit of the snail to 'negotiate' or 'dialogue' with its environment to be able to get round obstacles on its way with a 'well-lubricated tongue', whether the obstacles be rocks, thorns or boulders. Nigeria as a country with multiple cultural traditions that are unfavourable to women makes it imperative for the Nigerian woman to learn and apply strategies that would be useful to confront the hindrances to their attainment of self-actualization and self-development brought about by patriarchy.

From this explanation, it emerges that African women need to gradually work− even if at a snail's pace − in their dealings and interactions with their male counterparts in the "tough and very difficult patriarchal society they live in" (Akanmode, 2015: 1). While this may demonstrate some effort at redress, no matter how small, it is likely more expedient that these women be more radical in their demand for gender justice. So, perhaps from a slightly more radical stance, Olushola Ayodeji Akanmode proposes that women must learn endurance methods in order to amicably resolve problems they encounter. What Adimora-Ezeigbo calls the "endurance strategy" that women adopt in order to amicably resolve problems further informs my discussion of feminist empathy as a tool for resolving social conflicts.

The "womanism" of Ogunyemi and Kolawole, the "motherism" of Acholonu, "femalism" of Opara "stiwanism" of Ogundipe-Leslie, "nego-feminism" of Nnaemeka and "snail-sense" of Adimora-Ezeigbo have a commonality in that they all agree on the complementarity of women and men as earlier discussed. What is sorely lacking is a sustained discussion of how texts create female characters with empathy and how both female and male readers respond with equal empathy to such texts. It must be emphasised that these theories do not act in opposition to men; instead, all encourage complementarity of the sexes, while each feminist theory examines the oppression of women through a different lens.

Additionally, I will also employ intersectional theory in my study. Therefore, in what follows, I briefly review intersectional theory associated with Black feminism. I use Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's discussion of intersectionality as a basis for my discussion.

1.9.4 Intersectional theory

Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, a critical race feminist, coined the term "intersectionality". She described intersectional theory in 1991 and it has been further explained by subsequent scholars (Collins, 2008; Hurtado, 1996; Patil, 2013). This concept was a reaction to the failure of "[c]ontemporary feminist and antiracist discourses to consider intersectional identities such as women of color" (Crenshaw, 1991:1242). Intersectionality developed out of the works of feminist scholars of colour promoting the argument that most works within "the area of feminism in the period concentrated on white, educated, middle-class women, not taking into account other areas of importance such as race" (Shields, 2008:303–304). In this respect, they marginalise women of colour. Crenshaw (1991:1244) comments that:

> Because of intersectional identity as both women and of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both. [And] the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately.

She establishes that intersectionality emphasises this act of marginalisation which arises from several reasons which include race, class, gender, religion, language, ability, nationality, sexual

orientation and age. For instance, an individual could be disregarded due to being a female character, a poor person, belonging to a certain religious sect, and a particular nationality, all at the same time. In effect, these different forms of relegation could either make the female victim worse, or empower, or oppress her. In that, the various ways in which race and gender intersect easily forces black women to experience multiple dimensions in their discriminatory struggles. Intersectionality identifies merits and demerits that are felt by marginalised people because of the combination of the above-mentioned factors. In view of this, if an individual wants to understand how a society started to marginalise a group of people, especially women as a class, they would have to examine the ways that class, sexuality, gender and other aspects of identity inform this process.

In light of the above discussion, I use intersectionality, Crenshaw's Black feminist theory, as a tool to analyse the selected texts, with the focus on the treatment of characters. The notion of intersectional identities — race, gender, class, sexual orientation, ability, age and nationality — as empathetic explains my choice of intersectionality to support/underpin my discussion of feminist empathy and literary themes in this study.

How do the identities of the women in physical pain and suffering, as well as being victims of structural and other oppressions help a reader to deal with the intersectional issues which have pushed the women into such positions? This is exactly what the chosen three Anglophone African texts probe. These contemporary texts acknowledge the reality of how intersectional interactions among the multiple female identities represented depict difficult experiences that debilitate the bodies of women. This investigation, hence, explores the manner in which these concepts help to identify women as incapacitated within traditional patriarchal hegemonic communities.

The various concepts of feminism are all worthy and useful, yet there are theorists, activists, editors, scholars and writers who consider themselves neither womanists, motherists, stiwanists, snail-sense feminists, femalists, feminist empathisers, nor intersectional feminists.

For instance, the renowned Ghanaian writer, Ama Ata Aidoo, affirms this when she responds to the question of whether she is a womanist or feminist. She states:

> there are womanists, and feminists, but the most important thing is: what are we all trying to get at? If we are all trying to get at the development of society's awareness about the position of women in this world − and what to do about it, how to get women to develop − that's the important issue. If this is what we are about then, frankly, it is not relevant at all whether we are feminists, or womanists, or fundamentalists. … I am not going to stop talking to somebody because she is a womanist. I will argue with the person about the viewpoints. I will discuss them...; discuss the validity of the term (Rudolphi, 2003:28).

In view of the above opinions and issues raised in the scholars' discussions and interpretations, I discuss patriarchy, masculinity, gender and stereotyping in relation to feminist empathy.

These four concepts comprise the extent and depth of feminist discourse.

1.9.5 Patriarchy

Patriarchy is defined by Lisa Tyson (2006: 85) as "any culture that privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles". Tyson (2006) upholds that cultural gender roles "cast men as rational, strong, protective and decisive" while "they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing and submissive" (85). Similarly, Toril Moi (1986) says a practice which empowers men to dominate women in all social relations is known in feminist discourse as patriarchy. These definitions denote the suppression and subjugation of women while promoting the worth of men. Additionally, it "justifies inequalities, which still occur today, such as excluding women from equal access to leadership and decision-making positions" (Tyson, 2006). Kik Ruthven (1984) contends that the task of feminist critics is to uncover and address the way in which male dominance over females constitutes perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power, and goes on to say that the role

of feminist critics is to discover as well as find solutions to the practice of male dominance over women which constitutes the prevalent ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of authority. Tyson (2006) further asserts that feminist opinions themselves are contaminated with patriarchal belief. My contention with all these opinions is that patriarchal authorities tend to regard all women as necessarily feminine, while all men are seen to be necessarily masculine. Closely linked to patriarchy is masculinity**.** So, culturally, when a man heads and directs affairs in his family, this gives him the ability to exert power over women. The tradition where men rule over women is exposed and analysed in this investigation. Feminist empathy, one of the strands of feminism, is therefore adopted as the main theory underpinning this study and is used to challenge patriarchal ideology.

Feminist empathy venerates African culture and recommends a well-balanced presentation of African women in general. It emphasises the ideals of sisterhood as women live together with either little or no help from their men. The selected three novels are, therefore, studied within this theoretical framework, which helps to critique the innumerable ways patriarchy operates and how women ultimately succeed in devising means to triumph over their suppression and subjugation.

1.9.6 Masculinity

Stephen M. Whitehead (2002) postulates that masculinity voices those customs and ways of being that serve to validate a male subject's sense of self as a man or boy. Masculinity hinges on an array of attributes, traits and tasks generally accepted as unique or appropriate to a male. Conversely, Raewyn W. Connell, James W. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005:836) suggest that masculinity is "not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals; rather masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to gender relations in a particular social setting". It can then be argued that masculinity is a construct which does not relate closely either to real attributes, traits, or lives of any male. Helen Nabasuta Mugambi and Tuzyline Jita Allan (2010:56) observe that masculinity, like femininity, is "socially constructed and like the environments in which they are produced, masculine identities are subject to change". Kopano Ratele (2008:519), concurs with this view, which holds that "male practices and masculinity … are keen to concentrate on evolution, [and] mythical traditions". Based on these arguments, and

given the assertion that "most political, cultural … leaders around the world – those in better positions to influence change – are also men" it is important to engage "men to end gender-based [inequality]" (Ratele, 2008). Pursuing the same line of thinking, the UNPFA (2005:5) shares the view that work on gender equality will benefit from the engagement and support of males in that "men themselves are increasingly challenging notions of 'masculinity' that restrict their humanity, limit their participation in the lives of their children, and put themselves and their partners at risk." Akosua Adomako Ampofo and John Boateng (2007:71) explain that the harm that certain behaviours of men bring upon women and other men, work with males is argued for as to enable men to minimise "problems brought by the excesses of masculinity (and) harmful concepts of masculinity." In the light of all these discussions, many men "want to become supportive husbands and fathers, but need support to overcome deeply entrenched ideas about gender relations. … Stronger efforts to involve men more fully in … family life and gender equality are urgently needed" (UNPFA, 2005:5). The question that this study investigates is whether some, many or most men do in fact want to change in order to challenge structures and practices that support oppressive masculinities and gender inequity and inequality.

As mentioned earlier, this thesis concentrates on re-reading African literature with feminist empathy in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body*. The study focuses on the images of men in these novels as they are reflected in consciousness of sustained dominance in the social hierarchy. The privileged male position enables men to dominate as well as gives them the mandate to inflict undeserved pain on women. So, the relation between the African man and woman raises fundamental ethical questions. Hence, masculinity is identified by examining the masculine and feminine characterisations, language, concerns and themes which are presented in the three primary texts. Examination of masculinity and patriarchy highlight the significance of the interaction between women and men, This highlights the importance of gender.

1.9.7 Gender

Hazel Reeves and Sally Baden (2000) state that gender applies to the unique patterns of beliefs, ideas, and norms which shape the culture and the relationships between females and males as a class of people in a society. Similarly, Mark Weightman Bauerlein (1997) explains gender as a means of referring to the social organisation of the relationship between the sexes. This view

draws attention to the fundamentally social quality of differences related to gender. According to Feny Anggeria (2019:13), "[g]ender is the study of women and men among their roles in society". That is, it probes the thought processes behind the social, cultural and historical construction of sexual difference. For instance, according to Pucherová (2022b:61), "[e]xpressions of anger, ambition, loudness, stubbornness, or ruthlessness are accepted, or even expected of men, while they are criticized in women". Again, it is distinctive from essentialist thoughts of sexual identity or subjectivity founded on the natural core of biological sex of the body: "[U]nlike boys, girls are praised for their virginity and taught to be ashamed of their bodies and desires" (Pucherová, 2022b). On this basis, it seems that: "[w]e make them feel as though by being born female, they are already guilty of something" (Adichie, 2013a:21). The hierarchical binary opposition of female/male reinforces patriarchy and sexual privilege to the disadvantage of women. The inferior position of women permits their male counterparts to adopt a single-minded gaze on the pain they (women) experience and that does not address women's incapacitated bodies. This finds expression in Achebe's, Adichie's and Dangaremgba's novels selected for the study. All these, hierarchical binary opposition of female/male power and inferior position of women, are permissible in the tradition and culture, yet by and large the male characters in the selected texts still do not pay close attention to its negative effects on the women. There should be an or attempt to abolish it. This logically leads to the study of stereotype.

1.9.8 Stereotype

Stereotyping in our various cultures is being defined as notions of the typical features of a person, kind of art or thing in an oversimplified fashion. Stereotypes take shape in specific contexts (Russell, 1999). Thus, it is a social phenomenon and concept, which has its origin in the pre-literate period. Mike Cardwell (1999) establishes that stereotype is an over-generalised ideology about a specific class of persons. Expectations may differ; thus, for example, it could be an expectation of a group's personality, appearance, ability or preferences. David Myers (2010: n.p.) states that stereotypes are often "overgeneralized, inaccurate, and resistant to new information", while Craig McGarty, Vincent Y. Yzerbyt and Russel Spears (2002:3) assert that stereotype is any idea generally adopted about a class of people or a particular lifestyle intended to characterise the entire class of those persons or deeds as a whole. They further argue that "these thoughts or beliefs may or may not accurately reflect reality" (Craig *et al.*, 2002). As much as these generalisations about class or groups of individuals might be significant in decision-making, they might be erroneous

when used in relation to specific people who are perceived in an unfair or prejudiced way. Stereotype is a universal phenomenon because it cuts across racial and national barriers. Stereotypes as founded in these primary texts help the characters to make decisions more easily and quickly, hence, the tendency to unthinkingly accept them. Additionally, it influences the way the characters see other characters, interact with and treat one another. This study examines stereotypical representations of women and men in the three chosen novels through their male and female characterisations, race and related issues.

This investigation adopts and applies the theories of womanism, motherism, femalism, nego-feminism, stiwanism and snail-Sense because of their wider scholarly relevance to the research. Cognisant of Arndt's (2002) assertion that "feminist commitment has a specific, distinctive face which is rooted in the specificities of African societies and of the situation, problems and concerns of African women and men", an intersectional approach is used in the analysis of the selected novels.

In addition, the aim of feminism is to transform the undignified perception of women in order for all women to recognise that although they are generally perceived as "non-significant others", each woman is a valuable person possessing the same privileges and rights as every man. While this should be the situation, it rarely is. Eze (2016) offers a "new perspective that acknowledges the African woman for who she is: a person with unique dreams, desires, fears, aspirations, and a consciousness that deserves the total attention of society and those she lives with".

1.10 Significance of the study

My analysis of the selected African texts through the lens of feminist empathy makes a scholarly contribution to the existing application of feminist empathy in a literary context, because this approach has not been sufficiently applied thus far. It is precisely for this reason that I have undertaken to explore the multiple manifestations of feminist empathy in the selected works of Achebe, Adichie and Dangarembga as well as the pitfalls inherent in this concept. In a sense, this thesis seeks to further develop the theory of feminist empathy in the works of male and female writers and the implications these have for the development of African feminist thought.

1.11 Chapter outline

I only refer to Chapter One and then project forward in the other chapter outlines.

My research is segmented into six chapters. Chapter One provides an overview of the investigation, which is discussed in the above. Chapter Two comprises the literature review of the chosen texts. *Anthills of the Savannah* will be reviewed under the heading "Achebe's 'New' Woman"; *Half of a Yellow Sun* will be discussed under the heading "War and the Denigration of Women in Adichie"; and *This Mournable Body* will be considered under "Dangarembga on Women's Lives and Sexual Politics". In Chapter Three, I begin my critical analysis by looking at the biopolitics of everyday experience in *Anthills of the Savannah*. This novel was published in 1987 but that I refer to the 1988 edition throughout the thesis; and therefore it makes sense to start the investigation into feminist empathy by analysing the earliest of the three novels. The context in which Achebe wrote would determine to a large extent the depth or shallowness of his feminist empathy as a writer. Chapter Four covers a critical analysis of decommodifying female lives in Adichie's novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* which was published after Achebe's novel and before Dangarembga's text. Adichie's female perspective offers a good comparison of the form and shape feminist empathy takes, depending on the gender of the writer. Chapter Five analyses the agency/agentic force behind the mirror reflection and the power of accepting femalehood in Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body.* This demonstrates the ways in which the novel constructs the disabled body. This is the third analytical chapter in this study and the arguments developed here follow directly from what was discussed in Chapters Three and Four, and draw intertextual connections between them. Finally, in Chapter Six, I conclude the study by offering a synthesised overview of the preceding arguments. I also develop a comparative analysis of gendered techniques of subversion, convergences and contrasting techniques. These are analysed as adapted by the novelists of the texts, and the study is summarised.

CHAPTER 2:

Literature review

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter Two, I present analytical reviews of relevant literature and critiques on class, gender, socio-economic, political and traditional experiences of many African women, from the theoretical perspective of feminist empathy. As I review how these experiences typically relate to gender politics and colonialism, I point out how feminist empathy effectively draws attention to gender disparities, especially against women, because of their gender and class. Through my discussion, I explore how these scholarly interventions shape readings of the representations of culture and gendered resilience in the selected novels. Challenging and critiquing patriarchy that both genders − but predominantly women − advocate in African societies is the subject of concern in Chinua Achebe's *Anthills*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *HYS* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *TMB*. This research goes beyond the boundaries of Nigeria and Zimbabwe to review literature on issues relating to relationships between African women and men in general. It is necessary to extend the analysis beyond such national borders because the issues discussed are not unique to these spaces and indeed persist across the continent. Even though these issues may manifest differently in different contexts, there are commonalities, and patriarchy extends beyond borders. The analysis contributes to the study of African literary representations of women emerging as agentic subjects who resist men in patriarchal hegemonic cultures. It also adds to the analyses of the decommodification of female lives under patriarchy, and to the assertion of power by women who enhance their agency through acts of self-reflection by retro/introspection, which I term "mirror reflection". I use this term because the exercise of self-reflection carried out by the female characters that I analyse is aptly symbolised by one of the characters' (Tambudzai's) acts of looking into a mirror to take stock of her life, discussed in Chapter Five. While the other female characters do not necessarily perform the specific act of looking at their reflections in a mirror, they nonetheless take stock of their lives through retro/introspection of their experiences and issues. These critical issues are further investigated in Chapters Three, Four and Five respectively. Although Achebe is a first-generation male African writer and Adichie and Dangarembga are third-generation female African writers, they all constitute a crop of writers of contemporary African literature who place women at the focal point in their works. The question now addressed is: What are African feminist writings?

2.2 African feminist writings

In the previous chapter I pointed out that the term "feminism" carries negative connotations. Therefore, I agree with Naomi Nkealah (2016:7364) when she describes African feminism as "marked by contradictions, controversies and ambivalences". Some scholars such as Helen Chukwuma (1994: ix) define feminism as a means for rejecting "inferiority and a striving for recognition. It seeks to give the woman a sense of self as a worthy, effectual and contributing human being. Feminism is a reaction to such stereotypes of women which deny them a positive identity". Eze (2016) endorses this definition. Chukwuma reaffirms what genuine African feminism is: a belief which promotes equality between the sexes in patriarchal hegemonic society. It is also offered as a body of scholarship that aims to achieve equal opportunities for women by fighting against all aspects of male domination and sexist oppression which hinder them from self-actualisation. Ezeigbo (1996:1) states that feminism "emerged as a response to oppressive and unjust laws and attitudes arrayed against women [which have placed them in] subservient, dependent and marginalised positions, permanently relegating them to the background''. According to Ojo-Ade (1983: 71), "Black literature is a mirror of man's inhumanity and the voice of the victim". While Nutsukpo (2020: 84) asserts that African men and women, especially the latter, "have always been sensitive to all forms of discrimination within … African society, the emergence of feminism and feminist consciousness-raising awakened in them a new awareness of their oppression through the inequalities in society, reinforced by patriarchal tradition and culture." In the light of this, feminist awareness has made literature a means of exposing and challenging inequalities, oppression, patriarchal tradition and culture. This emerges in gendered readings of literary works by African writers, both women and men.

From this standpoint, African feminist writing raises "several issues related to the need to reconstruct the identity of African women and promote the social, cultural, economic and political development of the continent" (Koumagnon, 2018: 13). Over time, such texts can reveal the ill treatment, suffering and pains of women with the aim of "criticizing and transforming the status quo" (Koumagnon, 2018: 14). Ogunyemi (1988:60) states that "African literature which, once upon a time, was phallic and dominated by male writers who focused almost exclusively on male characters and male concerns, entered a new phase with the emergence of feminist conscious writers." An African feminist writer then, is someone (male or female) whose interest "is to articulate a self-consciousness about women's identity both as inherited cultural fact and as a process of social construction [to] protest against the available [subjugation] of female becoming"

(Heilbrun, 1988:19). As a parallel, I draw on Nutsukpo's (2020: 88) assertion which affirms that writers such as Chinua Achebe, Chimamanda Adichie and Tsitsi Dangarembga "are all proponents of African feminist [writing] who advocate for gender equality and a breakdown of patriarchal structures in the African society that impede the positive growth and actualization of African women".

While African feminist writing has highlighted the identity, status and role of African women, Shamim (2014:2) observes that "the role of women in the society and in their household changed with the passage of time." Achebe redefines meanings of womanhood since the pre-colonial period as are Adichie and Dangarembga. As indicated earlier, Bungaro (2006:68) endorses the idea of change as progress, stating that:

> Today's African women's [and men's] texts exploit multiple subject positions as a textual strategy for challenging the marginal status allocated to them in dominant discourses. Rather than viewing the marginal condition of African women as the cause of reiterations of their victimhood, which then would cement them into this role, writers describe this marginalization in ways that stress fluidity and movement.

Achebe's *Anthills*, Adichie's *HYS*, and Dangarembga's *TMB*, all focus on female characters through exploring what is entailed in being a woman in African societies. They all have central female characters. These writers, similar to Aidoo, "write about strong women …; women who are viable in their own right [and] traditionally a woman is supposed to be nothing more valid than a mother" (James, 1990:12). For instance, Beatrice and Elewa are the heroines in *Anthills*; Olanna and Kainene are the heroines in *HYS*, and Tambudzai is the protagonist in *TMB*. These female characters challenge patriarchy and are portrayed as "a person first, and a person herself … [rather than as] an appendage to someone else – a man …claimable by herself and without a reference to anybody else" (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994: 140). These fictional women are at the centre of these novels and this focus allows the authors to articulate the inequalities that women negotiate in order to challenge and critique patriarchy as well as the multiple stereotypes of womanhood that have shaped traditional notions of what women ought to be. Carmela Garritano (2007:71) argues that early male writers "shored up a masculine national identity" in order to depict an African self. For instance, Ayi Kwei's *The Beautyful Ones are not yet Born* (1968) shows constructions of masculinity which resonate with Garritano's argument. That is, in this novel, women are scarcely

given any assertive role. Additionally, Kwei portrays what identifies women in a traditional society which is rebelliously skewed to uphold the beliefs that approve the men and everything associated with them, while he purposely delineates women and represents everything feminine as odd. Therefore, this portrayal casts women as objects, not subjects.

In line with Heilbrun's (1988) and Nutsukpo's (2020) assertions, texts produced by African feminist writers depict positive images of women, and appear to overturn previous negative projections of femininity. At the same time, such texts reconstruct and identify a contemporary positive image purposed to affirm that femininity is promoted to a recognisable, valuable status. Nwapa (2007:530) explains that "the woman's role in Africa is crucial for the survival and progress of the race, and as such women have started to redefine themselves. They have started to project themselves as they feel they should be presented". Such selective self-projection as manifested in Achebe's *Anthills*, Adichie's *HYS* and Dangarembga's *TMB* reflects these developments.

Other scholars have also come to the conclusion that some authors create positive image of women characters in their narratives since women in their culture occupy positions of power and are not always oppressed. One such Nigerian scholar is I. E. Odinye (2010:41). He investigates the construction above by positing that "the background of some female characterization seen in the novels of Elechi Amadi, *The Concubine* (Chanter, 2006), Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) … have awakened the zeal and interest of some writers like Flora Nwapa, Alkali Zaynab … and other writers [like Achebe, Adichie and Dangarembga] to vividly portray the status of women in society and project the positive image of womanhood in society". The three novelists' works "are a form of reaction, resistance to meanings of womanhood provided by men. Through their personal experiences of womanhood, women's sensibilities, reactions and reviewers in a heterosexual relationship, politics and sex, some of these writers portray assertive female characters" (Odinye, 2010:41). Using the above, the French scholar, Garritano (2007) supports Odinye's view. He develops his argument in critiquing Amma Darko's *The Housemaid* (1998). According to Garritano (2007:72), Darko joins the "African writers' efforts to antagonize and re-write masculinist discourse by representing the sites of ambivalence and heterogeneity effaced within it". In like manner, women are portrayed positively; thus, the behaviour of these female characters may include

their ability to be assertive, and exhibit agency, some good which will influence other characters to achieve their goals, they may demonstrate the importance of motherhood and wifehood. It is obviously clear that Achebe's, Adichie's and Dangarembga's descriptions of the African woman are similar to Odinye's and Garritano's descriptions and portrayals.

In the light of the fact that the selected texts promote women's issues, depict them positively and portray them justly challenging patriarchal structures, Achebe, Adichie and Dangarembga could be labelled as feminist authors, who attempt to "render the lives of exploited women [and men] more visible through creative writing" (Higgins & Hirsch, 2007: 69). They put themselves in the experiences of the "exploited women and men", identifying with their pains. Eze (2016: 7) highlights that feminist empathy is the "ability to feel oneself in the experience of a woman [or a man] in suffering because of her [or his] gender. The goal of feminist empathy is to address the conditions that cause such suffering." A central objective of this study is to explore how the authors represent the various ways of subverting patriarchy in their texts, so I argue that the "easing of the unnecessary pain" and suffering that the genders, predominantly women, undergo is the main issue addressed by these three primary novelists.

Gervase Angsotinge, Kari Darko, Aloysius Denkabe and Helen Yitah (2007), on the other hand, observe that Darko's novels

> are not simplistic feminist novels in the sense that their main themes are of female solidarity and the suppression of women in a patriarchal society. Even though the exploitation and marginalization of women is central to [their] work[s], the women … are trapped in a warped society in which everything, including all human relationships, is commodified.

As intimated earlier, these writers' works also follow Darko's steps as Angsotinge et al. observe. Like other African writers, they discard the peculiar and usual representations of female characters in their works. In depicting the representativeness of African women, Achebe, Adichie and Dangarembga attempt to present a complete reality by first disallowing stereotypical images of women in their novels. Bryce (2008:49) comments on Adichie's portrayal of female characters by stating that, "the feminine is neither essentialized and mythologized nor marginalized, but unapologetically central" in her novels. Achebe and Dangarembga follow suit in prioritising

women. Several other scholars such as Nadaswaran (2011:20) discuss that first-, second- and third-generation African writers like Achebe (first-generation), Adichie and Dangarembga (third-generation) depict a credible image of women. They forgo the conventional stereotypes of women as wives, mothers and daughters who are voiceless (Jilek, 2020). African men's and women's writings pay much attention to portraying women's and men's predicaments through the themes of marriage as well as mothering and motherhood. This research exposes these themes and discusses how they contribute to the overall concerns of the texts to depict subversion of male dominance. Next, I discuss the thematic issues in the selected African texts.

2.2 Thematic issues in the selected African texts

The themes of marriage, mothering and motherhood handled by the writers become the tools through which they depict agentic females who are able to stand up against the established traditions in their societies. These selected texts convey concerns relating to the socio-economic, political and cultural dimensions of life in many parts of Africa. More specifically, such concerns range from subversion of patriarchy and stereotyping, rebellion against colonialism, corruption, dictatorship and war, to more contemporary socio-economic realities regarding gender, race and class. Paying close attention to the three selected African texts, I uncover the stated themes that focus on the social and cultural realities of gender, particularly women in relation to gender politics and colonialism, and their desire to be liberated from patriarchy and masculinity and achieve empowerment within their different cultural backgrounds. These matters which hinge on the cultural, political, economic and social difficulties of gender because of the injustices of patriarchy, stereotyping and masculinity are investigated in the three novels. The common subject matter in the three novels which will be critiqued are marriage, mothering and motherhood. The next section presents a critique of literary representations of marriage in selected African literary texts.

2.3 Marriage

From the brief plot summaries of the novels with character introductions in the introductory chapter, I state that the narratives are dominated by women characters' who in different ways experience pain and suffering often resulting from patriarchy. It is therefore important to review the different ways and positions characters/women characters have been traumatized by painful experiences generated by patriarchy. Thus, in marriage, as already indicated above, in the three primary texts, the authors "deal with, and often challenge, … dual-oppression-patriarchy that

preceded and continues after colonialism and that inscribes the concepts of … traditions such as dowry, bride-price, polygamy" (Katrak, 2006:239). Ogbeide (2013) states that in some marriages, mothers are exposed to physical, emotional and psychological mistreatment by their husbands in that males are the patriarchal heads of the family. Mtenje (2016:70) agrees with Ogbeide and further explains that "Beatrice Achicke is caged in her marriage because she surrenders herself to a patriarchal order which does not give her economic and social empowerment to break away from her oppressed status in life". From the critical perspectives above, pain and suffering are integral to an understanding of several married female characters in the primary texts.

Some scholars offer different perspectives on marriage. Chandra Mohanty (2003a) argues that third-world texts such as: *In the Ditch* (1972), *Double Yoke* (1983) and others like *Anthills*, *HYS* and *TMB* emphasise changing perceptions of marriage and motherhood. Just as Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* overthrows the glorifying perceptions of marriage and motherhood, so do the three selected primary novels. Katrak (2006:240) explains some African feminist writers' "stance, particularly with regard to glorifying/denigrating traditions". Thus, motherhood is depicted as a performative practice that is associated with a particular gender and biological gender norms. It is inherent in the image of a devoted mother and housewife who builds or provides a home away from the instability of the public space. Zulfiqar Sadia Chaudhry (2014:15) states that "motherhood should be a choice, [but] not an imposition". Davidson Umeh and Marie Umeh (Umeh & Umeh, 1988: 23) confirm that they would "like to see the ideal, happy marriage. But if it doesn't work, for goodness sake, call it off". Deducing from Umeh and Umeh's assertion, this may appear logical, it is, however, not as simple as that in contexts of structural gender inequality where women in submissive positions cannot simply "call it off". On the basis of this discussion, the selected primary novels offer valuable insights in portraying marriage as an aspect of culture which narrates bodies of married women in gratuitous pain. More specifically, these married women characters are often ignored, exploited and manipulated by their husbands. Therefore, those married women who are able to overcome their oppressive treatment, or are able to stand up to socio-cultural pressures to submit to such marital oppression, are depicted as heroines. For example, in *Anthills*, through his heroine Beatrice, Achebe brings to the fore the negative perceptions of marriage, presenting it as a choice for a woman to go into. Marriage is "a whole baggage of... foolishness.... That every woman wants a man to complete her is a piece of male chauvinist bullshit" (Achebe, 1988: 88). Similarly, Adichie shows that marriage can sometimes

take a negative turn, and therefore emphasises that it should "not be an imposition" on a woman. So her heroine, Kainene, "calls it off" by never agreeing to marry her fiancée, Richard, despite the persistence of especially the latter to enter into marriage with Kainene. On the contrary, Dangarembga's protagonist, Tambudzai, wants to marry so she can use that as an avenue to emancipate and empower herself from the life of penury and subjugation in the Zimbabwean society in which she lives. In the light of all these, Nfah-Abbenyi (1997: 11) concludes that feminist empathy, as a strand of African feminism, identifies "gender-specific issues and recognize[s] women's position internationally as one of second-class status and 'otherness' and seek[s] to correct that". The purposeful focusing on women's choice not to enter into marriage subverts the effects of patriarchy, at least in some aspects of women's lives. In spite of the fact that marriage "glorifies" womanliness as in Tambudzai's life, other women characters represented by Kainene bring to the fore that some of African traditions and societies affirm its negativism and shows marriage to be ludicrous in reality for the African woman. Examining the critical observations of the above-mentioned scholars (Katrak, Ogbeide, Mtenje and Chaudry), there appears to be a discrepancy between what marriage actually is and the erroneous traditional expectations of what it should be.

Ofosu (2013:182) buttresses the above by stating that "[i]n traditional and contemporary African societies, marriage is often positively portrayed" (Amadiume, 1987; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1987) as the zenith of feminine achievement: it is the institution that legitimately enables a woman to carry out the so-called female functions. Yet it is also the institution which most comprehensively enforces "cultural restrictions placed on the choices available to women and entrenches the double standards which underpin gender relations in society" (Olufunwa, 2008: 6). In this regard, "[m]arriage has been an arena for some of the bitterest battles of gender conflicts. Regardless of what species of feminism they subscribe to, if at all, Africa's [feminist] novelists have consistently probed the difficulties of marriage for women" (Olufunwa, 2012:2), contemporary African feminists such as Achebe, Adichie and Dangarembga "do not show the romantic aspects of marriage. They rather portray the stresses and problems aimed at sensitizing women to the harsh reality" (Chukwuma, 1994:82). On the bases of this, Achebe's *Anthills*, Adichie's *HYS* and Dangarembga's *TMB* examine the problems of unwarranted pain in the bodies of women in marriage. By and large, these writers demonstrate that the aims of marriage are primarily inconsistent and unachievable, and expose the scathing ironies marriage characteristically entails.

Azuike (2009:82) states that in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* female characters "identif[y] and confront various sources of oppression. … And so, in the face of polygamy, marital incompatibility and extremely harsh patriarchal laws and conditions which can leave women totally devastated and even debilitated for life" are portrayed as a performative practice. She goes on to say that Adichie's novels are "populated by psychopaths, rapists… and ruthless rulers; all of whom terrorise women" in their marital and home lives. This is in order to portray them as "frustrated and deprived" (Macgoye, 1996:6). Achebe's *Anthills* and Dangarembga's *TMB* address similar issues. Predominantly, the viciousness and adverse effects that typify marriage jeopardise both women and children in marriage. Therefore, Achebe's *Anthills*, Adichie's *HYS* and Dangarembga's *TMB*, like Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, use their novels "as instruments of self-discovery and of healing for the abused women in Nigeria [and Zimbabwe] who may have undergone some traumatic experiences in their marriages" (Azuike, 2009). From the above critical reviews, there appears to be a frantic call for a solution to the frustrations and harshness accompanying toxic marriages for some African women. The cynical ironies presented in marriage as a bond as well as an institution depict that the cultural practice as it exists now ought to be critically examined. African feminist writers such as the authors of the primary texts for this study have not shied away from demonstrating the realities of marriage with the aim of creating awareness for other women who anticipate entering into it. In specific African literary texts, the institution of marriage seems to inflict gratuitous pain, suffering and 'wounds' on women more than men. Closely associated with marriage is the issue of mothering and motherhood. This aspect is discussed in the following section.

2.4 Mothering and motherhood

One salient thematic concern of the primary novels is the issue of mothering and motherhood employed by the novelists to give their characters, especially women, a view and a voice to chronicle their situations. In the texts there appears to be a clear distinction between mothering as a practice and motherhood as an institution. This is depicted through the experiences of and interactions between many of the female characters. Karen Coats and Lisa Rowe Fraustino (2015:108) explain that mothering sets "our expectations of what a good mother is and does and who can perform mothering work". According to these critics, mothering refers to specific practices

discharged by a "mother" such as giving birth to a child and caring for children − feeding or bathing them − and other family relations (Molander, 2014) and carrying out home-making practices. In addition, Nollaig Frost, Rose Capdevila and Sally Johnson (2015:104) exemplify mothering-as-home-making practice involving "engagement in … a range of practical activities, a key one being feeding, with biological discourses positioning mothers as largely responsible for providing sustenance". According to Jennifer Johnson (2020:286), the role of mothers in the home "is at the nexus of understanding home as constituted through people's intimate relationships to one another that mothers figure [in] predominantly". Barbara Jilek (2020: 4- 5) further observes that "mothering practices are neither tied to a specific gender nor can they be carried out only by biological mothers". Jilek's argument is relevant considering the ongoing stigmatisation of infertile women in African settings, and the "unsettling of binaries such as "victim/agent" (Jilek, 2020). In reference to the three primary texts, all the mothers perform the above-mentioned mothering expectations. For instance, in Dangarembga's *TMB*, Tambudzi's mother gives birth to Tambudzai and her brother, takes care of them and, most significantly, trades to finance the education of Tambudzai's brother and sustain the family. Similarly, in Adichie's *HYS*, even though Olanna does not to give birth, she assumes the role of a biological mother and looks after Baby, the child of Amala (her husband Odenigbo's one night girl who "had forced herself on him, that it had been a brief rash lust" (281) and takes care of her matrimonial home. On the basis of this, Obioma Nnaemeka (1997a:5) supports Jilek when she acknowledges that "a woman's choice of adoption as an alternative route to motherhood may allow her to [define and participate] in motherhood as mothering on her own terms". Motherhood is strongly interlinked with mothering. Remi Akujobi (2011:2) defines motherhood as an

> automatic set of feelings and behaviours that is switched on by pregnancy and the birth of a baby. It is an experience that is said to be profoundly shaped by social contest and culture. Motherhood is also seen as a moral transformation whereby a woman comes to terms with being different in that she ceases to be an autonomous individual because she is one way or the other attached to another – her baby…. Motherhood [is] an experience and [is] an institution.

In the same vein, Lauretta Ngcobo (1998:141) also says that "every woman is encouraged to marry and get children in order to express her womanhood to the full". From these descriptions, it emerges that childcare practices constitute both mothering and motherhood. Motherhood among Africans is very vital in many traditional societies; however, it should not be considered

that that is all the woman is made for. Instead, it should be a choice, as some women would rather not experience motherhood. For instance, in Adichie's *HYS*, the relationship between Olanna and her adopted Baby portrays the repetitiveness of day-to-day mothering responsibilities, and thus accommodates non-biological mothers. Moreover, motherhood and mothering become intertwined with issues relating to a woman's identity.

K. S. Nithiyaa and Kannayya Kanchana (2018:128) posit that the "irony of motherhood" exists because, instead of mothers enjoying happiness in their marriage, they experience sadness. Developing this idea, Tamale (2013: 1) comments that [motherhood] "might represent notions of pleasure and the continuity of humanity itself, … [but it also] conjures up discussions about sources of oppression and violence". For instance, in Achebe's *Anthills*, the happiness of motherhood eludes Beatrice's unnamed mother due to her inability to produce a son for her husband. So, Beatrice says that her "mother bore me a huge grudge because I was a girl − her fifth in a row.... when I was born she had so desperately prayed for a boy to give my father" (Achebe, 1988: 86-87). In line with this view, Beatrice's mother has not fulfilled her desires of motherhood which perhaps accounts for her father's frequent beating of the mother: "There were times... he... flogged our poor mother.... [O]n those occasions my father always took the precaution to lock the door of their room. She would come out afterwards (having unlocked the door, or perhaps he did) wiping her eyes with one corner of her wrapper, too proud, or too adult to cry aloud like us it always made me want to become a sorceress that could say *'Die*!' to my father... " (Achebe, 1988: 86).

In the same vein, pleasures elude Olanna's and Tambudzai's mothers in their marriages in *HYS* and *TMB* respectively. Chief Ozobia, Olanna's father, is not bothered about how his wife feels about his practice of infidelity. Olanna, like Beatrice, shows her resentment towards her father's misconduct and therefore rebukes him: "I wish you had some respect for my mother.... It's disrespectful that you have a relationship with this woman and that you have bought her a house where my mother's friends live" (Adichie, 2006: 272). Despite these painful experiences, (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994:69) explains that "the … woman still values marriage and children over and above everything … hence she is willing to accept any humiliation from a difficult husband." Even though a specific type of assertiveness of women are not "in the majority", pain and suffering are inflicted on their bodies despite pleasing their male partners. In *TMB*, Tambudzai's "mother refuses to vend at the market for you as she had done for your brother. This

you do not say, because who can speak ill of a mother?" (Dangarembga, 2018: 106). Tambudzai's mother does not attach importance to a daughter's education, unlike a son, implying that the mother solely takes charge of the home in a patriarchal society. This apparent contradiction in Tambudzai's mother's motherhood conforms to hegemonic masculinity observation, where Michael A. Messner (2007:463) explains that the hegemonic masculinities are symbolically portrayed as an "exemplar of manhood" around which "power coalesces … over women" (Ampofo *et al.*, 2009:60). Grounding on this terrain of contradictory motherhood performative practices, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003b:527) affirms that there are "contradictions and complexities of [mothers'] lives and roles". Wendy Chavkin (2010:4) affirms that "motherhood is one of the most intimate and essential of human connections and therefore of concern to all; and female biological reproductive capacity and social assignment for childcaring and the maintenance of domestic life have been centrally connected with women's subordinate status across many cultures and historic eras". Although motherhood is crucial because of the salient creation of gender and biological gender norms and roles, pain is often an integral part of it. Marie Umeh (1980) argues in the words of Emecheta (1980:7), that mothers in the selected African texts are represented as bearing their "pain in silence for some imagined (and imaginary) greater good". This signals the complexity of literary representations of mothers, as motherhood is often depicted as central to identity in a way that should be celebrated, while also being a potential source of pain and suffering for some female characters. By acknowledging this complexity and different experiences of mothers, one opens up space for a more nuanced reading of Tambudzai's mother as well as of the relationship between them. Tambudzai's mother's rejection of the importance of Tambudzai's education, results in tension between mother and daughter. Through the author's portrayal of the strained mother-daughter relationship, Abiodun Olayiwola and Adekunle Olowonmi (2013:142) comment that "we identify some of the ambiguities [in] such relationships; an attempt to issue a caveat that illustrates absence of perfect motherhood". Bungaro (2006:68) corroborates that "African writers today are not only showing that perfect motherhood does not exist in women's [and men's] novels because it does not exist in real life, but are self-consciously rejecting proliferating images that suggest otherwise". Similarly, I argue that many women in the selected texts experience pain and suffering in their experience of mothering and motherhood in their marriages. Through a close reading of the primary texts, I investigate the conditions of gender relations, and how women experience pain and suffering in mothering and motherhood.

Mtenje (2016) comments that male dominance informs how mothers associate with their daughters. This male dominance does not emancipate, empower and socially develop both the

mothers and daughters. However, some daughters overthrow patriarchy as we see in Beatrice's, Olanna's and Tambudzai's cases. Their resistance to patriarchy highlights the important role women must play in experiencing motherhood. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:69) concurs with the state of motherhood through the description of a mother in *The Palmwine Drinkard*; she is a "courageous, resourceful [woman] who dares situations with her husband, who works at anything and willing[ly] changes roles with him when the need arises". Above all, negative socialisation as a result of the practice of patriarchal hegemonic culture seems to direct the experiences of mothering and motherhood into abusive situations as depicted in the three primary texts. This study fills the gap in the analysis of the situations of mothering and motherhood as narrated by each of these writers in their works. Nonetheless, each author's work will be critically reviewed differently under three main headings; Achebe's 'new' woman; War and the denigration of women in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*; and Dangarembga on Women's lives and sexual politics.

2.5 Achebe's 'new' woman

Achebe's novel has received considerable critical attention by Okolo (2006), Ogbaa (1996), Fonchingong (2006) and Shamim (2014) on issues concerning social, economic, political and cultural dimensions in the post-colonial era. In the main, the issues of denigrating women due to the practice of traditional patriarchal hegemony and the silent political position of women remain these scholars' concerns. From the perspective of feminist empathy, these scholars investigate who an African woman is in her society, women's experiences, pain and feelings and male-female relationships. As discussed earlier in the introduction to this chapter, this study goes beyond the confines of Nigeria to review the literature on issues pertaining to state repression and female agency; new ideologies of women's subversion of patriarchy; perceptions of the marriage institution; the naming ceremony; and the educated versus the uneducated woman. The review will contribute to the study of Achebe's concern, 'Bio-Politics of everyday life in *Anthills of the Savannah*: Real and imagined conquests'.

