Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's Snail-Sense Feminism: A Subtle Womanist Agenda for Nigerian Children's and Adult's Literature

By

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Dedication

To my late dad, Elder Felix Adeniyi Alalade.

And to S. Agboola Olatunji.

For the support.

Abstract

This thesis examines how the Nigerian woman writer, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense feminism manifests in some selected literary works by the writer. The thesis makes use of a selection of her works for adults, young adults and children and foregrounds the details of her snail-sense in the works. Acknowledging the importance of tradition of storytelling in situating cultural gender experiences within the Nigerian social and cultural world, the thesis addresses the cultural location of Adimora-Ezeigbo's stories as the propelling force behind the employment of her snail-sense feminist strategy. In this way the thesis can be seen to respond to Adimora-Ezeigbo's literary oeuvre as an acknowledgement and a continuation of the different feminist models that came before hers and have been developed by Nigerian women writers. The thesis examines the gender nuances of Adimora-Ezeigbo's children's literature as subtle gestures towards creating early gender awareness which runs in line with her gender complementarity within the snail-sense feminist strategy. Even though the research eventually found that despite the writer's claim to changing the portrayal of girl-child characters in literature meant for children, her fairytales for children still largely follows established patterns. Through the sample texts used in the research, the thesis establishes that Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense model is a variant which still follows the same path with earlier models by Nigerian women writers.

The thesis demonstrates that Adimora-Ezeigbo's literary oeuvre contributes to the Nigerian womanist literary debates especially in terms of the focused attention she gives to furthering the trajectory of a new feminist alternative. While a chapter each is devoted to examining the deployment of snail-sense in Adimora-Ezeigbo's adult and young adult fiction, the thesis devotes two chapters to the examination of the snail-sense feminist strategy in her children's literature because this is the area where she has written the most and an area where a dearth of feminist engagement still exists in Nigeria. While a chapter explores the development of women's writings in Nigeria since independence, a chapter examines how Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy for adults engages in a womanist exploration of women's history of power over time in Nigeria using the snail-sense feminist strategy. The two chapters on children's literature examine how her children's books engage with both retelling of oral tales and framing contemporary social issues in ways which consider the welfare of children within the snail-sense purview. The thesis also examines the ways she reworks old fairy tales to suit womanist purposes even though these do not show in the strong and serious ways she does this in the adult literature. The chapter on the young adult literature examines a text which shows Adimora-Ezeigbo's comment on the engaging and burning issue of women trafficking as a bane to women's development but a situation which calls to the importance of the snail-sense strategy in reworking a path of emancipation for trafficked women.

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Introduction

> The woman question cannot be said to be new-fashioned, neither is it too old a topic to deserve our focus in times like these. Issues which concern the woman who writes and therefore speaks, and the one who is written about and so is spoken for, may for a long time to come remain pertinent in [literary works].
>
> -Mabel Evwierhoma 2002.
>
> African women are aware that change cannot take place in vacuo but within a dynamic cultural crucible.
>
> Mary Modupe Kolawole 1997.

This thesis seeks to examine the different ways by which Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo engages with feminist ideas in her adult and children's literature. The thesis addresses the writer's unique feminist snail-sense model by examining how she deploys this in a selection of her literary texts across the three types of audiences for whom she writes. Snail-sense feminism is a feminist model which addresses issues of women's subjugation using an indigenous-based approach. The model adopts the characteristics of the snail animal for effective emancipation for women in Nigeria. It encourages women to use the slow pace mode of the snail as an important means to transcend subjugating conditions in Nigeria. Adimora-Ezeigbo considers the snail-sense as a means by which indigenous Nigerian women had successfully navigated cultural impediments. Addressing Adimora-Ezeigbo's literary trajectory over the course of her 27-year writing career, (1992-2019), the research also examines ways by which Adimora-Ezeigbo situates her fictional narratives within the larger literary corpus which focuses on gender within Nigeria's socio-cultural practices. Foregrounding the importance of the dynamics of what Mary Modupe Kolawole refers to as a "cultural crucible" (153) in Adimora-Ezeigbo's works, my thesis analyses her works as important means by which the works of women writers from Nigeria could be

understood. Thus, I explore the distinctions between her snail-sense postulation and other womanist alternatives proposed by other Nigerian women writers and critics. This is important as Adimora-Ezeigbo's work has more often than not shown affinity with other variants but cuts its own unique stand through the proposal of a particularly slow pace of the snail animal in achieving feminist freedom.

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo was born in 1947 in Uga town in Anambra State in Nigeria. She spent part of her early years in Uga, the oral traditional culture and history of which she usually links to some of her works and her aptitude in storytelling (*Gender Issues in Nigeria*, ch. 21). Starting her career as a graduate assistant at the University of Lagos in 1977, her writing career came to the public with her first children's book *The Buried Treasure* in 1992. The contributions of Adimora-Ezeigbo's critical and literary works to Nigerian literature have attracted critical considerations from other Nigerian critics and writers. In his *AkachiAdimora-Ezeigbo: Life and Literature*, Ezechi Onyerionwu regards Adimora-Ezeigbo as "a custodian of the African tradition in fiction" (21) and the emergence of her critical and literary works as a cultural intervention which adds to the ever-growing discourse on African women's situation. Onyerionwu's insightful work on the implications of Adimora-Ezeigbo's literary output for national development follows on other critical works which consider the trajectory of Adimora-Ezeigbo's life and works as having a cultural touch. For example, in a fairly recent collection of essays on Adimora-Ezeigbo's writings, *New Perspectives on a Literary Enigma: A Festschrift in Honour of Professor Theodora Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo*, several critics describe Adimora-Ezeigbo's emergence on the Nigerian literary scene as an energetic entrance which could not be ignored due to the number of works she produced within a short space of time and the fervour with which she creates an awareness of the cultural situation of Nigerian women (Emezue 2014, Nadaswaran 2014). Apart from critical works which show her ideological stand in terms of issues of national development in Nigeria and especially the

place of women in them, Adimora-Ezeigbo has published 41 literary works between 1992 and 2015, 25 of which are children's books. The importance of her work to the Nigerian feminist debate is captured in Godwin Emezue's words, that through her works Adimora-Ezeigbo "challenges any cultural structure that is erected and sustained to demean, deform and denigrate the woman" (51). This view of the importance of Adimora-Ezeigbo's contribution to the cultural reappraisal of the worth of African women runs through the trend of many of the critical appraisals of her work. She differs from many of other Nigerian women writers in her deliberate effort to situate her characters within her snail-sense ideological pose and the way she deploys her snail-sense womanist strategy to mediate the social conditions which she interrogates. Adimora-Ezeigbo's brainchild of snail-sense feminism provides an even clearer underpinning theoretical base for her literary works. My thesis departs from all the works that have been done so far on Adimora-Ezeigbo in the way I examine her deployment of her snail-sense idea in her literary works for both adult and children in the same place. My examination of all three works in her trilogy, *The Last of the Strong Ones* (1996), *House of Symbols* (2001), and *Children of the Eagle* (2002), as a representation of a historical continuum within the snail-sense idea is quite novel. Most of the works that have considered her trilogy have studied each of the texts on its own merit and are not in-depth in the way I have examined the snail-sense in the texts chosen for my thesis. Also, juxtaposing her snail-sense with some of the other variants of womanist ideological poses from Nigeria has not been done in any of the works done so far on Adimora-Ezeigbo.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's earlier critical works and literary writings had set her views of women's experiences within the Nigerian social space into motion. *Gender issues in Nigeria* which she published in 1996 examines various issues relating to women in terms of how forces of culture determine women's positions in Nigeria. Adimora-Ezeigbo's theoretical positions on this were formally put into a more cogent and coherent form and

clearly enunciated in the University of Lagos, Faculty of Arts Monograph Series in 2012. In *Gender Issues* while laying a foundation for her later literary efforts, she argues that:

> The misfortune of the modern Nigerian, nay African woman is that she enjoys neither political nor economic power. Her tragedy is that she has virtually lost out on all counts and finds herself even more marginalised and devalued than her traditional foremothers. (xvi)

She raises this and other social issues of womanist concerns in her later works thereby positioning her stance on gender issues on the African continent. In her trilogy, for instance, she traces what she refers to as the marginality and devaluation of the modern Nigerian women through a long line of powerful women within the Igbo cultural system. Using memory and history as supporting literary motifs and evidence, her appraisal of the social conditions which gave birth to Nigerian women's total condition and the responses of the modern woman elucidate her vision of snail-sense strategy.

Although Adimora-Ezeigbo's writings usually and specifically rely on the Igbo[1] culture as the basis for the social issues that she raises in her works on women, the discernible similarities in the patriarchal traditional cultures within Nigeria and Africa make it possible to make generalisations in terms of gender practices and women's experiences. Several critics of her works agree that her Igbo background influences what she espouses in many of her literary writings. Onyerionwu, for instance, submits that there is a "guiding Igbo spirit" which propels the "philosophical ethos she espouses" (5) in her works. Earlier, Nnolim (2009) had noted that the "home grown common-sense" that has propelled Adimora-Ezeigbo's equally "home-spun" feminist model and womanist engagements result from the cultural background in which she grew and was nurtured, the Igbo culture (92). Agreeing with these views Adimora-Ezeigbo also attests to the influence

[1] The Igbo people occupy the south eastern part of Nigeria. Occupying five of the thirty-six states of the nation with an estimated 19% of the total population of Nigeria, it is one of the three largest ethnic groups in the nation. Although it has a central language referred to as Igbo language, there are varieties of mutually intelligible dialects due to the many scattered sub-groups found all over the occupied states.

of the Igbo story-telling tradition on her literary output. In her critical book which clearly and extensively lays out the direction of her womanist engagements, *Gender Issues in Nigeria: A Feminist Perspective*, she gives an insight into the earlier Igbo cultural influences that shape her story-telling aptitude:

> When I was growing up, I was struck by the large corpus of stories by women in my locality for the purpose of entertaining and educating our young people. Wherever I found myself – whether at home or visiting my maternal and paternal grandparents and their kinsmen – I was always a participant in and an avid listener to exciting tales narrated and performed by gifted women storytellers, young and old. I remember vividly when I was between five and ten years old. My father was the Assistant District Officer (ADO) of a County Council. A section of his official quarters was given over to women from our hometown… who came to the county headquarters to be delivered of their babies… Throughout this period, I was fed and nurtured, with the folklore of my people, by these pregnant artists whose creative minds were alert and vibrant… What I remember most vividly today… [are] the numerous stories I heard which have helped to structure my vision as an artist and critic and to enrich my understanding of my culture and tradition. To these women, I owe my extensive knowledge of folklore, the art of storytelling and the power to create and structure tales. (78)

I have quoted extensively in order to establish Adimora-Ezeigbo's own thoughts about the importance of the cultural influences and sources of her writing career. This influence permeates her literary works as well as many of her critical works which dissect the Africanist womanist issues from this traditional and cultural perspective.

Snail-sense feminism is Adimora-Ezeigbo's unique feminist proposal. The snail-sense idea blossomed into a gender analytical proposal in 2012 in order to add her voice to the feminist debate within Nigerian literary circles. Referring to the term as one of the strategies which "describes the age-old but still relevant strategy women adopted in the past and which Nigerian women and women characters in contemporary novels apply to negotiate their way to survival," (*Snail-sense Feminism: Building on an Indigenous Model,* 1), Adimora-Ezeigbo argues that the model thrives on the efforts by Nigerian women to survive the "rugged terrain of patriarchy with its restrictions and subjugations" (1). The snail-sense simultaneously acknowledges the fact that Nigerian women have usually faced a traditional and subjugating patriarchal structure while also arguing that there has always been a traditional mode of female power negotiation which attempts no headlong confrontation with patriarchy. Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense suggests that in order not to leave room for a drastic change, Nigerian women have often maintained a philosophical snail pace stance in arguing for a position of power and negotiating for a measure of independence within the Nigerian social and cultural milieu. Adimora-Ezeigbo occupies a slightly different ideological position from some other Nigerian women writers such as Modupe Kolawole (1997) who believes that there are different ways Nigerian women have been both silent and speaking (3). For Adimora-Ezeigbo, the snail-sense philosophy shows that Nigerian women have always retained a measure of power as speaking objects even though with a measure of deliberate holding back in order not to upset the patriarchal structure. Thus, snail-sense as a feminist strategy in Adimora-Ezeigbo's works borrows from the unique natural and deliberate quality of slowness of the snail to move from one point of womanist gender negotiation to another. She foregrounds slowness as an effective strategy of attaining feminist freedom.

The global rise in gender-based and liberation-directed feminist literary politics sharpened the writings of Adimora-Ezeigbo. Indeed between the middle 1980s when

womanist influences enter Nigerian literary consciousness, and 2012 when Adimora-Ezeigbo put her idea of snail-sense feminism into perspective, more than four African-based theoretical postulations were developed by women writers and critics to redirect the discussion of women's issues in literary and critical discourses. Coincidentally, a number of the women critics are Nigerians, like Adimora-Ezeigbo. I discuss this in Chapter One of this thesis where I examine four alternative feminist strategies and ideas as some of the structures on which Adimora-Ezeigbo builds her own idea of snail-sense feminism. The early 1980s through the 1990s saw a lot of activities bordering on opposition to African mainstream theorising about the audibility and visibility of African women in African literature and mainstream Western feminism. It also coincides with the rise of both women critics and writers on the Nigerian literary scene. Several unexplored areas of Nigerian women's lived experiences are finding expression in literary works with commensurate critical appraisals of them. Adimora-Ezeigbo's voice as a critic within the area of discourses on women and literature had started to find expression within the academic scene. Her first published critical text on gender studies, *Gender Issues,* outlines various issues in Nigerian gender practices[2] in kaleidoscopic detail. This text sets the outline of her later full engagement with feminist issues in the following years of her career as writer and literary critic.

Even though Adimora-Ezeigbo's academic contributions before the publication of *Gender Issues* had shown a writer and critic with an inclination towards African women's

[2] *Gender Issues in Nigeria: A Feminine Perspective* outlines many of the issues which Adimora-Ezeigbo later comes to give full attention to in her literary works. The year 1996 was only four years into the public appearance of her first literary work, *The Buried Treasure* which was published in the United Kingdom by Heinemann. But in *Gender Issues* she critically appraises issues such as female circumcision, a widespread cultural practice in Nigeria, "Women and the arts: Expression of Female Creative Process" (78-113), role differentiation, dismal representation of women in public affairs, control of the female body, naming and women's identity, the image of women behind the wheel, women's image in proverbs, the effects of the Islamic and Christian religions on Nigerian women, and so on.

studies[3], she would go on to give full vent to her ideas and propose her version of the counter-discourse to radical Western feminism in clearer detail in subsequent years. She gives an insight into what the snail-sense feminist strategy advocates in *Gender Perspectives*. For instance, she outlines the different ways by which modern Nigerian women remain under the dictates of traditional cultures and how they can modify their lives in ways which leave them with agency but still recognises that the gender encumbrances are part of their daily lives. In her words:

> It is no easy matter being a woman in a society like ours where women are expected to do two-thirds of the chores. Women cannot escape many of the responsibilities thrust upon them by culture and tradition, but they can at least control their destiny to a large extent, and structure and take pride in every aspect of their lives. (7)

This argument incorporates the notion of the slow pace of the snail which Adimora-Ezeigbo argues as the best approach to combating gender imbalance in Nigeria. In Chapter One I flesh out the differences and similarities of Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense and other variants from Nigerian feminist critics and writers, situating snail-sense within a cultural matrix peculiar to her womanist vision.

Being one of the female writers who chose to write from Nigeria, the social and cultural location of the stories that Adimora-Ezeigbo tells becomes important in understanding the cultural ambience of her works. The thesis situates her snail-sense idea within the other feminist ideological alternatives that have emerged among Nigerian women writers since the 1990s. Her focus on issues pertaining to women in her literary works has been the main highlight of her literary efforts. This concern, with feminist issues that appeared in her first literary work *The Hidden Treasure* began what would later bloom

[3] Between 1989 and 1996, she had contributed nine chapters to edited books. Six out of the nine contributions are on various topical issues on African women in literary works. The same avid attachment to issues of women within the African space and outside of it permeates seven of her fifteen journal articles between 1982 and 2013.

into a full womanist endeavour which is anchored in an affinity with her Nigerian cultural experiences. Part of the reason Adimora-Ezeigbo has maintained her relevance in the Nigerian literary scene is her idea of snail-sense as an important means of dismantling the structure of patriarchy in Nigeria. An apt description of Adimora-Ezeigbo's culturally situated womanist ideology can be found in Emmanuel Adedun and Benedict Nweke's introduction to a collection of essays in her honour. The duo aver that:

> In her numerous writings, Adimora-Ezeigbo has demonstrated an unequivocal commitment to womanist issues. She has been described as a legendary icon and a promoter of the complementarity ideology, and has used her works to interrogate patriarchal attitudes as well as dislodge Nigerian women from the periphery to the centre. She embarks on the reconstruction of women in her female characters in the hope of freeing them from the bonds of social oppression, making them visible and powerful enough in a modern democratic Nigeria. She uses her works also to uncover the unacknowledged strength of African womanhood sidelined in the heat of feminist aesthetic. At best her creative arts can be said to have been utilized in restoring the dignity of womanhood. (xiii).

The reconstruction to which Adedun and Nweke refer began in a very subtle and mild form in Adimora-Ezeigbo's first literary endeavour, *The Hidden Treasure.* Even though this text is a children's book, much of what she would come to lay out more expressively and coherently in both her critical and literary endeavours started with the thematic focus of the text, the effects of the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-70 on widows and children in the southern part of Nigeria. Part of the reason she maintains a measure of relevance is her specific stance on the issue of women and women's treatment not only in Nigeria but throughout Africa. This is part of the reason why I use the words African woman and Nigerian woman interchangeably in some places in my research in recognition of the

nature of the debate on the similarities and differences of cultural experiences of women on the continent and the fact that most of the women critics whose works I use for the critical parts of my research use African women in a general sense in most cases.

For reasons that my thesis examines in the two chapters on Adimora-Ezeigbo's writings for children, the reception of her works for adult readers outweighs the number of critical appraisals of her children's literature even though she has written more within the children's genre than for adults. This is where my thesis shows a huge departure from existing examinations of her work so far. The majority of the available criticism of her work focuses on all the genres of adult literature which she has published so far. But in her inaugural lecture in 2008, Adimora-Ezeigbo describes her efforts at writing for children thus: "Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, nothing gives me greater joy than writing for children, especially Nigerian children".[4] This she has shown in the number of literary works she has produced for children. I argue in Chapters Four and Five that she makes efforts at expressing a womanist reorientation in some of these children's texts. She works these stories within her ideological brainchild of snail-sense even though her exploration in the texts does not show the strength that I found in her adult literature as the nuances about gender are quite subtle because of the focused audience which are children. Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense is quite subtle and has been condemned in some quarters[5] as too negative in connotation to be of much use to women's struggles. But being a strong

[4] She makes this assertion in her inaugural lecture at the University of Lagos, Nigeria. Titled 'Artistic Creativity: Literature in the Service of Society', she specifically outlines the ideological vision and underpinnings of her children's literature referring to her success up to then in these terms "But perhaps the greatest contribution I have made to literature is evident in the novels, short stories and children's books I have written since the publication of my first work of fiction for young readers…nothing gives me greater joy than writing for children" (25)

[5] One of the voices which had expressed some doubt about the suitability of Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail symbolism in womanist literary politics is the popular Nigerian poet and academic, Niyi Osundare. His was one of the critical comments during the 37th Annual Conference of the African Literature Association at Ohio University, Athens, Ohio where Adimora-Ezeigbo presented her paper titled "Snail-Sense Feminism: Building on an Indigenous Model". Osundare commented that a better symbolism than the snail would be adequate in galvanizing the woman into action to free herself from the shackles of injustice and oppression (*Snail-Sense* 49). The cultural implications of the animal which equate the snail with slowness and inability to effectively navigate one's territory, could have been responsible for Osundare's opinion of the snail symbol.

advocate for early intervention in the social conditioning of young children and early healthy gender orientation, Adimora-Ezeigbo claims that she deliberately uses female children as protagonists in her children's literature. I examine a number of her children's works along this line in order to explore the feasibility of the snail-sense strategy for children's fiction. I use both Perry Nodelmann's and Peter Hunt's appraisal of children's literature for reference on this section. Even though the two critics pursue this issue using a Western framework, their work sheds much light on the use of feminist arguments in children's literature and this speaks to my study of Adimora-Ezeigbo's texts for children in this regard.

Explaining her trajectory in children's literature, Adimora-Ezeigbo emphasises that she writes to underscore the importance of cultural orientations and social reengineering (in terms of reworking dying moral ethos) as a means of moulding young ones in her literature for children. Starting her literary career with *The Buried Treasure* which was published by Heinemann in the United Kingdom in 1992, she has gone on to publish 25 children's books up till 2015. This includes three collections of poetry. Two of her books for children, *The Prize* and *The Buried Treasure* have been translated into Xhosa and Swahili, two major African languages spoken in the eastern and southern parts of Africa. I consider this translation of the two texts as an important attestation to her strong writerly stature within this genre even though there is no evidence that the reception is linked to her snail-sense. Also, in relation to the present status of children's literature as a genre within Nigerian literary production, I consider the popularity of some of Adimora-Ezeigbo's children's writing as an attestation to how she makes the genre reflect the intercultural nature of the social changes taking place in Africa.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's works for children have received a measure of acclaim within Nigeria. In 2007, *My Cousin Sammy* jointly won (with Mabel Segun) the prestigious Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG) Literature Prize for the best children's literature

for the year, and in 2009 her *Heart Songs* singly won the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) / Cadbury Prize for Literature in the Poetry Category. Her interrogation of the tensions in urban/rural migration in Nigeria and its implications for children in *My Cousin Sammy* using the persona of an 11-year-old girl makes the text relevant in terms of subtler feminist issues, for contemporary times in Nigeria. In some ways, her works do not radically depart from the works of earlier writers such as Mabel Segun, Esther Bali, Teresa Meniru, Christie Ade-Ajayi, and other renowned children's writers in Nigeria, but she shapes her focus better by creating more assertive and stronger female protagonists as an effective means of calling attention to her snail-sense literary politics. I explore her literary efforts at creating children's literature which examines how social concerns within Nigeria are simplified for children using children protagonists. Within her children's literature I also focus on the importance of gender positionality within a cultural frame juxtaposing parallels from some of her adult literature that I use in this research. I posit that the family, home, age groups and other communal institutions are social components that she presents as vital in the early socialisation of young ones and that through each of these, the cultural ideas attached to people's roles and the implications for understanding the background from which such roles arise within the snail-sense become evident.

Adimora -Ezeigbo's fascination with children's literature is not unconnected with the influence of Western writers such as Dickens, Austen and the Grimm Brothers with whom she became familiar at an early age. This might actually be responsible for the thrust of many of her works for children which appear in the form of fairy tales. In an interview with Jennie Renton in 2015, Adimora-Ezeigbo admitted that she sometimes subverts the format of fairytale motifs whereby she creates agency in women in order to destabilise the popular appearance of men as heroes in common story lines. For example, her *Asa and the Little Stream* shows this female agency to an extent as I examine in Chapter Five. Many of her works for both adults and children push this strategy forward to express her feminist

politics which she later codified into snail-sense feminism. Many of these works reflect a cultural negotiation and reconstruction of gender politics albeit in subtle terms.

The writer's effort at forging a cultural reconstruction and reorientation about women and their social roles through literary works finds further avenue for expansion through her children's literature. In response to Achebe's (2007) observation on the constantly changing literary situation in Africa, Adimora-Ezeigbo's works for children show a concern to accommodate the changes and reconstruct a meaningful literary base along gender lines for the next generation of the nation. In some of these works she employs tropes which assist her to foreground her ideas about the treatment of women and the place of children in cultural reorientation as regards the treatment of women. Stringing together hitherto foreign elements with home-grown and local elements in children's stories, a hybrid (noticed also in earlier works for children by male writers) which reflects the changing mode of storytelling for children in Nigeria emerges. This reflects a lot in writers' mixture of imagery, character, theme and even tone that set the pace of the direction of stories. This blending is akin to what Roland Robertson would refer to as 'glocalization', a term which he describes in terms of the relational movements in international and local economics and cultures but sums up as "a global outlook adapted to local conditions" (28). Within the emerging trends in the contents and nature of Nigerian children's stories, one can explain glocalization in terms of the influence of writers' exposure to stories from British writers. This development takes form in Adimora-Ezeigbo's children's stories and has given birth to a new outlook in the stories while still attempting to retain its home base in some particulars. This is a form of intercultural interaction which Robertson further pronounces as "projects of importation and hybridization" (41). Adimora-Ezeigbo uses this hybridization to locate the children's literature that she writes within a developing space. For instance, her *Singing in the Rain*

explores everyday topical issues in the lives of Nigerian children where some of the poems dwell on the nexus of an old order of story-telling tradition and newer social developments.

Aiming at "resurrecting the buried and neglected female past" (*Gender Issues,* 3) and reconstructing in newer ways an "awareness of the inequality of the sexes which is neither a biological given nor a divine mandate, but a cultural construct" (3), by creating more and powerful female protagonists pitched against the dominating structures of patriarchy, Adimora-Ezeigbo's literary works for children place much emphasis on changing the status quo in children's literature. This hybrid form of literature for children often exhibits the qualities and features of both the traditional (oral) and the modern (written) story in both form and content. Aside from examining Adimora-Ezeigbo's creation of more and empowered female protagonists who have voice and agency, I explore the selected children's literature for issues of historical and philosophical conditions of childhood, children's culture within the larger traditional culture and as processes of acculturation and socialisation within the snail-sense purview. This area links the selected adult literature with the children's as cultural interventions in snail-sense ideals.

Although using children's literature to underpin feminist ideas may not be a new phenomenon in many nations of the world, for some Nigerian women writers this new means of apprehending untoward treatment of women and engaging with this as early as possible in children's literature further propels the agitation for women's emancipation. I point to the presence of notions of feminism in Adimora-Ezeigbo's children's literature in this section. The presence of notions of snail-sense feminism presupposes stretching the boundaries of a form of literature which has not hitherto focused on gendered narratives to radical frontiers, using children's literature for feminist engagements. This situation also conjures a state of power relations which moves beyond mere socialising entertainment. This condition has placed more imperatives on children's literature in line with Hunt's argument that the politics of children's literature is further made apparent by the fact that

adults write the texts and use them as part of complex power relations (85). This rather suggests that the contents of children's literature which seem quite simple on the surface may not actually be as simple as they look because it then becomes a site for gendered political suggestions, a notion to which Adimora-Ezeigbo's oeuvre for child audiences alludes. I discuss the snail-sense undercurrents using the following samples of her works for children: *The Buried Treasure, Asa and the Little Stream, Whisker the Brave Cat, The Prize, Sunshine the Miracle Child, Ezezemale and the Tree Spirits, Red One and the Wizard of Mula*, *My Cousin Sammy, Ako the Storyteller,* and *Alani the Troublemaker*. All ten books foreground the concept of family as an important social agent and a nucleus around which the bigger society operates. Thus, the hierarchy takes shape within this domestic unit. This represents the Africanist Womanist ideology of the family as a fulcrum of basic operation for the average African. I also argue that Adimora-Ezeigbo borrows extensively from the oral culture of storytelling with the various defining motifs which in many ways form a nexus between her adult and children's literature. Oral narratives provide a rich source of materials for children's story writers like Adimora-Ezeigbo who borrow from existing oral stories and sometimes restructure them to reflect new realities. I discuss the use of songs, proverbs, metaphors and other culturally indicative nuances as definite culture markers with an aim at snail-sense purposes in both children's and adult literature. I draw cultural inferences along feminist lines from the various symbols, motifs and imagery used by Adimora-Ezeigbo in telling the stories while interrogating the effectiveness of the writer's attempt at incorporating her snail-sense feminist ideals into these works.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's works for children form part of the body of literary works that bridge a generation gap between the oral tradition and written stories which is the new mode of children's literary socialisation in Nigeria. She creates children's literature situated within the Nigerian cultural orientations and emerging social realities in ways that show how these social environments affect children. The dwindling economic situation of

Nigeria which started in the mid-1980s with the military rule of General Babangida affected every facet of Nigerian life including the education sector. This was the beginning of the era of the sets of inexperienced writers referred to as 'hungry authors'. This group produced substandard literature texts which some of the illegal and unauthorized schools adopt for use in their classrooms. These types of texts are considered substandard as many of them are written in incorrect English language and sometimes fail to follow outlined curriculum topics for children. But with the publication of her first children's book, *The Buried Treasure,* Adimora-Ezeigbo's works enter the Nigerian children's literature market when the economic situation of the nation gives room for the production of substandard children's literary texts. These types of texts found their way into many classrooms (especially the many unauthorized schools[6] which had sprung up all over the nation). The professional way in which her works are handled from writing through publication and distribution puts her in a good stead to rescue the waning standard of written children's stories and the ways in which old ways of storytelling find a dependable transition into the written mode. In the replacement of oral storytelling, a mode which is becoming more unfashionable with the establishment of newer literary approaches among other factors, Adimora-Ezeigbo's children's stories provide an avenue for relevance and an environment more yielding and accommodating of developments in the general body of children's literature.

The importance of the womanist movement started by Nwapa in the development of Nigerian women's writing is reflected in Modupe Kolawole's examination of womanist ideology within the African social and cultural environment. In *Womanism and African Consciousness*, Kolawole argues that "African women are aware that change cannot take

[6] The porous nature of monitoring of the establishment of non-standard education institutions in Nigeria gives room for the establishment of unregistered schools. Many of these schools engage in unlawful recruiting of unqualified teachers and use of unapproved literary texts by unqualified authors who do not understand the issues involved in writing for children. Two examples are Hammed Motirade's *The Ghost in Town* (2001), and *The blind Cat*. (2004). The high cost of some of the government approved literature textbooks compounds the problems of using books from cheaper sources.

place in vacuo, but within a dynamic cultural crucible" (153). Engaging Kolawole's use of the word "crucible", one can assume two important resonances within the context of cultural changes as these concern African women. First, the encompassing nature of culture in storing the essential worldview of a people and their social heritage, and second, the ordeal-like condition of constantly changing environment whereby the African woman has to face a state of continuous change, fight for relevance and maintain a position of authority in her own right. The realisation of this informs the focus of Nigerian women writers whose awareness of the non-static nature of culture keeps their writings in a state of constant movement along the unstable line of culture. Keeping their works populated by women characters, women's experiences, issues of female identity and freedom, the literary outputs demonstrate an awareness of moving with time even while taking cognisance of antecedents in form of past history of women's power which give meaning to their literary struggles. This "search for self-respect, dignity, self-assertion, and new moral values in a new quest for redefinition and self-esteem" (Kolawole 194) in a constantly changing milieu grants the defining cultural trait to the writers' works. Bamidele argues that in many ways it is a carry-over of the job of the traditional artists who assume the role of redeeming agents within the traditional African societies (28). This role has always been shared by both male and female artists. But my concern in this thesis is how the dynamics of culture in terms of treatment of women and women's responses over time are artistically represented in the works of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo through the snail-sense prism. This is especially considered in the examination of her trilogy where she represents snail-sense responses through a matriarchal genealogy.

Focusing on the ways in which African women's cultural experiences differ from those of their Western counterparts, African women writers and women literary critics evolve ideas on women which situate their experiences within the African cultural environment. In her seminal work on the various African cultural locations and how these

locations have shaped the literary endeavours of women into different strategical poses, Mary Modupe Kolawole submits that:

> Several factors mediate the location of African women in gender discourses and some of these are personal, others are communal. One faces a problem in any attempt to generalize about all the women on a continent as diverse and as vast as Africa. Colonialism brought different kinds of affiliation to different parts of the continent. National, ethnic and regional idiosyncrasy, predominant religious influence, tradition, modernism, and post-colonial conditions intercept the writers' perception and consciousness. Nonetheless, these women are not only speaking back, they are fighting back as they deconstruct distorted images or misrepresentations of African women. These voices are not monolithic but multiple and the relevance of this outlook to African indigenous beliefs and attitudes also highlights the varying reactions to western feminism as a universal or universalising theory. (5)

Apart from enunciating the intertwining nature of experiences at different levels as these affect women and their literary output, Kolawole opens up the kernel of the diverse experiences which gave birth to the different strands of reactions discernible in African women's writings. This reinforces Bolanle Sotunsa's (2009) observation that the difference in the cultural backgrounds within Africa "necessitates a difference in [women's] outlook and worldview" (32). One level at which these differences are realised largely remains the recourse to traditional cultural affiliations to express what living within these spaces means for women.

Women writers gradually emerged on the Nigerian literary scene in the mid-1960s after a number of male writers had already registered their presence with publication of literary works in all genres. Works such as Amos Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard*, T.M. Aluko's *One Man One Wife*, Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*, and a host of others

had received acclaim within the nation by then. As the responses from the newer male writers (to the earlier ones such as Achebe and Soyinka), whom Akingbe refers to as "radical experimentalist"[7] (33) gained ground and continued to encourage a movement towards reinventing the African woman as important in Africa's history, women writers too set themselves to the task of representing African women's experience more accurately. Here is the point at which feminist literary engagements actually begin. The foundation was laid in the first feminist novel in Africa, Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*. The novel showcases a deliberate attempt to reverse the stereotyped portrayal of the African woman hitherto laid out in men's literary writings. Nwapa explains in "Women and Creative Writing in Africa" that "male authors understandably neglect to point out the positive side of womanhood … Women have started to redefine themselves; they have started to project themselves as they feel they should be presented" (527). This projection has become a huge womanist task which has continued over several decades in Nigeria.

The foregoing literary history is important in negotiating the literary oeuvre of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo on whom I focus in this thesis. Her snail-sense feminist strategy distinguishes her work from that of some of her contemporaries as I will discuss further in Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six. The cultural nuances and implications of her literary oeuvre demand that the various gender issues that she raises be seen from the standpoint of her own snail-sense gender strategy. Starting her writing career in the mid 1980s, at a time when women's issues had gained and were still gaining much literary attention in Africa,

[7] The experimental nature of these writers works reflect in their adoption of newer modes of literary representations, especially their reworking of history in ways which grant better agency to women in their writings. These are writers such as Bode Sowande, Tanure Ojaide, Isidore Okpewho, Femi Osofisan and others. Some of these male writers veered from the focus of the earlier male writers such as Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka in their experimentation with newer character portrayal modes. For instance, Femi Osofisan started out by creating works which deconstruct paternal power and male domination while foregrounding female agency. His *Tegonni: An African Antigone* is created along this ideological line. He also experiments with the creation of powerful historical female figures such as Moremi. The Moremian paradigm is common in his plays. (Moremi was a Yoruba mythical/historical queen who sacrificed her high position in search of a solution to the incessant raid by alien invaders on her town). Osofisan uses this myth in creating works such as *The Women of Owu*, an adaptation of Euripides' *The Trojan Women.*

Adimora-Ezeigbo follows the growing trend of situating the Nigerian woman within her cultural environment in order to create a cultural space to interrogate the issues concerned in women's social and cultural development. Comparing the cultural milieux of acclaimed Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe and Adimora-Ezeigbo, Onyerionwu observes that the three factors on which the African tradition in literature has been founded are what he calls "the original", "the experiential" and "the borrowed" (21). While the borrowed stands slightly apart as an aggregate of outside influences which had found their way into Africans' living experiences and especially as these relate to how literary works have represented the effects of these changes, what he refers to as the original and the experiential have very thin boundaries in terms of distinctive features. Both encapsulate the belief and customs and how these form the crux of African writers' works. He argues that traditional culture provides a rich source of narrative elements such as the setting, types of characters, genres and so on for many of the writers who had emerged over time from Africa's various rich cultural backgrounds. Kolawole similarly argues that many women writers of African extraction are using literary works steeped within the many traditional cultures of Africa as means of cultural revolution and change. It is within this literary context that I situate the literary endeavours of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo whose writings often move to and fro between the past and present social and political environments of Nigeria to dissect the social conditions of the African woman on the continent using the snail-sense feminist strategy.

As Kolawole rightly observes, the process of self-redefinition for African women is closely linked with the social changes on the continent (160). Within the Nigerian literary writing space for instance, the influences of ethnic affiliations, peculiarity of colonial experiences and traditional gender cultures define (even if subtly) the cultural realities of the writing milieu of the women writers working from specific regions of the nation. The colonialists built on the structure of governance that they met on the ground in each of the

regions of Nigeria: for example, while the indirect rule introduced by the colonial masters made use of warrant chiefs in the eastern part of Nigeria, they used the existing monarchical structures in the south western parts. Many of the Igbo areas are republican in nature, thus the rallying point for the colonial government is the warrant chiefs many of whom worked against the existing traditional culture of arbitrating through age-grade system and elders' forums, thereby disrupting the existing cultural structure and causing a cultural dislocation as seen in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones*. Also, unlike in the south western part of Nigeria where women take on traditional rulership offices, the eastern part where Adimora-Ezeigbo sets her stories does not have this culture of women rulers. But I argue here that despite the differences in the lived social experiences and realities of Nigerian women, the basic thrust still remains the same, the fact that in whichever way their realities are lived, there is a similarity of experiences in terms of the tendencies in an entrenched social system to muffle and keep in subjection a section of the populace. This subjection has usually been refuted through a measure of resistance as attested to in the works of Adimora-Ezeigbo like many other women writers in Nigeria. But as the realities change due to political and social developments so also the focuses change accordingly. It is within this light that I create an examination of the literary output of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo. The tracing of historical snail-sense feminist strategy in her trilogy, *The Last of the Strong Ones*, *House of Symbols*, and *Children of the Eagle,* is especially refocused as a progressive development in the evolution of Nigerian women through changes brought on by social realities and political developments to which women in her fictional history respond.

The oral medium is of importance to the majority of African writers. Abiola Irele argues that the oral medium of recording or propagating storytelling is of immense importance to African writers even though the Western world which has a longer history of literacy has often viewed orality with a measure of scepticism. Irele argues: "This new

skepticism seeks to deny the capacity of language to disseminate values that are other than purely textual and formal, to generate meanings that reflect the dense texture of experience" (77). He emphasises that there is an intimate relationship between language and consciousness, and between expression and experience, the milieu within which African orality functions in African writers' works. African writers continue to borrow from the rich existing oral lores of their traditional culture. Irele further posits that there is "an obvious sense in which orality can be considered as the 'true' literature of Africa" (79) because "it represents that form of expression to which African sensibilities are most readily attuned" (79). In the same vein, Okpewho observes the recourse that many African writers make to oral traditions at different levels in their literary works. He observes that the borrowings that African writers do from oral traditions are closely tied to an effort to redeem the untrue image of Africa in Western literature and to "contribute toward this vindication of traditional African culture" (82). These observations are apt for the fictional narratives of Adimora-Ezeigbo in some ways. The oral elements such as proverbs and symbols with which her works are often infused could be found within the Igbo culture. Many of these symbols are in her trilogy which is situated within the Igbo cultural world. The adaptation of orality has been a means which grants cultural nuances to her works. Okpewho argues that these oral elements sustain the works of African writers Achebe and Soyinka. While Achebe explores the traditional narrative approach found in speech performance, Soyinka appropriates mythological characters and situates them in stories artistically woven to fit into modern reading (84). In similar ways Adimora-Ezeigbo employs this oral ethos to grant cultural anchoring to her fictional characters following previous writers' pattern of invoking cultural modes even though hers is more inclined towards engaging with historical female patterns of showing a measure of female freedom. These historical patterns show women as fellow power brokers alongside their male

counterparts and as astute businesswomen who are major stakeholders in the economy of their society.

Davies provides more insight into the employment of oral narrative techniques in Nigerian writers' works when she argues that "in problematizing women's space in a modern African setting, orature is a domain of visibility and audibility" (10). Kolawole also contends that women writers actually draw inspiration from oral literature. She advocates for a re-inscription of the agency granted women through orality. Thus, I examine the ways in which memory making through history and oral narratives lends credence to the power of women within oral spaces. I explore this in detail in Chapter Three focusing on the trilogy and situating the three texts within what Kolawole describes as "areas of positive women's location" (73). The intersections of history, memory and women's place in traditional power structures form important junctures in Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense feminist strategy. In a contrary view, Aidoo argues that there is an "aesthetic vacuum" (157) which prevents female writers from adequately drawing any considerable inspiration from the oral repertoire of their cultures simply because the majority of women writers are alienated from the traditional sources by growing up in urban or semi-urban areas where cultural traditions have waned. Aidoo seems to be alone on this stand as most other female writers agree that the rich oral store of their traditional societies assists in locating the stories they write in most cases. (Emecheta 1998, Kolawole 1997, Christian 1985). Adimora-Ezeigbo particularly emphasises the importance of these oral beginnings as one of her inspirations towards storytelling. Gunner adds to this debate in her observation that:

> In an era of globalization, orality has not disappeared but has often adapted itself in its many forms to become a vehicle for the expression of the fears and hopes of new generations of African women, a vector for the making of modern identities and formalizing new experiences. (136).

Borrowing heavily from the Igbo oral repertoire within which the cultural sensibilities in her stories are established, Adimora-Ezeigbo explores women's positions in terms of the dictates of culture. Chris Barker argues that understanding of culture in the overall creation of literary works and its importance to the formation of people's lived experience deepens an understanding of the cultural nuances of these works. For Barker, the exploration of culture as constituted by human signifying practices, the meaning, and representations generated in the context in which they occur make cultural studies an important tool in studying power relations and how imperative these are in exploring socio-political issues such as gendered ones (50). Even though the evolution of gender studies over the years has reshaped both the understanding and (to an extent) the practices inherent in gender relations, emerging and newly crafted perspectives reveal a dynamism which is anything but stable. As newer modes of apprehending gender interactions and understanding within Nigerian cultures emerge, changes in cultural outlook create more grounds in which to examine gender issues. In many ways influences from developed nations and globalisation keep gender awareness, interactions and perspectives in a state of constant flux. In a way, both femininity and masculinity carry precise meanings within traditional cultures and these meanings are prone to changes as cultures undergo evolution. The construction of gender in Nigeria, for instance, has been analysed and studied from the positions of the changes that had occurred before and during the periods of the nation's interaction with colonial powers. This is evident in Admora-Ezeigbo's trilogy and its dissection of the issue through the snail-sense lens.

Being a postcolonial nation, gender practices in Nigeria have similarities to those of other postcolonial nation states in Africa. Ketu Katrak's book, *Politics of the Body* provides much understanding about the different manifestations of sexual cultures and how these reflect the status of being women within post-colonial third world nations. Her work is also important here as she considers the contributions of female writers in their

depictions of the female body as a site for social and sexual reordering where culture dictates the organisation of gender. Although her work dwells much on how the female body becomes a site for struggle and the ways in which belonging to the third world prompt women's engagement with a process of self-retrieval, her examination of how "institutions like family, schools, courts, prisons and bodily activities … perpetuate women's oppression" (70) puts the issue of masculinity and femininity into focus. She argues that both the colonial process and traditional culture collude to deprive third world women of full control of their self, but I argue that the major issues in female autonomy (or lack of it) are deeply rooted in Nigeria's patriarchal cultures. The issue of social conditioning reflects a lot in the area of sexuality as a culturally rooted phenomenon which sets the pace for gender treatment and social power ordering. This corroborates Carrie Paechter's argument that the type of social agents that children are exposed to and what the agents stand for can go a long way in preparing them for their future understanding of what their gender is worth within their societies. Paechter's *Being Boys Being Girls* reexamines the effects of subconscious group practices such as the differentiation of house chores based on children's gender. She argues that these encourage the formulation of gender categories which could leave a lasting effect on children. My argument is in consonance with Paechter's that "masculinities and femininities are the products of group processes" (1). This is why the socialising process at school, which includes the books that children are exposed to, become important in the nurturing of children. This is also instructive in understanding the works of Adimora-Ezeigbo for young readers. Even though for Adimora-Ezeigbo the snail-sense strategy is still important even within the children's texts. *Trafficked* is especially important in this regard as it focuses on young women's bodies in relation to the sexual relevance attached to it. The significance of this is even more pertinent as the story in *Trafficked* extends the phenomenon of sexual exploitation of Nigerian women within a global trafficking circle.

Literacy is fast replacing artistic oral delivery and performance in Nigeria. The change entails newer modes of telling and retaining stories and artistic expressions which once resided only within the realm of the oral. The written mode, which came as a natural consequence of formal education, shifts the boundaries of orature beyond mere orality to more permanence found in the written. Oral artistic culture is a defining element for the various Nigerian cultural entities as it encapsulates many conventions that govern their social interactions (Dasilva 2001, Townsend 2001). Bukenya asks a pertinent question that is important in studying the utilitarian value of orality in Nigerian women writers' literary works: "how does oral performance empower us to be, to do, and to grow?" (33). In the same vein, Kaschula also raises a question on how oral literature is adapting and functioning within the modern African world. The answers emerge in the different ways by which writers like Adimora-Ezeigbo are adapting local oral cultures to suit the needs of the newer writing culture by borrowing from contents of culture and situating the essence of their stories within these traditional cultures. There is a unique dynamism in the oral art which makes it possible for it to accommodate the changes introduced by the written. As the oral lore is gradually being replaced in the written mode, much of its transitory material is finding its way to permanency that resides in the written. Dasilva's contention further supports this assertion as he recognises that the changing times must necessarily affect the mode and scope of orality not only in Nigeria but in the whole of Africa. Through borrowings and appropriations of the materials found in the oral artistic culture, Adimora-Ezeigbo carves a niche for herself by resuscitating the use of different oral modes (especially story forms) in many of her works. A useful means of delving into the past and interrogating the present while projecting into the future, oral modes resurface in women's literary works. Some literary critics observe that it is actually a legacy of many of the oral spaces which African women occupied before they started to write (Finnegan 1976, Irele 1993, Kolawole 2004).

In Chapter One of this thesis, I discuss the snail-sense ideological stand as expressed in Adimora-Ezeigbo's works alongside four others which have been developed by a number of Nigerian women writers in a bid to articulate a theoretical basis for understanding the African woman within her cultural orientations. STIWAnism, motherism, African womanism (Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi's variant) and nego-feminism are surveyed and juxtaposed to Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense feminism. These are examined as ideological positions which are similar in various ways but differing on subtle grounds which are sometimes collapsible and quite overlapping in many areas. This part is necessary in other to further put snail-sense into perspective and discuss the differing responses of women critics like Adimora-Ezeigbo to the womanist needs on the African continent.

