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Women in Colonial Space: A Study of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy*

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Abstract

Chinua Achebe and Ferdinand Oyono in their novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *Houseboy*, present women in three phases: as people who are sadly oppressed by their male counterparts, people who contribute in their subjugation by accepting the norms placed on them, and as powerful women. Many critics have focused their analysis on the oppression of women without considering the role of women in their own subjugation. Though their assumptions may appear to be right, women in these novels possess a degree of power. This study submits that, women's suppression comes as a result of indigenous patriarchy and colonial patriarchal custom. The study has as findings that women accept some of the positions given them and even help in their suppression. The ones who try to speak out are either not heard, that is, "speaking in the belly of a beast" or considered in other lights. This study uses the Postcolonial feminist theory

for its analysis. The theory is suitable for this study because it presents the forms of marginalization and exclusion of women, and the misrepresentation of their roles. The study concludes that women are active, but their roles are underestimated by their counterparts, and they end up accepting the position given to them.

Keywords: Women, patriarchy, subjugation, Postcolonial Feminism

Introduction

Sex, biologically considers human beings and classifies them into two broad social categories namely, male and female. Gender, on the other hand attaches cultural roles in this classification of individual persons (human beings) into sexual categories. The difference between the male and the female is, first, based on biological characteristics and attributes of the two sexes. However, the centrality of the biological or physical factors has been roundly contested by some scholars. Theodora Ezeigbo suggests that “gender is constructed along psychological, cultural and social lines” (25). In her book, *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir suggests that women are constructed by men as passive inconsequential objects.

According to Postcolonial feminism, the term “woman” should not be limited to universal group because it will limit it to gender; rather, it should be defined by their roles, social class, race, ethnicity and sexual preference. A woman can be defined as an adult female who play significant roles. Woman from old English is “wifmon” which means “wifeman”. To Simon de Beauvoir, one is not born a woman but become one. That is, the sex difference does not give you a subordinate position but the society does.

Postcolonial feminist theory is primarily concerned with the representation of women in once colonized countries. When we apply the postcolonial feminist theory to *Things Fall Apart*, so many interesting readings will develop before our eyes. According to this type of postcolonial theory, the colonizer believes that he is the supporter and helper of the colonized. In fact, the male of the society depicted in the novel *Things Fall Apart* is the first part of the binary of self/other. He is the creator and controller of the colonized. Okonkwo is the self and his wives are the other and the latter is to be handled and managed by the former.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe presents us with a traditional society in which women are generally a subaltern group in the margin of society, docile and accepting the multiple levels of subjugation with utmost grace. According to Nelly Furman “in a world defined by man, the trouble with woman is that she is at once an object of desire and an object of exchange, valued on the one hand as a person in her own right, and on the other considered simply as a relational sign between” (61). Women in the colonial space are either depicted as docile wives whose identities are recognized through their husbands or they gain identity through motherhood.

Oyono appears as a socially dedicated writer who responds to colonial discourse by reacting to the fundamental requirements of his era, which is that of liberating the Cameroonians from the chains of colonialism and all forms of enslavement- physically, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, and psychologically. Thus, it must be acknowledged

that Oyono's *Houseboy* is a powerful novel of the evils of colonial experience. The novel recounts the failures and disillusion of French imperialism in most areas of life in Africa.

Oyono's novel *Houseboy* portrays women as opportunistic, weak, sexual objects and lacking sufficient will-power. These designations and roles valorize or devalue the female characters in the novels. This study supports the assertion by Kenneth Little that the male francophone African writers routinely portray their female characters in the stereotype as an oppressed and subjected wife who has little, if any, say in shaping her destiny or in changing the system that deprives and oppresses her.