Haile (2007) examines the developments of feminism in Achebe's three chronological works: *No Longer at Ease*, *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* (hereafter *Anthills)*. He compares the portrayal of women in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* to the three above-mentioned novels. Based on this comparison, he states that women are progressively depicted in a positive

way from the earlier novels to the three more recent ones mentioned above. This establishes the fact that Achebe is consistent in his positive depiction of women, a fact that consolidates him as a feminist writer. Acholonu (1996) corroborates this assessment of Achebe as Acholonu's study *Anthills* postulates that Beatrice as representative of other female characters succeeds in her emancipation. According to Acholonu, Beatrice highlights what appears to be Achebe's purpose to develop a female character who does not conform to society's traditional roles for women. She observes that "Achebe's woman … could wield the power of sustaining peace, common sense, and humanism in a world threatened by tyrannical rule of a despot and the untempered fanaticism of egocentric, revolutionary ideas" (Acholonu, 1996: 320). Beatrice is, therefore, idealised as a symbol of the female character with principle and determination to triumph in the face of political harassment and a male-biased Kangan state.

In the same vein, Nutsukpo (2012:160–161) observes that "Achebe has created a radical feminist. … Beatrice is portrayed as an intellectual and incredibly intelligent. … Beatrice's feminist perception of independence and selfhood embodies her lifestyle as an individual and a single woman". Even though Agbasiere (2004) explains that male characters dominated in societies in Achebe's earlier texts, these societies make room for women as well. Patriarchal hegemony is overruled, especially in *Anthills*, and Beatrice is depicted as an empowered female. "In *Anthills of Savannah*, the woman is dignified and free to live her life the way she wants …. [T]he more educated she is, the more her prestige rises, and the more she is a good candidate for the governance of the community" (Agbasiere, 2004:364). Hence, it is observed that women's empowerment in *Anthills* interferes with masculinity and politics (Salami-Agunlye, 2012). In view of all these, another school of thought posits that there is a portrayal of a positive liberating female model in *Anthills* (Mbonu, 2012). All the critical comments above seem to establish that, in the political sphere, women can also assume leadership roles in order to offer ideal solutions to suppressive and oppressive political systems, engineer stable democratic systems as well as effectively put in place social systems that promote the improvement of all the citizenry. Using the theoretical framework of feminist empathy, I show how all of these positive qualities impacting women converge in the forcefully projected traits of female characters such as Beatrice, who are portrayed as flourishing even in acrimonious settings. Thus, feminist empathy, as my critical frame for analysing the selected texts will build on existing work by demonstrating that the experiences of emancipated and empowered women work to their advantage because they become hardened against the pain of such experiences as they navigate the patriarchal socio-political system.

Oso (2017:2) postulates that patriarchy causes oppression and suppression of female characters in African novels, stating that critics such as “Sweetman (1984), … Akachi Ezeigbo (1998),… Grace Okereke (1996) [and Achebe (1988)] exemplify the celebrated African novelists and critics who have decried the patriarchal nature of African society and the marginalization of women in African male-authored novels”. Therefore, in *Anthills*, Achebe condemns male dominance Achebe condemns male dominance on the basis of the silent depiction of men in the political space, and male characters are presented in a disparaging light, reinforcing prejudices against males in leadership. This thesis fills the gaps in the analysis of how men are presented in leadership under Achebe’s concern on ‘State repression and irresponsibility: The Major Sam syndrome’.

As in Thomas Mofolo’s *Chaka* (1981), which creates a nuanced psychological portrait driving the protagonist’s life course, the protagonist over-indulges in power. Achebe's male central character, Sam, is confronted with the same issue of misuse of power. Ojinmah (1991: 5), examining Achebe's characterisation of Sam in *Anthills,* maintains that Sam's "characterization illustrates the rapacious use of power". The novel "dramatizes the debasing effect of ‘naked’ power on both its wielders and their subjects, through profuse use of animal imagery". Referring to some cruel acts of Sam in the Kangan state, Ojinmah concludes that dictators see their positions as birthrights. Consequently, they utilise any and every means to hold onto power hold onto power in their positions. The insatiable desire to remain in power devalues the human personality and dulls it to the point of destruction. Indrasena (1976:123), examining the debasing effect of power in Sam's character, observes that it is an indictment of the rule of dictators in the last quarter of the 20th century. He maintains that *"Anthills* is a scathing indictment of military dictatorship seizing power through violent coups which prove worse than civilian misrule". Sam's "pursuit of power-equations and power politics", Indrasena (1976: 121-122) concludes, is his “contact and association with Power [which] has undone him ultimately. Hence, the reiteration that it is Power who stands out as the real villain, culprit and criminal in the context of the novel”. Indrasena’s conclusion gives support to the view that Sam and even other male characters in *Anthills* defy the gender values in the community and this paves the way for their eventual ruin.

Similarly, Ogbaa (1996:146) makes the point that *Anthills* is Achebe's ideological treatise, an extension of his *The trouble with Nigeria* representing an enduring statement on the nature of African military dictatorship and the way that this has "destroyed many rulers, crippled their economy, inhibited the citizens' political liberty, and turned both the ruler and the ruled into victims". Power, an almost abstract entity, has the capacity to debase the human personality. According to Azmanova (2018), unbalanced/unequal relationships are the obvious result

achieved when power is exercised to impact and control behaviours. Regarding this situation, Camille Martin-Thomsen, Gaia Scagnetti, Siobhan Rachel McPhee, Ashley B. Akenson and Dana Hagerman (2021:280) further explain that power could yield to “an influential inequity in positioning and access to resources between two entities — in other words, an advantage often used to exert control over another”. This supports Ogbaa’s analysis that Achebe’s *Anthills* represents the nature of Nigerian military dictatorship. This research will expand on this issue from the angle of how these contemporary African feminist writers handle the theme of socio-political power and how their construction of characters’ relation to such power helps us to make statements about postcolonial writers more broadly. Such statements include the fact that through an analysis of these texts we are better able to trace and understand conceptions of gendered human rights as represented in African literature. The study also allows the reader to decipher gender-related discrepancies in the lived and imagined realities of the female characters represented in the literary texts.

Of utmost relevance to the objective of this investigation is the feminist empathy re-examination of Achebe’s work by Okolo (2006). Okolo (2006: 42) states that Achebe's *"Anthills* shows that the military is equally, if not more susceptible to the corrupt influence of politics and the intoxicating effects of power". Corruption is given as one of the main causes which military men cite to oust democratically elected governments. Some novels on military rule like *Anthills*, however, present military regimes as equally − if not more − corrupt than civilian governments. The main issues that take centre stage in the discussion of military rule are the life of terror and deprivation that the majority of people are faced with during military regimes. Undoubtedly, the experience that the populace goes through has an enduring negative effect on them. As indicated earlier, this critic's study will enhance this work in the analysis of the experience of the "sufferers".

Another issue that is central to critiques of Achebe's novel is the voicelessness of some of his female characters. These relate to women being voiceless in the face of the abuse meted out to them by their male counterparts; women being maltreated, subjugated, oppressed and relegated to the background. As far as Holst Petersen (2006:37) is concerned, "an important impetus behind the wave of African past was orderly, dignified, and complex, an altogether worthy heritage in order to fight cultural imperialism". Throughout this period, women's concerns were totally discounted and surrendered with the aim of venerating the past and re-establishing African self-assurance. The

earlier disposition of the African was created as a focus of a goal. The portrayal of woman's position and responsibility in this society was to maintain this pursuit, and in the end inject further self-esteem, which was expressed in a new constructive label than it actually guaranteed. Tyson (2006: 86) argues: “The belief that men are superior to women has been used, feminists have observed, to justify and maintain the male monopoly of positions of economic, political, and social power, in other words, to keep women powerless by denying them the educational and occupational means of acquiring economic, political, and social power”. Also, as Aboye (2020:16) observes, “[p]atriarchy discriminates between both sexes and attempts to validate the innate inferiority of females”. Again, “patriarchy portrays females as the other, taking secondary positions, and having inferior roles and significance” (Aboye, 2020: 4). This position has provided “material advantages to males while simultaneously placing severe constraints on the roles and activities of females” (Makama, 2013:116). According to Tyson, Aboye and Makama, in patriarchal society women are marginalised due to traditional norms, not biological production.

In view of this patriarchy, women are regarded as subordinates to their male counterparts. Thus, they are suppressed and oppressed by African cultural gender roles. Commenting on the roles of African women, Chukurere (1995: 2) observes that:

> [t]his childbearing function encourages early marriages, and negotiations in connection with them are often handled by the extended family. A woman’s importance and stability in her husband’s home are judged by the degree of her fertility, especially her ability to bear sons. If she is childless, she is considered a failure in her primary duty and often suffers considerably as a result.

In *Anthills*, Beatrice comes from a chauvinistic family background. Her father is depicted as a monster who beats his wife. Elewa (another major female character) and the unnamed wife of Mr. So Therefore (a minor female character) are also ‘wounded’ when they suffer a similar fate.

Additionally, to further compound the superiority of male power, some husbands prefer sons to daughters in the primary texts. In *Anthills*, we find Beatrice’s father demonstrating a preference for sons over daughters. As a result of this bias, Beatrice is often the victim who suffers from her father's violent temper. Besides, ages of subjugation conditioned many women to accept that their class or race or gender was inferior, and that they could only exist in society if they

acknowledged male domination. So, as indicated earlier, Beatrice identifies that her unnamed mother bore her "a huge grudge because she was a girl – fifth in a row when she was born" (Achebe, 1988: 86-87). The grudge stemmed from the fact that the mother had fervently prayed for a boy to deliver to her father (Achebe, 1988). In spite of her mother's acrimonious attitude towards her, Beatrice remains resolute in her aspirations for emancipation. This depiction of a resolute woman is characteristic of Achebe's traditional female characters who are not perturbed by social maltreatment but continue to push against the odds of being treated as second-class citizens and being voiceless in the societal decision-making process (Achebe, 1988). One way of examining Achebe's portrayal of women is to see them as rebelling against the physical and psychological pain inflicted on them. This perspective depicts in greater relief the subjugation of women by a patriarchal society which can best be appreciated through feminist empathy. The second way is to scrutinise how such insights into patriarchal domination bolster our appreciation of Achebe's concern of redefining masculinity and femininity.

Klein (2007), contributing to the discussion on post-colonial upheavals and gender inequality, explains the myriad delineations of male supremacy in Achebe's four texts, and demonstrates the extent to which these works show an ingrained disorder in postcolonial African societies as a whole. In his four main novels, *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God*, *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*, Achebe digresses to a certain extent from the order of appearance of these novels by following their inner chronology. He observes that all the protagonists suffer from an "essentialist" idea of masculinity − an idea which they try to live up to, but which ruins their lives. This is as a result of stereotype and culture that the Ibo society, and especially the male characters, conceive and practice.

Anne Phillips (2010:11) asserts that we "can all agree that over-generalisation, stereotyping, and an inability even to perceive characteristics that do not fit our preconceptions is a problem". Protagonists in Achebe's works fear not succumbing to the prevailing male domination. Thus, their thoughts erupt from a static view which does not take in its fluent and constructed nature (Phillips, 2010). Narayan (1998: 89) argues that "antiessentialism about gender and about culture does not entail a simple-minded opposition to all generalizations, but entails instead a commitment to examine both their empirical accuracy and their political utility or risk". Though Philips' and Narayan's contributions are focused on the vague term "gender", there is an implication that both men and women need to objectively evaluate / look critically at societal culture before asserting

their enactment of their unique gender roles. Failure to do so is, therefore, to be insensitive to the kind of feminist awareness that informs my investigation into how feminist empathy allows me to focus on exactly how female and male characters are depicted in the novel. Klein's (2007) study discusses the situation of postcolonial unrest in Nigeria, and he finally posits that the re-establishment of a more balanced relationship between the sexes would help in overcoming the inhibiting postcolonial situation. From Klein's perspective and discussion, a comprehensive study of *Anthills* provides a more holistic understanding of the portrayal of masculinity in certain characters.

Several other authors, among them Nwapa (1984), Emecheta (1986), Gideon Akase (2019) and Chukukere (1995) have studied the struggles of female protagonists to bring equality into the social norms of their patriarchal societies. According to Haile (2007:33), "while these [female] writers accept the significance of wifehood and motherhood, they also expose the dilemma in the lives of their heroines whose difficulties are tensioned between personal professional aspirations and endorsed traditional social norms". Chukukere (1995: 11-12) posits that in *Anthills*, "the dilemma in the life of the heroine is much like her traditional counterparts … her aspirations may not always correspond with those of some of her rural counterparts who are faced with sanctions [in marriage] as a socio-economic necessity". Consequently, "Achebe has given clear roles to women. … And to be able to achieve his objectives, Achebe breathes in them the psychology to be able to carry out his feminist instructions" (Akase, 2019:30). Achebe seems to be conscious of women's roles in the new independent nation so he represents progressively improving attitudes through his female characters' roles in the three texts. The foregrounded females' characterisation in *Anthills* reflects that in the postcolonial period women, represented by Beatrice, are decision-makers and politicians. Beatrice (a representation of all women) is the model of the "new woman" whom Stegeman (2000: 90-92) refers to in her article "The new woman in [the] contemporary African novel".

Commenting on Beatrice's portrayal, David I. Ker (1998:4) states that "she is a complex character, sometimes reminiscent of Chielo the prophetess of the hills and the caves." Akase (2004:30) comments: "One good thing about Beatrice is that though blessed with good virtues and success in her carrier [sic], Achebe does not portray her as an arrogant woman". Again, Chukukere (1995: 7) confirms that Achebe's characterisation of his heroine apparently reflects his intentions to equilibrate gender imbalance. She observes, "some male writers have created female protagonists

whose characters and mannerisms are treated with precision and authenticity of details". I argue that this can also offer insight into Achebe's representation of female characters. Commenting on such roles of the heroine by the above-cited critics, Fonchingong (2006: 145) aptly notes that the female protagonists "are empowered with strength, foresight and perseverance." Beatrice re-orientates the younger generation of women on certain issues, including the institution of marriage. Beatrice, similar to Adichie's Olanna and Kainene, sees it as a form of women's enslavement, especially when a woman is not fully prepared and equipped for it. Second, she advocates a new order in naming ceremonies. In the light of all these illuminations, "an overview of male imaging of women [heroines] in fiction is necessary" (Chukukere, 1995: 7). The theoretical intervention of feminist empathy can help shed new light on scholarly understandings of these imaginings. Beatrice's new ideologies on matrimonial imperatives and naming in order to "demasculinize [them] and find an androgynous and generic term to describe what concern both sexes in society" is her paramountcy (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1987: 12). This study fills the gap in the analysis of the new roles of women not only through the heroine, Beatrice in *Anthills*, but also Olanna, Kainene and Tambudzai in the other two primary texts.

Achebe, like Adichie and Dangarembga, structures his narrative in a way that shows the gradual realisation of women's strength in society. From a Marxist feminist perspective, Haile's study focuses on unequal economic and political power relations between women and men; for example, in relation to marriage and childbearing. This gives rise to questions such as what happens to the visions of women or men who are unequally considered in both politics and economics and whether society relates to people as individuals and not merely as members of groups. This research offers an opportunity to assess the ethical aspects of feminist empathy.

Based on discussions in the two paragraphs above, Amna Shamim (2014: 3) comments on *Anthills* that

> the general ideology of women was rejected and scorned upon by Beatrice as her perception of women and their role was different from the thinking of the common ladies in the society who were not as educated as Beatrice.… Beatrice Okoh represented the educated lot of women as she was an independent, educated and confident girl who had the audacity to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with males in the male-driven society.

Beatrice uses her education to liberate women from inequality and "move out of their cubby holes and carve a niche for themself [sic]" (Shamim, 2014: 3) in Kangan patriarchal society. In line with this argument, I also recognise the value that female characters without formal education can add to these conversations and rearticulations. Thus, Elewa − who represents other female characters not formally educated − also contributes to the development of women. Significantly, Achebe shows that it is "not just western education that inspires the African women to contribute to the development of the society. However, the uneducated too, if properly mobilized can equally make their contributions as shown in the example of Elewa" (Akase, 2019:32). Mama Oji and Mai (Tambudzai's mother) in *HYS* and *TMB* respectively are also without formal education. However, they mobilise their own efforts to contribute to the development of their families and societies. For instance, the narrator demonstrates that Tambudzai's mother Mai, despite being a single parent, sells at the market to support Tambudzai's brother (Dangarembga, 106), thus contributing immensely to the development of her son. However, she does not appear to show the same commitment towards Tambudzai's development. Therefore, although Dangarembga appears to commend African village motherhood for its resilience by showing how Mai solidly builds up her son socially through education, this commendation turns into a reproof of African culture for its failure to promote female upliftment equally, evidenced by the denial of access to education that Tambudzai suffers.

With reference to Akase's postulation that Beatrice and Elewa are Achebe's protagonists through whom he carries out his feminist sympathies (Akase, 2019:30), these two female characters reveal society's new cultural expectations just as Adichie's Olanna and Kainene and Dangarembga's Tambudzai do. Based on Shamim's and Akase's recommendations, I examine both formally and informally educated women, and how each category depicts different fortunes linked to their educational status. In doing this, they will be compared to male characters such as Major Sam, Chris and Ikem with whom they (Beatrice and Elewa) have intimate relationships. This is significant in my further analysis of Achebe's novel, particularly regarding his concern with representation of females in relation to affirmation of feminine roles.

From my foregoing engagement with relevant scholarly work, I continue to demonstrate that Achebe's *Anthills*, like the other two primary writers' novels, examines the issue of emancipation of women and the effects of dictatorship on the ruled in some African settings. The infusion of feminist empathy into these discussions comprises my unique contribution to this critical reception of Achebe's novel. I explore scholarly engagements with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *HYS* below.

2.6 War and the denigration of women in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Reviews of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's work (ANA, 2009; Hamnett, 2011; Nwajiaku, 2010; Onukaogu & Ezechi, 2009; Pape, 2012) reflect most of the issues raised in the reviews of Chinua Achebe's novel, *Anthills*. However, the same ideas are treated differently by each author. For example, in Adichie's *HYS*, women are elevated in their adoption of positive new strategies to sustain their families, especially when the men leave for war. This portrayal is similar to that of Achebe's women who are also elevated through the emancipatory roles they carry out in introducing new ideologies in marriage and naming, recalibrating gender relations to ensure greater equity. These differences will be examined in the Chapter Four.

Adichie's novels have received relevant attention from academic commentators, critics and other writers, among them Allwell A. Onukoagu and Onyerionwu Ezechi (2009), Catherine Brosman (1992) and Brain Hamnet (2011). *HYS* (Adichie, 2006) has also received critical commentaries from several other literary experts, particularly on the importance of her works in terms of characterisation of inter alia both genders, plot development, style, themes of the historical Biafran war, sexual politics, marriage, family, gender conflict, exploitation, indifference and urbanisation. Out of the many articles written on these issues, this review focuses on works that critique the central issues, such as the authenticity of the Biafran war, and the impact this had on the family and the citizenry in Biafran society socio-culturally. I interrogate the effects of war as depicted through the characterisation of Adichie's female characters from a feminist empathy perspective. This shows how patriarchal hegemony offers the male characters the leverage they need to oppress and denigrate their female counterparts for their total satisfaction; how patriarchy is dethroned in patriarchal traditional society; and the strategies the wealthy class employ to sustain their affluence. Adichie draws the reader's

attention to the need to have empathy for gender, especially women, and the importance of practising ethics and upholding human rights. My application of the conceptual tools of feminist empathy thus contributes to the scholarly discussion of her work.

In examining Adichie's *HYS*, Onukoagu and Ezechi (2009) describe it as "emotional', and (Adichie, 2007) confirms in an interview that she wrote this work for many reasons which include the fact that her parents lost their parents (fathers) in the war. Besides, hundreds of people − particularly women represented by Olanna's Auntie Ifeka, cousin Arize, who is pregnant, and Uncle Mbaezi − died in the massacres as a result of trouble that occurred between the Hausa and the Igbo people. Olanna is psychologically affected by a ghastly sight at Uncle Mbaezi's compound. She "felt a watery queasiness in her bowels before the numbness spread over her and stopped at her feet. Mohammed was dragging her, pulling her" (186). Eze's (2016) description of this pain relates to injustice and Adichie keeps the memory of the war alive in the work, *HYS*: "I don't ever want to forget".

The Association of Nigerian Authors' (ANA) *Abia Review* (ANA, 2009: 18) declares that "the stunning thing about *Half of a Yellow Sun* is the author's […] rendering of […] horrors devoid of emotional outcries by a daughter of Biafra. The impartiality, the refusal to take sides, the absence of judgmental stance or apportioning blame is part of the greatness of this novel". Furthermore, Brosman (1992:86) in her article establishes that war literature carries a "mark of authenticity and truth that history rarely attains because war literature is more authentic and satisfactory as a result of its powerful appeal to readers' imagination by identifying with characters and their emotions through the power of literary language". Based on all these assertions, I agree with the observations of ANA's Abia Review and Brosman that though the war had ended, the pen became a tool for Adichie to establish an angle from which a reader can comprehend and empathetically experience the suffering, pain, violence and oppression of her female and male characters, especially the latter, which resonates emotionally and cognitively. "Literature continues to function as the mirror of society", according to Ernest Emenyonu (2008:1). In the process of mirroring Nigerian society, the war literature serves as a means for Adichie's readership to imaginatively reconstruct such suffering, pain, violence and suppression of the female characters.

Adichie uses this novel to encourage Nigerians in particular and Africans in general to examine the psychological and emotional effects of innocent deaths in the war; and its past, present and future implications. Adichie herself attests to this fact in an interview with BBC's Molara Wood in July 2007. She says, “Biafra is a subject that we are not honest about, don't talk about. We should be asking WHY the war remains a sore subject.... What I hope this book will do... is get us to examine our history and ask questions...”. Though she brings her peculiar style and perspective to bear on the subject, her novel on the whole, like those of some earlier widely read Nigerian war novelists − Chinua Achebe, Flora Nwapa, Kalu Okpi, as well as Buchi Emecheta − "seems to suggest that war time experiences have a profound and transformational [socio-cultural] effect" (Nwajiaku, 2010: 48). Thus Adichie, as well as the above-mentioned writers reflects the history of the Nigerian civil war through her work. According to Hamnet (2011:2), this puts the text within the scope of historical novels because such historical novels are “medium[s] for expressing […] historical issues and illuminating national or social identities through the medium of human experience”. Adichie, therefore, writes about women’s and men’s personal realities in the Biafran war. Here she undoes her precursors’ “negative” portrayal of femininity and reinvents and creates new positive images which help to develop a positive and elevated image of femalehood.

Similarly, Nwapa (2007: 529) affirms that:

> [t]he woman writer cannot fail to see the woman’s power in her home and society. She sees her economic importance both as mother, … and trader. She writes stories that affirm the woman, thus challenging the male… and making them aware of women’s inherent vitality, independent views, courage, self-confidence, and her desire for gain and high social status.

Other scholars have examined Adichie's insight on the empowerment of women as they encounter a war that is profoundly gendered. All this highlights the subject of the transformational roles of women in parts of the African community. For example, Pape (2012:100) exposes that this war is gendered and emanates from "adverse circumstances, and their mastery of war-time life, their experiences of closeness to death, powerlessness and the disintegration of order [which] eventually result[s] in a growth of their strength". In addition, the gendered war that women participate in through their adoption of new gender performances is not fighting to destroy patriarchy but a new definition of womanhood as well as “(re-

)negotiations of gender relations" in order to deconstruct gender roles and create a new positionality for women in their post-war lives (Pape, 2012:101). Kainene's and Olanna's reactions to war in *HYS* challenge their former responsibilities as females by demonstrating their resilience in a life-threatening and trying situation.

From its commencement the Biafran war continued to "disrupt socialized female codes of behaviour" (Pape, 2012:51) by positioning females in elevated places among males who remained at home. In this culture, men are seen as the heads of families; however, the "[war situation], coupled with the scarcity of resources, made wives the bread winners in many homes, and this resulted in the disruption of power-relations in the family, − giving wives a superior position to their husbands" (Pape, 51). This substantiates the fact that, "the woman's role in Africa is crucial for the survival and progress of the race" (Nwapa, 2007: 529). Feminist empathy holds that the African woman is an individual with distinctive aspirations, dreams and consciousness that call for the attention of all society.

This study sees Pape's stand as a kind of liberation for women and reveals the value of a feminist reading of Adichie's work. Fonchingong (2006), Ker (1998) and Akase (2019) agree with Pape that the female protagonists in the other two primary texts, *Anthills* and *TMB*, are also empowered with "strength, foresight and perseverance" (Fonchingong, 2006: 145) to emancipate themselves from patriarchy and oppressive iterations of masculinity. This is in order to create gender balance so that the African woman's pain, suffering and maltreatment will be acknowledged, challenged and critiqued. Pape also highlights Achebe's and Dangarembga's feminist inclinations seen in their celebration of the spirit of the modern African woman, especially her status as independent and self-determined. Adichie also shows her feminist sympathies in that women's empowerment is seen to be the way to achieve independence. Nwapa and Pape recognise and strongly endorse the novelists' desire to promote gender equality and their demonstration that it is possible for even dependent and non-assertive women to become independent and assertive.

Commenting on the above issue, Ogunyemi (1983) reiterates that the female writer, and Adichie in particular, focuses on the commonly treated facets of the war, especially the welfare of women, children and the aged. This is in many ways like "the war novel [which] is written

by men, for men, and to influence men: women characters tend to be few and stereotypically drawn" (Ogunyemi, 1983: 211). As reiterated earlier with regard to the role of literature, all these are comprehended in Emenyonu's view that literary works function as a reflection of society. And "in the process of mirroring society and criticizing its pitfalls, War Literature [sic] also serves as a compass for social redirection" (Emenyonu, 2008:1). Adichie's *HYS*, like Achebe's *Anthills* and Dangarembga's *TMB*, mirrors the realities of war and illuminates the contemporary roles and responsibilities of gender, especially women.

In the light of all these concerns, what are the new dimensions and roles of the women that impact on individual families and the Biafran citizenry when the men are at the war front? The search for answers to these questions implies the need to study Adichie's sub-theme of 'Biafran war and its socio-cultural effects'.

Pape in Adimora-Ezeigbo (2012b: 54), describes Adichie as "belonging to the group of younger writers whose account of the war is daring and [Adichie] gives a much more emotional and sympathetic representation … She also claims that the younger the authors, the more daringly they write or recreate the war's history". In agreement with Pape, this thesis regards Adichie as a third-generation writer and pioneer of what one African body should mean to another African body and a promoter of feminist empathy. She demands equity and recognition in the relations between her female and male characters.

ANA's *Abia Review* (ANA, 2009) argues that the theme of betrayal looms large in *HYS*. This is established in the denigration of the affected characters, particularly women. Bryce (1991:36) observes that in Nwapa's *Never Again* "[w]hat it does well, is to give an insight into the situation of ordinary … non-political people, trying to live their lives in a situation of unbearable contradictions. …[T]he writer has one purpose in writing, to express her disgust and utter rejection of the war and the way people are manipulated within it". For, inasmuch as Bryce (1991) criticises Nwapa's *Never Again*, so does that criticism also apply to Adichie's male characters who often degrade their female counterparts in *HYS*. Udumuku (2007:108) comments that the image of *HYS* refers to

> a part of the Biafran coat of arms. Within the context of a concern for the ordinary people, the image is an allusion to the fact that part of the direct account of the key actors in the war, whose story tends to dominate, there is also the story of the ordinary people

> whose account is always glossed over. These are ordinary people who either died or lived.

Thus, it is women who are seen as "ordinary people", and their predicament faced during the civil war has preoccupied the attention of writers. One critic, commenting on the eponymous story of Achebe's collection, *Girls at War and Other Stories* says that *Girls at War* displays "one of [Achebe's] major themes: the moral predicament of the Nigerian womenfolk in the war situation" (Amuta, 1983:89).

Moreover, Ben Okri's *Dangerous Love* (1996) and Festus Iyayi's *Heroes* (1986) also describe the vulnerability of women during the Nigerian civil war fought between 1967 and 1970. Andrew Armstrong (2000) reviewing these novels, highlights the death of Ifeyiwa (who has a consistent abusive relationship with Takpo, her husband) and the rape of Ndudi by the soldiers as tragedies that the protagonists of the two novels are unable to represent adequately. Omovo, the protagonist, in *Dangerous Love* finds himself entrapped in a life that is anything but easy, thus, his father kicks him out of his house after he gets in a fight with his step-mother, Blackie, his mother dies and his brothers, Okur and Umeh, flee from a home controlled by a recently remarried, violent and disillusioned father. The challenge in articulation, according to him (Armstrong), is significant of the horrors faced by women in the war. From the above observation, one deduces that Adichie's novel centres on the ordinary people, particularly women caught in the heat of the war rather than on the battlefront. A similar thought is highlighted in Umelo's *Felicia*. Thus, these novels "touch on many issues to do with the disruptive effects of war on the traditional system and people's lives" (Bryce, 1991: 38). These are seen in Adichie's *HYS* as some 'married' or courted characters and close neighbours practise infidelity, which entails acts of betrayal. Bryce (1991: 16) comments that "Odengibo betrays Olanna by sleeping with Amala, a village girl who bears him a baby girl. Olanna betrays Odengibo and her twin sister Kainene by having carnal knowledge with Richard Churchhill. Richard betrays Kainene by sleeping with Olanna. Northerners betray their Igbo neighbours and friends by killing them in an orgy of massacres". Taking into consideration the above, the study examines the practice of infidelity among women and men in a traditional patriarchal society and how women subvert such patriarchy.

In spite of the above, Ezenwa-Ohaeto explains that poverty and constant loss of lives which occurred daily make men behave beyond the expected. Thus, "they … rape. The fear of death from

constant shelling and uncertainty increased this desperation. It is under this environment that Odenigbo and Olanna take the nuptial vows" (Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 2009:201–203). Norridge (2012: 27) observes that, sex/rape serves as "a metaphor for oppression and exploitation in the novel". Much as I agree with this assertion, I do not use the two terms interchangeably because sex is simply the generic term describing the specific act of intimacy, while rape connotes the additional sense of violence accompanying the act. Adichie's *HYS* is "fascinated by horrific sexually violent acts in the text" (Nwokocha, 2019:2), which makes Norridge (2012: 28) deduce that sex offers the outlet for "the sadness, the horror [of] rape, mutilation, and death" in the novel. Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Norridge and Nwokocha bring to the fore the fact that war is a disaster which can create many more disasters such as the sexual abuse of women. For instance, the white mercenary Rev. Father Marcel and the young male army conscripts indiscriminately use rape to denigrate the female characters. Analysis of the way Adichie presents the experience of the victims and provides an alternative solution for the female characters to escape from sexual violence enhances this research. Women are labelled as "ordinary people" who are denigrated by the majority of their male counterparts. In a different way, Adichie's portrayal of "ordinary people" shows how males, from their patriarchal perspective, degrade females.

A few men, represented by Odenigbo and Ugwu in *HYS*, are characterised positively because they challenge their fellow men's attitudes towards women. Nwahunannya (2003:195) asserts that "the older male writers like Achebe and Amadi who have stood accused in the denigration of women in their novels have, in their most recent novels, attempted a sympathetic updating of the female image". Nwahunannya's (Nwahunanya, 2003) critical work provides valid insight into both Achebe's and Amadi's novels as well as Adichie's *HYS*. According to Ada (2011:261), even though patriarchal hegemony is the cause of women's mistreatment by men, there are some forms of patriarchy which may be marginally less harmful to women and which promote peaceful relationships between women and men. For instance, in *HYS*, Odenigbo, depicted as an ideal husband, plays a supportive role in the life of his physically challenged wife, Olanna, whose legs become numb and incapacitated after she witnesses the horrible state of her Uncle Mbaezi and her pregnant cousin, Arize, killed in the war. In his support of her, Odenigbo displays love, care, thoughtfulness, compassion and sensitivity which results in Olanna recuperating within a short time. Odenigbo's action proves that "empathy is not passive" (Eze, 2016: 7) among all men in patriarchal society. Odenigbo is presented as empathetic towards a female character, but he is actually an exception to the general treatment of women. Thus, Adichie acknowledges and reminds her readers of the fact that patriarchy, a specific aspect of African culture under scrutiny, can be

challenged, critiqued or dethroned by both female and male characters. This study, therefore, embarks on such scrutiny of the issues that Adichie's text raises by examining these issues under the theme of 'Enchanted men'.

Another issue that is central to critiques of Adichie's novel is the spousal abuse in the family unit. According to Ogbeide (2013), many mothers are exposed to physical, emotional and psychological maltreatment by their husbands whose actions are often backed by the cultural construction of males as the patriarchal heads in the family. Mtenje (2016: 70) postulates that Beatrice Achicke is caged in her marriage because she surrounds herself with "a patriarchal order which does not give her economic and social empowerment to break away from her oppressed status in life". In *HYS*, Chief Ozobia's wife, is also stuck in her marriage. She endures emotional and psychological abuse from her husband, Chief Ozobia, in his acts of infidelity. Nonetheless, she supports her husband in matching their daughter, Olanna, with the family's wealthy businessman friend, Chief Okonji, in order for the father to reap business tenders in the future. Additionally, Eberechi's parents allow her to be sexually abused by the soldier for a familial benefit. Furthermore, in Achebe's *Anthills*, Beatrice's mother endures physical, emotional and psychological violence from her husband, yet endorses his preference of a son over a daughter, Beatrice. This patriarchal culture is validated because women like Chief Ozobia's wife and Eberechi's and Beatrice's mothers do not have economic power nor are they radically vocal. In any case, their husbands do not listen to their voices.

Nfah-Abbenyi (1997: 4) comments that many male African writers in their works represent African wives disparagingly, "as passive, as always prepared to do the bidding of their husbands and family, as having no status of their own and therefore dependent on their husbands". Macgoye (2003:15) affirms that most feminist writers challenge the problematic representations by many male writers who often portray female characters as "frustrated and deprived". By contrast, "a close look at the various images of African womanhood … recalls that to a considerable extent depictions of African women in literature by African women writers differ from the images presented by their male counterparts" (Evweirhoma, 2001:26). Adichie, as Macgoye observes, creates her female characters differently from the way her male fellow writers portray theirs. In her text, the victimised characters, especially women, form bonds of sisterhood that aid them in negotiating their way through situations when their husbands inflict physical, emotional and psychological pain on them. In *HYS*, Olanna reprimands her father, Chief Ozobia, for his flagrant practice of infidelity. Her reproach of his actions subsequently restores harmony at home. In this way, Olanna plays the role

of a feminist empathiser who through her actions seeks to promote a better life for other female characters, in this case her mother, by speaking up against the oppressive attitudes of her father that cause pain and suffering. Through Olanna's assertive character, Adichie reinforces Azuike's (2009: 79) argument that women must be assertive through "burst[ing] the system and set[ing] up for [themselves] parameters within [their] societies or risk being used as doormats for life". This suggests that women must be assertive so that they can stand up to any cruel relationships, or else they will remain forever subjugated in patriarchal society. This study, therefore, further looks at the adoption of strategies by men − both rich and poor − through the support of either their wives or daughters in order to maintain their affluence and enjoy familial benefits.

These diverse reviews of Adichie's text largely inform my critical analysis of *HYS* under the main sub-heading 'Decommodifying female lives in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun'*. My exploration of themes under this sub-heading focuses primarily on the contribution of feminist empathy to Adichie's vision for women and men. The last critical review will be on Tsitsi Dangaremgba's *TMB*.

2.7 Dangarembga on women's lives and sexual politics

Critical reviews of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *TMB* highlight most of the concerns discussed in the reviews of Achebe and Adichie. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, the same ideas are examined differently by each novelist. These dissimilarities will be investigated in the Chapter Five. Dangarembga's most recent novel, *TMB*, is still relatively new on the literary scene and, thus has received fewer critical commentaries. Nonetheless, this review focuses on critical and literary reflections on the novelist's first two novels – *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not* – which serve as backdrops for her third novel, *TMB*. These two earlier texts are relevant because they foreshadow events or acts of female resistance in *TMB*. For example, Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions* is depicted as a silent victim of her father's physical abuse. However, she recurs as a stronger character in *TMB* who resists every form of abuse that others attempt to inflict on her.

Education is one of the major issues of concern discussed in reviews of Dangaremgba's works. Charles Sugnet (2005:34) observes that "Tambudazi's peril is as complex and multiple as her

identity: she might, for example, free herself from sexism that denies her an education only to educate herself into perfect complicity with the Rhodesian colonial elite". Similarly, Natalia Flores Garrido (2020:146–147) observes that "[t]he precarity that [Tambudzai] the protagonist experiences is not only objective, in the sense that… she is positioned by a system in which her life is disposable, and in which all the sacrifices she made and efforts that she went to obtain a university degree do not matter, because that is just not enough". However, Sugnet (2005: 36) contends that "African men [are] higher on the ladder of colonial education [and] have … learned to negotiate the precarious position of the "native". For instance, in *TMB*, both males– Uncle Babamukuru and Shine − occupy key positions, headmaster and accountant respectively, because of their higher educational achievement and Uncle Babamukuru speaks in a unique manner to the white people.

Mbatha (2009) explains that colonialism entails Western modernity which includes education. Education is therefore a medium to oppose the patriarchal system in *Nervous Conditions*. It is not only in Dangarembga's novels that education is used as a means to resist patriarchy, but the other two primary texts illustrate this as well. Both Achebe and Adichie argue that women should be given education. This argument, they claim, is "a call for moral reappraisal of society's relation to the personhood of women who suffer gender discrimination" (Eze, 2016: 7). This contributes to the subversion of patriarchy in order that a female character is not subjected to any pain, suffering or infringement of her rights. Comparing the critics' postulations – those of Sugnet, Flores Garrido and Mbatha – two issues emerge. First, it seems education is for both sexes; that is, Tambudzai, who represents female characters, and Matimba as well as Babamukuru, who represent male characters. Each has a different experience in the acquisition of Western education. It appears the educated male characters are able to navigate their way in that hegemonic society while the females are at a disadvantage. It is, therefore, important to examine the situation of education for the female and male characters in patriarchal Rhodesia, Kangan and Biafra respectively. Again, we need to find out how each gender effectively uses their education acquired in colonial Rhodesia in Dangarembga's trilogy, particularly in the third novel, *TMB*. This also goes for Kangan in *Anthills* and in Biafra in *HYS*.

Another main issue that many critics have discussed in Dangarembga's writing is the violence meted out to women by men and male domination in the socio-cultural setting. For instance, Sugnet

(2005: 38) states that "Dangarembga redeploys Fanon's concept to show that 'woman' like 'natives', is not natural but is a 'historical artefact' constructed by an oppressive social situation". According to Mbatha (2009:15), "[i]n *Nervous Conditions* the male dominance is an accepted way of life, […] These traditional attitudes about gender are prevalent within African communities and are strongest". Cheryl Hendricks and Desiree Lewis (2004:68), sharing a similar view to Sugnet and Mbaitha, point out exactly how gender suppression and oppression were distinguishing features of pre-colonial, colonial and neo-colonial African society. In these eras, predominantly, "[w]omen suffer especially because of oppressive cultural traditions, many of which still persist in modern African societies" (Nyanhongo, 2011:9). In diverse works of African literature, Sugnet traces patriarchal hegemony that continues to circulate through Zimbabwean culture and society in the prequel *Nervous Conditions*, the sequel *The Book of Not* and in the trilogy *This Mournable Body* when women become the primary objects of violence. These texts all demonstrate the way that males see or recognise females as the "other"; and even to an extent as the "non-significant other" (Bressler, 1994:104) as earlier mentioned in Achebe's and Adichie's reviews. Sarah Gamble (2001: vii), comments that "women are treated inequitably within a society which is organized to prioritize male viewpoints and concerns. Within this patriarchal paradigm, women become everything men are not: where men are regarded as strong, women are weak; where men are rational, they are emotional; where men are active, they are passive; and so on". This demonstrates that men have treated and continue to treat women as inferiors, in line with Sugnet's conclusion that "all the conflicts come back to this question of femaleness". Tambudzai, Nyasha and Mako in *TMB*; Beatrice's silent mother, Beatrice and Elewa in *Anthills* and Olanna and Kainene in *HYS* all suffer violence of a physical, psychological and sexual nature from some of the male characters. For example, while Nyasha is battered by her father, Mako is sexually abused by Shine. However, Tambudzai and Nyasha resist violence by taking revenge on their male perpetrators.

Contributing to the above, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1994: 36) notes that some "African women are shackled by their own negative self-image, by centuries of the interiorization of the ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy". Besides, apart from men who mete out violence to women, some women also "turn on one another, fighting for scant resources and for men, who are regarded as the only guarantors of survival and advancement" (O'Brien, 2019:2). For instance, Tambudzai violently attacks Elizabeth Chinemibiri, her student and continues to act aggressively and attack

Mrs. Chinemibiri emotionally when she visits Elizabeth's school to seek redress for the daughter's condition. Mrs. Chinemibiri, like Nyasha and Tambudzai, also resists violence from Tambudzai, her fellow female. Flores Garrido (2020: 147) extends this to state that "[i]t is not a coincidence that the book is called *TMB*, entering into conversation with authors like Teju Cole and Judith Butler who, from different fields and disciplines, have reflected on the vulnerability of bodies that, according to society, do not deserve to be taken care of, sustained, or even mourned". This patriarchal portrayal promotes mental and emotional pain in these female bodies because they are living "to the tune of social constructs" (Eze, 2016: 6). The central idea in this study is to dethrone the "tune of social constructs". The aim of feminist empathy is to address the circumstances which result in this anguish and consequently hinder human growth.

Iniobong I. Uko (2014: s.p.) shows empathy with women by asserting that "contemporary African women [and men] writers are not only establishing the new woman …; they show that though the woman may be said to be situated on the fringes, the borders, the margins, her strength and resilience keep her in control at the centre". Feminist empathy affirms women by promising to position "African women at the centre and raise consciousness through the articulation of the inequalities they experience in fictional form" (Koumagnon, 2018: 17). Koumagnon vehemently promotes a positive change by rebelling against men by means of feminist empathy. Related to the above, Katherine Frank (1987) demands an agentic approach for women. Frank (1987: 19) advocates that using a "consciousness" creation approach, which induces the necessity for a "crucial union of westernized, [African] feminist and African culture" enables a woman to break the bonds of patriarchal society and define herself to defy male classification as the "other". If not, as Lindsay Pentolfe-Aegerter (1990: unpaginated) explains in her paper that in the context of the impossibility of the identification of a woman in post-colonial system, "No simple retrieval of an identity as 'African' or 'woman' is possible, because both are contested terms undergoing continuous revision in the colonial and post-colonial context." One of the most relevant interrogations is why there is so much ongoing violence directed against women by either men or women themselves in the novel *TMB*, and even in *Anthills* and *HYS*. Apart from this, what are the various forms of violence? The answers to these questions pave the way for the examination of Dangaremgba's concerns, 'Gender conflict and sexual politics' which offers an avenue to assess the ethical nature of feminist empathy.