Adimora-Ezeigbo foregrounds patriarchy as an embedded cultural practice which hinders women's development. Patriarchy as a social construct is important in understanding the cultural yoke which many African women carry. Patriarchy has a far-reaching operative mode. It permeates the social, economic, political and cultural space to the detriment of women. Although patriarchy goes back into antiquity in many of the world's traditional cultural environments, there are opposing opinions about its manifestation in African cultures. While a school of thought believes that men have always regarded women as their inferior both physically and mentally (Acker, Barry and Esseveld 1991, Abubakar and Sule 2014, Ngcobo 2012), another line of opinion argues the subjugation of African women began with the advent of colonialism which did not give due regard to many of the existing social systems in Africa whereby women were as empowered as men. Even though arguing in a general way, in the first school of thought, the trio of Acker, Barry and Esseveld consider the relegation of women from a universal perspective:

> Women are largely absent from this world: the female domain of production that provides necessary infrastructure for the male world is, despite its importance, invisible, uninteresting to so many social scientists, and largely unconceptualized. (137).

Drawing on the second view, Mabel Evwierhoma looks at it from a basically African point of view. She argues that historically, African women have "always been involved in systems of rulership and decision-making" (83), and that this was not too long ago in Africa. It is interesting to note that many women critics and writers hold to a history of Africa in which women were not sidelined in the traditional structure. Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo falls into this category. She regards the system by which women have often negotiated power sharing with their male counterparts as a strategy akin to the snail's movement.

Chapter Two of the thesis sets the context of Adimora-Ezeigbo's writings within the history of women's writings in Nigeria. The chapter examines the strength of women's literary works in Nigeria as a newer and important means by which women's history of strength and indigenous power within Nigeria's cultures can be understood. I discuss the precursors of Nigerian's women's literary works as foundational and prototypical models of womanist writings that developed in Nigeria over the past six decades. The works of Flora Nwapa are especially foregrounded as foundational. This historical conceptualisation is important in order to establish Adimora-Ezeigbo's position within the larger womanist debates and writings in Nigeria. The debates which give rise to and have sustained gendered literature, and which have been about the representation of women within male authored works are also foregrounded in this chapter. I consider the snail-sense strategy as Adimora-Ezeigbo's unique contribution to the Nigerian women writers' position on women's history of power and gender responses to social treatment in literary works.

In Chapter Three, the thesis delves into an examination of her trilogy in ways that reflect how Adimora-Ezeigbo represents antecedents in women's power and social development over time in Nigeria. The chapter considers the various ways by which she aligns snail-sense to the historical women's power base which has usually been argued as one of the traditional/cultural structures affected by colonialism in Africa. I argue that even though the trilogy is fictional, the three texts borrow heavily from some verifiable historical antecedents leaving the stories as a mixture of fiction and reality. All three of *The Last of the Strong Ones*, *House of Symbols*, and *Children of the Eagle*, trace a diachronic development of women in terms of social power structure and women's position within the Igbo patriarchal structure from the snail-sense prism.

In Chapter Four, I examine the gender dynamics of Adimora-Ezeigbo's urban-based children's literature using five of her children's books set within the newer social realities in which many Nigerian children presently live. I argue that she makes a deliberate effort to represent snail-sense concerns in three of the texts as she projects female agency using young girl protagonists in these texts. I examine the various social concerns that she raises in the texts in regard to how these affect Nigerian children's welfare, and in terms of how these concerns reflect Adimora-Ezeigbo's womanist concerns even in her children's books. I consider two of the texts, *The Buried Treasure* and *The Prize* as especially important ones which initially set Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense engagements in motion being the first two of her literary works. I situate all five texts within an appraisal of the social commitment of Adimora-Ezeigbo as a committed writer of children's literature in Nigeria.

In Chapter Five I discuss gender ordering and relations as grounded within the traditional cultural practices that Adimora-Ezeigbo presents through the texts in the fairytale group. She pushes to the fore the understanding of where power resides in gender relations in her interrogations of the power structure, multiple intersections of roles and

extension of possibilities in relationships which transcend established cultural stereotypes. The space where each gender as cultural constituent operates is rather implied than obviously stated. Mothering is a significant part of the cultural tradition from which Adimora-Ezeigbo writes. It can be both creative and limiting in different ways. In *Sunshine the Miracle Baby,* for instance, not being a mother is represented as being alienating and psychologically traumatising. This says much about the essentialist notions of women held in Nigerian cultures. Thus, as Katrak observes, infertility becomes exilic and "othering" leaving a woman out of the social space. As an important snail-sense focus, this is discernible in both of the adult and children's literary works of Adimora-Ezeigbo though approached differently. I examine the intersections of the issue of mothering as both exilic and othering and consider how Adimora-Ezeigbo negotiates this for adults and children in different ways. Also, her style of character descriptions shows a literary effort at expressing how particular words demarcate gender boundaries. In several ways, body descriptions are used to map how gendered physical and biological differences are constructed. I notice she uses this in texts for both adults and children. Using Asa and Sunshine juxtaposed to characters from the trilogy, I argue that Adimora-Ezeigbo in her exploration of body characteristics does not change the old notion of maintaining culturally prescribed body politics in earlier Africanist womanist engagements. My observation is that this maintains some of the traditional notions of the female being within her traditional culture. This shows that her fairytales have not shown any radical departure from the oral forms from which she borrows her story materials. In my opinion, the snail-sense strategy is muffled to an extent at this point.

Chapter Six of this thesis also examines the snail-sense dynamics in the newer gender issues in modern Nigeria. *Trafficked* stands between Adimora-Ezeigbo's adult literature and her works for children. In the chapter I examine the story in *Trafficked* in terms of how the text reflects Adimora-Ezeigbo's stance about social changes in Nigeria

and the ways these affect women and their development in the nation. *Trafficked*, situates the plight of the modern Nigerian woman within a post-colonial structure where a third world nation like Nigeria cannot provide structures of support for its female populace thereby destabilizing the power base which women were enjoying in the past. Situating the issue of the exploitation of women in workplaces within a snail-sense gender debate, Adimora-Ezeigbo reopens the issues surrounding the effects of a cultural structure on the well-being of women in Africa. I discuss this in terms of the power base that women enjoyed within the pre-colonial setting, but which necessarily takes on newer faces as phases of appropriation change. I argue that she lays out her snail-sense strategy in a more coherent and plausible way in this young adult literature than in her children's literature. I interpret the work as a sample of the writer's representation of a phase of national history with an implication for an audience different from her focus in the trilogy where I show history to be of importance in her snail-sense strategy. I discuss the text in terms of how it forms part of Adimora-Ezeigbo's contribution to the debate on how women's being continues to be exploited within newer social realities and how this treatment of women is still anchored in the old structure of patriarchy but within newer realities in Nigeria. Her representation of resilience in the major character in the story shows the kind of resilience and power that she advocates in the snail-sense, thereby granting the character of Nneoma agency through her recourse to the old power-broking strategy of snail-sense.

Critical works on Adimora-Ezeigbo which have considered her literary endeavour for children have usually worked along the line of morals which show the general thoughts about the nature of children's literature. My research moves beyond issues of morality to include cross-cultural implications of Adimora-Ezeigbo's works for children and in relation to her adult works. My research takes a departure from other available critical works on Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo because none of them has considered intersections of culture in both adults' and children's literature as I do in this project. At best, available

critical works on Adimora-Ezeigbo's children's literature explore how the works serve the usual moral and didactic purposes which children's literature in Nigeria are usually about. None have also considered perusing children's literature for feminist undertones as a serious area of research engagement as I have done in this research.

CHAPTER ONE

Snail-sense in Dialogue

> I see a greater and greater commitment among black women writers to understand self, multiplied in terms of the community, the community multiplied in terms of the nation, and the nation multiplied in terms of the world. You have to understand what your place as an individual is and the place of the person who is close to you. You have to understand the space between you before you can understand more complex or larger groups.
>
> Alexis De Veaux
>
> In whatever form or manner feminism displays or distinguishes itself, what is constant in all its shades is the determination of every group to uplift womanhood and strive towards liberating and emancipating women. This entails organizing enlightenment programmes for women and fighting for their rights in the larger society. The desire to initiate and execute programmes that would motivate women and propel them to a greater drive towards self-reliance and economic independence is a common vision shared by feminists of every creed and hue.
>
> Adimora-Ezeigbo

De Veaux's words aptly express the light in which one can start to understand the reasons for the various but similar types of African feminisms. Her argument constructs an idea of the importance of position accorded to the interaction between the community and its components (which include the cultural understanding of its various parts) in African feminist theorising. Seeking a construct that would pay attention to specificities of experiences within their own social space, women writers of African origin have described their notion of feminism in different ways which capture their womanist concerns. The articulation of these concerns in many ways show that connections to their communities'

value systems are important, central to and woven into their expressions of womanist theoretical frameworks. Constantly considered as too foreign to capture the social conditions of African women, the basic tenets of middle-class radical Western feminism are dropped in favour of the more homely (in the African sense) womanism. Although the womanist responses have been either centrifugal or centripetal in approaches, they have all aligned along the lines of the self and the community as important parts of womanist attainments. Arising from third wave feminism of the 1980s which produced better-informed women literary critics of African descent, African brands of feminism started to emerge in order to theorize appropriately for the divergent nature of the African women's social and cultural space. While some of the types that had been developed, such as womanism, stiwanism and motherism appear as pan-Africanist, others such as snail-sense focus more on issues that are rather local and peculiarly designed for only particular nations.

Womanism as conceived by Nigeria's Okonjo-Ogunyemi recognises the importance of a formidable familial structure in the development of African women. In womanism, marriage and family are two core areas where the roles of women as powerbrokers are felt. Thus, narratives that are womanist focus on women while recognising men and children as part of women's world. The importance of changes in social, economic and political statuses of African women vis-à-vis a continental development of Africa is the focus of Social Transformation Including Women in Africa (stiwanism) coined by Molara Ogundipe-Leslie. In stiwanism the development of the African continent is thus interwoven with that of its women populace. For Ogundipe-Leslie, the structure of patriarchy is the same despite the differences in the cultural structures of ethnic groupings in Africa. Thus, there is a need to build an enduring economic and social structure of women's power by negotiating each nation's women's cultural situation. Stiwanist narratives are expected to cover the peculiarities of the cultural

background from which such are written while promoting the roles of women in bringing about important social and economic developments. But for Chioma Nnaemeka, the need to confront issues of peculiarities of Western feminism should drive every agitation for a specific African situated feminist agenda. Nnaemeka conceives of Nego-feminism as a feminist stance which has an internal mechanism that can deal with hierarchy within the feminist house. In this way, each feminist stance is deemed important in and of itself no matter where it emanates. While negotiation of patriarchy in meaningful ways is very important, the eradication of ego and racial hierarchy from core Western feminism is also of paramount importance in nego-feminism. Charles Nnolim (2010) observes that "the feminist house in African literature is divided into so many camps, the most identifiable of which are a) the feminists; b) womanists and accommodationists; c; accommodationists; d) reactionaries and middle-of-the-roaders; and e) gynandrists" (115). Nnolim's classification expresses the multiplicity of the views in the various types of feminisms that have developed in Africa. The gynandrists are particularly male writers who favour the inclusion of women as protagonists and fellow agitators for freedom in their literary works. The works of Sembene Ousmane (of Senegal), Ngugi wa Thiong 'o (of Kenya), Femi Osofisan (of Nigeria) among others, are particularly important in these regards. I construe Nnolim's coalescing of some and repetition of others as the result of the indiscernible differences in some of the feminist types. This is discussed in the section which examines the different types. Within these debates, Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense constructs a notion of Nigerian women's strategy of power over time and within newer social realities of Nigerian social and political terrain.

The continuously emerging alternative plans for expressing the social and cultural situation of women in Nigeria have resulted in a plethora of feminist theories which attempt to adequately interpret the situation while situating the social and cultural experiences of Nigerian women within the larger feminist theoretical debate. The

divergence of the propositions in some ways reflects the differences in the cultures that produced the basic issues in the arguments. Although divergencies of social ethos are expected in a culturally divergent nation like Nigeria but the situation of confusing theoretical stands defeats what should have been an opportunity to evolve a pragmatic and unified theory which caters for divergent cultural experiences of Nigerian women. Adimora-Ezeigbo's voice is one of the newest in the debate which places the rights of Nigerian women into perspective. In this chapter, I put Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense feminism into dialogue with four of the other variants: stiwanism, motherism, womanism, and nego-feminism, a newer feminist model which insists on dialogic negotiation of racial as well as gender boundaries in order to arrive at women's emancipation in Africa. My aim is to find the areas of connections and disconnections and put Adimora-Ezeigbo's alternative into perspective. I aim to show that snail-sense is a feminist model which builds on the tenets of the motherist type especially and reconstructs an understanding of the situation of Nigerian women through a narrower 'snail-sense' lens. Even though criticisms of Adimora-Ezeigbo's choice of the predominant snail symbol and its various connotations have questioned the snail-sense feminist model, in this chapter, I engage with Adimora-Ezeigbo's use of the snail animal as a rallying symbol for Nigerian feminist discourses in relation to other models which came before hers.

Snail-sense was codified into a working document in 2012. Adimora-Ezeigbo first presented this feminist model at a discussion panel on feminism in Africa in Berlin in 2003 as a prototype of the growing number of feminist stances in Nigeria. While recognising the existence of precursors, Adimora-Ezeigbo uses both 'snail-sense womanism and snail-sense feminism interchangeably in recognition of feminism and womanism as two varieties of the same configuration. This becomes important for a model which claims indigeneity as an informing principle of its operation while acknowledging an informing theoretical root which is feminism. But while the issue of names is important in the different

arguments that have followed the acceptance (or otherwise) of feminism as an adequate word to engage the struggles for social justice by Nigerian women literary critics, each ensuing model has aligned with the core issue of women's matters inherent in feminism despite the different nomenclature. In these regards, the major tendencies have been an alliance with the umbrella term of feminism as a root word which can be used to express women-based issues without the anti-male notions attached to the term in some quarters. While feminism as a universal term is useful as a starting point for scrutinising the patriarchal process in every nation it has been considered as too single an ideological stand to cover the experiences of every nation of the world especially those that are considered of the 'global south'. Roselyne Shigali argues that the controversies that have coloured feminism as a basically rebellious, anti-male and anti-establishment term for instance make it unpopular with women writers from some nations (122). Shigali's argument stems from her examination of the dichotomies of Bessie Head's literary works. She found that the space of conjugal relations is where "the distinctions between African gender perspective and Western feminism is most pronounced" (123). This domestic space is much interrogated by Adimora-Ezeigbo in a bid to examine the differences that have necessitated the newer feminist models from Nigerian women writers and critics. But the robustness of various womanist discourses in Nigeria owes much to the so-called radical earliest feminist models even if the various cultures in Nigeria have always had their emancipatory paradigm before the formal articulation of feminism. Feminism in its basic structure still possesses a core programme that adequately synthesises Nigerian women's cultural experiences and can be used to hone these various issues. While Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) proposes STIWAnism as an "agenda for women in Africa without having to answer charges of imitativeness" (229), Adimora-Ezeigbo uses both feminism and womanism synonymously in a bid to indigenize feminism and make its ideals resonate with the social and cultural space of women's lives in Nigeria. She argues that "snail-sense feminism

appears to share, to some extent, a trait fundamental to Western feminism" (*Snail-Sense* 35). Reasoning that the usual attitude of dislike for the term stems from the misunderstanding of its major argument, Adimora-Ezeigbo argues that "in whatever form or manner feminism displays or disguises itself, what is constant in all its shades is the determination of every group to uplift womanhood and strive towards liberating and emancipating women" (2). Thus, she does not consider feminism in the radical light that gave rise to many of the arguments which had followed the use of the word in many literary circles. Buchi Emecheta's (2007) argument for choosing to be called a feminist with a small 'f' for instance stems from the radicalism associated with feminism as a term and its unAfrican tenets about relationship between men and women. Ogundipe-Leslie's and Adimora-Ezeigbo's opinions reflect two of the various thoughts about feminism and reasons for the development of other variants.

Building upon previous arguments which had distinguished different past structures of women's power within the indigenous cultures of Africa (Aidoo 1986, Ngcobo 1988, Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, el Saadawi 2007, Nwapa 2007), Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense model recognises that Africa is too multi-cultural for one theory on its women and their needs. Snail-sense is thus situated within the Nigerian social and cultural understandings of the treatment of women even while it acknowledges that both the construction of gender and the social conditions of women differ in Nigeria's multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society. On snail-sense, Adimora-Ezeigbo argues that:

> The theory derives from the habit of snails which most Nigerian women adopt in their relationship with men. Women in our cultures –from different parts of Nigeria- often adopt a conciliatory or cooperative attitude towards men. This is akin to what the snail does with the environment in which it moves and exists. The snail crawls over boulders, rocks, thorns, crags and rough terrain smoothly and

> efficiently with a well-lubricated tongue which is not damaged or destroyed by these harsh objects (27).

She constructs a perspective which situates Nigerian women's struggle for emancipation over time within a deliberately slow pace akin to that of the snail animal. Arguing that this type of reaction still defines Nigerian women's "reaction and response to socio-cultural and political forces that impacted and still impact on their lives in the past [sic] and contemporary times" (25) Adimora-Ezeigbo constructs a definitive and monotonic style of confronting patriarchy over time for Nigerian women, that of the snail's slow speed. That patriarchy then remains a fundamentally nagging issue even with newer realities then may be related to the unchanging reaction towards its various manifestations by the same type of reaction over time from women of different cultural set-ups in Nigeria. The inundating "boulders, rocks, thorns, crags and rough terrain" which the snail (representing women) navigates without any attempt to remove them reduces the efforts of the snail to an acceptance of the permanence of the impediments (patriarchy).Thus, "The snail crawl[ing] over thorns with a fine and well-lubricated tongue" and "when danger looms withdraw[ing] into its shell" though presents an attempt at transcending patriarchal impediments, is suggestive of inherent strength that is not actually directed at removing the structure of subjection but navigating it successfully through sheer resilience and willpower. This form of non-violent resistance places placation at the heart of womanist struggles because in the snail-sense womanist model the snail "goes steadily forward. It does not *confront* objects but *negotiates* its way past any obstacle" (27). The juxtaposition of confrontation and negotiation speaks to the main strategy of the majority of the different Nigerian feminist models and the construction of female strength in African feminist models generally. Ketu Katrak succinctly captures the informing principles behind this approach. According to her, the approach is commonly found in third world women writers' works. The principles are subtle and akin to "covert resistance" (3) which although

"takes risks and confronts domination selectively and strategically in the interest of self-preservation" is "undertaken with self-consciousness and remarkable creativity" (3). This self-preservation in Adimora-Ezeigbo's feminist model takes the form of unwillingness to disrupt the cultural ethos within which the model operates. The same style of approach is noticed in other models such as nego-feminism, stiwanism and motherism, which have sprung up from Nigerian women writers.

Responding to the constantly changing nature of religion, social cultures, and social spaces in Nigeria, Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense presumes that new feminist models would capture the evolving realities in Nigerian women's lived experiences and contribute to contemporary emancipatory discourse as old ones seem not to work. This main idea in snail-sense pays attention to a core which merges the social and cultural experiences of Nigerian women under one umbrella structure, that is, the similarities in gender structuring and patriarchal experiences. For instance, it is evident that both Christianity and Islam prune any power that Nigerian women wield in the old structural model of power. The operational praxis of the two religions situate women within the understanding of women as 'second class citizens' within their societies. In most cases women do not hold headship positions within these religions unlike in the old indigenous religions where the power of women is most prominent as priestesses and heads of cults, for instance. The reduction in women's power base negates the past power structure and thus a means of re-appropriating this power base is restructured in the snail-sense model. The past power structure consists of what Mary M. Kolawole refers to as women's means of mobilisation and struggle, and ways by which women reject subjugation and aim for "dynamic self-assertion and empowerment" (*Womanism and African Consciousness* 43). Adimora-Ezeigbo configures these means by which women demanded their rights without confrontation as effective but snail-like in nature even though many of these means of empowerment have shown a very direct power wielding structure that was actually very strong and culturally accepted

without frictions. For instance, that women were rulers in several parts of Nigeria before the colonial rule shows that they had a power status which was as politically influencing as their male counterparts. For example, in terms of political influence, Zaria, a northern state of Nigeria, had female rulers between 1536 and 1572. This is not exceptional as there were and still are cases of women rulers (especially as regents) in Nigeria. Trade guilds among the Yoruba women in the western part of Nigeria were also a means which allowed women a big measure of economic power and freedom (Kolawole 2007). Also, the notion of 'sitting on a man', a situation whereby women converges on the house of a man who has shirked his domestic responsibility or beaten his wife and forces him to make amends is a popular practice among the Igbos of eastern Nigeria (Nnaemeka 1997). Adimora-Ezeigbo considers snail-sense as a means of re-appropriating some of these traditional means of women's emancipation, freedom and expression of being which have become whittled and eroded by colonial processes, post-colonial problems and myths created about the African woman generally. Adimora-Ezeigbo conceives of snail-sense as not an absolute womanist agenda but "one of" the means available to tackle issues emanating from women's subjugation in Nigeria (*Snail-Sense*, 41). Kolawole had earlier called for new means of reinstituting past power bases which can start a "process of demythification and unveiling of the hidden codes that have enhanced male domination of power structures" (69). Constructing feminist models like Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense makes the articulation of the process clearer.

Adopting the essence of the snail as its descriptive praxis, snail-sense symbolically engages with the three periods of social space that have defined Nigerian written literature and had so far described the development of the Nigerian woman in literary terms. The power structure affecting women during the defining pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods in Nigeria provide a basis for situating the focus of Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense. As a new feminist model which recognises negotiation and dialogue as a

means of bringing dignity, engaging in a process of self-retrieval, and reinstituting female power within newer Nigerian social realities, snail-sense focuses on the pre-colonial position of women as power brokers within their various communities. The emphasis on the snail's movement as a symbolic interactive strategy shows Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense model as more of a prescription of the means by which Nigerian women struggle for re-empowerment rather than an articulation of the issues that are involved in the struggle for women's social and cultural freedom in Nigeria. Adimora-Ezeigbo examines cultural practices such as the persistently recurring ones that she mentions elsewhere (in *Gender Issues in Nigeria: A Feminine Perspective*) genital mutilation, child marriage, male child preference, denial of female rights to inherit or own property, demeaning widowhood rites, violence against women (especially the intimidating Sharia laws in Northern Nigeria), and discriminatory traditional laws and policies that have been embedded in the Nigerian national constitution and so on, as ways by which Nigerian women still remain under subjection in particular ways and therefore requiring a slow and unmitigated approach which the snail-sense offers for negotiation of spaces. Acknowledging that the problems still exist and could be limiting if there is no attempt to overcome them, many of Adimora-Ezeigbo's literary works focus on these issues as cultural problems for women. In most cases she builds on the emphasis of a majority of the female critics and writers coming before her. The articulation of these issues takes the nature of a subtext in the snail-sense theory as they are not specifically mentioned but subsumed in metaphoric undertones. For instance, the representation of women and their concerns with the snail and its mode of negotiating obstacles is connotative of a subtle negotiation of hinderances to women's development by women.

The interactive operational mode of snail-sense considers formal education as an important factor in according women a measure of freedom within Nigeria's socio-cultural space. Tying important social and political participation to formal education, Adimora-

Ezeigbo foregrounds formal education as an important aspect of the snail-sense structure. She argues that social struggles are time bound and preparation is a necessary part of this. In her words, "good education is the key to open the door of opportunities for Nigerian women" (29). In this emancipatory paradigm, the English language which is the language of formal education and other formal activities in Nigeria is of utmost importance for women in other to attain emancipation and other feminist breakthroughs. This presupposes a process of negotiation which factors in the constantly changing nature of culture and prepares for its exigencies. That women are compelled by presently existing circumstances to learn strategies of adaptation in the face of new social and political developments such as constitutional rights to own lands, full and unhindered participation in politics, and so on, in Nigeria informs Adimora-Ezeigbo's use of the slow nature of the snail with an undertone of cooperation where women gradually seek their own well-being without compromising values. This presents an idea which self-consciously engages patriarchy in a deliberately covert manner while working within the stifling system of indigenous cultures mixed with new social realities. Adimora-Ezeigbo considers education as a "realistic, practical and functional" (26) colonialist legacy that can work in favour of women considering that colonialism is complicit in dismantling the old power structure and instituting newer social structures which have worked against the power base that Nigerian women enjoyed before the advent of colonialism. She paints a damning picture of modern Nigerian women whose lives are enmeshed in an unfavourable social milieu but who can transcend their present position through adequate modern education which can equip them with the ability to be proficient in the language used by their subjugators, the English language. On this Adimora-Ezeigbo argues:

> Although the traditional woman lacked political power, she enjoyed considerable economic power and social influence in her community. The misfortune of the modern Nigerian woman is that she neither enjoys political power nor economic

> power. Her tragedy is that she has virtually lost out on all counts and finds herself even more marginalized and devalued than her traditional foremothers (xvi).

Even though Adimora-Ezeigbo acknowledges the importance of formal education as a liberating strategy for modern Nigerian women, she considers the multiplicity of cultural traditions in Nigeria as a factor that can be harnessed harmoniously to work for and not against women. But she advocates for the development of the individual as a prerequisite for the development of the larger community of women and men in Nigeria. If formal education takes time, then necessarily Adimora-Ezeigbo's advocacy for education for women's development is time bound as a process and strategy of emancipation for women. When Adimora-Ezeigbo explains her choice of the snail as a symbolic representation which aptly embodies the kind of survival strategies that Nigerian women should adopt, she considers the virtues inherent in the nature of the animal:

> The snail is wise, sensitive, resilient and dogged, or determined. Nigerian women are all these and more. They work hard, are tenacious and patient. However, these virtues must not be seen as a weakness on the part of the woman. Rather they should be seen as a way of strategizing to complement the man and join forces with him to develop the society for the benefit of all (28).

Adimora-Ezeigbo's choice of snail, a land animal indigenous to the tropical Nigerian climate (though found in some other places too), also situates her strategy further within the ambience of the indigenous cultures. This may be connected with a bid to situate Nigerian women within the African social and cultural environment where they operate and where everything surrounding their being can be understood. Culture-based and home-grown, there's a reflection of the spatial base of where Adimora-Ezeigbo operates in snail-sense feminism. In defense of the snail-sense model as an important intervention at a time when older models such as nego-feminism (Obioma Nnaemeka), stiwanism (Molara

Ogundipe-Leslie) and femalism (Chioma Opara) are not yielding the desired results, she writes:

> One question which any new model will have to answer is that of relevance. Is feminism still relevant to understanding and solving the problems of women in Nigeria, Africa and indeed the world after so many years of existence? If after all the theories that have been formulated the problems still persist, are we not to look for new models, seek new solutions? Besides, must we dress these new models in feminist garbs? Must any attempt to solve women's problems be conceived in feminist terms? I believe feminism is a viable concept to address women-related problems because it is a principle that seeks to highlight women's problems with a view to solving them and empower women. Therefore, new feminist models are needed, especially those that are realistic, practical and functional. One such model is snail-sense feminism (26).

Shigali outrightly dismisses and undermines these models. According to her they "are virtually invisible in global feminist discourse" (123). But her condemnation of the models does not erase the fact that they are efforts at appropriating the different manifestations of patriarchy in Nigerian traditional cultures and that they are also useful as a means of understanding socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity which engender discriminatory gender practices in these cultures. The rhetorical questions raised in the middle part of Adimora-Ezeigbo's explanation of snail-sense quoted above explain in part why Nigerian women writers and critics keep bringing up newer models. Acknowledging the constant search for cultural relevance which leads to the newer models, she would limit her snail-sense to the Nigerian social and cultural space with a focus on Nigerian women.

Like the different Nigerian models which have developed from the larger frameworks of womanism and feminism, snail-sense offers to wean practice from theory in order to enunciate in a different way of theorizing the issues involved in Nigerian women's

liberation. Adimora-Ezeigbo's explanation of the snail-sense process includes the practical ways by which emancipation can be attained by Nigerian women. The process includes the role of women as negotiators with men. This cooperative stance shares Alice Walker's ideas of participatory strategies of fighting oppression as paradigms of Womanism. In snail-sense, the concerns of Nigerian women are considered as issues for men and women, thus notions of being under the same yoke of oppression with men are created although with women bearing the biggest of the oppression as female children, wives, mothers and co-agitators under colonial rule. Walker also shows these interconnections in her explorations of the lots of both men and women under racism and black oppression in twentieth century America. Even though the focus is on the dynamics of class and race in many of Walker's works, the African-American and African experiences can be articulated in ways which show the realities of multiple oppression and exploitation with gender dichotomies at play and with the aim of confronting the structure of oppression through cooperation and conciliation. One connecting area that shows a type of feminist kinship in Walker's womanist outlook and the African feminist expressions is seen in Walker's treatment of issues of emancipation in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland.* Grange's realisation of the pattern of oppression that destroyed his family life sets him on the process of being there for his grand-daughter, Ruth. As a sharecropper who is perpetually indebted to the white southern Georgia landowner, Mr. Shipley, he is constantly frustrated. This is taken out on his family where he can prove to himself that he is still a man. The later changes in his third life reflect a realisation of the common enemy and what must be done even though the damage on his son, Brownfield, is irremediable. The bond between Grange and Ruth proves the sexless and classless emancipatory strategy in womanist paradigm while proposing an integrative struggle that is genderless. This kind of integration is also foregrounded in Adimora-Ezeigbo's model, that of cooperation in order to attain freedom.

Adimora-Ezeigbo conceptualises the historical tension which gives birth to the responses in feminist discourses in Nigeria in the metaphoric "boulders, rocks, thorns, crags and rough terrain" (26). For the woman, symbolically represented in the snail, to negotiate these encumbrances, which embody social conventions, cultural mores, and traditional practices that oppress and marginalize women, a deliberate action geared towards survival becomes necessary and vital. The rather slow but deliberate movement out of the line of impediments and oppression by the snail speaks to a non-confrontational posture advocated in snail-sense. This stance then does not remove the impediments but works around them and creates a survival situation even while living with the inhibitions. Snail-sense advocacy for strategies of negotiating cultural tradition despite the encumbrances of suffocating social realities reinforces the non-confrontational stance of most of the variants which have developed among Nigerian women writers and critics. These are examined below in relation to their similarities and areas of divergence with snail-sense.

Jain and Turner argue that naming is an important determinant factor in situations which require specific identification. In their own words:

> The crux of the politics of naming is that names serve as identifiers and are not neutral when attached to social movements, ideas, and groups of people. Naming and labeling becomes politicized acts when they serve to determine any type of membership at a group level (73).

Jain and Turner express one crucial point in the controversies that have trailed feminism as a term in African women's literary endeavours. It has further stretched the politicisation of womanist issues into more cultural, social and psychosocial fronts. The articulation of feminism as a concept which speaks to African women's political, cultural and social conditions gained prominence in Nigeria in the mid-1970s with the United Nations declaration of the decade as important in the development of women and children

throughout the world. The coincidence of this period with the renewed agitation for more understanding of the position of women within the social space of Nigeria through literary works written by women gave birth to different theoretical propositions such as Molara Ogundipe's proposal for the inclusion of women in the transformation of Africa's political space, Obioma Nnaemeka's suggestion of a renewed interest in the culture-based means of women's social power, among others, which resonate into the twenty-first century. Breaking decades of silence through literary writings also produced efforts directed at formulating theories which can adequately articulate the lived experiences of Nigerian women within their own cultural environment. Even though feminism as a Western theoretical construct provides a basis of articulation for the newly rising Nigerian writers and literary critics, the inherent shortcomings in terms of its inadequacy in capturing the situated social and cultural experiences of women of African origin has given birth to alternative theories such as womanism as propounded by Nigeria's literary critic and writer, Chikwenye Ogunyemi. For the newly emerging Nigerian literary critics, feminism was a take-off point to describe women and their concerns, but it was not enough. The perceived inadequacies of the term feminism in appropriating African women's needs perhaps prompts one of the foremost Nigerian women writers, Buchi Emecheta, to say "But if I am a feminist then I am an African feminist with a small f" (553). Molara Ogundipe-Leslie also enunciates the different controversies which had resulted from the acceptance and use of feminism as a term in African womanist discourses. One of the religious groups that has been vehement in this judgmental approach is the Federation of Muslim Women in Nigeria (FOMWAN) whose stand condemns feminism as a suspicious Western construct that is capable of "breeding pervasive traits like lesbianism" (542). Ogundipe-Leslie argues that religious fundamentalism which gave rise to such positions is a worldwide movement that still reflects in how women's liberation movements and ideologies are accepted in many African nations. Lack of adequate understanding and

suspicion of theories emanating from the Western side of the world are also responsible for the erroneous notions. Womanism as conceptualized by the African-American Alice Walker would have been adequate if not for the inherent clash of cultural interests which moves the idea of a universal black woman notches away from Walker's notion. For the continental African woman critic, the differences in the cultural experiences of African-American women and the continental African woman call for an indigenized African variant of feminist theory. This is because where the African-American woman experiences the effects or after-effects of slavery, for instance, the continental African woman faces issues of colonialism and its resonant effects within subjugating indigenous cultures. Thus, where the Walkerian notion of restoration of the balance between environment and nature and reconciliation of human life with the spiritual dimension would refer to Christianity in her articulation of unification of the black race, the multiplicity of spiritual practices in Africa calls for a clear-cut definition of this in the African appropriation of the womanist agenda. Another point of divergence is the fact that cultural similarities cannot be equated between the two for while one remains attached to the root the other is a fossilised remnant due to collision with a foreign culture (Sotunsa 2009:15). Sotunsa's observation puts the differences in African-American and continental African cultural gender discussions into better perspectives.

The search for a meeting point between theoretical gender analysis and practice continues to generate enquiries and animate scholarship (Kolawole 88). Even though women had formed and named women's organizations within several indigenous systems in pre-colonial Nigeria, the awareness of a more global outlook which gave more coherence to women's struggles everywhere in terms of feminist interests created a sharper knowledge and awareness of the influence which a coherent feminist movement can generate. But many of them prefer a distinction which sets the African feminism apart. Naming is highly connected to Okonjo-Ogunyemi's coinage, womanism. It was first

articulated in her paper "Womanism: The Dynamism of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English" (1985: 63-80).Okonjo-Ogunyemi's womanism is meant to separate the Nigerian notion of womanism from that of Alice Walker by explaining the various possible extensions of the phrase "women's culture" (64). For instance, Okonjo-Ogunyemi does not conceive of women's culture in terms of intimate sexual relationships between women as a form of female support found in Walker's *The Color Purple* between the characters Shug Avery and the much-abused Celie. The kind of bonding through solidarity and the spirit of sisterhood which Walker creates between the two characters and which constructs a successful womanist emancipation might have been differently expressed if written by a continental African woman writer. That Celie finds her first fulfilment of sexual encounter and liberation in another woman, for instance is quite rare in novels from continental African women. Conceived as an accommodationist ideology which recognises the heterogeneity of African cultures, Okonjo-Ogunyemi's womanism adopts an umbrella stance by stating that the womanist idea is "steeped in African communalism without ignoring patriarchy as an issue to contend with" (65). Her idea of the outlook of a womanist theory shares with the snail-sense model the dialogic approach to gender-sensitive issues. This similarity cuts across the majority of the Nigerian indigenous feminist models. For Okonjo-Ogunyemi, the constantly evolving social realities of African women call for strategies devoid of aggression and confrontation. This cross-national outlook extends the reach of the ideology beyond the Nigerian cultural and social space. Like Walker and Adimora-Ezeigbo, Okonjo-Ogunyemi's idea of evolving a woman-centred narrative involves an accommodationist culture rooted in familial relationships with marriage and family as the core focus. But where Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense would focus on Nigeria's several traditional cultural configurations and coalesce them as one, Okonjo-Ogunyemi would conceive of a homogeneous African culture. Whereas Adimora-Ezeigbo considers family structures, social and cultural value systems, women's

means of expressing collective strength such as kinship associations and women's trade unions and so on as similar in structur, Okonjo-Ogunyemi conceives of all these as homogenous and relatable throughout Africa.

Like the Walkerian womanist tenets which adopt a collectivising view of the experiences of all blacks, Okonjo-Ogunyemi adopts a stance which celebrates what she refers to as the ideals of black life, and a healthy appreciation of African cultures even as it recognizes the homogeneity of African cultures in certain measures. Her notion of feminist ideals expresses a unified African female ideology that sees the experiences of all African women as one under the structure of patriarchy despite divergent cultural practices. Packing all patriarchal cultural practices and female experiences under one homogeneous African cultural notion sweeps issues of specificity of cultural patriarchal experiences under a solitary carpet. Although Okonjo-Ogunyemi's idea conceives of a practice which proves ambitious for a workable African womanist theorisation because of the complex structure of women's cultures all over Africa, it forms a strong basis for the models which developed later. Ogundipe-Leslie argues that Africa cannot be generalised and amalgamated in this superficial way without creating a monolith that might implode. She buttresses her argument in the following words "in view of the history of Africa and cross-cultural links across the Sahara, the reality of cultures and enculturations in Africa" (543), submitting that simplistic and sweeping statements do not show the realities of Africa's political and social reality.

Nine years after Okonjo-Ogunyemi propounded her Afro-centric womanist idea, issues of specifying the African woman's concerns within the cultural space where she operates still preoccupy the works of feminist literary critics and writers of African origin. But Molara Ogundipe-Leslie's Social Transformation Including Women in Africa (stiwanism), conceived in 1994, still configures a structure of confronting patriarchy through an Afro-centric lens although she moves farther by admitting the enormity of the

African continent which is evidenced in the many intersections of cultures and overlapping inter-cultures. These are especially visible in the mixture of races on the continent. From the Arab mix in northern Africa to the European white South Africans who know no other homes apart from Africa, the African continent defies a simplistic cultural definition (Ogundipe-Leslie 543). But within these existing intersections, women's issues are particularly culturally and socially designed in ways that admit similar patriarchal structuration in some regards. Ogundipe-Leslie argues that a theory which admits of an understanding of the similarities of African women's social experiences of patriarchy can speak to the appropriation of these diverse practices and still speak to one notion of feminism in Africa. Thus, what the idea is named becomes central and as important as the issues involved in the emancipation of African women. Like Adimora-Ezeigbo, Ogundipe-Leslie argues that there had been a means by which African women agitated for their rights in precolonial times but that this only needs refocusing within emerging social realities of the African woman. These she refers to as indigenous feminisms which are "to be theorised around the junctures of race, class, caste, and gender; nation, culture and ethnicity; age, status, role and sexual orientation" (544). Ogundipe-Leslie argues that the understanding of these parameters can situate African women within a theoretical position where their peculiarities can be theorised and adequately captured as one encompassing theory while leaving room for sub-theories which address individual cultural peculiarities. Here what she conceives as stiwanism covers the social and political peculiarities of each African nation and works by negotiating each nation's women's situation within the nation's political and social environment. stiwanism builds a structure of women's power within newer social realities through existing structures of a traditional women's power base, the local/ indigenous feminisms.

In the same way in which Adimora-Ezeigbo resurrects notions of "existing indigenous strategies" (27) as local feminisms, Ogundipe-Leslie condemns the idea of a

homogeneous feminist understanding and a lack of the true nature of the concept of feminism in its basic sense. She asks if "African women or cultures did not have ideologies which propounded or theorized woman's being and provided avenues or channels for women's oppositions and resistance to injustice within their [traditional] societies?" (547). She contends that all of the means by which African women have defended their rights and "corrected gender imbalance and injustice" (547) were avenues and strategies[1] which still retain their authenticity and are being reframed within newer social realities on the African continent despite stiff opposition from most men who would prefer the status quo. Ogundipe-Leslie's idea is the general opinion of many of the African women who have theorised on the African structure of women's power outside of radical Western feminist notions. While the issue of feminism as a term which raises questions about the general attitude to the term is important for Ogundipe-Leslie and she would rather it is understood as an ideology more encompassing than the general peripheral understanding of it, her concerns are more about the egocentrism which gave rise to the rejection of the term from some quarters. While she agrees with many of her fellow critics that indigenous feminisms have always existed in African cultures, she insists that the term should be substituted for a more African-centred term in order to "bypass combative discourses that ensues whenever

[1] For example, women's associations that were based on trade, age and kinship were particularly prominent and important in precolonial times in Nigeria. Many of them are still vibrant and used as avenues for fighting for social justice for women in contemporary times in Nigeria. Many of these have metamorphosed into registered women's associations in Nigeria and have become recognised women's voices and pressure groups. The first national women's organisation in Nigeria, the Nigerian Women's Union (NWU) formed in 1947 as a pressure group, has given birth to others such as Women in Nigeria (WIN), the National Council of Nigerian Women Societies (NCNWS), Women's Consortium in Nigeria (WCN), the Nigerian Feminist Forum (NFF), among others (Rina Okonkwo,2011). Also, women have been known to use cultural traditions to demand for their rights and bring about changes. The historical Aba Women's Riot of 1929 in which Igbo market women protested the taxation imposed by the British colonial power was possible because the women had a strong trade union (Umeukeje, 1973). Also, Yoruba women of south west Nigeria were known to collectively bare their bodies naked in public as a last resort to demand for social justice. This taboo is highly avoided by authorities as it is strongly traditionally believed to have dire repercussions on the community where it took place. Kinship groups such as those formed as wives' associations and daughters' associations like the umuada, (association of daughters of a family) and alutaradi (association of wives) in the Igbo part of Nigeria are also women's cultural pressure groups. The culture of 'sitting on a man' for instance is one of the tools that the alutaradi uses to demand for their members' rights within the domestic space in cases of violation of rights by husbands within this space (Steady, 1993).

one raises the issue of feminism in Africa" (549). Other critics such as Evwierhoma (2002), Aidoo (1989), Awe (1989), Kolawole (2004), Oyewumi (1997), Sotunsa (2009) also think along this line. In most cases, the erroneous idea that lesbian feminism is central to western feminist interests and that issues of women's concerns within Africa are different in several ways from that of the West is central to the rejection of the term feminism.

By rejecting the rhetoric of combativeness and radicalism in the same way as womanism, Ogundipe-Leslie's continentally expandable stiwanism assumes notions of indigenous means of combating patriarchy as a possible cross-cultural method while Adimora-Ezeigbo conceives of snail-sense as "one of the many strategies which clears social, cultural, economic and political spaces for women in Nigeria" (Adimora-Ezeigbo 28). For Ogundipe-Leslie:

> [African] women may differ about strategies and methods, but they do not differ on basic assumptions: that women are oppressed as women and they are oppressed as the majority members of subordinate classes which are also in the majority (546).

By casting women as the majority of the oppressed class, Ogundipe -Leslie considers the fact that even though a number of African men could be seen to be undergoing economic suppression in certain ways, African women are more than men within this category and they have fewer opportunities for development within their societies. They constitute the larger number of the sex which needs assistance in order to realise their potentials unlike men who are majorly favourably positioned culturally. Like Ogundipe-Leslie, Adimora-Ezeigbo would accept a possible womanist progress in terms of economic emancipation for women. But while the idea of emancipation through social and economic power drives Ogundipe-Leslie's stiwanist idea, it is not directly stated by Adimora-Ezeigbo but subsumed under a plan of achieving female autonomy through negotiation of space in snail-sense. Where stiwanism admits of an open and unrestrained change which considers

social relevance from an inclusive political structure as important for women, snail-sense assumes that the impediments of culture can only be negotiated over time in covert ways, hence the symbolic slow movement of the snail. Adimora-Ezeigbo contends that the snail figure is a symbolic one which cuts across and can capture the strategy useful in womanist expression of the multiplicity of cultural traditions in Nigeria.

Centering the issue of womanist struggles on the female figure, Catherine Acholonu's Motherism emerges in 1995, a year after Ogundipe-Leslie's postulation. Hoping to achieve the much-sought indigenisation of feminism in Africa, she proposes focusing motherhood in the African female experience and in understanding the unique position of African women in theorising about African women. This narrowed conception advocates empowering women through the figure of a mother where the mother signifies a primordial element synonymous with the life essence. Stephanie Newell considers this approach as a "remythologis[ing] of the maternal body, [by] loading it with organic symbols and offering it as an expression of the African essence" (178). Newell's reference to mythology brings up the notion of the mother essence which permeates the reconstructionist works of literary artists in resituating and revivifying African cultural heritage in the 1950s. Mainly employed by the French-colonised African nations, negritude constructs images of the feminine black body represented in mother. Using the Senghorian[2] trope of Africa as a mother, Acholonu's motherism borrows from the

[2] Leopold Sedar Senghor (1906-2001), a cultural theorist and the first president of the French-speaking African nation of Senegal, Leon Damas and Aime Cessare have often been regarded as the arrow-heads of the Negritude movement even though new findings show that the African-Martiniquais Paulette Nardal and her sister Jane Nardal were important figures in the laying of the philosophical and theoretical foundations of the negritude movement. Through the journal; Review of the Black World that the Nardal sisters co-founded with other intellectuals, Paulette and Jean provided the working space needed for the take-off of negritude. A framework of critique and literary movement which was a response to racism, negritude is characterised by appreciation of the history and culture of black people. One of its prominent features is the valorisation of the African continent, (which features a lot in Negritude poems) as a beautiful woman in pristine condition before the incursion of colonialism. Womanist images are constant features of Senghor's works. But there have been criticisms that this type of imagery is essentialist in nature. His "Black Woman" written in 1945 for instance, has been criticised for portraying a feminised Africa using the image of a naked, voiceless female in an essentially objectifying way. This essentialist portrayal has been considered to be the logic of the colonizer which negritude aims to discredit.

negritudinist idea of Africa represented as a mother figure in pristine essence. Although where Senghor and his fellow negritudinists would see a wronged female Africa (due to decades of colonialism) and set a reconstruction task before themselves, Acholonu reconfigures an image of strength which retains its power despite centuries of misappropriation. In her attempt to indigenise feminism, Acholonu's model concentrates on the rural African woman as the authentic figure that captures the mother essence in its untainted state. "The rural woman is our link with mother Earth and with her rests our last hope for reunification with the indispensable mother essence" (*Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism:* 118). A traditional philosophical worldview in majority of African cultures, mothering is a signifier of nurturance and sustenance. The woman as a mother becomes indistinguishable from 'Mother Africa (Adimora Ezeigbo, 23).

Although the mother figure as an embodiment of the practicalities of womanist images is important in Adimora-Ezeigbo's works, her idea about the use of the mother figure as a signifier is different from Acholonu's notion of it. For her, that Acholonu excludes the urban African woman in the idealist picture that she paints of the African rural woman whom she (Acholonu) over-glorifies shows some descriptive lapses in motherism. Adimora-Ezeigbo contends that naïve and unsophisticated African women that Acholonu paints may not hold the key to true emancipation for African women who need to match up to the sophisticated level of political, educational, and social status and awareness of their men in order to be truly liberated. Adimora-Ezeigbo asks "If they are truly like this, what hope exists for political or educational empowerment for them?" (23). Stanlie James quotes Mbiti's insider view of the importance placed on the significance of mothering in Africa. Highly regarded in many places:

> as a means of strengthening the human group and ensuring the survival of life…The status of women – whose activities are centered around production, the physical and emotional nurturance of children, and household maintenance – is

> enhanced by the supreme symbolic link attached to them and their crucial role in reproduction. Thus within the indigenous African context, mothering is highly regarded. It incorporates the symbolism of creativity and continuity, and as such forms an integral aspect of women's identity. (Mbiti, 1969 qtd in James 45).

