

Research Article

Women and Patriarchy in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

The current study explores the representation of women and the structures of patriarchy in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Using African feminism and new historicism as theoretical frameworks, the paper examines the sociocultural positions of women in the Igbo society as depicted in both novels. While Achebe portrays women within a pre-colonial Igbo patriarchal community, Adichie presents a more nuanced representation of female agency in postcolonial Nigeria. The comparative analysis highlights the evolution of gender roles, the resistance to patriarchal constraints, and the intersections between gender, colonialism, and nationalism. The findings contribute to broader discussions on the role of literature in shaping and reflecting societal gender dynamics.

Keywords: Women, Patriarchy, Feminism, New Historicism, Gender.

1. Introduction

"Women hold up half the sky" is a Chinese proverb that emphasizes the integral role of women in society; illustrating their equal contribution to the development of the world alongside men. This concept of gender equality has gradually found its voice in literature, particularly in African literature, where the representation of women has evolved significantly over time. In the early stages of African literature, male writers, such as Chinua Achebe, in *Things Fall Apart*, often misrepresented or marginalized women, reinforcing patriarchal values and gender imbalances. However, the emergence of African female writers in the latter half of the twentieth century marked a shift in this narrative, as they began to challenge traditional gender roles and bring attention to the struggles of women in a post-colonial society.

Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966), widely regarded as the first novel by an African female writer: "Flora Nwapa is the first black African internationally admired female novelist with *Efuru* published in 1966. She is a Nigerian author, teacher, administrator and a herald of whole generation of African women writers" (Uttam 1). Nwapa pioneered the exploration of women's struggles in African literature, highlighting the complexities of female identity within the constraints of patriarchy and colonialism: "Nwapa is known best for her two novels, *Efuru* (1966) and *Women are Different* (1986). She fights against the misrepresentation of the female protagonist. Besides, she also creates a more positive technique to portray female characters. Nwapa's stories produce a Nigerian female with charisma and a positive attitude" (Néma 1).

The restriction of access to education for women, a legacy of both colonialism and patriarchy, contributed to the marginalization of female voices in literature. Following the independence of African countries, authors like Ama Ata Aidoo (*The Dilemma of a Ghost*, 1965), Buchi Emecheta (*Second-Class Citizen*, 1974) and (*The Joys of Motherhood*, 1979) began to address the impacts of colonialism on African women, as well as gender inequality, pushing for the inclusion of women's voices in the national narrative. The rise of African female writers in the 1960s and more specifically from the 1980s to the present, coinciding with the feminist movement, further reshaped the literary landscape: "From 1966 to the present, various inhibitions and encumbrances of women exercising their human rights have found expression in the literature especially in fiction written by women. Generally, their output has been feministic in portraying the female characters various reactions to a subsuming life" (Anuradha 4).

Writers such as Tsitsi Dangaremba (*Nervous Conditions*, 1988) and Sefi Atta (*Everything Good Will Come*, 2005) have made substantial contributions to African feminist literature, highlighting themes of gender roles, identity, and political resistance. Since the turn of the 21st century, African female writers have reached international acclaim, addressing key themes of intersectionality, race, gender, and power structures in their works. One such writer is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, whose second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), explores the resilience of women during the Nigerian Civil War.

The paper aims at investigating the victimization of women under patriarchy, focusing on the condition of women in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. It will explore how women's roles and conditions have evolved over time, particularly in the highly patriarchal Igbo society, through the lenses of a male writer (Achebe) and a female writer (Adichie).

2. Historical Background to the Study

Things Fall Apart serves as Chinua Achebe's literary response to the Eurocentric portrayal of Africa, particularly challenging the misrepresentation of Africa and Africans in works such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*:

Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril. Can nobody see the preposterous and perverse arrogance in thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the breakup of one petty European mind? But that is not even the point. The real question is the dehumanization of Africa and Africans which this age long attitude has fostered and continues to foster in the world. And the question is whether a novel which celebrates this dehumanization, which depersonalizes a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art. My answer is: No, it cannot (Achebe 21).