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Female sexual self-determination is a central concern to commentators of Dangaremgba's writings. Sugnet (2005: 40) notes that the "line between resistance and accommodation is sometimes a difficult one to draw; indeed, the grandmother's story suggests that surviving by accommodation may sometimes be the only mode of resistance available". Tambudzai realises that one of her grandmother's stories had "a tantalizing moral that increased your inspiration, but not beyond a manageable level" (Dangarembga, 1988:19). It is obvious that Tambudzai's vision and demands thereon are reasonable desires that should be tolerated. As earlier indicated, the female characters in Dangarembga's novels violently resist patriarchal domination through several modes. Bertha in *This Mournable Body* is described as "strong, of a size that thinking men run from should she be displeased with them" (51). Weitz (2003:x) comments that "women are not always passive victims of these [patriarchal hegemonic] practices. Rather, they may actively collaborate in their creation and maintenance or actively resist [patriarchy]".

Sally McWilliams' (1999:335) observation of Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* is also relevant to Dangarembga's novels, especially *TMB* under study. McWilliams examines exactly "how women's sexuality is circumscribed by colonialism, gender oppression, and compulsory heterosexuality". McWilliams' discussion portrays the role and responsibility of the post-colonial Zimbabwean woman to assert her dignity and gain recognition and acknowledgement through the acquisition of capital available for her empowerment. Garret asserts in relation to the above concerns, that women are at their best using their abilities to affirm their presence and importance in patriarchal societies. This is because it is often believed that a woman is capable of becoming her best self through the assertion of her abilities. Women's strategic tool of empowerment to solve the above concern in an alternative way defaults to the institution of marriage, which they deploy as the most appropriate means to acquire capital from rich men in Zimbabwe's patriarchal society.

Other scholars have examined Dangarembga's perceptions on poverty and its negative effects on women and society in Zimbabwe. Leah Mirakhor (2018: s.p.) postulates that in *TMB* "[t]he interplay of poverty and blackness is a theme that Dangarembga has been examining for many years". The text depicts the life of the black protagonist, Tambudzai, as well as other women, who attempt to escape from entangled forces of poverty, patriarchy and neocolonialism. Her family in the village is crippled by poverty. So, Tambudzai, and Mai (her mother) are "paralyzed, deprived of agency, and exiled from history in a way that Tambu could never find satisfaction" (Sugnet,

2005: 42). Lara Fiegel (2020: unpaginated) suggests that "Dangarembga sets herself the challenge of writing about how alienated personhood becomes when life stories lose hope and, in a country, where effort is no longer followed by reward". After her tertiary education Tambudzai becomes jobless, and thereafter lives in abject poverty. This state compels her to live in alienation.

Fuller (2018) highlights that the feature of double colonisation simultaneously is detrimental to the black protagonist's elevation in a neocolonial system. Commenting on this, Mirakhor (2018: 1) observes: "While Tambu is well educated and ferociously self-determined, Dangarembga shows that these qualities alone are not enough for her to be successful." Mirakhor goes on to state that "Tambudzai becomes a stand-in for a society struggling to gain its footing and maintain its soul amid the trauma of civil war and economic and political instability" (*Kirkus Reviews Issue*, 7th August, 2018). This is found in the author's prequel, *Nervous Conditions*, through to the sequel, *The Book of Not* and finally in *TMB*. Hence, the trilogy through Tambudzai represents conditions in Zimbabwe. In the same vein, Fungai Tichawangana (2019) also traces Tambudzai's development through the three novels and observes reveals that the trilogy is a representation of the post-colonial nation, Zimbabwe. From the critics, Mirakhor and Fuller on one side and Kirkus and Tichawangana on the other, there is a connection between Tambudzai's state of poverty, hopelessness and Zimbabwe's history. For, "like the period of Zimbabwe's history this story is set in, the pain, false hopes and dashed enthusiasm come in large doses and victory lies at [the end of] a very long road" (Tichawangana, 2019: unpaginated). A different way of studying the depiction of women in Dangarembga's writings is to see it as a revelation of their poverty, a state of hopelessness and how they finally emerge from it victorious. Furthermore, to study the depiction of women in Dangarembga's writing by investigating the portrayal of genders in the trilogy, is to know Zimbabwe's history.

2.8 Conclusion

Thus far, I have reviewed relevant literature of the prevailing critical views on gender, class, political power, race, socio-economic and cultural realities in the novels selected for this study. I have demonstrated how these critical perspectives are germane not only to the cited texts, but also to the wider discussions regarding the bonds between women and men in Africa. What emerges

from this review is that some critics such as Haile (2007), Nutsukpo (2012, 2020), Peterson (1984), Onukaogu and Ezechi (2009), Ogbeide (2013), Sugnet (2005) and Hendricks and Lewis (2004) reveal how the pain, suffering, gender oppression and subjugation of women remain distinctive features of pre-colonial, colonial and neo-colonial African society. This has significant bearing on the background of my research. What other schools of thought namely, Mirakhor (2018), Mbatha (2009), Macgoye (2003) and Nwapa (2005) critique about gender in African novels is that the central argument in such novels is the dethronement of patriarchy. This discovery is the pivot on which my study turns to analyse and interpret the relationship between the female and male characters in the three African novels selected for study. My investigations of these primary texts offer in-depth analyses on how these authors seek societiesin Nigeria and Zimbabwe which are devoid of pain, suffering, violence and suppression, and in which humans can flourish. The pain, suffering, wounds, violence and oppression inflicted on bodies do not only block empathy towards others; they also limit our responsibility to identify with the experience of a woman in pain and suffering. Feminist empathy, however, expands our ability to imagine, feel and think in an all-embracing and all-encompassing way. I utilise this framework in this thesis to highlight ways in which it allows us to better appreciate the texts.

The gender violence and its repercussions indicated in the critical reviews suggest that female emancipation and empowerment undermine male dominance and politics. Acholonu (1996: 320) affirms that a woman in a patriarchal hegemonic society can be in leadership because she "could wield the power of sustaining peace, common sense, and humanism in a world threatened by [the] tyrannical rule of despot and the untempered fanaticism of egocentric, revolutionary ideas". The opinions of this critic have motivated my study to thoroughly investigate the emancipation and empowerment of women from the African feminist empathy point of view. In addition, the depiction of female characters is generally different from their male counterparts in the texts of both female and male authors, an issue which my study problematises. In the light of the above, it is argued that "this … group of writers … are noted for their wit in a show down with their phallocentric [news], which desires to reconstruct the construction of the underdog, igniting incidents of a hateful patriarchal oppression of the woman" (Alkali *et al.*, 2013:246). So, whether they be male or female writers, they all write about similar concerns and issues, but present them differently. Aidoo (2007:514) reiterates that there is no difference between African male and African female writers: "If anyone protested that … [there] was any difference in any way from what male African writers had to

confront, my response to that would be: but of course not. There could not be any earth-shaking differences". Therefore, the critical review of the scholarship on the three writers' novels indicate that the writers use their works to resolve some long-held notions about women and their various roles in societies. These stories are designed to demonstrate gender imbalances, especially women's place in the struggle to right the wrongs done to women's bodies in their culture (Eze, 2014).

Other renowned scholars reveal that some female characters are unable to right the wrongs. They, therefore, cannot empower themselves and achieve emancipation from patriarchy and masculinity. Success in emancipation and empowerment is defined by feminist empathy as a woman being enlightened, assertive and obstinate. Achebe (1965:3) sees his mission in fiction as being "to help society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement". This mission is examined with emphasis on its contribution to feminist empathy and feminist elements in Achebe's, Adichie's and Dangarembga's visions of women and men.

CHAPTER 3:

Bio-politics of everyday life in *Anthills of the Savannah*: Real and imagined conquests

3.1 Plot summary of *Anthills*

Beatrice and Elewa are the heroines in *Anthills*, although they are at different poles. Thus, Beatrice is highly educated, intelligent, articulate woman who chooses to remain unmarried in open defiance of the prevailing gender tradition. She is a strong, forceful character with a distinctive voice of her own, and is able to connect with the common people in Kangan. Elewa on the other hand, lacks a formal education, she speaks "pidgin" English, but like Beatrice, she is highly expressive but emotional. Beneath her emotional displays belie her self-confidence and resilience. She is able to see through her boyfriend, Ikem's lie when he makes her leave his home after they make love at night. Major Sam and Chris are the other protagonists who also demonstrate that women are subordinated to men in the narrative. Ikem impregnates Elewa, but in the resolution of the text, Ikem is killed and Elewa is left to raise the fatherless child. Even though children are named by a man, Beatrice performs the ceremony with low-cost items as an attempt to break the cycle. The actions of the heroines portray that women attempt to overthrow patriarchy. In what follows, I show how women subvert patriarchy in my analysis under the chapter heading "Bio-politics of everyday life in *Anthills of the Savannah*: Real and Imagined conquests" in my chapter focus.

3.2 Chapter focus

Achebe, in *Anthills*, carries out a social restorative mission through his portrayal of the dethronement of patriarchy in what I am arguing constitutes a radical act of feminist empathy, as discussed in Chapters One and Two. In this third chapter of the study, I consolidate this core argument of subverting patriarchy by offering a thorough analysis and interpretation of the bio-politics of everyday experiences as represented in Nigeria in *Anthills*. In doing this, I also delineate behaviours of both the female and the male protagonists, especially the latter, who, through their acculturation in patriarchy, sexuality, stereotype and tradition, appear to have subjugated the former. However, my analyses will reveal that their 'conquests' are far from real and are actually imaginary within the patriarchal system, since the female characters capitalise on the male

characters to their own advantage. Drawing on Michel Foucault's (Foucault, 1978) notion of biopolitics, Linus Bylund and Beniamin Knutsson (2020:97) point out that "biopolitical works engage more specifically with the concept of inequality" for "[i]n biopolitical regimes, this problem is handled by constructing inequality as something normal to which government interventions must adapt." Their argument is in alignment with Foucault (1978) description of biopolitics which states that bio-politics have to do with the practice of contemporary nations or countries and their ruling of their dependents through "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and control of populations". Carl Death (2012:2), however, comments that

> one of the insights of the governmentality literature has been to view civil society as an effect of power relations, … and Foucault sought to show how forms of power relation that work at a distance and through the creation of 'free', responsible, self-governing individuals and civil societies characterize contemporary politics.

Interestingly, from Bylund's, Knutsson's as well as Death's arguments, in contemporary politics, Africa − specifically Nigeria − is used to depict the inequality and inadequacy of governors' governmentality-inspired engagements with local politics. Therefore, from Bylund's, Knutsson's, Foucault's and Death's perspectives, in bio-politics the male heads either in governance, the family or society manage their "subordinates" (females and other non-normative males), under structures/conditions of inequality, authority and power. Although this entails subjugation and subjection, Achebe's use of feminist agency as portrayed in *Anthills* results in a liberation of the governed (females and males), thereby overthrowing patriarchal supremacy. It then becomes relevant for men and women to be empathetic in playing a role in feminist agency. The theory of feminist empathy as espoused by Eze deals with such contemporary social and cultural issues that are pivotal to the feminist and masculinist discourses that form the focus of my analysis of *Anthills*. I also use feminist empathy as a lens to deepen my reading of Achebe's text.

In his two earlier texts − *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe, 1958) and *No Longer at Ease* (1960) − Achebe shows that his society had profoundly transited to a society characterized by chaotic militarism and ethno-religious or ethno-regional patronage. *A Man of the People* (1966), his third novel, disparages the behaviours and corruption of the civilian government, just as

Anthills condemns the oppression, irresponsibility and venality of the military governance. The novel presents a political narrative of endless battle by the populace to triumph over a history of pain and suffering resulting from bad governance in modern Nigeria which inflicts emotional pain and suffering on the ruled — peasants, truck pushers and market women. Politically, the rulers' governorship reflects, reinforces or challenges their concerns and the distribution of power between women and men. For instance, His Excellency Major Sam misunderstands the peaceful demonstration of the citizens to be against his 'retreating' and lack of concern for them as an example of insurrection that ought to be crushed with military might (Achebe, 1988:17; 73). Subtly, his reaction provokes pain and suffering on the Abazonians since he is unable to understand their situation.

Like the political issue above, the social and economic construction of women's bodies develops through conflicts between men and women and through different avenues to power and resources. Tsjeard Bouta and Georg Frerks (2002: 19) suggest that "some attention has been paid to women's role as protagonists to reach a more comprehensive, balanced picture of the impact of conflict on both women and men, and of the changing gender relations throughout conflict in both positive and negative terms". For example, the text presents Beatrice Okoh as a major, educated female character, who "is 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" (Achebe, 1988: 75) and Elewa, an illiterate female character who responds to Beatrice "I no sabi book" after Beatrice states "Elewa is too shy" (Achebe, 1988: 223) during the naming ceremony. The novelist depicts Elewa's status through her predominant use of pidgin English throughout the novel. Each of these characters has a different level of understanding of the experiences of women, culture, marriage and sexual politics in Nigeria. Through their experiences, they battle with Major Sam, Miss Cranford (a white woman), Ikem Osodi and the old man, Elewa's uncle, over their patriarchal and racist treatment, and the latter male character acknowledges that women now have the opportunity to define their own bodies. For instance, Beatrice exemplifies "feminine internal inclinations by the patriarchal fears from recalcitrant, unruly and insubordinate [woman]" (Ouahmiche & Boughouas, 2016:104). She is depicted as an obstinate female character who is not willing to cheapen her body, not even for Chris, her boyfriend. When Chris hears of her invitation to a private dinner by Major Sam, he says "My dear, let's keep all options open. It's never too late" (Achebe, 1988: 73). Chris anticipates that Sam, his closest ally, is attempting to reconcile with him through Beatrice, hence his admonition to her is to "keep all options open". He even accepts the notion of his girlfriend having sex with his old friend, just for his selfish

ambition. Even though Beatrice is hoping for a good outcome of this meeting, she is not willing to forgo her moral values. So, her reply to Chris' statement attests to this confirmation: "[a]ll options? I knew of one at least I would not keep open" (Achebe, 1988: 73). Again, Beatrice as a self-respecting person finds it difficult to accept the implications of Major Sam's invitation. He is not straightforward and shows no consideration in extending the invitation to Beatrice for his private dinner and he gives inadequate information on the venue for the scheduled dinner. All these are enough to make her angry which she demonstrates by breaking the protocols:

> My first act of rebellion which was to bring a wan smile to my face five minutes later for its sheer futility was to refuse my escort's offer to sit in the owner's corner of the black Mercedes standing in my driveway, as he rushed ahead of me and opened and held the door I simply said sorry, walked over to the other side and let myself in. the chauffeur turned sharply round on his seat perhaps to get a good look at today's eccentric cargo. When I said good evening to him on top of all that, he seemed dazed to begin with and then his bafflement gave way to a wide happy grin which pleased me very much for it confirmed that I had successfully compounded my rebellion – first to spurn a seat of honour and then to greet a mere driver first. That was when I smiled at myself and my puny, empty revolts, the rebellion of a mouse in a cage (Achebe, 1988: 72).

From these deliberate acts of rebellion and expressions of annoyance, Ouahmiche and Boughouas (2016: 104) posits that Beatrice's rebellious responses reveal the "hidden truth of women's potentials and aptitudes; women who are ready at any time to shake men's plinths." Again, Beatrice is portrayed as a level-headed female character who is conscientised to reject behaviours that drive individuals to see their fellows, especially women, as subjects. Achebe, through Beatrice's forms of rebellion and annoyance, creates awareness of the difference between seeing a female character in a relational way as a person, and seeing her as instrumental, a means to another end. An example of this is evidenced in Chris' advice to Beatrice:

> 'Look, BB, … 'in any country and any language in the world an invitation by the Head of State is a virtual command …. So my dear girl you will go and you may do some good. Sam is not a fool. He knows things are now pretty hopeless and may see in you a *last hope* to extricate himself. You may be able to help' (Achebe, 1988: 72- 73) (emphasis mine).

If Beatrice is portrayed as the "last hope" to bringing solutions to "pretty hopeless things" in order to release Major Sam from a physical constraint or an unpleasant or complicated situation then ironically, the heroes in the characters, Major Sam and Chris, emerge as imagined conquests. This is so because their acts of domination are overruled by the female protagonist's (Beatrice's) value. All these ideas reflect a specific economic context in which women increasingly demand equal treatment in the sphere of work, and reject politically and socially-determined ideas. They refuse to comply with patriarchal hegemony's prescriptions regarding the docility and vulnerability of the female body. In all these situations, Beatrice and Elewa emerge as victors over domineering masculinity. Beatrice's rebellion brings to our attention the unsympathetic and painful treatment that men such as Major Sam subject women to, and how women react to this, reappraising the moral foundations of gendered Africa relations. The analytical perspective of feminist empathy enriches my critical engagement with the complex issues in the text, as stated in Chapter One.

Eze conceptualises the nature of feminist empathy, especially in examining the phenomenon of women's pain and privation in African literature such as *Anthills*, commenting that in "most African cultures women are still viewed largely through the lenses of culture and tradition rather than as individuals with distinct wishes, rights, and dignities" (Eze, 2016: v). For Eze, feminist empathy has the power to positively change female lives in particular in meaningful ways, while Simon Baron-Cohen (2011: 10) observes that empathising is "being able to understand accurately the other person's position. Empathy makes the other person feel valued, acknowledged and respected". Eze articulates a theory and a set of conceptual tools that open up readings of the possibilities of making Nigerian society one that is devoid of needless suffering and violated bodies, populated by happier male and female characters. Importantly, he argues for the need for respect for all human rights and overthrows "gender inequality and outright sexism in [African] cultures" (Eze, 2016: vi). Reading the text through the lens of feminist empathy allows readers to simultaneously recognise the needs of both women and men because their lives are laid bare equally through the narrative. Thus, the reader is at once able to judge the men as well as the women without being unfairly prejudiced. Achebe achieves this by portraying the bio-politics of everyday life in Kangan and making female characters real victors. Achebe discusses Kangan society where the citizenry's life should not be dominated by masculinity and cultural ideologies, oppression, irresponsibility and venality of the military governance, but by a simple notion of acceptance, respect and acknowledgment of one another (Shamim, 2014). What Achebe demonstrates in *Anthills* is that he is "no longer at ease in his creation of women with limited roles" (Kolawole, 1997: 23), and the enabling of female bodies

that have been disabled by patriarchy and sexism. Achebe's perspective seems to echo the more theoretically grounded direction that Eze advocates in his writing on feminist empathy. Thus, Achebe's simple call for his audience to imagine a fair society is not very different from what Nussbaum (2001) and Baron-Cohen (2011) had already postulated about empathy being rooted in the power of the imagination, discussed in Chapter One. Through his act of drawing in his readers, the novelist demonstrates how he enables them to imaginatively reconstruct the pain of the sufferers (women) he is going to talk about. Following from this, it is in the power of an empathiser to accurately comprehend the sufferer's position, and hence put him-/herself in that position (Baron-Cohen, 2011). From these perspectives, we understand empathy as an important quality for the social validation of individuals, allowing them to flourish within the social order in which they find themselves. Empathy is also crucial when we read texts and attempt to make meaning out of them.

This chapter argues that feminist empathy promotes good relationships and allows the experience of collective feelings of empathy by imagining ourselves in the same circumstances as those affected. As I pointed out in Chapter One, intersectionality argues that "… women's lives are constructed by intersecting systems of oppression" (Carastahis, 2014:304). Therefore, patriarchy, race, and sex are all interwoven and converge to expose how, especially, the female characters' suppression and oppression are constructed at intersecting levels. These elements are central to my examination of Achebe's five concerns.

First of all, I discuss state repercussions and irresponsibility as part of his effort to highlight governance as an institution that inherently disempowers and denies recognition of the ruled. Next, I examine changing the narrative, as part of Achebe's effort to upgrade the lives of women in social, political, cultural and racial spheres in the practice of their new ideologies which weaken patriarchy. I then examine affirmation of feminine roles, as part of the novelist's effort to underscore the non-recognition and unacceptability of male characters' superiority. Additionally, I discuss matrimonial imperatives, as Achebe draws attention to the institutions that deny women recognition and acceptance. Finally, I examine two views of a strong African woman, where he uses examples of both educated and uneducated women, and how their reactions are linked to their level of education. Through these concerns, Achebe explores the biopolitics of everyday experiences in *Anthills*, and also shows how, when patriarchal hegemony is overthrown by the women in Kangan, this influences the thinking of others (Olaniyan & Quayson, 2007). In the segment below, I discuss state repercussion and

irresponsibility. Drawing on the ideas of Foucault, the discussion urges a reevaluation of the cultural and masculine assumptions that undergird the lives of the ruled of both genders in governance. These assumptions define and handicap subordinates on the one hand, while on the other, it maintains strategies that disempower men's and women's bodies in African governance and political systems.

3.3 State repression and irresponsibility: The Major Sam syndrome

In *Anthills*, Achebe's protagonist, President Major Sam, represents dictators in Africa who excessively abuse power in office. Sam's characterisation shows the rapacious use of power. He declines to visit Abazon and provide solutions to the Abazonians' problems which indicates his lack of concern and view that the Abazonians are irrelevant in the political and decision-making process in Kangan. On the basis of the above, Beatrice, like Ikem, thinks Major Sam is "withdrawing" from "the people and their basic needs of water free from Guinea worm, shelter and food" and "forget[s] the very people who legitimize [his] authority" (Achebe, 1988: 73). Major Sam further tells Okong to stand in his stead at Abazon as a way of showing concern and commitment to the people, albeit through false and bogus reports and promises. He tells him to "[f]ind some nice words to say to them. Tell them we are tied up at this moment with very important matters of state.... Peasants are impressed by that kind of thing, you know.... Humour them, gauge the temperature and pitch your message accordingly" (Achebe, 1988: 17). It is evident from the above that Major Sam is portrayed as not putting himself in the Abazonians' (peasants') situation despite the fact that they "legitimize [his] authority". These Abazonians include both men and women whom he has relegated to the background. In the words of Chantal Zabus (2007:8–9): "African writers are indeed keen to wrest their flesh and bodies back from various nexuses of power and to partake of the contemporary feminocentric urge to perceive the lived body as a source of experiential narrative." Achebe, as a contemporary African feminist writer like Adichie and Dangarembga, writes about African bodies that have been emotionally and physically abused and objectified by their traditions. By so doing, he pays close attention to what that reveals about Africans, and particularly Nigerians and their tradition. However, Major Sam has no empathy for the people of Abazon. He has not understood the displeasure and pain they would probably feel as a result of his retreat from them. As a result, their lack of basic needs of clean water, shelter and food persistently compromises their health and survival. Thus,

the president's actions reveal that in his line of judgment, there is no fairness and acknowledgment of the people's suffering, because the "idea of fairness asks us to be self-reflexive, to think about ourselves in relation to others, or in relation to us" (Eze, 2016: 62). The concept of self-reflexivity means that an individual is able to think carefully about how to relate to their fellow human beings, especially when the person is in pain. So, by implication, Major Sam has not adopted the self-reflexive nature of guilt or accountability which naturally leads an individual to be considerate of others. From Major Sam's attitude, I make a critical deduction that, as a male, he realizes that his gender is privileged in the society. Hence, he subtly expresses defiance as an appropriate instrument to enact domination. Through authorial engineering, Major Sam is negatively depicted and used to interrogate the dangers of unaccountable and repressive power in African governance. This is evidenced in the dialogue between him and his minister, Professor Okong after the Abazonians' delegation's futile visit:

> The crowd that came in an hour or so ago, … has come from Abazon. … It is a peaceful and loyal and goodwill delegation … that has come all the way from Abazon to declare their loyalty. Very good, sir. Very good! And I should say, about time … a sudden violent frown on His Excellency's face silenced the Professor's re-awakened garrulity. … Well you know – everybody knows – my attitude to petitions and demonstrations and those kinds of things. I do, sir. Every loyal citizen of this country knows your Excellency's attitude … Sheer signs of indiscipline. …, and you are as good as sunk. … So I have a standing answer to all of them. No! Kabisa (Achebe, 1988: 16-17).

Two of the dangers of Major Sam's unaccountable and repressive power is that the Abazonians, are easily yielded/exposed to undesirable happenings such as rebellion, revolt against mandating him as their president. Okong asks him, President Major Sam: "But your Excellency, … Why does every bad thing in this country start in Abazon province? The Rebellion was there. They were the only ones whose Leaders of Thought failed to return a clear mandate to Your Excellency" (Achebe, 1988: 18). The novelist thus advocates reappraisal of the dangers of unaccountability and suppression in leadership, which block people's empathy towards others.

Moreover, the nature of Major Sam's dictatorship is further highlighted by the main issue of political turmoil after independence in Nigeria as the gender question in the new structure is

accentuated. From Major Sam's speech: "Tell them we are tied up at this moment with very important matters of state. … If … they have brought a petition, accept it on my behalf and tell them they can rest assured that their complaints … will receive His Excellency's personal attention" (Achebe, 1988:17) it is discerned that His Excellency Major Sam is portrayed to have influence but not authority over the Abazonians. This indicates his irresponsibility and depicts him as a 'bad' president. Diamond (1989:436) describes him as an "egomaniacal tyrant, and controls like the sun dominates the sky". However, patriarchy in many parts of Africa is synonymous with power, wealth and responsibility since these qualities enable men to dominate. Major Sam lacks the quality to cater for his dependants who are "truck-pushers and the market women". This emphasises his lack of loyalty to them and the state. According to Emeka Okafor and Monica E. Akokuwebe (2015:1), "in Nigeria, obnoxious social norms, political exclusion and economic lopsidedness dictate [that] … men have control …, they have a dominant position in terms of political power". These socio-economic norms are entrenched in Major Sam, causing him to exercise excesses in his governance and inflict pain on the citizens. Part of their pain derives from the fact that Major Sam regards them as irrelevant.

According to Judith Butler (2005:8), "the recognition of the other takes the singularity and vulnerability of oneself and the other into consideration". Nonetheless, recognition is an unceasing process. However, Major Sam's positionality prevents him from constituting his individual self to realise that the citizens are dependent on him, and vice versa. Through Major Sam's failure to recognise the people and identify with their pain, the narrator traces the malaise of the nation to "the failure of our rulers to establish vital links with the poor and the dispossessed of the country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being" (Achebe, 1988: 141). Subtly, the author's voice establishes that His Excellency communicates poorly with the citizenry – the "loyal market women" and "truck-pushers", the poor and dispossessed. Thus, through Major Sam's role, Achebe "draws attention not only to individual self but also to other people who inhabit [his] world" (Eze, 2016: 15). The author, therefore, shows the importance of responsibility of leaders towards the poor and marginalised to bring about a positive change in their lives which will heal them of their pain and in the end enable them to flourish in Nigerian society. As Larry Diamond (1989: 435) argues:

> Indeed, the fiction of a certain country, culture or period may reveal more of its values, customs, stresses, changes and transformations than does all the formal scholarship of historians

> and social scientists. In particular, fiction may give us special insights into how culture and history intersect with and reshape, or are reshaped by, the lives of people, ordinary and extraordinary.

As seen in the argument above, in *Anthills*, the pain of the dispossessed, marginalised and poor is emphatically identified, in order to demonstrate the need for change and growth in their lives.

Major Sam is positively portrayed as a warm general, who is intelligent, friendly and charming, but he also shows disloyalty towards his two friends, Ikem and Chris, who are his closest allies. Sam betrays the trust of his friends and turns his back on them by even threatening to kill them. Through the characterisation of Major Sam the narrator invites us to question the betrayal of trust in friendship that causes pain to his friends who become victims of his perfidy. Achebe scrutinises the deeds of people who have close friends or are in intimate relationships. This is one of the concerns in feminist empathy: it treasures relationships which are honest and which value and respect the other party. Baron-Cohen (2011) posits that the concern of feminist empathy is the need to be valued in relationships in a bid to be acknowledged and respected. Thus, when we value, respect and acknowledge our friends we exercise feminist empathy.

From the foregoing analysis of Major Sam's attitude towards the citizens, especially the men and his friends, the text reveals that all these men remain silent in the face of Sam's betrayal of their trust. This depicts how Major Sam's hyper-masculinity overshadows and silences the other male characters, Chris, Ikem, truck-pushers, peasants and poor males who are relegated to the background by the male who enjoys undeserved status in society. According to Lisa Lindsay and Stephan Miescher (2003:6), "at any point in time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted". Even though, as Kopano Ratele (2008: 517) postulates, "masculinities are better seen as created at both the social and psychological levels, something males do and establish in ongoing activity in relation […] to other males, but also in relation to their own inner lives", this does not endorse the valorisation of certain types of masculinity. This postulation helps us to unpack the representation of the above-mentioned male characters, especially Major Sam, as an individual leader whose actions against and domination of other males is structurally supported, and "who in their *personal* stations find themselves subordinate to those who are in ruling positions in society" (Ratele, 2008: 516). As stated earlier, Major Sam occupies "a dominant position in political power" (Okafor & Akokuwebe, 2015: 1). A similar example of this is depicted in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, where Okonkwo subjugates other male characters like his father, Unoka. It could, therefore, be argued that the socio-

political position of a man together with the way he performs his gendered role shapes how he is recognised by his own gender or others. In this way, he may arrogate to himself the power to deny another person's voice, or not recognise or respect them and, above all, not acknowledge their pain. As all the above accounts portray Major Sam in this light, I argue that though he conceives of himself to be a great leader, in reality he is not because he fails in the larger discourse of what makes a good president. Therefore, he has moved from reality to an imagined position of power within which patriarchy is overthrown. Surely, his false, imagined status makes him uphold and perpetuate patriarchy.

Notwithstanding the above, issues in the text bring to the fore Major Sam's lack of emotional responsiveness, which is translated into "hypermasculinity" or "macho-masculinity" in political power, a situation highlighted by Achebe. Major Sam can be described as a hypermasculine man due to his lack of emotional response and trustworthiness towards the citizenry and his two best friends. In line with this argument, Thomas J. Scheff (2006: 8) asserts that:

> hypermasculine men are silent about their feelings to the point of repressing them altogether, …. Repressing the vulnerable emotions (fear and shame, … in feelings of rejection or disconnection) leads to either silence or withdrawal, on the one hand, or acting out anger (flagrant hostility), on the other. The composure and poise of hypermasculinity seems to be a recipe for silence and violence.

His hypermasculinity escalates to hostility and disconnection between the ruled who gave him the mandate and his best friends who support him in his political power. This causes unbearable pain to these characters, especially his friends. Gradually, it leads him to kill Ikem which pushes Chris to go into hiding in order to prevent his murder, initiated by Major Sam. Through Major Sam's characterisation, Achebe suggests that hypermasculinity promotes violence.

"Macho-masculinity" in political power, a situation highlighted by Achebe is, while Major Sam, is the power profiteer, Ikem and Chris are described by Achebe as absolute foils to Major Sam. The political crises in the novel escalate to counter coup d'états, power games, political assassination, feminist agitation and other integers of the unwholesome state of affairs, arguably fuelled by cultural hegemony. This is clearly depicted in the expositional give-and-take between Major

Sam and Chris, his Commissioner for Information and foreshadows the power play and class war, which are hatched as the plot progresses:

> 'You're wasting everybody's time. Mr. Commissioner for Information. I will not go to Abazon. Finish! Kabisa! Any other business?'
> 'As Your Excellency wishes, But...'
> 'But me no buts, Mr Oriko! The matter is closed. I said. …
> Why do you find it so difficult to swallow my ruling. On anything?'
> 'I am sorry, Your Excellency. But I have no difficulty swallowing and digesting your rulings' (Achebe, 1988: 1).

It is deduced from the above that Chris finally claims not to have yielded to Major Sam, yet he eventually accepts his (Major Sam's) instructions, which is subsequently demonstrated in the text. Besides, Major Sam is portrayed as a military dictator as well as an incompetent leader, who applies brute force, cultural hegemony and violence to establish his rulership and power base. It must be emphasised that the exertion of "macho-masculinity" is much more devastating for the most vulnerable in society women, children and the poor in general. Achebe's *Anthills* reveals a great deal about the situation of women, children and the vulnerable trapped by traditional restrictions and conventions, most of whom are voiceless. Achebe highlights the objectification of women, children and the vulnerable, and thereby creates awareness that their fundamental human rights are totally disregarded. The perception that "women abuse is often blamed on patriarchy" (Ademiluka, 2018:339) is depicted in Major Sam, Chris and Ikem. Achebe appears to focus on the promotion of awareness for a new vision for women in independent Africa. This call is directed at young African leaders such as Ikem, not at colonial masters. According to Eze (Eze, 2016: 17), advocator for feminist empathy, "Colonialism, imperialism, and other forms of exploitation and oppression close the portals of empathy by maintaining narratives that dehumanize different groups". The practice of "macho-masculinity" in society prevents the sharing of pain of the sufferers' — women, children and vulnerable — by the oppressor, creating the platform for Achebe to draw attention to its inherent injustices. Besides, as already discussed, Okafor et al. (2015:1) explain that abhorrent customs and political systems initiate the cry and pain of women in public spaces in Nigeria. Achebe, therefore, seeks to create a model society in *Anthills* as a blend for balancing gender disparity through the characterisation of female characters so that women are involved in the public space, although they live under patriarchy, which affects them in different ways. As a consequence, they attack traditional gender roles that stifle both genders head-on, particularly by critiquing and challenging patriarchy. This is examined in the paragraphs below.

3.4 Changing the narrative: Beatrice and Elewa

As discussed in the introductory section of this chapter, Major Sam in *Anthills* portrays to Miss Cranford that the young Nigerian woman, Beatrice Okoh, as highly educated with first-class honours in English and she “beat[s] the English to their game. We're very proud of her" (Achebe, 1988: 75). Despite her creditable achievement, Beatrice is treated contemptuously by Major Sam when he invites her to attend his presidential dinner. Chagrined, she states: "... he orders me to dinner and rings off before I have had time to express my profound gratitude. Then he doesn't think it is necessary to warn me that I have a forty-mile journey to make for the privilege!" (Achebe, 1988: 72). This causes Beatrice pain at being so callously treated. While Major Sam appears to venerate Beatrice because of her high educational status, he equally belittles her and that is enough to arouse her anger, which she demonstrates through the breach of protocol, as indicated earlier. Her story “bring[s] to our moral awareness the pain that the victims of Africa’s patriarchal and sexist structures suffer, and they do so in view of initiating a reappraisal of the moral foundations of Africa’s gender relations” (Eze, 2016: 70). Through Beatrice's role, therefore, Achebe reveals the idea that pain is often caused by the denial of women's voices. Hence, he subtly encourages a re-examination of the conditions of gender relations and human rights in several African societies. Moreover, Beatrice's treatment exposes and affirms that sexist discrimination characterises females as inferior, weak, submissive and voiceless. As Jean O’Barr and Kathryn Firmin-Sellers (1995) note, hierarchies in most parts of Africa have defined women as subordinates, thereby validating the persistent discrimination and marginality they suffer.

In a further act of discrimination, Major Sam ignores Beatrice at his dinner, and instead entertains Miss Cranford, the white American woman who does not even respect and recognize his office. To make matters worse, instead of Major Sam defending Beatrice at his dinner, he blames her, stating: "Oh don't be such a racist, Beatrice. I am surprised at you. A girl of your education!" (Achebe, 1988: 81). This is in response to the fact that she criticises the American female character who is taking all his time and attention away from the other guests at the dinner. For Beatrice, Major Sam’s blatant disregard of her presence at the dinner brings her painful reminders of a similar experience

with her former African boyfriend during her studies in England. This boyfriend, after two dances with a white girl, went "completely berserk" (Achebe, 1988: 79), totally neglecting Beatrice. This made the white girl remark that "Your boys like us, ain' they?" (Achebe, 1988: 79). From these two negative experiences, Beatrice seems to recognise that the subordinate role of women in African society has been created by patriarchy. The intersection of gender and race is at play here. We see that Achebe, through his male characters, shows black women as objects of both patriarchy and racism. Through these male characters, Achebe ridicules the manner in which contemporary young African males appear to prefer white females and give them preferential treatment over their own females, subtly exposing the manner in which black women are subjugated. There are no positive traits in these male characters. They thus typify and symbolise alpha male traits of race and gender which promote racial and gender violence. The above characterisations of the male characters who are involved in racism and class discrimination demonstrate that Achebe strongly condemns such discrimination as a societal menace. By means of feminist empathy, he invites us to put ourselves in the position of the female sufferer, Beatrice, and then to consider that her pain is caused by the inherently unfair patriarchal hegemonic culture.

Over time, Beatrice becomes sharply conscious of two battles she must wage — against males and white females. She is forced to struggle against multiple forms of discrimination: gender, race and patriarchy. Drawing on Crenshaw's discussion on intersectional categories of discrimination, Anna Carasthathis (2014: 304) argues that "[i]t has become a commonplace within feminism to claim that women's lives are constructed by multiple, intersecting systems of oppression. This insight — that oppression is not a singular process …, but is better understood as constituted by multiple, converging, or interwoven systems" which is exemplified in the way that patriarchy, race and gender interweave and converge to reveal the complexity of Beatrice's oppression. Chikwenye Ogunyemi (1985: 67) posits that "[b]lack women are disadvantaged in several ways: as blacks they, with their men, are victims of a white patriarchal culture; as women they are victimized by black men; and as black women they are victimize ed on racial, sexual, and class grounds by white [w]omen". Beata Lipman (1984:67) suggests that "racism is a more urgent matter... that can be extended to many Third World areas if we substitute hunger, poverty or backwardness for racism". Thus, Beatrice, representing the black woman, becomes 'wounded' as she bears the import of patriarchal traditions, sexism and racism. Her oppressors do not empathise with her pain because they do not and cannot identify with her wounds. What then does Achebe expect of his readers by centering on the 'wound' of this woman, Beatrice. James D. Johnson et al. (2002:1209) answer that "[t]he absence of racial empathy can lead to problems; ... white people are more

likely to receive treatment for pain while black people are left to languish". It is through showing these oppressive racial, political and social arrangements by which African women are the most disadvantaged that the author makes us feel the different ordeals that women experience because of their gender.

Like Achebe, Helen Chukwuma asserts that feminism's aim is to modify the degrading assessment of women in order for all women to realise that they are not non-significant others, and it also "seeks to give the woman a sense of self as a worthy, effectual and contributing human being" (Chukwuma, 1994: ix). Thus, each female is a valuable and capable person, providing and promoting the good of all and so deserving of the same privileges and rights men enjoy. Stephanie Shields (2008: 302-303) posits that studies in feminism must "acknowledge the intersections of gender with other significant social identities, most notably race". Beatrice, a black woman, is as important and valuable as the white women. Through Beatrice's 'wound', the novelist advocates equal treatment of women regardless of race or nationality.

Also, feminist empathy analyses the female/male power structure that constructs women as inferior and rejects it in order to work towards gender equality. This is because feminist empathy can be utilised in service of a "feminist literary movement [that] desires the illumination of female experience in order to alter the status quo for the benefit of women" (Ogunyemi, 1985: 64). In altering "the status quo for the benefit of women", women must adopt Adimora-Ezeigbo's (2012b: 36) 'snail-sense' feminism, which "adopting [the] habit of a snail, focuses on the individual, but encourages respect and tolerance for the group, with a readiness to negotiate and cooperate with others". In this sense, snail-sense feminism advocates for the endurance of females in the struggle against racism and patriarchal hegemony. As Adimora-Ezeigbo (2012b: 37) comments, "the [African] Nigerian woman ought to be wise, sensitive and proactive in her quest for justice and self-actualization". Beatrice exudes these attributes, as for the most part, she appears voiceless concerning her ill-treatment by her victimisers – Major Sam, her unnamed former boyfriend, and white females. She chooses to negotiate and cooperate with them for a total transformation, because this rather will rebuild her devastating self.

The above various practices depicted by the male characters domination over the black female character bear out the validity of Gwyn Kirk and Margo Okazawa-Rey's (2007:16) statement that "male domination manifests itself in women's sexuality, gender roles, and family relationships." Additionally, in *Anthills*, the background that Beatrice comes from is relevant to the cause which she embarks upon. She comes from a chauvinistic family. Her father is depicted as a monster, who frequently beats his wife, Beatrice's mother, he

> flogged our poor mother… on those occasions my father always took the precaution to lock the door of their room. She would come out afterwards (having unlocked the door, …) wiping her eyes … it always made me want to become a sorceress that could say *'Die*!' to my father and he would die as in the folk-tale. … I would bring him back to life and he would never touch his whip again. … and then one day as my mother came out wiping her eyes I … hugged her legs" (Achebe, 1988: 86).

In the narration above, Achebe employs first- and third-person points of view and permits Beatrice to reflect and tell of the traditional treatment of women in Nigeria. Beatrice shows her disapproval of her father's act through her use of emotive language. Her usage of the verb, "Die", the noun "sorceress" as well as the expressions, "it always made me want to become a sorceress" and "he would never touch his whip again" gives an indication that her mother and herself will be healed only when her father 'dies', and that she wishes she had superhuman power to make this death happen. That will make him eschew meting violence on her mother. This highlights the ability of some women to feel for other women's pain. Similar evidence of the power of empathy exists in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1989: 57-59), where readers are given a close insight into the plight of female characters who are "wounded". In the text, Ramatoulaye continuously reflects on her marriage to Modou because she cannot understand what led him to lose interest in her despite them being greatly in love. Such plights are revealed when the female victims are made to speak in their own voices by the author.

Through the negative connotations of Beatrice's emotive diction discussed above, Achebe portrays her unnamed father unfavourably which implies that he does not glorify the aspect of traditional culture where husbands maltreat wives. Beatrice's use of the verbs, "flogged" and "locked" emphasise the violent, controlling nature of the husband's behaviour, while "wiping her eyes", "hugged", and "poor mother", all suggest the soft, vulnerable nature of the wife. These words

convey the way women in sexist societies are physically abused, illustrating the unwarranted pain they suffer in marriages and which is validated by custom and tradition. Therefore, Achebe projects the injustice and absurdity of these socially constructed traditions and customs that have subjected married women to cruel and unfair treatment by men like Beatrice's unnamed father and other husbands like Mr. So Therefore (a minor character) who still control and beat their wives. Patricia S. Greenspan (1994:61) states that "the notion of a noble character seems to include a kind of heightened sensitivity to one's own moral wrongs. We sometimes think of this as a nobler ideal than moral purity, for that matter – so that imperfect comes out as better in a way than perfect virtue". From Greenspan's postulation, men showing guilt about their wrong acts — committing crimes against women — is a key factor in their assessing their moral worth. For only in this will they reveal their concerns, values and feelings of empathy for others (women) and their responsibility to their society. By implication, Achebe suggests that both married and unmarried men should feel guilty about inflicting wounds on women.