The different types of mothering enunciated in James' view shows the cultural nature of the activities involved in mothering and its very nature as an important part of the traditional African world-view. Mothering is in its totality a cultural work to which the majority of West Africans attach a high value. It is also linked in particular ways to the economic prospects of women because of its cooperative nature and openness to dialogue (James 47-49). Corroborating James' view, Acholonu considers the traditionally political and economic potentials of this position and centers mothering as the basis for allocation of power to African women. The nucleic location of the role of mothers which Mbiti foregrounds in the quote above is evident in the representations of what Acholonu refers to as the "cult of motherhood" in women-authored literary works. Her reference is to the adherence to a cultic attachment in the portrayal of motherhood. These are seen in representations of a maternal love bordering on the spiritual, obligatory maternity (referring to childbearing ability as a prerequisite for a successful marriage for women), cultural duties of motherhood, elevated positions of the female through the ability to be mothers, self-abnegation for mothering purposes, in many Nigerian women writers' works. In many of these works mothering is not perceived as societal imposition but a means of power and identity formation for women. These different roles are, for instance, evidenced in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Flora Nwapa's *Efuru.* In these two texts which belong to two generations of women's writings in Nigeria, we see the different ways by which motherhood is foregrounded as means of veneration as well as a sphere where limitations occur for African women. Through comparison of specific home spaces to the female womb, the kitchen space for instance has been shown to represent a space of

nurturance where women's strength is sustained just like the womb space which provides nurturance and security for an unborn human foetus. The exalted position of mothers in African familial settings where she is looked upon as the nurturer and the transmitter of the important social and cultural values further elevates the motherhood position (Sotunsa 44). But this position can be ambivalent in its purpose as it could also portray a limiting domestic sphere.

In a womanist move, Acholonu would expand motherism to include the entirety of the African continent. This extensive assumption considers Africa as a mother to other continents and a source of reference in terms of world nurturance and sustenance. She avers:

> An Afrocentric feminist theory must be anchored on the matrix of motherhood which is central to African metaphysics and has been the basis of survival and unity of the black race through the ages. Whatever Africa's role may be in the global perspective, it could never be divorced from her quintessential position as the mother continent of humanity nor is it coincidental that motherhood has remained the central focus of African art, African literature (especially women's writing), African culture, African psychology, oral traditions, and empirical philosophy. Africa's alternative to Western feminism is MOTHERISM and motherism denotes motherhood… The motherist is the woman or man committed to the survival of Mother Earth as a hologrammatic entity. The weapon of Motherism is love, tolerance, service, and mutual cooperation of the sexes… The motherist writer is not a sexist. The motherist male writer or artist does not create his work from a patriarchal, masculinist, dominatory perspective. He does not present himself arrogant, all-knowing self-righteous before his muse (3).

Acholonu's totalising of the female experience as essentially mothering might have negated other configurations in which women can feature. Also, the choices available to

women within emerging social realities are not considered in the model. The hegemonic rhetoric pushes the female gender to the fore in an essentially separatist manner. Even though James argues that "mothering may serve as an important Black feminist link to the development of newer models for social transformation in the twenty-first century" (48), the motherist[3] typology has featured in Nigerian women's writings before Acholonu codifies it as a working model. Barbara Christian's comparison of Toni Morrison's *Meridian* with Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* for instance, establishes a long standing motherist trend in the works of women of African descent considering that Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* is one of the earliest recognised works on the issue of motherhood from Nigeria. Emphasising that motherhood is a central force which is "for most African peoples, symbolic of creativity and continuity" (214), Christian concludes that a mother-centered world-view and philosophy resonates in African women's literature.

With the rural women as its ideal of authentic African womanhood, Acholonu's motherism conspicuously excludes the urban African woman in its descriptive mode and fails to recognise dissimilar cultural practices which diversify womanist practices in Africa. Where Adimora-Ezeigbo conceives of a model identifiable in the Nigerian social and cultural milieu, Acholonu totalises the African woman within a straitjacket that idolises and glorifies the mother figure while building everything else around the idealised figure. But while in similar ways the dialogic emphasis in snail-sense is an important aspect of motherism, motherism is more expansive in its coverage of the issues involved in the womanist agenda in African women's studies. Even though motherism builds new directions in women's development around rural women and considers nurturing roles as essentially important as points of female empowerment, it nevertheless portrays the dynamism of the occurring changes within both the micro and macro systems of the African world thereby showing a structure that subsumes the tenets of snail-sense in some

[3] Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and Buchi Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood*, for instance, centralises the trope of motherhood within the kind of configuration that Acholonu deploys in her model of Motherism.

ways. The contributions of both the male and female gender are considered relevant in the attainment of an ideal womanist freedom even if both the male and female essence are considered as belonging to the same operating mode. Where the "motherist male writer does not create his work from a patriarchal, masculinist, dominatory perspective" (Acholonu, 3), in similar ways a snail-sensitive male writer recognises the cooperation that must exist between him and his female readers. Many male Nigerian writers have in their literary works come to change to a discourse which recognises that women cannot continue to be portrayed from marginal and essentialist viewpoints. Even though Femi Osofisan, a retired Nigerian professor of drama, comments that Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense is "cosmopolitan" feminism that is devoid of "hysteria and dystopia" ("Foreword I" *Adimora-Ezeigbo: Life and Literature* xii), no male Nigerian writer has yet (as far as I know) asked point-blank that women adopt a slow-paced snail-sense approach to their freedom. This is likely to be rejected by the majority of Nigerian women writers because of the negative cultural connotation attached to the snail.

Practicalities of the female experience are the focus of Nego-feminism which Obioma Nnaemeka conceived in 2004. Female experience includes what Filomena Steady refers to as "areas of social and symbolic action that provide general paradigms for living which are essentially but arguably female" (90). Included in these are the beliefs, values, norms and linguistic expressions which illustrate the complex nature of female creativity and action and are derived primarily from roles and expectations characteristic of socially constructed female spheres (91). Expecting equality in world feminist practices, Nnaemeka conceives of Nego-feminism as no-ego feminism or feminism of negotiation meaning a type of feminist practice which leaves no room for superiority from any section of the world but recognises the authenticity of other feminisms around the world. Appearing to be quite aggrieved with issues of superiority in certain aspects of radical Western feminist theorisings, Nnaemeka condemns notions that she argues are akin to those which the

colonialist has for the colonised, in feminist practices. While gender cultures could be important in rallying the issues in feminism in Africa, Nnaemeka condemns its use as the main defining principle in ways which relegate others to the backdoors of world history. Realising the diversity of cultures within Africa, she argues that the recognition of culturally shared values can be used as organising principles in discussions about women in Africa but not in ways which engage in conferring superiority to women from more developed areas of the world. Here the peculiarities of each culture take precedence in engaging with its people and no culture is deemed superior to any other.

Nnaemeka's model with its pan-Africanist outlook is premised on Steady's earlier perception that in theorising about African women, the unique feminine traits that distinguish their experiences within their world should be the focus. Nnaemeka argues that, despite the multicultural nature of the various African societies, "there is a foundation of shared values, attitudes and institutions" (37). Basically, nego-feminism is a feminist practice that can easily replicate itself in practical living spaces of the ordinary African woman. For Nnaemeka, such feminism captures "the immediacy of lived experience [and] gives form to theory, allow[ing] the simultaneous gesture of theorizing practice and practicing theory, while anticipat[ing] the mediation of policy, thereby disrupting the notion of academy and activism as stable sites" (380). Nnaemeka's reference to the space where theory meets practice and where academy meets what lies beyond it is what she terms the "third space of engagement" (383). The space allows the realities of theory to speak directly to the actual experiences unique to African women within their own world. She conceives of a situation where the ordinary women being theorised contacts and understands the reality of theory. In this way there exists a space for the unfolding of feminisms and the actual practical experience which informs the theory in the first instance (383). The academy is considered as a classist section of society which must be ready to shed its ego in order to be relevant to practical daily needs on which it theorises.

Nnaemeka describes the roles of the academic, artist and critic in ways akin to what teachers and reformers do in terms of creating awareness in readers about the prevailing conditions in societies. While Niyi Osundare argues that the social functions thrust by exigencies onto the laps of writers make them "not only… vanguard for revolutionary change but … one of the front-runners of that vanguard (36), Bamidele contends that "the societal function of the artist is to awaken man to the ethical and the religious values of life… while his or her social task is to make life more bearable (33). Breyten Breytenbach considers the artist as a cultural worker. He argues that even though a writer has "contradictory responsibilities… (which makes him respond in several ways to his duties as a writer) he is the questioner and implacable critic of the mores and attitudes and the myths of his society, but he is also the exponent of the aspirations of his people" (166). This role is even more so "in the poor and colonized countries, [as] the writer plays a more visible role… he is called upon to articulate the dreams of his people" (166). In the same vein Achebe in his aptly titled paper, "The Novelist as a Teacher" contends that art has a "disquieting relationship to reality" and so "the writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done" (105). Speaking of women writers as very important in the task of creating the awareness that will bring the changes that are desired in the liberation of African women through their writings, Kolawole also argues that "the very process of literary creativity which is an aspect of African women's cultural production does not happen in vacuo but "within a dynamic cultural crucible" (153). This is the context in which women writers have taken a huge social responsibility by creating awareness through the creation of radical characters and better-aware protagonists which serve as examples. It has also been the reason for the creation of feminism of different hues. Steady had earlier argued along this line that "female models of social change should have at their core the articulated aspirations and agendas of women from the economically and socially oppressed groups of society" (90). Steady's argument

further buttresses the other arguments showing that the practical realisation of women writers' efforts happens in several areas of the society where the 'town meets the gown'. The influences which artistic creations can bring into the common women's everyday lives are important for womanist achievements.

Although Nnaemeka proposes moving beyond a focus on historical antecedents where questions of origin, genealogy and provenance are raised while interrogating the 'now', what she calls "moment of the action capturing both being and becoming" (51), it is obvious that no meaningful understanding of the issues at stake in African womanist discourse can be made without recourse to what the practice had been and how it reflects on the present social situation for women. More so, many of the emerging feminist models continue to build on earlier structures which the proponents believe are important in articulating modern African women's needs. Steady especially favours a revisionist model which, in form of "historical and economic forces have been instrumental in challenging the dominant structure and forcing change and recognition of alternative structures" (95). The evocation of past structures of power derives from reliance on history as a compelling force in charting the present for a good number of critics, writers and theorists. Thus, in most cases any attempt at understanding theoretical discourses on women is usually premised on the past to create a logical basis for emerging theories.

In contrast to Ogunyemi's idea of a homogeneous African feminist practice, Nnaemeka posits that in the context of African social realities, women writers and critics should argue for African feminisms and not a monolithic one. nego-feminism proposes a multiple line of approach to the practice of feminism because, in Nnaemeka's view, these approaches would accommodate different realities and histories which are inherent in all parts of the world. The critic posits that an eclectic approach is absent in the basic tenets of "Western feminism [which] is caught up in its [own] ambivalence, fighting for inclusions, it installs exclusions; advocating change, it resists change; laying claims to movement, it

resists moving" (60). Obviously, hers is a protestant feminism which laments the secondary position to which African women are pushed within the general Western feminist discourse. The protest nature is seen in the pertinent questions she raises about classism within the Western feminist fold. In her view, the abstract nature of feminist theorizing which she refers to as "intellectual gymnastics and empty theorising in feminist scholarship" makes feminist discourses more of a classist terrain detached from ordinary women's reality. This abstraction, she argues, is evident in both Western and African academies where theories are produced. This is compounded by the issue of ego which further separates the educated African woman from her non-educated sister and Western from African expressions of feminist interests. Nnaemeka, like Erica West, contends that there are social problems besetting developed nations who have turned themselves into 'big sisters' for third world nations (60). While Nnaemeka maintains that "no-ego implies that the opinion of other nations must be made to count on issues which concern the Western world too", she adds that to "meaningfully explain the phenomenon called African feminism it is not to Western feminism but rather to the African environment that one must refer for African feminism is not reactive but proactive" (376). This proactivity resides in the potentiality of African feminism to chart a way for a restructured society which does not leave out any of its sections through forging of women's empowerment. Like other Nigerian writers and theorists such as Adimora-Ezeigbo, Steady, Ogundipe-Leslie, and Sotunsa, Nnaemeka assumes that a proactive African feminism is the accommodationist type that is expressed in terms of the cooperation between men and women within its framework. Furthermore, proactivity in African gender theorising means diversifying feminist theory to meet the specific social needs of African women. Commenting on the relevance of theory to the everyday needs of African women, Sotunsa argues that when gender discourse is saved from becoming irrelevant, static, rigid, and

dogmatic, it will hopefully help in solving the numerous problems of African women[4] (231). This is becoming even more important in recent times as several post-colonial issues continue to complicate the social issues besetting modern Nigerian women.

Nnaemeka's argument that African feminist theory must be built on an African indigenous model which disengages from Africa's past but builds on what African people consider important to their lives is quite contentious and sweeping. Her stance contradicts Adimora-Ezeigbo's advocacy for a structure built on previous indigenous models of women's power, the type she advocates in snail-sense. Most stories in modern African literature written by women have relied heavily on the past to adequately relay the existential issues in the lives of African women from precolonial to post-colonial times. The past has been shown to play a substantial role in people's present reality by affording them the basis on which to improve on several levels of socio-cultural aspects of their lives. African literature especially is constructed on this structure on which developmental changes accommodate the past and builds on the positive aspects of it such as strong women's model of political power while disavowing the parts such as subjugating gender practices which are to be rejected.

Nnaemeka's proposal in nego-feminism is premised on the idea of mutual understanding embedded in some African proverbs which show the relevance of cooperation in tackling issues which require respecting others and their choices as it suits them. For example, proverbs such as "one head cannot go into counsel" (Sotho proverb,

[4] In this regard, I think in terms of how concerted agitations for women's rights by Nigerian women's groups over time have positively changed legislations in favour of women. A case in point is the coalition between the 'elite' women's group, Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) with ordinary market women in Abeokuta, South West Nigeria, to work together to stop the imposition of heavy taxation on women in 1948. Some of the women leaders also fought alongside Nigerian founding fathers to request independence from British colonialists. In most cases, the women leaders serve as the voices of other women in various areas. When it comes to rights and the agitation for it, there have always been educated women at the forefront, coordinating and leading less enlightened women through concerted coordination. Lobbying male colleagues at the helm of public affairs has usually been possible as many of these men are often colleagues of the educated women leaders. In recent times a lot of cases of violation of women's rights have been taken up by women's groups with success.

South Africa), and "the sky is vast enough for all birds to fly without colliding" (Yoruba proverb, Nigeria), reflect a philosophical understanding of African feminism and its relationship to feminism from other nations. The idea is that each has its cultural and philosophical specificities, and these must necessarily be mutually respected. It further points to African women critics' attempts at generating authentic voices and theories that would accommodate African voices and realities and which leaves a space for understanding other people's realities within their own contexts too. Despite its inherent deviation from other women's theories by trivialising the importance of the past in African feminist struggles, nego-feminism provides a stronger viewpoint in African feminist theorising. It provides a stronger and more robust argument for African feminist views. Chris Anyokwu appraises this aspect of Nnaemeka's nego-feminism as a strong alignment with Adimora-Ezeigbo's idea of negotiation and collaboration in bringing about a usable and all-encompassing Nigerian feminist theory. Deriving from "the literal quotidian human habits of haggling and bargaining" (Anyokwu 12), both snail-sense and Nego-feminism "share common conceptual planks" which "valorize and promote plurality and multi-perspectivism" (13). But where Nnaemeka conceives of an array of feminisms which speaks to the multi-cultural nature of African feminisms, Adimora-Ezeigbo delimits her theoretical outlook to the Nigerian feminist space. Her approach, as Kolawole contends, reflects the multiple levels of perceptions of human consciousness (34) which drives the creation of the different feminist theoretical postulations in Africa. These postulations help African women critics and writers to confront the realities of women by giving expressions to them and attempting to proffer solutions to them. Thus, Adimora-Ezeigbo's can be considered as one of the feminisms which are within the purview of Nnaemeka's conception of African feminisms.

Snail-sense shares several points with all the other feminist types which had emerged from Nigeria. The inclination towards building on the indigenous is shared by all. Okonjo-Ogunyemi's womanism, Nnaemeka's Nego-feminism, Acholonu's Motherism, Ogundipe-Leslie's Stiwanism and Snail-sense all explore the various means by which home-grown feminist strategies can be brought to bear on the womanist demands of present-day African women. Adimora-Ezeigbo would reiterate the existing indigenous and newly formed means of subverting women's subjugation and agree that "there is a need to adopt a more democratic and pluralist approach to gender issues in Nigeria" (*Snail-sense* 10). This shows a recognition of the divergence of traditional cultures of the Nigerian nation and the importance of considering this in theorising for Nigerian women.

At this point I turn to Ezeigbo's use of the symbolic snail in interpreting her stance in the continuously growing debate on feminism in Africa. Considering the snail-sense as a "realistic, practical and functional model" (*Snail-sense* 35) Adimora-Ezeigbo argues that the snail model encourages women to take up a conciliatory and cooperative attitude akin to what the snail does. She would present the snail-sense as an old strategy which women had used in the pre-colonial and colonial era of Nigeria. Although Adimora-Ezeigbo's treatise does not present a clear picture of the period where the link between those she termed precolonial and colonial women, and "today's Nigerian woman" breaks,[5] she nonetheless shows that the hegemonic practices which Nigerian women have always moved against remain a big issue that requires adequate theorising. These issues are particularly evident in the relatively new religious practices of Christianity and Islam

[5] The legacy of the Christian religion and its impact on women after colonialism in Nigeria are explored in Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy. I discuss this in the chapter on history and memory as womanist weapons.

which are in many ways against Nigerian women's indigenous negotiatory practices.[6]

An important aspect of the snail-sense feminist strategy, the principle of individuation is imperative in snail-sense. Symbolised in the snail animal, it refocuses the importance which Adimora-Ezeigbo would later reiterate in the body of the theory in terms of Nigerian women's personal development. Even though the snail animal is sometimes found within the community of its own kind, it mostly behaves as an individual entity especially through its self-preservation habits. Thus, Adimora-Ezeigbo would posit that "the woman should not just accommodate others… but should ensure that she achieves recognition for herself because self-preservation and self-actualization are crucial to a woman's success in life" (35). In Adimora-Ezeigbo's configuration, this pursuit of individual success and development, vital to survival, goes on to rub off on the community. Here a snail-sense feminist model transverses both the Western feminist model and African womanist type in its straddling of the two where individuation and communalism are both important to women's survival in patriarchal situations. The strategy ensures personal survival as a prerequisite for communal survival. The informing principle for the critic is what she terms the shifting orientations and perceptions in the present globalised world

[6] Some of the earliest works that emanated from Nigeria show that one of the strongest traditional areas of women's strength is religion (Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Flora Nwapa's Efuru, for example). With women as priestesses in some cases, they occupy a pedestal of honour like men within the same position. But both Christianity and Islam, which are colonialist legacies and largely practised in Nigeria presently, do not grant a similar space to women as found within the traditional religions. Islam especially pushes women into the background in its Sharia tenets which guide the social operations of the religion. In terms of marriage and reproductive rights, for instance, the Sharia law which operates largely in the northern part of Nigeria is usually applied against women's interests. The celebrated case of Amina Lawal, a young woman sentenced to death by stoning in 2005 for committing adultery in Zamfara State, is an example. The man is exonerated but the woman is punished under this law. Also recent is the case of schoolgirls abducted in 2008. Known worldwide as the Chibok Girls case, the case particularly shows how religious fundamentalism reduces the worth of women. It is a grave example of how female children's rights are violated 'legally' and illegally under religious laws. Lastly, in northern Nigeria in 2010, a sitting Muslim governor married a thirteen-year old minor from Egypt for a fee. A common practice, the Islamic law permits the sixty-two-year-old man to marry a child. In these ways women's rights are subsumed under religious laws. Within the Christian religion, many churches do not grant women the opportunity to attain the highest levels of priesthood unlike men who have this opportunity. This is a practice which consider certain biological processes of women's bodies as inhibitions in sacred places. Women do not have rights to their fates under these settings as the dogmatism in these religions are deeply embedded within the deeply patriarchal cultures that produced them.

(36). These changing realities which are social and cultural and are compelling women to first reappraise the self in order to be able to assess the society and work within it for personal and communal progress further situates the snail animal as a symbol of this movement. The idea is that while patriarchy as an age-old structure would perpetuate itself continuously, women hoping to change its structure must first work on themselves at an individual level and then make an outward concerted effort with others to change the system. Adimora-Ezeigbo insists that the change must be gradual for it to replicate indigenous models and yield womanist advantages. Flora Nwapa notices the avalanche nature of these changes in her "Women and Creative Writing". She posits that:

> In Nigeria and other countries of Africa, there have been tremendous changes in all facets of life which contribute to the continent-wide awareness and rethinking of women's problems and roles in the society. These changes are affecting both men and women in many ways and creative writers are responding to them by recreating meaningfully women's culture and worldview in this age of female awakening and feminist consciousness (529).

Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense being one of the critical reactions to the changes mentioned in Nwapa's earlier position argues that while a snail exists close to other snails, it is independent and individualistic (36) and thus a unique form of group consciousness which speaks to female bonding that grants recognition to individual development emerges in this type of arrangement. She employs this trope in many of her literary texts.

There have not been a lot of references to Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense brainchild. While some critics such as Niyi Osundare and Benedict Nweke, who comment on it have criticised her use of the snail animal in theorising about Nigerian women, others such as Charles Nnolim, Femi Osofisan, and Ezechi Onyerionwu examine her deployment of the snail-sense as a feminist strategy and consider it a good enough womanist principle. Noting that the snail animal is unsuitable and inadequate as a symbol in galvanizing

women into actions which might free them from injustice and oppression, Niyi Osundare, a Nigerian poet and critic, would prefer a better symbol which might perhaps prove stronger and faster in nature. But Adimora-Ezeigbo would defend her choice by reiterating the snail's style of negotiation of impediments as a fitting model for womanist strategies (*Snail-Sense*, 49). Onyeka Iwuchukwu also examines two of Adimora-Ezeigbo's plays that were published in 2010 along the lines of the negotiatory paradigms of snail-sense. She notes that revolts by women in the two plays *Hands that Crush Stone* and *Barmaid and the Witches of Izunga* take subtle forms whereby the oppressed women in the plays resort to diplomacy, tact and discretion to fight for their rights. The structure of oppression which engages Adimora-Ezeigbo's attention in the plays is neither dismantled nor moved as nothing shows that there are changes to what gave rise to the women's oppression in the first instance. But Iwuchukwu concludes that the snail-sense strategy proves useful for the oppressed women. In his own examination of Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle*, Nweke disagrees that she deploys the negotiatory and accommodationist paradigm of snail-sense in this work. He concludes that the denigration of the male characters in the novel denounces the purported complementary ethos of womanism from which snail-sense builds its structure. Nweke's grouse with the last of Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy shows the kind of responses that usually trail attempts by women writers to put women characters at the centre of womanist works. Nweke finds "the use of language in the narrator's delineation of [the]se female characters…subverts the very positions for which they advocate" (201). For him the various ways by which the daughters of Eaglewoman (who are presented as models of modern African women) also express the new directions in feminist thinking in Africa are against the very tenets of womanism which birthed snail-sense. Nweke shows an encouragement of patriarchal treatment of women by arguing that the women of Umuga whom Eaglewoman's daughters ask to become more assertive and demand satisfaction in copulatory practices are being prompted to "challenge the

traditional restrictions on issues of sex and love and the long-standing myths of the supposed passivity of women in sexual matters" (202). For Nweke, "this to an African is rebellious and capable of setting ablaze the cultural structure of the people" (202). Accusing Adimora-Ezeigbo on these grounds does not actually pronounce the text un-snail-sense given that the writer in essence is presenting the various options before modern African women and urging them to make the choices which would not be harmful to them while working towards gaining the freedom they desire in a deliberately conscious manner.

The withdrawal strategy is important in the snail-sense feminist model. In Adimora-Ezeigbo's words, "If danger looms, it [the snail] withdraws into its shell" (27). Withdrawal from oppressing concerns may not remove patriarchal impediments from Nigerian women's paths but keeps the issues in perpetuation if not tackled headlong. Even though Adimora-Ezeigbo would defend her choice and say that:

> It is important to point out that there are specific qualities of the snail that triggered my endorsement of snail-sense feminism – doggedness and the ability to get around obstacles no matter how formidable by exercising effective skills and sensitive attitude. I describe this virtue as snail sensitivity. It has nothing to do with movement (37).

Strength and resilience which can adequately stand against a long-standing structure as that of patriarchy might perhaps be needed by the Nigerian woman. The snail symbol refracts from notions of enduring strength but if a unifying womanist theory is yet to emerge within the Nigerian literary space, snail-sense, like its previous sisters, proves one of the sound bases to formulate an all-encompassing womanist/feminist theory. Sotunsa forewarns of the implications of the dangers of different African feminist theorisations which fail to coherently address all the issues involved in the African women's world. She contends that in the face of the failures of the existing types such as stiwanism and motherism to gain wide acceptance because of their inherent flaws, there "is a critical need for African female

writers and critics to evolve and to synthesize an indigenous African theory in order to properly situate and locate the peculiarities of their experience in gender discourse" (233). Regional types such as snail-sense are still working towards Sotunsa's appeal.

This chapter has set out the main tenets of Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail sense feminism. By engaging with a discussion of the relationship which snail-sense has with other variants developed by other Nigerian women writers, the chapter outlines the differences amongst the different variants while addressing Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense as an addition to the Nigerian literary feminist dialogue. While snail-sense shows a slight departure from the others by focusing specifically on the Nigerian social and political environment it maintains a huge affinity with the others in its interrogation of the ways by which Nigerian women have been tackling issues of patriarchy and ways by which the notion of snail-sense strategy works within newer social realities in literary texts for women in Nigeria.

CHAPTER TWO

The Historical Context of Nigerian Women's Literary Writings: A Building Context for Adimora-Ezeigbo's Literary Oeuvre

Dogged, undaunted, goal-oriented, obsessive-driven woman!
Burning with vision and the desire to change things
It was a great day when you emerge
From the wings and you occupy the centre stage
In full visibility, refusing to be observer or spectator
You stormed the stage, away from the backdoor of history
My sister, listen, always stay where the action is
You liberated the word to become its utterer and proclaimer
You no longer mutter or stutter
Your inferiority complex evaporated like mist
You are no longer one of the crowd, but first among equals
Queen of letters, that is your name
You beat the drum and others dance
You leaped high and reached the top
To shatter the glass ceiling
With your fist you shattered it
Like a battering ram.

"**Ode to the Successful Woman Writer**" (*Heart Songs*:128)

Adimora-Ezeigbo 2009.

This chapter focuses on the development of women's literary writings in Nigeria. I situate the literary oeuvre of Adimora-Ezeigbo within this historical development while exploring her works for both adult and children, as part of a continuing developing women writers' efforts at creating a social space for women within Nigeria. This appraisal is important in order to understand the writer's exploration of women's concerns as significantly interventionist and cultural in nature. Adimora-Ezeigbo's exploration of women's concerns which shows an engagement with the ongoing development of women's lived experiences

in Nigeria further sheds light on the specificity of Nigerian women's cultural situation even while cross referencing the African women on the continent in some instances. Her literary works are reflective of the important contributions of Nigerian women to the large body of Nigerian literature. Therefore, in this chapter I return to Nigerian women's writings to show how this developed into a nationalist discourse which explores history via memorialisation. I discuss Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's contributions to Nigerian women's literature as part of the production of cultural memory which furthers not only the understanding of women's roles in Nigeria's political development but also a dynamic part of the institutionalisation of women's contributions to national development. The snail-sense inclination of her works captures the essence of the institutionalisation.

Nigerian Women's Literature as Cultural Memory

For Nigerian women writers, written literature has become what Astrid and Rigney describe as sites of memory that acts as "placeholders for the memories of particular groups" (3). The duo's observation reaffirms the materiality of the literary medium for Nigerian women writers. As a medium which can locate people's experiences in both time and space, Nigerian women writers' womanist literary works have become material objects of history and memorialisation of women's experiences over time. In ways that feed into the project of national development and the social well-being of women, Nigerian women's literary works perform the three functions related to the production of cultural memory as identified by Astrid and Rigney. The two critics emphasise that literature can serve as a tangible group material which is capable of justifying portions of history. In the production of cultural memory, Astrid and Rigney insist that literature is a medium of remembrance, an object of remembrance and a medium for observing the production of cultural memory. Nigerian women writer's works find national relevance within these three configurations. Viewed in terms of the various elements which come together to

shape an understanding of the past, their works could serve as pointers to historic facts which can arguably represent women's social development over time. Their literary narratives also shape collective national memories.[1] The literary repertoire has become a reference point which can aid the understanding of womanist endeavours in the face of subduing influences of patriarchy. Nwapa's essay "Women and Creative Writing in Africa" demonstrates the importance of rewriting (through literary representations) the misconceptions of historical antecedents in male authored works in a bid to create authentic women's history. Of her two novels, *Efuru* and *Idu*, she writes:

> Apart from exposing the pain, misery and humiliation which childless and barren [sic] suffer in the traditional society the two novels (I hope) give insight into the resourcefulness and industriousness of women which often made them successful, respected and influential people in their community… I tried to debunk the erroneous concept that the husband is the lord and master and that the woman is nothing but his property… the woman not only holds her own, she is astonishingly independent of her husband. (528)

Nwapa's exposition here demonstrates that these earlier Nigerian womanist novels are a means of understanding the gender structure in place in this period. As reflections of social structures, the works are set as immaterial memorial objects. In terms of memorialisation, the various oral tales which have been reworked to assume relevance within newer social and political realities get more permanence in the kind of substantive forms that written literary works take as representative art. By the foregoing, I regard retold myths, folktales and other hitherto oral forms which have been rewritten into books as a means of

[1] By this I refer to the ways in which earlier narratives have shaped the understanding of women's power. For example, Achebe's treatment of his women characters in his earlier works such as *Things Fall Apart* has been argued to be a representation of the treatment of women within the cultures that form the setting of his texts. In like manner, I see in Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy, for instance, means of getting insight into the arguments in African literature about the position of women before the Nigerian civil war and the various issues that have come up over time in terms of this structure of power. That Adimora-Ezeigbo borrows extensively from real life events to tell the story also says much about the shaping (even if representational) of national memories.

reestablishing women's living conditions and gender practices of the past. As insiders to the traditional cultures from which they form their stories, Nigerian women writers stand in the best position to demonstrate a deep consciousness of the issues involved in women's struggles for emancipation over time. Ruth Finnegan observes that researchers from outside Africa cannot fully understand the intricacies of the oral repertoire that forms a substantial building block of African creative stories (54). As early as 1917, commentators on African orality such as Lowie (mentioned in Finnegan 2012) argue that oral history has neither content nor factual validity. What must have escaped Lowie's attention is the fact that much of what constitutes a people's literature rests much on their history which might have been oral but has contents on which they can rely for institutionalising collective memory. Although insiders such as Nnaemeka and Evwierhoma agree that African tradition and African realities are conflated and women's voice and agency have ever been discernible amid the patriarchal din, the two critics argue that the transition from the earlier traditional space into a larger and changed social structure has robbed women writers of the kind of vibrancy that oral creativity displays. But even if the majority of women writers have lost a measure of the oral contents due to social changes and the demands of the kind of stories that they tell, elements and patterns of orality are still discernible in many of their works as these display an existing affiliation with their oral roots.

Reflections on literary works by male writers as precursors to women's writing in Nigeria can be regarded as the beginning point of the intertextual nature of women's writings. Studying works by male writers also created an awareness in women writers that women's part in cultural history had become distorted. Male-authored literary materials gave rise to thoughts that birthed women's works. As Zaynab Alkali argued, the earliest male authored Nigerian literary works can be regarded as a response to a misjudged idea of the ideals of the rich Nigerian cultural heritage and culture which were misrepresented by

colonialists to justify colonialism. But the responses to the misrepresentations were still lopsided in the fact that male writers such as Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi and others failed to include the contributions of women to Nigerian cultural history in arguing for the uniqueness of the various cultures in which they situate their stories. Alkali argues that if *Things Fall Apart*, for instance, is a response to the colonialist Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*, which portrays an average new Nigerian elite class as gullible, corrupt and fickle-minded, then Achebe's response in *Things Fall Apart* should have been more demonstrative of the gender equality that was in place, and he should have been more proactive in narrating women's contributions to national and cultural developments. Thus, the responses which follow in the earliest women's literary endeavours[2] follow as both objects of remembrance which are capable of reimaging earlier male-authored texts through a recourse to historical antecedents albeit in fictional forms and as means by which cultural memory can be reworked and thereby reestablished.

As a medium for the observation of how cultural memories are produced, Nigerian women's literature directs readers' observation to other means of gleaning an understanding of the nature of gender structure in Nigerian national, social and political culture. Women's work can be set in dialogue with other history-producing writings by finding parallels to historical women models in the fictional characters which women writers produce in their literary narratives. For instance, the numerous women's uprisings[3] that have been recorded as part of the nation's history can be viewed as dialogues with literary writings which are fictionalised reworkings of these occurrences. In chapter three

[2] I refer here to Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and *Idu* (1970) and also later works of Buchi Emecheta who also creates representative images of women who endeavour to move beyond the shackles of female suppression. Her *Destination Biafra* (1982), for instance, reconstructs the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970. Using a feminist positionality Emecheta recreates this historical period which situates the importance of the roles of women in the war.

[3] For instance, the Aba Women Riot of 1929, when women engaged in collective action against Warrant Chiefs who were installed by the colonialists and were accused of restricting the role of women and demanding taxes from women, is akin to Adimora-Ezeigbo's description of the war that brought to rubbles the fictive Umuga community. The destruction in 1916 of signposts of colonial presence in Uga, for instance, parallels the same incidence described in *The Last of the Strong Ones.*

where I locate Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy within the political and social history of Nigeria, I discuss the importance of her *The Last of the Strong Ones* as a sample of womanist works where the awakening of Nigerian nationalist memory in terms of women's struggle alongside their male counterparts become important events and statements about women's power even though the history is a fictionalised version. I also discuss the text (*The Last of the Strong Ones*) as part of the ongoing process by which memories about women in Nigeria have become shared and have changed over time in the nation. Adimora-Ezeigbo's efforts reflect how gender relations are products of constantly changing historical conditions. Her works produce an informed understanding of the notion of women's power in the past as contained within the snail-sense strategy. This recognises the ability to negotiate patriarchy in all its ramifications without attempting a radical overthrow of the structure.

The idea of the visibility of women in patriarchal cultural environments has generated heated debates about women's place. For example, Kolawole argues that, "the invention of the African woman is being interrogated by several women writers, but a hiatus still exists, and this gives the impression of voicelessness and absences even when history presents alternative realities" (5). Carole Boyce Davies observes that though "certain inequalities and limitations existed/exist in traditional societies and that colonialism reinforced them and introduced others" (563) African women must have had means of engaging strongly with oppression. Also corroborating Kolawole's argument from a continental perspective, Davies contends that there is an inherent system of power which granted women certain measures of autonomy. She insists that:

> African women must have addressed the problems of women's position in society historically. … Revised historical records are indicating that African women in the precolonial period and in antiquity were competent rulers, warriors and participants

> in their societies. In fact the mythology of several peoples shows women in leadership positions (563).

Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* is one of the foremost Nigerian women's works which aptly positions Nigerian women in this way even though the protagonist is eventually shown to be overwhelmed by the changing social structure of postcolonial Nigeria. But Lauretta Ngcobo contends that the reality of the life of the African woman is sometimes far from what writers put in their books. Part of Ngcobo's contention is that the issue of African motherhood for instance "come[s] out of the seething experience of African life rather than the dreamlike recapture of an escaping tradition such as many [writers] write about and read from each other's books" (533). What Ngcobo refers to as "layers of assumption" in writers' representations of women's social experiences are to me in many cases neither over-exaggerated representations nor purely fictionalized experiences. The representations in most cases draw attention to germane developmental issues such as rights to personal growth, demeaning cultural practices, and so on, in the lives of women.

I locate Adimora-Ezeigbo's literary endeavours within the second generation of Nigerian women writers. The location is informed not only in terms of time but also in terms of the issues addressed by her works and the developments that have emerged in women's writing after she started writing. The second phase of womanist literary endeavours is characterised by resurrection of historic notions of women's power in order to reestablish through literary works, ideas of the place of women within their different traditional cultures. Even though this idea of place reclaiming permeates the works of the few first-generation Nigerian women writers, it took a refocused turn in the second generation. For instance, while writers of the first generation such as Mabel Segun, Remi Adedeji, Rosina Umelo, Martina Nwakoby, Ifeoma Okoye (mainly children's literature writers), Flora Nwapa, Teresa Meniru, Zulu Sofola, (first published Nigerian female

playwright), Audrey Ajose, Helen Ovbiagele (Romance writer), depict women whose lives still revolve around the essentialist notion of women as domestic beings, even though power brokers in certain ways, writers like Adimora-Ezeigbo provide a more robust image of women who are neither tottering on the edge of society nor hampered by the constraints of tradition. Despite the dominating structure of patriarchy and the controlled feminine places, the female characters reflect notions of power and understanding of how they can negotiate asphyxiating environments. They appear as evolving people whose collective destiny is interwoven with that of the Nigerian nation with future possibilities of growth and enlargement. The constantly enlarging number of women writers on the literary scene during the second generation is the direct consequence of women's western education on the Nigerian soil. Even though the first generation of women writers could write because formal education was eventually extended to them like their male counterparts, the better exposure to higher education and subsequently womanist agitations across Africa in the early 1990s contributed to the rise in the number of women writers in Nigeria. Also, the interest of the United Nations in the development of women and children in less developed nations further opens women's interests in literary works which construct the situation of women in Nigeria. The various thematic foci of their literary works which are centred on women and their cultural experiences also reinforce the efforts to create a space of visibility for Nigerian women.

Women's literature in Nigeria is post-colonial. Even though many of their works, like Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy, have made recourse to pre-colonial history in order to imbue their works with cultural authenticity while locating their stories within historical antecedents, the literary works only appear after the Nigerian colonial experience. Even though historically, Nigerian women's agitation for liberation has been considered as part of women's culture over time, the encoding of this structure in the written form for women only became material after the colonialists left the nation to self-rule in 1960. It is worth

mentioning that Nigeria has over five hundred languages and hundreds of ethnic groupings. This multilingual and multiethnic landscape naturally gave rise to diverse cultural practices. But the colonial experience and institutionalised patriarchal practices in all the cultures produced a common ground for stories that focus on women's collective consciousness and experiences irrespective of cultural affiliations. Thus, notwithstanding cultural affiliations, Nigerian women writers produced works which have national relevance for women's collective experiences. Hitherto, the various specific women's oral genres formed a feminine corpus which women had been using for self-enhancement and the negotiation of positions. These various oral collections rely on history via the medium of memory to form a continuous flow from one generation through another until literacy sets the endeavour into more permanence as they became written. The reliance on these recollections to give authenticity and relevance to their works further situates Nigerian women's literary works within Nigeria's gendered cultural practices. With the agitation for a more culturally situated feminist standard, and the realisation of the importance of specific gender ideology that caters to the peculiarities of African women, women writers of the second generation such as Adimora-Ezeigbo, and others of the first generation make recourse to history and cultural issues in order to situate and locate their stories within the Nigerian womanist culture. They derive inspirations from oral genres which have been a means of women's voice and visibility. Kolawole notes that the process of self-retrieval and self-assertion which is necessary for locating the Nigerian woman properly within her culture begins with the oral genres from which women writers borrow (108).

Flora Nwapa sets the pace for the literary exploration of a Nigerian national womanist experiences with the publication of *Efuru* by Heinemann in 1966. Nwapa's efforts at engaging with reclaiming space and voice for the hitherto silent Nigerian women gained discipleship in other womanist literary works of other women writers of the first

generation.[4] Buttressing the idea that both the second and third generation of women writers follow in Nwapa's steps, Ogunyemi says "*Efuru* is the original on which other Nigerian women's works keep signifying… the fabric whose replication turns the entire Nigerian women's corpus into aso-ebi [family cloth]" (67) In the Nigerian social context of Ogunyemi's criticism the significance of a family fabric lies in the importance attached to a common fabric at times of family or communal ceremonies in a bid to show familiarity with a celebrant. It connotes solidarity borne out of an understanding of the issues involved in a celebration. In *Children of the Eagle* Adimora-Ezeigbo refers to this as a "herd mentality" (92). She attributes this to the fact that "women are usually not accorded recognition at functions like men: to counter the slight, women bunch together, wear the same clothes, hoping that sheer number might do the trick" (92). Even though Adimora-Ezeigbo sees this as a weak way to associate on the part of women, and I construe this as a snail-sense option on women's part, Ogunyemi considers the commonality of women's experiences and bonding in this way as a means of forging a common front in order to agitate for a common solution where the fate of one is intertwined in that of the others. The women writers wrote for adults, young adults and children using female protagonists imbued with the kind of strength found in male writers' male characters. Rosina Umelo's

[4] It is important to mention here that the demarcation in terms of generation is only a matter of convenience of setting the focus of the works of these women writers into perspective. The first generation of women writers in Nigeria refers to the first set of women who started writing and publishing literary works for public consumption like their male counterparts who came before them. The generation started precisely in 1966. The second generation of women writers were the Nigerian women whose literary works were published between the early part of 1990 through the early 2000. There are actually no clear-cut demarcations as some of the writers who perhaps might appear within the second generation of writers, for instance, are also to be seen among the third-generation writers. Adimora-Ezeigbo is an example in these regards as she spans both the second and third generations in terms of when she started publishing and the focus of her works as I discuss in the introduction and parts of the present chapter. Mabel Segun who began writing almost at the same time with Nwapa and thus belongs to the first generation also wrote through the 1990s. Her work for children *Surrender and Other Stories* was published in 1995. The discernible continuities in terms of the use of womanist imageries and the use of women's experiences cannot just be waved off in order to delineate generations. There are overlaps and interpenetrations as many of these texts talk to one other another across generations. The same efforts at creating female strength permeate their works over time. For instance, the women writers of the third generation still follow the patterns of self-fashioning even if withdrawing from too much reliance on mythological images of African women in a bid to create role models.

Felicia (1978), Mabel Segun's *My Father's Daughter* (1965), and several other stories by women writers of this period follow this pattern set by Nwapa. Between the early 1980s and mid-1990s, Nigerian women writers feature in soft-sell novels such as the Pacesetter[5] series. With more calls for greater participation in literary works of greater intellectual rigour, coupled with the lack of consideration of women's works as serious endeavours worthy of attention,[6] writers such as Tess Onwueme, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, Zulu Sofola, Buchi Emecheta, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, and a host of others in the late 1970s through the early 1990s add their voices to the growing attention to important women's issues that have national implications for women's growth. I consider this as the core period of the second generation of women writers even though the demarcation is fluid. In this period only a few of the women such as Buchi Emecheta were writing from the diaspora. Even though writing from the diaspora, their works still project a deep affinity with their cultural womanist heritage, thereby having similar focus with those works written at home. Despite showing a deep consciousness of the need to fight for the reinstitution of women's rights, the works of some of the women writers during this period still reflect what I regard as a compromise with hegemonic positioning of women within cultural configurations. The works of the late professor of dramatic literature, Zulu Sofola, in many ways show that Nigerian women are expected to act within the dictates of

[5] The Pacesetter was a collection of low-cost paperback novels by Macmillan Publishers. It started publication in 1977 and disappeared in the 1990s as a result of the Structural Adjustment Programme of the military government then in power in Nigeria. The economy had taken a downward turn and affected the publishing industry which had hitherto been flourishing in Nigeria. Many of the authors writing for the series were Nigerian. The effects of this is the large reading audience which the series enjoyed in the nation. Dealing mostly with contemporary issues that were of interest to young adults, the series was characterised by ostentatious covers and generic focus on romances, adventure and thriller. One hundred and thirty of the soft-sell novels were produced at the time Macmillan Publishers stopped its production and took with it the publishing rights as they closed their publication outfit in Nigeria. Some of the important women writers of the time featured as writers in the series. Buchi Emecheta wrote *Naira Power* (1984), and Helen Ovbiagele and Rosina Umelo authored *Evbu My Love* (1980) and *Felicia* (1978) consecutively.

[6] The works of the first female professor of dramaturgy in Africa, the late Zulu Sofola, (a Nigerian) for instance, did not enjoy the type of popularity and critical attention that her male contemporaries such as Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and J.P. Clark enjoyed. Her plays were criticized for being too preoccupied with culture and tradition to the neglect of more 'serious' issues. In Olu Obafemi's words, she displays "an uncanny propensity for the magical, the mythical, the legendary and the traditional" (1989:60).

patriarchal customs. In many cases her female protagonists suffer the consequences of tampering with the dictates of culture. Her *Wedlock of the Gods* (1973) and *The Sweet Trap* (1977) are examples. This period marks the peak of the second generation of women's writings in Nigeria. With a rising consciousness of the global debates in women's rights and the realisation of the importance of culturally situated reworkings of womanist agitations, the Nigerian womanist literary works started to reflect the growing Afrocentric ideological developments in women's studies. The works produced by Adimora-Ezeigbo whose presence on the literary scene began to be registered during the early 1990s show a consciousness of this ideological development. She straddles both the second and the emerging third generation of writers even though her works do not show the radical turn which is one of the hallmarks of the latter writers.

Images of strength, resilience, and womanist purposes suffuse women's writings in Nigeria over time. From the earliest published women's literary works through contemporary ones, the lot of women within the social milieu has been of concern to women writers. Even though not all women writers in Nigeria fall within the radical feminist bent, the experiences of women within the cultural environment have usually been linked with the social spaces allotted to them. Zaynab Alkali argues that Nigerian women's literary works can be regarded as performing the same corrective function as the first indigenous male-authored works in Nigeria. Situating her argument in relation to the earlier observation of Taiwo (1976), Alkali contends that:

> With Achebe in the lead, African writers set out to assert our true image, to propagate our cultures, and to reconstruct in fiction, a Nigerians' Nigeria out of the ruins of history and as an appropriate reaction to the misrepresentation of Africa which has gone on for so long (12).