Achebe's novel seeks to reclaim the narrative by showcasing the richness of African culture and restoring the dignity of its people in the face of European colonialism. As Anitha notes, "Achebe wanted to change the impression held in much of the Western world that African cultures were simple, one-dimensional, and impossible to understand" (Anitha 1).

Set in the late 19th century, during the onset of colonial rule, *Things Fall Apart* examines the deep-rooted patriarchal traditions within the Igbo society. The novel serves as both a precolonial and colonial text, portraying the Igbo way of life in the fictional village of Umuofia. The Igbo people live in relative peace and harmony, guided by their ancestral beliefs, where individual achievements are celebrated alongside the respect for communal values: "Before the advent of colonial forces, the Igbo society was a dynamic entity, operating on the principles of communal living, a keen sense of justice, and an intricate system of religious beliefs and practices. Achebe paints a vivid picture of a society rich in cultural traditions and rituals, a society where every individual, every deity, and even the natural elements held a distinctive place and significance" (Sangeetha 2).

However, the arrival of European colonizers disrupts this stability. The colonial presence begins with the establishment of Umuru where missionaries build schools and churches, and the imposition of a legal system that reinforces oppression. A religious conflict emerges as Christianity challenges the Igbo's traditional spiritual practices, further undermining their ability to maintain social and cultural cohesion. This disintegration of unity is exemplified through the character of Obierika who reflects on the weakening of their collective strength in the face of colonial adversity by uttering: "The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were assumed at his foolishness and allow him to stay. Now he has warned our brothers and our clan no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart." (Achebe 160)

Half of a Yellow Sun, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, is set during the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), a period characterized by intense political upheaval and significant social and cultural transformation: "The Biafran War was a civil war fought between the government of Nigeria and the Republic of Biafra, a secessionist state which had declared its independence from Nigeria in 1967. For most Nigerians, the war is generally regarded as a hapless period that was better left to be forgotten, but for the Igbo people who fought for secession, it remains a life-defining event" (Veronica and Sangeeta 4).

The novel explores the complex dynamics of the war. It highlights not only the political struggle between the Biafran secessionists and the Nigerian federal government but also the personal and emotional toll that the conflict inflicts on individuals, particularly women. Through its multifaceted narrative, Adichie offers a critical examination of the intersection of gender, war, and national identity, portraying the ways in which women navigate both the physical and psychological consequences of a nation at war.

3. An Overview on the Theories of African Feminism and New Historicism

Since the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, feminism has evolved into a multifaceted movement addressing gender inequality across various social and cultural contexts. Scholar Bell Hooks defines feminism as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression sexist oppression," (hooks 2) but according to Simone de Beauvoir: Feminism is the recognition that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Simone 283). While feminism has largely developed within a Western framework, African feminists have articulated perspectives that reflect the continent's distinct historical and sociocultural realities. Nigerian scholar Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, for instance, emphasizes that "African women's struggle is not about antagonism to men but about the inclusion of women in the process of social transformation, with an awareness of the historical and cultural specificities of African societies." This view highlights the necessity of an intersectional approach that acknowledges the complexities of African experiences in the pursuit of gender justice.

African Feminist theory critically analyzes the ways in which literature reinforces or subverts gender inequalities, focusing on the roles, voices, and agency of female characters within patriarchal structures: "The theory seeks to expose patriarchal premises and resulting prejudices in literary texts and strives to change the social division of the sexes by striving to promote a discovery and re-evaluation of literature by women as well as evaluate the social, cultural and psychological contexts of literature and criticism" (Tyson, 2006).

Tong (2009) is of the view that African feminism situates its critique within the specific cultural and historical contexts of African societies, addressing the distinct challenges faced by African women. Unlike Western feminist discourses, which often adopt a universalist approach, African feminism acknowledges the intersection of gender with colonial histories, indigenous traditions, and sociopolitical realities, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of localized gender struggles.