As discussed earlier, Beatrice's unnamed mother also suffers multiple forms of oppression stemming from patriarchy, gender and class, which all intersect in her experience of marital life. Achebe makes her character unknowable on the one hand and, on the other, makes her more accessible to readers. That is, through her role, the novelist emphasises the system that denies her – and all women – recognition. Shields (2008: 304) affirms that "intersectionality first and foremost reflects the reality of lives. The facts of our lives reveal that there is no single identity category that satisfactorily describes how we respond to our social environment or are responded to by others". As such, multiple identities of oppression and discrimination in her daily life and in the lives of other women underscore that they are marginalised and objectified. Achebe thus uses empathy as a tool to create awareness of the plight of married women in various communities and elicits a sense of how morally wrong this is from the reader.

The African feminist writer and scholar Nnaemeka (2003:359) postulates the necessity for "a multi-pronged approach to combat gender inequalities, stressing the need for negotiation and the suppression of egoistic tendencies which may forestall rather than enhance the meaningful partnership between women and men that is fundamental to the feminist cause". From this stance, Beatrice, representing all women, needs to eschew being preoccupied with herself in order to deconstruct patriarchy and suppress self-esteem for the woman's benefit. More importantly, Beatrice's mother's suppression of her pain in her refusal to cry: "She would come out afterwards

wiping her eyes with one corner of her wrapper, too proud, or too adult to cry aloud like us" (Achebe, 1988: 86), demonstrates that in addition to the physical abuse that she suffers, she also suffers emotional abuse through her inability to express her pain. Elaine Scarry (1985) affirms that pain severely destroys our capacity to speak, and we only express it paralinguistically, either through crying or laughter. Thus, physical pain is difficult to express because this difficulty has a political effect "by making overt precisely what is at stake in 'inexpressibility' … [hence it] begin[s] to expose by inversion the essential character of 'expressibility' whether verbal or material" (Scarry, 1985: 19). Beatrice's mother does not cry aloud because society has made her voiceless. Beatrice having known her mother since her birth knows that her mother's fate could be hers. Therefore, witnessing her pain as a young child, she "rushed to her and hugged her legs" (Achebe, 1988: 86). The scene is a strong display of solidarity emanating from feminist empathy. There is a bond which leads to the display of love by Beatrice, just as it manifests between Mrs. Chinembiri and her daughter Elizabeth Chinembiri when the latter's teacher, Tambudzai, badly beats Elizabeth prompting the former to empathise with the daughter in Dangarembga's *TMB*. Unfortunately, in *Anthills*, the mother "pushed [Beatrice] away so violently that [she] hit [her] head against the wooden mortar" (Achebe, 1988: 86). This shows that solidarity can lead to violence in some cases. The import of this in feminist empathy is that we cannot exist as humans by excluding others because of the violence meted out to the other. Like Beatrice, other female characters including Elewa, Agatha and the wife of Mr. So Therefore are also 'wounded' when they suffer a similar fate. However, Elewa is depicted as an assertive character who challenges and critiques her boyfriend Ikem's domination.

Elewa's condition results from male domination which is highlighted through her relationship with Ikem. Though Ikem is seen as a responsible, educated leader in Kangan, in his dealings with Elewa, he turns out to be irresponsible. Achebe uses his role as a starting point for his critique on the pain of females as a result of male oppression and subjugation. It is revealed that Elewa is only reserved by Ikem for his sexual gratification as he takes her to his house only for this purpose. He does not worry about the time she goes home, which is often late at night and at her own peril. She takes this risk because Ikem does not want her to spend the night in his house. Putting her life at risk in this manner also testifies to the disregard of female lives by patriarchal males.

Elewa, though not formally educated, is able to express in pidgin her disgust at the abusive treatment meted out to her by Ikem. In protest against such treatment, she vehemently rebukes him for wanting to put her in a taxi at midnight to travel home alone despite the risk of being attacked by armed robbers. In response to Ikem's insistence that this danger no longer exists, Elewa retorts:

> The woman dem massacre for motor Park last week na you killam.' … 'Why you no drive me home yourself if say you know arm robbers done finish for Basa. … 'Take your mouth comot my name, ojare. Tomorrow make you take your nonsense battery come pick me again. Nonsense!' (Achebe, 1988: 35)**.**

From the dialogue above, it is evident that Ikem treats Elewa as a dispensable plaything. Undoubtedly, this is because Ikem is a product of patriarchal ideology which regards women as playthings or toys. Thus, Ikem inflicts psychological wounds on Elewa once he gets his satisfaction from her. He behaves like this because he sees Elewa as a means to an end. As such, the way he allows Elewa to risk the road by herself at midnight is callous and unfair. In his inconsiderate attitude, Ikem does not put himself in Elewa's position, so he does not realise that her pain is caused by his careless, indifferent attitude. Consequently, it needs to be asked who would hold Ikem responsible for Elewa's attack or death Response to this question – probably no-one – help reinforce the realisation that women suffer at the hands of men who are not held accountable and would therefore escape with impunity. Contemporary African writers like Achebe create novels that challenge us to share in the pain that women are subjected to in African societies. Through Ikem's thoughts and decisions, Achebe demonstrates the traditional norms or expectations regarding women in traditional society which appears to affirm the abuse of women for men's sexual gratification. In view of this, "our assumptions about the differences between men and women have led [us] to construct a world that reinforces [these] very assumptions" (Weitz, 2003: 1). Such assumptions make women suffer disrespect, loss of dignity and self-worth from the men who engage with them. Invariably, this aggravates gender inequality, which "in human society is seen in the imbalance of power" (Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 2009:25). Thus, in Achebe's characterisation of Ikem (and other men like him), the patriarchal mentality of men as a result of the imbalance of power is strongly criticised. Elewa is portrayed as a strong character who resists such male aggression. She puts Ikem in his proper place through her wit, a**s** evidenced from the above quoted textual rebuttal (Achebe, 1988)**.** Thus, she gains some relief and healing from her emotional wounds. Like Beatrice, and their female allies from other African literary texts such as Sekyiwa in *The Housemaid* (Darko, 1998), Esi Sekyi in *Changes* (Aidoo, 1991) and Olanna and Kainene in *Half of a Yellow Sun* (Adichie, 2006), Elewa represents an emergent and forceful African feminist voice. Being assertive

and knowledge-driven, her opinion resonates with that of any woman who accepts femalehood and feminist empathy. Through her audacious objectivity, Elewa confronts the traditional status quo and subverts the norms of male domination. The portraiture of her challenging Ikem's tyrannical stance establishes her as a force to reckon with against patriarchal suppression.

Besides, Achebe, in a similar manner to early feminist writers, Ama A. Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta and Olive Schreiner, uses the assertive nature of Elewa to bring about correction in men's attitudes. The feminist scholar Weitz (2003: x) states that "women … actively resist these patriarchal practices", and Achebe shows that "women are not always passive victims of these practices". Through the characterisation of Elewa, Achebe depicts that women are able to logically and critically rationalise issues, no matter their educational status. They do not just constitute a passive grouping that needs males to make decisions for them. Hence, he implicitly invites all men (educated, uneducated; young and old) to adopt attitudes or behaviours that see females, not as objects or a means to a selfish man's end, but as ends in themselves. Accordingly, the uneducated Elewa emerges as a real victor over the educated and patriarchal Ikem.

Beatrice is also used by Chris as an object for gratification even though he tries to heal her emotional pain. They "fell in together into the wide, open space of her bed and began to roll over and over until she could roll no more" (Achebe, 1988: 114). Then Chris allows himself to be ordered and dominated by Beatrice during their intimate intercourse, "Come in". And as he did she uttered a strangled cry that was not just a cry but also a command or a password into her temple" (Achebe, 1988: 104). Chris tries to placate her by being more emotionally available after Beatrice feigns anger at his uncaring attitude of not calling or visiting her earlier. By giving in to Beatrice's emotional needs, Chris adopts a position of subordination to Beatrice by putting himself in her situation, entering into her experience, and identifying with her emotional pain. Therefore, Chris is positively depicted as he has fulfilled the aim of feminist empathy by attaining the experience of fellow-feeling and acknowledging alternative perspectives of being.

Molara Ogundipe-Leslie's (1994: 230) assertion that, "Feminism is the business of both men and women anywhere, and in Africa. The feminist agenda everywhere... must include men and mobilize men in order for us to attain a more successful completion of the work of humanizing society" is relevant to Chris's empathy. Chris' process of healing Beatrice's emotional pain is reflected

through the concepts of African womanism and snail-sense feminism posited by Ogunyemi and Kolawole and Akachi-Ezeigbo respectively. These scholars focus on the complementarity of both genders, which we find depicted in the relationship between Chris and Beatrice. In this way, Achebe asserts himself as feminist empathiser, womanist, game-changer, intersectionalist and snail-sense feminist advocator, who portrays a female with emotions, capable of feeling and loving, and is not just an object to satisfy male desires. Furthermore, his avant-garde female character is accorded respect and dignity as a valuable member of African society. Thus, through her assertiveness, Beatrice, just like Elewa, is seen to overthrow patriarchy, thereby becoming the real conqueror as opposed to the man. Surely, the ideal is not reverse domination, but equal power for both parties.

In the light of the character traits of Ikem, Chris, Major Sam and other men, it is shown that men use their sexual power to exploit and denigrate women. Thus, Achebe exposes predatory men who are always on the prowl, cold-heartedly and excessively wielding their masculine power over women. For instance, as mentioned previously, during the presidential retreat/party, Beatrice recounts her narrow escape from the clutches of the president who had wanted to have sex with her, “[A]nd then came the master’s voice summoning me to have my turn in the bedchamber of African polygamy! … Fully aroused he clung desperately to me. And I took him then boldly by the hand and led him to the balcony railings to the breathtaking view of the dark lake from the pinnacle of the hill” (Achebe, 1988: 80-81). Achebe highlights a contemporary situation in which females seeking either normal relations, assistance or job placements are taken advantage of by men yet remain silent due to shame or fear. Achebe, like Ngũgi wa Thiong’o in *Devil on the Cross* (1980), also highlights how women are seen by men as mere "sex objects" who exist purely for their pleasure and comfort. Ngugi exposes this issue through his female protagonist, Jacinta Wariinga, who struggles to cope with sexual harassment (10-29). First, she loses her job for having rejected the advances of Khiara, her boss. She is then abandoned by her boyfriend, John Kimwana. Similarly, in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973: 92-96), the European governor at the castle keeps a mistress for his comfort because his wife cannot meet his sexual demands. For such men as is also the case for Achebe’s Chris, Ikem, and Major Sam, it is obvious that they only live in an imaginary position of power, because their female lovers have both directly and indirectly subdued them. Thus, through Beatrice’s and Elewa’s assertiveness and empowerment, they confront the cultural status quo and challenge the patriarchy, re-examine their traditions and cultures to draw from them appropriate tools for empowering women. To further demonstrate the illusion of patriarchal beliefs, I examine the affirmation of feminine roles in the next segment.

3.5 Affirmation of feminine roles

To further compound the superiority of male power, Beatrice's father prefers male children to female ones and Beatrice, being a victim of this situation, suffers her father's violent temper just like Ezinma the daughter of Okonkwo's first wife, Ekwefi, in *Things Fall Apart* (henceforth *TFA*) (Achebe, 1958: 31-32). Beatrice, like Ezinma, is always yelled at to "sit like a female!" (Achebe, 1988: 87) when she acts like a boy. Again, her father does not spare giving her disparaging names such as "Female soldier" (Achebe, 1988: 87) as a means to denigrate her gender. Apart from these specific instances, years of subjugation have led women, as portrayed in Beatrice's mother's role, to accept that their gender is inferior and they could only survive in the clan if they accepted male superiority. Beatrice realises that her "mother bore me a huge grudge because I was a girl - her fifth in a row... when I was born she had so desperately prayed for a boy to give my father" (Achebe, 1988: 86-87). In such situations, the feminist empathiser laments the fact that "different ideologies that are packaged in seemingly harmless terms such as culture, tradition, heritage, et cetera, can block people's empathy towards others.... [A]dhering to cultural heritage or even to nation-building as categories for interpreting the African woman's experience is flawed" (Eze, 2016: 17-18). Therefore, the "conception of feminist empathy undercuts the effects of ideologies by centering on women's subjectivities" (Eze, 2016: 18). Patriarchal norms must be cross-examined so that attitudes like preferring a son over a daughter, giving disparaging names to females and accepting or normalising male superiority are avoided.

Beatrice's reactions are Achebe's way of critiquing patriarchal attitudes towards women as objects and inferior. Through Beatrice's characterisation, Achebe expresses anguish at the fact that women are treated according to their social construction, not their biological nature. Feminist empathy shows that in a patriarchal society men construct the paradigms of social living and usually make these serve their own needs. Achebe's positive representation of women led to the creation of Beatrice Nwanyibuife, which means "A female is also something" (Achebe, 1988: 87). She is "endowed with beauty, brains and brawn" (Achebe, 1988: 118). Tracing the development of contributions of women in Achebe's first four novels: *TFA* (Achebe, 1958), *No Longer at Ease* (Achebe, 1960) (henceforth *NLAE*), *Arrow of God* (1964) (henceforth *AoG*) and *A Man of the People* (Achebe, 1966) (henceforth *AMP*), Beatrice, the heroine in *Anthills*, asks Ikem to consider

the role of women in his political thought. However, he becomes angry with her on that matter/issue, which indicates that he is still living in the old order. After Beatrice emphasises women's positive contributions to successfully resisting the colonial invaders, it then dawns on him to consider the proposal. Ikem has fixed his attention on the pain of women so he comes to terms with them. Beatrice argues that:

> For here's a man, who has written a full-length novel and a play on the Women's War of 1929 which stopped the British administration cold in its tracks, being accused of giving no clear political role to women. But the way I see it is that giving women today the same role which traditional society gave them.... It is not enough that women should be the court of last resort because the last resort is a damn sight too far and too late! (Achebe, 1988: 91-92).

In "[i]t is not enough that women should be the court of last resort because the last resort is damn sight too far and too late!" (Achebe, 1988: 92), Achebe affirms the moral, political, economic and intellectual integrity of African women. The patriarchal cultural norms and values which relegate women to the background in the author's earlier novels − *TFA* and *NLAE* − are not apparent in *Anthills*. Men identification with the pain of women leads the latter to struggle for self-fulfillment. According to Uzoechi Nwagbra (2009), Nigerian feminist writers have reconstructed femininity, giving precedence to female individualism and empowerment, thus overthrowing the seeming weakness of females in relation to political authority. The characterisation of Beatrice provides a model for modern women; that is, women not caught in the stranglehold of patriarchy and parochial restrictions. By implication, Achebe's aesthetic preoccupation resonates with English scholar Ania Loomba's (2005) observation that postcolonial women's designation in the postcolonial period is an uninterrupted imagining of the different heights and paradigms of liberation, that is, an avenue to rewrite local history, assuming postcolonial symbols and appreciating the voice of women.

As the plot develops, Ikem understands Beatrice's thinking better. This is made manifest through what he says to Beatrice: "BB, you may be wondering why I am behaving so strangely today. Well, I've come to thank you for the greatest present one human being can give another. The gift of insight. … Insight into what?' 'Into the world of women" (Achebe, 1988: 96). The context of the above excerpt indicates that Beatrice, the educated, is strong and firm, and geared up to resist the old assumptions and representations of femalehood, based on her philosophy. Ben Agger (1988: s.p.) observes that "the major achievement of feminist theory is to make the politics of sex: and gender central to understanding oppression. However, feminism is not only about understanding

but also about action." Extending Agger's argument to a feminist, empathetic reading of Beatrice's actions, we see a clear indication that she belongs to the radical feminist group who blames men for women's oppression. Her portrayal and that of other educated women who put across their ideology for men like Ikem to accept, indicate that they challenge patriarchy, since "[a] goal of the feminist project is to end the oppression of women and attain social equity for them" (Koumagnon, 2018: 93). As a consequence, Ikem gains a better understanding of the new ideology and shows remorse for his past antagonism: " You told me a couple of years ago, do you remember, that my thoughts were unclear and reactionary on the role of the modern woman in our society. Do you remember?" (Achebe, 1988: 96). Here Achebe, speaking through Ikem, his 'alter ego' male character, endorses equal opportunity in power and ending gender suppression. On this basis, I agree with Pucherová (2022b: 209) that "[b]y re-imagining African cultures as dynamic and capable of changing", *Anthills* makes "a non-violent, non-binary, tolerant Africa into a future possibility". The protagonist, Ikem, suffers from guilt and that inclines him toward "self-reflexivity" to strive for emancipation by toeing Beatrice's line of argument. He thus pursues a course of realigning his relationship to women and society and thus redeems himself. Achebe calls for a "self-reflexive" form of moral awareness which allows ample room for all, and men in particular to pardon themselves, restoring their broken relationships with women in the best interests of society. The writer's alter ego, Ikem, who is both a journalist and a writer, provides an example to society of fairness and human development. I argue that *Anthills* is about the outright subjectification of women. It presents the challenges of female bodies fleeing pain and annihilation, but offers hope that attitudes and behaviour can change.

Furthermore, the novelist uses Ikem to highlight the ancestors' tales as a cause of gender disparity. This is established through his love-letter to Beatrice:

> The original oppression of Women was based on crude denigration. She caused Man to fall.… That is Woman in the Book of Genesis. Out here, our ancestors, … made the very same story differing only in local colour. At first the Sky was very close to the Earth. But every evening Women cut off a piece of the Sky to put in her soup pot or,... she repeatedly banged the top end of her pestle carelessly against the Sky whenever she pounded the millet …, the Sky finally moved away in anger, and God with it (Achebe, 1988: 97).

From the narrative above, it appears that traditional stories and myths have played a big role in subjugating women. They inform and shape gender roles and behaviours. Liz Gunner (2007:67) asserts the importance of orality: "Orality needs to be seen in the African context as the means by which societies of varying complexity regulated themselves, organized their present and pasts, made formal space for philosophical reflections, pronounced on power, questioned and in some cases contested power". This indicates that orality, particularly in this case, provides answers to certain traditional occurrences and helps to shape behaviours and cultural ideologies in order to eschew causing pain in women's bodies, although surely, such myths create prejudice against women by blaming them. In *Anthills*, through the myth of creation, the author recognises that the subordinate role of women in society has been created by patriarchy.

Achebe highlights the idea that myths on creation do not primarily hinge on the beginning of the earth. They indicate right from the outset that men oppress women. Feminist empathy's concern is to narrate stories from the genealogy of womanhood in suffering and pain so as to induce readers to position themselves in the place of women and imagine their pain. Here, Ikem's characterisation depicts the changing patriarchal hegemonic man, who acknowledges that everything around him is changing. Ikem continues to highlight that both the Christian and traditional myths gradually developed to dilute men's guilt and conform to changing traditional thoughts, feelings and actions. So, while "that kind of candid chauvinism might be OK for the rugged taste of the Old Testament..., The New Testament required a more enlightened, more refined, more loving even, strategy –.... So, the idea came to Man to turn his spouse into a very Mother of God, to pick her up from right under his foot where she'd been since creation [...] to a nice, corner pedestal" (Achebe, 1988: 98). Here, the text focuses on the life of the African woman as shaped by a "mother-centred ideology", with emphasis on caring. Achebe suggests that women have a new role to play to bring about their elevation. *Anthills*, therefore, shows that women are forerunners in the journey towards recovery. Ikem gains a better understanding of the new ideology and shows remorse for his past antagonism towards femininity. Being remorseful portrays his defeat in real conquest, for his role of male dominance is only imaginary.

It is my conviction that there are some illuminating thoughts on the new role of women in Nigeria. Even though Achebe acknowledges the significant role that women represented by Beatrice have played in the political sphere, he is still vague about the particular role (s) that

they ought to play in order to enhance the needed change as discussed in the earlier paragraphs. In this regard, Ikem argues that:

> "I can't tell you what the new role for Woman will be.... I should never have presumed to know. You have to tell us.... And perhaps because you've never been asked you may not have thought about it; you may not have the answer handy. But in that case, everybody had better know who is *now* holding up the action" (Achebe, 1988: 98).

Achebe uses Ikem's perception that the males since time immemorial have not been clear on the specific roles females are expected to play. Beatrice is the focal point of Achebe's representation of women in the narrative, because she comes to represent the emergence of a new feminine identity. Through her he affirms hope, moral fortitude and integrity of women in the social situations which have kept them in the dark. She is prototypical of African women who have emerged with the passage of time. Achebe uses her role to epitomise the new form of the educated African woman, who portrays restoring post-colonial Africa to a permanent stable and peaceful political and social region. In light of this, Onyemaechi Udumukwu (2007: 311) argues that "Achebe's re-visioning especially in the positive image conferred on women marks a willingness to espouse change". This new direction draws on the syllogism that if "men's participation in leadership will focus more on issues of men's interest" (Okafor & Akokuwebe, 2015:8), then, in the same vein, women's participation in leadership will also focus more on issues of women's interest. Achebe's perception on the new role of women in postcolonial Africa is a complete break away from previous "crude denigration" (Achebe, 1988: 97) of womanhood. Presently, the "new woman" actively contributes to political affairs of the country; cooperatively carries out her work with her male counterparts to develop the country after independence; and has a strong, equal partner who shares her feelings, views and thoughts on economic, social, political and religious issues. Above all, she has a mind of her own.

The urgency of transformation of women must not be taken for granted. This is clearly indicated in the words of the Nigerian feminist scholar Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) when explaining her concept, 'Stiwanism':

> "'STIWA' is my acronym for Social Transformation Including Women in Africa.... This new term STIWA allows me to discuss the needs of African women today in the tradition of the spaces and strategies provided in our indigenous cultures for the social being of women... 'STIWA' is about the inclusion of African women in the contemporary social and political transformation of Africa.

> …Women have to participate as co-partners in social transformation." (Arndt, 2002: 50).

This pronouncement portrays women as a source of change in traditions and culture in African communities. Again, it brings to the fore that the success of social transformation and restructuring needs to embrace issues of gender regarding the conditions of women in Africa. Achebe strives to affirm the moral strength and integrity of African women in order to raise their social status to the level of their male counterparts.

Beatrice's father's description of her serves as the militant spirit foreseen, thus, her assertiveness and obstinacy to soldier on for positive changes in women's lives in patriarchal society by him. It is manifested as she later uses this positive sides to advance the cause of women. That is, in the first place, she attacks the traditional belief that a woman should not name a child. She sees that it "is really safest to ask the mother what her child is or means or should be called" (Achebe, 1988: 223). Furthermore, she does not see anything wrong in a woman naming a child she conceived and carried for nine months, suggesting that women may step into men's shoes because she "think[s] our tradition is faulty there" (Achebe, 1988: 223). In the resolution of the text Beatrice performs a naming ceremony for the orphaned child of Elewa and Ikem:

> Beatrice decided to perform the naming herself and do it right away. She called the little assembly to order and proceeded to improvise a ritual. She picked up the tiny bundle from its cot … We shall call this child AMAECHINA: *May-the-path-never-close*. Ama for short. … In our traditional society, resumed Beatrice, 'the father named the child. But the man who should have done it today is absent (Achebe, 1988: 221).

The point needs to be made that whereas the traditional system requires items such as: "kola nut, alligator pepper,... honey,... bitter-leaf... snaps and agricultural chicken" (Achebe, 1988: 227) for a naming ceremony, the new order advocated by feminists is at best cost-saving. Thus, anything affordable can serve. Ironically, Beatrice does the naming without the use of any traditional elements as deduced from the above quotation, yet it was successful. Clearly, from the above analysis Beatrice represents the emergence of a new feminine identity, thus, one, who can compete equally with men in relation to social, economic and financial security. Yet again, Achebe through Beatrice allows the women to steer affairs and retain calm after the agitated absence of the father "who should have done" the naming ceremony. This is reflected in the laughter by the old man,

Elewa's uncle, who is brought to name the child as he is informed that the name is already given and goes ahead to explain the reason for his laughter: "I am laughing because in you young people our world has met its match" (Achebe, 1988: 227). The performance of the naming ceremony underscores the idea that Beatrice, the heroine, has rightly reclaimed her body which was misrepresented, abused and objectified by her culture. Commenting on this, Chantal Zabus (2007: 8-9), says: "When African writers reclaim their bodies from society's (male) narratives, when they write about their bodies that had been misrepresented, abused, or objectified by their cultures, they invite the readers to consider their pain to pay close attention to their culture.... They ask us to engage in feminist empathy". Therefore, Achebe indirectly entreats readers to put themselves in the position of this female character and then realise that her pain was caused by a system that is inherently unfair. Thus, the system allows the female character, Beatrice's body, to be objectified, misrepresented and abused.

By giving Beatrice a strong character and agency, the novelist has altered perceptions of a woman's role. She is now in a parallel position with the male. So, ethically, her leadership in the performance of tradition and culture has been judged approvingly which demonstrates gender equity: "That is how to handle this world...If anybody thinks that I will start a fight because somebody has done the work I should do that person does not know me" (Achebe, 1988: 226). Alice Walker's term 'womanist' is appropriate here because it embraces the whole person – male and female. The author's switch of women's perspective is that it coincides with Philomena Steady Chioma who talks of an African feminism that conveys the strength of post-colonial African women, their autonomy and respect for womanhood and women's contribution to society. Another example of Beatrice's contribution to society is her philosophy of marriage, discussed below.

3.6 Matrimonial imperatives

Achebe also raises the issue of the marriage institution. Here, he touches on the different mindsets held about the institution between the educated and uneducated. Beatrice, unlike the other female characters, does not remain in the good books of a "good woman". This is because ironically, while her other females see marriage as their main accomplishment and as a measure of economic, social and religious success, they consequently find themselves defeated

whenever this exploit does not materialize. Through the vision of Beatrice, Achebe re-orients the younger generation of women in order for gender balance to be achieved in the institution of marriage. He views marriage as a form of enslavement, especially when a woman is not fully equipped for it

> That's when you hear all kinds of nonsense talk from girls: Better to marry a rascal than grow a moustache in your father's compound; better an unhappy marriage than an unhappy spinsterhood; better marry Mr Wrong in this world than wait for Mr Right in heaven; all marriage is *how-for-do*; all men are the same (Achebe, 1988: 88).

From the forgoing ideology, it is worth noting that these perceptions of marriage are "a whole baggage of... foolishness.... That every woman wants a man to complete her is a piece of male

chauvinist bullshit" (Achebe, 1988: 88) to Beatrice. Therefore, we are made aware that she regards marriage as an institution which depreciates the reverence and worth of femininity. Beatrice's story reveals much about the situation of ensnared young females whose only alternative to marriage is to "grow a moustache in [their] father's compound". Examining their lives, one is permitted to probe the traditional patterns which force them into economic dependence. Would they need to be in an "unhappy marriage" and "marry Mr. Wrong" if they had the means to sustain themselves economically? In this context, these young women are only tools in the grip of the tradition's reverence for the male. They (young women) are a means to an end. This argument illustrates Kolawole's (1997: 27) assertion that, "feminism has always been rooted in African cultures". By Achebe's presentation of Beatrice's views on marriage, he criticises traditional norms which do not seek the welfare of spinsters. He condemns the phenomenon as a consequence of patriarchal power.

Martha Nussbaum (1990:5) in analysing the affiliation between literature and philosophy observes the relevant relationship between form and content, then highlights that in narratives, "a view of life is told" that enables us to react to this "view of life" together with the characters pretending to believe who they are in reality. Then from this perspective, it would be deduced again that Achebe demonstrates the immoral reality that these young women about to be married are objectified and hence lack dignity in marriage, as a result of the culture. However, according to Rowland Chukuemeka Amaefula (2021:290) African feminist writers "make efforts towards reversing

perceived injustices instituted against women" in the marriage institution as Aidoo (1998) also observes. As in male-dominated cultures, females are relegated to the background due to the inferior position in which society places them. Repetition. This provokes pain that transmutes into "a memory" and a "wound" (Norridge, 2012: 4). An obvious question that arises is what Achebe wants his readers to know by focusing on the pain, memory and wounds of these young women. He allows us to feel the different traumas that these spinsters are forced to go through in the selection of a man in marriage because of their gender. Beatrice's interlocution suggests that their best alternative or solution to a poor economic life together with insignificance is a male, a husband, any husband at all – "a rascal". Achebe also wants us to ponder the moral significance of this situation: Exactly what is one's relationship to the opposite sex? How does one want to be cared imagining that he is in her position? Finding answers to these questions aids us to engage with Achebe's moral concerns as he calls for participatory moral responsibility. In this way he urges and encourages us to pay attention to the relational nature of gender identity and difference, which centres on empathy.

Beatrice's thoughts sensitise us to the enormous challenge women face in matrimony. Achebe, like Aidoo in *Changes – A Love Story* (Aidoo, 1991), emphasises the need for both formal and informal education for women in such a situation. Both writers show that a combination of traditional/cultural knowledge and structured training empowers women with a keen awareness of their roles, worth, rights and abilities within their society. As such they become assertive and empowering against patriarchal hegemonic stereotypes relating to marriage. Thus, it is only inhibited women who are cowed by age-old views and domineering men, and who become oppressed by their husbands and fathers as a result. Such women, like Beatrice's mother, hold on to the perception that "a totally reasonable wife is always pregnant" (Achebe, 1988: 88). In the light of the above examination, in *Anthills*, Achebe exposes an emerging Nigerian femininity where women, specifically uneducated women, are bothered about being victims of cultural imperialism, socio-economic forms of suppression and neocolonialism, but not worried about being victims of sexism and chauvinistic ideology. Achebe provides an alternative: that is, to represent female characters as proactive economically, socially, domestically and with a sense of their own importance, so that they can become independent. In this connection, Beatrice decides to be totally 'unreasonable', ruling out marriage from her life. She advises women to be "determined from the very beginning to put... career first and, if need be, last" (Achebe, 1988: 88). This echoes Pucherová's (2022b: 61) assertion that women "should have careers". Women with careers are able to be independent and also reject patriarchy and the "social pressure to make themselves 'likeable'"

(Pucherová, 2022b: 61). Beatrice becomes an example of the "new woman" in contemporary Africa. As an African woman, societal laws or conventions should enable her to have the choice of either working in a white-collar job, be a mother (married), or both. It is in the light of this that Ezewa-Ohaeto (2009:25) affirms that "women have risen with great urgency in defence of themselves". Importantly, whatever resolution the woman reaches must be respected and acknowledged. In this way, she is not disadvantaged by her sex, and instead has boldly embraced her feminist identity. With the passage of time, the African woman will realise and come to terms with the power and equality of womanhood that will result in liberation and empowerment.

In *Anthills*, Achebe projects that when one woman fights back, she liberates all women as they cannot attain any significant effect if they are opposed to one another. So, Achebe depicts a strong intimacy between two different women – Beatrice and Elewa – to fulfil an aim of feminist empathy, which is to transform female-female relationships between women who are unknown to each other and who hail from different backgrounds. Both Beatrice and Elewa are portrayed as confident, strong and rebellious notwithstanding that the latter is deprived of education and uses impolite and unrefined language to express the plight of the suffering woman and the part that women have played in accepting and maintaining chauvinism: "Hmm! But woman done chop sand for dis world-o... Imagine! Hmm! But na we de causam; na we own fault. If I no kuku bring my stupid nyarsh come dump for your bedroom you for de kick me about like I be football? I no blame you. At all!" (Achebe, 1988: 34). The simile in the last sentence,

> "If I no kuku bring my stupid nyarsh come dump for your bedroom you for de kick me about <u>like</u> I be football? (Achebe, 1988).

demonstrates that even the illiterate represented by Elewa acknowledge male dominance over females which has led to the reduction of women to the level of a football. Women are regarded as weak and powerless as evidenced in the insulting simile with negative connotations. Achebe criticises men who treat women as "mere objects" such as a "football". Again, he condemns the phenomenon as a consequence of patriarchal power. Men as depicted in Elewa's presentation are insensitive, irresponsible, selfish and exploitative. They are people with no respect for women and womanhood. Evidently, this provokes a "torrent of emotions" (Hunt, 2008:34) in readers because of the way it sheds light on the pain of women. Elewa, as a deconstructive tool in Achebe's hand, questions the values from within. In so doing, the beliefs of endorsed individualities and severe traditional rules are re-examined. In the end, not only do we create the avenue to fix our gaze on the individual but are also positioned to put ourselves in the plight of women in pain. Again,

Beatrice and Elewa emerge as conquerors with their new ideologies in marriage, because they reject the authoritarian power of men. Achebe's negative portrayal of men in *Anthills* therefore degrades African men in relation to African women. Two views of a strong African woman are examined in the following section.

3.7 Two views of a strong African woman

As already specified, both Elewa and Beatrice are on different social levels. While Beatrice is on a sophisticated level because she is educated, Elewa is the opposite. These two categories of women depict different fortunes linked to the degree of education they have. Comparing the strength of these two classes of women, it is obvious that whereas the heroine experiences social, financial and political strengths – she lacks emotional strength. Elewa displays the reverse, having more emotional strength. Achebe, through Beatrice, appears to underscore the view that the greater the education a female character receives, the better the social, financial and political strength she possesses, and the more respect and dignity she gains in patriarchal society. It is these strengths which enable her to have feelings of condescension to empathise for some characters' pain. For instance, she helps Chris to hide from the military immediately he is declared wanted by the state; she aids Chris in search of Ikem when it is known that Ikem cannot be seen in his house; and she also attempts to reconcile the three friends – Chris and Ikem − with His Excellency Major Sam. Unfortunately, her attempt at reconciliation is not successful.

With regard to the last instance mentioned above, Odubogun (1996:23) posits that at times opinions of women for political positions are disregarded and this act limits women's capability to "influence political, social and economic structural functions". Additionally, Odubogun (1996:23) argues that women should be diligent and committed in the political sphere towards "a participatory and accountable democracy… if their empowerment is to be actualized". Towards the end of the narrative, Beatrice rises while the men fall. She gives counsel to spinsters to rather put their careers first and last than marry "a rascal" (Achebe, 1988: 88) who will only treat them as objects in marriage. Additionally, she names Elewa's baby showing that a female no longer needs to be relegated to the background, awaiting decisions by males. Beatrice's as well as Elewa's characterisations are "imposing new demands" (Achebe, 1988: 217) in the traditions and conventions relating to women's role in order to be respected, honoured and acknowledged as their male counterparts. At the end of it all, their human rights will be accorded when traditions and conventions which work against them are overthrown. It may be deduced from the characterisation

of the two heroines that they conceive and deliver new ideologies in patriarchal tradition and culture which the men, represented by the old man, accepts. This therefore makes both women real conquerors. In all the above analyses, we infer that Beatrice shares in the pain of Chris's death, arrest of Ikem by Major Sam and the misunderstanding among the trio of friends, patriarchal boundaries and limitations set for spinsters' entry into marriage as well as Elewa, a mother, who is not considered by her male partner in choosing a name for their baby, whom she has carried for nine months, thus, only for males to decide to name her baby without her input. Through her exercise of social, financial and political strength, she rights all wrongs done to the bodies of the victims mentioned above. Beatrice is more interested in the pain of gendered bodies than in national matters. It is in the light of all these that Emmanuel describes her as: "a captain whose leadership was sharpened more and more by sensitivity to the peculiar needs of her company" (Achebe, 1988: 229). In view of these strengths, Beatrice is a real conqueror over the all-male trio and other males such as Emmanuel, as well as some females in relation to normalising their social, financial and political sufferings in Kangan. Here Beatrice is not restrained by patriarchal norms.

Kolawole (1997: 116) comments on Beatrice's strength: "Beatrice Okoh is depicted as a shaper and a sharpener of consciousness in her relationship to Ikem Osodi and Christopher Iriko. …[S]he is also a motivator of the head of state of Kangan.... Achebe creates in Beatrice … an extremely intelligent girl". Affirming Kolawole's assertion, Chris describes her as "a perfect embodiment of ideal woman, beautiful without being glamorous. Peaceful but very strong. Very, very strong" (Achebe, 1988: 63-64). Her strength of character and genius give her an indispensable central role. From the three descriptions above from two male characters, Emmanuel as well as Chris, and a female feminist critic, Kolawole, Beatrice is perceived as intelligent, strong, motivated, wise and beautiful. These descriptions justify my acknowledgment of Beatrice – an African woman –as a female character with exceptional vision, cravings, aspirations together with a consciousness that deserves the full attention of society and those she lives with. Beatrice represents an ideal woman, illustrating Ogundipe-Leslie's (1994: 28) view that African Feminism focuses on womanhood as "idealized and claimed as a strength by African women and seen as having a special manifestation in Africa".

In *Anthills*, Achebe underscores the need to pay attention to the collective presence of gender in exercising efforts to execute a common action. It is noteworthy that soon after the demise of Chris, Beatrice's apartment becomes a temporary home and centre of political debates for her visitors who have been part of her recent life. It is against this background that the narrator says: "In the weeks

and months that followed, her flat became virtually the home of Emmanuel and Braimoh and the girl Adamma. … [S]ometimes, especially at weekends, they would all be there together and discuss the deepening crisis in the country" (Achebe, 1988: 219). The context of the excerpts illustrates the expression, “I am because you are”. This notion, drawn from the concept of “ubuntu”, demonstrates that for each character to be a full person, he/she must behave and relate well to the other (Eze, 2016; Robb, 2017; Thompson *et al.*, 2019), since humans live on “dependability” — caring, community and connection. Ubuntu links the state of survival of the body to that of the other. The use of the “you” refers to both the singular and plural forms of the second person pronoun. The two male characters, Emmanuel and Braimoh, have experienced pain as an effect of witnessing the death of their bosom friend, Chris. Similarly, the young female character, Adamma, is in perpetual emotional pain because Chris’s act of saving her from being raped leads to his death. In consequence of all these experiences, these characters are in dispositional experience, thus, forever, wounding for the loss of a bosom friend. Beatrice has the capacity to empathise and sympathise with them because she places her body in theirs, which implies that she could equally have experienced a similar fate. In this way she establishes a link between her feelings for them and their pains. Her home therefore becomes a place where they can heal their pain through the discourses they engage in. This is evident from the narrator’s voice above when he remarks: “The Captain also came quite frequently. … [T]hey would all be there together and discuss the deepening crisis in the country” (Achebe, 1988: 219). Beatrice is depicted as a just and fair female character who encourages the adoption of behaviour that pushes persons to see others, particularly women, as more than mere objects. Moreover, through Beatrice’s role, Achebe shows the contrast between seeing women in a relational order as human beings, and seeing them as instrumental to a further end. Ethically, her role shows that she respects the rights and dignities of both female and male persons – Emmanuel, Braimoh, Captain, Adamma and a handful of friends. However, these males live as imagined victors in patriarchal Kangan because they have been overshadowed by the power of Beatrice’s beliefs. The novelist accepts, and therefore, created her empowering role showing she has to switch perspective in order to implement her ethics effectively, proving that feminism is inseparable from ethics. Collective feelings of empathy and sympathy are possible if we imagine ourselves experiencing the same circumstances as the victims.

The above excerpts illustrate that Achebe's vision of gender harmony between sexes produces a better society. He advocates sharing thoughts on political, social, economic and other issues for men and women to progress socially, obviating the trauma of chauvinism. Once again, the fact that

Beatrice's house (a "woman's home") is used as a meeting place indicates that she is accepted by the people around her, and with the passage of time, society and the nation start accepting the equality of the sexes. This is underlined through Chris' admiration for Beatrice: "I love her and will go at whatever pace she dictates" (Achebe, 1988: 64). Boyce Davies (1986: 12), editor of essays of African feminist criticism, postulates that future works on African feminist writing have "to come to grips with issues such as the treatment of women characters and the growing presence of African women [and male] writers". Beatrice is used by the author to demonstrate that certain limitations that exist in traditional societies could be changed through the combined efforts of women (Beatrice, Elewa and Adamma) and African men (Emmanuel, Braimoh, Captain, and a handful of friends). Obioma Nnaemeka (2003: 3777-3778) sees this as recovery through negotiation. Nnaemeka is of the view that recovery could be made by "negotiation [which] has the double meaning of 'give and take/exchange' and 'cope with successfully/go around'". She further observes that African feminism practised in Africa "challenges through negotiations and compromise, [and] knows when, where, and how to detonate patriarchal landmines" (Nnaemeka, 2003:3777–3778). To be able to recover from these limitations and inequalities Nnaemeka's Nego-feminism which, like Okonjo Ogunyemi's womanism, should be applied in full force. These two theories – nego-feminism and womanism – are grounded in 'negotiation'. Besides, as posited in Chapter One, the former theory hinges on the principle of 'no ego'.

From the foregoing analysis, women ought not to be deserted by men and also the positionality of men must not be contested by women to bring about a transformation in society. The treatment of female characters as active participants in change forms the crux of feminist empathy. In *Anthills* Achebe envisages an opinion of females which honours them as well as recognises their bodies. In so doing, he shifts from the marginal role female characters play in his earlier texts such as *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe, 1958) and *Arrow of God* (Achebe, 1964) to the dominant role they play in *Anthills,* in constructing and mediating the realms of power. Fonchingong (2006: 45) observes that "the portrayal of Beatrice represents a woman shouldering the responsibility of changing the course of female emancipation". Beatrice is pivotal to socio-economic transformations at the centre of social, political and economic schema. Women are distinguished as subjects, not just objects in a society or nation. Achebe's feminist narrative in *Anthills* foregrounds females' depravation of males' ideals and systematised practices and the need to educate society about ending gender-based violence. Such violence is largely psychological shaped by discourse handed down from generation to generation.

In view of the above analysis, Achebe's *Anthills* comes close to Stephanie Urdang's *Fighting Two Colonialisms: Women in Guinea-Bissau* (1979). In this novel, women in Guinea-Bissau hope that through their voices, and addressing the conditions which cause pain and suffering, especially to themselves, they can "challenge, disrupt, and transform oppressive imperialist and patriarchal forces from without and from within" (Nnaemeka, 2005:15). Achebe's female characters and particularly his representation of Beatrice emerge as real victors over the male characters, Emmanuel, Braimoh, Captain and Chris.