Bolanle Awe states that in the pre-colonial period, women were... to be found in virtually all spheres of human endeavour... they were active in agriculture... the field of politics and decision-making, they played a prominent role at the local level (314-315). In the novel, women are portrayed as helpless, dependent, brutalized, belittled, either concubines or prostitutes destined in Ogunyemi's words "to carry foofoo and soup to men dealing with important matters." The image of women in African literature is compounded by the unhelpful hand of tradition, patriarchy and colonialism. Colonization upsets the legal arrangement of African communities by the introduction of the nineteenth century European notions of patriarchy. As a result, the traditional system, which gives women the opportunity to exercise their rights in both private sphere and public domains, is disrupted.

Also, in *Things Fall Apart*, patriarchy intrudes into any sphere of life. What we can read from the beginning of this novel is the world that centers on male. The man is regarded as everything and the woman as nothing. Women in the colonial space are as seen weak and inferior. A woman is the man's possession- as wives and his other possession like yam barns, and title. Men who have all these possession are respected and get the highest title in the clan. This can be seen in the lines: "There was a wealthy man in Okonkwo's village who had three huge barns, nine wives and thirty children. His name was Nwakibie and he had taken the highest but one title which a man could take in the clan" (18). In *Things Fall Apart*, women are viewed mainly as child bearers and help mates for their husbands. They are seen as one of his possessions, and her role as a woman is underestimated since she is considered as a weaker sex.

Furthermore, women in *Things Fall Apart* are not given the identity that is desirable. Else, how does one explain the fact that the mother of Okonkwo, that is Unoka's wife, does not have a name by which she is identified in the text? Similarly, one notices that the first wife of Okonkwo is simply referred to as "Nwoye's mother". This suggests that the female gender has been constructed to show their lack of identity in a colonial African space.

Women in this period have been silenced by their male counterparts. As such, they are to be seen and not heard. In this novel, the women are expected to act as they are told without questioning. Okonkwo has three wives whom he treats with a heavy hand. He asks his senior wife to look after a boy, and when she asks about the time of his stay with them, he shouts at her and orders her not to question what he had said:

“He belongs to the clan”, he told her. “So, look after him”. “Is he staying along with us?” She asked.

“Do what you are told woman ”(18).

Okonkwo shouts and despises her by saying, “When do you become one of the ndichie (clan elders)? (18).”

Women in this novel are placed in an inferior position to the point that they are not expected to question anything that they are being told by their male counterparts. The patriarchal construction that men are the authority and women their belonging gave a lot of power to the men. This condition reduces the roles of women in the real life. In Bessie Head in *The Collector of Treasures* states: “The ancestors made so many errors and one of the most bitter making things was that they relegated to men a superior position in the tribe, while women were regarded in a congenital sense, as being an inferior form of human life. To this day, a woman still suffered from all the calamities that befall an inferior form of life” (92). It is from this inferior position that a black woman is struggling to rise. With the limited power at her disposal, she tries to make a better life.

In *Houseboy*, the Engineer tells Sophie to sit at the back of the van in one of their travels. This is because, he doesn’t want to identify with her in public, yet he wants to use her sexually at the background. Sophie feels embarrassed and thinks that she isn’t different from the other ladies he carries in front. Sophie laments thus, “...my arse is just as delicate as the arse of the ladies they have up in the driver’s cabin...” (38). What is more, any time a White lad visits, he would grant Sophie leave of absence and instruct her on how to behave; to pretend that she doesn’t know him whenever he is with a White lady. He gives orders to Sophie like: “Sophie, don’t come today. I’ve got a European coming to see me at the house. Sophie, you can come, the European has gone. Sophie, when you see me with a White lady don’t look at me, don’t greet me, and all the rest”. This is an indicator that he feels ashamed to identify with Sophie in the presence of his white colleagues given that he even grants her a leave of absence in such occasions. He doesn’t want his white friend to even have a knowledge of him knowing Sophie not to talk of having an affair with her.