New historicism, by contrast, underscores the significance of historical and cultural contexts in shaping the production and interpretation of literary texts. "New Historicism is a methodology in literary criticism and literary theory which relies on the assumption that the literary work must be viewed as a result of a composition, rather than as an isolated art work or document, from its time, place and historical circumstances" (Gokcen 383). In a similar vein, Dobie avers that: "From a new historicist perspective, any reading of a literary text is a question of negotiation, a negotiation between text and reader within the context of a history or histories that cannot be closed or finalized" (Dobie 129).

This theoretical framework facilitates an analysis of how Achebe and Adichie embed historical realities within their narratives, particularly in relation to gender roles and societal expectations. By integrating feminist and new historicist perspectives, this study examines the ways in which both authors engage with patriarchal ideologies and interrogates the extent to which their works reinforce or challenge historical gender norms. The use of Feminism as theory to the study is much relevant because it will serve at analyzing the portrayal of women in both novels and at investigating how power structures contribute to their subordination.

As for New Historicism, it plays a pivotal role in this study. It facilitates an examination of the conditions of women depicted in *Things Fall Apart* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* within the broader historical, cultural, social, and political contexts in which the two novels were produced.

4. Sociocultural Position of Women in *Things Fall Apart*

4.1. Wife Beating

There are some instances of wife beating in *Things Fall Apart*. The physical oppression is somehow formalized. For instance, Okonkwo physically 'disciplines' his youngest wife, Ojiugo, for neglecting her domestic duties specifically, for leaving home to have her hair plaited and failing to prepare his meal on time. His actions, however, are not condemned on the grounds of gender-based violence but rather because he violates the sacred Week of Peace, an important ritual in Umuofia's cultural tradition:

You have committed a great evil." He brought down his staff heavily on the floor. "Your wife was at fault, but even if you came into your obi and found her lover on top of her, you would still have committed a great evil to beat her." His staff came down again. "The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall all perish (Achebe 31).

As said earlier, Ezeani, the priest of the earth goddess Ani, reprimands Okonkwo not for his act of domestic violence, but for committing it during a time when peace must be strictly observed: "Okonkwo's breaking the rule during the Peace Week in beating one of his wives. As a consequence, he has to be punished as follows" (Ngassaki 6): "And that was also the year Okonkwo broke the peace, and was punished as was the custom, by Ezeani, the priest of the earth of goddess" (Achebe 29).

Okonkwo perpetuates another act of domestic violence against his second wife, Ekwefi, after she cuts a few leaves from his banana tree to wrap food" (Achebe 38). His response escalates beyond physical assault when, provoked by her remark about his gun's ineffectiveness. He attempts to shoot her:

Unfortunately for her, Okonkwo heard it and ran madly into his room for the loaded gun, ran out again and aimed at her as she clambered over the dwarf wall of the barn. He pressed the trigger and there was a loud report accompanied by the wail of his wives and children. He threw down the gun and jumped into the barn, and there lay the woman, very much shaken and frightened but quite unhurt. He heaved a heavy sigh and went away with the gun (Achebe 31)

However, the most egregious instance of gender-based violence in the novel is the case of Uzowulu, who severely beats his pregnant wife, Mgbafo, to the extent that the assault results in a miscarriage: "During those years no single day passed in the sky without his beating the woman. We have tried to settle their quarrels time without number and on each occasion Uzowulu was guilty-". "It is a lie!" Uzowulu shouted. "Two years ago," continued Odukwu, "when she was pregnant, he beat her until she miscarried" (Achebe 91). The incident underscores the normalization of patriarchal violence within the Igbo society as depicted in *Things Fall Apart*. What is more, women's suffering often tends to be dismissed or sanctioned under cultural traditions.