3.8 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has discussed the representation of women and men in *Anthills* in the light of feminist empathy and other strands of feminist theory and criticism including intersectionality, womanism, motherism, snail-sense feminism, nego-feminism and STIWA feminism. In the course of the analysis of the text, it has been established that emotional and psychological pain is inflicted on the ruled when leaders exploit, marginalise and betray their subordinates and friends. This phenomenon is worsened when the former exercise hypermasculinity. If the gratuitous pain is not healed, it alienates men and women but if leaders become sensitised to the cries of pain of affected citizenry, reconciliation is possible. Furthermore, it is obvious that the female characters have been unfairly treated by their male counterparts, even to the extent of having their human rights violated, marring their relationships. My discussion of these concerns highlights one of the aims of feminist empathy which is to empower women to have an equal say in their intimate relationships with their male lovers or husbands in order to promote their dignity and growth, equal to men. This chapter has revealed how patriarchy attempts to justify its dominance over women by tracing the long period of women's subjugation, suppression and perceived position of inferiority to the Bible and to African oral mythology. This unvalidated justification is further extended to legitimise the infliction of gratuitous pain on African women's bodies. Achebe's depiction of women in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, however, contradicts the victim image of women assigned by patriarchal hegemony. As a result, Achebe's women rise and stand up for themselves, are actively involved in social, economic and political issues and are also able to voice their concerns.

In addition, two major female characters (Beatrice and Elewa) through their defiance against masculine domination initiate actions that contribute to healing their 'wounds' and empowering their incapacitated bodies, and doing the same for others. Thus, they exhibit agency to resolve challenges related to oppression, subjugation, and conflicts; and they successfully act according to new ideologies that subvert patriarchal hegemonic culture. Some male characters (Chris and Ikem) in the spirit of empathy, identify equally with the women on their emancipatory feminine roles. In view of the above analyses of the bio-politics of everyday life in Kangan, Achebe's heroines, are real winners as evidenced through the strength of their characterisations. By contrast, Achebe's major male characters are represented as antagonists, who live as imagined conquerors in patriarchal Kangan. In reality, they fail as figures of authority or oppressors, and ultimately acknowledge and accept the changes made by the women to the traditional culture. In this power play between the real and imagined, women and men, feminist empathy buttressed by various strands of feminism and intersectionality converge in the post-colonial project. Achebe's *Anthills* upholds the reconstruction of identity and the nation and promotes a positive image of women within an ostensibly masculine social order.

In the ensuing chapter, I continue my discussion of promoting a positive image of women through Chimamanda Adichie's decommodification of female lives in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, using feminist empathy and other concepts discussed in Chapter One.

CHAPTER 4:

Decommodifying Female Lives in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

4.1 Plot summary of *HYS*

The novel *HYS* presents twin major (educated) female characters, each with a different level of consciousness about the experiences of women in third-world countries during and after the Biafra War, culture, career, education, marriage in Nigeria. Kainene ranks high with her view on social, political and sexual issues affecting the voiceless men and women, especially the latter, in her refugee camp during the war; Olanna follows with her views on education, marriage, infidelity and general societal perception of women. A few men like Odenigbo (protagonist) and Ugwu (houseboy to Odenigbo) show concerns and love towards women in their negative experiences of traditional patriarchal hegemony. Contrarily, other men such as Chief Ozobia, Olanna's father, Father Marcel and the white mercenary subjugate and oppress women due to their consideration of women as objects. However, the twin heroines are agentic who provide an alternative solution for the women to escape from objectification, rape, and all forms of domestic abuse by the male characters in the culture. The practice of this agency enables women to subvert patriarchy. I then depict how women characters overthrow male-dominance under 'Decommodifying female lives in *Half of a Yellow Sun*" in my chapter focus.

4.2 Chapter focus

In the previous analysis, I examined the subversive roles that the main female and male characters play in the novel, *Anthills*. Throughout my analysis, I argued that Chinua Achebe, like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Tsitsi Dangarembga, subverts patriarchal hegemony through female agency including socio-economic and cultural interventions. In this chapter, I turn my discussion to the disparate representation of men and women in Nigeria in an analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *HYS*, focusing on how the men maintain their identities as subjects with value, power and control, while subjugating the women through forms of dehumanisation. From this analysis, I show how in some spaces women have developed agency and the power of resistance, whereas in other spaces, they are reduced to undignified objects.

However, in such undignified situations, the affected women continue to struggle to exercise agency and have their voices heard.

A close reading suggests that Adichie has recognised the importance of women's emancipation in *HYS* through the representation of gender inequality amidst the prevailing patriarchal hegemonic tradition and culture (Makokha, 2014). Her depiction of female roles reveals that women shoulder a disproportionate burden of familial and societal responsibilities (Fuwa, 2004; Knudsen & Waerness, 2008) and suffer discrimination on the basis of gender and family status (Correll *et al.*, 2007). The practice of patriarchy has resulted in "a dis-placement and a self-displacement: leaving or giving up a place [society] that is safe, […] Both dis-placements, the personal and the conceptual, are painful – either the cause or the result of the pain, risk and a real stake" (Lauretis & Teresa, 1986:101). This quotation can be used to unpack the representation of the ways in which Adichie's male characters physically and psychologically maltreat the women to the extent that some of them give up and abandon what is duly theirs. For example, the young female bartender gives up her job after Ugwu, nicknamed the "Target Destroyer", rapes her (Adichie, 2006: 458). This sort of situation leaves the female character feeling like a commodity or an object that is used, abused, and abandoned or discarded. Such use and abuse of females' bodies results in degradation and feelings of inferiority and worthlessness.

This sense of unworthiness is what causes the female bartender to give up her job, and in effect she is discarded by the patriarchal system. In a literary representation that values female characters in a specific patriarchal African society, Adichie promotes the status of women rather than that of their male counterparts by decommodifying female lives that have been "[commodified] under the pressures of cultural forces" and subjected to patriarchal forces which have ruthlessly injured the female body (Egya, 2018:77). In this way, she transits women from "the margin to the centre and their contributions to social change" (Nutsukpo, 2020: 84). This opens up space for "remarkable progress in [women's] lives and society and gain[s] [them] respectable acceptance and recognition from even the most stubborn reluctance of male domination" (Nutsukpo, 2020: 84). Furthermore, decommodification serves as a representation that requires us to relinquish patriarchal culture enforced by stereotypes. By this, I argue, Adichie "is exemplary of the new generation of African women writers who respond to aspects of their cultures that they perceive as oppressive to them as women in African communities" (Eze, 2016: 311). The novel presents twin sisters, the major female characters, as Adichie's heroines, who like Beatrice and Tambudzai in Achebe's *Anthills* and Tambudzai in Dangarembga's *TMB,* represent the new emancipated African woman who heals

others and their ‘wounds’. This they do through their defiance of masculinity and particular iterations of femininity, exemplifying what Eze describes as ‘feminist empathy’ by feminist writers in Africa.

The twin sisters demonstrate similar levels of perception about the experiences of female characters in Nigeria, on marriage, career, culture and education. Chief and Mrs. Ozobia, parents of the twin sisters, follow with their views on education, marriage and the career development of women. Odenigbo, a major, educated male character, next presents general societal perceptions of women and experiences the negative effects of culture, tradition and “black magic” on his marriage. However, he is unable to do anything about these due to his belief that “[t]he real tragedy of our postcolonial world is not that the majority of people had no say in whether or not they wanted this new world; rather, it is that the majority have not been given the tools to *negotiate* this new world” (Adichie, 2006: 129). Finally, there is Richard, a Briton, who expresses his concerns about his relationship with Kainene, and suffers the adverse effects of jealousy and racism.

These perspectives on the abuse of women as represented in the selected novel draws attention to Eze’s deliberate attempt to examine the nature of typical feminist empathy, with regard to African writers. By using feminist empathy as a lens through which to read these texts, I demonstrate that these writers pinpoint “two realities that are often condemned in a feminist context: forced marriage and domestic violence” (Berrebbah, 2022:4). Feminist empathy “can be regarded as a form of advocacy” where Adichie uses her text “to echo African women’s issues and concerns throughout her female characters” (Berrebbah, 2021: 87). Nina Mickwitz (2020:459) explains advocacy as “speaking on behalf of or in solidarity with someone who is not able to speak for themselves; advocacy, is motivated by an ethical response, and is, presumably, intended to support or effect social change.” On the basis of these arguments, Adichie advocates for women identified as objects who experience ‘wounds’, pain and suffering in relation to their gender: particularly, women who are victims of rape, spousal mistreatment and other instances of sexual discrimination, in order to create a space for empathy, and effect positive changes such as “diminish[ing] the gap between [men and women], and on the other, circumvent[ing] the discourse of otherization” (Berrebbah, 2021: 85) in the patriarchal hegemonic culture. For Deniz Kandiyoti (1988:274), an effective way of ending sexism is “bargaining with patriarchy”. This entails enabling women within patriarchal hegemonic constraints to negotiate strategies that will allow them to actively or passively resist

patriarchal oppression. Triggering empathetic experience and challenging sexism through bargaining with patriarchy, Adichie aims at decommodifying female lives through the medium of African literary works. This remains a crucially important project because African women can be regarded in several African communities as an afflicted gender "due to the multi-faceted oppression they go through and confront; this includes sexist treatment, [class] segregation, patriarchy and struggle for gender equality" (Berrebbah, 2021: 80).

In decommodifying female lives in her work *HYS*, Adichie, a third-generation writer, advocates for social fairness, justice and the enabling empowering of bodies that have been rendered oppressed and constrained by chauvinistic and sexist constructs. Adichie offers representations of these bodies exercising their freedom or actualising their potential. Adichie's text offers a representation that echoes the core tenets of Eze's theory of feminist empathy. An instance is when Kainene learns of the sexual assault of the young girls in Orlu refugee camp by Father Marcel, who ostensibly oversees spiritual activities there (Adichie, 2006). Upon this discovery, she dismisses him (Adichie, 2006: 499) because his actions inflict pain on women. A reading of the effect of his actions through the conceptual tools of feminist empathy would encourage readers to gain a more nuanced understanding of the suffering of these female characters.

In my reading of the text, I deduce that part of Adichie's concern is the revelation of the gendered structures that hinder and promote human development in Nigeria. As she exposes these, Adichie deals with contemporary social, economic and cultural issues that are pivotal to the feminist empathy discourses that form the focus of this work. I categorise these issues under four themes: The Biafran war and its socio-cultural effects; Denigration of Women; Enchanted men; and The strategies of the wealthy class.

I choose to work with these selected themes because, in the first place, Abigail Mensah (2020:19) observes that "womanist novelists prefer being realistic in their presentation of life to being romantic". Collins Amartey (2013:17) agrees, stating that "womanist writers prefer to tell of life as it is, sometimes of life as it is thought to be and rarely of life as it ought to be. Womanist novelists therefore concern themselves with the ethics of surviving rather than the aesthetic of living". The selected four themes in *HYS* are therefore examined within this construction which will aid in analytically representing the myriad ways patriarchy, the

subjugation of female characters and how they manoeuvre to challenge or overcome their subordinate positions are portrayed in the novel. Steve Ayorinde (2007) points out the significance of Adichie's declaration on the occasion of *HYS* winning the Orange Broadband Prize for fiction that: "This book is my refusal to forget". She therefore engages in historical narration and memorialisation, showing that women underwent additional suffering during the civil war in Nigeria because of their gender. Even young girls like Eberechi are given to an army officer by her parents as a sexual pawn in return for favours that will secure both the benefit and safety of their family (Adichie, 2006). These women are left in the hands of military men who rape, abuse and force them into military servitude. As earlier cited, the unnamed female bartender is offered no security and protection from the assertion of masculinity by Ugwu and other boys conscripted into the army. Her vulnerability causes the boys to rape and abuse her. From the analysis of Adichie's writing, specifically *HYS*, it is obvious that women suffer the effects of war more than their male counterparts, yet they adopt positive strategies that lead to their survival. , I examine the validity of the observation by Eromosele (2013) and Norridge (2012) that sex serves as "a metaphor for oppression and exploitation in the novel" through the themes, "The Biafran war and its socio-cultural effects on women" and "Denigration of women".

In her book *We should all be feminists* (Adichie, 2013a), Adichie shares her experiences about being feminist and her ideas on gender construction and sexuality. She highlights the challenge which she tries to portray as an opportunity to engage with gender to shape who we are. Again, in *HYS*, she succeeds in demonstrating that men have the ability "to [overthrow] the limitations imposed by societal constructs of gender, and to negotiate the way this is to be endured" (Da Silva, 2012:267). These propositions underpin my exploration of the theme, "Enchanted men". Furthermore, Adichie demonstrates how women deal with matters that affect them, coupled with the roles society ascribes to them. More importantly, she presents various issues on the predicament of women and what they go through at the hands of society. In her quest to project characters who seek self-fulfillment through economic independence, she creates female characters who are strong-willed, rebellious and venerate some of the traditions of their people but reject those which suppress them as individuals. *HYS,* therefore, portrays how the female character's activities, desires fulfilled and her challenges and happiness are all relevant themes for analysis (Durosimi, 1994: 111). One such significant theme that I explore in my analysis of the novel

is “The strategies of the wealthy class”. Under this theme, I examine how men actualise their domination over women through their material/ financial wealth and gendered social capital.

The 21st century has seen emerging third-generation female authors such as Adichie, Lola Shoneyin, Warsan Shire and Patricia Jabbeh Wesley employ the above-mentioned themes in their writing. As discussed in Chapter One, Adichie, like her contemporaries, highlights and confronts African gender politics and the appalling human rights conditions of women in her country, Nigeria. Besides, in support of Eze’s assertion, I posit that Adichie makes “a simple demand from [her society] in regard to the relations between men and women; [she] demand[s] fairness and recognition” (Eze, 2016: 2). In the light of this, Maya Jaggi (2012:s.p.) says *HYS* “develops its characters in a period of peace”; going on to say the novelist “projects ethnicity, …, the characters’ grief, resilience and fragmenting relationships”. Apart from this, she uses her writing as a form of resistance to traditions which encourage inequalities between the sexes, and even sometimes threaten the lives of women who are the main victims in most of the situations. These themes represent current issues which challenge women and men, and are brought to bear on the larger society, creating solidarity and awareness. This prompts people to question and critically examine certain practices so that societal problems, emotional and psychological pain and wounds emanating from those practices can be curbed and healed.

Adichie often represents positive female attitudes. Ogechukwu Ikediugwu (2013:3) affirms that “Chimamanda Adichie presents and develops female characters that can stand firmly and take decisions on their own”. She also sometimes accepts males’ positive characteristics but frowns on some male characters’ conduct. The section concludes with a summary of how my analysis of Adichie's text allows one to see expanded possibilities for the application of feminist empathy to literary engagements and decommodifying female lives as identified in *HYS*. This analysis begins with the examination of the theme “The Biafran war and its socio-cultural effects”.

4.3 Biafran war and its socio-cultural effects

Adichie’s *HYS* is a love story which centres on the Biafran or Nigerian Civil War. It is essential to know the historical background to the war in which the novel is situated in order to comprehend situations within the perimeter of the text. Emphasising this point, as already

stated by Adichie, "[t]his book is my refusal to forget" (Ayorinde, 2007:3). She therefore narrates the historical war because it is "the most important starting point for the shaping of the subject matter by an author of a narrative work" (Stanzel, 1984:4). In the war, Adichie shows how women and men, particularly the former, manage pain and suffering and how they deal with trauma. She considers the numerous issues that led to the civil war and she explores what causes certain characters to experience gendered pain and suffering.

Chinyere Nwahunanya (1991) chronicles the work of Nigerian war novelists such as John Munonye and Insidore Okpewho. Adichie, like Okpewho and Munonye, shows that the cause of the Biafran war was political and ethnic resistance. This was partly due to the number of attempts that the southeastern provinces of Nigeria had made to become independent and so create the Republic of Biafra, which caused fierce disagreement to erupt among Igbos, Hausas, Fulanis and Yorubas. Then the Igbos attempted to break away from Nigeria to become the independent Republic of Biafra. By the time the war ended, with the crushing defeat of Biafra, life in Eastern Nigeria saw negative effects such as heightened ethnic conflict, economic and political exploitation and problematic manifestations of class consciousness. This is evidenced in *HYS* through a flashback when Odenigbo, the protagonist, angrily speaks his mind to an African theatre attendant, who unfairly requests a white man to jump the queue at the theatre at the expense of black customers: "You miserable ignoramus! You see a white person and he looks better than your own people? You must apologize to everybody in this line! Right now!" (Adichie, 2006: 43). Upon witnessing this incident, Odenigbo becomes depressed as he reflects on how a black person can continue to discriminate against people of his own race in spite of the revolutionary ideas that accompanied the war. His depression results from the fact that he feels the shame of unrepentant people who think of other races as better than themselves. This representation signals Adichie's engagement with the dynamics of complicity and the internalisation of oppressive ideologies.

The family unit which is the microcosm of society disintegrates because the state or government dispossessed the citizenry during the civil war. In another analepsis, the strained relationship between Adichie's heroines, Olanna and Kainene, is revealed to readers:

> Kainene had always been the withdrawn child, the sullen and often acerbic teenager, the one who, because she did not try to please their parents, left Olanna with that duty. […] they had

> drifted apart, but it was Kainene who now anchored herself firmly in a distant place so that they could not drift back together (Adichie, 2006: 52).

The analepsis depicts the tense relationship between these two sisters on the one hand, and then between Kainene and her nuclear family on the other. Pain is inflicted on Kainene's body which is why she "could not drift back". It could therefore be argued that this strained relationship "speaks to the conflicted relationship between Nigeria and Biafra" (Coffey, 2014: 17). That is, the twins' relationship becomes a microcosm of Nigerian society at the time. As a feminist seeking empathy in one's state or condition as well as fairness in systems and structures, it appears Adichie wants irresponsibility in relationships and the social causes of war to be totally eradicated in order to have "... a world devoid of needless pain" (Eze, 2016: 46). The irresponsibility in relationship neither benefits any particular ethnicity, race, group or class, nor privileges women over men. Accentuating this point, Eze (2016: 6) posits that, "any action, condition or system that renders a body or mind incapable of exercising its freedom or realizing its possibilities, [incapacitates] that body or mind". Adichie (2016:45) tailors her work to offer powerful literary representations of ways in which we can "transform our lives in meaningful ways". In this way, she satirises the yellow sun of the Biafran flag which symbolises a glorious future for the young state in which sexist oppression and bodily pain will no longer exist.

According to John Hawley (2008:15), many critics such as Coffey (2014) have observed that *HYS* is preoccupied with the Nigerian civil war, which serves as "a backdrop for interpersonal ethical questions". In view of this, three major "interpersonal ethical questions" are raised: 1) What relationship exists between families, men and women? 2) Exactly how did men and women react to situations during the war? and 3) Are both sexes given equal treatment during the war?

Maurice T. Vambe (2012:31) posits that Adichie's *HYS* "centres on the forms of consciousness on the figures of female characters who are depicted as simultaneously supporting the Biafran cause". The novelist uses female characters who consciously and unconsciously defend the Biafran war. These characters represent women who are formally educated (Olanna and Kainene) or strongly traditionally oriented (Mama Oji and the traders). These women are in charge of their families and go through challenging odds to get food supplies for them. This is evidenced from the narrator, who notes that "Olanna stood awkwardly among the women and children, who all seemed used to

standing and waiting … and [to] be given food donated by foreign strangers" (Adichie, 2006: 335). By doing this, the women carried out their familial roles by taking on tasks which were previously performed by males. This is due to the fact that the majority of the men had left home to help on the war front. Bryce (1991: 32) affirms that "women had different relationship to the war from men, who did the actual fighting and held command positions." Unfortunately, the realities of war hit their families back home. The absence of males from home, inadequate provision of food and the lack of a good health system push the female characters to take up new ways of existence so as to continue surviving with their families. In this way, the old order is challenged, albeit in problematic ways at times.

In the parts set during war, the text shows how African women, Adichie's heroines, Olanna and Kainene, both educated, middle-class Igbo women, struggle to hold on to the role of familial and community providers for themselves, their families and other Biafrans in order to stay alive. The situations of these women produce humiliation, degradation, oppression and emotions. The war crisis motivates Olanna and Kainene to become aware of their new dispensation. After several months of Olanna's provision for her people despite the danger of being killed through bombing, she becomes

> filled with a frothy rage. It was the very sense of being inconsequential that pushed her from extreme fear to extreme fury. She had to matter [...] would no longer exist limply, waiting to die. Until Biafra won, the vandals would no longer dictate the terms of her life. She was first to climb out of the bunker (Adichie, 2006: 351).

Olanna's anger is rational and strategic in that: "Most of the time, anger is a result of harmful and/or unexpected interpersonal relations. If there would come any kind of conflict and dissatisfaction in interpersonal relations, it might be a trigger of frustration and anger" (Shahsavarani & Sima, 2014:143). Jilly Boyce Kay (2019:593) asserts that "women's anger has been construed as deviant, monstrous or otherwise a taboo, this is --- we might say --- […]. It appears to represent nothing less than a qualitative shift in the affective rules that govern public culture". On the basis of Shahsavarani, et al. (2014) and Kay's (2019) argument, I argue that Adichie's novel attempts to introduce us to the socio-cultural calamities that burden women in Africa and also echo what causes women's tempers to flare. Additionally, it forges connections with socio-political and economic associates, men, so that feminist empathy as a "form of advocacy" is more sustainable. Olanna

takes her destiny into her own hands and pulls herself away from fear of death in performing her responsibilities. The experience of Olanna's emotion shows a fight for the right of a woman to stand firm in order to execute her decisions, and, moreover, is a sign of impending victory for the woman in patriarchal Nigeria who remains steadfast in her decisions.

Similarly, Kainene also goes through the hardest encounter in the discharge of her new roles. Through the voice of the narrator, she informs Odenigbo and Richard "that she has decided to take the risk to cross over to enemy territory" (Adichie, 2006: 505) to take provisions for the refugee camp under her care, placing the welfare of others above her own safety to prevent Biafra from suffering. She, together with her sister, evoke the reader's admiration, sympathy and compassion.

Furthermore, it is apparent that the two heroines have diverged from their familiar, traditional social system, and are newly empowered to direct their own fortunes, rather than being completely controlled. In the midst of all this, imminent death is a constant reality. Although Bryce's assertion that it "touches on many issues to do with the disruptive effects of war on the traditional system and people's lives" (Bryce, 1991: 38) is not made in reference to *HYS,* it is nonetheless relevant. From the text, it emerges that Adichie, through the twin sisters' empowerment, captures the suffering of the Biafran citizenry, especially the women and children's identification of pain, in Olanna and Kainene. However, the twins are not perturbed in that they have withstood fear, cowardice, being controlled by men and imminent death. Through the actions of these two female characters, it is revealed that other women and children from poor backgrounds have their association with their fellow-victims, Olanna and Kainene, as their sole assurance of escape from their insignificance and poverty. Olanna and Kainene are "endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of [sisterhood]" (United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights 1948, Article 1). Adichie therefore allows us to feel the trauma that these female characters — Olanna and Kainene — are forced to go through in the performance of their new roles of supporting the Biafran cause. In the process, they suffer physical trauma as they negotiate both for others and themselves during the Biafran war. Drawing on Sigmund Freud's idea of trauma, Augustine Uka Nwanyanwu and Okwudiri Anasiudu (2019:27) describe trauma not only as "physical injury", but also as a "psychological injury". In the case of the female characters under discussion, such injury, both physical and psychological, results from the violence meted out to them by the dominant masculine system. Therefore, we find that Olanna's and Kainene's new roles

bring pain, horror, trauma and suffering which “threaten the very existence of a people” (Nwanhunanya, 2010:102). In line with this, Adichie’s account of the troubled lives and negative encounters of these two female characters allows readers to experience empathy for the tragic effects of war on its victims.

Women as depicted through Olanna’s and Kainene’s characterisation establish their identities and changing perceptions of gender and familial roles and responsibilities in society, illuminating Adichie’s concern for matters affecting women during the war, even if they are not at the war front. This new direction by women is shown to be honest, equitable, permissible and admirable in individuals learning to exercise their free will in virtuous action. Through their hard experience as a result of the war, the twins become agents of their own well-being and actualise themselves. In terms of feminist empathy, this move is applauded because "feminist thinking and practice emphasize the value of mutual growth and self-actualization" (hooks, 2000:103). In this way, Adichie validates women as subjects who are able to function as agents of change. Their subversion of customs and traditional practices for the independence of women is key to their role in the novel *HYS,* developing themes found in other female Nigerian writers’ works; Buchi Emechata’s *Destination Biafra* (1994), Flora Nwapa’s *Never Again* (1975) and Rosina Umelo’s *Felicia* (Umelo, 1978).

The anxiety of survival requires Olanna to make certain informed decisions in the prevailing circumstances that she has never thought about previously. First, the responsibility of feeding the family and others, coupled with the scarcity of provisions, reduces her to the status of a beggar at relief centres: “Olanna joined the queue and held herself from pushing back. … The incongruity of queuing to beg for food made her feel uncomfortable, blemished” (Adichie, 2006: 337). On top of this, the Biafran soldiers physically attack her to steal the begged food, specifically a tin of corned beef as she returns from the relief centre:

> The shell-shocked soldier followed her out of the gate. She quickened her pace[..., but five of them, all in tattered army uniforms, soon surrounded her. They babbled and gestured toward her basket, ... Olanna made[... some words. "Hungry go kill us!" (Adichie, 2006: 341).

Through Olanna's emotional outburst, Adichie reveals the strength, determination, resistance, agility and bravery that women are capable of showing in their bid to fulfil their objectives in difficult times. The reality of the civil war is that the “shell-shocked soldiers could do anything; [being] desperately lawless” and also because of their “noise-deadened brains”. Olanna does not examine her means or strategy of survival if it is “improper, unethical [to expect] to get food in exchange” (Adichie, 2006: 342) for resisting the soldiers domination. The war influences her to stand resolute and take hard decisions which imaginatively manifest in “fighting, strangling, and killing” the soldiers (Adichie, 2006: 342). The characterisation of these soldiers reveals the strained relationship between the soldiers (men) and Olanna (women). Their action of following her and gesturing toward her basket indicates that they have become wild and dangerous in their state of desperation and threaten Olanna, whom they have surrounded, with violence. As Scheff (2006: 3) observes, such hypermasculinity manifests in violence and makes “men dangerous to themselves and others.” It is in the face of such danger that Olanna makes a brave attempt to jest with the soldiers, and flee from them.

Although, as already stated, Adichie validates women as capable agents of change, from the quotation above, it is evident that Adichie reveals the objectification of women seen in the abuse by the “shell-shocked soldiers”. Even though the soldiers have inflicted gratuitous pain on her (Olanna’s) body, because of her sex, they do not have the ability to feel and imagine her pain. Their sense of male power prevents them from identifying with her. Simon Baron-Cohen (2011: 10) posits that "empathy occurs when we suspend our single-minded focus of attention, and instead adopt a double-minded focus of attention". Such single-minded focus of attention regards other people as objects to be used. He further writes that:

> Being able to empathize means being able to understand accurately the other person's position, to identify with 'where they are at'. It means being able to find solutions to what might otherwise be deadlock between incompatible goals. Empathy makes the other person feel valued, enabling them to feel their thoughts and feelings have been heard, acknowledged and respected (Baron-Cohen, 2011: 12).

This implies that, in empathy, we adopt a double-minded focus of attention in our interaction with victims. That is, we put ourselves in the suffering person's position and address the circumstances that brought about the pain. Through Olanna's role, Adichie highlights that women's pain is ignored, which is why Olanna is determined to overcome the suffering inflicted by male domination.

Adichie invites us to employ a double-minded focus of attention so that we question the systems that bring about the pain of the characters, especially women, in *HYS*.

Through Olanna's imaginative effort of “fighting, strangling, and killing” the soldiers, she inadvertently achieves her aim: "The corned beef was hers". Olanna's physical and emotional state suggests that the traditional social structures are no longer accepted. Francoise Ugochukwu (2011:256) confirms that Olanna's physical and emotional experience "reveals a shift in values, changing attitudes to life and the presence of women at the heart of the warzone, central to the preservation of life". The effects of the war in this novel therefore push women such as Olanna to defy oppression and refuse to accept marginalisation, exploitation and domination. Olanna is a representation of female resistance in *HYS*. She challenges traditional roles and responsibilities, demonstrating Adichie’s endorsement of women’s resistance to traditional norms and male domination.

The third decision is Olanna’s organisation of free private tuition in "mathematics, English and Civics every day" for the children in the camp (Adichie, 2006: 366). In this endeavour, she is amply aided by her friend Mrs. Muokelu and Ugwu, her domestic helper. Education for all, both formal and informal, is another important issue that Adichie raises in *HYS*. Adichie, like her predecessors Chinua Achebe, Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta and Efua Sutherland, in *Anthills of the Savannah* (Achebe, 1988), *Changes* (Aidoo, 1991)*, The Joys of Motherhood* (1976) and *The Marriage of Anansewaa* (Sutherland, 1975) respectively, reveals the importance of education in the lives of both genders. Through Olanna's act, Adichie stresses that education is a priority and the key to success. Utilising an intersectional approach to examine the interactions that cross-cut economic and political exploitation, racism and class consciousness, I argue that Olanna portrays how these interactions and other causes of war and conflict can be overcome through education which creates awareness of one's rights, and offers economic emancipation and empowerment in society.

The war influences the move by Olanna to engage in an economic activity which depicts how the needs of all groups — women, men, young boys and girls rather than the elite minority — can be met, by enabling them to build self-confidence, speak English and Igbo fluently, develop the habit of politeness and take pride in their country. These find expression in the voice of the

narrator who states that "when the war is over, [the children] will all fit back easily into regular school" where they can be taught the essence of "pride in our great nation" (Adichie, 2006: 366). Olanna's act establishes two things: first; the right to education (Article 17 in African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights); second, with the men at the war fronts, the necessity for women to "bear the burden of being 'mothers of the nation' as well as being those who produce the boundaries of ethnic/national groups and who transmit the culture as privileged signifiers of national difference" (Kandiyoti, 1993:377). In this respect, Olanna, together with Mrs. Muokelu, is presented as intelligent and visionary, and is venerated. The positive projections of female characters are a trope that typifies most of Adichie's texts such as *Purple Hibiscus* (Adichie, 2003) and *Americanah* (2013b).

Events in *HYS* portray that the gender of the female characters, is not inherently a disadvantage, but rather becomes challenging because of living in a sexist traditional culture which limits women's roles and expectations, exacerbated by the effects of the Biafran War. Yet paradoxically, these effects have also re-engineered gendered roles by empowering women to take on responsibilities that were hitherto the preserve of men. They have also challenged or opened up new ways of understanding the male ego and patriarchy in general. Adichie, as a feminist empathic writer, through literary language, highlights this state of affairs by focusing on the plight of women. The "[d]isruptive effects of war on [women's] lives" (Bryce, 1991: 38) are further manifested in the following discussion of Adichie's theme; "Denigration of women". Through this discussion, I will show that even though the male characters use sexual intercourse to violently oppress the voiceless female characters, the other stronger female characters exercise feminist empathy with their fellows, and so liberate them from this masculine sexual oppression. The latter women thus enhance the core argument of this thesis, which is that feminist empathy is about subversion of patriarchy so that greater fairness in dealing with women's bodies comes about.

4.4 Denigration of women

In relation to sexual politics in the novel, *HYS* challenges ways in which women are disparaged and regarded as unimportant, especially by their male counterparts. As Jerome Terpase Dooga (2019:136) states, issues related to sex are among the "crucial factors … at the root of the socio-political or economic inequality of women". This is depicted through the way some male

characters, such as the white mercenary, Father Marcel and the boy conscripts, sexually mistreat the affected female characters during the war and also, how some married male characters (Chief Ozobia and Odenigbo) are not bothered by their practice of infidelity.

The author uses acts of sexual violence as synecdoche to represent the violence of the Biafran war. The women are depicted as powerless, so men at various levels of society subject them to rape or sexual violence. Additionally, Norridge (2012: 457) argues that sex serves as "a metaphor for oppression and exploitation in the novel". During the war, womanhood is referred to as "the food" which "is fresh" (Norridge, 2012: 458), to be sexually exploited constantly by either the white mercenaries, reverend fathers, soldiers or boys conscripted into the army. Metaphorically, the body of the women is equated to "food", which is described as "fresh" and which induces the men to sexually "consume" it violently just for pleasure and self-gratification. According to Norridge (2012): sex and violence are intricately interwoven and that the examination of sexual pleasure in [*HYS*] forms both a language and strategy with which to explore and contest violence against women. In doing so, it draws on […] sexual nature of outsider perspectives on conflict, the political choices involved in describing gender-based violence, and the crucial role of intimacy in representing […] wounding (Abstract)**.**

These mercenaries are the males in power, and they use their positions to rape the young and defenceless girls. Chikwenye Ogunyemi (1983: 211) observes three groups of women who are sexually exploited. The first is "the marginally treated woman destined to be raped as we see in minor characters". We are made aware of this in Okeoma's reply to Odenigbo: "[Y]our commander, the white-man mercenary [...] throws girls on their backs in the open where the men can see him and does them, all the time holding his bag of money in one hand" (Adichie, 2006: 406). Our sympathies and emotions increase when the 'big man' on whom the Biafran army depends for leadership is very confident that no one, not even His Excellency, will reprimand him for his rape of innocent young girls. Here, Adichie's novel echoes Achebe's *Anthills* and Dangarembga's novel (to be discussed later), in that it becomes "literature of the flesh" (Eromosele, 2013: 99). In relation to such literature, Madeleine Henry (1992:252–253) indicates the "persistent association of food with women and the likening of women to food". From her radical feminist perspective, Henry points out how both women and food are constructed as consumables that men can devour at will. Such a description could also be

ascribed to Adichie's other two works, *Purple Hibiscus* (Adichie, 2003), and *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009). In *HYS*, Okeoma and Odenigbo are further used by the author to reveal to the reader the debauched behaviour of males, which indicates that for these men, women are considered objects for their sexual gratification. It is also evident that the young female characters who find themselves in such situations are unable to voice their objection to the men's cruelty towards them.

As the plot progresses, the young, needy girls suffer most in the various refugee camps. One of the religious personalities, Father Marcel, who sees to spiritual activities and provides reassurance to the famished citizenry in the Orlu refugee camp that Kainene runs, has sex with the girls in exchange for food. This results in unwanted pregnancy for one of his victims, "that small girl Urenwa" (Adichie, 2006: 498). Adichie describes Father Marcel in a satirical manner and his philosophy of life and work are plainly demonstrated. Life as he sees it, is lived purposely and his control of spiritual activities is the means by which he achieves his purpose at Orlu refugee camp; his survival in the war depends on how he submits himself to Kainene, his supportive proprietress. However, Adichie portrays him negatively because his actions do not match up to what is expected of him as a reverend father. By extension, his negative behaviour rubs off the other reverend fathers in the camp, who also turn out to be figures of subjugation who lack moral integrity. Father Marcel, due to his position as a divine head of the Orlu refugee camp, has unlimited control over those under his authority and especially the young women. Like others of his calling, Father Marcel and other Fathers in the camp perversion of customs and traditional practices for the satisfaction of the flesh sums up their role in the novel. Examining Father Marcel's actions and inactions further, Adichie again shows that the acts of rape arise from the conduct of both his spiritual and physical responsibilities towards the girls. The narrative draws attention to the way the placement of men in established spiritual and social roles over women can create possible avenues for the oppression, tyranny and suppression of women. As Kainene observes, this often results in the infliction of pain on women. It is such pain that evokes in the reader the sense of empathy through which the tragic experiences of the characters may be absorbed.

Kainene dismisses the two fathers from the camp: "You both are leaving now, right now" (Adichie, 2006: 499). The fact that the white mercenary, the reverend fathers, Colonel Ojukwu and the young conscripts rape the young girls exposes the quality of their intersubjective

relationships, illustrating what Baron-Cohen (2011: 12) has called single-minded focus of attention, which deems other vulnerable individuals as objects to be used. This underscores the pervasive deployment of masculine power in its most abusive form in Africa, particularly in a war situation. This negative image of men, especially ministers of the gospel, demonstrates Adichie's condemnation of the culture of masculine domination.

In addition, Colonel Ojukwu indiscriminately uses married women whenever he wants. Just as David ordered Uriah to be moved to the front-line of a battle, so he could have an affair with his wife Bathsheba [2 Samuel 11, 12; 1 Kings 1, 2] (Holy Bible, 1984), ironically, he also sends his 'desiring' women's husbands to prison as saboteurs. Thus, Colonel Ojukwu is portrayed in the same negative way as Father Marcel and the mercenaries to reinforce the author's abhorrence of physical and sexual abuse of women under any circumstances. Odenigbo, on the other hand, is portrayed positively when he states that "there are many of us who can *truly* fight because we are willing to give ourselves for Biafra" (Adichie, 2006: 406). (emphasis added). "Truly" as an adverb means "honestly, without affectation". Odenigbo's use of the adverb "truly" implies that, he would have discharged his service in the Biafran war without subjecting the women to rape or sexual violence. Here, the novelist approves of his love and concern for women. In this aspect, Adichie advocates commitment, love, care and concern, especially in the treatment of women in the course of discharging societal and national service.

As discussed earlier, Kainene has put herself in the young girls' position, and has effectively addressed the system that caused their pain. Here, she thinks about others, not only herself. Adichie endorses the adoption of 'a double-minded focus of attention", as opposed to " a single-minded focus of attention" (Baron-Cohen, 2011: 10) in empathising with individuals. Kainene, therefore, symbolises goodness and fairness**.** Throughout *HYS,* Adichie *,* attempts to challenge and demolish the patriarchal status quo and translates socio-cultural and political realities into human terms which creates a space for empathy for women. In such a space, power relations will be reversed as women will also be in authority or will be responsible for socio-economic affairs. According to Pucherovà (2022b: 217), "authors as diverse as Chimamanda Adichie, Jennifer Makumbi, Chinelo Okparanta, Nick Mwaluko and Akwaeke Emezi propose … male-author-ized signifying systems that maintain and justify women's subordination". In *HYS*, the male characters through their indiscriminate sex with the "women … minor characters"

(Baron-Cohen, 2011), become dependent, exploitative and oppressive, explaining why Norridge (2012: 20) affirms that sex serves as “a metaphor for oppression and exploitation in the novel”. Not only does this occur in *HYS*, but also in the other two primary novels, that is, *Anthills* and *TMB*. Adichie, like Achebe and Dangarembga, therefore, portrays the majority of the male characters in a negative light as a way of demolishing patriarchal atrocities against femalehood. On the other hand, it appears that although women are more often than not socially represented as docile, in *HYS* they are rather seen as “propagandistic to uphold an anti-war position” (Ogunyemi, 1983: 211), self-reliant and providers of support for males, young women and children. This positive image shows that Adichie places faith in the redemptive and emancipatory power of women.

There is much more in *HYS* that points to the ways in which some male characters are abusive. Mention is made of gang rape by the young boys in the army and Adichie highlights the rape cases during the war by further alluding to Ugwu’s younger sister, Anulika. In her case, the soldiers " forced themselves on her. Five of them. ... Near the stream. ... They said the first one that climbed on top of her, she bit him on the arm and drew blood. They nearly beat her to death. One of her eyes has refused to open well since. ... Ugwu ... sat down on a rock and sobbed" (Adichie, 2006: 526). Anulika's experience is the saddest of all the young girls because in addition to suffering the violence of rape, she also partly loses her vision after the incident which necessitates her brother having to share in her suffering. It is through her portraiture that Adichie demonstrates that "patriarchy incapacitates the psyche and the body of the subordinates" (Eze, 2016: 58). Anulika does not reach this state merely because of lack of knowledge, but because of her powerlessness. Her reaction while being raped leads to her body being maimed. Adichie positions herself as one of the many female writers of her generation who has revived interest in feminism by representing the bodies of women in pain.

This dark moment in Anulika’s life allows the author to present the denigration of women in order to expose and critique the gendered power imbalances that enable such violence in the first place. However, for Ugwu, the flashback of rape haunts him: "Ugwu felt stained and unworthy ... He wondered what Kainene would say, what she would do to him, feel about him, if she ever knew about the girl in the bar. She would loathe him" (Adichie, 2006: 499). Ugwu's flashback constitutes a narrative technique deployed by Adichie to emphasise male sexual violence and the pervasive abuse of women.

Furthermore, through Ugwu's experience of flashbacks, he commits himself to making gender equality his business. As Carole Boyce Davies (2007: 563) remarks in her discussion of feminism, *HYS* appears to summon all men (old, young, educated and uneducated) to make gender equality their business. That is, African feminism recognises "a common struggle with African men for the removal of … domination and … exploitation." Most importantly, Davies' (1994:230) thought resonates with Molara Ogundipe-Leslie's observation that "feminism is the business of both men and women anywhere, and in Africa. ... The feminist agenda everywhere in the world must include men and mobilize men in order for us to attain a more successful completion of the work of humanizing society". Adichie's representation of gender inclusion offers ways to think about the achievement of the African feminist agenda.

It is in the light of all these incidents of abuse that one of the white journalists who accompanies Richard offers a piece of advice to both Richard and his colleague: "I hear there's a lot of free sex here. But the girls have some kind of sexually transmitted disease? The Bonny disease? You guys have to be careful so you don't take anything back home" (Adichie, 2006:463). These revelations expose these male characters' biased attitudes towards women. As in Dietz's (2003:399) definition of feminism, which foregrounds "raising consciousness, ... engendering in the name of specific principles, liberty, dignity, recognition, respect" for women, Adichie criticises the negative image that the men paint of the women by problematising the subjection and objectification of women through gendered relations. This is in line with the argument raised in the introductory chapter of this study, which advocates that humanity must be willing to change. This view contends that all women must become conscious of the negative disposition of society towards them so that they can work together to leverage their influence in society and change such biased perceptions.

Though Kainene is not raped, Adichie uses her to highlight women's selection of sexual partners. Kainene takes a decision to affirm her belief in freedom to choose one's sexual partner. For instance, she defiantly and publicly declares to Major Udodi, "My choice of lovers is none of your business, Udodi" (Adichie, 2006: 101). This is when Udodi publicly expresses his reservation about the love between Richard, a white, and Kainene, a black. In his drunken state Udodi utters:

> our women who follow white men are a certain type, a poor family and the kind of bodies that white men like"... The white men will poke and poke and poke the women in the dark but they will never marry them. How can! … it's a new slavery ... But you are a Big Man's daughter, so what you are doing with him? (Adichie, 2006: 101-102).