In the same way, Nigerian women's writings have become responses to negative and hegemonic portrayals in the way Nigeria writers such as the widely read Achebe's *Things*

Fall Apart is a response to colonialist misrepresentation of the African cultures they (the colonialists) could not understand. Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie's essay, "The Female Writer and her Commitment" reiterates the imperatives of the duty of the female writer to correct the misconceptions about Nigerian women with a view to rework the narratives and present more authentic and genuine images through women's point of view. I agree with Ogundipe-Leslie's opinion that this engagement provides an important missing perspective which can correct distortions of history. By creating assertive, proactive, and powerful female subjects in literary works, a comprehensive picture of historical parallels is reinforced and a challenge to the hitherto lacklustre female image is set. Okolocha argues that creating important female subjects is a form of self-identification and preservation for Nigerian women writers (72). His consideration of the role of self-identity as an important part of creation of history extends the nuances of memorialisation in perpetuating the feminine ideal within Nigerian gender cultures.

The first printed literary work of Flora Nwapa, *Efuru* opens the path for women's writings in Nigeria. Considered as the opening port of the first generation of women's writings in Nigeria, *Efuru* has been both accepted and rejected as a feminist intervention. Shaped by both Eurocentric perceptions of women and the biased representation of male Nigerian writers, this foremost attempt to carve a space and voice for Nigerian women has become foundational for later women's writings in Nigerian. The lack of the sort of discursive rigour of fundamental political issues lacking in the works which a feminist interventionist work requires gives birth to the second generation of Nigerian women's writings. Not many women writers occupied the first generation of women's writings when women's education was still regarded as unimportant. Rina Okonkwo argues that the Victorian idea of the value of women as more domestic than public was imported to Nigeria and resulted in denying women formal education. She cited the example of the first girls' school in Nigeria, Queen's College, Lagos, which was established in 1927, sixteen

years after its all-male student counterpart, King's College, was established. For several years, the subjects on the Queen's College curriculum were geared towards domesticity and creating elite women who still took the secondary position of existence beside men. By the time Adimora-Ezeigbo emerged during the second generation of Nigerian women writers, new thoughts about African women and their place within their world necessitated the paradigmatic shifts in form of distinct Nigerian feminist ideals and the pursuance of this in women's literary and critical works. These were captured in stories and feminist viewpoints which reflect individual standpoints. Jane Bryce (2008) notes that:

> The forms of feminine identity evident in earlier women's writings (1960-1990s) constrained by nationalist priorities that privileged masculinity, have given way to a reconfiguration of national realities in which the feminine is neither essentialized and mythologized nor marginalized, but unapologetically central to the realist representation of a recognizable social world (49).

While the flow of writing patterns from the second to into the third generation, where the likes of Adimora-Ezeigbo are still relevant, is somehow indistinguishable, what is distinctive of the third phase are the efforts to establish a distinguishing characteristics for the Nigerian brand of women's writings in such a way that the unique cultural experiences are foregrounded. Many of the writers endeavour to showcase particular and specific Nigerian women's experiences in a manner that calls attention to their peculiarities. But with newer tensions which show that a model branch is fast developing from what is termed the third phase of Nigerian women's writings, questions of what could be considered as a specific Nigerian women's literary writing have come up. For example, questions of women writers of Nigerian origin but who have spent most years of their lives in the diaspora and writing as Nigerian women from these 'outside' places raise concerns of how much of a specific Nigerian experience can be discerned in their works. Several factors are responsible for these problematics. Of importance in this regard is the downturn

in the economic condition of the nation which has pushed many women writers into writing from the diaspora. This crop of writers such as Chika Unigwe, Abidemi Sanusi and Chimamanda Adichie, among others, many of whom are based in Europe, have yielded to the demands of foreign publishers who dictate what the contents of their writings should be. This removes the kind of autonomy which they might exercise in terms of the cultural contents of their works. The dilution of cultural attitude to the depiction of overt sexual relationships such as found in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun,* for instance, has deviated from how this type of experience is usually discussed and depicted in the writings of home-based writers. More importantly, the fact that the set of Nigerian women writers writing from the diaspora are writing for a wider international audience might have influenced their presentation of the issues they depict in their works. The situation creates two sets of the third generation of writers with different purposes even while they claim a similarity of purpose.

The argument about the powerlessness or empowerment of the traditional African woman still generates debates because many critics argue and counter argue about the roles of many African women in the socio-political climate of their time. Newer social realities have modified this argument in several ways. Sophia Ogwude, for instance argues that "contrary to a feminist's expectations and premise for arguing that the African woman has from the beginning of times been maligned and subjugated by patriarchy, a reading of many texts would not bear this out even though aspects of many would too" (3). Her conclusion is that "women have on the whole been portrayed in African literature realistically" (4). By this Ogwude recognises that differences in cultures yield the different configurations of African women that have been found in written literature whether by men or women writers. I posit that even though the majority of African women have always operated within their own space and not usually recognised as an equal partner with their male counterparts on different levels, a few transcended patriarchal boundaries and

dictates. Thus, it has never been a story of complete or total subjugation for African women. Gboyega Kolawole agrees with the side of the debate which argues that the lot of many African women traditionally fell within the domestic arena, but that a few usually stepped outside the bounds and transcend patriarchal dictates. His argument finds substance in the empowering structure of particular cultural/political setup which grants some authority to female figures. He makes extensive references to women as political office holders within some Nigerian traditional set ups. In his words:

> The obstacles the woman faces are legion; such varying degrees of subjugation were believed to be her destiny, this probably being the reason that the anomaly of gender discrimination was not attended to for a long time because it had become part of most cultures. But the traditional belief that women remain confined to the background may not be entirely true (13)

What is clear, though, is that the appearance of women writers later than men on the Nigerian literary scene is, in itself, a consequence of traditional patriarchal attitudes and sidelining of women in matters of social and political importance. Most Nigerian women received Western education later than their male counterparts. But as soon as the doors of literacy were widely opened to women, they used literary writings as a potent tool for investigating the various untoward social and cultural treatments which they had suffered, and which still permeate the world in which they live. Although their initial attempts aimed at correcting the erroneous impressions created in male writers' literary works about women, women writers later turned literary writings into a tool for not only interrogating patriarchy in its entire ramification but a space for empowering the modern African woman who carries the burden of tradition and modernity in several ways . These efforts gained more momentum as time went on.

The development of feminist women's literature in Africa came a few years after African women started writing literary works. The initial attempt was to respond to the

phallocentric representation of women in male-authored works. So, the first few women's works could perhaps be termed proto-feminist at best as they are not too confrontational like the works of those that came in the later part of the second generation and the third generation.[7] Creating economically independent and industrious female characters who have a strong economic base as against the dependent women seen on the previous men-authored texts[8] is one means by which the women writers' endeavours were registered. Nwapa said in 1989 that she only aimed at showing the real side of the African woman whom male writers have misrepresented. According to Nwapa "Women have started to redefine themselves; they have started to project themselves as they feel they should be presented" (527). Her first novel was not one based on any established theory but an urge to correct the image of the African women that she had read in male writers' works. She sets about this by creating a more balanced female personality whose image matches the historical women in African traditional cultures. Nwapa acknowledges that the African woman carries with her a two layered cultural burden. She is first an African woman under a patriarchal social setting and a struggling figure with her male counterpart under the yoke of colonialism and, later, post-colonialism (also Bukenya 2001). She is constantly living under the unjust appropriation and domination of her person and the material resources that are supposed to be at her disposal. Ifi Amadiume and Ogunyemi contend that the subjugators of the African woman include even the Western women writers and critics whom they believe, add to the already two layered burden that most African women carry. This is within the area of the Western critical and literary writing which tend toward what Amadiume terms "abstract anthropology" (56). The critic argues that Western women

[7] My opinion is that their intention was not laid out under a coherent feminist thought although it marks the beginning of what subsequent women writers followed in a more structured format.

[8] The works of the earliest Nigerian male writers such as Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and others portray women in this hegemonic picture even though there have been arguments against this notion. For instance, both Fashina (2006) and Ogwude (2014) argue in favour of Achebe's sincerity of purpose in his portrayal of women in his popular *Things Fall Apart*, while writers such as Arndt (2014) and Alkali (2012) argue that Achebe's writings reinforces the hegemonic structure of the Igbo nation in which *Things Fall Apart* is set.

theoreticians do not understand the cultural realities of women from other nations (especially women from the regions which have being politically tagged 'the Global South'). She accuses them of fantasising a measure of superiority over African and other Third World women. Amadiume's opinion is that there is a need for a proper understanding of the African culture before anyone can theorize adequately about it. This, she opines, the majority of the theorists do not possess and are not willing to find out. Amadiume's position shows that she regards as true the suspicion of a global conspiracy against the less developed parts of the world by better developed ones. I posit that even though there are generalized opinions about so called 'third world women', Amadiume's conclusion is rather too sweeping because there are various hues of opinion on the issue of African women and their lot from Western critics.

The insinuation of a global conspiracy notwithstanding, it is obvious that various social constructs within traditional cultures are involved in the asphyxiating domestication of majority of African women as the 'other'. Various ascribed social and gender roles restrict women and put a bar on both domestic and public powers they can wield within their social environment. This is especially prominent within the area of familial issues where women's roles as mothers, daughters and sisters are placed behind that of men in a secondary position. Patriarchal social constructs are important in understanding the cultural yoke which African women carry. Patriarchy has an all reaching operative mode. It permeates the social, economic, political and cultural space to the detriment of women. Although it goes back into time, there are opposing opinions about its manifestation in African cultures. While a school of thought believes that men have always regarded women as their inferior both physically and mentally (Rich, 1976, Abubakar and Sule 2014, Mohanty 1991), another line of opinion is that the subjugation of African women came with the advent of colonialism which does not give due regard to some existing social systems whereby women were as empowered as men. Evwierhoma (2002) argues

that women have always been "involved in systems of rulership and decision-making" not too long ago in Africa. (also Amadiume 1989, Awe 1992, Egharevba 1986). That colonialism played a big role in the denial of rights to women is true to an extent considering the denial of Western formal education to girl children when schools were first established in many parts of Nigeria. Okonkwo (2011) traced the activities of the colonial powers in Nigeria and shows that girl-children were initially denied formal education unlike male children. She links this discrimination to the biological worth of girl-children. However, the first few literary works in Africa, such as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, show a picture of subjugated women whose lives mainly revolve around the domestic sphere and are dependent on men even before colonialism. Achebe creates a powerful (although eventually tragic) figure in Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*. The domineering Okonkwo as an embodiment of the traditional expectations of the prowess of a successful man but also exhibiting the shortcomings of a failed man. A reader of African literature is unlikely to find the type of power accorded to the towering character of Okonkwo in cultural, social, religious, economic and political areas in female characters. Okonkwo is imbued with the phallic generative power which makes hegemonic history. A greater percentage of the women characters are submerged in repression and limiting strongholds of patriarchy. They are never called by their names but referred to as somebody's wife or somebody's mother (preferably the son) such as 'Nwoye's mother'. In this way they are always owned or attached to a male person (who might even be a child) as an appendage. Women in *Things Fall Apart* like others in most early male writers' narratives are always not meant to ask questions but expected to obey. For instance, when Okonkwo brings the child Ikemefuna home his wife's sensible question gets a rude and silencing "Do what you are told, woman …when did you become one of the ndichie [elders] of Umuofia?'' (*Things Fall Apart* 10-11). Women are not members of the ndichie who constitute the highest ruling body of the Igbo culture from which Achebe writes. In the existing social order,

women are not recognised. Social institutions and interactions are conditioned by patriarchal constructs that polarized the man and, the woman along binary opposites such as superior/inferior, master/servant, public/domestic, vocal/silent, independent/dependent, and strong/weak. This rather points to the problematic nature of gender culture in Africa (taken together) and even within some nations such as Nigeria where there are diverse cultural practices especially in the area of gender empowerment.

As raised in the above paragraph, the degree to which women are denied presence in texts can be measured by the same way men are accorded strength, independence and public presence. Silence is considered a female virtue. Thus, men's voices represent being heard while women's lack of voice connotes silence even in their own affairs. An attempt to operate outside of this stereotypical enclave is deemed anti-social. In other words, a woman is good when she docilely fits into the mould shaped for her by patriarchy. It is against the backdrop of the foregoing contentious assumptions that women writers emerged on the African literary scene. The need to deconstruct and subvert patriarchy and phallocentric tendencies led to the creation of authentic female characters that are vocal, assertive, independent, and educated while some of them also operate within the public sphere. Women writers have continued to achieve this reconstruction of the feminine gender through various means. Apart from creating assertive characters, these women writers adopt a unique Nigerian voice of retelling their stories and re-inscribing their image into African and world literary history. By this uniqueness I refer to the use of narrative modes which could be considered specifically Nigerian. For instance, Adimora-Ezeigbo's extensive employment of the Igbo proverbial lore and cultural onomastic properties in names to create gendered narrative codes in her stories represent a unique way of creating a specific Nigerian signature in her trilogy. Noting this as one way in which Adimora-Ezeigbo's gender bias manifests in the second work of her trilogy, Chukwuemeka Oha (2008) argues that "all the various manifestations of naming in *House of Symbols*

contribute to the realization of the feministic bias of the novel and beyond" (239). In contrast, Felicia Ohwovoriole argues that Adimora-Ezeigbo's employment of cultural elements such as naming patterns and proverbs are unique means of "locat[ing] the literary focus in the novels of Adimora-Ezeigbo within the context of tradition and modernity in Nigeria" (229) and not just scoring feminist points. In Bryce's view these elements are parts of the uniqueness of narration for Nigerian women writers. She avers that these perform double functions. Her words: "the realist narrative strategies of new Nigerian women's writings may be read ambivalently, as simultaneously performing new identities and revising old ones" (53). Acholonu (2004) points out the essence of this kind of creatively assertive language. She avers that these women "rejecting the reality principle governing the male oriented tradition of literary realism, pursue and project the new woman's programme of self-actualization" (58). In my view Adimora-Ezeigbo's employment of various cultural elements including those found within the Igbo oral lore set her work apart as peculiarly Nigerian even while they speak to general African women's experiences. They also project her intention for a well-informed peculiarly Nigerian literary feminist politics. She embarks on a programme of self-reclaiming for women by memorialising the history of women's power steeped in cultural affiliations through her literary works. It is important that the assertions of the trio of Owhovoriole, Bryce and Acholonu (who are women critics) applaud the use of cultural elements in Adimora-Ezeigbo's works while only the voice of Oha, who is male, differs. This shows that a recourse to the traditional culture where patriarchy is located is important for women in finding ways of transcending patriarchal barriers even within literary works. This is part of a literary politics which further gives solid grounding to Adimora-Ezeigbo's literary efforts.

Through the creative manipulation of language, for example in the use of proverbs, the female writers try to revisit and revise the traditional mode of realistic fiction which is

an integral part of the cultural construct, geared towards perpetuating male superiority and female inferiority. Bryce argues that while it is true that women writers especially of the first and second generations bend towards recreating mythical images of women, the majority of them tend to combine the two elements in their narratives. She states that "magical or surrealist elements there may be, but the collective mood is one of conformity to the realist status quo. The third generation prefer to be realists despite having the surrealist system at their disposal" (59). Even though Bryce's observation is correct in terms of the veering towards realism of the third generation of writers, there is a difference in these regards between those based on the continent and those writing from the diaspora as earlier noted. Another way in which there is a departure in these regards is in terms of the period in which these writers began writing. One could talk in terms of their chronological age. For instance, Adimora-Ezeigbo could borrow extensively from the oral lores of her Igbo cosmogony because she grew up exposed to these traditions but a writer like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie belongs to another age hardly exposed to these oral structural patterns to which she can make references. Also, she writes from the diaspora. All these elements combine to inform the choices they make in terms of realist or what Bryce tags surrealist elements in their works. Bryce contends that "understanding the difference in the environment in which 'third generation' writers are finding their voice from that of first and second generation is crucial to understanding how these late comers are rewriting the script of national identity reconstruction" (50). But notwithstanding the differences in how the focus is achieved, Kolawole notes that "these women are not only speaking back; they are fighting back as they deconstruct existing distorted images or misrepresentations of African women" (94). In a move towards radicalism Okereke posits that "the hope of liberation for the woman and the African then lies in the conscious, rebellious daughters of the assimilated Africans, who know the secrets of the enemy's weapons of power – knowledge and voice for the deconstruction process" (34). This attests

to the African women writers' resolute posture in bringing down the formidable walls of patriarchy. The opinion of the trio of Okeke, Kolawole and Okereke captures the stand of the third-generation women writers (especially), on means of tackling patriarchy. These writers have succeeded in carving a territory for the Nigerian women's literature in the areas of creative and critical writings. While their literary works show the cultural impediments which women are attempting to transcend, their critical narratives are giving explanations to the process of achieving their feminist goals. This process is situated within the African cultural and sociological structure with a hint at the relationship with the global in some instances. They have developed into theories which form the basis of understanding the literary works produced by most women writers on the continent. I strongly believe that they are strands (or what I call alternatives) within the global feminist debate because they focus on women's concerns although from the African (and sometimes specifically Nigerian) cultural standpoint.

Nigerian women's literature has over time moved beyond mere writing back in response to earlier male writers' portrayal of lacklustre women to an assertive creation of stories which represent women's position of power in the Nigerian society. In several ways Adimora-Ezeigbo's literary oeuvre builds on several works of women writers who came onto the Nigerian writing scene before her, even while she creates a unique snail-sense feminist model of understanding her works. As a writer who transverses both the second- and third-generation periods of Nigerian women's literary writings, her contribution further interrogates the structure of power and the issues involved in women's means of attaining power within Nigerian society. Thus, hers is a continuation of the debates of the situation of the Nigerian woman in literary works which interrogate the issue of female power. Her introduction of the snail-sense creates a unique means of reading her works and understanding the direction of her stories.

CHAPTER THREE

Memory and History as Womanist: Issues in Adimora-Ezeigbo's Adult Fiction: The Trilogy as Sample

This chapter focuses on three of Adimora-Ezeigbo's adult novels, *The Last of the Strong Ones* (1996), *House of Symbols* (2001), and *Children of the Eagle* (2002). These texts together form Adimora-Ezeigbo's popular trilogy as they produce a fictionalised historical continuity of the interrogation of Nigerian women's political and social power over time. My aim is to examine Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense agenda and assess her efforts at engaging with this by fictionalising history through memory. Using the Igbo community, one of the three largest tribes in Nigeria, to explore the shifting paradigms in women's cultural and social development over time within the Nigerian socio-political system, the trilogy examines the changing consciousness in Nigerian women's world. *The Last of the Strong Ones* is significant not only as Adimora-Ezeigbo's first novel for adults, but for its interrogation of the roles of women in Nigerian history even though in fictionalised form. I particularly focus on the fictionalised historical concerns of this work and its interrogation of the roles of women in the making of Nigerian colonial history as the author's efforts at reinforcing not only women's important roles as fellow power brokers with their male counterparts but as her reinforcement of the historical snail-sense strategy by Nigerian women. *House of Symbols* and *Children of the Eagle,* though a continuation of the fictive history started in *The Last of the Strong Ones,* further develop the snail-sense task of the writer. In Adimora-Ezeigbo's words, "they form a formidable chain between the past and the present" (Author's Note, *Children of The Eagle:* v). These novels flesh out Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense concerns and establish her literary agenda for a continuously emerging women's literary space in Nigeria as they move through both time and space to explore women's concerns over time. This exploration, although undertaken within a

particular community, is representative of a larger sphere of the Nigerian and African[1] social and cultural environment as will be made explicit in the areas of this research where I examine some of the different feminist ideas which have developed over the past five decades on the continent.

The interplay of history and memory as prominent concerns of Nigerian women writers[2] over time give direction to the understanding of womanist struggles in Nigerian women writers' works. These historical concerns are prominent issues in Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy. One of the strategies which the writer employs is recourse to recollection of the past with an aim to establish an authentic space for women and challenge previous erroneous representation and sometimes total erasure of women from Nigerian national as well as literary history. Through these novels, she continues a discourse of earlier women writers' response to male-authored narratives which leave women out of both fictional and real history in Nigeria. Her works interrogate as well as navigate a position of importance for women in national history. Forging a link between past women's structure of power with the present through an interrogation of history crafted through literature, Adimora-Ezeigbo reimages our understanding of the interplay of

[1] I take the liberty to generalise in this way because of the similar colonial experiences of many African nations. The operational praxis of colonialism whereby an overarching structure of total appropriation of the colonised is put in place makes a lot of generalisations possible. For instance, what Amilcar Cabral (2007) refers to as ''permanent and organized repression of the cultural life'' of the dominated population is an experience common to all colonized nations. The effects of colonialism are strong in this regard and constitute many of the points raised in Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy

[2] I refer here to the fact that the issue of leaving the important contributions of women out of national history has been of foremost concerns to women. This has often dictated the directions of women writers' creation of powerful women characters as a way of countering the dismal pictures of women created in male-authored narratives. I discuss this issue at length in the chapter on the historical contexts of women's writings in Nigeria as a building framework for Adimora-Ezeigbo's literary works.

history and fiction through remembrance of incidents[3] which shape the lives of the people she represents in the texts. Foregrounding important powerbrokers among the women populace with the aim of exploring historical power bases of women within established Nigerian societies serve literary womanist purposes for Adimora-Ezeigbo. In this chapter, I examine the interplay of memory as a navigating instrument in Adimora-Ezeigbo's mixture of history and fiction as she creates a blurring of the borders of the two. This blurring of historical borders and fictional boundaries shows the liberty which a writer has at reworking historical antecedents in ways that suit their own vision. In Adimora-Ezeigbo's case she reworks history to suit her snail-sense feminist purposes in several ways. Adimora-Ezeigbo's artistic crafts(wo)manship, such as she expresses in the specifically poetic narrative style in *The Last of the Strong Ones,* creates an effective engagement with the on-going debate of how the African woman has not only always negotiated her position but was a fellow history maker alongside male contemporaries. For example, the description of the strong women leaders, the Oluadas in poetic panegyrics usually reserved for powerful men shows a subversion of male-centred narration to score feminist points. I argue that Adimora-Ezeigbo reconfigures the picture of the ever-strong African woman who bowed to the colonial process (like her male counterpart) despite her strength. In Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy, the strong women resolve to reclaim their space in a deliberately slow mode, they do not seek to upturn the established cultural foundation of their traditional society in a radical manner. Framing the writer's attempt at engaging in

[3] Adimora-Ezeigbo's reference to the activities of Umuga women in the face-off between colonialist forces and the local Umuga people in *The Last of the Strong Ones* is a fictional representation of the colonialist attack of 1916 on the Uga community in the Igbo dominated south western part of Nigeria. Ezechi Onyerionwu describes Adimora-Ezeigbo's engagement with the part that the Umuga women leaders played in the struggle for domination as "no mere feminization" but an effort at "de-authorising the chauvinistic versions of history and identity that African male authors alongside their imperialist overlords have regaled the continental readership with". Onyerionwu contends that the figures of the strong Umuga women which Adimora-Ezeigbo creates highlight and further put in perspective the social visions of Nigerian women which Adimora-Ezeigbo "developed to the optimum, far above what previous colonial narrators were prepared to oblige the traditional African woman". Ezechi Onyerionwu *Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo: Life and Literature*. (2017:225).

this space-clearing effort from her novels becomes important in view of her ideology of snail-sense[4] feminism which examines women's struggle from an Africanist, womanist viewpoint.

My analysis of the three texts is informed by both postcolonial and resilience theory. Postcolonial theory traces the issues involved in Europe's colonialism of former colonies and the various attempts of the colonised to reject colonialism, rid themselves of imperialism and refashion their lives after the colonial process. Simon Gikandi argues along this line that:

> Not only were the founders of modern African literature colonial subjects, but colonialism was also to be the most important and enduring theme in their works. From the eighteenth century onwards, the colonial situation shaped what it meant to be an African writer, shaped the language of African writing, and overdetermined the culture of letters in Africa. (54)

The colonial situation that birthed a lot of Nigerian male writers' works also shaped the writings of women such as Adimora-Ezeigbo. Even though I consider her trilogy (especially *The Last of the Strong Ones*), as part of the body of responses to the earlier male-authored postcolonial works, the texts do the double work of examining the colonial process as well as outlining a process of womanist responses to the colonial programme in Nigeria. What Adimora-Ezeigbo does with her works moves beyond what Gikandi refers to as "the question of African autonomy" (57) in the response to the colonial encounter. Like the earlier women writers, she questions the role of women in these encounters and reawakens historical contexts which lend credence to women's roles in the political history of Nigeria as well as the resistance put up against colonial domination. Resistance issues are an important focus for many African literary artists who reconfigure many of the social and cultural changes in Africa as effects of the changes brought about by colonialism. Like

[4] For more on Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense feminism see Chapter One where I examined it in detail with other Nigerian feminist alternatives that have been proposed by other women writers.

Gikandi, Edward Said, a leading voice in postcolonial theory, also argues that the inherent culture of resistance in colonialism prompts the colonised subjects to produce their own culture of opposition and resistance. Writing to reclaim their space is thus part of this strategy of resistance. For Said, both the coloniser and the colonised use writing for the purpose of the binary discourse of colonialism, one for hegemony and the other for resistance. This he refers to in the introduction to *Culture and Imperialism* as "a general worldwide pattern of imperial culture, and a historical experience of resilience against empire" (i). In his view, the novel plays an important role in "the formation of imperial attitudes, reference and experiences" while also being "the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history" (*Culture and Imperialism* xii). Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy is thus read and framed in this light as novels of resistance. The issues that she raises in the trilogy, framed within the discourse of postcolonialism, constitute the types of resistance which over time have developed into ways of engaging with the interactions between the colonised and the coloniser. Adimora-Ezeigbo focuses a lot on the material reflections of historical antecedents such as cultural formations of power between men and women, oral means of recording history, women's modes of apprehending power in both the domestic and public spheres, and so on, in the first part of the trilogy.

In the same way that postcolonialism as a discourse emphasises the resistance of the colonised to domination, resilience theory is a strength-based social framework that highlights how the subjugated person responds to factors which keep him/her under subjection. The theory is useful in explaining and determining the importance of positive factors in development, despite adverse environmental challenges. As an adaptation mechanism, it constructs a structure of power framework within an environment of subjection and supremacy, politics, participation, adaptation and exclusion whereby the excluded formulate a means of transcending obstacles, adjusting to future shocks, and

stresses while fashioning means of coping and regaining lost power in newer ways (Mlambo 2013, Lothar 2000, Andreries et al 2013, Kabeer 1999). Relating the field of resilience to feminist studies, Elizabeth Flynn, Patricia Sotirin and Ann Brady consider it as a useful rhetorical device in understanding many of the intricacies of the strategies employed in tackling power issues in feminist studies. In their introduction to *Feminist Rhetorical Resilience: Possibilities and Impossibilities*, they argue:

> Resilience is a powerful metaphor that, although heretofore absent from conversations within feminist rhetoric can refocus the field in very productive ways. While similar to metaphors used previously by feminist rhetoricians, it is also distinct in that it places greater emphasis on agency, change and hope in the daily lives of individuals and groups of individuals. Resilience suggests attention to choices made in the face of difficult and even impossible challenges (2).

Although the trio argues that "a feminist conception of resilience is best seen not as fundamentally psychological but as rhetorical, relational and contextual" (2), the psychological state which gives rise to resilience and the resultant psychological effects in the process, until a level of stability is maintained in a struggle such as feminism, is very important. As new directions are established and rhetorical actions such as in literary texts are taken to propose better social actions in the face of daunting social and material forces, issues of psychological and psychosocial developments arise. This is even more so because the people involved (women) are social beings operating within social spaces where factors of social living affect them. Like post-colonialism, resilience theory has a binary referential structure which proposes an existence of two opposites but with the focus here on one side which is seeking to legitimise its own existence through processes of adaptation. As a theory for reading literary works by women from formerly colonised nations, resilience can be employed to explore the adaptive strategies which many of the writers proffer in order to steer the course of historical antecedents as these affect women in post-colonial

nations. It is in this light that I consider Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy as the writer's evaluation of the historical processes of women's subjugation in former colonies and the options before them to fashion a means of transcending these cultural impediments which have been embedded in traditional cultures, and aided by the incidence of colonialism. These resilient moves speak to the alternative strategies which Adimora-Ezeigbo presents in the first and last part of the trilogy, *The Last of the Strong Ones* and *Children of the Eagle,* using the amazon-like women characters that populate the text. It also resonates with her snail-sense womanist politics.

Historicism in the Service of Fiction

The problematic nature of historical truth in fictional narratives demands critical attention here. This is examined in this chapter in order to put the blurred borderline of historical truth in fictional works, especially as this relates to Adimora-Ezeigbo's works under examination here, into focus. Borrowing from historical antecedents in order to build parts of the plots of her trilogy (especially *The Last of the Strong Ones*) calls for an examination of how the 'truth' of history helps to configure memory in fictional narratives and the ways in which the entanglement of truth and fiction structure a new way of understanding this type of fusion. Hayden White argues that the artistic imagination and insight employed by a writer sets a unique difference between "truthful information" (151) which history supposedly aims at, and the kind of more compelling image created in fiction. These two are fused in Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy. Use of literary devices such as "topoi, tropes and figures, schemata of thought, characterization, personification, emplotment, and so on" make a big difference between "a merely truthful account of an event" as set out in history, and "an artistic treatment of a real event in the past which transcends the truth-reality distinction" (151). White's extensive explanation of the subjectivity of historical exactitude opens up the importance of what is remembered and

how much is recollected or could actually be recollected in the writing of narratives either as pure history or as historical fiction. He argues that both history and fiction are narratives and are open to individual idiosyncrasies. Beverly Southgate also deflates the notion that history is pure and absolutely objective in its narratives. Her argument rests on the mode by which fiction operates as White lists above. She contends that history also depends on the same materials to manifest. Thus, Southgate draws a similar structure for the two. For her, "the nature of history is fictive", and so "history and fiction are not mutually exclusive opposites" (7). Even though pride of position is often accorded history for exhibiting a 'strong' evidential structure (sometimes equated with scientific exactitude), Southgate maintains that history is not actually an objective, scientific or verifiably true rendering of the past because of its literary nature. This similar doubt about exactitude in history is raised by Linda Hutcheon in her examination of the problematics of postmodernism and the way it deals with its contrarieties in modern fictional narratives. For Hutcheon, the fact that history depends on written sources which are imperfectly remembered by its authors and subjectively constructed narratives which are the fragmentary remains of a complex and multitudinous past lost to us, makes history subject to individual assumptions, biases and objects of ideological purposes strung together into a narrative that is plotted the same way as fiction (Hutcheon 51). Thus, the boundaries of the two have become blurred and tangled, viewed within the "intellectual and cultural tradition that has become particularly prominent in our postmodern times" (Southgate 31). Even though Hutcheon in her argument that both fiction and history "derive their force more from verisimilitude than from objective truth" and that "they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalised in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying their own complex textuality" (105) she opposes the notion that any claim to a recuperation of the past in historiographic fiction is incontestable. For Hutcheon, fiction cannot in any way

reproduce history or mirror reality. It is only "offered as another of the discourses by which we construct our versions of reality" (40). Seen this way as lacking objective truth but serving as a dialogue with the past in order to forge a connection with the present, Adimora-Ezeigbo's narratives in the trilogy become a blurring of borders where the factual and fictional mix to allow for a robust engagement with artistic creativity which gives room for a version of 'herstory'.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's interrogation and negotiation of group identity through alternative historical recollections have implications for the foregoing in terms of memory making. Memory, being an important issue of history, plays into her embodying of gender narratives. She blends a culture of memory with issues of development and nation building in order to shape historical processes in a way that tallies with Sylvia Paletschek's idea of how "cultures of memory are closely associated with the development of the nation state and the shaping of national identities during the nineteenth century" (164). Paletschek's argument puts much premium on the functioning of memory which can be gleaned in the body of "reusable texts, images and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose cultivation serves to stabilise and convey that society's self-image" (164). For the purpose of aligning her view with my argument, I consider the body of "reusable text" here as the oral histories of historical incidents as Adimora-Ezeigbo emphasises in the unlettered recollections of the rememberers who are "the mouth that talks" and "cultural experts" with whom the memory of the people of Umuga resides (*Children*: 171). This is particularly emphasised in the narrator in *The Last of the Strong Ones*, Okwudiba, whose figure still looms large and flows into the beginning parts of the second text of the trilogy, *House of Symbols*.

In the trilogy, Adimora-Ezeigbo foregrounds the processes of history and memory as womanist weapons which help to link the old and new order of women found within the cultural set up of Nigeria, the old being the ones who lived before and within the

experiences of colonialism and the new being those who come after, meeting a confluence of cultures (western and indigenous) which they struggle to make meaningful. Using a non-fictional central Igbo community in Nigeria, Umuga, she traces the lives of four generations of women through a trilogy which dwells on how these generations impacted one another especially towards Nigerian womanist purposes. The chain remains unbroken as Adimora-Ezeigbo explores the power of memory and its importance in situating the position which these women occupy and how these have changed over time. Adimora-Ezeigbo acknowledges the historical sources of the trilogy and how the artistic is made to bear on the factual aspects of history. In her author's note to *The Last of the Strong Ones,* she writes:

> However, as most creative writers would, I have taken liberties with restructuring local history to suit my artistic vision, to interpret historical facts so as to make the past present, to bring the distant near. Hence, this book is an imaginative work that has made use of the events of the past to reconstruct historical moments in my community during its transition. (iv)

The Last of the Strong Ones sets the narrative of the trilogy into motion by imaginatively reconstructing the earlier point of colonialist contact with the Umuga community in south-eastern Nigeria. This moment of contact is quite important in examining the colonial experiences of many African nations as it puts the issues inherent in the conflicts of culture contact into perspective. Much in the same way, a similar consciousness of socio-cultural and historical awareness is found in Chinua Achebe's popular *Things Fall Apart* using this same juxtaposition of periods in engaging with processes of colonisation and its disruptive nature for the colonised within Africa.

Fictionalised Memory in Adimora-Ezeigbo's Trilogy

Even though the culturally disruptive effect of colonisation was rife in the early literary and non-literary discourses in Africa, the liberating instrumentality of literacy which is a by-product of colonisation has been hailed (Mudimbe 1988; Gerard 1993; Ricard 2004). Mastering the art of writing in order to collate oral materials which have been mainly within the domain of memory have been described as an immensely empowering one for the colonised of Africa. Liz Gunner (2012) argues that "literacy has impacted in various ways on oral modes of communication and has often produced brilliant hybrid forms" (69). The different shapes in which the oral form has emerged through the instrumentality of writing show a robust relationship between the written and the oral with the resultant effect of an adaptation which Gunner connects to globalisation. Gunner concludes that:

> In an era of globalisation , orality has not disappeared but has often adapted itself in many different forms to become a vehicle for the expression of the fears and hopes of new generations of Africans. (70)

These expressions are in the form of narratives that were used as weapons of protest which question the legitimacy of colonisation[5]. Mapping this historical moment of colonisation through writing has implications for the social cultures that developed later as the mapping allows for a comparison of developmental issues over time. The trilogy explores this conflation of cultures as the birthing of new awareness of issues of social ordering, especially in terms of exploration of culturally ascribed women's strength within traditional environments. The importance of Western formal education is an important

[5] Of importance in these regards are the earliest male-authored literary works from writers all over Africa. In Nigeria, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart,* and Amos Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard* readily take the centre stage among these narratives. The importance of Tutuola's works especially as a collation of oral tales in written form at a time when literacy was just taking root sets his literary works within the pioneering front of Nigerian written collation of oral memorial texts. It is noteworthy that women did not feature in written works during this period. This is part of the reason why I consider Adimora-Ezeigbo's fictionalised capturing of the old order and the gradual movement into the new within her trilogy as important. But more importantly is how she captures the moments from a feminist perspective.

aspect of the snail-sense which Adimora-Ezeigbo also foregrounds in the second and third part of the trilogy. Opening with a prologue establishing a troubled moment of disruption in the social space of the community, the first text of the trilogy engages with the process of change which necessitates "the need to recall the past, record the present and all other events yet to unfold" (*The Last of the Strong Ones* 1) by a competent "teaching voice" (*The Last*. 2). This "teaching voice" are people not only recording history mentally but who are responsible for the perpetuation of the important truth, myth and folklore of the people by way of stories told to the youth (2). The sombre description of the biosphere gives an ominous insight into the general atmosphere created by the colonial presence and the overall setting of the story:

> All was not well with the land. The sky was overcast with heavy clouds and the rumbles of thunder echoed the chaos that threatened Umuga. The people clamoured to be left alone… It was a season when a lot of troubles were occurring with lightning speed (1).

The same tone permeates the entire narration of *The Last of the Strong Ones* as Adimora-Ezeigbo presents the disorientation that pervades the lives of the Umuga people due to disruptive change. The narrative is woven around the lives of four fictional but influential women (Ejimnaka, Onyekozuru, Chieme and Chibuka) referred to as the four Oluada.[6] Their activities alongside their male counterparts in the process of fighting foreign domination within the Umuga community deconstruct the initial erasure of women from

[6] This title separates the exalted position of the four special women whose lives are woven around that of their community's development from that of other female leaders within the community. They are the only four women among the highest decision-making council called Obuofo which comprises sixteen members: twelve men and the four women, called Oluada. For the Igbo cultural world in which Adimora-Ezeigbo's adult texts are often situated, titles carry connotations of power and authority, hence the phrase "titled men" which acknowledges not only social but economic power and influence. In some cases, titles are earned through exemplary character, charisma and hard work as is the case with one of the powerful women here, Chieme.

both creative and critical writings of Nigerian literary and cultural history.[7] Adimora-Ezeigbo interweaves the destiny of a town with that of individuals through the fictive narrator through whom Adimora-Ezeigbo expresses the development of Umuga women's social strength over time. In a representation that shows the "inseparability of the individual and communal experiences in the construction of African womanhood" (Kolawole 1997), the personal life histories of the four powerful women were told in terms of the political relevance of their economic and domestic activities. Bhattacharji (2008) describes the four Oluada as "vibrant, vocal, politically conscious individuals, with powerful female genealogies immersed in independent professions." (143). These qualities push forth the cultural and political relevance of the women. A substantial part of the novel is devoted to a vivid description of the efforts of the four women leaders alongside their male counterparts, in rallying the activities of their community so as to put a stop to betrayals from some fellow Umuga[8] people who are helping the colonialists to upturn the traditional system of governance. The disunity and disorientation caused by the ensuing fracas changes the state of harmony in the community. Ultimately the colonial system wins but the leaders of the people decide to salvage whatever is left of their culture. Each of the four women, whose lives are described extensively and woven into the main plot of the text, becomes helpless in the face of a system bigger than their collective efforts. Weaving the narration around the experiences of the four women leaders, vital issues of memory and history appear inextricably linked with the continuity of a race in the face of daunting

[7] The issue of total erasure from narratives, misrepresentation and lack of acknowledgement of women's contribution to the process of national development rates highest among the reasons for the thematic focus of Nigerian women's literary and critical focus. This is dealt with more extensively in the introductory part of this research as it forms an informing factor for both critical and literary engagements in Nigeria as well as in a lot of nations across Africa.

[8] The Umuga community, according to Umeukeje (1973) "are Igbos to the core. By every consideration, the town occupies the central Igbo area. Its dialect agrees with most of what is used in central Igbo, and the customs and traditions show traces of what obtain in most parts of Igbo land. They are quite at home as farmers showing much of the Igbo man's self-sufficiency in their exalted titles (Eze-Eze, Ume-Ume, Okwara-Okwara) and in their walled family cities, but also showing much communal interest in Umunna and age-grade arrangements, in extended family circles of Ikwu-nne and Ikenna and in societies of cults as of masqueraders, Nzes, dibias and inyom class" (12).

hegemonic processes. The collision between tradition and the changes brought by the new order (colonial government and lifestyle) leaves the community in disorientation, forming important moments which require the enormous task of remembrance, a task given to two other women who orally collect and commit history to memory.

Adimora-Ezeigbo foregrounds the importance of the people responsible for recording the people's history for posterity in several parts of *The Last*. Memory and its purposes for resuscitating history spread through the narration. Storytellers are assigned and also self-assume conscious responsible positions as the repositories of ancient tribal culture and tradition. These chanters and story-tellers act as traditional custodians and also portrayers of some versions of history. The role of the storyteller interweaves the best strands of communal and individual spirit, which in many parts of the novel is that of the strong women leaders. Positioned against earlier writings such as those of Achebe and other male Nigerian writers where important history revolves around men, the deliberate commitment of the work of tracking and recording history into women's hands by Adimora-Ezeigbo in *The Last of the Strong Ones* points to the writer's commitment to the snail-sense operational mode. These women storytellers refuse to accept history as a linear progression or a male-centric domain even though they are aware of simultaneous multiple interpretations and misinterpretations of history. In several places in the text, this vital role keeps the reader aware of the centrality of the roles of these characters and their position as custodians of the people's collective history. Forging an unbroken link with the past, present and future, "the historian, the story-teller and the custodian of tradition began to gather the young ones together and teach them (our) ways… to accomplish this task, the teaching voice knew how to extract truths from our myths, our history and our folklore so that youths could be properly instructed" and "possess an uncluttered memory" (2). As listeners, observers and recorders (12) they also require an uncluttered memory which stands the test of time as seen in the character of Okwudiba.

The presence of these memory makers becomes important at every major event and meetings of the town. Throughout *The Last of the Strong Ones*, readers are constantly confronted with statements which show that the non-lettered recorders are human reservoirs of some sort. Their constant references to the immense political power and prowess of each of the four Oluadas reframe the issue of a women's power base within the traditional past and how memory can retain this history thereby creating a process of Africanist womanist struggles which goes back into time. At the crucial meeting of the Obuofo, the importance of recording history is captured in the words of the narrator (later revealed as Okwudiba, one of the recorders):

> We watchers were alive to our task. We were all eyes and all ears. The memory of the story-teller and the guardian of the tradition ran deep. Every son or daughter of Umuga knew that those who were truly committed to the task they were called upon to perform would not rest until the task was done (23).

Collecting memorial treasures in form of the life stories of the great women leaders, the cultural historians are hailed as "Daughters of Umuga, eloquent of voice and perceptive of mind, (you are) the custodians of Umuga's history and secrets" (46) while they appear as "the watching eyes and the listening ears of Umuga" (73) at the crucial meeting of the Obuofo where the memorable encounter of the messengers sent to deliver the town's letter to the colonial white people was discussed. This turning point where the fragile relationship with the unwanted intrusion of the white colonialists takes a downward turn through a misguided and misrepresented letter requires the presence of the history makers more than at any other point because this is actually where the reason for the final confrontation is determined and it has to be properly recorded into history. During a crucial meeting where the strategies to be employed in dialoguing with the white colonialists are discussed, Ejimnaka, one of the four Oluadas, suggests "Let us write a letter to kosiri [the white man] and tell him what our people want" (21). But even though Ejimnaka's

suggestion is taken, and the content agreed upon, the letter-writer who is from another clan takes advantage of the Umuga decision-makers' ignorance of the white man's language and misrepresents their intentions. Making these important political and historical matters items for posterity and describing the place of the key women players requires "listening, remembering and committing to [a] memory" that is uncluttered (84). The memory is described as "cavernous" (12), "bottomless" (82) and "deep and unflagging" (90), depicting a limitless space which is capable of storing the mass of both individuals' and communal history (of the four women leaders and the Umuga community). This recording takes on a newer form in the opportunity of literacy which has an equally limitless space for storage as Nnenne's (a great grandchild of one of the Oluadas) continues to record history in writing in the last part of the trilogy, *Children of the Eagle*.

Further importance is accorded the task of the 'rememberers', foregrounding their position as moving beyond the present to the hereafter and as custodians of the link between the various realms, they "are the memory of Umuga, with skills and knowledge" which are "indispensable to the community". And as "carriers of (our) lifeways", their "remembering bridges the gap between the memory of the departed and the memory of the living as well as the memory of those who are yet to come" (125). After telling her story to the historians in order for them to commit it into memory Chieme, herself an accomplished singer and chanter, praises the history recorders as "the memory of the community… like a string that links generations, keeping alive (our) history and (our) tradition"… whose "remembering is inexhaustible and will nourish the powers of recollection of (our) youths" (118). In the same manner, Chibuka, one of the women leaders, refers to the duo as "the ear that listens and the mouth that shapes words" while their memory is noted as "a storehouse of knowledge" (149). Witnessing of events for clarity of reportage makes the presence of the recorders vital at every important incident. When the irate, impatient and precocious Okpo Age Group of Umuga burns down what they presume to be two of the

symbols of the colonialists, the school building and the church building, the recorders "hurried along with the two men" sent by the surprised and much distressed Obuofo, who was at a meeting at that time, "to see (for ourselves) and commit the event to memory" (156). The republican nature of the Umuga community[9] warrants collective decision making for the good of the community. This communal arrangement thrusts further importance onto the tasks of the women recorders of history whose responsibility is continuously woven around that of the community and its vital decision-makers. Being at every meeting and following every event becomes compulsory in the light of one's responsibility to posterity.

At a point towards the end of the narration in *The Last,* the question of truth and authenticity of history becomes very important. Aware of simultaneous multiple interpretations and misinterpretations both of communal history and the part that women play in it, the recorders:

> go over the accounts (we had been) given by the four Oluada, review the stories and agree on how they were to be presented for hearing when occasion calls for them. (We) were not surprised that many versions of an event or a story existed simply because the custodians of history or the story-tellers had not agreed on what account or story should be regarded as the authentic and passed on to hearers or to secondary and subsequent performers (*The Last*. 158).

The above quotation then raises Adimora-Ezeigbo's awareness of issues of what Southgate describes as the "instability, deficiency, and unreliability of memory which goes to the heart of histories both personal and public" (Southgate 92). This is not only important for the intensely oral society of the first part of the trilogy but even in later parts where the same questions of what to include and what to leave out of the Osai family

[9] The Igbo people of Nigeria were largely republican in nature until recent times when they began to operate the monarchical style like many of the other cultural groups within Nigeria. They operate in age groups while their leadership style is more of collectivism where titled people meet in council and make collective decisions.

history is Nnenne's burden as the family historian. In Southgate's conclusion to Penelope Lively's *Photograph*, an insignificant item of history could be big enough to upturn and disrupt the whole evidential structure of history and subject it to questions (92). This might be what is left out either deliberately or inadvertently or what is consciously or unintentionally included. Thus the decision of the recorders in *The Last* to "review the stories" they have collected so far and "agree on how they were to be presented for hearing when occasion called for them" assumes an attempt not to rewrite the stories but create an authentic version. The problematic question of authenticity in history opens up the issue of truth, (un)reliability of human memory, error of judgment, and personal or group interests in what is put down as history. For this part of the trilogy, the oral nature of the works of the recorders makes the issue of authenticity more pronounced. Committing historical happenings to mental memories makes their recollection subject to the various pitfalls of failed or warped remembrance. Richard Marius and Melvin Page argue that there is no absolute purity in the contents of history. For them, "historians must always put something of themselves into the stories they tell; never are they empty vessels through which the records of the past are transformed into untouched truths about a past" (9). This insight can be applied to the recording of Umuga's war with the colonisers. Being a situation of war and under much compulsion, the recorders face a lot of restrictions. They

> could not be in more than one place at the same time, so (we) made plans as to how to gather information on the happenings in the various zones of the conflict. Women were not allowed by the War Council to get to the war front except on the few occasions when they take food to the fighting men (184).