According to *Women of Africa: Root of Oppression*, “the African woman of rural area is portrayed as more than a slave, who goes about her task with silent acceptance... she never speaks about herself but always spoken about”. In Achebe’s novel, women are brutalized and treated as slaves. In chapter four of the novel, we see an incident of violence against women in the novel. Okonkwo who is the major character in the novel beats his wife seriously. He is provoked when his youngest wife, Ojuigo did not return early enough to cook the afternoon meal for him. The wife went to plait her hair at her friend’s house, forgetting that it was her turn to cook for their husband. The incident led to Okonkwo violating the law of week of peace. Women in this society could be beaten by their husband at will. After beating his wife, he is punished not because he beats her, but because he beats her in the week of peace. The reaction the women get is an evidence that they are being seen as natives in the lenses of the men.

Interestingly, Oyono presents the hypocritical attitudes of Europeans who pretend to hate the Blacks, yet they still sleep with the natives and conceal their deeds from one another. We are exposed to the fact that European men often “send their boys into the location to hire a ‘mamie’ for them” (46). The French Agricultural Engineer identified only as “Sophie’s lover” gives us a case in point of how deceitful and hypocritical the Whites can be, particularly when controlled by their sexual desire. The agricultural Engineer keeps Sophie around for sex, yet hides her as a secret from other colonialists by maintaining that she was his “cook” (37). Sophie makes this clear when she informs Toundi: “He told me he was afraid of the Commandant, his Chief, and that he couldn’t tell him he was my boy-friend. That’s why he said I was his cook” (44). The Engineer does not reveal to the commandant who Sophie is to him because he knows that he will be seen as a disgrace, and as a result, a failure to his race.

The Engineer not only hides his lust for Sophie from other Europeans, for the story tells us that he could not leave her “alone in Dangan with old Janopoulos” (43). The relationship and the Engineer’s affection for Sophie is even made more hypocritical when Toundi receives a threat from the Engineer not to have affairs with her. On one occasion when the Engineer could no longer bear the emotional pain, he questions Toundi bitterly: “You are sleeping in the same hut as Sophie, aren’t you?” (42), then laments thus: “I’m sending her to hospital as soon as we get back to Dangan. I’m sending her to the hospital...” (42), and subsequently threatens Toundi: “I shall know where to find you” (42). This shows that the Engineer loves Sophie only because he uses her to satisfy his sexual gratification. As such, he doesn’t want anyone to divert her attention, which may lead to him losing her.

In chapter five of Achebe’s novel, Okonkwo commits another crime of wife battery against his second wife. The said wife had cut off a few leaves from a young tender banana tree to wrap some food; the action offends Okonkwo. The incident leads Okonkwo to another crime of attempted murder. Okonkwo makes an attempt to murder his second wife by gun shot, when the woman, having been beaten by Okonkwo, humiliates Okonkwo and his gun that never shots. The scene clearly demonstrates that Okonkwo has a weakened ability to prevent his thoughtless violent aggression. According to Ethel Klein in “Stages of Feminism” in the book *Gender Politics*, women were there... punching bags for the release of anger that they in turn accepted that they were not capable of their nation. Another violence against women is recorded in chapter ten. Uzowulu who has been found in the habit of beating his wife, Mgbafo all the time beats his pregnant wife in an occasion that leads to miscarriage. Uzowulu violent act against his wife Mgbafo shows that the woman suffers injuries, emotional or psychological effect from her husband and other men. According to Abadi et al, “domestic violence during pregnancy is a global social problem due to its potential ability to physically and psychologically harm a woman and her foetus”. Zora Hurston Neale in *Their Eyes were Watching God* defines the position of a black woman as a bearer of all the societal problems when Nanny explains to Janie that “de whiteman is de ruler of everything” (14) and “De whiteman throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He picks it up because he have to, but he don’t tote it. He hands it to his women folks. De nigger woman is the de mule

uh de world so fur as Ah can see” (14). Nanny here gives the impression that the women are the ones who shoulders all the load of the society since the loads finally ends with them often moving from one hand to another.