This vulgar description presents an image of 'cheapness' on the women's part in their sexual relationships with white men. From the information provided, Kainene belongs to the second category of women as the “food” to be sexually exploited, “the better-favoured female meant to be taken to bed but not married” (Ogunyemi, 1983: 211). Even though Kainene, as seen in the discussion above, occupies the position of being a subject, here she typifies and symbolises weakness in choosing sexual partners. This is because flirting with a white man who will never marry her is considered as going against the cultural expectation of fitting into a socially prescribed female role. Traditionally, a woman is expected to marry and bear children for her husband, so society frowns on Kainene’s situation, which is why Udodi rebukes her. Notwithstanding the helpful role that Udodi plays through empathetic engagement to save Kainene from disgrace, it is worth arguing that “empathy [sometimes] may be impotent and cause … a potential malfunction” (Berrebbah, 2021: 87). As evidenced from the text, Major Udodi wants to save Kainene from what he considers to be a bad relationship, but at the same time he condemns her which negates his empathetic engagement, as she defiantly and publicly declares: “My choice of lovers is none of your business, Udodi" (Adichie, 2006: 101).

On the other hand, Kainene is depicted as the embodiment of female hard-heartedness where her reaction exposes Udodi's lack of discretion in his disapproval of women whom he deems incapable of properly choosing their lovers. Here, Adichie is questioning the construction of the African woman as created by the male character. The African woman is more complex than their perceptions. Women must also have the right to choose whom they want to associate with, express their opinions on varied social matters, and make informed decisions affecting their lives, be it socially, sexually, economically or politically. Adichie advocates that men take a proper look at this right and freedom and respect it. She also encourages Nigerian women to be bold and speak out as well as fight for their liberation and that of their country and continent as a whole.

Adichie again stresses that women, just like men, have the right to freedom of association. Dietz (2003: 399) comments that feminism focuses on "a historically constituted, local and global, social and political movement with an emancipatory purpose and a normative content. ... [F]eminism is geared toward action-coordination and social transformation ... changing the world". This is clearly recognisable in *HYS*, as evidenced by many critics such as Gloria Ajami Makokha (2014: 119), who indicates that Adichie's *HYS* depicts that "[t]he problem of patriarchy and domination of African women by the African men can be solved by the men resorting to treating women as counterparts, and not second-class citizens, both in the domestic and formal set up".

Adichie's concern then is creating awareness of gender worldwide and promoting relevant methods for positive transformation in order to live peacefully in Africa. Makokha (2014:116) observes:

> The bruising of human flesh, especially pronounced in the first novel [Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*], hints to the hidden layers of bruising that underpin the Nigerian national fabric symbolised by the Biafran conflict detailed so overtly in the second novel [Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*]. The evocation of enduring trauma is seen in *Half of a Yellow Sun* in the reference to ... the exploration of rape as an experience damaging to both victim and perpetrator. Both novels ponder the role of writing and representation in the processes of healing the national body.

Amuta (1983: 89) also observes that Adichie's novels, especially *HYS*, like Achebe's *Girls at War and Other Stories*, portrays "one of [Adichie's] major themes [denigration of women]; … of the Nigeria womenfolk in the war situation".

Infidelity is another important area of concern in the denigration of women which Adichie tackles in *HYS*. In the novel, we are presented with a picture of the kind of infidelity which many male characters continue to perpetrate. The entire infidelity phenomenon appears rigged to favour only the man, leaving the woman's body 'wounded'. The men's action goes against the phenomenon of using their "bodies to construct our means of living, [and] to take care of each other", forgetting that "a disciplined body creates a context for [good] social relations" (Martin,

2003:219–220). Infidelity in marriage as presented by Adichie depicts men as culprits. All these are made manifest when Chief Ozobia, Olanna's father, keeps and maintains a Yoruba mistress while his wife briefly visits London to see a Kensington gynecologist. What is revealing about Chief Ozobia's misconduct is that "…he has bought the mistress a house in a neighborhood where Lagos socialites lived" (Adichie, 2006: 272). Chief Ozobia is not bothered about his infidelity, showing that he has not put himself in the position of his wife at all because they live a patriarchal world where women (wives) are regarded as the property of their husbands. As a result, the wives are not in any position to probe their husbands' infidelity. This is why the Chief's wife replies to Olanna: "What am I to say to him? ... There is nothing I can say to him" after the latter asks, "Have you talked to him?" (Adichie, 2006: 271). Through this action, the author "teach[es] people what to look for and what can be ignored; … what to value and what to hold in contempt" (Frank *et al.*, 2010:46). Hence, Adichie uses the first-person perspective and permits Mrs. Ozobia to narrate her story to Olanna, her daughter.

From Mrs. Ozobia's account, Adichie allows us to feel the trauma that married women experience because of the gendered treatment of their bodies, consequent on the prevailing culture and tradition. According to Cheryl Stobie (2012:421), "patriarchy is one of the infallible systems that Adichie sets out to dethrone". Adichie holds patriarchy reinforced by stereotypes in contempt. We are allowed to examine cultural patterns that deny Chief Ozobia's wife the right to probe her husband's infidelity. She is in pain but she is unable to express it because of patriarchal hegemony. Here, some feminists have argued that the very practice of infidelity is demeaning to the woman, since it suggests that the husband has bought the wife. Adichie, through Olanna, reprimands her father:

> I wish you had some respect for my mother... It's disrespectful that you have a relationship with this woman and that you have bought her a house where my mother's friends live... You go there from work and your driver parks outside and you don't seem to care that people see you. It's a slap to my mother's face... I am not going to tell you what to do about it, but you *have* to do something. My mother isn't happy (Adichie, 2006: 272-273).

From the counsel above, Adichie establishes that women represented by Olanna are more sensitive to morality, holding that wives deserve respect from their husbands and vice versa so

that there is harmony at home. Above all, solutions should be found for every action which makes women unhappy.

While condemning Chief Ozobia for his infidelity and commodification of women and womanhood, we also need to condemn women for allowing themselves to be commodified, particularly women allowing themselves to be used as concubines, thereby hurting their fellow women. As discussed under “marriage” in the previous chapter of this study, women have been taught that they are their own 'natural’ enemies and that solidarity can never exist among them. This attitude does not promote justice or fairness, as, according to M. Bahati Kuumba (2006:117), feminism should achieve equity and justice through a collective engagement of women “in a participatory process of creating dramatic role-plays from their stories and experiences”. When such participatory actions are taken towards the wellbeing of all, women will not commodify one another. In *HYS*, such efforts are deployed against injustice and inequality towards women.

Mention is also made of Odenigbo, another male character who practises infidelity in marriage. In comparison to Chief Ozobia, he is highly educated and acts rationally. However, he falls into his own mother's net of ‘black magic’ to betray his love for his ‘wife’, Olanna, because the mother wants his grandchild. Similarly, this takes place when Olanna also travels to London and what pains her very much is "his sleeping with his mother's village girl [Amala] after only three weeks away [...] It seemed too easy, the way he had broken her trust" (Adichie, 2006: 281). In this way, the novelist depicts Odenigbo as a shameless womaniser. He does not feel any guilt when he reports to "her that he had been drunk, that Amala had forced herself on him, that it had been a brief rash lust" (Adichie, 2006: 281). Odenigbo’s flaw is unfaithfulness, which is a common characteristic of patriarchy. Odenigbo gives us insight into the reasoning behind most males' infidelity, which he states as absence of their wives or intimate female lovers. Also, women, as seen in Olanna’s inability to give birth and her unavailability, are held responsible for the sexual choices that are made by men. However, infidelity may also occur because it is a socially sanctioned option that is available to men and to which they feel entitled.

According to Sheila Ruth (1990:109–110), "in patriarchy, men construct the ideal in their own interest and the woman whose lives have no purpose outside of being, have little choice". Indeed,

Odenigbo's practice of infidelity, which will be examined later, is evidence that Olanna has "little" or no "choice" over his construction of his selfish interest. Maria Toma-Ikoma (2004: 17) points out that a "husband is socially superior as compared with that of wife's status in African traditional marriage relationship. The African woman must serve, respect and honour her husband". It is in the light of this inequality in the traditional social system that "patriarchy is one of the infallible systems that Adichie sets out to dethrone" (Stobie, 2012). Adichie's concern is not infidelity per se; her concern is the conditions that ultimately facilitate men's decisions to engage in illicit relationships and the emotional pain that it inflicts on women. Odenigbo and Chief Ozobia have displayed a single-minded gaze on their wives, Mrs. Ozobia and Olanna respectively, a point the novelist highlights because it portrays women as sexual objects.

It is not only men who practise infidelity in marriage, but women too. Ironically, Olanna flirts with Richard, her twin sister's 'husband' as revenge against Odenigbo's sexual intercourse with Amala. She boldly confesses to Odenigbo:

> I slept with Richard and he goes tantrum with mixed feelings; "No." Odenigbo looked incredulous, shaking his head. Yes ... Do you have feelings for the man? "No,". He came back and sat next to her. He looked torn between shoving her off the bed and pulling her close, and then he got up abruptly and left the room. When she knocked later on his study door to say she was leaving, he did not respond (Adichie, 2006: 305-306).

Odenigbo's demeanour, which reflects amazement, asking questions, pacing up and down in the bedroom and being unresponsive, underscores the fact that the revelation has wounded his heart and ego. Stephanie Newell (1996:60–61) observes that "the masculine power structure is only apparently destabilized" when [men] make their "futile assertions of authority" over independent women. In line with this argument, Olanna, in *HYS*, asserts her independence by practising infidelity as payback against Odenigbo, her husband. Even though he is not initially aware of her unfaithfulness, he is bluntly informed about it by Olanna herself. This subversive behaviour on the part of Olanna causes him a lot of pain, but it also destabilises him, causing him to lose interest in asserting his authority through such acts. According to Akin Olaniyi and Anthony Akinwale (2012: 150), Olanna's act of infidelity depicts Adichie's "unAfricanness", particularly since she appears to endorse sex outside marriage. While this is "frowned at in traditional African environment", it is "permitted in Western culture" (Olaniyi & Akinwale, 2012:150). Pucherová (2022b: 65),

however, drawing on Adichie's feminist theory in order to develop her line of argument about feminism, posits that Adichie's feminism "is of the liberal variety — it believes in equality of opportunity, in women's ability to maintain their equality through their own actions and choices, and in sexual freedom". Adichie, like her contemporaries, Minna Salami and Sefi Atta recognises that the "postmodern mixing of cultures helps to relativize essentialist cultural discourses — for example, about gender —and this is enabling for women's liberation […], a search for identity, self-fulfilment, feminist emancipation" (Pucherová, 2022b: 65-66). In the end, Olanna's unfaithfulness and ability to consciously break away from the socially prescribed role of silent submission and suffering disarms Odenigbo and causes him to recognise Olanna as an equal match to his authority. Ethically, from Odenigbo's demeanour, he judges Olanna's action and inactions as wrong. However, the moral of Olanna is that "we are no more in the age when [women] are forced to [accept men's infidelity which is] contrary to their wishes" (Newell, 1996: 60). Olanna, therefore, points to the possibility of a gender-equal society where women fairly choose to pay back male partners on a par with young men. Plaias (2014:118) notes that Olanna's retaliatory betrayal comes as a levelling act that fills her "with a sense of well-being, with something close to grace". In as much as the female character, Veronica, in Rufus Okonkwo's *The Game of Love* (1960) "deserves praise" (Newell, 1996: 60) for choosing her marriage partner over her father's will, Olanna similarly "deserves praise" for subverting male authoritarian acts of superiority. Through Olanna's action as a result of the pain inflicted on her, the author raises our awareness of the need for social justice and equal participation in matters that affect humanity, especially women. Here, Olanna does not allow her body to be commodified by Odenigbo, thereby resisting patriarchal culture. Other female writers such as Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross* (Thiong'o & Ngugi, 1980), Seline in *A Wreath for Udomo* (Abrahams, 1956) and Ramatoulaye and Panda in *Gods Bits of Wood* (Ousmane, 1960), like Adichie, contribute to this discourse by assigning the heroines positive roles in their literary works. Unexpectedly, when, in *HYS,* Odenigbo and Olanna ultimately forgive each other for each practice of infidelity, they become very intimate in love bonding.

It is apparent that the element of guilt hangs around all male and female characters who engage in infidelity in marriage. Adichie seems to suggest that we feel guilty in our immorality in order to reveal "our concern about people, society and the common good; it is a compass that seeks to redirect us to our sense of community and fairness, and it reveals our scale of values" (Neblett, 1974:655). Our feelings of compassion for each other's emotional pain easily lead us

to show concern for one another. So, empathy is a sentiment that induces one to understand the feelings of others. In conclusion, apart from the female characters, Kainene and Olanna, who save their fellows from denigration as well as drowning in pain, men can also empathise with females in pain and suffering which leads to men redemption. This is discussed in the next session, “Enchanted men”.

4.5 Enchanted men

Despite the fact that most male characters are negatively portrayed in *HYS,* there are some whose actions and inactions are seen as positive because they do not inflict pain or suffering on women. Fwangyil Gloria Ada (2020:37) observes that some males are “geared towards entrenching a positive attitudinal change in male-female relations”, and are admired by women. Prominent among them are Odenigbo and Ugwu. The narrator creates an aura of sensuousness around Odenigbo when Olanna, his wife, is physically and psychologically affected after she sees the horrible state of her relations – Uncle Mbaezi and her pregnant cousin, Arize – being killed as a result of the war. Through this, Adichie draws readers’ attention to the Biafran tragedy. Physically, Olanna's legs become numb and she is therefore incapacitated. The narrator describes how Odengibo facilitates her recuperation. He:

> carried her in, bathed her... He even sang when he bathed her... [assures her] You'll be fine ... spoke too softly to her ... pills Odengibo slipped in her mouth ... For a while Odengibo had asked their friends not to visit [because] she could hear the rise and fall of voices from the living room. He had stopped playing tennis, too, so he could be at home and Ugwu would not have to take her to the toilet. [Intermittently] he checks on her in bed and asks, "You haven't rung in a while, nkem. Don't you have to urinate? (Adichie, 2006: 200).

His care demonstrates the extreme level of concern he gives to his 'sick wife', Olanna. The use of the words “carried”, “bathed”, “sang”, “slipped” and adverbs “softly” demonstrate that Olanna is soothed as he quietly and gently performs the action of bathing her and generally displays awareness of and solicitude for her traumatised state. The positive connotations of these words affirm Odengibo as an ideal husband who plays a supportive role in the life of his 'wife'. In this way, the novelist attests to the fact that “not all men accept patriarchal ideology” (Tyson, 2006: 83). Odenigbo is portrayed as a positive male character by the author, because he is loving, caring, thoughtful, compassionate and sensitive.

Also significant in this relationship is Olanna's desire for sex. She is always satisfied when she yearns for it. One of these moments occurs when she tells Odengibo, "Touch me." She knew he didn't want to, that he touched her breasts because he would do whatever she wanted, whatever would make her better" (Adichie, 2006: 201). In fact, this act heightens her recuperation and helps her to regain normalcy, enabling her to walk again. Femi Ehijele Eromesele (2013: 104) postulates that Adichie uses sex as a metaphor to "[deliberately] attempt to underscore the humanity of the characters" to symbolise the settlement of substitutes and to also symbolically depict the love relationship between Olanna and Odengibo which is "unlike the typical African man-woman relationship, a relationship in which the woman takes the lead" (Eromosele, 2013: 105). Thus, the sexual act is used as a symbol of freedom, and a metaphor for an escape from chaotic war scenes. As already indicated, Olanna is healed from her physical and psychological trauma through sexual satisfaction, showing that Odenigbo understands and has addressed what Olanna's body needs. His performance of all the actions and inactions described above have enabled Olanna's body and mind to exercise freedom and return to normal life. She is decommodified. Through Odenigbo's role, Adichie subtly indicates the manner in which a man can bring about healing the pain of a woman.

It is for these reasons that some female characters ascribe good attributes to Odenigbo. This is first shown in the second sentence of Chapter One when Ugwu's aunt remarks: "But he is a good man" (Adichie, 2006: 3). This foreshadowing creates expectations about his character in the reader. Second, are Olanna's perceptions: "She watched Odenigbo walk across the veranda, aggressive confidence in his strides. Her man sometimes when she looked at him, she felt gripped by proud possession" (Adichie, 2006: 186). "Good" and "proud" give Odengibo positive character traits. Here, Adichie strongly approves of this loving attitude because it strengthens the husband wife-relationship which in turn wipes away any pain.

In the same vein, Odenigbo, through Ugwu, extends his care and concern towards "the lucky ones" who are not massacred by the northerners. He instructs Ugwu: "The railway stations are full of our people. If you have tea and bread to spare, please take it to the stations. Help a brother in need" (Adichie, 2006; 182). Odenigbo's ability to identify and feel for those in need underlines his masculine role in the community and he is portrayed as a wise and effective leader. His role as a caregiver underscores African feminists' position which recognises and

accepts the potential value and contributions of men. This idea of Adichie is in line with Wole Soyinka, who "[has] at various times agreed that the writer in African society is the conscience of the society" (Ojinmah, 2012:2). From the foregoing paragraphs, we see that Odenigbo has adopted a double-minded conscience of attention in empathising with Olanna, the 'lucky ones' and even Ugwu's mother's undeserved pain. This demonstrates that he regards all these persons as 'subjects', not 'objects'. His role, therefore, is aligned with the argument that, "empathy occurs when we suspend our single-minded focus of attention, and instead adopt a double-minded focus of attention" (Baron-Cohen, 2011: 12).

Besides Odengibo, Ugwu also shows concern towards Olanna's physical and psychological trauma as a result of the tragic scenes she witnesses. Olanna becomes emotionally shocked and traumatised as a result of seeing the unexpected brutal killings of Igbo people in Kano, especially her relatives:

> In Sabon Gari, … Olanna saw the smoke rising like tall grey shadows before she smelled the scent of burning. … The street looked strange, unfamiliar; the compound gate was broken, the metal flattened on the ground. Then she noticed Aunty Ifeka's kiosk, or what remained of it: splinters of wood, packets of groundnuts lying in the dust. … she paused for a moment because of how glaringly bright and hot it was, with flames billowing from the roof … She stopped when she saw the bodies. Uncle Mbaezi lay facedown in an ungainly twist, legs splayed. Something creamy-white oozed through the large gash on the back of his head. Aunty Ifeka lay on the veranda. The cuts on her naked body were smaller, dotting her arms and legs like slightly parted red lips (Adichie, 2006: 185-186).

She falls sick because her state of trauma can be described as "the wounding of the mind brought about by sudden, unexpected, [and] emotional shock" (Leys, 2000:4). Similarly, Olanna's experience can be explained by Cathy Caruth's (1995: vii) notion of "psychic trauma" which is characterised by psychological/ mental pain. From this perspective of psychic trauma, although she herself is not physically harmed, she suffers the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, which includes panic attacks and paralysis. All these account for how "the psychological and physical devastation on [her] psyche is affected by violent confrontations" (Nwanyanwu & Anasiudu, 2019: 27). Through Olanna's "wounds" the text portrays the

author's commitment to bearing witness to the pain and suffering of the people, especially her fellow Igbo citizens. Ugwu extends his love and care to expedite Olanna's relief from the scenes of wounds, psychological and physical trauma. From the narrator's voice, he "curled on a mat right outside their [Odenigbo and Olanna's] door" (Adichie, 2006: 201) so that he might come in handy if his master, Odengibo, needs any item in the kitchen at midnight. Additionally, "Ugwu's gentle knock woke her up; he would open the door and come in with a tray of food that he would place next to her packets of medicine, bottle of Lucozade, and tin of glucose" (Adichie, 2006: 201). Ugwu's service demonstrates the qualities of sensitivity, competence, emotionality, domestication and empathy, showing that he has integrated traditionally feminine qualities with his masculinity. Adichie uses his actions as a testimony to suggest that a young man can move beyond adult manhood and mere service to achieve a wider and better understanding of how to treat women. His unflinching service and support, therefore, dovetails into the author's description of him right at the exposition: "Ugwu's ... walk was brisk, energetic, and he looked like Ezeagu, the man who held the wrestling record in Ugwu's village" (Adichie, 2006: 7). All these have become possible because Ugwu demonstrates double-minded focus of attention in trying to soothe the pain of a woman, Olanna.

It could consequently be said that since the society is changing, men − as represented by the characterisations of the two major male characters mentioned above − should make the effort to practise behaviour that will remove the antagonism displayed towards women. Thus, for society to change, Adichie insists that care, love, concern and support for women must be accompanied by positive attributes. In all these presentations, Odenigbo and Ugwu have been able to heal the pain in the bodies of Olanna, Ugwu's mother and the "lucky ones". Through Odenigbo's and Ugwu's roles, the position of women in *HYS* is dignified. However, while these changing attitudes help to uplift women, the entrenched patriarchal mindset of some men of the wealthy class continues to inflict pain on women. This is exemplified through the attitude of Chief Ozobia towards his daughter, and also through Eberechi's father. Such behaviour is sanctioned by the patriarchal society that has a "set of structures and conditions which delimit the typical situation of being a woman in a particular society" (Eze, 2016: 6). The observation then holds that "a man heals and then destroys". Finally, this will be examined in the next paragraph under the theme 'The strategies of the wealthy class'.

4.6 The strategies of the wealthy class

Another issue that Adichie raises in *HYS* is that of the strategies of the wealthy class which is represented by Chief and Mrs. Ozobia together with Chief Okonji. The consequences of the rich characters' actions seem to suggest that even though it is desirable to be rich, the extent to which richness is exercised is very important. Chief Ozobia's wealth is affirmed from Susan's mini-biographies to Richard: "Chief Ozobia owns half of Lagos but there is something terribly *nouveau riche* about him. He doesn't have much of a formal education, you see, and neither has his wife" (Adichie, 2006: 74). Though Chief Ozobia is not well-educated himself, he is able to educate his twin daughters — Olanna and Kainene — to the highest level. In connection with this, Eunice Chinyere Nwodo (2013:8) reiterates UNESCO's observation that "education will enable women to improve their families, health and diet, increase their productive ability, improve their socio-cultural status as well as enable them to discharge their responsibilities as mothers, wives, and members of the society effectively". Through education, Olanna and Kainene have their bachelor's and master's degrees from universities in the United Kingdom. This enables Olanna to get "a job as instructor in the Department of Sociology" (Adichie, 2006: 38) at the Nsukka University, while Kainene too moves to "Port Harcourt to manage Daddy's businesses there" (Adichie, 2006: 38). The twins have been empowered in urban, Western settings and Adichie shows women's empowerment is the way forward rather than in a man's world, thus, being dependent on a man. This Adichie suggests can only come about if women do not surrender to manipulation. Olanna and Kainene are therefore idealised because of the way they subvert patriarchal roles. These women are able to perform particular roles in society through financially supporting themselves because they are educated. Adichie shows the long-term value of Chief Ozobia and his wife's decision to encourage and support their female children's education.

Chief Ozobia as a rich businessman and politician persistently hosts high-level dignitaries in his home. The businessmen who want to give him tenders expect sexual favours from his beautiful daughter, Olanna. Through the characterisation of Chief Ozobia and his wife, the novel shows that men possess wealth and at the same time are the "holders of power [which] is translated not only into mental body-images and fantasies, but into muscle tensions, posture, the feel and texture of the body" (Connell, 1987:85; Martin, 2003:220). Fitting into these

descriptions, Chief Okonji appeals to Olanna's parents who do not appear to be in any way disturbed by his lewd suggestion of sexually appropriating their daughter. Rather, both parents do all they can to persuade their daughter to prostitute herself. This is evident in the discussion among Chief Okonji, Chief Ozobia and his wife, as well as Olanna:

> I hope you've thought about coming to join us at the ministry, Olanna. We need first-class brains like yours." Chief Okonji said (Adichie, 2006: 38).
> "Such a cool night," Chief Okonji said behind her (Adichie, 2006: 40).
> "I just can't keep you out of my mind," Chief Okonji said again. Look, you don't have to work at the ministry. I can appoint you to a board, ... and I will furnish a flat for you wherever you want."
> He pulled her to him, ... *She pushed him back*, ...
> "I love you, believe me. I really love you". *She slipped out of his embrace and went indoors.* Her parents' voices were faint from the living room (Adichie, 2006: 41) (emphasis mine).

From the encounter above, it can be deduced that Adichie, through Chief Ozobia and his wife, portrays Nigerian women as 'objects' for sale and agents for sex to fulfil filial obligations. Both the Chief and his wife cause their daughter pain. On the one hand, Ozobia's wife plays the role of a supportive wife and a mother who cares about the well-being of her husband and daughter, because she decides to let her daughter marry a wealthy person just as she did in order to take care of her family in future. Olanna's parents do not like Odenigbo, Olanna's fiancée who is a university lecturer with little wealth because they regard him as "one of those hot-headed university people who talked and talked until everybody had a headache and nobody understood what had been said" (Adichie, 2006: 40). On the other hand, she is portrayed as a 'bad' mother, in that she perpetuates patriarchy and is "socially programmed, as are most … men, not to see the ways in which women are oppressed by traditional gender roles' (Tyson, 2006: 86). Such a female character is not only patriarchal because she consciously enforces patriarchal tenets, but is also a beneficiary of patriarchy because the patriarchal system assigns her a certain level of power over others, such as her daughter, Olanna. Her behaviour can be seen as detrimental to womanhood as she is subtly depicted as a 'wife prostitute'. In a way that is similar to Amaka, in Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough*, Ozobia's wife accepts the fact that maintaining wealth and moving up the economic ladder necessitates some unethical manoeuvring tempered with the knowledge that a wife can help to maintain her husband's status and wealth. Moreover, she also plays a subordinate role because of low financial status,

hence her authority is diminished. She fears to question any unjust situation happening in her house in case her maternal authority is threatened by her husband, the Chief.

She tells Olanna:' "You know Igwe Onochie's family? Their son is an engineer. I think he has seen you somewhere, and he is very interested." Olanna sighed and leaned back to listen to her mother' (Adichie, 2006: 277). It is surprising that a female character is involved in pushing Olanna into female commodification. In this way, Adichie again shows how female characters can act in ways that disadvantage their own gender. The strategy she adopts portrays some women as their own worst enemies, revealing the negative aspects of their own lives.

Quite on the contrary, Olanna is "controlled and disciplined [to] do more" (Martin, 2003:220) by her response of objecting to what her parents subject her to. This is realised when "she pushed him back, […] she slipped out of his embrace and went indoors". This makes her a strong and assertive character with moral fortitude. She disciplines herself to remain chaste and faithful. This self-discipline leads to denying her negative portrayal of her weakness but it is for love of a male whose equal she, Olanna, wishes to be. Here, Adichie through Olanna's act of self-discipline shows accomplishment of virtue and self-respect which the reader admires, appreciates and honours, because Olanna feels strengthened enough in her female identity to resist male sexual dominance. She is a person who could be claimed as an authentic African woman by standing up for herself and upholding the image of a moral ideal. Olanna's action against her parents and the financial minister, therefore, rejects the male idea that women can easily be manipulated. Besides, her persistent rejection of Igew Okagbue's son and Chief Okaro's son despite the wishes of her mother, and her sticking to Odenigbo, the Maths lecturer with little wealth, represents the fight for the right of women to choose their marriage partners. This is a sign of victory for the contemporary African woman in patriarchal society to select a marriage partner for herself, irrespective of opposition from her parents. Here, Adichie "bring[s] to our moral awareness the pain that the victims of Africa's patriarchal and sexist structures suffer, and [she does] so in view of initiating a reappraisal of the moral foundations of Africa's gender relations" (Eze, 2016: 70). As pointed out, Adichie draws attention to the situations which limit females' ability to make choices, circumstances which obviously push them to accept their parents' selection of suitors.

Adichie further initiates a reappraisal of the moral foundation of gender relations through Eberechi's, another female character's situation. Contrary to Olanna is Eberechi, Ugwu's love interest in the Umuahia saga. Her parents, like Olanna's, also push her to be sexually exploited by the army officer for the exchange of her brother's and the family's benefit. She painfully narrates her sexual ordeal with the Colonel to Ugwu: "She told him about her parents' pushing her into the army officer's room, ... "He did it quickly and then told me to lie on top of him." He helped us. He put my brother in essential services in the army"(Adichie, 2006:369). Examining Eberechi's actions and thoughts carefully, one understands her psychological and emotional predicament. Adichie portrays her, unlike Olanna, as not assertive enough to refuse male sexual domination through the pressure of her parents. Eberechi, therefore, sees her plight as natural, and complies, based on the customary "obey and worship" mentality. Nfah-Abbenyi Juliana (2005:7), comments that "[t]hese black women sought to speak out and bring their own (her) stories to the forefront, to express their point of view on (black) women's culture, on (black) women's silence". Eberechi is representative of the young generation of females who rely entirely on their parents and elders for sexual counsel and in the process diminish their femalehood and by extension their humanity. It confirms the suggestion that women are forced into a socially constructed limitation by the roles and expectations society places on them. This portrayal naturally makes pain an integral part of their being in patriarchal society. Hence both men and women as demonstrated through the characterisation of Chief and Mrs. Ozobia, Chief Okonji, Colonel Ojukwu, and Eberechi's parents, do not empathise with women like Olanna and Eberechi who are subjected to undeserved pain. Even their fellow women do not feel for the pain being inflicted on them by their own colleagues. The greater significance of this is that unwarranted pain is still inflicted on women by their fellows in order to satisfy the family's and society's obligation of childbirth. This is because in traditional set up, children must heed to their parents' counsel, whether good or bad, for the family's or society's advantage. Both men and women help to actualise this reality.

From the examination of the above themes, it has emerged that violence, oppression and political discrimination are suffered by both the major and minor female characters — Olanna, Kainene, Eberechi, young girls at the camp and Anulika, together with a few male characters such as Odenigbo. This comes about as a result of race, gender, sex and class identities. There are multiple dimensions of suppression and the added struggles these entails are all too often overlooked. Spelman (1988:123) observes that "how one form of oppression is experienced is influenced by and influences how another form is experienced". Race, sex, gender and class identities are 'interlocking', and Adichie seems to suggest the importance of acknowledging

all to enable readers to understand the reality of the women's experience. Crenshaw (1991: 386) explains the continuous battle black women face in relation to race, sex and gender suppression: "Black women are regarded either as too much like women or Blacks and the compounded nature of their experience is absorbed into the collective experiences of either group or as too different, in which case Black women's […] femaleness sometimes has placed their needs and perspectives at the margin of the feminist and Black liberationist agendas". The author, Adichie, as a third-generation feminist writes on this intersectional oppression and suppression in the lives of predominantly women so that readers imaginatively reach out in gestures of empathy to them. In this way, Adichie subtly reinforces "initiating a [positive] reappraisal of the moral foundations of Africa's gender relations" (Eze, 2016: 70). With this aim, Adichie's *HYS* suggests that feminism is first about fairness in dealing with women's bodies; and second, about elevating the status of women.

4.7 Conclusion

From the discussion of the various sub-themes in *HYS*, Adichie shows the Biafran war and its socio-cultural effects, including the violence it metes out to the citizens. The Nigerian female character in the postcolonial patriarchal political setting experiences double colonisation: the first by the British colonialists and the second by the Nigerian man in postcolonial Africa. The Nigerian female characters are presented as having been colonised in both mind and body, resulting in the women elevating the status of African men to a position which is socially and politically higher than their own. Again, Adichie uncovers the effects of the war in which the female characters are usually faced with challenging situations in administering both their "new" responsibilities and roles while their men are at the war front. For wounds to be healed and equality between genders to come about, she calls for responsibility in leadership. Nonetheless, the female characters are able to work out their dilemmas. In other words, femininity has boldly moved into areas that were traditionally considered male domains. This, therefore, indicates that Adichie recognises and dignifies women's role in patriarchal Nigeria.

Traditional men with sexist attitudes abound in the text because the novel focuses on exposing societal norms that give men the leverage to oppress women, and ignore their pain, revealing

that men display a single-minded rather than a double-minded focus of attention. This becomes permissible because unwarranted pain is often legitimised by traditional norms. As far as the denigration of women is concerned, Adichie portrays male characters who are traditional and chauvinist, and who exude attitudes of responsibility and humanity, but who also indulge in acts of unfaithfulness, and disrespecting their wives.

In this chapter l have suggested that women's lives are enhanced if men demonstrate gestures of empathy towards the pain in women's bodies, and treat women in domestic and formal arenas as their equals, not as second-class citizens; and above all, share in women's pain. In line with Sangeetha's (2019: 50) assertion that "women play a considerable position in our society from their birth till the end of life … playing all the roles in a proficient manner" helps in a nation's development. In addition to this, education constructs the African woman as an eye-opener (enlightened) in order to eliminate chauvinism and embark on supporting the progress for self and other women's physical, mental and academic spheres. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2013:801) "targets women as the optimal locus of economic, social, and political development projects". Adichie elevates the female characters to positions which puts them on a better footing in relation to their male counterparts. Thus, the depiction of these female characters in African women's writing demonstrates the application of feminist theory that a new kind of woman is envisaged.

In the light of the above discussion, Adichie, like other contemporary female authors of African literature, is increasingly airing her concerns as a woman, and showing her disapproval of the misconceptions created by some male writers about women. Adichie presents versions of a woman who longs to be fulfilled in an unfair system that perceives women as "appendages" to men. As Pucherovà (2022b: 216) declares, "[i]ndividualism is seen as necessary … for self-definition, [and] as a prerequisite for the recognition of the human rights of each individual. In this way, African women … are able to redefine their bodies that are no longer the sites of victimization, but sexual liberation". In line with Sangeetha's (2019:50) assertion that: "Women play a considerable position in our society from their birth till the end of life… playing all the roles in an proficient manner" in a nation's development. These "proficient roles" refer to the exact portrayal of all the elements of feminist empathy, African feminism, intersectionality, and therefore, decommodifying female lives in this era in Nigeria. In the next chapter, which focuses on Tsitsi Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body,* I develop my discussion of the subversion of patriarchy

through the employment of female agentic force behind the mirror reflection, where female characters gather power and take responsibility for their lives.

CHAPTER 5:

The Power of Embracing Female Agency

5.1 Plot summary of *TMB*

Dangarembga's *TMB* centers on Tambudzai who is unmarried and unemployed young black woman. She attempts to breakout from the entangled forces of patriarchy, neocolonialism and poverty ever-present effect on daily life in modern Zimbabwe. She survives from poverty by daily stealing vegetables from her landlady's (Mai Manyanga's) garden. The system, however, favours the males such as Shine and Uncle Babamukuru. Thus, they easily climb higher on colonial education and are well employed after completing their education. All these make them to see the women as non-significant other. For instance, Babamukuru batters his daughter, Nyasha, and Shine sexually abuse Mako. Upon self-reflection, Tambudzai and Mai Manyanga adopt strategies to overturn their -situation in patriarchal Zimbabwe. Tambudzai's chooses Larky, a wealth son of Mai Manyanga to marry so that she experiences respect and recognition in the society. Change in women's ill experiences elevates them to a new order of things in the patriarchal Zimbabwean society. Chapter focus is the next session to be examined in the below.

5.2 Chapter focus

In the preceding chapter, I analysed how Chimamanda Adichie's presentation of female lives in *HYS* depicts the Biafran citizenry, especially the women and children through their experience of emotional and psychological pain. I argue that the enactment of constructive, well-informed decisions of these empowered women can be read as honest, good, equitable, fair and in service of a world that is characterised by greater gender justice. In this chapter, I continue examining literary representations of "gender inequality and outright sexism in [African] cultures" (Eze, 2016: vi) through my analysis of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body*. I argue that these challenges can be addressed meaningfully if women continue to assert their agency by voicing and giving practical effect to their aspirations. According to Aletheia Donald, Gayatri Koolwal, Jeannie Annan, Kathryn Falb, and Markus Goldstein (2017:200) female agency refers to women's "ability to define goals and act on them" in order to advance their emancipation and empowerment. In my analysis, I supplement this notion of female agency with the ideals of feminist empathy which promotes

solidarity amongst women in an effort to achieve emancipation and empowerment for all. To reach these goals, these female characters employ agentic force, where they gather power and use that power to take responsibility for their lives. In Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body*, the major female characters, such as Tambudzai, Nyasha and Mai Maiyanga, influence the male characters to have control over them (female characters). So the female characters' actions result to consequences emanating from the male characters, which is that the women, take responsibility for their lives. As these women employ agentic force, gender equality is advanced in a patriarchal, hegemonic society. Based on the analysis of Adichie's *HYS*, I argue that while several African literary texts of the 20th and 21st centuries focus on the emotional, psychological and physical pain inflicted on female characters, the author, Dangarembga, sees their "bodies not as symbols or allegories of something else, but rather as homes for their individual selves" (Eze, 2016: 3). The writer recognises the fact that women's bodies belong to themselves, not to the culture or society. Hence, in their writing, they focus on the ethical awareness of the pain that victims, predominantly female characters, suffer in Africa's patriarchal hegemonic and sexist cultures. This is in order to initiate a positive reappraisal of the ethical foundations of the gendered relationships in particular African societies.

With regard to *TMB*, the narrative represents gratuitous pain and suffering in Zimbabwe, much of which is depicted as being caused by the traditional and cultural system. In *TMB*, just as established in *Anthills* (1988) and *HYS* (2006), men treat women as dispensable playthings, because these male characters are products of patriarchal ideology. Mai Taka, wife of Silence, the guard, tells her master, Leon, that "I must go if I do not want someone to kick me tonight like I am that someone's football!" (Dangarembga, 2018: 157). Like Elewa in *Anthills*, Mai Taka has also acknowledged male dominance over females which has led to the reduction of women to the level of a football – an object. The system allows the body of the female character, Mai Taka, to be objectified, misrepresented and abused. Based on this, it can be argued that the African female's narration of her story and advocating an avenue for resistance in the post-independence era is a just and fair act. The representation of female characters' suffering and pain in Dangarembga's narrative reveals the racial, traditional hegemonic and cultural systems that impede women's growth in Zimbabwe. This revelation is signalled in the title of the text "mournable body". Dangarembga performs retrospection through the image of the "mirror" in which all the female characters, represented by Tambudzai, the protagonist, observe and judge ('mourn') their bodies/identities. They express grief over the misfortune of

their wounded bodies, confined within a society that "is a composite of barricades towards [their] journey of attaining visibility, audibility, autonomy and growth" and which causes them to "still struggle to redefine and reconstruct" themselves (Otieno, 2019:1). This retrospection offers the female character the opportunity to reflect on her body/identity from the past to the present. Francoise Lionnet (1995:99) observes that "[i]f the [female character's] self-image is widely at variance with the social and cultural reality that surrounds her, if the reality is a mirror that casts back nothing but distorted reflections, the [female] finds herself in a tragic impasse". The "tragic impasse" is represented by the fact that Tambudzai sees herself as being caged in, a condition which is emphasised by the image that she views in the mirror and that displays the pain and suffering her body has undergone.

Through acknowledging this impasse, these women accept who they are and begin to fight for their rights and opportunities by resisting the patriarchal, racial, cultural, ethnic and economic causes of their oppression in Zimbabwean society. Every experience that the women undergo conveys this primacy of the mirror retrospection through pain and suffering which becomes a metaphor of the situations that the female body has transcended during different stages in Zimbabwe's past and present. *TMB* completes the trilogy which commences with *Nervous Conditions* (Dangarembga, 1988) and *The Book of Not* (2006) as the sequel that reveals the endeavours of the African female characters to resist patriarchal domination in their quest to gain fulfillment.

Dangarembga's characters embody the feminist empathy ideals of self-empowerment, courage, determination, self-actualisation and audacity. Additionally, her text represents the pursuit of acceptance of female agency and emancipation from patriarchy, male abuse and male dominance as discussed in Chapter One, where feminist empathy was discussed as a theoretical intervention. She offers a text that can be read as a redefinition of feminism to suit the conditions of black Zimbabwean female characters. In this chapter, I discuss five concerns that emerge from the text through the mirror reflection of pain and suffering. First, I examine the duplicity of education as an establishment that inherently incapacitates the female characters because its justification is in the traditional structure and racial system. Next, I examine the causes and effects of poverty in the lives of educated women. I then examine gender conflict as an avenue to express "psychological madness", modes of resistance (like vomiting), mistreatment and detestation. All these are the various forms of resistance to the social system, traditional structure, racism and patriarchy. I then examine issues of sexual politics or the

politics of sex with regard to female sexuality. Lastly, I discuss marriage as the means for women to acquire capital from wealthy men in order to be dignified, recognised and accepted in Zimbabwean patriarchal society. From all these concerns, through which I analyse the power of embracing female agency in *TMB*, it emerges that women are victims of patriarchal and institutional powers which inscribe positions and prejudices on them. In relation to feminist empathy, these powers and structures which prevent the positive acknowledgement of women are exposed. The women as determined characters, embark on measures to reconstruct their broken bodies through acts of self-determination, promotion of solidarity among themselves and fairness in dealing with each other through empathy to challenge and critique patriarchy, all of which they succeed in doing. The duplicity of education is examined in the subsequent paragraphs.

5.3 The duplicity of education

Formal education for women is a major issue raised by Dangarembga in *TMB*. Dangarembga reveals the ambivalent effects of education on the lives of women. Her narrative shows that education for women does not necessarily prevent joblessness, and could even sever family bonds and exacerbate isolation. The men in *TMB,* on the other hand, appear to benefit greatly from education as it contributes to creating awareness of their rights, offering economic empowerment, and building self-confidence. In Tambudzai's perception, disappointment in life and the effects of pain and suffering are the preserve of individuals from underprivileged families or social classes such as hers. In comparing her pain and suffering to that of her cousin, Nyasha, Tambudzai's experiences are more understandable than Nyasha's because, according to the narrator, Tambudzai was:

> [b]irth[ed] into a poor family, … struggle[d] to achieve [her] education, planting a field of green mealies and selling them to keep [herself] in school when your mother refuses to vend at the market for [her] as she had done for [her] brother. … [Her] uncle, Babamukuru, your father's elder brother and the head of the clan, returned from England to take up a position as headmaster … After [her] brother dies he brings [her] to his mission for a superior education (Dangarembga, 2018: 106).