Even where the recorders are personal first-hand witnesses like the ones in *The Last of the Strong Ones* and not collectors of what others had recorded, a prejudiced structure of narration unfolds because of the gendered nature of the part of the history that is being recorded. This is because the recorders are women taking down history basically focused

on women telling their stories largely from women's perspectives, that is Chukwudiba and the other unnamed recorder and the four Oluadas whose life-histories are being recorded and woven into that of the community. Against the foregoing, the importance which Adimora-Ezeigbo accords education as part of the liberating strategy of the snail-sense becomes important. Being literate could thus rescue the women oral 'rememberers' from vital points in the history of both their town and the important women whose life histories they are committed to recording.

The critical moments of colonialist contact, their efforts at domination and the colonized people's struggles for emancipation recorded in *The Last of the Strong Ones* move into a second phase of a new social order in *House of Symbols,* the second text of the trilogy. In this part Adimora-Ezeigbo examines memory as an essential part of the mythic and mystical Igbo worldview in terms of circular continuities of human existence. This continuity is extensively fictionalised in terms of reincarnation as an essential means of reworking and reawakening of genealogical memory. Foregrounding a community grappling with new social and religious realities and struggling not to forget its past religious inclinations, the focus here is very much on the spiritual, emotional and psychological development of Eaglewoman, the grand-daughter of Ejimnaka, one of the four women leaders introduced in the first of the series. Eaglewoman takes centre stage but within new social realities. The interweaving of a mythic strand into the tale takes the reader through the life of Eaglewoman, one of the important women clan leaders of Uga, referred to as the "lioness that leads the pack", and "the wise one, the thundering tigress of Umuga" (*The Last* 8). This second book in the trilogy establishes the point in Nigerian history where colonialism has already taken root and the descendants of the important players against colonialism that we saw in the first book have embraced the Christian religion and Western ways, which caused the initial disruption. The embracing of the new ways is connected to issues of cultural alienation. Aziagba, Ejimnaka's daughter and

Eaglewoman's mother, embraces Christianity to save her twin sons from death. Twins are considered an abomination and aberration within the Uga culture. They are to be left to die in the evil forest but Ejimnaka runs to the mission house and lives there to save her children. Thus, the cultural estrangement forces her to become a Christian and her daughter is brought up in this new religion abhorred by her mother, Ejimnaka. Eaglewoman is a key player in this saga. She is also Christian and does not believe in the old ways which her grandmother, Ejimnaka, fought to sustain before her death. The incidents in the growth of Ugonwayi (Eaglewoman) reflect the changing periods within the society. The people's lives have undergone dramatic changes which show in Eaglewoman's disbelief of the old ways which her forebears cherish. Imbued with the type of character strength found in the four strong women, Eaglewoman's uncommon charismatic qualities draw people to her and the lives of the people around her become interwoven into hers. For instance, a part of the narration describes Eaglewoman:

> But there is a lot that can be said about Eaglewoman's relationship with people, those who work with her or for her, with those who are her friends, her relations and even her business rivals. She knows how to give and enjoys giving relationships and other things what she herself has come to describe as a personal touch. Eaglewoman is a solid rock that gathers moss. Around her, green and yellow moss blossoms in a thick, furry mass at all seasons… People obey her and dance to her tune. Some thrill to please her, to put a smile on her comely face. Some simply want to be near her, close to her magnetic presence. She knows ways to burrow into people's skin like a mole, without irritating or annoying them. Her influence is not a flash in the pan or the sudden flare or glitter of a shooting star (*House*. 109).

The focus on her character in this part of the trilogy foregrounds the type of strength found in the previous women leaders while setting the stage for the writer's full snail-sense engagement in the last of the series.

The recreation of lives and the reconstruction of events in *House of Symbols* continues the tracing of memory for the purpose of establishing the roles of the amazon-like women of the Umuga community. But rather than a group exploration, the focus narrows down to Eaglewoman, a great granddaughter, who serves as the link between the previous and coming generation of women. The narration opens with Okwudiba, one of the two recorders of history in the first of the series as she struggles for release from an earthly existence which she no longer desires, while she awaits the coming of the toddler, Nnenne (meaning mother has returned), Eaglewoman's second daughter, a reincarnation of one of the great women leaders whose life history she recorded in the earlier years. Like many other culturally situated phenomena, reincarnation as a concept resides within the realm of mythical belief system and cultural practices of people. It lacks verifiable scientific authentication. In the African worldview, as in many traditional belief systems there is the consciousness of a cyclic movement of the human soul in the form of transmigration for the advancement of an ancestral link through birth and rebirth. The connection between the past and the present becomes important not only as a cultural thing but as a means of engaging with womanist power. Dwelling on reincarnation as a mystical essence which further advances the chain of an ancestral network running through a maternal lineage, Adimora-Ezeigbo reimages the spiritual as an essential part of African creative imagination and as a space of power for women. Honing in on the character of Okwudiba as a model which defines an on-going cultural transformation, Adimora-Ezeigbo uses the idea of reincarnation to push further the ideal of sisterhood which has been sustaining the community as the women stand by the men and fight colonialism in the first of the trilogy. The state of social and religious affairs in the Umuga community at this point is captured in Okwudiba's laments at the evocative beginning of *House of Symbols*:

> Lioness, in your other existence, I carved your name in the memory of our people. You inhabited their mind as a rabbit in a burrow. I, Okwudiba, rememberer with a

> storyteller's infinite memory, I have lived to see a generation in a haste to abandon the ancestors and trample on age-old traditions. To live to see these sights is a punishment to the soul. Unbind me, Lioness, and I will depart in peace (3).

The strong sense of connection and stability which the returning of the dead creates in terms of earthly rebirth, and the continuous movement of the soul of man, as part of the belief structure in many African traditional cultures but especially as an important strand of Igbo cosmological arrangement, resonates in Okwudiba's utterance. Trampling on this, for Okwudiba, the historian, amounts to threats to destabilise "age-old tradition" and demolishing the entire structure on which the house is built. Considering that it is not common to cast ancestors in terms of a reincarnated woman.[10] Adimora-Ezeigbo's deployment of reincarnation as a transmigration of the soul of strong women of the past reinstitutes her commitment to carving a womanist structure of strength. Ofure Aito (2008) contends that the importance of reincarnation as a continuity and as a womanist weapon of communal as well as self-sustenance and creation of sense of history and security is germane to the creation of historical women role-models. He avers: "for the African woman, [reincarnation] is even more important, given the various ways that patriarchy isolates, demeans and devalues women" (167). His argument rests on the tracing of ancestral pedigree in the majority of African traditional cultures through the male parentage, a phenomenon which leaves women out of lineage history. Thus, tracing history through women constructs a space where women can draw upon the strength and examples of other women in history and become agents and parts of the important historical and ancestral arrangements which place women on the same pedestal of genealogical importance as men. Engaging with known women's paths of power, that is, roles that could

[10] Masquerades for instance are regarded as ancestors visiting the living during masquerade festivals all over Nigeria. They are cast as men and regarded as male ancestors. Women are not regarded as ancestors and are not thought to come back to visit the living. Women do not feature as masquerades. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* depicts this masculine cast in different incidents in the text. For me the way this is treated in terms of ancestral links for women is one very important way in which Adimora-Ezeigbo recuperates history within traditional cultural practices to create an important cultural space for women.

be traditionally played by women (such as women as raconteurs), Adimora-Ezeigbo creates this genealogical and historical connection built on reconnections forged by situating death as the beginning of an end and vice versa. Reincarnation shapes and interprets the progress of history where memory flows in an unending stream of cultural consciousness leading to reawakening of consciousness of being. Thus, the eventual sighting of the toddler, Nnenne, marks the spiritual release of the entrapped soul of Okwudiba whose acknowledgment of the continuity of existence (reiterated almost throughout her lament and depicted in her religious clinging to the old ways) shows in her monologue with baby Nnenne, that she (Okwudiba) herself would soon "bow low in acceptance of this transition. Perhaps, hereafter, to return in a new form and, as a new vessel" (*House.* 91). In this way, reincarnation becomes a process of development and continuity which by extension serves the purpose of memorialising recollections and reconnections. Highlighting the heroic stature of women as ancestors who can also reincarnate and "return on purpose to weave a new destiny" (90), Adimora-Ezeigbo resuscitates the submerged women's position of power within the patriarchal Igbo culture. Eaglewoman acknowledges this as she watches the young Nnenne grow:

> Eaglewoman follows Nnenne with her eyes that shine with love. She acknowledges her as the one who left in anger in a period of transition and returned in peace in the time of transformation. (*House*. 152-3).

The reference here is to the manner of Ejimnaka's death. Mourning the arrest of both her husband and son-in-law who were taken away by the colonial government and never heard of again, she had chased the son of the new District Officer up her ukpaka tree in blind fury. She falls and dies. But she is considered to have only transited while awaiting a reincarnation to continue her earthly mission later. Thus, both at the material and spiritual levels, women operate as part of the unbroken chain of cultural power structure as ancestors.

Adimora-Ezeigbo connects both tangible and intangible cultural elements in creating cultural memory to emphasize that the process of historical connections is linked with every aspect of people's lives within a traditional setting such as that of the Umuga community. Anchored on memory, the process of cultural transformation has become a serious concern in womanist writing in Africa. Adimora-Ezeigbo emphasises this in the development of Eaglewoman. Tracing her personal development through her strong maternal forebears, the character follows in the strength of her grandmother, Ejimnaka, who is a clan leader, and her mother, Aziagba, who is a male-woman.[11] The decision to annul Eaglewoman's engagement with Nathaniel Okeke, a non-consensual arrangement made on her behalf while she was still a child, shows a character whose strength follows in the footpath of the earlier female models. In several ways, Eaglewoman proves to be as resilient as her forebears. From an initial state of childlessness in marriage through conquering bitter rivalry in her bread business which "is a new food in Atagu" and which "everybody gives her credit for introducing this delectable bird food- so-called because of its light texture", (117) and her tailoring and snuff trade, she shows the type of strength of purpose and astuteness in business depicted in the Oluadas. Being a perceptive businesswoman, like Ejimnaka, her mat-seller grandmother, she is nick-named "Tree that grows money" (121). Charitable and accommodating, "Eaglewoman's presence is felt everywhere in the make-shift market as it is felt in all the markets in the surrounding villages and towns where her products are marketed" (159). Adimora-Ezeigbo imbues the character of Eaglewoman with a proportion of the political strength found in her forebears. Her eventual decision to go into active partisan politics proves that the writer is further exploring the previous power grounds where the women of the past thrived and where the

[11] The male-woman custom is common among the Igbo people of eastern Nigeria. A practice which requires a woman of marriageable age to remain within her father's home, take on male partners of her choice, and bear children that do not belong to the man but to her father for the purpose of continuing the lineage of her father. This happens when the father is unable to have male children. In place of the usual marriage rites, the *nluikwa* ceremony where the woman in question chooses a partner is performed.

new generation must also continue a snail-sense space clearing.[12] In a way, I read this as a further interweaving of the lives of women characters with that of the community:

> With her business bursting at the seams and thriving like a healthy baby, Eaglewoman looks for a new area to conquer, a new and worthwhile venture to hold her interest. Politics beckon to her with open arms. She is aware of the political activities traversing the land, shaking communities, villages and towns. Her ears receive news of political activities in Eastern Region… She was elected the vice chairperson of the party's Working Committee in Umuga (409).

Committing herself to her business and the activities of her political party resuscitates the strength of the strong women in *The Last of the Strong Ones*, whose political influence matches and sometimes surpasses that of their male counterparts. Ejimnaka and the other women leaders in the first of the trilogy have thriving businesses which make them economically independent and politically relevant. In this way, the writer creates for Eaglewoman, the type of strong identity of economic power, social and political influence and independent selfhood which runs through the narration in the first of the trilogy.

While the activities in Eaglewoman's younger life shown in *House of Symbols* represent a period of gradual movement of Nigerians from a point of full colonial activities as seen in Umuga, to a time of full independence (1960 onwards) for the Nigerian nation, the social conditions continue to transform in the face of social and political changes. The next set of the generation whose history begins in *The Last of the Strong Ones* take centre stage in the last book of the trilogy within these newer transformations. Set in the

[12] I imply here that Adimora-Ezeigbo builds on the earlier feminist power base to situate her opinion about earlier notions of political power available to women and to represent in Eaglewoman the need for greater participation of women in partisan politics within newer social realities. Even though there are disagreements about the amount of political power available to women during precolonial times in many African societies that have been studied, textual evidence shows that the position of women "has alternated between dominance and passivity over the years" (Evwierhoma 2002:85). This can be verified in the present as women regents and rulers still exist in many parts of Nigeria. These women enjoy the same political power as male rulers even though the number is not as big as that of men. Separate studies carried out by Bohannan & Cutin (1981), Kolawole (1997), Awe (1992), Cutrufelli, Maria Rosa (1985), show that women have held positions of political authority in several areas of Africa including Nigeria.

postcolonial Nigeria of the early 1990s, *Children of the Eagle* presents a continuously changing gendered space and further expresses the ideological focus of Adimora-Ezeigbo through the five children of Eaglewoman. Juxtaposing Eaglewoman with her five daughters allows for an engagement with new-fangled feminist thoughts and the writer's stand in the debate. The five of Ogonna, Nnenne, Obioma, Amara, and Chiaku are set in contrast with their mother. Eaglewoman favours the African womanist philosophy in several ways while her daughters' stances vary from mild to radical feminist attitudes. Issues of women's empowerment, culture sustenance and disruptions, especially as these affect women's rights and choices in the face of changing social realities in Nigeria, sustain the direction of the writer's snail-sense feminist ideals in this third text of the trilogy. The character of Nnenne is especially foregrounded as the reincarnation of her great-grandmother, one of the four Oluadas. Presented as an already established writer, she is saddled with recording the history of her father's family, the Osai family. Thus, she takes on the roles of the previous unlettered recorders of history in the first of the trilogy although within newer orthographic realities. Her views and those of her sisters concerning established traditional treatment of women within cultures sometimes contrast with that of Eaglewoman who stands to represent the snail-sense feminist outlook of the writer by still approaching the issue of women's rights within traditional cultures with measured caution. For instance, after the show of gratitude to the emissaries sent by the council of elders on the land dispute between the Osais (Eaglewoman's) and the Umeaku family, Eaglewoman admonishes her daughters who think that the show of gratitude is too effusive and quite uncalled for since they are fighting for their rights:

> Listen, my children, you have to know how to deal with these people if you want to get on with your life. A woman is like a snail that must crawl over thorns and rocks with a smooth and lubricated tongue. This is the only way the snail can survive, or

its tongue will be torn to shreds as it journeys on its rough terrain. But being like that does not mean women are fools (357).

This is the same snail metaphor that Adimora-Ezeigbo uses in her own scholarship (*Snail-Sense Feminism*). Therefore, the shared metaphor demonstrates parallels between the author's own worldview and this specific character, Eaglewoman. This snail metaphor permeates most of Eaglewoman's attitude to the different gender crises raised throughout the text.

Anchoring the discussion of the historical development of women in Umuga on cultural advancement, Adimora-Ezeigbo shows that the conservative and the modern clash in Eaglewoman and her daughters. The tracing of the colonial and post-colonial processes through the voice of women and from this hitherto neglected viewpoint further establishes the importance of Adimora-Ezeigbo's efforts at retelling the story of these historical phases of the Nigerian nation. Chioma Opara refers to this as an important avenue of further understanding of Nigerian colonial history from women writers, and as "the resounding voice of women which is muffled in Achebe's classic" (340). Opara's reference to "muffled" voices further puts into perspective the unacknowledged positive contributions of women to the uprooting of colonialism and the importance of reclaiming women's contributions through voice as Adimora-Ezeigbo attempts in her trilogy. After the first text of the trilogy establishes the important positions of women history recorders, which the duo of Okwudiba and Erionu (whose name is only mentioned once in *House*) occupies, and the impact of these strong women as participants, witnesses and interpreters of history in the struggle against colonialism, the second in the series, *House of Symbols*, continues this process. Tracing the growth and development of the lineage of the earlier powerful women (especially Ejimnaka), Eaglewoman's daughters become symbols of the impact of the social changes on feminist thoughts. The importance of the old women's struggle against colonialism and its attendant problems situates them on the same pedestal with the

newer forms of resistance that we find later in Eaglewoman's offspring in *Children*. Although not struggling with colonialism which has come and left its indelible cultural marks, they are struggling against a culture which seems not to recognise women as an important part of it.

In the next few paragraphs, I reinvoke the aspect of reincarnation as an important part of the traditional belief structure of the setting of the trilogy. This becomes important here as *Children of the Eagle* raises this once more for the purpose of linking the most prominent of Eaglewoman's daughters, Nnenne, to her female ancestors. Thus, the establishment of the processes of reincarnation as an important mythical aspect of the historical process which Adimora-Ezeigbo attempts to establish starts in *House* and takes a practical structure in *Children*. Understanding major aspects of many traditional African societies is closely tied to making sense of the mythological arrangement of their world. This mythological approach to the social and the spiritual offers culturally derived answers to many questions of daily encounters and the how and why of human life within these environments. Aito argues that it is from the 'reality' of the spiritual that "the pragmatism and dynamism of characters spring and unify" (167). Adimora-Ezeigbo draws from this cultural configuration to shape Nnenne's character and identity. According to Clyde Kluckhohn, reincarnation is at the heart of provenance, the sustenance of social systems, precepts and traditions. This includes the questions of how and why the world was made, why death occurs and the interrelationships between the two phases of human existence-life and death. The myth of reincarnation is here recognised as an important aspect of memory-making and historical processes of women's power. Eaglewoman has misgivings about traditional beliefs which grant authenticity to reincarnation and other mystical practices within the Umuga community. But the near-magical incident in Okwudiba's house, where the old woman stupefied her and Osai (her husband) by making her daughter, the two year old Nnenne, who is not yet able to walk, start walking leaves Eaglewoman in

a suspension of her disbelief of the old ways before Christianity entered Umuga. The old seer and priestess of the old ways, Okwudiba, addresses the little girl as the reincarnation of Ejimnaka whose mission is to continue the noble purposes which she began in the first of the trilogy before the colonisers disrupted the Umuga community. The link is forged into *Children* as Nnenne grows up to become a writer whose mission presently is not the tracking down of community history, like her maternal forebears, but the history of her immediate family, the Osai family. This historical referencing tallies with the womanist direction of the first parts of the story (which is about women) because it is also, majorly, the story of the Eaglewoman and her children, who are all female.

For the majority of African women writers there exists a close connection between literature and history. This connection, further reinforced by the desire to make their own voices heard as participants in the history of their nations, allows for a synthesis of fiction and fact. This makes it possible to choose and manipulate the contents in a way that suits the purpose(s) they set before themselves. This creative mechanism, as Bamikunle argues:

> depends on historical realities for many or all of its constituent elements: from subject matter (mankind) to language (medium of expression) to the artistic traditions that provide the author with form and other modes of expression, to the critic and the reading public that literature needs to survive (33).

For Adimora-Ezeigbo, historical realities could be made to work for snail-sense purposes. The important position which the past occupies in Igbo historical thought in which people are always seeking justification from the past constructs a position of importance which the ancestors occupy. In his interpretation of the role of some of the important female characters of Adimora-Ezeigbo's works, Tayo Ogunlewe argues that a reader can see that:

> the past represented by the Umuga saga is being relived with a view to learning from it. The past must be confronted and examined, even interrogated in the forging of the present and future ways… For the saga is a recreation of history, of

> myths and of legends. It is a story of a people's belief systems and ceremonies which encompass burial, reburial, reincarnation, signs and emblems of the past and superstitions, among others (225).

The superfluous details which the historian leaves out of his narration become writers' ingredients as facts and fiction are mixed in a bid to present all the minute details of history embellished for literary purposes. Adimora-Ezeigbo, in a not too direct answer to a question in an interview granted Emmanuel Adedun in 2014, admits that "a writer may use some of her personal experiences to explore issues in a work of art, I'm no different" (358). And as she also writes in the author's note to *House*, "the subject of these novels is the history of my community, anchored on the lives and unique experiences of the memorable characters raised and nurtured in the Umuga environment and in the wider national and international landscapes" (iii). Underlining the place of memory in these engagements, she agrees that the power of a writer's imagination is "fuelled by a good memory, which transmutes the raw materials of experience into a work of art" (iii). In this way, the tension which gave rise to the struggle for emancipation in *The Last* continues through the tracing of history embedded in memory, recalled for the purposes of situating the strong women who constitute the central figures of the trilogy. The recall, located in memory, Kolawole argues, gives room for self-referencing, which situates African women writers within their own works, and constitutes a technique of healing which helps tell their own stories and positions the urgency of these stories within a larger medium. (167). The truth of this assertion manifests in Ezechi Onyerionwu's biography on the writer, *Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo: Life and Literature*. Tracing the life history of Adimora-Ezeigbo from childhood through adulthood, many of the references to places, historical events and personages are found to be part of Adimora-Ezeigbo's real life experiences. Borrowing from quite recent and verifiable historical sources such as "church bulletins, students' magazines, journal and brochure of community ceremonies and celebrations" (Onyerionwu

223) Adimora-Ezeigbo creates what she herself describes as "the fusion of folklore and written history that make up the source of (our) writers' historical fiction" ("History and the Novel in Africa" 17). In her case, the setting of the trilogy, the Umuga community, exists. The war of 1909-1916 that brought the town under full colonial power as described in *The Last* is an actual part of the town's history, while many of the players of history mentioned in parts of the trilogy such as Ezeukwu, Nnenne's great grandfather (who is actually Akachi's great-grandfather) are actual people. These form the raw materials of her fiction to the extent that one can draw a parallel between Adimora-Ezeigbo and the character of Nnenne whose description in *House of Symbols* matches Akachi's remembrance of how she looked when she was young. Describing her childhood looks to Onyerionwu in an interview, Adimora-Ezeigbo says:

> "I was not only very slim… I was also small. So my mates took advantage of that and cheated me in so many things. I was given a nickname mimicking my slim build and I was teased mercilessly about it". She remembers her mother always getting agitated because she felt Akachi needed more food and might die if she continued to look so slim and unfed (19).

A similar description of the fictional Nnenne in *House* brings to mind the resemblance. "Eaglewoman laughs softly as she watches the slight figure [of Nnenne]. The child has grown taller and thinner. Almost skinny, with liquid eyes which seem to harbour a pool" (134) and "Eaglewoman is often cross with her for not eating as well as other children" (146). Thus, the writer's self flows into her own narration and a blurring of borders of fiction and history emerge.

Understanding history from the point of view of a woman who lived the history and understands its undercurrents is essential in snail-sense interpretations of novels by women writers (Hunsu 2015). The processes of history and historical developments in Nigeria lend credence to the issues raised in the stories. In this regards, Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy, but

especially *Children*, assumes the importance of works aptly located within a central position in the womanist literary politics of Nigerian women writers. The four women who constitute the Oluada represent resilience, strength and courage which are aspects of women's history that have been left out of both literary and non-literary Nigerian history so far.

Adimora-Ezeigbo adroitly recaptures historical developments and how these deepen an understanding of the present. She links the processes which reconfigure the image of the four Oluadas in the persons of the five daughters of Eaglewoman. In a bid to reinvent the various ways by which colonialism and its resultant effects have affected Nigerian women, she invokes the traditional strategic position of custodians of history, which her characters occupy in an attempt to construct the multilayered and variegated roles which Nigerian women played and occupy in the nation's past, and how these have changed or been forgotten in the process of newer material developments. Just as Ejimnaka takes a very important central position in the advocacy against the Kosiri (white men) who entered Umuga and acted like "the guest who turned aggressive" (*The Last,* 7), Nnenne in *Children* takes the position of strength that we see in the character of Ejimnaka. This occurs within a new setting which has become modified by new social realities. This character's strength is derived from formal education which has endowed her with the ability to write and connect events in writing as against her maternal forebears who commit history into memory in mental unwritten notes. A child whose difference among her siblings sets her apart from babyhood, Nnenne becomes the new recorder of the history of the Osai family. She understands this to be an enormous task of putting the family history together and "pruning it to remove what is irrelevant or superfluous. To shape into a book this mass of facts, to handle with tact the sensitive revelations made in interviews with members of the family and other dug-up in my research for material" (171). In an ironical twist, Western education which was part of the kosiri's legacy and what the former

matriarchs moved against in the first part of the history, becomes the tool of strength which the descendants deploy in fighting the new form of subjugation. The extraordinary prowess at remembering and writing with which the character of Nnenne is endowed is a strategy of resistance and resilience predicated on the past in a link to her maternal great-grandmother and the great-grandmother's friends and fellow female warriors, Chieme, Ejimnaka, Chibuka and Onyekozuru who were "the voice of the women, among the sixteen inner council committee" (*The Last,* 3). She is imbued with an uncommon intellectual prowess (aided by western education) which is foregrounded in the recorders of history in *The Last.* Like Chieme and Okwudiba in the first of the trilogy, Nnenne becomes the metonymic "mouth that talks" which "refers to a cultural expert like a storyteller, singer or orator. Mouth, therefore, is a significant symbol in Umuga" (*Children,* 172). To do this she has to follow the footsteps of her predecessors who were tasked with "maintain[ing] an accurate sense of (our) people's history by looking into both the past and the future and recording the present with an unfailing skill" (*The Last.* 3). This connection between the past recorders of history and Nnenne becomes important for the continuation of the process of recording history. Like these recorders who used no pen but "ever watching, took note of these things, (our) memory, womb-wise stored the seed of future earthing and sprouting" (*The Last*, 12) She commits the happenings to memory but unlike them she moves further to record them in writing.

The significance of the womb as a space invested with symbolic functions is emphasised at this point in the story. The important happenings in the collective history of the people are stored in a space linked metaphorically with safety, security and multiplication which is what the womb connotes here. It depicts a desire to invoke creation and recreation while reconstructing an identity similar to the functions of a woman's womb. As a reservoir, the physical, spiritual, and mythical implications of this space reimage the cultural functions of women within many traditional African societies, that of

childbearing unlike the male reproductive structure which is fashioned not to retain but only to give. In this regard, Eaglewoman's opinion raises the understanding of the womb further "a womb is meant to bear fruit, but when it is not so used, it is in trouble" (*Children*, 32). Regarded as custodians of life's creative hub, which is the womb, Adimora-Ezeigbo's women historians are thus in charge of the creative space in both the denotative and connotative sense. Similar suggestive word that shows a space of retention in *The Last* shows the cultural understanding of the womb as an important space of storage for posterity. One of the memory makers at the beginning of the narrative says, "We, the observers, listened and recorded, in our cavernous memory, all that was said at the meeting" (12). The cavern symbolises not only a storage space like the womb but also a safe and private domain for future retrieval. Nnenne is expected to use newer methods of orthography to pin down history. She is to "observe and interpret events accurately, talk to important sons and daughters of Umuga, relate closely to the Umuada, (Association of daughters of the land), the Oluada, (Voice of women), the Alutaradi, (Association of married women) and the obuofo, (The inner council which comprises of four women and twelve men)" (*The Last.* 3).

Although with historical undercurrents, the task before Nnenne takes its form within the new realities of a modern-day Nigeria in which she and her sisters are living. The social structure of colonialism which has rendered women more powerless within their society makes Nnenne's task of creating more avenues for women's empowerment within the snail-sense purview crucial. Even though Nweke contends that Nnenne and her sisters subvert Adimora-Ezeigbo's conciliatory snail-sense by being radical in their desire for social change and violating the principles of womanism that birthed snail-sense on some occasions, the critic fails to take cognisance of the factors that inform their choices. Nnenne and her sisters face issues of gender discrimination. For example, at the University of the South where Nnenne works after her doctoral training in Britain, she confronts a

system which does not value intellectual brilliance, especially from a woman. Nnenne says of the myriad of issues she faces in her academic career as a woman lecturer:

> Why had I received no positive response from those eggheads? Or are they not really eggheads? Am I the problem? The wrong person to mobilize people? The wrong gender? Who could say? In a society where one could encounter many obstacles – ethnicity, nepotism, hatred, religious intolerance, gender oppression or sexism and sexual harassment (*Children* 176).

While thinking of ways to tackle the issues emanating from her job in the university, Nnenne turns to her ancestral home, Umuga. She says "Umuga became the object of my gaze. I isolated issues, which I consider undesirable and attacked them vigorously, like a boxer" (176). This backward gaze towards the direction where she can put women's history of subjection and power into perspective helps Nnenne to reconfigure women's path of power in order to choose the best approach to fighting patriarchy within newer realities. Nweke considers these attacks through letters and the Osai sisters' urging of other women towards liberation as a tendency towards "upturning or countering existing cultural practices in Africa instead of guaranteeing their sustenance or peaceful existence" ("Deconstructing Womanism" 201). But while I consider Nnenne, the recorder, and the other Osai daughters, Ogonna, Obioma, Amara, and Chiaku her fellow game-changers as representative of the new ways of interrogating women's issues in Nigeria, their strategies are still within the ambit of snail-sense womanism.

Children opens at a significant point where Eaglewoman and her children hold a memorial for their late husband, and father, Osai. The significance lies in the importance of foregrounding this homecoming as a reconnection with the past in a bid to establish the chain with their roots for the Osai children. Staying connected is in keeping with what Ogonna had attached with staying in touch "with their beginning and keep[ing] the channel of communication (with their roots) open for as long as possible" (*Children*. 99). That

they are all women is also a pointer to the diverse issues of female subjugation which Adimora-Ezeigbo would further raise in many parts of the text while situating them within a womanist political attention. While attempting to emphasise the operational praxis of snail-sense, Adimora-Ezeigbo juxtaposes Eaglewoman and her daughters, as representatives of the old order and the new, respectively. Homecoming grants the women the opportunity to attempt to put into perspective the changes that had occurred over time in both the family and the community of Uga and their own positions in this milieu. The fate of one is thus intertwined in that of others. The women's convergence on their native place helps us put Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense into a new perspective by comparing the local women (representing the old order) with the educated Osai daughters (representing the new) in some incidents in the story. Likening the overjoyed village women's warm welcome for the enlightened Osai daughters to the Osai family's dog, Lucky, Adimora-Ezeigbo creates a first impression of class difference in the two groups and situates the narration further through a classist comparison. Nnenne muses:

> As each woman rubs her body and face against Nnenne's, she's reminded of no less affectionate display of pleasure and memory, which Lucky, Eaglewoman's dog, had demonstrated the day she and her sisters arrived home. Lucky had sniffed at them, wagging his tail and rubbing his body against theirs in recognition and acceptance… Nnenne understands that these young wives from the extended family are overjoyed to have her and her siblings home. She does not hide her pleasure at having them in her home. She tells herself that the educational gulf between her and them should not create a barrier to them and their relationship (91).

This separatist attitude even though not pronounced in some ways emphasises the emergent womanist issues raised in *Children.* The same strand is noticed in the Osai daughters and the Alutaradi of Umuga whose lifestyle is set in contrast with that of Eaglewoman's educated daughters. The Osai women educate their rural fellows on

changes that can bring them emancipation in keeping with emerging womanist issues. The discussion of the issues of equality in copulatory relations, for instance, shows that this is one way in which the rural women can break the shackles of sexual monotony and gain more freedom with men. Nweke argues that the introduction of this issue to the women runs contrary to womanist ideals. He argues that:

> Other areas where the African female protagonists [Eaglewoman's daughters] introduce disharmony in the society are in the issues of sex and the disorienting of Umuga wives towards demanding satisfaction from their husbands in copulatory relations, the women being encouraged to revolt against some traditional practices that do not guarantee them happiness. Indeed they are urged to be bold and assertive in demanding this… In doing this, they challenge the traditional restriction on issues of sex and love and long-standing myths of the supposed passivity of women in sexual matters. This to an African is rebellious and capable of setting ablaze the cultural structure of the people (202).

Even though Nweke would see these contrasts as a violation of the principles of womanism from which snail-sense takes its form, I regard this as a strategy which allows Adimora-Ezeigbo to further reinforce the basis for the focus of snail-sense.

While speaking with the Umuga women on sexual relations with their men, Nnenne emphasises the dialogic tenets of snail-sense. One of the women asks "Hey, how can I look him in the face and demand such a thing? How can I act normally before him after making such a shameless demand? Will I be able to retain my dignity?" (*Children,* 109). Nnenne responds "You can, why not?" She encourages them to talk about this with their husbands. Thus, this is in line with Adimora-Ezeigbo's argument in snail-sense that "it is important to point out that negotiation or dialogue is sometimes more efficacious in achieving success in human relations than aggression or confrontation" (*Snail-Sense Feminism.* 37). Nweke's

contention is that Eaglewoman's five daughters are radical especially in terms of "questioning the basis of certain tradition" (*New Perspectives.* 203). His argument is that:

> The issue of culture of social harmony is one that captures an immediate attention. In the novel it is obvious that the female protagonists are fighting to bring the girl-child to the limelight. But in doing this, their dispositions rather demonstrate efforts geared towards upturning or countering existing cultural practices in Africa instead of guaranteeing their sustenance of peaceful existence. The issues and questions these female characters raise suggest their desire for such changes that might upset social stability and harmony (201).

Even though one can agree with Nweke that the disposition of the daughters of Eaglewoman tends towards bringing on changes (which is the ultimate aim of snail-sense feminism), some degree of upset and countering is inevitable in order for women to gain equality. The subversion and what Nweke would want to see as an "implosion" of the inherent principles of womanism in the exploration of the incidents here are strategies of strength, resilience and resistance which, as I argue further below, actually investigate African women's social status. Even though Nweke isolates some incidents such as the discussion between Eaglewoman and her daughter about child-bearing as a matter of choice for women, the daughters' seemingly unAfrican stand on this expresses Adimora-Ezeigbo's efforts at stating the obvious which is the fact that perceptions about this type of issue are fast changing and challenging the status quo which some of Eaglewoman's utterances represent. For instance, Eaglewoman's insistence that fibroids in African women are a result of their unAfrican choices in matters of childbearing meets with a radical response from Amara, one of the daughters. Eaglewoman strongly believes that "it is not right for a woman to leave a healthy womb fallow all her life. A womb is meant to bear fruit, but when it is not so used, it is in trouble" (32). She is shocked when Amara responds, "Not everyone wants a child, Mama. Times have changed" (34). To this she

responds, “you say times have changed, have they? Well, I’m not aware that times have changed so much in Umuga or any other part of this land when it comes to the question of having a child. Who does not want a child” (35). She is more than appalled at Amara’s response that she does not want a child and to this she responds, “my child, shut your mouth before you say something you will regret all your life. Please do not ever say that again. Do not let your chi hear you utter such foolish words” (35). But Amara is of the new philosophical bent about women’s freedom of choice of what they do with their own bodies which Nweke attributes to an:

> upturn[ing] of the cultural norms in society… [a thing] also inimical to the social and cultural health of African societies, since no “sane” African would prefer childlessness (*New Perspectives*… 202)

Even if not yet on a large scale, fundamental issues such as child-bearing are fast changing with new social realities in Nigeria. With various options open before women who choose not to have their own children through a biological process or choose not to be bothered by childbearing even if they can, the weight of the concern raised by Eaglewoman becomes light even though the concern is still rife in Nigeria. Nweke’s reference to “social and cultural health” though important to African womanist thoughts also negates newer trends in women’s freedom as raised by the more liberal Amara.

The reference to the importance of male children in many incidents in *Children,* for instance, brings to focus the peripheral position which the women occupy and their struggle to “upturn” age-old notions. But while Eaglewoman is filled with self-pity and would lament, “What could I do? I have no husband or grown son to fight for me” (61), her daughters are brave and determined to show that their being all female does not grant anyone the opportunity to disinherit them of their father’s properties. Nnenne responds: “Mama, you are not to worry; we will take care of this problem. Your daughters are not as helpless or useless as you think. We’ll show these people that we know how to fight for

our rights" (62). This they actually carry out by writing a letter to the Ogunano Ezeala, the all-male arbitrating council of Umuga which neither permits female representation nor a direct audience with it except through a male representative. Nnenne, always the most outspoken and audacious of the Osai children, proffers the solution to which Eaglewoman cannot but agree. In a strategic move to rupture the existing inflexibility of the cultural dictates, Nnenne proposes:

> I know what we can do…We'll write a letter to them. This means we'll communicate with them directly as well as have a record of our demand for justice in case we need to go beyond the council to seek justice at a later date (65).

The attempt to confront the hegemonic treatment of the women and clear a space for them propels both the arguments and the positions which these women (Eaglewoman's daughters) adopt. Pinning these processes down in writing also forges a link with the past which thrives on unwritten memory and the present where the future is prepared in written references in newer ways. That the Osai daughters take the subtler letter-writing strategy (as against the more confrontational modern legal process) is also indicative of a measured and non-confrontational stand of snail-sense feminism. In a tone that exudes strength and a sense of knowledge of their rights, part of the letter says "We know what to do to protect our rights, but we wish to accord you the respect and trust due to you as primary arbiters in settling cases in our beloved village…" (69). The strategy yields a positive result as the Ezeala's response indicates: "Ezeala is pleased with the matured way they acted on this matter…Peace, we all know is better than strife" (353). This is a form of victory for African women through calculated and measured strategies, a working tactic of the snail-sense.

The issue of land and the importance of understanding this as a substantial factor in the battle for women's freedom in many parts of Africa drives Adimora-Ezeigbo's reiteration of snail-sense feminist strategies at different points of *Children*, (49, 86, 184,

355). For instance, the insistence of the Ezeala's representative to have little Nkemdirim[13] or any available male family member present at the erection of the land markers on a land in dispute brings about opposing reactions from the Osai daughters. The man insists, "Your brother may be a child but he is a male. The land in question belongs to him: it is his inheritance. Whoever hears that land issues are settled in the presence of women in Umuga? (354), while Amara retorts later on: I'm fed up with the farce in our so-called tradition. It's all a sham. How can one have respect for a tradition that denies women the right to be treated decently as human beings? (356).

At Eaglewoman's call for a snail-like conciliation, Amara asks:

> Mama, where has this conciliatory attitude got women? What has it brought them? Nothing but pain, oppression and insult. To tell you the truth, women are the weakened sex, not the weaker sex as the saying goes (357).

Eaglewoman agrees with her daughters that "there are a multitude of customs that mortify the soul so much that one wonders how they were configured in the first place" (357). But she insists that both the good and the bad are inherent in the traditions, and that the need of the hour is a consistent and concerted effort tempered within cultural understandings of such matters instead of a radical force which runs contrary to womanist ideals. Agreeing with such a strategy as Nnenne's written communication with the all-male council as a conciliatory approach in the snail-sense mode, Eaglewoman urges them to "know how to deal with these people if you want to get on with your life. A woman is a snail that must crawl over thorns and rocks with a smooth and lubricated tongue… But being like that does not mean women are fools" (357). This dialogue constructs a strong argument for the

[13] Nkemdirim is the result of Obioma's short relationship with an army officer, Lanre Roberts, during the civil war. The war had been devastating and she had had a brief love encounter which resulted into an unwanted pregnancy. The cultural stigma that this would bring upon the family makes Eaglewoman decide to take the responsibility of pretending to be the mother. She pretends to be pregnant until Nkemdirim is born, thereby giving the community the impression that the boy is a brother to the five daughters. He becomes the only male child in the family. Throughout the story, no one but the immediate Osai family knows that Nkemdirim is born out of wedlock and not a direct child of Eaglewoman and her husband.

snail-sense model. This brief statement confirms the entrenched structure of patriarchy which Adimora-Ezeigbo argues women must confront and surpass in a bid to retain and attain freedom without disrupting the traditional structure of society. The deliberate and goal-directed movement of the snail speaks to the importance of planned agenda for liberation.

Even though critics such as Nweke argue that the new-fangled feminist ideas of Eaglewoman's daughters are radical, Adimora-Ezeigbo expresses in Eaglewoman's daughters a move to circumvent deep-rooted negative cultural ideas against women as an important aspect of the fight against subjugation. This idea tallies with womanist ideology. Creating adequate awareness in other women is thus an important part of this process. Several issues of traditional practices about which the more outward-looking daughters of Eaglewoman would create awareness are raised during the important incident of the meeting with the Alutaradi (wives within an extended family). The body represents rural women and the unsophisticated rural living where old traditional notions of male/female relationship still thrive. For the rural uneducated women, the strangeness of asking for their rights and acting in accordance with a new order which shows self-assertion connotes a disruption of the status quo and a bid to push women to a measured resilience. For Nweke "this to an African is rebellious and capable of setting ablaze the cultural structure of the people" (Nweke 203). But Adimora-Ezeigbo's handling of the issues where these cultural clashes occur in the text shows that what Nweke refers to as "rebellious" are necessary questions raised and answered without "setting ablaze" any cultural fabric. Talking to the Alutaradi in *Children,* for instance, serves as a process of enlightenment for the unlettered women, a strategy which many ideological variants of Africanist/womanist ideology employ. What Nweke fails to acknowledge is that these are important areas where women's individuality is restricted, and their voices muffled. I would argue that, Adimora-Ezeigbo artistically calls attention to this in *Children.* Demanding equality in sexual

interactions, for instance, challenges the traditional boundaries on issues of sex and the passivity and voicelessness expected of women in these marital activities. The notion of asserting their rights in sexual relationships with men is novel to the Alutaradi women whose "herd mentality" and "bunch[ing] together" (92) reflect their lack of self-confidence and brings into focus their low self-esteem which the Eaglewoman's enlightened daughters wish to bring to their notice for the purpose of change. I do not consider the Osai women's actions as ones directed at "upturning" social stability and harmony, but ones meant for engaging with women's powerbase in a bid to steer the rural women towards more collective consciousness of their rights. While Nnenne encourages them to "have fun with [their] man at the end of the day" and "not allow him to grab all the pleasure" (108), one of the women asks "how can I look him in the face to demand such a thing?" (109) But Nnenne and her sisters believe asserting their rights does not radicalise them but is "the only way to learn, to be aware" (110). Thus, reorientation is an important part of the snail-sense strategy and an inherent narrative in womanist engagements.

The "inseparability of the individual and the communal experiences in the construction of African womanhood" (which Kolawole considers an important aspect of womanist consciousness) is a compelling force in this narrative. Adimora-Ezeigbo lays much emphasis on women helping women in a bid to create a formidable power structure where the Africanist womanist agenda can be achieved. This is what Eaglewoman's daughters attempt to do with the uneducated rural women as Nnenne "tells herself that the educational gulf between her and them should not create a barrier to their relationship" (91).

Forging a womanist front in order to destabilise the cultural patriarchal base in all its manifestations in African women's lives has always been of importance to African women writers. Adimora-Ezeigbo is no exception in these womanist struggles. This chapter has thus examined the writer's attempt at reawakening historical moments in a

verifiable cultural space (Umuga in eastern Nigeria) as a strategy in examining issues of women's resilience. The manner in which memory moves across time to negotiate womanist agenda within newer social realities for women in a bid to gain autonomy foregrounds the importance of this as an important tool for womanist literary engagements. Tracing the writer's efforts in these regards, her trilogy, but especially some incidents in her *Children of the Eagle*, have served in examining this issue. The chapter concludes that the writer's attempt in this text puts her snail-sense feminism into a clearer perspective and engages with the strategies involved in it in more profound ways.

CHAPTER FOUR

Womanist Issues in Adimora-Ezeigbo's Urban-based Children's Literature

This chapter analyses five of Adimora-Ezeigbo's books for children which are set within urban Nigeria. The texts are examined as a body of work representing Adimora-Ezeigbo's subtler presentation of her womanist agenda akin to how the snail-sense tenets are also perceived in her fictional works for adults. I examine how cultural notions of issues such as family ties and cohesion, motherhood, and women's power base present in the children's stories are similar to some of the issues that I have raised in Adimora-Ezeigbo's fictional narratives for adults. I investigate the children's texts for her efforts at reawakening cultural memory in and through children's literature for feminist purposes as well as keeping up with a continuing womanist effort which speaks to traditional understanding of the roles of Nigerian women as raconteurs within the African social and cultural environment. Adimora-Ezeigbo's deployment of the snail-sense feminist strategy in her works for children and the extent to which this extends her efforts at reclaiming a space of power for young female children in some of these works are placed within a historical perspective of Nigerian women writers as custodians of cultural womanist duties. A large part of my discussion also focusses on the different areas of the selected children's books which show an engagement with newer cultural and social realities and changes in the socialisation of Nigerian children especially as these newer means of socialisation speak to engaging with the rights of girl children, and girl children as models of motherist duties. In this way, I examine the texts in this chapter as stories set within a more realistic world of twenty-first century Nigeria and which address children's experiences in the society in ways which interrogate the changes that have occurred and how the changes have affected important aspects of traditional culture. In several ways, I discuss means by which the oral culture from which some of Adimora-Ezeigbo's folk stories emanate enrich the stories she tells.

In her inaugural lecture on 13th February 2008 at the University of Lagos, Nigeria, Adimora-Ezeigbo gave a clear hint of her project in writing for children. Delineating the shifts that had occurred over time in the social and cultural landscape of Nigeria and how much these shifts have moved the engagements in both the issues and mode of storytelling to the younger Nigerian generations, Adimora-Ezeigbo reiterates the importance of stories in the socialisation of children. She avers:

> In the traditional past, children were entertained and instructed with folktales…Though this tradition still exists in Nigeria, the written culture seems to have taken over storytelling in the form of hundreds of books published for the young today. Some writers have written down and preserved the oral tradition in books which are marketed for children with the intention of instructing and entertaining them (9).

Her words outline what she has usually emphasised as her reasons for the number of children's works that she has written in her writing career, that is, the continuance of the traditional duty of women as raconteurs and nurturers of children through stories which teach while entertaining them. Starting out as a writer of children's literature with *The Buried Treasure* in 1992, Adimora-Ezeigbo had produced 23 children's literary texts by 2014. With the changes in social culture, the defining traits of storytelling take newer forms. Many oral tales find their way into books for children with modifications which show newer social orientations.

Exploring shifts in social paradigm in Adimora-Ezeigbo's urban-based children's literature

The gradual movement from a primarily oral culture to a culture of writing which necessarily prioritises the socialisation of its young through storytelling informs a major part of the social commitment which I noticed in Adimora-Ezeigbo's children's literature.