Toundi in *Houseboy* clearly recognizes a link between frustrated sexuality and violence in father Vandermayer but dismisses it because he was not affected: he loves to beat the Christians who have committed adultery – native Christians of course. He makes them undress in his office while he repeats in the same light. He asked them “when you were kissing, weren’t you ashamed before God? (50). Toundi’s silent acceptance of Vandermayer’s hypocrisy becomes the verge of his own origin into the European confusion of sexuality and violence explored throughout the rest of the novel. Evidently, violence is used to control female sexuality behavior and this is why violence against women finds expression in sexual forms. Oyono examines the injustices of the colonial system and expresses the hypocrisy and insincerity of Europeans in their relationship with Africans, which to my mind reflects the harshly sarcastic views of French colonial administration and the work of Christian missionaries alongside the questionable claim of “civilizing” Africans.

At the same time, Achebe in the same novel shows true romantic love affairs between some married couples in the Igbo society, like Ogbuefi Ndulue and his first wife, Ozoemena. They love each other very much. Ndulue never does anything without consulting Ozoemena. They even die together. When Ndulue dies, the youngest wife goes to Ozoemena in order to inform her “to be present at the washing of the body, she [finds] her lying on the mat, dead” (61-62). Obierika says: It was always said that Ndulue and Ozoemena had one mind... I remember when I was a young boy there was a song about them. He could not do anything without telling her. This is an example of perfect understanding and love between husband and wife. But in Igbo society, a husband is seen as weak if he respects and consults his wife. When Okonkwo hears the words of Obierika about the couple, he says, “I (Okonkwo) thought he (Ndulue) was a strong man in his youth”. Ndulue, loving and consulting his wife makes him weak in the eyes of Okonkwo who is a chauvinist.

Also, women are excluded in decision making and council of war. They were not invited to stay when men were engaged in any discussion. They are not included in councils of war, because war is considered to be a man’s job in patriarchal society. They did not form part of the masquerades representing the council and ancestral spirits. The social structure of this community can be seen from the way the people stand or sit in the ceremony. The titled men and elders (the most respected men) sit on their special seat called stool. The crowd, people watching the ceremony, stands a bit distant. On the other side, the women just look on from the fringe. They are not involved in the meeting, not even as audience. The women are like the outsiders. “It was clear from the way the crowd stood or sat that the ceremony was for men. There were many women, but they looked on from the fringe like outsiders” (83). According to Molar Ogundupe Leslie in her preaching of Stiwanism, women should be included in these spheres. Women have the potential to actively participate in the social, political and economic spheres, but the societal construct have placed them in limited areas. Including them in every

society, makes life better given that they are better leaders and educators. The role of women in Achebe's novel is underestimated by many critics though their role should be projected with its great significance.

Furthermore, certain roles in the colonial space are being ascribed as either feminine or masculine. Okonkwo never allows himself to be mistaken for a woman, and he makes no mistake about it as he declares:

Let's not reason like cowards, said Okonkwo. If a man comes into my hut and defecates on the floor, what do I do? Do I shut my eyes? No! I take a stick and break his head. That is what a man does. These people are pouring filth over us and Okeke pretends not to see. Okonkwo made a sound full of disgust. This was a womanly clan, he thought. Such a thing could never happen in his fatherland (113).

Okonkwo's society in the novel is a patriarchal one; that is why men dominate it. His radicalism is equally displayed at all levels, even towards his wives and children. To him, anything bad should come from women, because men are not bound to make mistakes. Ironically, he goes to his mother's land to find refuge after committing a crime and he is sent on exile.