From this description, Tambudzai is portrayed as very diligent, determined and strong-minded to achieve her purpose of being educated without support from her mother as a little girl. She tills a maize farm and sells the produce to fund her education at a tender age. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994: 28) posits that African Feminism focuses on womanhood as "idealized and claimed as a strength by African women and seen as having a special manifestation in Africa". Thus, Tambudzai represents an ideal woman as she portrays diligence and determination to reach her educational goal. Apart from this, "the self-determination we think of as requisite to [a] career" (Bartky, 2003:34) is manifesting here: Tambudzai has developed more strength and endurance than was heretofore allowed in order to achieve her ambition. However, the colonial educational system favoured the male characters over the female characters as shown in Tambudzai's difficult educational path. Dangarembga, like her literary predecessor, Emecheta, in *Second Class Citizen* (1975), reveals the family's preference for educating a boy over a girl. This is a result of gender discrimination with Tambudzai relegated to the background. Tambudzai and five other female characters are Africans who suffer racism while studying in the multiracial College of the Sacred Heart. The college's ambiance is harsh due to the fact that they have to compete academically against the white female characters who are advantaged by the prevailing system, and they also stay away from their white classmates. This is as a result of a racist and imperial educational legacy. The African female characters in the college are seen as 'other'. This is evidenced when Tambudzai's award for being the best O-level student is 'stolen' by her white female counterpart, "Tracey Stevenson, the eternal favourite at school" (Dangarembga, 2018). We empathise with Tambudzai given that her experience of unfairness makes her more vulnerable to exploitation or unfair treatment. Dangarembga's narrative Dangarembga's perception of Western education, we need to reconstruct the world she creates and empathise with the feelings of the female characters, especially.

Tambudzai experiences the curse of abject poverty as an effect of her university education which does not yield the success that she had wished for. So, she ends up unemployed, hopeless and a victim of racism and sexism. How does she then survive? How does she challenge patriarchy? Answers to these questions will be examined under "Effects of poverty on women and their coping strategies" below.

5.4 Effects of poverty on women and their coping strategies

Another important concern that Dangarembga examines in *TMB* is the effects of poverty on women and how they navigate through these challenges. Poverty is a common condition in many parts of Africa. A village in Zimbabwe, the traditional setting for *TMB*, typifies this reality. Tambudzai's parents represent the older generation and live in a poverty-stricken village in Zimbabwe. According to Francoise Lionnet (1995), in most African societies like Zimbabwe, the discussion of female sexuality describes "femininity in relation to binary traditional inscriptions. This therefore, positions the females into abject poverty. "Abject" connotes being miserable, hopeless, low, shameful and appalling". Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (2001: 136) discusses how traditional structures in African societies weigh heavily on women, keeping them in perpetual subordination to men. These structures do not only subordinate women, but actually privilege men. As Boyce Davies (1986:9) notes, "privilege … is accorded to males … in general and the concomitant loss … is the females. Women are stripped of everything, whilst men are elevated and have systems that support them". In relation to this, Oyeronke Oyewumi (2003a; 2005b) and Ifi Amadiume (1987) criticise women's subordination and men's privilege, citing how such inequitable social structures result in imbalances that keep women in abjection. In *TMB*, the negative attributes of abjection define the situation of female characters in the village. These characters include Tambudzai, Mai (Tambudzai's mother), Nesta (Tambudzai's sister) and Aunt Lucia (Tambudzai's maternal aunt). Tambudzai's village can be seen as a metaphor of a society that is deeply rooted in masculine tenets and destructive to the female body. Tambudzai's plight is exacerbated by her mother who does not deem it fit to recognise the importance of her body because of patriarchal beliefs. The narrator attests that Tambudzai's mother refuses to vend at the market for **[**her**]** as she had done for [her] brother. This you do not say, because who can speak ill of a mother? To do so will increase the crime of being born who you are and where it happened. It is better to concentrate on the positive things that happened (Dangarembga, 2018: 106).

The last statement: "It is better to concentrate on the positive things that happened", Dangarembga draws attention to the negative aspects of African village motherhood, and the African culture that fails to accord Tambudzai her social right to education. Tambudzai's

mother's words indicate the lack of solidarity between her daughter and herself. Indeed, the mother's act destroys the possibility of solidarity between them. This immediate non-identification with Tambudzai is an invitation to the reader to empathise with her.

All these circumstances cause Tambudzai to grow up poorer and with significantly fewer advantages. This is realised again in MaiManyanga, Tambudzai's landlady's probing question borne out of pain, observation and reflection: "How, with all your education, do you come to be more needy than your mother? End up less than a woman so dashed down by life that she tried to lean on her second daughter — a daughter who requires support herself, after losing a leg in the war" (Dangarembga, 2018: 37). Additionally, Tambudzai's state of beggary makes the narrator confront us with questions of ethical importance: "You wonder whether after all it is [Tambudzai's] fate to become as indigent as [her] father" (Dangarembga, 2018: 56). What are the societal causes of unwanted pain to women? Why does Zimbabwean society painfully prevent women from having and enjoying wealth or riches? The text draws attention to the immorality of this situation which demonstrates the cruelty of inflicting needless pain on women, as represented by Tambudzai.

Perhaps, what Tambudzai's mother is most culpable of is her preference for exercising her responsibilities for her son at the expense of her daughter. Patriarchal societies exercise their tightest control through a series of norms of responsibilities which favour men. This is because they are potential patriarchs, and in matters of headship, "men have to be men". If men have to be men, then it follows that "women have to be women". That is, parents have to fulfill their responsibilities towards the girls. The patriarchal society depicted in *TMB* sees the female body as lowly in comparison to males.

In the face of this economic depression, Tambudzai adopts a means to solve her needs. She turns to survive "on several occasions … harvesting her vegetables … Now and then soon becomes every day … [She] continue[s] to help [her]self to [her] landlady's crop with decreasing compunction" (Dangarembga, 2018: 47). Here, Dangarembga shows that Tambudzai habitually pilfers vegetables as a means to sustain her starving body. She subtly shows regret or shame for her action. This resonates with Sandra Lee Bartky's (2003:34) assertion that "a measure of shame is added to a woman's sense that the body she inhabits is deficient; … Here is additional source of shame for poor women, who must bear what our

society regards as the more general shame of poverty". A woman who experiences poverty is scorned in Zimbabwean society. So, in the words of Scheff (2000), I argue that Tambudzai endures "this ritual of subservience", causing alienation. Tambudzai's idea of shame "arises from alienation" (Dangarembga, 2018: 84). This, therefore, inflicts gratuitous bodily pain, which is structurally reinforced by patriarchal hegemony and culture. While Eze (2016: 26) observes that "the feeling of shame, in turn, urges that person to action", in the case of Tambudzai such shame results in a negative reaction. As the text reveals, the pain that Zimbabwean society has wreaked on Tambudzai prevents her from achieving selfhood and she barely survives by cutting corners. The wound of her body conditions her reactions. Cutting corners is a negative reaction from the commodification of her body.

Right from page one of the first chapter of the novel, Tambudzai sees that she is caged in abjection because she experiences desolation and unhappiness in the patriarchal hegemonic society. Tina Chanter (2006:88) posits that the abject, which is neither subject or object, "designates those unthought, excluded others, whose borderline … secures the identity of those who occupy authoritative positions in relation to dominant discourses". In her analysis, these "others" include "mothers, daughters and wives". Drawing on this idea, women in general are those who experience the state of abjection which is characterised by a lack of recognition of their social status, roles and worth. Clifford Davies (1995:8) explains that the abject "represents the excluded and repugnant effects" of patriarchy. In line with this, traditional proscriptions and prescriptions fail to accept and recognise who Tambudzai is, and in effect she is rejected. In my own use of Davies's (1995) argument in relation to my reading of this text, Tambudzai's state of abjectness portrays that she is "thrown out" (8) by the Zimbabwean system which worsens the image reflected in the mirror: "There is a fish in the mirror". Metaphorically, "the mirror" is the site where the female body is observed and judged. It presents the picture of how far Tambudzai has come compared to how she was in the past, which she comprehends through her flashback. As already indicated, according to Lionnet (1995: 99), the subject is cast in an ambivalence of self-recognition and self-identification through the mirror-image. Using this mirror-image as an effective narrative trope that also functions through flashback, the mirror provides an opportunity for introspection by comparing the present image with the past one. Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* opens with the female protagonist, Mara, sitting naked before a mirror to gauge what has become of her body which has been battered through excessive use and abuse as a result of years of prostitution in Germany:

> I am sitting before my large oval mirror. … I am staring painfully at. … what is left of what once used to be my image. **…** I keep hearing chuckles and pantings … coming from rooms that are same as mine, … there are pretty women like myself, one in each room waiting to be used and abused by strange men. They are all about me. … I feel so very, very far away on my own. So friendless, isolated and cold (Darko, 1991:1).

The female body, then, mimics the narrative of self, a self-reflexive inscription thrown back at its owner for stock-taking and decision-making. In the case of Tambudzai, she is tragically fixed in this reflection.

Consequently, she re-examines her past life as a protagonist in Dangarembga's prequel, *Nervous Conditions* and in the sequel, *The Book of Not*, which in turn is pivotal in her understanding of her current predicament in the last of the trilogy, *TMB*. In *TMB*, she is disgraced and displeased with the image of her female body: "the fish stares back at you out of purplish eye sockets, its mouth gaping, cheeks drooping as though under the weight of monstrous scales. You cannot look at yourself" (Dangarembga, 2018: 5). Tambudzai's metaphor identifies herself with a fish because of its dryness, roughness and inferior form of life. All these reflect her selfhood and make her feel ashamed and displeased also with the colonial country of Rhodesia which inflicts abject poverty, the negative impact of Western education and patriarchal practices on the woman. These have inflicted "wounds", suffering and despair on her body, causing her to become despondent. Henceforth, all experiences of the female characters are seen in terms of "wounding" and suffering, and associated with the image of the fish. Tambudzai is, therefore, an embodiment of "wound", both bodily and culturally. Based on the analysis of the "fish" imagery in *TMB*, which develops from Dangarembga's first two novels, it is evident that Dangarembga's narratives concentrate on misery, violence and agentic force behind the mirror reflection in Zimbabwe. She employs such metaphors and images of misery and self-reflection to bring to the fore our moral awareness that the "wound" that the victims, specifically Tambudzai, suffer result of Africa's patriarchal and sexist structures. She initiates a re-evaluation of the moral foundations of gender relations in Zimbabwe**.** This underscores the notion that feminism is about fairness in dealing with women's bodies. In relation to feminist empathy, the structures which prevent the positive acknowledgement of women are revealed. In so doing, *TMB* highlights the need for female solidarity through empathy to overcome the conditions of abjectness which keep women down.

As examined earlier, Tambudzai is portrayed in a negative light when she steals her landlady's vegetables. Like Amma Darko in *The Housemaid*, the novelist shows that poverty should be alleviated through "proper" means. That is why Tambudzai repeatedly scouts for employment and attends various job interviews until she picks up a "post as a biology teacher" (Dangarembga, 2018: 85) at Northlea School for which she is "not qualified" (Dangarembga, 2018: 85). Unfortunately, she suffers a nervous breakdown which emanates from the effects of her poverty, miserable state, impoverished upbringing and joblessness, so she discontinues her teaching appointment after a gender conflict between Elizabeth's parents and herself. She does not relent in her efforts to have her femininity accepted, and still moves on to secure jobs because she thinks about her future and what she hopes to achieve — wealth and a position of status: "I want to be better. I want the things that make me better" (Dangarembga, 2018: 108). Fortunately, Tracey Stevenson offers her a job on the latest project, the Green Jacaranda Gateway Safaris, which is located on Jason Moyo Avenue — the wealthiest and most desirable space in Harare. On a more profound, aesthetic level, it is only logical that the setting for the office is a disruptive tool in the hands of the novelist. Dangarembga interrogates the culture of inequalities from within, and in so doing, raises our awareness of the vast inequality between wealth and poverty in Harare. In a way, Tambudzai becomes a means by which Dangarembga lays bare the culture of inequalities in Harare, and specifically how it denies black women like Tambudzai their rights and dignity. One instance is where an award meant for her is "stolen" again for a white male worker (Dangarembga, 2018: 107).

The practice of inequality is obvious to Tambudzai as well as Tracey, who remains conscious as a result of her relative privilege and status in Harare. As the plot develops from "Ebbing" through to "Suspended" and finally to "Arriving", Tambudzai "arrives", which mirrors her improved state of affairs. She marshals her energy to take responsibility for her life in order to achieve equal acceptance and recognition as her male counterparts. Here she secures a number of jobs at companies such as Steels et al, and AK Security. In addition, she resides in a new business accommodation that "enables her to obtain appreciable tax benefits" (Dangarembga, 2018: 173), "sit[s] in a purple double cab, to which [she is] entitled" (Dangarembga, 2018: 230) as well as embarks on many professional projects. With a stable job, accommodation, owning a car and enjoyment of tax benefits, she is able to fend for herself in ways that she never enjoyed as the daughter of impoverished parents. Being able to provide for herself and even appreciate her cousin by using "part of [her] first salary to purchase Nyasha a thank-you present" (Dangarembga, 2018: 181), she creates a new image of self that she can feel proud of. The narrator juxtaposes her former

self to the new self: “After your period of troubles, events are finally conspiring for you and not against you. This development that you desired so strongly is due, of all things, … your new cheerfulness is further encouraged by your growing relationship” (Dangarembga, 2018: 166). bell hooks (2003:131), affirms that “when black women relate to our bodies, … in ways that place recognition, desire, pleasure, and fulfillment at the centre of our efforts … we make new and different representations of ourselves as subjects”. In the black woman’s new self, she is recognised, accepted, her desires and expectations are met, and hence she experiences a fulfilling and pleasurable life and also becomes a “subject” just like her male counterparts. Such a situation does not inflict either pain, suffering or wounds on the body of the woman. So, therefore, it affirms Suzanne Keen’s (2007: 123-124) argument that “women writers [like Dangarembga] very often promote the positive consequences of empathetic reading experiences”; thus, here, the author’s narrative triggers a stronger positive sense of feminist empathy. In the foregoing juxtaposition, Tambudzai has been treated “fairly” like her male counterparts, VanManyanga, Uncle Babamukuru and Shine, who are all employed, enjoy societal advantages, independent, self-sufficient and dignified. In this way, she has been able to “fight battles against men” (Geisler, 2004:9) to achieve equality and so has challenged male domination successfully.

Dangarembga, through Tambudzai’s situation, advocates that fairness towards women entails primarily accepting the source of their different kinds of pain. So, it is not merely fairness that Tambudzai wants but also, she seeks to be treated with decency and acceptance of her femalehood. Her struggle for these portrays her as determined, strong-willed, courageous and resilient, attributes that enable her to be “better [and achieve] the things that make her better” (Dangarembga, 2018: 108) in the midst of her challenges, exemplifying that “[w]omen in Zimbabwe are undaunted” (Dangarembga, 2018: 169) by their endemic pain and suffering. For Tambudzai, to be a Zimbabwean woman, one ought to be forceful, strongly-motivated and even callous. All these are necessities for a woman’s survival in a patriarchal, hegemonic culture such as the type that Tambudzai finds herself in. Tambudzai is positively portrayed and the narrator endorses her efforts to take responsibility for her life in order to achieve equality, acceptance and recognition. That way, Tambudzai can effectively liberate herself and also “transcend male-invented limits for women” in her typical Zimbabwean society (Egya, 2018: 79). Through Tambudzai’s role, the text depicts that contemporary female characters in

Zimbabwe can direct their energy and focus attention on their own set purposes, and avoid the temptation to gaze at whatever diverts them from those purposes.

Dangarembga's *TMB* (2018), like the works of some Nigerian male authors — Felix N. Ogoanah's *The Return of Ameze* (2007), Abubakar Gimba's *Footprints* (1998) and Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* (2006) — has identified conscious and deliberate efforts to correct the unbalanced portrayal of female characterisation as well as sensitisation of the public to the important roles women can play in the development of society. Subsequently, through Dangarembga's presentation of her female character, Tambudzai, she creates the awareness that poverty is a social canker and advocates for stringent measures to be adopted for constructive change. Feminist empathy seeks to reveal and end varieties of pain of the victim and then morally progress to a more just life. In the succeeding segment, I examine "Gender conflict" as another concern in Dangarembga's *TMB*.

5.5 Gender Conflict

Gender conflict is another major concern of Dangarembga's depicted by the characters in the text. In *TMB*, males, especially the youth, are socialised to be aggressive and fearless while females are conditioned to accept subservience. So, when female characters decline to submit to this established order, and insist on a fair share of male-dominated power, gender conflict arises. This takes the form of verbal attacks, accusations, physical assault, refusals to assist, disparagement and confrontation. However, while some women, particularly Tambudzai, also use verbal attacks and physical assault on their fellow female characters, Elizabeth Chinembiri and her mother, Mrs. Chinembiri, others such as Nyasha resort to vomiting as a form of resistance to men's abuse. Gender conflict in this novel, therefore, arises from the struggles of women such as Gertrude, Mrs. Chinembiri and Nyasha to free themselves from oppression and their refusal to accept marginalisation and domination. These three women, especially the last two, represent the image of female resistance in *TMB*. They are strong, determined and intelligent. The levels of gender conflict that Dangarembga focuses on in *TMB* will be examined in relation to both female and male characters.

One kind of gender conflict is realised in the type of clothes that Gertrude wears in public. The entire concept of decency − in this case, how it manifests in judgements of the way women should dress, or so-called 'indecent dressing' − is gendered and oppressive. At a combi station bus stop, her apparel, in the words of the travellers, male and female characters, does not conform to society's conventions. We know her dressing through Tambudzai's description:

> She is elegant on sky-high heels in spite of the rubble and the cracks in the paving. She pushes out every bit of her body that can protrude — lips, hips, breasts, and buttocks—to greatest effect. Her hands end in pointed black and gold nails. … she swings her bags behind her buttocks to prevent unwanted sightings (Dangarembga, 2018: 18).

This desire to avert "unwanted sightings" indicates her awareness of the male gaze and her eagerness to police her own behaviour accordingly. From the description provided above, Gertrude's dress does not conform to the standards of femininity as prescribed by traditional society in *TMB*. Consequently, "the crowd shifts and regroups. Men inside and outside combis exhale sharply" (Dangarembga, 2018: 18), suggesting verbal assault. One such instance is when "[a]n urchin grabs a mealie cob from the rubbish in the gutter. The cob curves through the air like scythe. Satisfaction opens up in everyone's stomachs as the missile hurtles past Gertrude's head, taking strands of her one hundred percent Brazilian hair weave with it" (Dangarembga, 2018: 19). Kopano Ratele (2008: 515) affirms that "[i]n several African societies, traumatic acts of violence against women and girls go on daily – such that they may be referred to as part of undeclared yet public gender wars." Gertrude, just as Olanna in *HYS*, is an object of public violent attack from everyone, be they male or female, who are happy to physically abuse her under the guise of 'cleansing' society of women such as Gertrude, and so restoring society's perception of who is a "true woman". Kathryn Pauly Morgan (2003:172–173), confirms the above expectations and gendered dynamics when she states that women's "public conformity to the norms of beauty often signals a deeper conformity to the norms of compulsory heterosexuality along with an awareness of the violence that can result from violating those norms". Again, Dangarembga, like Morgan, reveals that a woman's (Gertrude's) body is "viewed as a "primitive entity" that is seen only as a potential, as a kind of raw material to be exploited in terms of appearance … as defined by the colonizing culture" (Morgan, 2003: 173). Zimbabwean culture and tradition empower both genders, especially the males, to taunt, harass and disable their female counterparts' bodies for failing to appear 'decent'.

"Correction" through physical abuse inflicts emotional pain on the woman. In this way, Dangarembga calls attention to the issue of women's complicity in gendered oppression.

Also, Gertrude is exposed to disparaging remarks and verbal attacks from all sorts of travellers, from child urchins to mature adults. Typically, the combi driver sneers, "What's the matter with you? Since when are naked people allowed to come into vehicles? My car wants to go, with self-respecting people! How can it now, if it's packed with naked women?" (Dangarembga, 2018: 19-20). The driver's verbal abuse of Gertrude shows that "men enjoy certain privileges that derive solely from their gender, the most obvious of which is the unquestioned control over their bodies, especially with regard to [their] functions" (Eze, 2016: 26). This articulates the attitudes of most men in African patriarchal traditions written about by contemporary African third-generation women writers such as Tsitsi Dangarembga. In *TMB*, Gertrude suffers rejection and abuse by a society that is prescriptive according to the established codes of patriarchal consciousness with regard to the female body's configuration and presentation in the public space — something that is not required of the male body. She, like Olanna (Chapter 4), suffers Cathy Caruth's idea of "psychic trauma", where she is physically harmed and suffers the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, which includes "abandonment, rejection, betrayal" (Kaplan, 2005:1). All these forms of abuse show "the psychological and physical devastation on [Gertrude's] psyche [which] are affected by violent confrontations" by both genders (Nwanyanwu & Anasiudu, 2019: 27). My reading therefore resonates with Ratele's (2008: 517) observation that "masculinities are better seen as created at both the social and psychological level, something males do and establish in ongoing activity in relation to females, to other males, but also in relation to their own inner lives". Although the violent attack on Gertrude is carried out by both male and female characters, the former constitute the majority and are louder than the latter. The female characters appear to be complicit in this violence even though this may be silent. At one level, their silence depicts that they are protecting themselves, while on the other, their silence may indicate a certain level of hesitancy in their complicity, suggesting feminist empathy towards the female victim.

Gertrude's way of dressing, which society equates with nakedness, undermines the struggle against male domination and maltreatment of women. Her representation reveals that women are often deemed as not possessing dignity "[w]ithin African cultural traditions, beliefs and practices" (Pui-Ian, 2004: 10). This is because society often tends to portray them as "marginalized women and render them as second-class citizens" (Pui-Ian, 2004: 8). In the light

of the foregoing analysis, it can be argued that Zimbabwean society has little or no concern for the pain of its members, especially the women, because they are regarded as "second-class citizens". However, these women still forge ahead as they challenge patriarchy.

As earlier discussed, the text reveals that, similar to Darko's *the Housemaid* and *Beyond the Horizon,* some female characters also scheme against their fellow women to denigrate them and we see that Gertrude additionally suffers at the hands of women. Tambudzai is one of the women who attacks her. Ironically, Tambudzai who is a hostel mate of Gertrude and moreover a woman, does not respond to Gertrude's plea for help at that painful moment, for "[she] drops [her] gaze but do[es] not walk off" after Gertrude pleads "Help me" (Dangarembga, 2018: 21).

Tambudzai is complicit in the attempt to cover up the scandal, thus, the male characters actions of physically abusing Gertrude. Charlotte Knowles (2019:243) explains that "[c]omplicity describes the way in which an agent can help to reinforce or perpetuate their own unfreedom." Tambudzai chooses to adopt a way of life that alienates them, Gertrude and herself, from their own freedom. Her actions and inactions symbolise the lack of solidarity between these female characters, who are hostel mates. The questions then to be asked are "what should Tambudzai, the contemporary Zimbabwean woman, undertake in order to salvage the body class and gender of her own colleague?" and "how does she deal with the pain that Gertrude is experiencing?"

Drawing on Simone de Beauvoir's theories in order to develop her own arguments about complicity, Knowles (2019: 244) argues that

> women's unfreedom, … their unequal position in society and their subordination to [are dependent] on men. This idea finds its philosophical articulation in the notion of woman as "Other". Not only are women unfree in a material sense, having fewer resources and fewer opportunities than men, but at a more universal level women are unfree because they are conceived of as the "Other".

She further acknowledges that "the man who sets the woman up as an Other will thus find in her a deep complicity". In this light, Tambudzai's refusal to offer assistance to her roommate, Gertrude, establishes that she does not "reject her position as the Other, as man's passive and dependent counterpart, rather she accepts and even embraces this position" of complicity, despite the fact that

it is one in which her "humanity is effectively denied" and her freedom is "effective[ly] suppress[ed]" (Kruks, 1987:115). From this analysis, women are seen as the "Other", which depicts the particular manner in which they are perceived in the African world which "encompasses both the objective and subjective aspects of experience" (Moi, 1999:68). Knowles (2019: 245), in the words of Susan James, posits that "situation is the key determinant of women's complicity", in that "freedom can only exist between equals who are not bound by relations of dependence" (James, 2003:165). From *TMB*, Tambudzai's and Gertrude's situation is one of extreme dependence on men, so they lack socio-political freedom, leading the former "to become complicit in ways of life [she] would not otherwise choose" (Knowles, 2019: 245). Based on this reading, "complicity is not a matter of choice" (James, 2003: 160). But women's position of "Other", and situation of dependence as well as subordination "distorts their psychology" (Knowles, 2019: 246). I argue that this distortion rather preserves the strength of women like Tambudzai and yet some female characters, working as agents of opposition, still act to reinforce rather than resist their own imprisonment. Tambudzai inflicts wounds and pain on the female victim, Gertrude, because Tambudzai is a product of patriarchy. Her behaviour in relation to Gertrude would not be welcomed by any woman who endorses feminism. Gertrude is worthy of compassion as posited in Chapter One, with reference to Barnett and Mann's (2019:230) perspective of feminist empathy, which deals with "a cognitive and emotional understanding of another's experience, resulting in an emotional response that is congruent with a view that others are worthy of compassion and respect and have intrinsic worth". This reflects the way Tambudzai's action of complicity in *TMB* may be judged. The narrative of *TMB* is a true reflection of the fundamental assumption of patriarchy which raises the question, "do women's bodies really belong to them?" In response to this question, Eze avers: "Patriarchy assumes that women's bodies belong to society, that is men" (Eze, 2016: 147). Tambudzai obviously fails to see Gertrude as a person with dignity; she sees her as an object. We observe a parallel between Tambudzai and all the male characters at the combi station in regard to their critical attitude towards Gertrude, and by extension, all women. The text therefore demonstrates the objectification of women, and documents the challenges of female African bodies being wounded and marginalised in Zimbabwean society.

Tambudzai's act of refusal could be described as similar to death of the sense of self: "refusal may be akin to a kind of death" (Morgan, 2003: 177). The metaphor of the death of the sense of self is seen in the further destruction and abuse of Gertrude's body by the men since

Tambudzai's refusal to assist enables the men — "the young driver, urchin, a builder, a man, [a]Another urchin" (Dangarembga, 2018: 22) − become strong in character and, therefore, they can physically and verbally attack Gertrude till she gets dressed "decently". In this instance, Tambudzai is presented as the embodiment of female hard-heartedness, because her attitude towards Gertrude amounts to vengeance against her fellow female. Her behaviour undermines the struggle against male domination and maltreatment of women. Additionally, her passivity serves as a foreshadowing of her future behaviour; her refusal to support and coordinate with another female colleague, Mrs. Chinemibiri, again. This subsequent concern that Dangarembga raises will be examined later.

On the other side of the divide, Tambudzai is portrayed positively, as shown and quoted above (Dangarembga, 2018: 21). In some sections of the novel, Tambudzai represents contemporary women who socially support their societies to attain fairness in the practices of their cultures. In the minds of the affected women such as Gertrude, their own gender (that is, other women) do not really love them, as the love they show is only superficial.

In the exposition of the novel — "Ebbing" — Gertrude, despite her "evil" behaviour, seems to regret her manner of dressing. She is, for instance, described as standing "shivering, head bowed" (Dangarembga, 2018: 22), because of her self-reflection of what she has lost: recognition, acceptance and dignity. This makes her a complex character. The portrayal of Gertrude's grief does not augur well for the much-needed sisterhood espoused by African feminist ideology and casts her in an anti-feminist mould. According to Oyeronke Oyewumi (2003b:15–16), sisterhood is "where women are aware of the ongoing gender imbalances and want to actively take part in changing those imbalances". Also, Mari Bergman (2016:4) asserts that sisterhood embraces women for they share "common experiences and connections … not biologically related to each other but who share something with each other on the basis of their shared experiences as being oppressed by the patriarchy." As argued earlier, and underscored by Yaba Amgborale Blay (2008:62), Gertrude and Tambudzai fail to gather strength as a unified front to challenge and critique hypermasculine action in order to depict that

> pa-tria-archy is the cross
> women carry, [hence, they are] charged
> we must unite
> to fight it
> with all our might

(Yaba Amgborale Blay, 2008: 62; see also, Oyewumi, 2003a)

In the same vein, Nancy Topping Bazin (1989:11) also cautions that "uniting together would be so much better than [women] being isolated […]. Women should choose to be "solidaires" rather than "solitaires." From Blay (2008) and Bazin's (1989) statements it is evident how the notion of feminist empathy aligns with solidarity.

Gertrude's experience and Tambudzai's refusal to help her, strongly demonstrates that the society depicted in *TMB* does not support 'indecency' in dressing. Dangarembga comes close to Ayi Kwei Armah's and Amma Darko's descriptions of women as dependent on others, especially men for direction in *The Beautyful Ones are not Born*, *Beyond the Horizon* and *The Housemaid* while (in this contextual portrayal of Gertrude) she comes into direct conflict with some African male and female writers like Sembene Ousmane's and Ama Ata Aidoo's descriptions of women as strong and independent in *God's Bits of Wood* and *Changes: A Love Story* respectively. Other writers just present dressing and leave the reader to draw his or her own conclusions contextually, as in Mawuli Adzei's *The Jewel of Kabibi* (2014:173):

> She staggered on her high-heeled shoes like an acrobat on stilts. She tripped over a small rock and lost her balance. She stooped to examine her right toe which was hurting from the impact. Her buttocks jutted out from the high helm of her skirt like a pair of ripe pawpaws. Two women passers-by cursed under their breath and went their way.

The critical consideration in the above is that, even for a commercial sex worker like the girl in question (Salma) for whom skimpy dressing is part of the trade, fellow women are unhappy seeing her and "curse under their breath". Thus, it is obvious that this representation of so-called indecent dressing is in no way neutral. Rather, it is loaded with connotations of the rigid and gendered cultural expectations of what constitutes 'decency' within the society. It must be emphasised though, that there are two sides to this issue. First, for the womenfolk, including Tambudzai, in a patriarchal society where women's bodies are commodified, exploited and abused, "decent" dressing is an act on the part of the woman to preserve and uphold the inviolability of the female body. As is evident from the foregoing analysis, it appears to conform to Eugenia Kaw's (2003:189) view that gender ideology states "beauty should be a primary goal of women. [Women should be] conscious that because they are women, they must

conform to certain standards of beauty". Hence, Dangarembga, through Gertrude's characterisation, draws attention to the need for women to look their 'best', according to societal norms. Second, for the menfolk, defining and determining "correctness" in female dressing is part of their arsenal of patriarchal hegemony. The text shows that such societal norms and attitudes generate gender conflict.

Further examples of this are found in the relationship between a teacher and pupil on the one hand, and a father versus a daughter on the other. The resulting conflict from these encounters may be seen as the cause of Tambudzai's solitude, unemployment and alienation from family after her Western education. She becomes abusive to her fellow females as a form of expressing her emotions and dislike of other students' attitude towards her and her headmistress. She has her own experience as a teacher to defend, one which comes to a premature and disastrous end when she loses her temper with one of her pupils — Elizabeth Chinembiri — and uses a T-square to beat her so badly about the head that the girl loses her hearing. When Tambudzai is summoned to the headmistress's office, with Elizabeth's parents in attendance, she is in extreme mental torment and cannot stand the mother's crying. This is as a result of "the burdens poor women bear [in poverty] are … psychological" (Bartky, 2003:34). Tambudzai develops psychological pain from her inability to utilise her education, her experience of abject poverty and an unfair system. She, therefore, attacks the worried woman, Mrs. Chinembiri. The latter rebuts Tambudzai by denouncing vehemently, "You want to show my daughter and me the meaning of agony by killing the child. Nhai, tell me, my daughter's teacher, are you like maize in a field of manure? Is that how it is here, where we send our children every day, that you grow on the dung of the way we are hurt?" (Dangarembga, 2018: 97). The rhetorical questions as emphasised in the speech act above exacerbate the conflict in the parent/teacher relationship. It arises from the mother's resistance to Tambudzai's sporadic and spontaneous acts of violence, an example of teachers' power over parents and pupils. Mrs. Chinemibiri refuses to submit to abuse and domination. The novelist suggests that the suppression and oppression of women is not exclusively the domain of male characters.

Conflict also involves woman-on-woman violence which in most cases is the result of institutionalised practices together with hierarchical female spaces that make women both victims and victimisers. Dangarembga, like Nwapa, Beyala, Emecheta and Ba, demonstrates this concern by portraying the pain and betrayal of woman-on-woman violence in their narratives (Nnaemeka,

2005: 19). On the basis of Nnaemeka's (2005) argument, Dangarembga's text seems to introduce readers to the socio-cultural calamities that women burden their fellows with in Zimbabwe. She suggests that it is preferable and more sustainable to forge connections with socio-political and economic fellows, women, with the aim of realising that feminist empathy is a "form of advocacy". Again, these rhetorical questions stated in the previous paragraph speech acts: "You want to show my daughter and me the meaning of agony by killing the child. Nhai, tell me, my daughter's teacher, are you like maize in a field of manure? Is that how it is here, where we send our children every day, that you grow on the dung of the way we are hurt?" (Dangarembga, 2018) assume that empathy and solidarity belong only within one's immediate social order, as discussed in Chapters Three and Four of this study.

Motherism, an African feminist theory centred on mother and child bonds, also plays out in *TMB*. As Nfah-Abbenyi (2005: 110) observes, "female bonding develops out of this sensuous maternal love and paves the way for both women to shift in and out of their marginality". Related to this assertion, in *TMB*, Mrs. Chinembiri's story is interwoven with her daughter, Elizabeth's, just as in her life she shifts in and out of brutal reality. From her two rhetorical questions which are: "Nhai, tell me, my daughter's teacher, are you like maize in a field of manure? Is that how it is here, where we send our children every day, that you grow on the dung of the way we are hurt?" (Dangarembga, 2018), she tells her story in the same way as she struggles to construct an identity for herself and her daughter. In some ways, this echoes the idea that some mothers may tend to stick firmly to mother-child bonding as it may sound that in Africa, a woman lives for her child (Alkali *et al.*, 2013). Motherhood entails the experience of "pains and rewards" (Nnaemeka, 2005: 5). The above-mentioned conflict between the two females emanates from physical mistreatment of the female body, which has a psychological impact on the woman. Dangarembga, through this conflict, illustrates how violence as mentioned earlier is not the sole preserve of males but a general social challenge. She also shows how woman-on-woman violence and mistreatment depict women as a group suffering from self-inflicted wounds and above all, "how the broader issue of globality and imperialism intensifies gender politics in nationalist discourses" (Nnaemeka, 1997b:21). In light of this, *TMB* presents women in troubled situations, highlighting issues related to gender discourse, and social, political and cultural pressures. The depiction of these two female characters evokes feminist empathy in the reader as well as presenting a clear exemplar of the difficulties they encounter not only to fulfil their lives, but also to survive.

Mrs. Chinembiri's stance, on the contrary, implied through her rhetorical questions: "Nhai, tell me, my daughter's teacher, are you like maize in a field of manure? Is that how it is here, where we send our children every day, that you grow on the dung of the way we are hurt?" (Dangarembga, 2018) depict that she is very assertive. Through her assertive role, Dangarembga breaks social silences surrounding the treatment of parents, especially the mother in school and in society. Mrs. Chinembiri assumes a powerful role when she uses her assertive nature to challenge her "daughter's teacher" for not complying with the school's rules that are used to regulate their actions as teachers in the school. Again, through her portrayal, Dangarembga exhibits resonance with some African male and female writers such as Sembene Ousmane's and Ama Ata Aidoo's descriptions of women as strong and independent in *God's Bits of Wood* and *Changes: A Love Story*. Through Mrs. Chinembiri, Dangarembga exposes teachers, particularly females, who are unwilling to respond to societal transformation because transformative power seems naive.

When the plot progresses to Part 3, "Arriving", Tambudzai is filled with guilt for her action, and therefore goes to Elizabeth's family to apologise. Mrs. Chinembiri responds to her, saying: "Your regret tastes foul in your mouth. … you repeat your request for forgiveness anyway." Mrs. Chinembiri remains silent. … "[Y]ou repeat your apology and prepare to leave" (Dangarembga, 2018: 212). This apology is rooted in African tradition and it has specific implications: the protagonist attempts to restore her relationship with society in order to liberate or emancipate herself, for "the feeling of guilt is genuinely moral to the extent to which it is self-reflexive" (Neblett, 1974:655). I argue that with her "arriving", Tambudzai's concern and empathy for her victims is indisputable linked to her regret for the pain that she may have caused other female characters. The self-reflexive nature of guilt creates a space for her to forgive herself, which she does, and she feels that her splintered relationship with society has been realigned. As indicated in the preceding chapter, our knowledge of fairness requests us to be self-reflexive, to ponder about ourselves in relation to others, or others in relation to us. Dangarembga, through the protagonist Tambudzai's representation shows readers the right approach to fairness in relationships. Empathy is one crucial step in maintaining healthy relationships.

Nyasha, similar to Mrs. Chinemibiri, is emotionally distressed as a result of being physically abused by her father in her childhood. Through Tambudzai, we note that Nyasha, "who was a teenager was

herself brutally beaten by her father, closes her eyes … Now tears roll quietly down Nyasha's cheeks" (Dangarembga, 2018: 171). Her frequent emotional outbursts find expression in flashbacks whenever she reminds herself of her abusive experience. In Dangarembga's first novel, *Nervous Conditions* (Dangarembga, 1988), Nyasha attempts suicide after she develops a habitual eating disorder. Her "nervous" sickness is bulimia, vomiting all the food she has eaten, which is a manifestation of her pain and uneasiness. Her father's physical abuse leads her to developing a fearful relationship with him. According to the editors of the *CODESRIA Bullet*, African scholars like Dangarembga, can engage with emergent issues affecting women by challenging "the masculinities underpinning the structures of repression that target women" (CODESRIA Bullet, Gender Series 4, 2005). Jerome Terpase Dooga (2009: 136) asserts that "the extent to which such 'masculinities underpinning the structures of repression' [should be] identified, discussed and new pathways found, or solutions proffered". As Nyasha grows in *TMB*, her bulimia metaphorically portrays domination and resistance in the text. Dangarembga's *TMB*, like Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (2005), describes characters like Nyasha, who will not eat and negatively react with antipathy. Through the experience of Nyasha's antagonism (manifested as an eating disorder) it is evident that to fight for the right of a woman is to show a deep psychological disturbance in order to overthrow the domination of men's abuse toward women. Here, by Nyasha's representation, the author shows differences in gender conflict and the "nervous" responses to African culture. This is cultural psychology and the expression of conflict through physical symptoms, which is quite different from the forms of conflict analysed earlier. Women's resistance and antagonism through conflict or assault as described in Dangarembga's two novels, *TMB* and *Nervous Conditions,* resonate with similar depictions in Stephanie Urdang's (1979) *Fighting Two Colonialisms*, Rebeka Njau's (1975) *Ripples in the Pool* and Ngugi wa Thiongio's (1980) *Maitu*, *Njugira* (*Mother, Sing for Me*). This thematic concern which threads through all of these texts, from Zimbabwe, through Guinea-Bissau to Kenya, betrays a nervousness arising from an oppression/resistance binary that reiterates Fanon's notion of a nervous condition as discussed in his seminal text *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963). Charles Sugnet (2005: 35) argues that Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* "redefines Fanon's insights" because she crafted the title *Nervous Conditions* after her reading of the latter's text. In relation to this, Nyasha bemoans after Anesu, her daughter, informs her that, her brother, Panashe's, (Nyasha's son's) teacher, "always hits the children" (Dangarembga, 2018: 168). Nyasha, realising how petrified Panashe has become to an extent of weeping, she "wipes away the boy's tears with the back of her hand" and judges the action of the teacher as "[T]hat woman belongs in jail" (Dangarembga, 2018: 171). Tambudzai describes Nyasha's actions as "a nauseating act of ghastly femininity [and she has] no desire to

expend energy on sympathy for a minor matter of corporal punishment" (Dangarembga, 2018: 169). However, after she "arrives", Tambudzai realises and recognises that Nyasha's state does not just depict a "nauseating and ghastly femininity" but emanates from a psychological pain which originates in her past. The past is marked by physical abuse which has left lasting effects. Through the narration which shows how Tambudzai relates to the pain of her fellow female characters resulting in her change of attitude towards them, the reader is able to appreciate and vicariously experience the feelings and predicaments of female characters in the text.

In the foregoing examination, Dangarembga, through Gertrude, Mrs. Chinembiri, Nyasha and Tambudzai, portrays women with emotions, who are capable of feeling and loving. Yet again, Dangarembga, similar to the early African writers such as Chinua Achebe in *Anthills of the Savannah* and Efua Sutherland in *Foriwa*, uses the emotive characterization of the above-mentioned female characters to bring about correction in men's and women's attitudes. First, Tambudzai's reflection on the emotive nature of both Mrs Chinembiri and Nyasha enables her to develop acceptance and a positive mindset about her fellow women. Second, Nyasha, subverts the patriarchal order when she consciously breaks away from it through her acts of antagonism towards her father. Psychological pain and emotional torture are further inflicted on some of the female characters' bodies when men violently sexualise them. Others like Bertha, resist patriarchal hegemony by challenging and critiquing their domination and authority. In the following paragraphs, this will be examined under the sub-heading of "Sexual politics".

5.6 Sexual politics against women

To further compound inflicting psychological pain, emotional torture and suffering on female bodies, men sexually objectify women. This is another issue of concern to Dangarembga. In portraying female characters as objects of sex, the narrator draws on women who are young and controllable. Achebe (1988: 104) in *Anthills* mentions that the craving for sex shown in a man metamorphoses him into "the odorous he-goat" who implants "his plenitude of seeds from a huge pod swinging between hind legs into she-goats tethered for him in front of numerous homesteads". In this analogy, the male is referred to in the active voice and accorded agency whereas the female is constructed as a passive entity who is acted upon. With such passivity

appearing to be the dominant depiction of female characters in the text, it emerges that in matters related to sex, the women have no choice.

In *TMB*, it is always the male characters who have control over their sex lives. The "villain", Shine, rapes women anytime he has sexual desires and does not care about their feelings. In the first part of the novel, "Ebbing", we know that in MaManyanga's hostel, Mako (Makomborero), Bertha, Tambudzai and Brother Shine are boarders there, and Shine easily rapes Mako, because her "room is next to Shine's" (Dangarembga, 2018: 54). Mako reports to Bertha that in her room, "he enjoyed himself behind me. And I thought only let him finish. Let it be finished. Let him go. So I kept quiet" (Dangarembga, 2018: 54). This highlights women's strategic decision to remain silent as a survival strategy in the face of the sexual violence perpetrated against them by the male. Additionally, this affirms Dobrota Pucherovà's (2019:113) postulation that women, like Mako, mostly conform to "the dictate of the patriarchal tradition that privileges the man and oppresses the woman." Mako is therefore subjugated as a result of allowing the privileged Shine to "finish enjoying himself behind" her. On the basis of this argument, I demonstrate that women on their own are vulnerable and that it is in unity that they find strength to overcome the oppressive system. This further corroborates Bazin's (1989) advocacy for unity among women.