The Buried Treasure (1992), *My Cousin Sammy* 2007), *The Prize* (1994), *Alani the Troublemaker* (2006), and *Ako the Storyteller* (2009), are five of her children's stories in which Adimora-Ezeigbo explores the new ways in which the socialisation of young children in Nigeria is entwined in the discourse of contemporary issues which speak to the important place of childhood experiences in national discourses. While Adimora-Ezeigbo maintains the general outlook found in the majority of the Nigerian literary works for children written before hers in *Alani the Troublemaker*, and *Ako the Storyteller, My Cousin Sammy* and especially *The Prize* express her authorial desire to place the agency which she creates for girl-children at the fore of the narrations in some of her children's stories.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's first literary work, *The Buried Treasure,* explores the devastating effects of war on children and women. The story is set in the mid-1970s of Nigeria when the country has just come out of a devastating civil war that lasted for almost three years. The few years following the exit of the colonialists saw a growing disagreement among Nigerian politicians on how to run the newly independent Nigerian nation. Martin Meredith captured the antebellum years in the following words:

> By nature, Nigerian politics tended to be mercenary and violent. Political debate was routinely conducted in acrimonious and abusive language; and ethnic loyalties were consistently exploited. The tactics employed were often those of the rough-house variety. But the reckless manner in which Nigerian politicians fought for control during the six years if civilian rule was to lead ultimately to a tragedy of monumental proportions. (195)

Apart from the reckless attempt by politicians from each part of the nation to gain an upper hand in the control of the affairs of the nation, there were frequent civil disturbances which led to destruction of lives and properties between 1960 and 1966 when a coup was successfully spearheaded by a group of five young military majors. There were

insinuations that the bloody coup had targeted a particular section of the nation, the Igbos, thus, there was an attempt by this eastern section of the country (the Igbos/ Biafrans) to secede. The aftermath was another bloody tribal cleansing which eventually led to the Nigerian civil war. The war lasted for two and a half years between July 1967 and January 1970. The Biafrans had lost.

War and children might perhaps be two concepts which few novelists would be willing to engage in the same story, the reason being the kind of pictures that wars evoke in readers' imagination and the presumed innocence of children which the depiction of war situations is likely to violate. This notion has changed in the realities of post-independence Africa which has seen more civil wars, terrorism and violence with dire consequences on the living conditions of the populace. Some of these civil wars involved the use of children as untrained soldiers. Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Soza Boy* (1985) is an apt representation of this phenomenon in the Nigerian civil war. It is emblematic of these types of wars which recruit children. The immaturity of the unwilling fighters is summed up in the words of one of the child soldiers:

> …true true I do not know why we are fighting the war. The Chief Commander General has not told us why we are fighting. The Soza Captain did not tell us why we must go inside the pit. I just carry gun, fight… (114)

From the child-soldier's innocent remark a depth of issues involved in war situations emerge. In the first instance his remark shows a violation of the rights of those recruited in this way into the war. It points to mental and emotional confusion which is likely to reverberate into the future of the young soldiers if they survive the war. Uzodinma Iweala's 2005 book, *Beast of No Nation,* also describes the horrors of the experiences of children as recruits in the wars generally. The African setting of the novel is not given a name but the narrative, as told by a child-soldier, equally presents readers with the grim realities of the effects of war on children and women especially of the three years, 1967-

1970. It was a historic period which could not be waved off without entering the narrative oeuvres of Nigerian literary writers.[1] Julia Udofia (2015) observes that the grim experience of wars all over Africa changed the usual simplicity of stories told to and written for children on the continent in many ways. For example, the various wars fought in many nations of Africa -the Ethiopian/Eritrean war between 1998 to 2000, the Liberian first civil war between 1989 and 1996, the South African Border War of 1990, the Algerian civil war between 1991 and 2002, the Mozambican civil war 1977-1992, and so on caused many parts of the continent to move from a state of relative peace to that of conflicts which affected the social, economic and political stability of the nations involved in war. Necessarily, these untoward experiences are depicted in the literature from writers in these countries. Writers depict the various experiences of devastation, hunger, homelessness and other attendant evils caused by war in some of their literary works. Udofia avers:

> In these early stages written children's literature in Africa was limited in scope with regard to the issues explored in protecting the child from the harsh realities of life. However, in recent times, children's literature in Africa has shifted away from this need to the depiction of a grittier realism, as its adult counterpart. This is no thanks to the grim realities of present-day Africa where violence, militancy, terrorism, and their attendant pain and suffering have become the order of the day (70).

Even though Udofia's argument to an extent reflects the state of affairs in terms of the depiction of war and its consequences for children's well-being all over Africa, her sweeping conclusion that "children's literature has moved from the need to shield the young from the harsh realities of life to the depiction of grittier realities like war, sex and

[1] *The Insider: Stories of War and Peace from Nigeria* (1971), edited by Chinua Achebe and Ernest Emenyonu was the first imaginative representation of the Nigerian Civil War and post war periods. So many literary works have focused on the war. Some of these other literary works which focus on the Nigerian Civil War include Chinua Achebe's *Girls at War* (1972), Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka* (1972), Flora Nwapa's *Never Again* (1976) Ken Saro-Wiwa's *On a Darkling Plain: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War* (1989), Peter Onwudinjo's *Women of Biafra and Other Poems* (2000), Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1984), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007), and Chinua Achebe's controversial *There Was A Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (2012).

crime" (79) might be a little over-exaggerated. The texts that she cites are not basically directed at children audience even though they use children as major characters. For educational reasons, the language of Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Soza Boy* in particular is not meant for children as it is written in a mixture of pidgin English which is a non-standard informal form of English used all over Nigeria. But notwithstanding Udofia's argument that children's literature now show the evil effects of war in stark reality, she gives a very useful insight into the issue of war and its effects on children in modern times in Africa. There are also many poems and prose narratives which explored diverse themes relating to the Nigerian civil war (see footnote 1). Its historical significance for the nation has made the war a theme in a lot of literary works which are efforts at remarking on this phase of Nigerian national life. Chris Anyokwu observes that "if there is any aspect of Nigeria's socio-political life that has mostly engaged the creative attention of Nigerian artists, it is unarguably the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War of 1967-1970" (3). The implications of the war for the nation and its people manifested in the different aspects of it such as tribal sentiments in matters of love, political heroism, collective social struggle, disillusionment, and so on, that have been focused in literary works by Nigerian writers. One important part of these aspects is the representation of the many changes that have been noticed in people's living conditions in the immediate postbellum years.

The Buried Treasure is the story of the Ogosis whose breadwinner has been killed in the Nigerian Civil War. Mrs Ogosi is left with four young children of school age, the eleven-year-old Ola who is the eldest and the only girl, her three brothers, Afam, Ejike and Udo. The family has just returned to Enugu which they had years before left hurriedly when it was about to fall into the enemy's hands. The town was overrun and destroyed by the Nigerian army but was returned to the residents after the war came to an end. Many of the former residents return and rebuild their homes. The home to which Mrs Ogosi and the children return to has become decrepit. Under normal circumstances it is not a fitting place

to live but they have no other option. Mrs Ogosi fries bean cakes which Ola hawks around in order to get the family some pittance to live on. The children cannot attend school like many children around them because Mrs Ogosi cannot afford the money for school. No help is forthcoming, but the United Nations has provided succour in the form of food and other materials for the war victims of Biafra. The man in charge, Mr Ibeako, has appropriated the materials for his own use. Instead of the fair distribution which the United Nations expects from him, he sells the materials and lives in affluence with his family. He offers to buy the Ogosis' house but Mrs Ogosi does not sell the house to him. Help eventually comes to the Ogosis in a mysterious manner. Ola dreams of her late father. In the dream he shows her where he had buried some substantial money and Mrs Ogosi's valuable trinkets. The family digs up the spot shown to Ola in her dreams and they find the treasure. About the same time, the atrocities perpetuated by Mr Ibeako are discovered. He is arrested and taken away.

The Buried Treasure foregrounds Adimora-Ezeigbo's literary representations of the issues of the welfare of women and children in terms of social conditions that violate their fundamental rights in post-war periods. The Nigerian Civil War especially has been one of the important centre-pieces of her earliest critical academic endeavours and creative enterprise. Starting with her PhD thesis titled "Fact and Fiction in the Literature of the Nigerian Civil War" (1986), where she explores the various literary and critical accounts of the Nigerian Civil War, she goes on to create literary narratives of the war period. Her PhD thesis got published in 1991 with the title unchanged. This was followed by *The Buried Treasure* in 1992. Even though the violence of the war situation is toned down in the text, the living conditions of people shortly after the war is represented in the picture that we encounter in the lives of the Ogosis. It is obvious from the outset that the writer focuses on issues of rehabilitation and reintegration of survivors of the war which had claimed the lives of millions of the Igbo people during this historic period of the Nigerian nation.

That Adimora-Ezeigbo intentionally focuses on the female child can be gathered from the first description of the living quarters of the Ogosis. Opening *The Buried Treasure* with the description of where the Ogosis live makes many points at once. First, the reader is confronted with the devastation caused by the Nigerian Civil War through the description of the living quarters of the poor widow and her children. Second, the significance and centrality of Enugu city and its position as the headquarters of the Biafran nation during the antebellum and the war period presents the stark reality of the aftermath of the war thereby raising its implications for those who survived. Also, the social significance of the economic situation of the family and the reason for it immediately confront the reader: "Ola lives in Enugu with her mother and three brothers. Her house was the ugliest in Udi Street"(1). The focus on Ola goes on into the description of "Her house" (1) creating the first impression that the experiences of the eleven-year-old are the focus of the story. The description of their home as "the ugliest in Udi Street" (1) also reinforces the abject poverty that would be depicted later and what bearing this has on the welfare of the young girl. That the house "had deep holes in the walls" (1) and is among the "many houses" that "were damaged by bullets" (1) presents the picture of an aftermath of the war, a ruin that calls for attention showing the helplessness of the family. That Ola cannot join her mates in school also amplifies the poverty of the family: "My child, I don't have money to send you and your brothers to school" (2). This aspect of the resultant effects of the war period foregrounds the further plight of Ola who has to hawk bean cakes for her mother as her contribution to the upkeep of the family. The backlash of the decisions of adults who decided to go into war shows in the truncated future of the child population. Girl children are especially shown in *The Buried Treasure* as fellow burden bearers with women. That none of the neighbours, relatives and friends of the Ogosis help suggests that a newer kind of social relationship had developed after the war. Communality has given way to individualism due to the unpleasant experiences of the war. In response to

Ola's question "Is there anyone who can help us?" Mrs Ogosi answers, "No one. We have no friends now. Even the people your father helped before the war do not talk to me" (15). Apart from toughening the people, the new social and economic tensions occasioned by the war seem to have shaken the cultural structure of filial affections. Friends and families have been torn apart and the brutal experiences of the war have taught them new philosophies of existence different from what they used to know, that of 'each person for himself' which runs contrary to the traditional ways of life before the war. Chimalum Nwankwo argues that many of the present tragedies befalling African nations have their roots in the many wars in which the nations have ever engaged. In his words:

> War is Africa's muted index, but mute as it is, one could read beyond simply trying to capture the regular zeitgeist which good national literatures capture. The index could guide the insightful reader towards the foundations of Africa's numerous perennials or still unfolding tragedies. Clearly, the most quotidian of Africa's problems, ranging from human rights to various cultural, political and socio-economic issues appear either related or traceable to a long and turbulent history of wars and their unsavoury aftermath (13).

Anthonia Yakubu corroborates Nwankwo's earlier assertion. She expresses the devastating implications of the war on children and women in ways that show that it had been a traumatising experience for the Igbo people in general. In her examination of how Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets* represents the post-traumatic effects of war through the characters in the adult war novel, she observes that "With cautious hope, the Igbo started the gradual process of walking free again, without the fears of rockets and bombs. But it was not as easy as that. Many of the survivors – civilians and soldiers- were shell-shocked and many carried terrible traumas that needed psychiatric attention" (311). These "terrible traumas" reflect in the good interpersonal and communal interactions which have become strained as seen in the nonchalance of people to the plight of the Ogosis. "There

were many holes in the roof. All their things were ruined" (11). But the family has no help. The situation keeps Ola awake at night and she cries constantly. She usually joins her and consoles her mother.

In several parts of the short narrative, Adimora-Ezeigbo reinterprets the post-war years from a womanist lens. The non-confrontational stance that she recommends as a working tool of snail-sense feminism reflects in the helpless stance displayed by Mrs. Ibeako. Ola's round of hawking takes her to the front of the Ibeakos' house and she stops to talk to the Ibeakos' little daughter, Ebele, who is on her way to school. They used to be classmates before the war. The two girls are juxtaposed here in terms of the poverty and affluence of the two families. Ola is out of school while Ebele could go to school amid her family's affluence. Instead of the sympathy one would have expected of a man who has a daughter of Ola's age, Mr. Ibeako verbally assaults little Ola who becomes visibly shaken. "Ebele's mother, Mrs Ibeako, came out and saw the two girls. Ebele, you'll be late for school.' She scolded". She asked after Ola's mother but Mr Ibeako comes forward to say, "Your mother is very stubborn." (6). Mrs Ibeako's brief and weak remonstrations with her husband should not have stopped at her first attempt if she is in a position of the same authority with him. But what follows points to Mrs. Ibeako's position. "Don't say that, Papa Ebele.' Mrs Ibeako said sadly" (6). Mr Ibeako ignores her and continues to assault little Ola. "She's very stubborn,' Mr Ibeako said again, ignoring his wife. 'She refused to sell her house to me. It needs repairs. I would have fixed it by now." (7). Ignoring his wife shows that Mrs Ibeako's voice lacks enough strength to match Mr Ibeako's utterances. She remains mute after this. Ola puts up an attempt to correct the wrong notion about her mother that Mr. Ibeako creates. "Please, sir, leave my mother alone. She's done nothing wrong… My mother has worked hard since my father died.' Ola was crying now" (8). Mr. Ibeako does not stop at this. He describes the late Mr. Ogosi as foolish for having fought in the war which claimed his life. "Your father was foolish. He got himself killed in the war

fighting for Biafra,' Mr. Ibeako laughed." (8). This mockery of the selfless sacrifice of the slain soldiers in the war disregards the heroic nature of the part played by those who fought in the war. It equally demonstrates that the individual sacrifice critical to the survival of the proposed Biafran nation is not mutually shared by all.

The Biafran struggle which is meant to be a communal sacrifice becomes a means of personal gains for some. Mr. Ibeako's actions show the greed and avarice of the profiteers in the Nigerian civil war. "Mr Ibeako was in charge of the United Nations Aid Programme in Enugu. He gave food, clothing and blankets to the war victims." (6). This position gives him the opportunity to hoard what he is supposed to distribute to the victims of war. While many who believed in the cause of the war went to war and died, people like Mr. Ibeako make undue fortunes from the war in several ways, having dodged being conscripted into the war like many of their compatriots. This character's attitude reflects Sophia Ogwude's (2008) opinion about the political and human rights dimensions of war and war periods. She argues that "The Nigerian civil war soon proved to be more economic than political and there were two main beneficiaries namely, a profit-motivated mafia and an arrogant, raping, murdering, terrorizing soldiery" (78). Thus, asides from being battered by the devastating natural consequences of the war, the victims also suffered in other ways from their fellow citizens and soldiers. Onyerionwu paints a graphic picture of the postbellum trauma suffered by the Biafrans:

> The Nigerian civil war may have secured a notoriety as one of the deadliest and bloodiest civil war in the history of mankind, but the post-war struggle for survival among the defeated people was a huge calamity of its own… There was the case of soldiers' indiscipline which, despite the diligence of the Nigerian military, abounded in some alarming degree in certain quarters of the region. There were also many reported cases of looting by Nigerian soldiers. The Biafrans, weary from suffering, were heartlessly stripped of their last pieces of belonging, cars, goats,

> chicken, anything at all… the suffering was much and there were all kinds of strange illnesses which kept killing people; corpses at different stages of decomposition littered the roads and footpaths and the whole environment lacked form and shape (84-85).

This gory picture of destitution in the immediate post-war years though toned down in *The Buried Treasure* because of the audience for whom it is written is evident in the penury in which the Ogosis are living. Mrs. Ogosi's plight for instance shows the trauma of women whose husbands had died in the war. The Biafran nation has just been reabsorbed into Nigeria. There had been terrible devastation which had left survivors in penury and lack. Within this scenario, Mrs. Ogosi makes efforts to cater for her children. These efforts are not enough. The children, especially the eleven-year-old Ola, suffer. As a post-war child, Ola lost her childhood and enters into the realm of adults. With no hope of a secured future that could be made possible through formal education, she becomes proactive in order to survive. Not only does she have to contribute to the family's economic upkeep through hawking, she also becomes her mother's confidant and adviser. The tragic events of war and its consequences thus rudely catapult the innocence of Ola's childhood into the stark reality of the world of adults. She is confused and asks her mother pertinent questions of survival. She could not grasp the greed that drives the character of adults like Mr. Ibeako so she asks her mother.

Ruminating on what could have been if her father was alive represents a process of entering a mental calculation of the kind of truncated hopes that could arise in situations of war. "She remembers some things about her father. He had told Ola that he wanted her and her brothers to get good education" (16). Ola doubts her father's choice to be patriotic to the Biafran state. His death justifies the choices of people like Mr Ibeako who is alive and enjoying his ill-gotten wealth while the majority of the population still reels under the suffering occasioned by the war. Ola considers Mr Ibeako's earlier words and ruminates

upon them. “That evening Ola went outside. She sat under the orange tree at the back of the house. She remembered Mr Ibeako’s cruel words. ‘Your father was foolish…’ Was her father foolish to fight in the war? Ebele’s father had not fought in the war. Maybe her father should have stayed back at home too.” (9). The questions of the senselessness of fighting wars are further put into perspective here. But at the same time the issue of patriotism is also raised by the writer. Exploring the symbolic inference of the situations that allude covertly or overtly to insanity in some war stories from Nigeria, Iniobong Uko (2008) sums up the events that led to the war and those of the war time as conditions of madness and blind ambition on the part of the leaders of the two warring parties. According to him:

> The tragedy of the war was built on Ojukwu’s [Biafran leader] inflexibility and the consequent inability to effect compromise on the political side. He fueled the disaster with his ambition, desire and inability to control the situation in Biafra. The Nigeria -Biafra war was a camouflage designed by the oppressive leadership on both sides to shield from detection their excesses and crime against the common man (58).

Seen this way, Mr Ibeako’s decision not to join the army could be read as a form of self-preservation from the madness started by the leadership of Biafra, but his undue profiteering from the materials meant to bring relief to the victims of a war in which he refused to fight raises the question of war-induced corruption and social irresponsibility. Denying others their rights calls his decision into question. While things become tougher for Ola and her family, “Each day Ola passed Ebele’s house. She saw lots of people going in and out. Some carried expensive briefcases. Others came out with big cartons and sacks. They put them in cars and drive away” (19). Mr Ibeako had been selling the relief material meant for war survivors. “Ola and her family had become poorer and poorer. Mr Ibeako had a new car and Ebele had lots of new clothes. Mrs Ogosi cried all the time now” (20).

In Adimora-Ezeigbo's interpretation of the aftermaths of the war for women and children in the old nation of Biafra, they are shown to be victims of the exploitative tendencies of those at the helm of affairs of the nation. She represents their plights in terms of social welfare and loss of communal brotherliness which had hitherto characterised the people's lives before the war. These are expressed in terms easily intelligible to a child audience. For instance, Ola's father and Mr Ibeako had been friends before the war. "Both men played football at Enugu Sports Club" (13) and Mr Ogosi had helped people before the war (15). All these have changed due to the war.

The psychological effects of the verbal assault from Mr. Ibeako and the struggle to survive brings Ola and her mother closer. I consider this a womanist move on Adimora-Ezeigbo's part to create an agency in the eleven-year-old Ola. She builds in Ola a high sense of responsibility for getting a solution to the family's state of poverty. This nurturing instinct keeps her constantly suggesting solutions to the family's condition to her mother while consoling her. "Ola got up from her mat. Her brothers were fast asleep. She tip-toed to the next room. Her mother sat on her bed. She was crying softly." (18). Even though her young mind could not conceive of an immediate practical solution, she shows the kind of feminist supportive roles that appear in subsequent works of Adimora-Ezeigbo for children. For instance, both Asa in *Asa and the Little Stream* and Ene in *My Cousin Sammy* (discussed later on) also exhibit this nurturing trait which characterises African womanist tenets. Apart from supporting the material upkeep of the family through her hawking, she becomes a psychological support for the home. She teaches her younger siblings to read and supports the mother. '"Don't cry, Mama,' she said. 'Something will happen. Someone will help us.'" (18). Ola is shown to be the type of womanist support that her mother could not get elsewhere.

The dream-like literary scheme which Adimora-Ezeigbo comes to fully employ in many of her subsequent children's literature begins with *The Buried Treasure*. Ola has a

dream where her late father shows her where he hid Mrs Ogosi's jewellery shortly after he sent his family away from the heat of the war. The discovery takes the family out of their penury. The family digs up the place that was shown to Ola in the dream and they find lots of money and Mrs. Ogosi's jewellery. Ola's first utterance after the box is dug up and its contents revealed further pushes her sense of responsibility to the fore. "We can go to school now, Ola shouted. We can repair the house" (31). The simultaneous occurrence of Mr. Ibeako's arrest signals the efforts of government at restructuring the social and judicial process of the postwar period. "They carried the box into the house. Ola turned on the radio on the table. 'Here's the news. Mr Ibeako, head of the United Nations Aids Programme, was arrested this morning. The police said he had been selling the food and clothing meant for victims of the civil war" (27). Ending the story with social justice restores hope in the government. Unlike Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets* (an adult war fiction) which represents the Nigerian civil war in all its stark reality, *The Buried Treasure* tones down the details of the war down to the level of the child audience for whom the text is meant. Like she did two years later in *The Prize*, Adimora-Ezeigbo expresses her conviction about the importance of formal education in the emancipation of women. The emphasis on this at different points in *The Buried Treasure* points to this fact. Even though she only laid this out more clearly twelve years later in her snail-sense feminist model, these earlier works for children point to her focus on the importance of education for women. Thus, she ties women's ability to gain agency to formal education. For Adimora-Ezeigbo, women can transcend many of the patriarchal obstacles to their development only when they are at par with men in terms of formal education. Education can grant them access to better social and political participation. These are areas where their collective fate is daily determined. That Ola's first comments are about her hope of going back to school after the buried treasure is found show Adimora-Ezeigbo's belief in

the liberating effects of education for women. The next two stories follow Adimora-Ezeigbo's efforts at creating this child-centred examination of feminist issues.

In *The Prize* and *My Cousin Sammy,* Adimora-Ezeigbo make deliberate statements on the importance of agency for girls. *The Prize* narrates the struggles of Onyema, a thirteen-year old twin girl, against a subduing traditional culture which essentialises its female members. Mr. Agu, Onyema's father, is not interested in sending her to secondary school like her twin brother even though Onyema is a promising and brilliant girl. He decides to marry her off to old Onyia, while her twin brother goes on to secondary school. Onyema triumphs with determination and the assistance of her mother whose efforts to help Onyema despite the circumstances eventually prove fruitful. *My Cousin Sammy* is the award- winning story about eleven-year-old Ene Mark-Metu whose selflessness and gentle understanding of others give needed support to her cousin, Sammy. Sammy, an orphan, leaves the rural area where he has been living to join the Mark-Metu family in the city. Overwhelmed by the social gap between his rural background and his new urban location, Sammy is assisted to settle down and navigate the exigencies of several new shifts, and tensions that arise in a bid to blend into his new environment. But Sammy is not as naïve as the members of the Mark-Metu think he is. The robust rural setting (representing a near-forgotten pre-colonial past) from which he comes has much to offer the culturally dislocated Ene and Adaka and even their parents who live in the urban present.

The Prize and *My Cousin Sammy* set out what Adimora-Ezeigbo lays claim to in children's books. The two texts precede her popular adult fictions. Thus, I conjecture that while they prepare the grounds for her later adult fiction, they also capture her understanding of the place of early socialisation of children towards gendered thought in Nigeria. Centralising female children in these two texts posits the authorial effort at expressing the imperatives of the womanist issues which Adimora-Ezeigbo considers as important in any Nigerian woman writer's career (*Gender Issues in Nigeria,* 80). The

examination of the Nigerian patriarchal society in her earlier children's texts thus finds a fuller expression in her later adult literature. The changing face of social culture in Nigeria and the importance of foregrounding the female experience in order to carve a place for women and growing girls within it make the *The Prize* and *My Cousin Sammy* two useful texts to argue Adimora-Ezeigbo's feminist efforts in the children's genre.

While Onyema's predicament raises issues of the rights and importance of girls within Nigerian society, the story also examines gender equality by foregrounding the equal birth status of the twins. Onyema is a girl while her twin, Ogbonnaya, is a boy. Adimora-Ezeigbo imbues Onyema with intellectual qualities which push her to the fore even while the societal ascription and ordering position her behind her twin brother. Her teacher Nwiboko says, 'But Onyema is very clever…In fact she's the best pupil in mathematics in the class" (3). Onyema wants to study to be an engineer. But the age-old cultural perception of her value as only of a biological importance within the society cuts short any status or relevance that her intellectual ability might have. In the opening paragraph, Adimora-Ezeigbo describes the domestic space where the thirteen-year-old Onyema is engaged in a household chore. "Onyema sat on a mat in front of her house. She was opening melon seeds for the evening meal", while her twin brother, "Ogbonnaya ... had gone to play football with his friends" (1). This scenario pointedly expresses role ascription within the traditional setting of the text, and the patriarchal condition which limits Onyema's existence to the private space while her twin occupies the free outside. Her worth within a patriarchal domain which her suitor's brother later reinforces in the text does not extend beyond the kitchen as reflected in the preparation of the family meal. Her supposed worth is also summed up in her father's response to Mr. Nwobiko, whose recognition of the intellectual potential of the young girl prompts him to appeal to the father, Mr. Agu, to pay for the scholarship form for Onyema. Her father says "I don't believe in educating girls beyond primary school. It's just a waste of time and money" (3).

Onyema's plight is like that of other girls in her village who must learn early in life to take after the kind of roles which their mothers perform daily. These are the roles to which their gender assigns them. They remain in the condition of obedient daughters and later mute wives (like Onyema's mother) who must remain only relevant within the domestic sphere. The girls cannot join the special preparation classes which Mr Nwobiko organises for the sixth form pupils. "All the boys stayed for extra lessons, but only a few of the girls could stay. Most of them went home to help their mothers working in the house or selling things in the market" (8). When Onyema is not helping her mother, "Mr Agu often told Onyema to do things for him after school. But Ogbonnaya was free to stay for extra lessons. It was always Onyema who fetched water and gathered firewood and cooked the evening meals" (9). Adimora-Ezeigbo argues that against the background of a measure of gender complementarity that was in place in precolonial Nigeria, colonialism and the two prominent but imported religions in Nigeria collude to restrict the rights of female children. This, according to her reflects in curtailing the rights of girl children to education like their male counterparts (80). This scenario is framed in Onyema's case.

In Nigeria as well as many other developing nations, depriving girls of quality formal education has been a major theme in women's writing. Tsitsi Dangarembga, a Zimbabwean woman writer, explores this theme in *Nervous Conditions* (1988). Her major protagonist, Sisi Tambu only gets a chance at formal education after the untimely and unfortunate death of her elder brother, Nhamo. Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* (1977) also examines this theme in the post-independence Nigeria of the 1960s. Adimora-Ezeigbo's infusion of this theme into children's literature decades after her predecessors shows a social problem which persists despite the passage of time. She argues that "Good education is the key to open the doors of opportunities for Nigerian women, for when a woman is educated, the family in particular and the country in general are educated and empowered." (*Snail-Sense*. 29). Rose Sackeyfio notes that child marriage is one of the

unproductive cultural practices that constitutes a major obstacle to women's progress in Nigeria. In many cases a girl is taken out of school in order to get married. Sackeyfio argues that "In order for any society to develop and make genuine progress, the talents and skills of both females and males are mandatory in the socialisation of children in contemporary society" (13). Formal education helps in developing these skills in young children. The lack of it accounts for the perpetuation of poverty among women. Onyema's mother's helplessness in this situation is reflected in the covert way she attempts to assist her daughter. She pays for Onyema's scholarship form without her husband's knowledge and she is quick to lie to Mr. Agu that she was the one who sent Onyema on errands after school because Onyema had stayed back to attend the extra lessons in preparation for the scholarship examination (22). "Sometimes Onyema was able to stay for extra lessons. Her mother would come home early to do the work in the house. Her father didn't know about this. He would be angry if he finds out" (9). The lack of courage to confront her husband, that readers can easily perceive in the character of Mrs. Agu measures how much female disempowerment reflects in this type of situation. This scene foregrounds the indirectness and non-confrontational style of Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense. Mrs Agu does not attempt a headlong challenge to move against the patriarchal structure which is keeping her daughter's progress in check. She understands her daughter's plight because she too had been a child-wife, married at age thirteen (11). Even though she wants to help her daughter, the subjugating formation of the social power stratification prevents any overt attempt from her.

Onyema's several attempts to gain some agency are depicted in her hard work at school, and how she stands up to Nwokolo whose brother she is expected to marry in March. She responds to Nwokolo's rude remark that "Girls can't be engineers." (14). And when Onyema insists, Nwokolo responds "Then you'll be an engineer in my brother's kitchen". (16). She is emphatic, and retorts "Your brother is wasting his time. I'll never be

his wife. I'm going to be a real engineer" (16). The kitchen represents an enclosure which forecloses any aspiration that a woman can lay claim to. That the teacher Mr. Nwiboko, and Ogbonnaya, Onyema's twin brother, both support Onyema in their different ways further strengthens the sort of cooperation and assistance between men and women which Adimora-Ezeigbo appeals to in her snail-sense feminism. She counterposes more forward-looking and supportive male characters to the traditional Mr. Agu. The support from the duo of Mr. Nwiboko and Ogbonnaya gives Onyema the strength to stand up to her father and say "Papa… I've told you, I won't be Onyia's wife! I'm going to be an engineer" (19). The strength in this statement does not show any consequence until Onyema passes her examination and proves to her father that she is more than an intellectual match of her male sibling and that she is worth more than ending up in old Onyia's kitchen. Having to prove herself shows the extra efforts required of women within a patriarchal setting which does not ordinarily grant them a chance for self-expansion. This pivotal point that is usually raised in Adimora-Ezeigbo's works constructs female power within a newer social setting where women still struggle to attain a measure of power within Nigerian society. It also highlights the importance that she places on formal education in womanist liberation strategies.

Like Onyema, Ene in *My Cousin Sammy* is a growing innocent girl; however, she faces a different cultural struggle. She struggles to understand the differences of social statuses and attempts to understand the intricacies of a traditional life to which her parents fail to expose her. Ene's privileged and elitist background is expressed in the social status of her parents. Ene's mother:

> liked things imported from Europe or America. Her holidays were spent in London or New York. She travelled out of the country at least two times in a year. She refused to watch local television programmes. If she wanted to listen to news, she tuned to the BBC or CNN (7).

Against this elitist and privileged status of Ene's family where Adimora-Ezeigbo creates the disjuncture between the old order and the new social levels in Nigeria, Sammy emerges as a timid figure on the fringes of the two societies. Ene stands as the bridge between the urban (represented in her elitist parents and older brother) and rural (as depicted in the character of Sammy). Imbued with a compassionate demeanour, intelligence and sensitivity to handle conflicting issues, Ene epitomises the strength which Adimora-Ezeigbo builds in many of her leading female children characters. That Ene is only an eleven-year-old girl makes this even more remarkable as an important womanist interventionist statement for a young audience. Adimora-Ezeigbo discusses social status differences within Nigeria as a consequence of the disruption along the lines of the major shifts that had occurred in the social life pattern in postcolonial Nigeria. The urban-rural divide conveys the sense of social gap where one side thinks of the other as remaining in a past which is unyielding to newer and perceived better living standards. Sammy's initial fear of plunging into a new urban life with his uncle's family reinforces the idea of a difference in the two social scales. The inexperienced Sammy needs the attention of the adults around him at this point for him to understand and navigate the urban terrain into which he enters. He laments "I don't want to live in Lagos. I want to return to Agatu" (21). But his uncle, Mr Mark-Metu, and especially his wife thinks nothing of Sammy's difficult adjustment to a city. Sammy's first day in the Mark-Metu's home shows his difficulty to adjust to his new settings. The first food offered to him is spaghetti. "He stared at the food for a while. He pushed the plate away, shaking his head. What's the matter? Mum asked. Don't you want to eat? Are these worms? Sammy asked, pointing to the spaghetti in the bowl." Mrs. Mark-Metu's harsh scolding response unsettles the poor child on his first day in their home, "Sammy, don't expect to choose what to eat and what not to eat in this house. You eat whatever is prepared at any time. Is that clear?" (25). Ene displays a mature sense of empathy expected of the adults as she helps the timid Sammy to plantain and salad

which look more like what the dislocated Sammy is used to. Ene's perceptive understanding of the plight of Sammy in whose person Adimora-Ezeigbo constructs the rural and therefore less sophisticated ways of rustic living, shows a key point in Adimora-Ezeigbo's positioning of the inner strength she wants to imbue in her readers. A pattern of motherly care which is emphasised in womanism is configured in Ene. She takes on the nurturing of her initially timid cousin even though she, and the family also later comes to enjoy Sammy's wealth of rustic wisdom.

In many parts of the story fundamental questions which probe the implicit status difference between sophisticated and educated Nigerian urban dwellers and rustic rural dwellers are raised through the interaction between Ene and her cousin. The profound ideas of differences in upbringing and their effects on children establish a gap which needs to be bridged for an all-round development of young ones in Nigeria. Ene's perceptive and deep reflections show a sensitivity that creates several insights into the person of Sammy, her own parents and other issues that are quite subliminal. For example, when she heard that Sammy has lost both parents and would be moving in with the Mark-Metus, she perceives that Sammy could be happier if his only sister lives with him, "I was sorry for Sammy and his sister though I did not know them…Oh, Dad, can't Sammy and his sister live with us? If they live with us, they will be together" (12). Later, Sammy's Christian upbringing which is strange to Ene makes her muse "Where was heaven? … What if heaven and hell existed? What would happen to Dad, Mum, Adaka and me when we die?" (48). The foregoing shows that Adimora-Ezeigbo considers children as being capable of important reflections that can also inform equally vital life decisions and choices. Ene's questioning mind probes subtle questions of life which do not figure in her parents' busy schedules.

The disconnection between Lagos and Agatu reflects a lack of continuity of the traditional values which had formerly sustained the old cultural strength and stature of the different cultural groups of the Nigerian society. Adimora-Ezeigbo examines the changing

value systems in Nigeria by juxtaposing life in the rural and urban environment. That Sammy can speak two local languages fluently with passable communication in English while his two cousins can use only the English language engages with the ongoing debate about the co-existence of English language with other native Nigerian languages and the effects of this on cultural values and even children's education. Many of the languages are dying fast due to the change to the elitist English language in many of the urban areas of the nation. Adimora-Ezeigbo's idea of creating a middle point where the English language can co-exist favourably with other Nigerian languages emerges when both Ene and Sammy decide to learn from each other. Sammy says, "I will teach you Igbo" (40) while Ene replies, "We will start the Igbo lesson on Sunday. Do you want me to help you to speak and read English better? (41). In a way, this suggests that 'rural' can also equal 'sophisticated' in many ways. Adimora-Ezeigbo discusses the issue of language as an important part of children's socialisation, and an indispensable part of people's culture. Creating a connection between language, family cohesion, and positive cultural values which assist growing children to be well-grounded in ways that speak to overall development in children, Sammy represents what is lacking in his two cousins, cultural connectedness and familial influences (from relating with their extended family) which are necessary paths to healthy Nigerian children's development. Distancing Ene and Adaka from their extended family by their parents cuts them off from the cultural values into which Sammy has been immersed. Ene laments:

> I wondered about Dad. He was so different from Sammy's father who was his brother. He did not teach Adaka and me our language. He did not take us to the village to see grandma and our other relatives… How I wish Dad was a little like Sammy's father (41).

Ene's words conjure a picture of the lack that occurs from a disconnection from cultural roots for Nigerian people, a fact to which Adimora-Ezeigbo wishes to call attention in the

book. Osita Ezenwanebe notes that Adimora-Ezeigbo expresses cultural awareness that relates to moral values through the creation of what she terms "authentic African experiences" (266). These experiences are deeply intertwined with values found within local cultures. Through the constant use of native language, and intimate familial relationships with the extended family members, Sammy appears to be more culturally grounded than his urbanised cousins.

The values that have formed the person of the eleven-year-old Sammy rub off on the family eventually through his usefulness in ways which help the disconnected Mark-Metu family regain some of the connections with the rural which they had lost. This is evident in Sammy's reinvention of a local oral children's game which brings laughter back into the Mark-Metu family in ways which resurrect the type of close relationships that this invokes in the rural settings. Storytelling time has been argued to be one of the important moments which create communal cohesion as it brings people together (Emenyonu 4). Creating a model child in Ene, Adimora-Ezeigbo expresses the social reality that Ezenwanebe considers as an informing principle which makes the writer's works relevant for Nigeria's growing children. This social responsibility of a writer which speaks to social relationships as an important part of children's upbringing reinvests traditional culture as a big stake in grounding children into their societies. Adimora-Ezeigbo foregrounds language as an important aspect of this social relationship in people's traditional cultures. *My Cousin Sammy* is one of Adimora-Ezeigbo's quintessential texts for children which focuses on the preservation of the core values of Nigeria's various ethnic groups even though the nation has moved into a different phase of political and social life, that which is becoming increasingly urban with implications for social cohesion and cultural continuities. She places the importance of language here as an element of cultural connections.

Unlike *The Prize* and *My Cousin Sammy* which have young girls as major characters, *Ako the Storyteller*, and *Alani the Troublemaker* both have male protagonists. In the two texts Adimora-Ezeigbo continues to pay greater attention to the development of children within the prevailing social realities of Nigeria. Through several incidents in the stories, she creates a significant position for young children in a social milieu which thinks little of the importance of little happenings in the lives of the young ones. She discusses the different ways in which the peculiarities of the Nigerian cultural, social and political conditions, for instance, are important for defining the lives of Nigeria's children. Issues of social, psychological and cultural well-being that could be both limiting and empowering for children are explored in ways which revisit the cultural work of women as teachers and consider children as important members of the society. Like *My Cousin Sammy*, the psychological barriers that could be threatening to a child's development are focused in *Alani the Troublemaker*. Adimora-Ezeigbo illustrates the strong tie of familial relationships in an extended African family as a prerequisite for an all-round development for children. Following the loss of his father, Alani becomes psychologically destabilised. No one notices what could be responsible for his recalcitrant and anti-social behaviour. His widowed mother takes Alani to his uncle for a proper upbringing. The hands of love extended to Alani as he moves in with his uncle's family are instrumental in turning the young boy around to good behaviour. This contrasts with Sammy's lacklustre acceptance in his uncle's house in Lagos. While the warm welcome and full acceptance of Alani changes him from a troublemaker who thinks everyone hates him to a responsible and brilliant boy, the opposite is the case for Sammy as he begins to tell lies due to the harsh treatment from his uncle and aunt. Thus, Adimora-Ezeigbo here reiterates the importance of the place of family bonds and conducive familial environment as important parts of the cultural structure of good upbringing for young children.

Adimora-Ezeigbo introduces an important traditional element of a culturally located belief system in *Alani the Troublemaker*. The belief in the majority of African traditional settings in a cyclic movement in human existence is an important one for invoking a continuous relationship and interaction between the dead and the living. The interaction between dead ancestors and living relatives which she treats extensively in *House of Symbols* is briefly introduced in *Alani the Troublemaker*. Alani's uncle can work through the young boy's psychological trauma by persuading him to make his dead father proud of him as he (the dead dad) watches his activities. The young Alani is spurred to success with these thoughts of his dead father as an influence in the background. His uncle says "Alani, you must work hard at your education so that your father will be proud of you, wherever he is now. You must not disappoint him too" (47). In contrast, Sammy's plight and brief inner traumas stem from his uncle's vilification of his late father, an accusation which he attempts to refute. One day in his first week in the vast city of Lagos, Alani losts his way as he comes home from school. Found after the third day by a stranger who brings him home to the Mark-Metus, he faces the anger of his uncle, his aunt and his hurtful cousin Adaka, Sammy's uncle says "Stupid boy!...You are as stubborn as your father, he did not take my advice but went to live in that unknown village where he lost his life. How can I be sure you are telling the truth? I will not allow you to cause more trouble in this house" (*Alani*.75). The urbanised Mr Mark-Metu still holds grudges with his late brother, a sign that he disregards the belief system of the dead as occupying the elevated position of ancestors. This brief incident brings to the fore one of the ways by which the old cultural understanding of belief structures is becoming eroded by the newly emerging thoughts which do not grant any importance to these belief system. Talking ill of the dead is a taboo in many of world's traditional cultures as the dead are regarded as forming part of the ancestral lineage watching over the living. But new thoughts about this belief as meaningless are seen in Sammy's uncle's accusation of his late brother in reaction to

Sammy's attempt to run away from home. The distraught Sammy tries to defend the memory of his late father, "Papa was a good man and everyone in Agatu liked him, he sobbed" (75). Where Sammy's aunt thinks little of him and says, "I hope he will not bring with him the bad manners and dirty habits people display in the village!" (10) and shouts "You imp! You are lying" (75), Alani's aunt creates a warm welcoming environment even on his first day. She "was expecting them [Alani and his uncle who went to bring him] and had prepared a delicious meal to welcome them" (*Alani*,45). And where Ene says Sammy "scrambled to his feet and shrank away from [his aunt] in fear. He was afraid. He stood by the wall, looking at [his aunt]" (*My Cousin Sammy.* 49), Alani's aunt has been "teaching him the techniques of essay writing" (*Alani*. 53). This presupposes a close relationship which constructs notions of a good familial environment for the young Alani. Thus, where Alani's dead father is invoked to comfort, encourage, and spur him to success, Sammy's is vilified in ways that disturb his emotion. Adimora-Ezeigbo treats family cohesiveness and children's success as coexisting on the same social continuum. These are important aspects of Adimora-Ezeigbo's womanist concerns. She contends that major attitudes that define people take shape within the family setting and are transferred to the larger society. Also, of importance are Adimora-Ezeigbo's comments on good and bad parenting as important factors in children's upbringing. Thus, the socialisation of the young ones is embedded within the core values of the society in which they are growing.

Adimora-Ezeigbo continues her advocacy for the position of good nurturance as an important part of children's upbringing in *Ako the Storyteller*. Her major preoccupation of defining children's roles within the social contexts of Nigeria places *Ako the Storyteller* within the matrix of Nigeria's social and political location. Examining existential issues of living in poverty which puts into perspective governmental responsibility in the present-day postcolonial Nigeria, *Ako the Storyteller* pays attention to children's struggles within an unfavourable social system and parental ignorance of their obligations towards their

children. A widow, Ako's mother struggles to raise her twins, Ako and Obo, with her meagre income without aid or assistance. "She worked very hard to take care of her sons. It was hard for her" (1) but family poverty and ignorance on the part of the widowed mother rob Ako, one of the twins, of his legs. He has polio. "The doctor said he had polio. His mother had not immunized him after he was born." (24). He becomes crippled. Adimora-Ezeigbo's treatment of the interplay of poverty, social well-being, and children's upbringing with the issue of responsibility and obligations towards children, in governance gives the story a political flavour. Ako is crippled through polio but forges ahead through the encouragement of his mother and twin brother. He develops his story-telling aptitude and becomes a renowned storyteller. The story reiterates lessons in hard work and determination. Family cohesion in the face of unfavourable social circumstances is foregrounded as a determinant of success. While Ako's withered legs make him dejected and forlorn, "his mother and his brother, Obo, were very kind to him. He became more cheerful" (*Ako the Storyteller*, 24). Like in the previous texts, Adimora-Ezeigbo treats family support as a prerequisite for successful living within Nigeria's social world. Ako's mother buys a handcart for the crippled Ako in order to facilitate his movement to and from school while his twin brother "pushed the cart to school" (24). Despite the encumbrances, "Ako made up his mind to finish school" (25). Developing his storytelling abilities through the support of family, the crippled Ako's condition is noticed by the governor who gives him a wheelchair as the government's support for Ako's hard work and a scholarship which sees Ako through higher education. The story reinforces Adimora-Ezeigbo's arguments on the importance of the mother figure as a nurturer and support for the family as well as the responsibility of the government in assisting disadvantaged citizens. With the ingenuity of Ako's mother and the expression of responsible governance as seen in the character of the governor, Adimora-Ezeigbo reiterates the importance of the

home and the social welfare put in place within the Nigerian nation as important aspects of the wellbeing of Nigeria's younger generation.

CHAPTER FIVE

Gender and power relations in Adimora-Ezeigbo's Fairy tale for children

This chapter discusses the subtle snail-sense nuances in Adimira-Ezeigbo's books for children which are in form of fairy tales. These texts form the second group of her children's literature which are basically from the oral repertoire transformed into the written to accommodate the newer social and cultural realities in Nigerian children's education. In these books I explore the different ways by which Adimora-Ezeigbo continues to rework some of the existing oral stories to reflect empowerment for women through subtle references to the different ways by which they contribute to societal good and further feminist thoughts in the snail-sense.

The next few paragraphs are the plot overview of the children's literature in the second group, the fairytale types that I use as samples in this chapter. I sometimes analyse the stories in this group in ways which bring the same trends in different ones together hence the decision to give a brief summary of each in the following paragraphs to create a measure of clarity of each story.

Whisker the Brave Cat, henceforth *Whisker*, is a traditional fairy tale set in an imaginary animal land. The initial setting presents a utopic environment where all the animals irrespective of type and size live in peace and harmony until an unfortunate incident turns the cat families except the family of Father Cat, against all the other animals in the land. Many of the incidents revolve around a young male cat called Whisker. His unusual intelligence, hard work and diligence make him a model character. He initiates vital decisions which help the community to live in peace. While chaos and disorderliness begin in the land Whisker is seen to be fighting frantically to proffer solutions. Within the story Adimora-Ezeigbo intimates the place of the female animals as more domestic and undervalued than necessary although the story ends with more involvement of the female

animals in the search for a means of the community's survival from fellow animals who have turned on them.

Red One and the Wizard of Mula is a story about a young princess, Red One. She is the only child of her parents. On her fifth birthday she is abducted from her parents' palace by a wicked magician who holds her captive and takes advantage of her special mystical powers to enrich and make himself famous. Red One who gets her name from her strange red hair lives with the wizard until an accidental, (although predicted) occurrence at the age of twenty-one helps her discover her true identity. Mansa, the only survivor and the youngest of the soldiers who set out to look for Red One since her abduction, comes to the magician's house. He is on a search for a way back home to Ubungu (Red One's hometown) after being lost for sixteen years. He is directed to the only person who can give him clues, Mulana (Red One) the only daughter of the Wizard of Mula, and thus, the stage is set for a love encounter which sets Red One free eventually as she and Mansa fall in love. The Wizard of Mula "knew that Red One and Mansa were fated to meet and fall in love. His magic revealed to him long ago that he would lose Red One when a young man from the kingdom of Ubungu came to Mula to consult him" (99). Thus, Red One gets her freedom. She is eventually reunited with her father and gets married to Mansa.