Though Oyono portrays women as victims, they can also be projected as directors. Sophie, in this novel displays a dual role of a victim and a controller. Sophie appears to be controlled in very possible ways by the engineer and the social conduct. In the presence of Toundi she opens up and expresses her immense unhappiness and anger at her current predicament. Even though Sophie is portrayed as a victim of the engineer's presence, she blossoms when speaking to Toundi in private. Sophie tells Toundi of her secret plan to run away to Guinea Spanish. Although she states that she doesn't mean anything to the engineer and that fortunately "it's good job its mutual" (27), she later questions what "other women have that she does not have" (38). She appears to have some control over the engineer when he brings her out on an outing with him for fear of leaving her with the old Janopoulos who also uses her as his sexual object. She eventually takes control of her own existence by running off with the engineer's 150,000 francs and achieving an aspect of freedom for the first time in her life. Through Sophie, Oyono depicts a female character who has avoided social convention and determinism to redefine or remake herself within given situations.

In Achebe's novel, when Ezinma, the daughter of his second wife, asked him if she could bring his chair for him, Okonkwo replies that it is a boy's job (42). Although, Ezinma is strong and smart enough to do the job, her father refuses her from doing it because he sees her as weak, like other women. In Okonkwo's mind, men must be strong, violent, and hard working. He wanted these characteristics belong to his sons. That a man must be able to control women is kept in his mind. All the characteristics he wishes for his sons are portrayed in the life of his daughter. Though he suppresses this resilient attitude of Ezinma, that doesn't stop her from being a strong woman. To ensure that his sons obey him and value the tradition as Okonkwo, he is proud of telling stories about his wars, violence and bloodshed. He is determined that this custom must be preserved and valued. This kind of stories differs from female stories that tell much about fable, animal stories or legend. Okonkwo is happy when he

hears him grumbling about women. That shows that in time he would be able to control his womenfolk. No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children (and especially his women) he was not really a man. (49-50)

In Oyono's *Houseboy*, both black and white women are looked up to as sexual objects. The natives also ridicule of the whites. One of the natives, Mekongo, "the army veteran" (57) reveals that the Commandant's wife is like other women. He informs his fellow natives that he has also slept with White women (58) and that the "White Madames" equally sleep with their houseboys. "It's quite normal" (95-96). Here, the statement implies that even though "the whites forbid us [Africans] their women" (57), it reveals the potentials of black men sleeping with white women and the fact that decidedly white women are prostitutes (58). This assertion vividly depicts the moral destitution of the White women. Moreau's houseboy expresses this candidly when he remarks: "None of the white women are much good" (71). They only pretend to be religious and of high moral standing when they come to Africa. Women here are seen a people of lower standard when it comes to morality, yet the men, promoters of promiscuity are ironically not mentioned as perpetrators of the act.

In Achebe's novel, the people make a living by growing yam. The yam is synonymous with virility. This prestigious plant brings with it the owner's respect and dignity. According to Gayatri Spivak, in a colonized society, the roles of the females are chosen by the male and for the male. The roles chosen to the female folk in the Igbo culture are also indicative of gender discrimination. The women are given few roles to perform. Even crops that are planted there are gender based. Okonkwo, a 'manly' character is fond of sowing yams, 'king of crops' and it is considered a man's crop. On the other hand, his mother, sisters and wives grew women's crops such as coco-yams, beans and cassava. Yam in this society stands for manliness, the plant for men while cocoyam and cassava are seen as a woman's crop: "Yam stood for manliness, and he who could feed his family on yams from one harvest to another was a very great man indeed... Yam, the king of crops, is a very exacting king" (31-32). Cocoyam, cassava and yams of smaller sizes and lesser value are regarded as female.

Unoka, Okonkwo's father, is considered an untitled man, connoting femininity (20). Though he is an artist, his skills are not regarded because he has no title. As such, he is regarded by other men in his community as a woman, simply because he has no title. The greatest fright of his son, Okonkwo is to be like his father, who is considered lazy. Similarly, Osugo has taken no title; so, in a gathering of his peers, Okonkwo unkindly tells him, "This meeting is for men" (28). All men according to Okonkwo should be title holders, and any man without a title to him is not worth to be called a man, and therefore, he should be referred to as a woman. People with no title are considered to be weak and lazy, and associating them to a woman is an indication that women are looked upon as lazy and weak. This assumption is faulty because women are active in different spheres and they actively participate in different areas in their family and community.