This sexual abuse is further worsened when Bertha shows her solidarity with Mako's plight, "Mako, if you ask all women at your workplace, in fact all women, … then you will know it's what nearly every one of them puts up with" (Dangarembga, 2018: 54). The statement "puts up with" indicates that "all [the] women" endure the men's sexual abuse by keeping quiet just as Mako. From the perspective of the female characters — Mako, Bertha and all the silent women referred to above – have been denied their human rights because their society does not recognize their voices, and also does not make it possible for them to express their predicaments. Hence, Mako together with "all women, kept quiet". The foregoing female characters show that the feminist empathy that Eze has posited is the core condition for achieving women's rights in several parts of Africa (Ethics and Human Rights) and the system ought to be challenged. Dangarembga suggests that psychotherapy for Mako's and all women's problems would have to begin with listening to their stories of intense pain. For "it is only once we have listened to the voices of women who have [been abused sexually] that we can try to assess the extent to which [their] conditions … have been met and look at the consequences of

these [conditions] for the position of women" (Morgan, 2003: 169). The gap between women and society might be bridged when people begin to be attentive to women's cries and listen to their narratives. This becomes the ethical significance of the narrated lives of women, which can be examined from a feminist empathy perspective that focuses on the individual as an embodied being.

Furthermore, the narrator reports that "the nights are yet more horrendous since … Shine takes a different woman into his room practically every day of the week. The encounters in the next room grow more strident from one night to the next, as though Shine measures the noise level from his women" (Dangarembga, 2018: 58). Through Shine and other unnamed men, as implied in Bertha's solidarity discourse, the demeaning sexual experience men take women through is clearly demonstrated. Dangarembga, like Jude Dibia in *Unbridled* (2007) and Chris Abani in *Becoming Abigail* (2006), explores the phenomenon of sexual politics grounded in patriarchy and strengthened by stereotypes. According to Iris Marion Young (2003:159), "patriarchy is founded on … sexuality. Woman is both, essentially — the repository of the body, the flesh that he desires, owns and masters, tames and controls; and the nurturing source of his life and ego". Dangarembga shows that women's bodies are incapacitated, because they are sexually abused. Therefore, she examines the Zimbabwean society that takes advantage of women and sees them as objects that men use to satisfy their untamed lust and unconscionable sexual craving. Hence, she exposes the selfishness of men who only satisfy their drive, which amounts to an attack on women's lives. Thus, there is no mutual pleasure and affection. From this portrayal, we, as readers, gain appreciation of the pain inflicted on the women in *TMB*. In this way, *TMB* emphatically draws us in as it turns our attention to the powerlessness of its female characters and their silences. The text problematises the selfishness and denigrating sexual experience that the male characters subject the female characters to. Through Mako's and the silent women's characterisation, Dangarembga depicts that women in the contemporary Zimbabwean society portrayed in *TMB* are victims of sexual and gendered violence as well.

TMB presents a graphic illustration of the type of sexual politics in which many women are still entrapped.

In the light of the discussion above, an intersectional-driven examination reveals that "women hold other identities that may impact their daily lives (e.g., social class, age, sexual orientation), their unique experiences [… and] may lead them to be especially conscious of their racial and

gender identities" (Settles, 2006:589). Sexual exploitation and experiences specific to race, socioeconomic class and gender are the focal point of Dangarembga's concern, and form crucial elements of intersectionality discourse.

Notwithstanding the above, there are a few women, such as Bertha in *TMB*, who resist masculine power. Tambudzai reflects on her hostel colleague: "Bertha is strong, of a size that thinking men run from should she be displeased with them; a woman who often says she is hardened past femininity by too many things to talk about" (Dangarembga, 2018). From the description provided above, Bertha represents an emergent feminist voice in Dangarembga's work and the author describes her positively. She is very assertive and knowledge-driven. Dangarembga highlights that "women are not always passive victims of these [patriarchal hegemonic] practices. Rather, they may actively collaborate in their creation and maintenance or actively resist [patriarchy]" (Weitz, 2003: x). Drawing on the ideas of bell hooks (2000: 95), Bertha demonstrates that "women do not need to depend on men for our well-being and our happiness— not even our sexual bliss … This knowledge opened up a world of possibility for women". It can be argued that the narrative proposes resistance to or overrule of patriarchal hegemony as the only solution to women's oppression by men. Additionally, it appears that Dangarembga exposes Bertha to this behaviour in order to develop human flourishing, to build the basis for recognition and a meaningful gender relationship in the narrative.

Contrasting Mako and Bertha, it is obvious that whereas the former experiences sexual abuse lacks self-importance and is denied dignity by Shine, the latter experiences the reverse. She, for the better part of the novel, occupies the top-most position on the scale and is not humiliated by "men". Dangarembga, through Bertha, appears to underscore the view that the greater the assertiveness of a female, the better the social position she occupies, and the more respect and dignity she gains in patriarchal society. Bertha is shown as having a sense of direction, satisfaction and security. It is her assertiveness that makes "thinking men run from [her] should she be displeased with them" (Dangarembga, 2018: 51). Here, Bertha's attitudes, beliefs and behaviour are formed, nurtured and expressed in society. This forms the basis of her judgements of what is right and wrong, and how both genders relate to each other in society and at home. These are structural and systemic issues that are rooted in deeply embedded gendered power imbalances. Bertha's attitude voices the power of accepting femalehood as well as Dangarembga's advocacy for Zimbabwean women to embrace assertiveness. By speaking through her, Dangarembga highlights that

assertiveness is, first, a way to liberate the woman from hegemonic oppression and suppression; and second, to sensitise the female to be proactive socially, domestically and also show self-importance. As Ogundipe-Leslie (1994: 28) points out, African Feminism focuses on womanhood as "idealized and claimed as a strength by African women and seen as having a special manifestation in Africa". In line with this, Bertha represents an idealized woman as she is portrayed as the resilient and perceptive woman behind whom other women (such as Mako) can rally.

Tambudzai, on the other hand, shows passivity towards Gertrude's and Mako's sexual violence. In drawing the similarities and differences between these two forms of sexual violence between both women, Tambudzai is insensitive to and unconcerned about Gertrude's actions, because Gertrude intentionally dressed to attract the men's attention at the combi stop. So, it is "proper" for "a man" from "the crowd" to use a language of debauchery on her; Gertrude, "someone open those thighs for her, … Do it for her if she won't!" (Dangarembga, 2018: 19). On the other hand, Tambudzai has feelings and cares about Mako, due to the fact that the latter does not solicit men's attention, this is known from the narrator's description of Mako: "Mako is wearing baggy sweats and a long-sleeved T-shirt for cleaning. You have never caught her in a miniskirt or tight leggings" (Dangarembga, 2018: 54). Yet Shine abuses her sexually as indicated earlier. From this analogy, Dangarembga through Tambudzai's observation draws attention to sexual violence as a universal phenomenon, which women experience indiscriminately. Any woman is vulnerable and prey to men's aggression, not just the woman wearing a short skirt and low-cut blouse. All this demonstrates how *TMB* appeals to its readership through feminist empathy, through which empathetic readers are able to engage, feel and identify with these female characters.

Tambudzai translates the preceding reflection into a self-centered fear for herself as she observes that "[Mako's] heart beats faster. [She is] a woman alone. [Whose] room is next to Shine's" (Dangarembga, 2018: 54). Here, Tambudzai is traumatised by what she has observed, and hence she shows concern with the implications of Mako's experience for her own security. It appears her cry of fear is the novelist's request for us to recognise her humanity and to ask significant questions about the source of her fear.

In order for women to gain recognition, acceptance, dignity, relief from the curse of poverty and fear, acquire wealth, and heal psychologically from all pain, suffering and wounds, as highlighted above, some of them devise the strategy of getting married to wealthy men. I finally examine "Marriage as a means of economic empowerment", as one of the socio-cultural issues explored by the author in the next segment.

5.7 Marriage as a means of economic empowerment

The last major area of concern regarding the empathy of women and men that Dangarembga tackles in *TMB* is marriage. Some women marry for economic support, acquisition of wealth and security. To alleviate poverty, women deliberately contrive to marry men who are rich in order to gain status, recognition, acceptance and ease in economic life. Possessing wealth or being rich is associated with men because they benefit from the so-called 'patriarchal dividend' by virtue of their male status. Tambudzai hatches the plan of seducing one of Mai VaManyanga's sons and marrying him for his wealth:

> This arrival is a gift, bringing you a man to consider. It is a stepping stone to another life you crave, away from this nowhere and the days that gape empty behind you. You do not think of love, being obsessed only with what the gentleman can do for you, how the widow's son will be insurance against your absolute downfall (Dangarembga, 2018: 39).

She judges the finest among the three male siblings; Praise, Ignore and Larky and eventually "choose[s] Larky as first target because he is the most powerful" (Dangarembga, 2018: 46). So that her (Tambudzai's) "dream of the house [she] will live in then, in which there will be neither pink frills nor yellow kitchen. [She] train[s] [her] heart and mind on the black granite swimming pool, to make sure it will be waiting for [her]" (Dangarembga, 2018: 46). Hence, Tambudzai's thirst for riches such as a decent furnished house with a proper fitted kitchen, swimming pool and other luxuries. Her intense desire for these riches in Zimbabwean society will enable her to experience recognition, acceptance and upward social mobility. Also, like Achebe's and Adichie's society, the society depicted in *TMB* is a place where wealth and prosperity are enjoyed primarily by men. Therefore, it is her distress that calls for a desperate strategy of becoming prosperous, having failed to achieve this despite her high education. As Weitz (2003: ix) points out, "the social construction

of human bodies", just like all other political processes, evolves through struggles between groups "with competing political interests and with differential access to power and resources". In this sense, Tambudzai − like Achebe's "unhappy spinsters" (Achebe, 1988: 88) and Adichie's (2006) Mrs. Ozobia's − experiences reduced pain in her body, because her desires are met from the body of her other gender (male). Dangarembga, through Tambudzai's intentions, seems to discredit patriarchy, as she is drawing attention to a particular story of a woman living in that patriarchal system, who has to act unnaturally to survive in an unnatural society. Also, by listening to Tambudzai's strategy in her narration, could recast paradigms for relationships in traditional society. Our understanding of her story could help us in our critical appreciation of the institution of marriage.

In addition, Tambudzai's narrative, just like the stories of other women in *Anthills* and *HYS*, exposes many states of entrapped women who usually seek escape from the conditions of penury through marriage. Critically examining Tambudzai's abject life, incapacitated body, fears and traumatisation, we are permitted to probe the traditional patterns that deny her access to economic independence. The source of her economic dependence lies in her abjectness. Would she have needed to ensnare "Larky as [her] first target because he is the most powerful" (Dangarembga, 2018: 46) if she had had the means to sustain herself economically? We understand her intention to be married to the "most powerful" wealthy man available as a means of coping with the culture that limits her life.

All these examples affirm Michael Chapman's (2003: 1) comments in his history of Southern African literature, including Zimbabwe; "[I]n the literatures of all countries, there is the shared experience of economic form attendant on strong, permanent settler populations. A consequence is the large theme of […] liberation with people in Zimbabwe having had to resort to struggles". Tambudzai and another female character, Mai Manyanga, adopt strategies to attain economic empowerment so that they liberate their bodies from abjectness, non-recognition, unacceptability and lack of dignity. Next, I discuss Mai Manyanga's struggle.

In the same vein, Mai Manyanga's condition is not very different from that of Tambudzai. She possesses wealth through the efforts and inheritance of her late husband, VaManyanga, so she is portrayed as a rich woman. Her story sets the conditions which entrap most women in traditional patriarchal society. That is, while working for the rich VaManyanga, Mai Manyanga is "elevated

from executive secretary to spouse, did not want to lose a moment. Overflowing with enthusiasm, she immediately put down a concrete slab at the back of the two–hectare property" (Dangarembga, 2018: 30). The "concrete slab" is symbolic of her frantic efforts to maintain the marriage. Indeed, at that particular time, it could lead to two positive turn-arounds in her life: first, the protection of her position; and second, the acquisition of the possessions she will later inherit upon the death of her husband, VaManyanga. Hence her sense of urgency; "she did not want to lose a moment" and "immediately put down a concrete slab". For the average Zimbabwean woman, marriage represents security, which is why they "struggle" to contract it. The novelist alludes to this twice in the development of the plot, in Chapters Four and Seven: "You do not think of love, being obsessed only with what the gentleman can do for you, how the widow's son will be insurance against your absolute downfall" (Dangarembga, 2018: 39); and again : "you still entertain a desire not for marriage itself but for the security the state of being married brings. You do not direct your grudge against wives you have not seen, but against these … plastic-nailed creatures who are enjoying a life of security and ease" (Dangarembga, 2018: 72). All these expressions connote safety, acceptability and freedom from worry, pain and suffering in marriage. It could then be said that in order for women to be accepted into patriarchal society they have to adopt defensive strategies.

Here too, Mai Manyanga, like Tambudzai and others such as Nyasha, preys on her target, who is "most powerful" in terms of wealth. When society controls this woman's social and economic roles, the female body gets branded in biotic terms according to misogynist perceptions. Dangarembga, through Tambudzai's intention together with Mai Manyanga's strategies of cementing her marriage, depicts those men, Larky and VaManyanga, are also objectified by women. They (men) are regarded as a means to an end.

The description of Tambudzai's and Mai Mayanga's radical plans highlight their greedy, self-interested and ruthless calculations. They seem to abhor all notions of femaleness and embark on a journey of grabbing. While they are depicted as victimisers, Larky and VaManyanga are portrayed as victims of the system. Dangarembga, through the characterisations of both women shows that men can also be victims in African cultures. Tambudzai's and Mai Mayanga's actions may show that when society does not provide equitable opportunities for all, the strongest and the smartest take advantage of others; in this case, it is men who are taken advantage of. Neither Tambudzai nor MaiMayanga are likeable because of their manipulativeness. They are perhaps two of Dangarembga's most complex characters. We see

them in a negative light but at the same time pity them and understand their situations. There are traits in their characters that are difficult to understand. The initial positive image created of them (especially Tambudzai), as forceful, strongly-motivated, wise, courageous agents of cultural change, appears to be subverted by a negative image of deviousness. However, if critically examined, this turn in their character may be seen as more positive than negative as it is necessary for them to develop a shrewdness to foster their empowerment.

5.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have extensively studied how the power of embracing female agency, feminist empathy, feminist ideals and intersectionality in the narration are realised in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *TMB* that completes a trilogy with its prequel, *Nervous Conditions* (Dangarembga, 1988) and its sequel, *The Book of Not* (Dangarembga, 2006). Dangarembga shows that female bodies are psychologically wounded from joblessness, abject poverty, gender conflict and sexual politics. Their wounds and suffering stem from masculine domination, sexism, fragments of imperialism together with legacies of colonialism such as racism. These factors cause the women to be in a state of alienation, despair and hopelessness, where they are not recognised or respected so they become "marginalized women and […] second-class citizens" (Pui-Ian, 2004) in Zimbabwean society.

Zimbabwean men, by contrast, are economically positioned like "Shine, an accountant with a job" (Dangarembga, 2018: 62). Comparing and contrasting these characters' gendered treatments, the narrative calls on all members of the Zimbabwean patriarchal society to save the African woman from the state of joblessness and non-recognition of her superior education by giving her the same opportunities as men in order to change the culture and the perceptions that have defined women's bodies and identities. In this way, feminist empathy is evoked for what the female characters in particular feel. The novelist opts for a "proper" means to alleviate penury. We empathise with the women and feel solidarity with the female body when finally, they are employed and enjoy the attendant benefits. By placing the African woman on this economically empowering path, Dangarembga corrects the unbalanced portrayal of female characters in African literature and also exposes that the suppression and oppression of women is not a purely masculine phenomenon as some feminist writers assert. Rather, it also involves woman-on-woman violence, where women

can be both victims and victimisers. The African woman is depicted as the man's commodity, which renders the woman voiceless because Zimbabwean society is not ready to listen to their stories.

Notably, this chapter also reveals that many African women are forceful and resilient. Their resistance strategies affirm that the society is shown as a place where wealth and prosperity are heavily skewed in favour of men. Thus, to assert their place within such an imbalanced society, women marry to obtain financial security which compensates for their suffering and pain. These African women's stories could recast paradigms for gendered relationships in society as African women resist the old order, which is heavily embedded with wounds, pain and suffering and aim to create a new order. After their tragic mirror self-reflection, they learn to fight for their rights and opportunities, establish their power, accept their femalehood and embrace female agency. Their empowerment leads them to challenge patriarchy and attain certain positions where they are accepted, recognised and accorded dignity in society. In the ensuing chapter, which is the last of this study, I conduct a comparative analysis of the convergences and contrasting techniques of subversion that each of the three authors employ to challenge and critique patriarchy and to consolidate their notion of women empowerment.

CHAPTER 6:

Conclusion: Comparative reflection on techniques of subversion

6.1 Introduction

Throughout this study, I have examined the challenge and critique of patriarchy in *Anthills*, *HYS* and *TMB* through the theoretical rubric of feminist empathy. I have analysed the resistance to patriarchy in these texts and, more importantly, applied the conceptual tools of feminist empathy to them. In this chapter, I offer concluding reflections as I flesh out my central argument: that the application of the conceptual tools of feminist empathy to an analysis of my selected texts allows fresh insights about the representation of gender oppression and techniques of subversion to emerge. In addition, these insights shed new light on literary representations of African female characters' empowerment and assertiveness. I reaffirm that the thesis draws largely on Chielozona Eze's scholarly work on feminist empathy, which I reinforce with other strands of feminist theory including Womanism, Motherism, Stiwanism, Nego-feminism, Femalism and Snail-sense. These theoretical approaches to the texts selected for this study facilitate a better understanding in two ways. First, we are better able to appreciate the experience of pain and suffering and lack of fairness in gender relationships as depicted through characters situated in the Nigerian and Zimbabwean societies portrayed in the novels. Second, we discern the ways in which the female characters strive to become empowered as they demonstrate agency through their enactment of constructive, well-informed decisions that ensure that they attain equitable conditions of life within their societies. These critical perspectives do not presume to prescribe an order or establish a principle of social being for African women in general, but they are an appraisal of the traditional, cultural and moral beliefs which undergird the social lives and expectations of African women. In this regard, my examination of the three novels using this approach draws out the issues affecting women's lives in Nigeria and Zimbabwe, and points to the ways in which these African texts address such concerns by juxtaposing different facets of female existence within Nigerian and Zimbabwean societies. To this end, I highlight the convergences and contrasting techniques of subversion in the paragraphs that follow.

6.2 Convergences and differences in textual acts of subversion

Although the three primary authors are of two different generations, they examine the commonalities that exist among the male characters in the three novels. That is, the violence

and humiliation they use against women to demonstrate their authority over the latter. These male characters include: Major Sam, Ikem, Osodi, and Chris Okong in Achebe's *Anthills*; Odenigbo in Adichie's *HYS*; and Shine and Babamukuru, Nyasha's father, in Dangarembga's *TMB*. For instance, Major Sam and Ikem are blind to the worth of women, especially black women, because of their perceived powerlessness (Achebe, 1988: 35; 81; 79). Babamukuru and Shine similarly stick to psychological and emotional abuse coupled with physical battery to humiliate their daughter (Dangarembga, 2018: 171), next-door female neighbour and other women (Dangarembga, 2018: 54) into submission, because of their perceived powerlessness. The above-mentioned male characters are characterised as educated but are ardent adherents to the patriarchal and sexist values in the Nigerian and Zimbabwean societies respectively. Moreover, they all live in the cities in their various societies which draws attention to the gendered construction of the urban spaces in which these female characters find themselves. Diana Jeater (2000:29) comments that "[i]t used to be said that African migrant workers in urban areas … were predominantly male". She further asserts that "African women's presence in [these urban areas] was obscured by African men claiming urban public spaces as 'male space'. Although women were there, they were not acknowledged as part of the urban environment". These male characters settle in the urban areas often for employment or economic improvement, and benefit from the positive changes in all socio-economic aspects of the colonial establishments, which include respect for people's rights, and adapting to peaceful living with one another. In the three primary texts, this assertion equally holds true for the female characters whose involvement in urban life stamps the social spaces with their activities as "workers, landladies and providers of … services" (Jeater, 2000: 30), thereby claiming and navigating these spaces. Consequently, in these gendered constructed spaces, the men who are considered patriarchal heads end up losing ground to the women who challenge their authority. This narrows the gap of the power relationships between women and men, as it overturns the social order that enables women's subordination, thus, fulfilling an objective of feminist empathy.

Chief Ozobia in *HYS* and Beatrice's father in *Anthills*, as well as the drivers and urchins in *TMB*, are different from the above-mentioned male characters in terms of education. While these latter male characters – Chief Ozobia, Beatrice's father, drivers and urchins – are not either given formal education or traditional training, or are partially educated, the former set of male characters – Major Sam, Ikem, Chris Okong, Odenigbo, Shine and Babamukuru – have benefitted from Western education. Of the men cited, Chief Ozobia, is the wealthiest. As a result of this, he can assert power and influence over his own gender, his nuclear family and the outside community. Thus, he rules his family with brutal force even though he appears

amiable and responsible in the eyes of the community. In his insatiable desire for more wealth and power, he forces his highly educated daughter, Olanna, into sex with his business partner in order to court more business contracts and favours. However, Olanna refuses to give in to his request. This demonstrates a total subversion of Chief Ozobia's patriarchal authority over her and is also an indictment on his character, exposing him as an irresponsible patriarchal head.

Despite this negative portrayal of his overbearing behaviour, his wealth provides the financial support upon which his nuclear family depends, and which has facilitated the high levels of education obtained by his twin daughters, Olanna and Kainene. It is the exposure and enlightenment that these female characters have acquired that has made them assertive, and able to stand up against the patriarchal hegemony endemic to their society. From a feminist empathy perspective, I argue that even though their father is a domineering patriarch, he is subtly bringing about social change by educating them, thereby empowering them with the tools of knowledge and confidence to stand up for themselves.

Despite the depiction of Chief Ozobia's wealth as an empowering tool for his daughters, Beatrice's and Tambudzai's fathers are neither rich nor highly educated, and yet remain equally domineering. On the other hand, Major Sam, Odenigbo, Shine and Uncle Babamuruku are highly educated, yet also overbearing in their dealings with women. This shows that in patriarchal society, men's education enables their employment, thus, allowing them to enjoy higher positions. For instance, Uncle "Babamuruku, … take[s] up a position as headmaster" (Dangarembga, 2018:106); then Shine is "an accountant with a job," (Dangarembga, 2018: 62). Therefore, their characterisation of all these men – Major Sam, Ikem, Chris, Beatrice's father, all in Chapter Three; Chief Ozobia, Odenigbo, both in Chapter Four, the urchins, a man, drivers, Shine and Uncle Babamuruku, all in Chapter Five – substantiates the notion that patriarchy, sexism and hegemony know no boundaries in terms of wealth or education. Thus, either wealth, formal or traditional training, disappointingly does not necessarily bring about more enlightened attitudes towards women. Rather, it appears to be a traditional practice into which the male characters are socially conditioned. To effectively bring such a conditioning to an abrupt end, a carefully thought-out process of transformational socialisation must be put in place. This is what Achebe attempts to represent in his text *Anthills*, when he calls attention to the leadership roles that women play in African society, through such examples as Beatrice steering the affairs for a naming ceremony, or leading in the reconciliation efforts to ensure peace among men – Ikem, Chris and Major Sam. This is relevant if the feminist

empathy agenda of commitment, love, solidarity, care, concern and survival of women, men and children are to be achieved. Adetokunbo Pearce (1987: 78) asserts that "for a people to make progress, it must do away with sexism … and classism. It must involve all its members in a communal effort to continuously rebuild itself … Tradition is the root of a people's culture, but it becomes retrogressive if treated as an end in itself." This attitude is a therapy that Efua Sutherland prescribes for the survival of society in her work *Foriwa* (1962) in order to bring about positive social change together with a real struggle for justice on all fronts. This is demonstrated when Labana, an Hausa stranger, from the north of Ghana, comes to the land of Kyerefaso which is in the South of Ghana, and succeeds against all odds to marry Foriwa, a native of that town. Foriwa's mother also makes Labana her closest ally and together they build a bridge between tradition and progress. Thus, the marriage between Labana and Foriwa serves as the bridge metaphor that connects north and south, and brings ethnic groups together, and reconstructs the narrative of difference to reflect diversity and inclusion. In Chapters Three and Four of this study, the female protagonists, Beatrice, Olanna and Kainene refuse to marry due to how the prescribed traditional system subjugates and oppresses women so they represent a challenge to the status quo regarding marriage.

Beatrice and Elewa (from *Anthills*), Olanna and Kainene (from *HYS*) and Tambudzai, Mai Manyanga and Bertha (from *TMB*) demonstrate the ability to take charge. For instance, Bertha's assertiveness prevents men from violently attacking her (Dangarembga, 2018: 51). Similarly, Beatrice and Elewa in *Anthills* subvert patriarchal authority by challenging the dictates of traditional norms in marriage. Beatrice ends up being represented as totally unreasonable, by ruling out marriage from her life and not countenancing pregnancy. She advises women to be "determined from the very beginning to put career first and, if need be, last" (Achebe, 1988: 88). Beatrice is the example of the "new woman" in contemporary Africa. Like her, Elewa and Mai Taka (in *TMB*), also stand up against female denigration by men. All three women question the image that men have of women through their use of similes in which they compare women to footballs that men can kick around. By their critiques, they highlight the commodification of women by men and depict men as irresponsible, selfish, exploitative and insensitive with no respect for women and womanhood. This quality does not help to close the distance between the male and female characters without erasing the differences in identity formation which inflicts pain on women. It is against this backdrop that both Beatrice and Elewa decline to marry.

In a similar vein, Olanna and Kainene, in *HYS*, refuse to marry for the same reasons. They just date Odenigbo and Richard respectively even though these men are willing to marry them. A typical instance is when Odenigbo passionately appeals to Olanna, his lover, one early morning: "If you won't marry me, nkem, then let's have a child" (Adichie, 2006: 135). Additionally, Olanna's femalehood does not deter her from becoming fully aware of the influence of her culture and tradition and the change it exerts on her life. As she endeavours to assert herself against the dominance of culture, she tells Odenigbo that "she did not have that fabled female longing to give birth" (Adichie, 2006: 132). Just as Achebe does with Beatrice and Elewa**,** and Dangaremgba does with Bertha, Adichie presents Olanna as a prototype of women with changed attitudes towards marriage. This means that "bad" marriage, often referring to marriages not producing offspring, are not so much seen as offensive or hurting for women anymore. This change is acknowledged by Carole Boyce-Davies (1994) when she declares that in women's writing, there is far more ambivalence towards romantic concepts, because women concentrate on producing texts that express resistance, reassertion, renewal and rethinking. Juliana Nfah-Abbenyi (1997: 148) observes that women "take charge of their destiny in order to disrupt the patriarchal establishment's predetermined hierarchies". She urges women to use their writing as a weapon that "[re]inscribes African women in such ways that transgress and shatter hegemonic [male] representations". Additionally, male authors like Achebe in this study are gradually understanding and accepting a change in gender roles, "and the whole process of women changing things for themselves" (Bungaro, 2005: 47), which allow them to vehemently break men's patriarchal powers in traditional society. In this way, there is the possibility of triggering a stronger sense of feminist empathy. Thus, these primary authors prepare a reader to imaginatively reconstruct the pain and suffering of the women sufferers, which illustrates what Simon Baron-Cohen (2011) intimates about empathy being rooted in the power of the imagination. It is the power of one person (non-sufferer) to put himself/herself in the situation of the sufferer. Imagining the pain and suffering of women can promote human wellbeing and end needless pain and suffering in societies. Therefore, the three writers of the examined works have also situated the women in their specific cultural milieux, each demonstrating peculiar cultural limitations together with general patriarchal boundaries.

In contrast to the female characters cited above who refuse to conform to the socio-cultural imposition, other women like Tambudzai and Mai Manyanga (as particularly analysed in Chapter Five), embrace marriage as a strategic tool to carry out their emancipatory ideas. An example is when the narrator reveals that Tambudzai's ability to marry well "is a stepping stone to another life [she] crave[s], away from this nowhere and the days that gape empty behind [her]. [She]

do[es] not think of love, being obsessed only with what the gentleman can do for [her], how the widow's son [Larky] will be insurance against [her] absolute downfall" (Dangarembga, 2018: 39). In their roles as married women, they adopt careful, contrived strategies to fight sexism in order to flourish, and experience recognition and upward social mobility. Therefore, for these women, marriage serves as a platform to attain economic empowerment so that they are able to liberate their bodies from abject poverty, non-recognition, lack of dignity and disabling conditions. Through their successful strategising, they depict alternative representations of feminist empathy, qualities of audaciousness and proactiveness for self-preservation and transformation. It can be argued that "Adichie [as well as Achebe and Dangarembga] stresses the importance of teaching … young men to feel comfortable around women who are powerful, …, or even more vocal" (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Feminist Activism, LibreTexts 1.4). They are archetypal representations of African women who know how, where and when to apply the appropriate strategy of culture and modernism to achieve their empowerment. They do not allow themselves to be culturally assimilated into the hegemonic system their Zimbabwean society practises. These female characters' roles show their determination to totally disable the practice of patriarchy, sexism and commodification. Dangarembga and the two other primary writers, therefore, use their works to demonstrate the perspective of feminist empathy from different cultures; and in this way, they raise awareness of the intersections of culture and feminism.

In the light of these accounts of the female characters' resistance to patriarchy and commodification (as specifically discussed in Chapter Four), it emerges that the men who appear dominant or superior in their roles as president, husbands, lovers, fathers, and reverend ministers are not truly superior, but project a false sense of their superiority as they live out imagined conquests. This is because, in reality, they carry out tasks and ideas that are normally initiated by the women around them, and which they then turn around to present as their own. For instance, in *TMB*, Mai Manyanga, a female character, while working for the rich VaManyanga (a male character), is "elevated from executive secretary to spouse" (Dangarembga, 2018: 30), and in order not to "lose a moment" she "immediately put[s] down a concrete slab at the back of the two–hectare property" (Dangarembga, 2018: 30). Her elevation and the "concrete slab" are representations of the enormous effort that she makes to win VaManyanga's favour and maintain the union. After she has done all these, the credit appears to go rather to VaManyanga who is complimented on choosing well. From a feminist empathy reading, MaiManyanga's effort as a woman is acknowledged either fully or partially. The reader is invited to pay close attention to what that effort yields, in

terms of promoting and building a good relationship between the genders and so fulfilling an objective of feminist empathy.

The above discussion shows that there is a contrast between the roles of the female characters in *Anthills* and *HYS*. While Beatrice, Elewa, Olanna and Kainene avoid marriage, Tambudzai and Mai Manyanga in *TMB*, marry as a means to gain what they want, successfully dethroning patriarchal hegemony in the process. All these females represent emergent feminist voices in Achebe's, Adichie's and Dangaremgba's works. They are the fibres that maintain the bonds of love, commitment, care and concern among their families and communities.

Similarly, analyses of the three novels from a feminist empathy perspective demonstrate that, at times, women are complicit in contributing to patriarchy, sexism and stereotyping. As Barbara Applebaum (2010:123) comments: "one is accountable for the harm we do together". In this regard, we find complicity at play as she further asserts that "[p]articipatory intention is intention to act as part of a group in collective action of agents who orient themselves around a joint project". Drawing on this notion, my analyses reveal that some women − involuntarily and voluntarily − carry out acts of sexism and classism against other women, thus, enabling the patriarchal dominance of men.

In the first place, such involuntary actions or inactions of women arise from the ubiquity of patriarchal assumptions and understandings of the world. The female characters like Beatrice's mother in *Anthills* (Chapter Three**)**, Chief Ozobia's wife in *HYS* (Chapter Four) and Tambudzai's mother in *TMB* (Chapter Five**)** for instance, become at once patriarchal and commodified women because they are "socially programmed, as are most men, not to see the ways in which women are oppressed by traditional gender roles" (Tyson, 2006: 86). Thus, they are conditioned to accept the superiority of manhood and the inferiority of womanhood. As a result, both Beatrice's and Tambudzai's mothers subscribe to the mentality that the worth of a woman lies in her ability to bear not just children but male children. Typically, Tambudzai's mother endeavours through every possible means to prove her son's value by educating him despite being cursed with abject poverty but deprives her daughter, Tambudzai, of education so that her son gets the best in life. She, therefore, "refuses to vend at the market for her as she had for her brother. This you do not say, because who can speak ill of a mother?" (Dangarembga, 2018: 106). In a similar vein, Chief Ozobia's wife plays the role of a supportive wife to aid Chief Ozobia's decision to persuade her

daughter, Olanna, to yield to Chief Okonji's sexual advances, thereby practising prostitution in order for Chief Ozobia to reap business benefits. In relation to feminist empathy, these mothers are not prepared to step into the shoes of their daughters, even though the daughters suffer the pain of discrimination and abuse. Chief Ozobia's wife fears to question any unjust situation happening in her house so as not to lose the benefits that will accrue to her from that transaction. Thus, while it is evident that men benefit materially from patriarchy, as Abeda Sultana (2010:9) points out that men "derive concrete economic gains from the subordination of women [especially wives]". Chief Ozobia's wife demonstrates by her complicity that it is equally possible for some women to exploit what Sylvia Walby (1990:20) refers to as the "patriarchal mode of production". This explains why she connives with her husband at her daughter's expense. The three above-mentioned female characters, all mothers, in the three primary texts are therefore not only commodified agents of patriarchy but are also its beneficiaries. While this contravenes the ideals of feminist empathy, what is essential to highlight here is the fact that the subordinated daughters do behave in ways which challenge the oppressive treatment meted out to them. For example, Olanna breaks away from her nuclear family and marries her own choice of husband (Odenigbo); Tambudzai funds her education herself; while Beatrice scorns her father and other men such as Major Sam.

From the depiction of these female characters, the three novelists, Achebe, Adichie and Dangaremgba, have added their voices to the assertion that it is unfair to continue labelling all women, particularly those in the global south, as "weak, emotional, ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-borne" (Kumah, 2000:6). This accords with the findings of my study. These female characters are much more than powerless victims, expressing resistance to the oppressive patriarchal order in various creative ways, as demonstrated in this thesis. However, while these novelists acknowledge that these female characters' resistance to patriarchy is a new beginning for women, not all women have equal access to these possibilities. There are some female characters who do not embrace new gender possibilities and empowerment opportunities at all and still hold on to the practice of patriarchal hegemony perpetuated by their male counterparts. This is because psychological trauma, suffering, pain and emotional depression are deeply embedded and internalised to the extent that they cannot fight for empowerment and recognition. Men such as Chris and Elewa's uncle in *Anthills*; Chief Ozobia and Odengibo in *HYS*; and Babamukuru in *TMB* acknowledge the new roles women are performing. However, there are others like Mr. Therefore, Beatrice's father, Chief Okonji, Father Marcel, Shine and All Silent Men in *Anthills*, *HYS* and *TMB* respectively who hold on to the traditional and conventional portrayal of women, no matter what roles they play in the family, society or nation. Hence, the novels reveal that female

empowerment and emancipation is a slow process, which necessitates more education at a woman-to-woman level, such as Beatrice persuading unmarried women to concentrate on their careers rather than marrying "a rascal". Such education is moreover promoted through the literary texts as the authors highlight the agency of their female characters and the positive outcomes that emanate from their agency.

Not all men in the three novels are depicted in a negative patriarchal light. Some do not support the patriarchal hegemony of men, particularly when it involves inflicting violence and suffering on women's bodies. Some examples in the texts are when Chris is shot to death as he saves Adamma, the young girl whom a sergeant attempts to rape in *Anthills*. Odenigbo shows love, care and concern in facilitating the recuperation of his wife, Olanna, when her legs become numb and she is incapacitated in the Biafran War in *HYS*, while Uncle Babamukuru takes Tambudzai to England for her superior education in *TMB*. These instances underscore the fact that patriarchy and sexism are not a natural trait inherent in men: rather, they are learnt behaviours which can be unlearnt. *Anthills*, *HYS* and *TMB* create opportunities to conscientise and socialise all characters, especially men, to be receptive to the needs of women as well as accept equity and equality of women, men and children. It is through such acceptance that the uncompromising social limitations and expectations stacked up against women like Beatrice and Tambudzai begin to yield. The application of the theoretical and conceptual tools of feminist empathy allows for a focus on the ways in which these primary texts represent the positive consequences of empathetic engagement with the experiences of both the perpetrators and the victims of gendered oppression.

According to Chris Osuafore (2003: 40), Achebe, like other first-generation African writers, explores the African condition while situating his settings in "the pre-colonial [and post-independence] era in order to position what went wrong – the popular technique of short-cutting the future through the windows of the past". As a first-generation African writer, and even "one of the leading writers of the first generation" (Awuzie, 2018:124.4), Achebe makes ruralism prominent in his work as do other first-generation African authors such as Sembene Ousmane, Christopher Okigbo and Wole Soyinka. By doing this, they review the abundant colonial narratives about Africa (Awuzie, 2016; Egya, 2018; Nnolim, 2009). For example, *Anthills* is set in Abazon, a desert and Bassa, a city. In these places, especially in the latter,

Achebe uses his narrative to depict the assertive and empowered nature of women who fight against the subordination of the African female.

As shown in Chapter Three, the wrong that Achebe brings to the fore is how his male characters practise cultural traditions which debase women in such a way that allows the men to assert and express their superiority over the women. This is the core of the cultural definition of masculinity. As shown in Chapter One of this study, masculinity highlights these cultural traditions and methods of being that serve to affirm male dominance either as a man or a boy (Whitehead, 2002). In contrast to the depiction of toxic masculinity, Achebe constructs positive roles for women, and depicts them as formidable agents who subvert the status quo, showing that he addresses the abiding cry of women against their subjugation.

The third-generation African writers such as Adichie and Dangaremgba discussed in Chapters Three and Four respectively follow the practice of employing two or more settings for their novels. *HYS* and *TMB* are set in postcolonial Nigeria and Zimbabwe respectively. While Adichie sets her novel (*HYS*) in Abba, Nsukka, Lagos, Port-Harcout, Umuahia and Orlu, Dangaremgba sets hers (*TMB*) in Zimbabwe, Harare and Tambudzai's homestead/village. These settings, especially in Zimbabwe in *TMB*, are shown to be countries that are trying to heal from pain and suffering and move forward for development. Some of the settings in both *HYS* and *TMB* are characterised by poverty, including Orlu, Umuahia and Tambudzai's village where there is not much connection to the pockets of wealth concentrated in the cities of Lagos, Port-Harcourt and Harare. These rural settings afford the female characters the opportunity to remain true to their identities as a people. The economy of the village, especially Tambudzai's homestead where they cultivate green mealies, predominately depends on subsistence farming. This is an indication of the hard life attendant on the poverty of the striving female characters. So, ruralism appears to equate to poverty. When these female characters migrate from their rural settings to urban areas, there appears to be a positive shift in their circumstances even though they have to attain their socio-economic progress by enduring and overcoming hardships. While these settings chart a development in the character and identity of the women in the texts, they also immerse the reader in the experiences of these female characters by engaging them through feminist empathy to acknowledge how ubiquitous gendered oppression is, occurring geographically across the rural and urban spaces which these female characters have to navigate.

Among the villagers or inhabitants, patriarchy is the system that governs affairs, and this makes the village a place of fear and repressed memory. To escape this, Tambudzai moves to the urban setting of Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe, which becomes her second home, and where she explores opportunities for professional advancement. Similarly, Nsukka, Lagos and Port- Harcourt where Olanna, Kainene and their parents live and thrive, are characterised by wealth and life is better for them because this wealthy family can afford to satisfy their needs and wants. Olanna, later in the plot, finds life difficult in her marriage to Odenigbo at Nsukka. But she confronts him by resisting and unaccommodating his patriarchal culture of infidelity at Nsukka.

This dichotomy of rural versus urban, and poverty versus wealth, highlights the way that moving to the cities can help the female characters develop a sense of self that makes them become more assertive and less tolerant of domineering patriarchal culture. Adichie's and Dangaremgba's novels are seen as third- generation texts, which are a departure from the traditional and rural texts of the first- and second-generations like Achebe's *Anthills*, showing the limitations and inequalities that rural women are challenged with. However, through their assertiveness and defiance they resist and overcome all these challenges and emerge as real victors. As this study has revealed, Achebe, Adichie and Dangarembga have used their narrative techniques to expose, subvert, resist and encourage the overthrow of patriarchy in Nigeria and Zimbabwe.

6.3 Summary

By re-reading African literary texts through the lens of feminist empathy, I contend that feminist writers advocate their backing to instances of knowledge-driven, self-assertive, individualistic, educated and economically independent women as presented in Achebe's *Anthills*, Adichie's *HYS* and Dangarembga's *TMB*. All the authors studied demonstrate Western and African feminist ideals in their works. However, feminist empathy which is an aspect of African feminism prevails over the other kinds – womanism, motherism, femalism, and nego-feminism. This is because feminist empathy concerns itself with the phenomenon of pain caused by discrimination, injustice, exploitation, privation and bodily trauma that are directly or indirectly occasioned by culture. The Nigerian and Zimbabwean cultures have space to accommodate feminism because culture is dynamic and can also serve as a tool for change.

Analysis of the Nigerian and Zimbabwean cultures depicted in the texts show how it is possible for them to embrace feminist empathy (feminism) to bring out and enhance the strength in women for the improvement of society at large.

6.4 Recommendations for further study

Throughout this research, feminist empathy and other strands of feminist theories have suggested that the portrayals of African female and male characters in literature by African women writers do not differ from images presented by their male counterparts. Thus, the male writers show feminist empathy, and that female writers also extend empathy to male characters. Generally, it is suggested that women in such novels have a face, a voice and an identity. It would be interesting, therefore, to undertake a study of a novel or novels by Nuruddin Farah, who is identified by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o as Africa's first male feminist writer, whose hallmark is his ability to enter female subjectivity in his novels, which at the outset of his career featured central female characters. It would also be worthwhile to explore the male writer's empathy for female characters in Farah's novels with female protagonists.

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