Asa and the Little Stream is the story of a young princess, Asa, whose life situation changes when she is taken captive to Lubeluland. She finds herself alone in this strange land as she becomes the personal slave to Princess Akudu, the only daughter of Chief Igunu who rules Lubeluland. Subdued but of a great character, Asa is forced to go on an adventure with the proud and highly conceited Princess Akudu. Akudu wants to satisfy her curiosity about the existence of a magical stream mentioned by a visiting magician. Naturally gifted with the knowledge of herbs and being of a good and compassionate nature, Asa's personality evolves into full bloom as she proves very useful on the journey

which ends in a fulfilment of the longing for freedom and the beginning of a profound lesson for the haughty Princess Akudu.

Sunshine the Miracle Child tells the story of a good and compassionate couple, Usi and Olega, who face the difficulty of conceiving their own child after many years of marriage. Although they are not rich they live within their means and are able to give to the needy from the little that they have. This generous nature brings a kindly spirit to their doorsteps. The strange man, a hunchback, leaves them with a strange stick and instructions on what they must do after he is gone. The stick turns into a beautiful daughter whom they name Sunshine. Sunshine rows like every normal child but the hunchback already gave the couple an instruction concerning her upbringing, she must not step into the farm until she turns eighteen. Uta, the orphan boy whom Usi and Uta take into their care, feels cheated. He questions why Sunshine is kept out of farm work while he has to work on the farm every day. The stage is thus set for the hatred that threatens the existence of Sunshine. She prematurely goes back to her source. Usi and Olega become unhappy but because of their good nature Sunshine is restored to them and Uta is forgiven his ignorance.

Ezezemale and the Tree Spirits centres on Ezezemale, the only daughter of her rich and doting parents. She flouts the warnings of her parents not to go out while they are away: “spirits move about in the hours between morning and evening” (10), warns her father. And thus, she must stay indoors. The consequences of her disobedience bring the world of the spirits, animals and that of the humans together. By picking the udara fruits which she loves so much to eat and which the king of the tree spirits provides, she has ignorantly and unwittingly entered into a pact with him to be his wife. The king of the tree spirits and his subjects come in the night to take Ezezemale away. Her parents must release her or face even worse consequences. They release her but seek means to rescue her before it is too late. After exhausting every available means of rescue, a hawk comes to her desperate plea for help and takes her back home. The hawk insists on getting a reward for

rescuing Ezezemale in the nick of time from the tree spirits who were already preparing to eat her up. The hawk is given a chick which the story explains as the reason why hawks snatch chicks up and eat them.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's fairytales for children include a mixture of the contents commonly found within oral tales for children in many Nigerian traditional cultures. This shows in several ways, the oral origin of the stories. These stories which culturally constitute a large repertoire where a substantial aspect of Nigerian people's knowledge and perception of issues reside have usually been referred to as a means of gaining a substantial knowledge of gender relations in the cultures. Kolawole's observation that women use the folktale genre to their advantage in advancing and strengthening a positive female gender image, gender enhancement and repositioning women as creative individuals within their cultures reflects Finnegan's and Katrak's positions that the genre seems to be predominantly used by women in certain areas of Nigeria. In Kolawole's words, many oral genres including folk stories:

> are manifestations of collective women's voices, dynamic group consciousness and a tool for eliciting positive influence on the society. They are not passive texts… Women use oral literature and exclusive female genres to condemn social problems, immorality, unfaithfulness, and idleness – and to make demands… Other aims of women's oral arts include moral mediation and legalistic intervention as well as confrontation of and resistance to negative change and acculturation. These reveal women's collective consciousness, composite voice, female bonding, unity, identity and positive eliciting and reassessment of womanhood and femininity. They act as a metaphor and as a repository for the predicament, problems, hopes, aspirations, burdens, and ideals of womanhood (67).

That Adimora-Ezeigbo continues in the tradition of converting old tales into what Kolawole refers to as a means of influencing women's empowerment in the written form shows a continuous effort at continuing the old tradition of empowerment through stories told by women and for women. Apart from her adult books this is also discernible in her books for children that I make use of in this research. Adimora-Ezeigbo is particularly concerned with converting old characters in folktales to strong literary women figures. By thus retrieving powerful women figures who are not in any written history from tales (as she does in her trilogy), she borrows from oral tales to mediate in moral terms and confront issues of women's empowerment which Kolawole raised as quoted above. Azuonye's study of two types of this genre- Akuko Ifo and Akuko Ala (from the Igbo culture), shows that the image of women found in most folk stories is both diametrically opposing and supporting of the picture of women as creators and destroyers. But Adimora-Ezeigbo attempts using the genre towards improving the image of women by expressing womanist concerns which are shaped through her snail-sense by concentrating on the positive images of women in these oral tales. The Majority of the oral stories feature the stock motif showing women as jealous co-wives, the evil witch, the flatterer, the gossip, the cruel stepmother, the beautiful but foolish maiden, the hated wife, the flippant, and the timid. If the folktale genre is a women's genre as Azuonye, Okonkwo, Kolawole, and Katrak all argue, then women, being the principal tellers, appear to be complicit in the creation of their own negative images found in these stories. But these negative images are toned down by Adimora-Ezeigbo. She replaces them in some instances with strong female characters such as the girl child Asa in *Asa and the Little Stream*. She also brings up cultural womanist concerns such as she raises in *Whisker the Brave Cat* and in the positive way she situates women characters such as Olega within the domestic and public space. One of the strong points which Adimora-Ezeigbo raises is changing the narratives to suit newer womanist engagements by not reinforcing these negative images but replacing them

with a positive female presence in the stories for children. This is fully borne out in the analysis below. This is important because the over-exaggerated negative image of women found in many oral tales has hitherto tended to overshadow many positive ones in several ways.

In Kolawole's study of gender theories and African women's mobilisation over time in Africa, she argues that the folktale is a genre dominated by women and where women's power is greatly felt in oral traditions. In her words:

> These oral genres are manifestations of collective women's voices, dynamic group consciousness and a tool for eliciting positive influence on the society. They are no passive texts. In many parts of Africa, folktales are dominated by women… [who] use oral literature and exclusive female genres to condemn social problems, immorality, unfaithfulness and idleness – and to make demands (76-77).

Her arguments on this topic rest on the prevalence of women as important storytellers and as custodians of cultural ethos, such as simple every day guiding moral rules for children, in most of the African oral traditions that she studied. Kolawole gives a valuable insight to the many oral genres that have been the main domain of women and how useful they have been as means of empowerment for them. One of the grey areas in Kolawole's research though, is her failure to acknowledge how much of the old stereotypical notions about women in folktales are being reinforced in written texts. Since her research covers such areas as "women's literary archetypes and a progression in consciousness" (79), it could be useful to see the progress along this line. It is commendable though that her womanist lens covers other areas which have been of importance in the works of Adimora-Ezeigbo and others who have emerged on the writing scene. These women have endeavoured to debunk these negative images in a bid to create more positive descriptions of women in narrative texts. She is preoccupied with how these oral genres reflect women's power over time. This is one of the areas that I raise in this research about Adimora-Ezeigbo's womanist

oeuvre. I raise questions about how much of the old womanist power through oral genres are discernible in some of her works. Although Kolawole maintains that women writers are encouraging the creation of positive women's images by underscoring women as the source of virtues through the myths, proverbs and folktales which they analyse by "creating archetypes that strengthen positive images of women" (95), there are several ambivalent images of women found in Nigerian women writers' works. This brings up the question of whether the majority of these writers are merely writing for its own sake without considering what this entails. Olarinmoye contends that the image of women in folktales is varied and not as absolutely negative as some authorities make it seem. However, her investigation fails either to address key concerns about how the negative portrayal of women expresses and further reinforces actual living experiences of women as the subordinate gender in the Yoruba culture of Nigerian society or how most of the negative images in oral tales are feminised. For Adimora-Ezeigbo, it is important to understand the implications of the psychological imperatives of the projected images of women in texts. Giving more projections to the positive images by replacing negative ones goes a long way in generating a power base for women within the cultures.

The type of narrative strategy adopted by Adimora-Ezeigbo for the following texts which belong to the fairytale genre is oral in many ways. The texts in reference here are; *Asa and the Little Stream, Whisker the Brave Cat, Ezezemale and the Tree Spirits, Sunshine the Miracle Child* and *Red One and the Wizard of Mula*. She reworks some of these texts in line with her literary politics by giving more emphasis to her advocacy for an early feminist orientation in terms of assisting young children to understand the social implications of what characters do or do not do according to their gender. Apart from *Whisker the Brave Cat* where I concentrate on the incidents where Adimora-Ezeigbo's feminist stance is most pronounced as the text does not make use of a female protagonist, I discuss the other texts focusing on the parts where Adimora-Ezeigbo's feminist stand is most pronounced through

the female protagonists. The family, home, age groups and other communal institutions are social components that Adimora-Ezeigbo presents as vital places to locate the position of women and in the socialisation of children even within the fairytales. Through each of these cultural components, the ideas attached to gender roles and the implications for understanding the background from which such arise become evident. She also shows gender ordering and relations as established and grounded within the traditional cultural practices from which she takes the stories. Adimora-Ezeigbo pushes more further the understanding of where power resides in gender relations in her interrogations of the power structure, multiple intersection of roles and extension of possibilities in relationships which transcend established cultural stereotypes. All the texts in this group, already listed above, showcase the family as an important unit of Nigerian society. In all the stories, Adimora-Ezeigbo shows a culture-situated effort to grant agency to some of the female characters.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense is quite apt and more overt in *Whisker* even though it is an animal story. The text presents a situation where women basically operate within just the domestic space as opposed to the public where the male animals make vital decisions. *Asa and the Little Stream* deviates a little in this regard (because the reader is not presented with any full family unit in the text). The space where each gender as a cultural constituent operates is rather implied than obviously stated. Notwithstanding, the understanding of the relationship that the reader gathers from the characters of Chief Igunu and his proud daughter, Akudu, suggests this same hierarchy discernible in the other stories. The family unit in *Sunshine* reflects subtle emotions in relation to gender. The text establishes that emotional superiority resides with the man Usi, who can withstand the pain of the couple's childlessness better and console his wife who constantly cries.

Mothering is a significant aspect of the cultural tradition from which Adimora-Ezeigbo writes. She gives prominence to issues of motherhood in her written works for children in almost the same way she does in her texts for adults. Motherhood has been

shown in several ways to be both rewarding and restrictive. As in her adult literatures, being a mother is represented as being exerting even while being emotionally rewarding as seen in *Whisker*. Mother Cat's domestic activities are quite demanding, but she derives emotional satisfaction in the care that she gives to her family:

> Mother Cat was proud of Whisker, her first born. She loved to mother him and took good care of him. She made sure he ate well and encouraged him in his work. She cleaned his room regularly and relieved him of some of the chores that would rob him of the time he needed to be useful to the society… In spite of all that Mother Cat did for her first-born, she still gave plenty of attention to Father Cat and her other children (8).

Her duties also span the part of the public space as can be gathered from the reference to her work even on the farm. This gives the impression of the hard work that Adimora-Ezeigbo attaches to women's living conditions. "The whole family rewarded [Mother Cat] devotion with deep affection and helped her in the work she did in the home and the farm" (9). The activities of Mother Cat show that her work spans both the domestic and the public space. Her mothering activities are especially foregrounded. This says much about the notions of the domestic attached to women in the cultures that form the background of the story. The issue of being able to become a mother or not is usually given prominence. As Katrak observes in *Politics of the Female Body: Post-Colonial Female Writers of the Third World*, infertility as an issue of being or not being a mother, becomes damaging to women who are unable to become mothers due to infertility; they are seen as less than women. This is the position in which Adimora-Ezeigbo puts the character of Olega. But past this, the writer moves beyond the wider cultural framework that provides the setting of the work into newer thoughts on African women which provides a more positive construction of motherhood as an institution. Here I mean the construction of a notion of motherhood as an issue beyond just the ability to give birth to children. Nnaemeka posits that Nigerian women writers'

works produce cultural literacy which being cultural productions are effectively analysing all that is involved in the notion of mothering, which have hitherto been left out of the discourse on motherhood. According to Nnaemeka, the 'mother' notion in newer African womanist thoughts include multifaceted concepts such as "motherhood, mother-wit, motherland, mother-tongue, mothering" (8) from all of which the "paradoxical location of (m)other as both central and marginal" can be deduced" (9). By this she refers to other available options which are equally fulfilling for women within their communities. For instance, that the childless Efuru in the eponymous *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa, finds fulfilment in being a messenger of the River goddess Uhamiri, shows that her 'usefulness' does not end in biological achievements such as childbirth. Adimora-Ezeigbo's casting of Olega in this light is suggestive of blending this idea into her children's literature. Motherhood thus moves beyond the nurturing of a woman's birth child. The lack of the mothering experience which is initially alienating for Olega places her outside of the notion of women as nurturers and agents of community continuity. She feels left out of the opportunity of motherhood. This makes her lament to Usi "But my soul longs for a child of my own. A child you and I can truly love and give our name. I want a child who will have the right to call us father and mother" (*Sunshine.* 7). But while Adimora-Ezeigbo finds other equally fulfilling duties for Chielo in *The Last of the Strong Ones,* Olega's fulfilment is dramatic. A strange hunch-backed man visits the Olega and Usi. Because of the warm reception which they gave him, he gives them a magical stick which turns to a beautiful baby girl. Apart from this, Olega also gets an 'othermothering' opportunity through the adoption of an orphan, Uta. Becoming responsible for a child other than one's own is an important aspect of the African mothering structure. Olega accepts Uta and raises him with Sunshine.

Apart from the changing cultural construction of motherhood, family as an important social agent and a nucleus around which the bigger society operates is foregrounded in all the selected texts. Through the family as a unit of the community, social hierarchy takes

shape and is understood as a viable domestic unit that is important to an understanding of social interactions and societal values especially as these relate to women. Rather than equality within these relationships, maleness is foregrounded as the norm. In several ways, Adimora-Ezeigbo foregrounds the notions of gender categories and patriarchal family structure in the children's narratives under study in this chapter. Obvious, too, is how she constructs women's power and disempowerment within the stories. In *Whisker,* within the home and outside it, Adimora-Ezeigbo makes a deliberate statement on political decision making as a sole prerogative of the male animals. None of the wives belong to the forum where decisions are made but occupy the domestic domain. The female animals are confined within the domestic sphere which Katrak in her interrogation of some third world nations' practices of mapping of the female body describes as belong(ing) to and remain(ing) outside like "the exiled in a patriarchal setting" (56). The queen in *Red One* may give advice, but the final decision rests on the king even when it concerns the safety of their only child. The situation created in *Red One* when Queen Arit expresses her fears about the princess' safety says much about domestic power relations and defines the partner who decides. Red One's extraordinary hair and beauty is a constant source of attraction for the people of Ubungu. They abandon their farms and business to gaze at her all day long. But:

> After a while, the queen was worried. She was uneasy about people coming from far and near to look at the princess and carry her in their arms. …She decided to do something about it. First, she complained to the king. She said she did not want the princess to be an object for show. She said it was not good for the child to grow up seeing herself as an object of admiration. She might even be proud and vain. "What if some wicked people or spirits cast a spell on the child? … My lord, you must stop this show before our little girl gets hurt (7).

King Opoko's response, though mild and seemingly unassuming, retains a measure of power which gives the final verdict on the safety of Red One. He says:

> You worry too much, my queen. No one is going to hurt our child. She is so pretty and harmless. Who will want to hurt her? Let's just allow the people to satisfy their curiosity. I'm sure the people will grow tired of this pastime in no time and forget the princess' red hair. (8)

The king's decision causes the misfortune that costs the family the better part of Red One's young life and sends Queen Arit to her early grave. A similar situation occurs in *Whisker* where Father Goat trivialises and refuses the sensible advice of his wife about confronting the lion family on the issue of missing animals in the kingdom. Mother Goat advises that her husband exercise some caution. Father Goat will have none of this. Mother Goat asks "You can wait, can't you? Father Goat did not reply. Mother Goat sighed. She knew that as far as Father Goat was concerned, the conversation was over" (*Whisker*, 50). This scenario paints almost the same picture that occurs in the conversation between King Opoko and Queen Arit. In *Whisker*, the force which the voice of the male animals carry is not transferred to the female even within the private space. Father Goat eventually pays with his life. "Father Goat did not come home. Mother Goat waited till evening. There was no sign of him". (50) The scenario in *Red One* is repeated because the little princess eventually comes to harm just as the mother feared. The female voices in the scenes are quite weak but prove to be prophetic, carrying dire consequences for masculine egoistic acts. The voices of both Queen Arit and Mother Goat construct female wisdom and foresight. This representation of the wives and mothers within the family unit in Adimora-Ezeigbo's work for children appears ambivalent in its purpose because while it aims to represent the female person as a subject under patriarchy and seeks to show how it is subjected to masculine will within the family unit, it fails in some of the stories to reinforce women's agency by allowing the male prerogative to dominate in many instances. I interpret this to be an engagement with the kind of social reality to which the writer wishes to draw readers' attention in the snail-sense model.

Another means by which power and power relations within the context of Adimora-Ezeigbo's writings are expressed is land and its ownership. The issue of land is germane to colonial issues in many adult texts found all over Africa. In many cases the issue of land as property moves beyond mere physical interaction to include the spiritual aspects of cultural formations (as especially found in the works of Kenyan Ngugi wa Thiong'O). Land features a lot in many of Adimora-Ezeigbo's adult texts (especially *Children of the Eagle*) where ownership of land confers power on the holders. The five daughters of Eaglewoman have to fight for the right to inherit their late father's land despite cultural dictates which disinherit them because of they are women. The dictates are embedded within the traditional culture. Women's rights to land are non-existent as far as the Igbo culture in which Adimora-Ezeigbo's writings is concerned.[1] Traces of land issues have found their way into Adimora-ezeigbo's children's literature. Even if it is likely that Adimora-Ezeigbo seems not to be doing much reinforcing the issue of who holds power in these regards in her children's literature, the stories of *Asa, Whisker, Sunshine* and *Red One* all echo the importance of land as men's privilege. For example, in *Sunshine* Usi the husband of Olega "had inherited a piece of land from his father" (3). The land provides sustenance for the family because the couple cultivates it for a living. In *Whisker* the reference to the male animals as the heads of households suggests they are the owners of these communal spaces. But while this notion of power-holding through land is not directly pointed out in the other three works, it is nevertheless implied by the fact of Red One's father's position as a king and the Wizard of Mula's acquisition of a large land and home from the wealth he makes from Red One's trade as a seer. All holders of land in the stories are men. Owning land confers power and privilege on the male characters. Land as property is linked to ancestors, thus the importance accorded ancestors moves down to anyone who has the land link with them. The writer may have overlooked the type of reinforcement

[1] It is important to note that this is not the same in some other traditional cultures in Nigeria. To a large extent, female children are entitled to parts of their late father's land in other areas of the nation. This is a practice with varying degrees of difference in Nigeria.

this notion of ownership might have on young readers within the culture in which she writes, but it remains an important statement about where power resides and who controls it. The stories do not redirect this notion towards a feminist end.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's treatment of the domestic area in the stories in this group demonstrates idea in snail-sense that age-long customary practices could be hard to fight off. I explain this in terms of how the stories still invariably refer to the domestic space in terms of male ownership. Domestic activities in the stories under focus in this section show a strong presence of the female characters. In most cases they control this space, cooking food, serving dishes and getting the bedroom prepared for even visitors as readers see in the domestic activities of Olega in *Sunshine.* Yet there the overall appearance gives the notion of this space as being part of the men's properties as the head of the families. This demonstrates a continuation of ownership of every available physical space. For instance, the strange hunchback who visits Usi and Olega's house refers to the household he visits as "Usi's house" (13) as he was directed to it by the townspeople. After a nice meal cooked and served by Olega was over, the hunchback "praises Olega for being such a good cook" (12). As he and Usi sit outside the house after their meal he explains that "When he asked some people he met on the way where he could spend the night, they showed him Usi's house. They told him Usi would not send a stranger away" (13). Thus males, whether animal or human, are referred to as the heads of families, giving the impression of who controls even the domestic space. While the male animals in *Whisker* "recount all that was said at the meeting to his family" (3), the kitchen space is the sphere for the wives in *Sunshine, Ezezemale, Asa* and *Whisker* with only occasional assistance from the male if at all. Adimora-Ezeigbo might be dwelling on what Nwapa refers to as creating "an objective image of women, an image that actually reflects the reality of women's role in the society" (527), but the attempt does something more, that is reinforcing the notion of where the women reside in the social order. This reinforces Adimora-Ezeigbo's argument

and the issues she raises in her snail sense feminism, pointing at women's gradual self-retrieval process that does not fight headlong but tackles patriarchy slowly. The depiction of the domestic space of operation in these texts with women struggling with the everyday burden of living at the fringes marks the ground which attenuates their living conditions. There is no indication of an attempt by the writer to reclaim these domestic spaces of operation such as even the kitchen for the women in the children's stories under focus here. This shows an ongoing womanist struggle upon which snail-sense feminism focuses.

Characterisation and power structures in Adimora-Ezeigbo's children's fictions

Several of the characters in the fairytales in this group are depicted in ways that children can easily understand. Fusing realistic elements such as everyday people with characters that are mainly outlandish, many of the characters oscillate between realism and fantasy. Adimora-Ezeigbo shapes a fusion of the two in ways that children's young minds are invited into meaning from the stories. She creates realistic incidents that can be found within the prevailing social conditions that children can recognise around them and infuses these incidents with the fantastic that moves beyond reality. For example, the characters of Olega and Usi represent realistic everyday people while the hunchback and the strange stick that turns into a beautiful baby girl are elements of fantasy. This technique of blending the real and the imagined into tales is common in children's narratives. All major characters are strategically placed and depicted with symbolic qualities by which the writer intends calling attention to virtues and social values without seeming to preach morals to children. For example, Asa's qualities are foregrounded from the beginning of the story. Asa is imbued with the tremendous power of African priestesses as healers and seers. This very important religious and cultural role is given a lot of prominence in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols*. It is one of the areas where women's powers within cultures is prominent and respected, Asa is gifted with the ability to see visions beyond the

physical, interact with spirits, and identify herbs and use them for healing purposes. Princess Akudu loves to gather wild fruits. During her trips to the forest with Asa:

> The princess and Asa got to know many herbs and shrubs. They discovered that some of these herbs could be used for medicine. Asa was actually the one that made this discovery. She realized that she had deep knowledge of herbs and shrubs, but she could not explain where this gift came from. Little did she know that she inherited the knowledge from her mother (6).

On another occasion, Asa's demonstration of her unique gift with herbs saves one of Princess Akudu's guards on their journey to the Beautiful River. A viper had bitten one of the guards:

> Asa abandoned what she was doing and rushed to him. The man held his leg at the point of the bite. Asa gave the leg a cut with a small sharp knife, close to the point and squeezed hard until blood flowed out. She said she had to run back a little distance away to pick some leaves from a plant she had seen there…They watched as she crushed the leaves until some fluids appear. She rubbed the wound with it. It was an antidote to the poison produced by the snake. Then she squeezed some of it into the man's mouth and asked him to swallow it. All the people were pleased with Asa and thanked her for saving the man's life. They said God gave her a special gift of healing and knowledge of herbs (40).

This positions her on a higher pedestal beyond other characters women characters in the text. That "Princess Akudu was not happy that everyone was saying nice things about Asa and thanking her with great admiration" (40) shows that Asa occupies a special pedestal of honour because of her special abilities. In this regard, Flora Nwapa argues that women who occupy this position "wield tremendous power in many areas, including healing and predicting the future. They mediate between the supernatural and natural worlds, between the divine (deities) and the human" (2007: 527). These characteristics set Asa apart and

show strong womanist traits that confer power on her. Apart from these distinguishing traits, the contrast which the writer creates between Asa and princess Akudu is quite sharp and distinguishes between the two characters. Lexical items such as "beautiful and intelligent", (*Asa,* 3) "cleverer and prettier" (4) are used in foregrounding Asa's qualities while Akudu is "proud like her father" (1). The sharp contrast promotes the reader's perception of the two characters and as the story unfolds shapes the expectations of the thrust of the narrative. The character that requires the reader's sympathy emerges through the subtle references to values that child readers can easily recognise. Asa has been a child slave since she was eight years old. "She was a slave captured in one of the towns Chief Igunu defeated in battle… Asa never saw the others again. She was kept in Chief Igunu's house. She cried everyday, asking for her mother and father but nobody paid any attention to her" (2). Even though "Asa's clothes were not as fine as those of Princess Akudu, she looked very lovely in her drab dresses." (3). By contrast, Whisker the cat does not suffer the same fate as Asa, but the author's description of Whisker follows the same predictive pattern of character traits in his description as "clever", "brave" (5) "a role model" "intelligent", (7) and he gives "selfless service" (8). Although the character of Red One reflects a personality who lacks of agency because she lives for a long time under the magician's mesmerising charm which keeps her subdued, her movement from an innocent five-year-old to a subdued young woman constantly under the powerful influence of the wicked magician presents her for readers' sympathy. But she is imbued with the same spiritual power as Asa. A born seer whose ability in this regard develops as she comes of age, Red One's power is curtailed under the evil influence of the patriarchal and overbearing male presence of the Wizard of Mula until his power expires. While Asa is able to realise her own power and agency without promptings, Red One's attention is called to her strange abilities. The incidence where Red One foresees the death of a man who was unaware of the danger that Red One already saw marks the point of the ripening

of Red One's power. The Wizard of Mula recognises this coming of age, "in his heart he was very happy. For he knew that the time had come for Red One to help him become rich. The power to foretell the future and reveal the past had descended on her at the age of ten" (54). He tells her, "You have the power to see things other people cannot see" (55). But she is a subdued female, "The wizard had used his magic power to keep her under control, but the power would break if he broke the rule and beat her" (71). Thus, he has been forced by greed to patiently await the time when Red One will become a seer. In every way Red One lacks agency even after she is set free. Her liberation does not emanate from her own person, like the Asa character.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's use of fairytale characteristics is important in the stories. These characteristics allow the stimulating of children's emotion. For instance, the elements of fantasy in the scene where "the Wizard of Mula touches Red One and Mansa with his magic stick and they became two beautiful birds" belongs to the fantastic mixed with reality. This type of scene also comes up at the end of *Asa and the Little Stream*:

> The man with the shoes that jingle and shone led them back the way they had come. He allowed them to enter the first room where Prince Eras was imprisoned. Then he followed them. He stretched his right hand and waved a magic wand over the Prince and Asa. In a twinkling of an eye, Asa and Prince Eras found themselves in Falalaland. What a delightful experience (116).

The deus ex machina-like endings to the stories in *Asa* and *Red One* is quite popular with children's literature in Nigeria. Adimora-Ezeigbo blends this into the tales in ways which blur the boundaries between fantasy and didacticism. Grenby argues that "fantasy literature and the fairytale are amorphous and ambiguous genres whose boundaries are difficult to set" (2). Adimora-Ezeigbo constructs the tales to reflect both the 'alternative world' in fantasy and the realistic known world so as to provide instruction rich in imagery for her

child audiences. The creation of personhood for the child characters in the stories especially shows important womanist messages.

Children's conditioning towards specifically ascribed gender roles in the process of socialisation into their societies starts early in life through the different things they are exposed to within their environment. One of these things they are exposed to is the books they read. Although Malmkjaer and Knowles argue that it is not easy to demonstrate the influence of what children read on their subsequent behaviour, through her children's stories, Adimora-Ezeigbo demonstrates what has been established as one major means by which African children are encouraged towards socially acceptable behaviours. These behaviours are expected to guide them towards responsible adult life right from childhood. Stories expose children to various cultural behavioural codes which can inform demonstrable behavioural changes. These range from specific oral stories within a traditional culture to ones that are universal but can be applicable within children's immediate surroundings. The universality of storytelling as one major means of influencing good behaviour in children reflects in the similarities in some of the storylines that are found around the world. The rags-to-riches motif, for instance, is quite popular and universal in stories meant to call children's attention to good behaviour. Knowles and Malmkjaer's argument take cognisance of some other internal and external influences which can also be responsible for the socialisation of children, for instance, both the environment, and inborn biological traits may well play major roles in outward behaviours and tendencies. But African writers place a lot of premium on the influence which stories have on children as stimulants for good behaviour. For Nigerian writers of children's literature, writing for children continues the task of socialising children through stories even though they now appear in the written mode. Ernest Emenyonu argues that "folktales are rich and authentic sources of raw African values." (*African Literature Today*, 3). His contention is that the pedagogical implications of folktales and other oral performances which writers transfer

onto the pages of children's stories not only reflect "in positive impacts on the behavior of children in their formative years, but will also help in no small way to establish a viable reading culture in African countries" (4). By "raw African value" Emenyonu refers to a basic cultural ethos which is generally found on the continent and specifically African. This ethos, in most cases are the basic rules for healthy living within society. In his words these values are embedded in "folktales in which enshrined community values were explicitly extolled" (427). For Osita Ezenwanebe, the increasing attention to children's literature by writers such as Adimora-Ezeigbo is an important advocacy needed for raising an awareness about the ills within the Nigerian nation. She argues that Adimora-Ezeigbo's children's stories reflect the menace of anti-social behaviours and their devastating effects on the progress of the Nigerian nation while creating awareness about changing the ills through children as the next generation of the nation. This includes creating awareness about changing the different ways by which gender differences create unstable status for women. Ezenwanebe avers that "in the face of the social decadence in modern Nigerian society, with corruption, bribery and greed being linked with the adult, many writers simply employ their art to teach and protect the young from the depravity of the adult as a means of securing a better future" (264). Even though Ezenwanebe's claim seems quite ambitious considering that measuring the impact of literary works on people might be illusionary, her reference to the impact of literary works is not unconnected to the use of oral arts for didactic purposes. Emenyonu paints a clearer picture. He submits that:

> Teaching and reading of children's literature to achieve traditional purposes and functions which made folktales and other oral performance part of the upbringing of children in African societies…should be given more attention through research and presentations at conferences. Effective implementations of these will not only result in positive impacts on the behaviour of children in their formative years but will also help in no small way to establish a viable reading culture in African countries (3).

The early childhood socialisation and socio-cultural conditioning is what Adimora-Ezeigbo aims to achieve in her works for children. One of the means by which she does this is by juxtaposing characters in order to allow her audience to make informed choices about the moralistic nuances in the texts. This pattern is present in the majority of traditional oral stories which specifically aim at moral lessons. Character contrasts are important in traditional oral stories for children because many of them aim at didacticism, thus the application of the lessons in the stories in their day to day lives is expected. Each strand of behaviour in characters in stories issues of everyday living within the community in which children live. Butts argues that the interests, values and concerns of a society appears in its children's literature (84). This makes the connection between the writer and the reader an important one as it forms a platform for the relevance of what is put to children in stories. In the case of children's literature, the "patterning of narrative images" (Sekoni 42) is especially important as it gives more authenticity to the stories. These images are especially important in children's literature. Child readers easily relate with and catch the subtle description of characters following the values they are aware of. They organise as well as interpret as well as invoke meaning from the values they already know within their social cultures. For instance, the description of Usi and his wife with words such as 'kind' (*Sunshine.* 2) 'humble' (*Sunshine.* 3) 'peaceful' (*Sunshine.* 5), 'contented' (5), sets the stage for child readers' empathising attitude to the couple's plight. The situation which makes most readers align with protagonists (often in sympathy) also causes children naturally to tend towards story characters who exhibit charismatic traits such as Adimora-Ezeigbo creates in the character of Usi and Olega in the text *Sunshine.*

Character descriptions are capable of setting gender boundaries in the way particular words are consistently associated with a particular gender and bodies become sites for the mapping of social constructions of differences (Brown and Gershon 34), for instance, the

description of male characters such as Whisker, Uta (in *Sunshine*) and Mansa (in *Red One*) with words such as big, strong, clever, brave, well-built and so on which connote courage and bravery in contrast with words which are considered softer and feminine such as beautiful, lovely, pretty, obedient, used in the description of Asa, Red One and Sunshine reinforces fixed gender expectations. In this sense, body differences of both male and female are defined in ways which shape where power resides. For examples, on their way to the Beautiful River, "Didi, one of the guards began his watch. He was strong and good-looking. …For a long time, he stood watching the inert figure [of Asa]. He could see her lovely face in the dim light provided by the campfire" (*Asa* 43). The seemingly inert form of Asa is represented in this scene in terms of delicateness and fragility in comparison with the strong physical form of Didi, the guard. Even though not in comparison with a male character, Sunshine is also described in this soft physical term. "When Sunshine was seventeen years old, she was the most beautiful girl in Alabego… Usi and Olega were lucky to have such a pretty and intelligent daughter" (*Sunshine.* 41). In like manner, in *Red One and the Wizard of Mula*, Prince Mansa says to Red One "Well, I did not expect to find a young and beautiful woman in the room" (*Red One.* 81). Red One's beauty endears her to Mansa who has come to her for consultation. "Mansa gazed at her in admiration. She looked like a goddess sitting on a throne" (84). These descriptions are important means of calling attention to the nuances of the gender differences that Adimora-Ezeigbo calls attention to in these texts.

It is possible that Adimora-Ezeigbo is drawn to writing fairytales both because they continue the oral (Nigerian) tradition and because they show more conservative and womanist attitudes to gender. They also, in several ways that I will make clear in this part of the discussion, present a more gradual move towards women's emancipation in ways that tally with her snail-sense idea. The various restrictive cultural codes of feminine behaviour in the body narratives in the stories express a further understanding of established gender hierarchies discernible in Adimora-Ezeigbo's works. Even though the ways in which

Adimora-Ezeigbo creates an understanding of women's roles in these children's texts do not really (in some ways) positively negotiate notions of patriarchy, the power-packed girl-child image depicted in the Asa character is an attempt at strengthening the image of women, especially that of girl-children in her literary works for children. Rescuing the incarcerated Prince Eras confers some power on Asa as a gallant agent of liberation instead of being on the receiving end by being rescued:

> Asa raged at the boatmen and threatened to follow Princess Akudu if they did nothing to rescue her. The men ignored her. With a swift movement, Asa jumped into the river and soon disappeared as [did] Princess Akudu (101).

The expansion of the Beautiful River impedes the homeward journey of Princess Akudu's train. They can only get across by a ferry after pacifying the river with a beautiful song composed by Asa. "From nowhere, a large boat appeared. Inside were two men who were ready to ferry them across the river" (99). In the middle of the river the men throw the proud and haughty Princess Akudu: "She cried out once and the river swallowed her" (99). But In the attempt to rescue Princess Akudu who has been thrown into the river because of her haughty attitude, Asa becomes the rescuer of Prince Eras who is being held under the river waiting for his rescuer. The climactic action in which Asa's gallantry and bravery engage with issues of power and agency of a female being shifts the usual figure of the male as the rescuer to a female as the saviour. Asa's elevation carries with it messages of virtue and morals in a typical oral rhetorical style: "The prince had been a captive for several years. He could only be set free if a pure and virtuous princess came to the mansion when he reached the age of twenty-one" (108). Thus, in different ways, the female figure contains notions of power and the morals intended for Adimora-Ezeigbo's child audience. But later, the construct of a figure of power in Asa shifts notches down from a heroine to become subdued in marriage. Even though this is mild and subtle to a certain degree and fits into Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense philosophy, it is a statement which I consider to be disempowering. In

some ways, marriage deducts from women's freedom. As seen in the domestic activities of the female animals in *Whisker* and also in *Sunshine*, marriage situates women within the domestic sphere: "A few weeks later, Prince Eras and Princess Asa were married. It was the most fantastic and joyous wedding that ever took place" (*Asa,* 121). Asa marries the prince at the end thus getting rescued from slavery herself. In certain ways, Adimora-Ezeigbo still reinforces established and existing cultural notions of the female gender category as ones to be subjected to marriage as if this is a way of completing their personhood and attaining happiness and fulfilment. The staple fairytale figure of the wronged orphan (who is also a princess in this story) is reinforced.

The usual euphoric and formulaic ending completes the story "Prince Eras and Princess Asa lived happily ever after" (121). Asa could be represented as more physically energetic in more feminist ways and not end up being married while Red One can also emerge eventually as someone less subservient and with a more forceful character if this were not a conventional fairytale. For instance, Adimora-Ezeigbo could have represented Red One as a more assertive character who resists the Wizard of Mula's gluttonous tendencies instead of being weak and subdued all through the story. Adimora-Ezeigbo's treatment of the characters here reinforces her ideological leaning of subtle negotiation which gives high regard to existing gender ordering while negotiating the intersections of patriarchy slowly. A better agency is shown in the treatment of the woman, Olega, in *Sunshine*. Placing Olega beside her husband Usi in certain instances for example, seems to situate the woman's being within the higher social circle of male operation. The couple: "worked hard in the farm and cut wood during the dry season…No day found them idle. If they were not in the farm, they were sure to be in the forest cutting wood or in the market selling their produce" (*Sunshine.* 5). Olega works beside her husband on the farm while Usi also helps her out in kitchen chores. He "helped her to wash the vegetables and peel the yam" (9). The situation is an extension of gender boundaries in more flexible ways that

situate the women within the space which men usually monopolise and showing men within the usual feminine space.

The degree of flexibility in gender boundaries and the measure of feminist triumph which Adimora-Ezeigbo grants the female in her children's literature shows efforts at empowering the women and girls even if this comes in subtle ways in some cases. *Whisker the Brave Cat* is one of Adimora-Ezeigbo's fairytale stories which falls within common traditional oral narrative which mixes reality with the fantastic. The story is cast within a comprehensible frame of an understandable human environment but features mainly animal characters. Unlike most African oral tales which only give partially human traits to anthropomorphised animals, Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Whisker* world is filled with animals with full human traits: "The mothers prepared food and fed their families. Later, they all gathered in the playground on moonlit nights to play, tell stories and learn new ideas to improve their lives" (4). Adimora-Ezeigbo artistically weaves her feminist stance into the main thrust of the tale whilst foregrounding Whisker's bravery as an important moral lesson for children. She presents a world of gender hierarchy which foregrounds a male-centred decision making practice. The male animals' refusal to include their wives in major decision making despite the female animals' eagerness to contribute to the process in their society is a depiction of patriarchy and its different modes of manifestation within a human world. Adimora-Ezeigbo illustrates the reality of the Nigerian patriarchal situation despite attempts by women to transcend and negotiate it in several ways. The mother animals are portrayed as caregivers, cooks and home-makers. While some male animals such as Father Rabbit and Father Cat would openly show that they value the opinion of their wives, others such as Father Goat think nothing of his wife's advice. For examples, Mother Cat is the first to advise on the challenging issue of the Lion family: "Father Cat tried to puzzle out how best to tackle the problem. Mother Cat advised that he should see some heads of families and speak his mind…Father Cat thanked Mother Cat and went to see these heads of families" (60), while

Father Rabbit solicits the inclusion of the female animal mothers in the general assembly of male animals. He persuades the other male animals "Since we the heads of families cannot provide a solution, why don't we ask our wives? They might be able to help us you know" (13). The unwillingness of the other male animals measures the value they place on the mother animals in terms of their capabilities for important political contributions. Adimora-Ezeigbo's female animals are generally voiceless and unappreciated. Even where they give advice it does not carry the same power accorded male utterance. But although *Whisker* comes out in the end as a 'how' tale which explains the presence of domestic animals within human's living environment as a result of the rupture within the animal kingdom at some point, Adimora-Ezeigbo makes an apt feminist statement which in some ways show an ambiguous relation to her feminist political idea. The female animals' subdued position shows the in following:

> Life returned to normal in the animal community. Heads of families continued with their monthly meetings and forgot to invite the mothers… when it was obvious that nothing would come out of the hope they nurtured like babies, the mothers began to talk less about it. The pain of disappointment decreased until it was no longer there. They continued to look after their young ones and husbands. They cooked and cleaned their homes. But something inside them died as days turned into months and as months turned into years. Mothers became very passive and patient (26-27).

Passivity and patience replace active enthusiasm for inclusion in the political affairs. Thus, the male animals occupy and monopolise the political outside space where the female animals are considered irrelevant. Even though the initial inaction of the female animals water down the snail-sense ideal, the reaction reinforces in some ways the calculated movements of the snail, waiting for opportunities for negotiation. This determination to transcend patriarchal obstacles as laid out in snail-sense shows in the moment when the female animals start to be proactive in social concerns. The killing of other animals by the

lion family and other cat families gets to a point where the mothers think they cannot remain passive. The persistently chaotic situation requires concerted efforts which the mother animals reason the fathers alone cannot handle so:

> Mothers decided to come whether they were invited or not. The situation had become critical and the mothers reasoned that they could not sit back and watch while they and their young ones were killed. With or without the permission of the heads of families, they would attend the monthly meetings or any other meetings. They would contribute to discussions on security (81-82).

This important moment of a vital step to assert themselves despite initial passive acceptance of non-participation in the social affairs shows a deliberate move by Adimora-Ezeigbo to reintroduce the agency of the female animals. From this point onwards, they take an active part in the process of emancipation from the oppressive and murderous animals. This stronger feminist stance where the female seeks to rudely break into the standing structure of patriarchy is a step beyond the compromising womanist stand in snail-sense. This goes back to earlier attempts by some of the proactive male animals' efforts to bring their female members to the public meetings. For instance, Father Rabbit who cherishes his wife's ideas tells the other male animals: "Women are more intelligent than many of us think. They are the pillars of our homes. I have no doubt they can also be pillars of our community if we give them the chance" (15). The final decision to invite the women is not implemented until the female animals decide to come uninvited. A similar occurrence is represented in *Children of the Eagle,* where the Osai ladies decide to take a step which negates the customary rules of women participating in the activities of the all-male council. Even though theirs is in form of a letter, it nevertheless represents a breaking of boundaries of silence imposed by tradition just like the female animals do.

That the female animals in *Whisker* wash, clean and make house while the free outside space is left for the male as the sole providers and major decision makers for the

home shows a sharp and undisguised reference to the kind of peripheral and backwards position into which the female animals are pushed. The possibility of children understanding this as a feminist statement may be quite contentious as children are unlikely to read this adult stance into the story. Unlike Adimora-Ezeigbo's other works meant for an adult audience and which depict reality, the interrogation of women's position here does not show an engagement which may likely have a feminist effect on a child audience. The end of the story places a lot of stress on why some animals are domestic while others are wild. At the symbolic level, the fairy tale or folktale grants a writer an undisturbed access to manipulation of the plot and characters of a story in ways which allow the impossible in a fantastic manner. Ordinary things sometimes assume importance through the use to which the writer puts them. Adimora-Ezeigbo could have chosen to use the fairy tale in different ways which navigate the narration in a way that engages the subtle references to patriarchy and shake its boundaries. The culturally indicative symbols point to spaces and the occupiers could easily be subverted to establish changes if the writer so wishes.

In line with the commitments of the African womanist ideal, Adimora-Ezeigbo creates an operative space for motherhood in positive ways. This she does by paying more attention to women within the domestic spheres where they control the space (or should at least do). How she presents this manifests in a culturally specific manner which tallies with Nigerian women writers' cultural reality as mothers, sisters, aunts and daughters. These operative environments are shown as many of the female characters (either as animals or humans) take on these feminised roles in ways that show this culturally normative positioning. Whisker's mother's handling of the domestic arena as cook, dish-washer, child-carer and clothes-washer for the family or Ezezemale's mother and Olega, performing similar roles while Red One's mother plays her role as only a second to King Opoko, who considers her counsel about their daughter quite trivial even though she is proven right eventually, are instances of this normativity in some of the stories. The role of women as

nurturers and carers is given much prominence in line with African feminist discourses with a view to a continuation of this notion. The fixedness of gender roles is common in most of Adimora-Ezeigbo's stories.

Fantasy as a tool for feminist engagement in Adimora-Ezeigbo's works for children

Fantasy stories which are situated within the domestic domain, as in *Whisker, Red One* and *Sunshine,* for example, are rooted in a world recognizable to children and at the same time fixed in a secondary world outside everyday reality which could task children's young minds. But the two worlds are sometimes collapsed by authors offering child readers the chance for a movement in and out of the two conveniently. An obvious reason is the fact that there has been a heavy reliance on the oral traditions which made use of some of the elements to establish certain cultural understandings. A large number of these works borrow from a strong oral tradition as its emergence as a literary body worthy of attention matured over time with critics focusing on its contents as a means of addressing social issues. Feminist writers use this medium as a space for the interrogation of the treatment of women within Africa's cultural space.

In Adimora-Ezeigbo's case, although her predecessor Ogunyemi's womanist literary politics informs her strategies, her own ingenious brain-child of snail sense feminism creates a distinctive mode of female resilience, patience, tenacity, sensitivity and dogged resilience as means of surmounting the African woman's myriad obstacles in order to survive and negotiate issues successfully. Osofisan notes this as a non-confrontational stance in Adimora-Ezeigbo's condemnation of patriarchy. Many female writers from Nigeria follow this non-confrontational trend in the fight for women's emancipation. Creating strong female characters and asserting their place in time and history through literary works enable female writers to confront all forces threatening to silence them (Evwierhoma 55). Driver also argues that old standards could be measured and corrected

using the means of literature to give autonomous value to women's experience by helping them to perceive the various parts of the social system which suppress them. The structure of patriarchy is condemned as an old standard past any usefulness. This is what Adimora-Ezeigbo attempts to engage with by proposing the non-confrontational snail sense feminism, a subtle means of negotiating female subjugation which also accounts for not tackling patriarchy head on even in her children's literature. But in a way a certain hegemonic understanding of cultural gender dictates and prescriptive orderings get reinforced by still portraying them without changes.