Though women play important roles in their society, and economic activities are held by them in both private and public spheres, their roles are eschewed and misrepresented.

Women in this novel are very hard working. To produce an abundant harvest, the traditional farmer needs a good workforce. Women constitute and still do the core of the rural workforce — farming, tending animals, nurturing children. In preparing for festival, all of the women will be very busy preparing the abundant foods for all of the villages and their relatives from outside of village. In any kind of ceremony, women work hard with many activities (34). Again, women are seen as educators. Okonkwo prefers Ezinma and it is Ekwefi who has educated and trained her. As a mother, psychologically she sharpens Ezinma's mind and makes her to be alert about things.

Women are also seen as brave. Though “terror seized her” (91), “her heart beat violently” (91) Ekwefi chased the priest in dark night without bothering about the society or the deities. She is not afraid of the possible dangers in deserted paths in darkness. Unpaved paths with weeds or rotten branches could not stop her. She seems like a warrior who is running for the sake of her daughter's life. Nothing in the world can stop her. She is ready to face the deities and even to sacrifice her life. “She swore if she heard her cry: she would rush into the cave to defend her against the gods in the world. She would die with her” (147). Some men may not be able to act like Ekwefi, even in a desperate situation. Her brevity is portrayed in the manner in which she tries to save her only daughter. Nevertheless, Ekwefi is the most spirited of Okonkwo's wives and frequently stands up to him and talks back.

Women Contribution in their Subjugation

Another important factor in these novels that should not be underestimated is the fact that, women also contribute in their subjugation. Ekwefi, the second wife of Okonkwo in Achebe's novel is represented as a cheap and immoral woman who escapes from her husband for no justifiable reason only to throw herself, uninvited, on Okonkwo, apparently because of the latter's fame and achievement. As we are informed regarding Ekwefi:

She had married Anene because Okonkwo was too poor then to marry... She was going to the stream to fetch water. Okonkwo's house was on the way to the stream. She went in and knocked at his door and he came out... He just carried her into his bed and in the darkness began to feel around her waist for the loose end of her cloth (109).

Okonkwo did not invite Ekwefi to sexually harass her. Ekwefi, though married, thinks that a relationship with Okonkwo will make her to be better placed in her society given that he is a famous and hardworking man. Her interest is to be better placed in the society regardless of how she goes about it or what the people will say. She marries Anene not out of love, but because of his economic positioning. Since Okonkwo strives to a better position, she also shifts her attention towards him and visits him uninvited.

Furthermore, we get to know about the hypocritical nature of the Commandant's wife, Madame in Oyono's novel when her illegal love affair is revealed. This hypocrisy is exposed in her affairs with M. Moreau, the Director of prisons. It becomes shocking to witness Madame's illicit love affairs with whoever is available. According to Ethel Klein in *Gender Politics*, “women were therefore nothing but pleasure objects to the delight of men” (98-99). She takes advantage of her husband's frequent tours to engage in illegal sexual relationship

with the Director of Prisons. The Commandant's reaction upon discovering his wife's infidelity harshly reveals his wife's regular habits. He quickly tells her that: "You didn't even give it a bit of time before you started deceiving me out here as well...and the natives had to know all about it before I did" (98). Women in the French colonial space as portrayed in the novel are seen as prostitutes, who go about sleeping with other men even as married women.

Also, the story informs us that: "There was not a soul unaware that the wife of the Commandant was deceiving her husband with M. Moreau the prison-director" (71). Speaking of Madame's shameful act, Moreau's houseboy says in hatred: "Even the wife of a great chief like the Commandant let herself be taken on the seat of her husband's car down some Dangan lane" (71). Madame as part of her deceiving act has one set of smile for her lover and an entirely different set for her husband. Toundi informs us thus: "When she smiled at M. Moreau I could see only her eyelashes. When she smiled at the Commandant you could tell from the perspiration on her forehead how hard she was trying to keep her laughter sounding completely natural" (72). Madame's sexually promiscuous habit has become a lifestyle to her to the point that she knows how to manage the different presence and tension. She doesn't feel shameful with her act, and even when her husband gets to know, it means nothing to her. She does not sleep with particular people, but anyone available. This gives room for the men to use her at will as their sexual toy.

In addition, as the story progresses, we turn to see Madame's lust for Toundi as a sex object to satisfy her. This can be seen when Kalisia declares: "You only have to look at her eyes when she talks to you" (95). As Kalisia goes on to confess: "I'd say she couldn't do without a man even for a fortnight" (95). It is significant to note that when Madame realizes that her secret love affair is public awareness, she openly becomes aggressive and rude towards her servants, finding faults in all they do and projecting her shortcomings onto them for the knowledge of her secret (73-74).

Moreover, Ezinma in her father's exile has become one of the most beautiful girls in Mbanta. Okonkwo expresses his desire to her and tells her: "There are many good and prosperous people here (Mbanta), but I shall be happy if you marry in Umuofia when we return home". Accordingly, Ezinma refuses all good suitors from Mbanta and also tells her half-sister, Obiageli not to marry in Mbanta because their father wishes so. "So the two of them [refuse] every offer of marriage in Mbanta". Thus, Achebe shows a strong bond between the father and daughter. Okonkwo thinks she is able to understand him perfectly. Nevertheless, Okonkwo, the patriarch, wishes that Ezinma "should have been a boy". Obiageli and Ezinma's obedience also signifies their acceptance of the patriarchal frame of reference. From this discussion, it is evident that the women themselves accept the lesser position which the men assign to them because of the society's programming which places the women beneath the men. The chauvinistic ideologies see women as subordinate and as bearers of children. In Emecheta's *The Bride Price*, when Adah invites Francis to read the manuscript, he responds "you keep forgetting that you are a woman and that you are a black. The white man can barely tolerate us

men to say nothing to brainless females like you who could think of nothing except how to breast feed her baby” (178).

In *Houseboy*, Sophie seems to be the victim of the society and ultimately men. Apart from being the lover of the agricultural engineer; she has also an affair with Janopoulos who is old enough to be her grandfather. In the very sarcastic tone, Magnol refers to her as the fiancée-mistress of Toundi even though she is not. Because of the inherent cultural injustices, Sophie can't choose a partner for herself, her father gives her to the European agricultural engineer who treats her the same way he would treat an animal or any other African under the tenets of imperialism and colonialism. Sophie constantly questions her position in the society and seems to have no control over her happiness. Sophie like many women appears to be completely controlled by the culture surrounding her daily life. When introducing Sophie to the Commandant, the engineer refers to her as his cook and Sophie cannot do anything to explain her hurt and her unhappiness to the engineer. Even though she cries and complains to Toundi while in private conversation, she cannot tell her lover, the agricultural engineer, what she feels. Sophie, while talking to Toundi states that she has not “slept with a son of the soil in the same hut” (p. 43).

To conclude, Women are seen as agents of important social and cultural changes through the roles they play. Achebe is quite enlightened and flexible in presenting his women characters. He reveals the power and strength of women in Igbo society. Thus, through the novel, Achebe presents true picture of his women. Though Achebe portrays them as active and sincere to their families and society, they are not appreciated but marginalized and insulted. The analysis of Achebe and Oyono's novels shows that women in patriarchal traditional and colonial community consider the “other” though they possess some power in them given the role they play. Women are men's possession, domestically and politically. Although women have big roles in many social activities, the political decision is in the man's hands. Women's position in public places are not regarded. However, Achebe and Oyono portray the women as sexual objects, opportunistic, weak, happy and harmonious members of the community.

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