In many Nigerian fantasy[2] stories for both adult and children, power held by the female figure has usually been configured in terms of antisocial behaviour. This has gender implications. Many of these oral narratives have often depicted a woman as a witch capable of practices detrimental to social welfare. In most cases the witch in the stories usually comes to a sorry end and is punished for some evil done to serve as lessons to children. Women as witches in stories reflect a deep-seated culture-related subversion of power in women (Kolawole 95). Even though the witch image connotes power and knowledge, a lot of esoteric and negative undertones are attached to it. The witch motif is prevalent in Nigerian oral lore. Carolyn Daniel argues that the witch figure is a pathological image of the bad mother, the one who consumes instead of nurturing. The attribution of magical powers to women is related to "their mysterious abilities to create life" (Campbell, quoted in Daniel 116). In this way the denigration of women as witches is attached to their sexuality in some

[2] Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard* (1952) and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954) are two popular adult fantasy works from Nigeria. Several instances in the stories reflect Tutuola's Nigerian (Yoruba) cultural notions about women. For instance, the experiences of the protagonist of *My Life* where his jealous stepmother deliberately leaves him during a slave catchers' raid shows an age-old notion of women that is consistent with women's images in some oral traditional tales.

ways. Adimora-Ezeigbo turns the figure of women as evil witches[3] in most oral narratives on its head. Where various old tales associate the witch figure with negative characteristics that set them against societal norms for good characters and procreation, Asa, Red One and Sunshine are imbued with positive character traits and spiritual powers that place them within powerful circles of what is usually referred to as witchcraft but far removed from the negative image that tends to perpetuate women's subjugation. All three characters are cast by Adimora-Ezeigbo in a positive light which makes them useful as against causing societal havoc in the stories. From a patriarchal viewpoint, the witch figure is culturally and psychologically fearful, meant to be dreaded and avoided. Christine Wilkie-Stibbs notes that the repression of women through a creation of the figure of female as witches is "necessary to sustain male narratives of supremacy" (109). The sustenance of male supremacy is necessary for the perpetuation of notions of power as predominantly masculine thereby continuing patriarchal interests. The description of the witch figure and body is sometimes distorted in order to reinforce the notion of a fearsome person who is opposed to the patriarchal ordering of society. In her research into Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones*, and *Echoes in the Mind*, Susan Arndt pushes further an understanding of the reasons for the hegemonic presentation of women as witches within oral stories. She writes: "Perhaps the most credible answer is that this kind of image was solely created and has been sustained ever since to keep women under through largely contrived but psychological weapons of ridicule, calumny and vilification" (28). Corroborating Daniel, Arndt also argues

[3] The only one of her books so far, where Adimora-Ezeigbo presents women characters as witches is *Barmaid and the Witches of Izunga* (2010). It is one of her young adult books. But instead of the common antisocial and hostile characteristics of fictional witches, the roles of the four witches in the story are interventionist. They are four women who disguise as witches in order to scare away an audacious barmaid who has just come to town and is luring their husbands away from home. The angry wives make a recourse to a metaphysical confrontation with Barmaid by assuming the identity of witches. With the notion of the age-old fear of witches the women use an unorthodox but effective means of confronting the barmaid who they perceive as an enemy. This particular work came out around a period when there were reports of young girl children being accused of witchcraft and being tortured in the South South zone of Nigeria.There were reported cases of children killed due to accusation of witchcraft. Although Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Barmaid* does not explore the issue of child witches, this work downplays the usual anti-establishment accusations against witches.

that the negative images of women found in oral folktales show an attempt to denigrate women in a bid to subdue them. She surmises that this goes on to show an innate fear of powerful women held by men in most world cultures. She concludes that the image of women as witches is tantamount to subjugation.

In the depiction of the majority of her girl-protagonists, Adimora-Ezeigbo infuses them with the sort of power attributed to people who are considered different and who often exhibit extra-ordinary capabilities. The exhibition of capabilities that are different from an everyday person has usually been a reason for tagging women witches. But in her children's literature, even though she does not refer to them as witches, the unusual abilities of the girl protagonists show them as models of power in the positive direction. Their powers contain notions of liberation which refocus the old notion of witchcraft as negativity. Asa can see the future in her dreams, while Red One has an inherent ability to tell people's future: "… Red One had unusual gifts. One of them was the power to tell people what would happen to them many years to come. She could look at somebody's palm and reveal the person's fortune or misfortune. She can also look into eyes and tell the owner what had happened to him or her in the pat or what could happen in the future". (*Red One*, 51) and Sunshine is magically born, and able to display an ability that moves beyond the everyday child abilities; she can solve mysteries. Sunshine is able to tell the whereabouts of a four-year-old girl who had been lost: "They had almost lost hope when Sunshine solved the mystery…Nobody could tell how Sunshine knew the child was in the next town" (37). The witch-cum-healer figure is reinforced in Asa's ability to identify and make use of herbs. This healing ability is traced to her mother who also could heal using herbs (*Asa,* 36). It is interesting that this ability is traced to Asa's matrilineal connections. The transference of magical powers to the majority of child witches in history have been linked with either their mother or grandmother. Thus, Asa's unusual power with herbs still reflect traces of maternal connections. Asa's abilities with herbs show the common identification of witches with natural things which they can

manipulate using their power. Asa uses these unusual abilities to rescue both herself and the Prince Eras who has been in chains under the sea : “As soon as the prince saw her, his chains fell away and he was free. He rose from the floor where he lay… He said, ‘Princess, you are here at last to rescue me...’” (*Asa*. 110). The final rescue works in favour of both Asa and Prince Eras. Asa’s magical powers are positively employed towards her freedom and that of the prince. While the constraint to Asa’s magical abilities is Princess Akudu, a female, Red One’s subjugation comes from the Wizard, a male. Adimora-Ezeigbo shows how constraints within Nigerian patriarchal configurations can make attempts to subdue the power of the female as seen in the character of the Wizard of Mula. He abducts the little Red One and, curtails and controls her spiritual powers for a long time. This creates the attempt at subjugating the female’s power through established male paths of power. But Red One’s eventual rescue makes a point in Adimora-Ezeigbo’s idea of cooperation and compromise in snail-sense. While she liberates Mansa through her power, Mansa’s coming also restores her freedom from the patriarchal grip of the Wizard of Mula. While Sunshine does not show much sign of agency in comparison to how this reflects in Asa and Red One, her powers are expressed on two occasions. One is in the expression of uncommon ability to proffer solutions to problems as seen in telling where a lost child could be found. The second instance she rescues a chick from a kite, (*Sunshine*. 38). Sunshine is equated with the fortune which Usi and Olega experience as soon as she enters their lives: “Usi and Olega discovered that since Sunshine came into their lives, they had become richer. The child seemed to bring them good fortune” (29). A parallel of the character of the Wizard of Mula emerges in Uta, an orphan boy adopted by Usi and Olega. He taunts Sunshine until she decides to go back into the tree from which the Hunchback brought her as a baby to Usi and Olega. Even though this is for a while, the attempt at subduing the power of Sunshine reflects patriarchal tendencies in Uta. Asa is also contained in this manner through subjection to slavery within the kingdom of Chief Igunu. But the virtues of each girl character and the victory woven

into the outcomes for each of the characters of Asa, Red One, and Sunshine define Adimora-Ezeigbo's efforts at changing the kind of narrative of the witch character in many oral tales from which she takes her stories.

One striking feature of the change that Adimora-Ezeigbo effects in the traditional image in the witch character is the description of the physical looks of her little children witches. Where "cultural paradigms of beauty are overturned and even ridiculed" in many descriptions of typical witch characters (Daniel 131), Adimora-Ezeigbo creates images of beauty in the three characters' bodies. In Asa's case, "some Lubelu people whispered among themselves that Asa was more beautiful and intelligent than Princess Akudu" (*Asa* 3). She has a "lovely face" (43). Red One has the sort of hair that the Ubungu people had never seen. "As Red One grew older, her hair shone like red light" (*Red One* 3). "She was almost five. She grew more beautiful every day. Her hair was longer and shone more brightly" (15). "When Sunshine was seventeen years old, she was the most beautiful girl in Alabego" (*Sunshine* 41). These image descriptions depart from the common ugly stereotype of the witch in tales and create positive images that child readers can easily relate with.

Although Adimora-Ezeigbo succeeds to an extent in making important feminist statements in her works for children as she creates little s/heroes that appear as the protagonists of these works, for instance, Asa rescues the prince from the prison where he is kept under the river, nevertheless, subtle cultural nuances situate Adimora-Ezeigbo's work within a hegemonic patriarchal cultural framework which is yet unmoving despite claims of negotiation. I realise that many of the stories tend to follow her snail-sense subtle negotiation of patriarchy. Women's being is still being negotiated in ways which show an attempt that begs for space of operation for them within the Nigerian cultural milieu. While a change in the status quo is often important to the ultimate development of many of Adimora-Ezeigbo's child protagonists and she works to achieve this within her stories for children, it is obvious that she recognizes the importance of the specifically African

cultural ethos within which the stories operate. Thus, she still responds to many of the moralistic and cultural insinuations which demand feminist attention in her works for children. Particularly in her fairytales where her "ideological posturing and complex aesthetic persuasions" (Onyerionwu 215) are mixed with a leaning towards core African moralistic requirements, the attempt at showcasing female empowerment is toned down. It is important though to mention that even at that, Adimora-Ezeigbo's works for children still remains one of the loudest voices in creating a space for feminist agitations in children's stories in Nigeria.

CHAPTER SIX

Adimora-Ezeigbo's Young Adult Fiction: Womanist Issues in Trafficked

Rare as oyster in River Niger
Jewel of a woman
O sensitive social worker
Where is that oasis in the desert
Of our arid and denuded land?
A beacon on a hilltop
A flashing light in life's lighthouse
Ray of hope: a drop of golden sun
Let it be a boon
Sent from God of mercy
Rare creature
Garlanded with eagle feather…
Pain extinguisher
Pathway to recovery
Love and friendship ignite
Psychic comprehension
Of the feel, taste and need
Of every client
Every patient…
You accept them as they come
Social work is work with people
Intriguing in its complexity…

"Social Worker" *Heart Songs*. Adimora-Ezeigbo 2009

This chapter discusses Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* using her snail-sense feminist strategy to examine the uniquely Nigerian womanist issues that she raises in the text. Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* stands between my discussion of her works for adults and that of children as a sample of her texts meant for young adults.[1] I analyse it here as a work

[1] Others are *Echoes in the mind* (1996), *Rituals and Departures* (1996), *Fractures and Fragments* (2006), *Heart Songs* (2009), *Hands That Crush Stone* (2010), and *The Eagle and Other Poems for Secondary Schools* (2014).

which engages with a social issue that is in certain ways uniquely Nigerian and at the same time of international import. Of all her works so far for young adults, *Trafficked* shows a more focused and direct effort at addressing a particularly key issue of national concern which affects the youth population of Nigeria, that of a new form of slavery of young women, trafficking for sexual purposes. My concern here is the materiality of the story in engaging with the unfavourable position of women even within contemporary Nigeria and how Adimora-Ezeigbo's womanist appraisal of the situation reflects in the text. For the analysis of the issues of women's trafficking raised in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*, I locate my discussion of the text within the writer's snail-sense feminist strategy. As laid out in Chapter One, even though the snail-sense bears a lot of similarities with other womanist variants such as stiwanism, nego-feminism and Africana womanism, for instance, and can be analysed using these womanist theories, the specificities of the snail-sense theoretical structure are quite pronounced in some ways in *Trafficked*. The snail-sense lays emphasis on a gradual gravitation towards female emancipation in ways devoid of confrontation and force. It foregrounds a decentralised strategy of self-reclaiming akin to the movement of the snail. Emphasis is laid on formal education as a means of attaining the womanist ideals which Adimora-Ezeigbo foregrounds in the text. Within the snail-sense, proactivity by the female self is important. One of the highlights is that the self can only impact the community after it has impacted itself through deliberate self-reappraisal and doggedness. According to Adimora-Ezeigbo, the individualistic pattern of the snail which informed the snail-sense womanist theory works well in interrogating ideas of female sexuality, emancipation, autonomy, bonding and group consciousness (*Snail-sense Feminism: Building on an Indigenous Model*, 36). These features are foregrounded in the text *Trafficked* which draws on the inherent ability of humans to transcend societally imposed obstacles by sheer willpower. Resilience, wisdom, sensitivity, and determination, which are important ingredients in the snail-sense feminist strategy, are all built into the

major character of the text in order to emphasise Adimora-Ezeigbo's womanist stance and promote female strength.

Trafficked thematises the menace of women trafficking and its devastating effects on young Nigerian women victims. The story revolves around a young woman Nneoma, who has just been repatriated to Nigeria after spending six years in sexual servitude in London. It is set within two decades after Nigeria's independence from colonialism, a period characterised by the dissipation of the spirit of nationalism which gave birth to independence. The post-colonial Nigerian nation state has fallen into the hands of a profligate political class which is self-serving and undemocratic. The effects of neoliberal policies in Nigeria have left the nation in unprecedented corruption by the leaders and poverty within the populace. Adimora-Ezeigbo creates in *Trafficked* a representation of how the effects of the political period result in a situation whereby young women like Nneoma become entangled in the web of deceits leading from a search for better living conditions outside the shores of Nigeria. The exploitation of women's sexuality becomes one of the means by which desperate local "body merchants" (Nadaswaran, 167) collude with outsiders to deprive unwary Nigerian women of their freedom. With incessant workers' strikes, students' unrest, unpaid pensioners' allowances, incessant and successive military coups, and the profligacy of the elitist political class, young girls like Nneoma become easy targets of trafficking. The lure of the outside with the illusion of a better life captivates Nneoma as she agrees to travel out without her family's knowledge in order to escape the social decadence of the Nigerian nation state. Her family has been in abject poverty due to her father's unpaid gratuity and pension. After a traumatising sexual servitude where she serves Madam Dollar under the watchful eyes of Captain, Madam Dollar's bodyguard, she is arrested on the streets of London and ignominiously deported to Nigeria. *Trafficked* foregrounds the process of reinstating Nneoma and her friend Efe back into the social life of Nigeria through the assistance of a non-governmental organisation set

up by some women. The efforts of women like Dr. Chindo Okehi, a university lecturer, and the all women board members of Oasis, the non-governmental organisation which assists the repatriated women, demonstrates Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense sensibilities in the rehabilitation and empowerment of women through feminine efforts. Nneoma's resilience and personal resolve to transcend social encumbrances by pursuing education in order to rise above the social barriers that sent her out in the first instance shows the snail strategy at "crawling over boulders" without hurting itself. The final triumph of the protagonist is further foregrounded in her reconciliation with her former lover through the model academic, Dr Chindo Okehi.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* can be situated within a literary debate on trafficking which considers the trafficking of persons for the purpose of prostitution as a breach of women's rights and choices. The narrative departs from the debate on prostitution as a situation where women have freedom of choice and can decide on what happens with their bodies. It narrates sexual labour as a situation which takes away women's agency, while denying them their human rights. Anchored on social and political irresponsibility which has created poverty and mass hardship in Nigeria's polity since independence, *Trafficked* engages the issues involved in women's trafficking for sexual purposes from Nigeria to Europe. Ezechi Onyerionwu argues that the urgency of the situation in Nigeria, as at 2008 when the text was written, prompts Adimora-Ezeigbo's imaginative scrutiny of the trafficking issue as she artistically explores the intricate complexity of trafficking and the serious human violations that it involves (321). Employing a victim-centered approach to the issue of women's trafficking, Adimora-Ezeigbo problematises mass migration to the West in ways which show neocolonialist undertones in the story and speak to the years of misrule which have characterised many African nations after gaining independence. Onyerionwu refers to the trafficking business as a "brutish business" which is "a well-syndicated international sex merchandise empire"

(312). *Trafficked* shows this brutal nature of the trafficking business especially in terms of how young women are the brutalised victims. Adimora-Ezeigbo's narration centres on the character named Nneoma, (from Edo State[2] in Nigeria) and her travails as a trafficked and repatriated young woman. The post-traumatic issues in human trafficking which Adimora-Ezeigbo explores in the lives of the victims, Nneoma, Efe, and the other girls are the struggle with established customs and that of regaining a measure of freedom while becoming reintegrated back into Nigerian society. Scrobanek quoted in Rutvica sees the struggle to gain a measure of reintegration after trafficking experience by trafficked women as enmeshed in issues of silence and vocality within their cultures. According to her, the resulting stigmatisation that follows repatriation often compels women to remain silent about their experiences abroad otherwise they become social outcasts (67). This helps them to maintain an appearance of a morally unspoiled womanhood which their society expects of them. While regrets and low self-esteem often characterise the post-trafficking experiences of the majority of the victims as shown in the main character of *Trafficked*, Adimora-Ezeigbo places much emphasis on the importance of will and self-determination at the heart of reintegration for victims of sexual trafficking. Efe makes

[2] Edo State which is one of the thirty-six states in Nigeria has been quite prominent in the trafficking of women in Nigeria. Most authorities which have examined the menace of trafficking as part of the resultant effects of misrule by the political leaders in Nigeria have pointed to the fact that the majority of trafficked Nigerian women come from Edo State. While Shelley (2010) avers that Nigeria is one of the unfortunately positioned nation states which produce a ready market for traffickers, she states categorically that "Nigerian traffickers recruit their victims primarily from the state of Edo in south central part of the country" (95). Kevin Bale and Zoe Trodd (2000) also affirms that majority of trafficked women working as prostitutes in Italy are from Edo State in Nigeria. Aronowitz (2001) argues that "Edo State has a lower poverty rate than three quarters of the states in Nigeria", therefore it is not accurate to say that the high rate of poverty in the region is responsible for the high rate of women trafficking occurring in the state. Cherish Adams sheds more light on the issues which are directly responsible for the endemic rate of women trafficking in Edo State. According to her, while the misrule that has characterized the nation since a decade after its independence from Britain in 1960 has been a major factor in the proliferation of women trafficking, the high ratio of trafficked women from Edo State has been attributed partly to cultural issues which show the treatment of women within the various traditional cultures in Edo State. Tim Braimah (2013) argues that the endemic preference for male children, devaluation of women, primogeniture factors (whereby only firstborn males inherit family property), and general devaluation of girl children which leave many female children out of school have been pointed out as important issues in the proliferation of trafficking in women from Edo State in Nigeria. These are some of the reasons which Adimora-Ezeigbo raises in *Trafficked.*

deliberate efforts to reconstruct her battered being through determination to excel in formal education.

Exploring the productivity of trafficked victims after repatriation, *Trafficked* places agency at the heart of issues of trafficking in women for sexual purposes. Adimora-Ezeigbo's womanist approach is a useful analytical tool for understanding why young Nigerian girls are easily lured and become undocumented migrant sex workers who are at the same time victims of trafficking for sexual purposes. In Nneoma's case, family poverty and an attempt to escape the squalor in which she lives inform her decision to travel abroad in search of better living conditions. Adimora-Ezeigbo's feminist approach also makes it possible to engage with the issue of trafficking within the peculiarities of the social, political and cultural situations of the Nigerian nation. Sex trafficking is closely linked to unfavourable social and political situations in Nigeria. Tracing an historical path of mis-governance that ushered in the hitherto unknown social malaise in Nigeria, Shalini Nadaswaran contends that:

> The trafficking of Nigerian women points back to Nigeria's socio-economic and political structures, particularly the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) which were implemented during Babangida's regime, a reflection of the multi-layered, self-serving, hypocritical governance that increased Nigeria's international debt, overvaluation of the naira, internal corruption and decline into poverty (165).

Lipede's findings also link the unprecedented rise in human trafficking in Nigeria to the worldwide drop in oil price in the 1990s coupled with gross violation of human rights which characterised the military rule of the 1980s into the 1990s in Nigeria. In the same vein, Louise Shelley argues that globalisation exacerbates the proliferation of trafficking of women from third world nations to the developed parts of the world. She contends that apart from other factors such as exploitation, ethnicity, political volatility and conflict, poverty and lack of employment, "globalisation which has encouraged global mobility of

goods and people and more rapid communication is responsible for the rise in the human trafficking business" (48). Within the Nigerian nation, all these factors come together to push the gradual and steady rise in poverty which compelled an outward gaze towards 'better' places where a majority of the populace believe they can have better lives. This disillusion results in young adults' engagement in drug related crimes and trafficking in humans. Although Akor also agrees that poverty is a causative factor for trafficking, he contends that trafficking is not in any way linked to gender issues. What he fails to acknowledge is the precarious situation in which culture and tradition leaves the female person in an unstable economy which leaves women vulnerable and makes them easy targets of traffickers. Women's sexuality thus plays a big role in such situations as their bodies are regarded in terms of their economic worth. Kathleen Barry puts it more succinctly. She links sexual exploitation to national politics and patriarchal agendas. In her words, "Sexual exploitation is a political condition, the foundation of women's subordination and the base from which discrimination against women is constructed and enhanced" (11). This is the situation which Adimora-Ezeigbo creates for the trafficked girls in the novel. Shelley considers this as a reflection of a vicious global economics. She avers that "trafficked victims are caught within a web of global economy" (45) which leaves them with very limited opportunities of escape either outside their state or within their nations. This is because the global web continues to expand while its intricacies continue to be more complicated.

Trafficked also focuses on issues of repatriation as a part of the process which further denies trafficked women the measure of rights as stipulated in the standing laws of the United Nations. The protection and support which victims are to enjoy are shown to be only policy statements which are not respected by some nations like Nigeria. The victims of human trafficking thus face victimisation even in the hands of law agents. This is not unconnected with their gender. In several ways, Adimora-Ezeigbo works through the

moments of emotional state that the trauma and shame of repatriation puts the victims. She creates incidences which depict a means of strength for the trafficked victims. Nneoma and the other repatriated girls face humiliation and condemnation from officials who are neither sympathetic nor helpful. “Shame on you. Go and join the rest of the scum who flew in from Rome a few minutes before you.” (*Trafficked* 17), one of the officers taunts Nneoma and the other repatriated girls as they arrive at the Murtala Mohammed Airport in Nigeria from the United Kingdom. Continuing the mental violation of the victims, the process of repatriation thus becomes one of extradition as victims become stereotypes of human trash. They are “without passports, without any identification… They had been stowed away at the back of the plane during the journey” (2). But they have emerged better empowered to face the conditions which pushed them into the experience in the first place.

The process of reintegration which Adimora-Ezeigbo foregrounds in the person of Nneoma and her other deported colleagues at the Oasis Youth Centre for Skills Development, a fictitious rehabilitation NGO place for trafficked persons in Lagos, shows that there are cultural and political tensions involved in cases of trafficked victims. For instance, the effects of societal attitudes towards sex related issues keeps the young women at the periphery of society. Fearing stigma and living in constant fear of being discovered as a deported sex worker, Nneoma fights to keep her identity as a formerly trafficked woman as secret as possible. But even after her reintegration, she is discovered and disgraced by her employer, Chief Amadi. He asks “Why didn’t you tell me you were a deported prostitute when I interviewed you for this job? He asked brusquely” (272). Chief Amadi’s regards having a former trafficked woman in his employment as a blight on his public image. “I cannot keep someone with your background here” (273). A former victim of sexual trafficking, she is stigmatised and could not be admitted into “decent” society. One of the important messages which Adimora-Ezeigbo intends with the text is expressed through Nneoma’s response at this point. One of the reporters who was at the airport as the

trafficked girls are being shamefully repatriated earlier exposes this secret to Chief Amadi under whom Nneoma now works as a trained tailor. The calmness of her response to the harsh words of Chief Tobias Amadi who sacks her ignominiously shows a realisation of what she must do to reinvent her downtrodden personality:

> What Nneoma found interesting about the whole episode was her reaction to the sack. Instead of crying or begging, she had left the place with her head held high. How different from how it had been when she lost her job as a catering assistant in a London hostel (281).

In the above scene Nneoma displays a sense of dawning hope of reinventing the self and reclaiming of one's body by developing womanist dignity which focuses on opportunities and is not derailed by setbacks. This become important in situations of gender discrimination. Despite her humiliation, Nneoma resolves to get a higher Western education and raise her being higher from the untoward situations from which she is learning through hardship. This is particularly important in Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense feminist project. For her, "Good education is the key to open the door of opportunities for Nigerian women, for when a woman is educated, the family in particular, and the country in general are educated and empowered" (*Snail-sense*. 29). Her advocacy for self-preservation and self-actualisation in the pursuit of individual success and development (*Snail-sense.* 35) are emphasized in Nneoma's response to her predicament. She decides to go back to school. Nneoma shows an understanding that getting a good university education is a way of completing the process of emancipation started at the Oasis. In response to Efe's doubt about her decision to go for a university degree, Nneoma says "I'll try. I'll never be happy until I get a degree. That's the only thing that will complete my healing" (164). The process of reconstructing of her independence and power is thus linked to good education.

Even though the disillusion which sent the young girls into sexual slavery is still prevalent in the nation and getting a Western education does not seem to bring succour to the colleagues they left behind in Nigeria while they were in Italy, Adimora-Ezeigbo makes efforts at showing that good Western education is still one way by which emancipation can come to women. Showing that little has changed in the society since the six years within which Nneoma and her colleagues had been lured into sexual slavery in Europe, Adimora-Ezeigbo weaves an intricate web of incidents which present the social and political situation that gave false hope of a better life elsewhere to the trafficked girls.

> The state government had done nothing to address the teachers' grievances, so the strike had dragged on. Most of the teachers had started trading to survive, as did many of the pupils and students. Some helped their parents work their land. A few had become armed robbers, terrorizing people in their homes or snatching cars from drivers in the highway (109).

Student unrest constantly necessitates closure of higher institutions while the political elites keep stealing the common wealth of the nation. There were incessant changes of government which, in most cases, were through bloody coups by the military. Each change did not bring any difference. Thus disillusionment and lack of hope in the ruling elite create attempts to seek better places outside the country. Nneoma "had left with so much hope and aspirations; now she was returning in shame and hopelessness" (12). By the time she comes back, "civilians were back in power now but little had changed really… corruption was still rife, injustice stamped about like a monster and poverty ravaged the population" (35). Adimora-Ezeigbo shows an awareness of the Nigerian government's various attempts over time at stemming the post-colonial issues which are threatening the well-being of women in the nation. She speaks through the character of the Commissioner for Women Affairs whose address to the repatriated girls at Oasis captures the efforts at curbing the menace of sexual slavery. She says:

> The condition of Nigerian women and children has worsened, especially in the past two decades, as a result of military rule. Violence, brutality and all forms of abuse have multiplied. But the present government is fighting this evil… We want to stamp out prostitution from our society; we want international prostitution to stop. The trafficking of our girls is despicable and this evil trade must be eliminated (55).

The dismal situation which the Commissioner blames on the military regimes remains the same even under democratic governance as women continue to be victims of the abject poverty resulting from maladministration in government.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's approach reflects a consideration of sex trafficking as a form of abuse and violation of women's rights. For her, prostitution is patriarchal in all its ramifications. Even though Efe, Nneoma's friend, at a point deliberately goes back to prostitution in Italy before her deportation, this is depicted as an action borne out of the necessity to fend for herself in a foreign place where she has no other option. In her reminiscences, Efe says "I worked my 'new owner' for two years before I escaped. Then I fled to Verona and teamed up with a prostitute I met there and worked independently for about another year because I wanted to save up money to return home" (100). Constant movement in search of freedom keeps the sex workers in sexual labour. This feeds into part of the major narrative of sexual labour for sexual immigrants from Africa to European nations. Implicating global politics and capitalism in the proliferation of trafficking for sexual exploitation, Kempadoo et al corroborate Adimora-Ezeigbo's idea in the following words:

> Trafficking of women was completely seen to be shaped by hegemonic and local patriarchies, globalized capitalism, and the widening gaps in income and wealth, as well as by reconfigurations of empire under late twentieth century globalization that reinscribed international hierarchies around notions of racial, religious, and national differences (xix).

Thus, much of what transpires in trans-border prostitution feeds back into international capitalist and feminist debates.

Trafficked speaks to the form of support available for repatriated young women victims of trafficking from Nigeria. Housing, medical, legal, financial as well as psychological support in the form of counselling supports become important in reintegrating deportees into the society. There is a marked relative absence of the activities of the Nigerian government in the assistance of the trafficked victims in *Trafficked*. Adimora-Ezeigbo foregrounds the role of NGOs in the challenge of meeting the reintegration needs of Nneoma and her colleagues. Seeming to step in where government has failed, the Oasis speaks to the position of NGOs as the conscience of the Nigerian government as it steps into the vacant spot where the government should have been for the victims but has failed to take the initiative.[3] The weakness of the government's efforts and the lukewarm attitude of the government to address the menace in the years leading to the publishing of *Trafficked* seem to be responsible for the downplaying of Nigerian government activities in the text. Finding the immediate psychological assistance that is much needed at Oasis after the trauma of the process of deportation, Nneoma settles down to pick up the pieces of her battered person after her trafficking ordeal. The referral system which the NGO operates enables the victims to seek fulfilment in handiwork of various kinds. The young women choose from a variety of vocation, "tailoring, hairdressing, catering, and pottery" (52). The support includes "motivational talks, seminars and workshops for residents" of the Oasis Centre. The positive image of the Oasis which

[3] The realisation that Nigeria had become one of the biggest sources, destinations and transit countries for trafficking resulted in the step taken in the year 2000 whereby Nigeria accepted a declaration to prevent and combat trafficking in women and children. The Nigerian government set up the National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons (NAPTIP) on the 14th of July 2003. The agency is saddled with the responsibility of preventing, suppressing and punishing trafficking in persons in Nigeria. An amendment was made in 2005, to the law which set this agency up to include other related offences as there were complications. Newer developments showed the hydra-headed nature of the trafficking menace. But between 2003 and 2007, of the 7500 trafficking cases identified and prosecuted, only a paltry 218 traffickers were actually convicted. The legislation in place was not strong enough to deal appropriately with every trafficking case.

Adimora-Ezeigbo creates in the narrative negates Kampadoo's idea that economic rewards and interests shape much anti-trafficking NGO and institutionalised activity, and often supersede the humanitarian dimensions of the work. Adimora-Ezeigbo foregrounds the warm welcome extended to the girls and the various ways in which they are assisted to be reintegrated back into the social and economic system. For example, the author's description of the women board members of the Oasis Youth Centre for Skills and Development and their reassuring words to the repatriated girls show a commitment that goes beyond what is found in government parastatals:

> Nneoma was impressed. Being the chairperson must mean Mrs Ejekam had founded the organization, didn't it? She was sure all the women were all graduates. How else could they have the ears of the government…She was struck by how simply they were dressed, in comparison to how over-dressed middle-class women often were in the country. Mrs Ejekam and Mrs Oderinde wore boubou made from adire material while Mrs Hart and Mrs Lar were clad in skirt suits made from local fabrics (52).

The arrangements made for the girls' welfare also depicts a situation whereby the reintegration of the girls is at the heart of the Oasis Centre and the coordinators of the place. As the girls settle in, Mrs Ejikam informs them of the various ways by which the centre operates and the welfare packages in place for the girls:

> You will be allowed to choose a trade to learn as part of your rehabilitation… We apprentice our girls to the best practitioners in these trades in Lagos and transport them to and from their work locations… You will get a modest monthly allowance, but since you are fed and clothed, this sum should be enough to take care of any other minor needs you may have (53).

The foregoing example show a commitment that goes beyond personal gains in the process of reinstituting the young women back into the society. It is significant that the Oasis is owned by women providing succour to trafficked younger women. Adimora-Ezeigbo foregrounds the important works of non-governmental organisations in restructuring the lives of socially battered women. In her poetry collection *Heart Songs*, the poem "Social Worker" (partly cited above) recognises the humanitarian dimensions of NGOs' activities. Lines 1 and 2 of the stanza 3 of the poem metaphorically refers to social workers as "pain extinguisher" and "pathway to recovery" directing attention to the importance of their efforts at bringing succour to victims of different social and political ills in the world. This reference to selflessness has already been established in *Trafficked* which was published in 2008. Research carried out by Marina Tzvetkova on the efforts of NGOs to meet the needs of trafficked victims also shows that "trafficking in women is not recognized as an issue of primary concern amongst other development problems that Africa faces" (66). The two researchers show that the role of the state as the guardian of its citizens is often called into question. Where supported reintegration process which is a right owed victims of trafficking is not in place, successful rehabilitation becomes a big struggle for the victims. Even though this may be true, Adimora-Ezeigbo creates hope for ill-used women, where the government has failed in some ways, by foregrounding the succour provided through NGOs.

The progressive way that Adimora-Ezeigbo treats the development of the character of Nneoma shows an expansion of the agency which, though present as Nneoma's personality unfolds initially as a young and precocious girl, has waned in the newly repatriated young woman that we see at the beginning of the narrative. "She had been a happy child, avidly exploring the world around her and finding fun in all she did" (7). But at the point where the story begins, Nneoma has become a victim of the disillusionment which citizens of failed states suffer. Just coming out of a third-party controlled sexual

servitude, Nneoma's self-image passes through an untoward experience which requires a process of re-orientation and total rehabilitation to be fully reintegrated into Nigerian society. Even though self-determination to succeed spurs her into seeking the kind of liberation that formal education can afford her, the writer foregrounds the importance of female bonding to self-healing and total liberation for traumatised women. The friendship between Nneoma and Efe assist the two young women to navigate the challenges of finding peace in a traumatising situation. Nadswaran argues that connection between the two characters, Nneoma and Efe, is a deep form of female bonding necessary in a process of self-reclaiming for psychologically battered women. This womanist bonding helps the two women to identify the threat of being re-trafficked and move against it before it becomes another problem.

A very important issue in women trafficking is the involvement of women as victims, perpetrators and activists. Both Madam Dollar and Madam Gold who are Nneoma and Efe's 'owners' respectively portray the complicity of women in the trafficking of fellow women. Nneoma reflects:

> In Italy I discovered I am trafficked. I have no say in the matter. There's a woman called Madam Dollar… she owns us and the man, whom we learn to call Captain, is her bodyguard. She keeps us prisoners in her flat. Life is hell in Rome – we are always walking the night, selling sex to Italian men and foreigners… As soon as we arrive, she sells my friend. I have not set my eyes on her since (128-129).

A similar experience is narrated by Efe. At the Oasis, women dominate the efforts at reintegrating the trafficked women into the society. This foregrounds a process that puts women at the heart of the trafficking business and the efforts at moving against it (Shelley 84). Adimora-Ezeigbo's literary intervention also formulates a response which places women along the lines of self-reclamation in the trafficking debate. Her thematic explorations in *Trafficked* which show the various overlapping issues involved in the

world-wide exploitation of women offer an insight into women trafficking in Nigeria. Shelley describes the structure of trafficking in women for sexual exploitation as "a self-producing organisational structure" (91). Many of the Nigerian women who act as traffickers or middle women have also been trafficking victims but have themselves become traffickers of other women. The system of the operations shows a unique Nigerian style which engages voodooism in order to silence the victims. The trafficked victims become mentally conditioned to see themselves as bound to the oaths of allegiance to their traffickers. In many ways, this mental conditioning affects how much information victims give about the traffickers and the amount of intervention that could be offered by the government and activists to curb the menace. This is why Shelley concludes that "there is no single strategy that will work in stemming the growth of human trafficking" (302). A unique intervention measures which take cognisance of the uniquely Nigerian psychological means of subduing women trafficked from the region, for instance, would be needed to tackle the effects on women trafficked from Nigeria. Narrating the incidence of oath-taking that bound her to her traffickers, Nneoma reveals to Efe, "the only thing that worries me is that we have to take an oath and they tell us the consequences will be severe if we disregard the terms of agreement…," (*Trafficked.* 127). Shelley's study throws light on the psychological grip on Nigerian trafficked victims. "Women trafficked for sexual exploitation must abide by a pact with their trafficker. This determines how much she must repay and is sealed with Nigerian rituals of voodoo" (91). Madam Dollar's menacing grip on her victims throws light on the kind of technique which the women traffickers employ in dealing with their victims. She employs male physical power to subdue the girls and make them comply. Keeping the trafficked victims under perpetual compliance through harsh treatment is a key strategy in enforcing their compliance. This treatment also hardens them and could be the reason some of those who leave third-party controlled sexual exploitation become traffickers themselves.

A number of the fictional representations of trafficking by Nigerian writers both in the diaspora and at home have also exposed the transnational nature of trafficking and its effects on Nigerian women who are transported for sexual purposes. Examples of these are Bisi Ojediran's *A Daughter For Sale* (2006), Abidemi Sanusi's *Eyo* (2009), Ifeoma Chinweuba's *Merchants of Flesh* (2003), Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sister's Street* (2011) and Ikechukwu Asika's *Tamara* (2013). The proliferation of fictional representation and the attention to trafficking as an issue of concern for Nigerian literary artists since 2006 shows the growing menace of trafficking and its newer dimensions while demonstrating a sincere concern from Nigerian writers. It also points to Nigeria's prominent role in global trafficking and the nation's dominant profile in African literature whereby writers have become social pioneers not only for the nation but for Africa. While Ojediran employs detective and thriller sensibilities in exploring the trafficking of a young victim, Alice, Sanusi in *Eyo* represents the trafficking of under aged children as domestic servants to Europe and their eventual entrance into sexual slavery. The similarities in most of the narrations further reflect what have been clinically enunciated in critical texts. Most of the fictional examinations of trafficking by Nigerian writers show an understanding of the intricacies of trafficking and the subjugated state in which it leaves its victims. While Barry argues that writers often introduce sensationalism which downplays the seriousness of trafficking, and "renders the phenomenon of sexual trafficking and exploitation invisible" (56), Nigerian writers have usually represented the menace of trafficking in serious terms that move beyond mere dramatics for effects to express the devastating condition in a down-to- earth manner. Barry contends that casting sexually exploited victims "as poor, sweet, young things to dramatise and create attention casts suspicion on the veracity of the stories" (56). But I argue that the fact that Sanusi's *Eyo* was nominated for the Commonwealth Prize for literature in 2010 while Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sister's Street* won the highest Nigerian prize for literature, the Nigerian Liquified Natural

Gas (NLNG) prize for literature in 2012, shows that Nigerian writers have represented trafficking in all its ugly facets. The reasons are that the representation of the trafficking issue has gone beyond a mere effort to make a passing dramatic comment on the issue but to draw attention to the seriousness of it in terms of effects such as psychological trauma, loss of independence and selfhood, disillusion and so on on women's sexuality. In ways that take the fictional representation of women trafficking further, Adimora-Ezeigbo shows several of the issues involved in the post-trafficking concerns for repatriated trafficked Nigerian women. Her *Trafficked* moves beyond earlier examinations of the trauma to reposition trafficked women within Nigerian society and offer hope of reintegration without scars using the snail-sense strategy. Where Ojediran's fictional Abel who finally rescues the trafficked Alice sees a dismal future that holds no hope for the poor and battered girl in *A Daughter for Sale*, Adimora-Ezeigbo creates an environment which recreates agency for Nneoma and Efe who are former victims of trafficking. Also, where all the women in Eyo's life such as her mother, the Londoner Lola who holds Eyo in servitude, and Big Madame who makes Eno sell her body for profits all represent women as totally complicit in the trafficking business, Adimora-Ezeigbo shows the two types of women figure who are on the two sides of the trafficking menace, the women as perpetrators and the women as rescuers. The women of the Oasis center are the hope of the disillusioned trafficked victims.

Engaging in this type of narrative response to issues of subjugation of women within emerging global trends offers insight into Adimora-Ezeigbo's continued womanist efforts. Of more importance in these regards is the audience to which the text is directed, the young adults. The text offers solutions which objectively underscore the importance of womanist efforts aimed at supporting women in trauma. In several ways, *Trafficked* addresses an important issue in the contemporary history-making process of establishing a new dimension in women's subjectivities in Nigeria. Although an international

phenomenon, the many ways by which the Nigerian women appear as the abused and the abuser in this text further demonstrates Adimora-Ezeigbo's efforts and practical concerns with fictionally memorialising the rights of women in post-colonial Nigeria and pinning them down in national history through literary works. For Barry, that sexual slavery is not new and that it has ever been "pervasive throughout patriarchal societies" (40) necessitates concerted efforts on the parts of the gender that has always been the victim. In her words "to recognise women as survivors is not enough. There is a difference between survival and effective survival. Effective survival necessitates women coming together over the serious threat of sexual violence and organizing against it." (49). Women writers' representation of the issues in women trafficking such as Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* and the roles of women-led NGOs such as is represented in the fictional Oasis thus become part of the organising for an "effective survival" for victims.

This chapter has demonstrated that Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail-sense also maps important post-colonial cultural intersections and realities for young Nigerian women. Her preoccupation with issues of emancipation through deliberate self-help which is one of the tenets of the snail-sense feminism pervades the general atmosphere of the text *Trafficked*. Even though other Nigerian writers had explored the women trafficking issue before he wrote *Trafficked*, the deliberate manner in which she imbues the story with the need for women to be decisive in reworking the process of self-redefinition refocuses the snail-sense feminist strategy.

Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Studies

The direction of the argument of the thesis has been towards the examination of the uniquely Nigerian womanist ethos in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's works. Her snail-sense feminist strategy has been proven to be an alternative feminist model which sheds light on her literary efforts and provides a basis for understanding her womanist vision. By subjecting her stories to her snail-sense womanist lens, the research sheds light on Adimora-Ezeigbo's voice in the debate on women's emancipation in Nigeria through representational texts. Her literary depictions of the various social, cultural and political conditions of women and the complex nature of the cultural society within which Nigerian women live compels an understanding of her works within the social background in which she situates these stories. In this respect, her works show that the snail-sense approach to rethinking Nigerian women's condition stretches back into women's history of power in precolonial Nigeria. Thus, women have always been history makers, history recorders and power brokers in various ways. While interrogating this history of gender power, her snail-sense also reappraises the notion within newer realities of present-day Nigeria.

The propelling forces behind the literary output from women writers in Nigeria have often been the different cultural movements in literature since the 1960s. Beginning with the precursors such as Flora Nwapa, Esther Bali, Bolanle Awe, and Buchi Emecheta, a handful of women who were writing back to reclaim spaces of visibility and audibility for women in the Nigerian canon, the global rise in awareness of women's rights in the 1990s brought more Nigerian women on to the writing scene. They were building on the earlier model in newer ways. The awareness of a need to create an image of strong and empowered African women contrary to the existing lacklustre one created by male writers propelled the changes that started in this period. Revolutionary in purpose, the efforts to showcase a different scenario of women's lived experiences create in their wake rippling effects which combine home based and international awareness of the condition of women

and the position of the woman as a writer and as the one written about. Compelled by earlier misrepresentations of women by male writers to create s/heroes whose figures embody the cultural attitudes that define the pre and post-colonial Nigerian woman, Flora Nwapa, the first West African female writer to publish a novel with Heinemann, consciously observes the dynamism in the traditional cultures of the pre-colonial period in Nigeria while the generations of women writers who followed in her footsteps have also worked within this milieu of the constantly changing times which affect women culturally. Those who built on Nwapa's earlier efforts differ in some ways from what they consider an approach which was not yet strong enough to challenge the existing image of African women in male-authored texts. They artistically represent in their works a history of women whose existence has not usually been anchored on that of their men. In this research, apart from building on the works of her female predecessors, Adimora-Ezeigbo's works are studied as a means by which she codifies the debates on womanism in Africa through her snail-sense feminist model, thereby showing the ways by which she departs from the approach in some of the earlier women-authored works in Nigeria.

In many cases, issues relating to the rights of women raised in African women writers' works can have a pan-Africanist outlook due to the homogeneity observed in the social and economic pattern in many African societies. The focus on familial relationships and the importance of the community as a centring force, for instance, is a pattern common in many African social settings. With similarities in living patterns and changes in social conditions experienced all over the African continent due to Western influences, the convergence of social cultures is becoming more similar and pronounced. For instance, trans-border prostitution as an international issue in African nations gives *Trafficked,* Adimora-Ezeigbo's 2008 young adult novel, a pan-Africanist womanist outlook. The novel explores the issue of transnational migration as a phenomenon across Africa and with implications for all womanist writers. The social situation leading to the new social menace

of trafficking of women for sexual exploitation cuts across African nations and holds the same results for women caught in the web of this criminal and vicious international trade.

The different ways by which Adimora-Ezeigbo creates fictional reworkings of the snail-sense through her literary works used in this study demonstrates the peculiarities of the snail-sense to the Nigerian society even though it can be generalised for the majority of African societies. While the adult and young adult novels of Adimora-Ezeigbo provide a very straightforward examination of her snail-sense agenda by the representation of women's conditions in direct ways, her children's fiction used in the study provide a less direct approach to the snail-sense model of women's engagement with power. But the similarities of the spatial settings of the texts make it possible to extend the nuances of the snail-sense even in Adimora-Ezeigbo's children's books. All the representational works show different levels of the writer's illustration of women's condition and state. All of the works dealt with in the thesis have been treated as Adimora-Ezeigbo's creative response to a history of power and the changes that have happened to women's power base within the Nigerian cultural base over time. In addition, while her snail-sense has been shown as not too different in several ways to others such as stiwanism and motherism from Nigerian women writers and critics, for instance, it is more Nigerian in conception where the others are continentally African.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's works could be seen to respond in several ways to the search for feminist aesthetics that is peculiarly Nigerian and meant to recall moments in history where women held measures of power alongside their men. While her trilogy seeks to reestablish the claims of many of the womanist writers and critics on the continent that there have been demonstrations of women's political power in history, her children's literature used in this study show that she makes authorial efforts to create awareness about the importance of gender complementarity in her works for young children. As this thesis demonstrates, Adimora-Ezeigbo's children's literature set within the urban realistic

environment of 21st century Nigeria validates a direct attention to issues of women's power than those within the fantastic as can be seen in her fairytales used in this research. But the resonance of the call for feminist emancipation through a snail-sense approach spread through all the books in different measures.

Within this research I have only used Adimora-Ezeigbo's prose texts with very minimal references to a few of her works in drama and poetry. The choice of using only the prosaic forms of her works is connected to the fact that many of Adimora-Ezeigbo's works appear in prose more than the other two genres. Also, the unavailability of space within the research for the inclusion of more of Adimora-Ezeigbo's literary outputs to buttress her snail-sense standpoint informs the use of the number of texts in the study. This is why the thesis makes choices across her prose works within the three types of audiences she writes for rather than across the genres in which she writes. Thus, the thesis examines the resonance of her snail-sense feminist strategies in all the books used in the research.

One of the important conclusions drawn from the research is that even though Adimora-Ezeigbo proposes a deliberately slow pace of social and political emancipation for women in Nigeria through the snail-sense feminist model, the subtle nuances of the model create a sense of the enormity of the emancipatory work before Nigerian women. This has been one of the questions that have been raised against the effectiveness of the model as an adequate approach to women's liberation in Nigeria. But the snail strategy considers patriarchy as a culture built over time and whose dissolution must also be time conscious. Even though the representational women characters usually transcend the obstacles rather than getting totally overwhelmed by them, the natural process of change which the snail-sense model proposes might be too slow to catch up with global realities for Nigerian women. As demonstrated in *The Last of the Strong Ones*, the withdrawal of the measure of social and political power demonstrated in the powerful four women referred to as the Oluada, shows a representational historical process which has left women

out of the political history of their nation due to changes in political and social systems over time in Nigeria. The responses of the strong women in *Children of the Eagle* demonstrates the changing ethos and the efforts to bring demand for a measure of womanist power within the newer realities of Nigeria which is used for the wider setting of the narrative. An examination of works of other Nigerian women writers which show other womanist variants could further put Adimora-Ezeigbo's works in greater perspective.

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