4.2. Women as Mere Commodities

In *Things Fall Apart*, women are not only voiceless but also reduced to the status of commodities within the rigid Igbo patriarchal society. They are classified as part of a man's wealth. Such state of affairs reinforces men's objectification and economic value as illustrated by Achebe through his depiction of a wealthy man in Okonkwo's village. The man is described as having "three huge barns, nine wives, and thirty children" (Achebe 13).

The novel highlights how wealth is measured by a man's agricultural productivity, particularly the number of yam barns one possesses and the size of the household. This surprisingly includes the wives and children. Thus, within the socio-cultural framework, the accumulation of wives and offspring serves as a symbol of power, status, and economic prosperity. In addition to Nwakibie, the richest man in Okonkwo's village, Okonkwo is also depicted as a prosperous man in the novel:

Okonkwo's prosperity was visible in his household. He had a large compound enclosed by a thick wall of red earth. His own hut, or obi, stood immediately behind the only gate in the red walls. Each of his three wives had her own hut, which together formed a half moon behind the obi. The barn was built against one end of the red walls, and long stacks of yam stood out prosperously in it. (Achebe 14).

In the Igbo tradition, as in many other African traditions, patriarchy serves as the foundation upon which social structures and gender roles are built. Masculinity is highly valued. Men are expected to embody

strength, power, and bravery, while women are relegated to roles of submission, obedience, and perceived fragility.

Achebe's depiction of women in *Things Fall Apart* reflects their marginalized position during the colonial era, reinforcing the notion that weakness is not only undesirable but also inherently linked to femininity. This association is evident when Okonkwo's playmate remarks that his father is an agbala. Agbala is a term that is known to Okonkwo. It is not only used for a woman but also for a man who has failed to acquire a title (Achebe 13). In this context, lacking status is equated with being a woman an indication of failure within the rigid patriarchal framework of Igbo society that silence women.

4.3. Women as Voiceless Beings

Another bad condition of women in *Things Fall Apart* is that women are voiceless and seemed to normalized silence as part of their condition. In the Igbo tradition, as in many other African traditions, as stated earlier, patriarchy forms the foundation of social structures and gender roles. Masculinity is highly esteemed. Men are expected to embody strength, power, and bravery, whereas women are relegated to positions of submission, obedience, and perceived fragility. Achebe's portrayal of women in *Things Fall Apart* reflects their marginalization during the colonial era. This reinforces the notion that weakness is both undesirable and intrinsically linked to femininity. Within this rigid patriarchal framework, a man without status is equated with a woman. After dealing with the sociocultural position of women in *Things Fall Apart*, the next seeks to reflect the position of women in *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

5. Sociocultural Position of Women in *Half of a Yellow Sun*

5.1. Women and Psychological Trauma

The Nigerian Civil War profoundly altered the social conditions of women by subjecting them to immense suffering and hardship. Women endured both physical and psychological trauma, ranging from violence, rape, and starvation to the lasting effects of war-induced distress. Rather than serving as protectors of their own people, the Biafran army frequently became agents of oppression. Women were often sacrificed as part of the larger strategy for war efforts.

Adichie highlights this brutal reality through Ugwu, Odenigbo's houseboy, who, after being conscripted into the army, becomes complicit in a gang rape of a young bartender (Adichie 341). Although he internally resists the act, he ultimately participates to avoid being labeled a coward by his fellow soldiers (Anitha 2). This moment underscores how war, not only, dehumanizes its direct victims but also forces individuals into moral compromises, further entrenching gender-based violence as an accepted consequence of conflict.

The atmosphere in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is one of suffocation and devastation. As the novel chronicles the Nigeria-Biafra War (1967–1970), it highlights the extreme vulnerability of women and children, who bear the brunt of conflict-induced suffering. Adichie's narrative meticulously documents the multifaceted struggles of women as they attempt to resist and survive sexual violence, exploitation, corruption, humiliation, civilian attacks, forced displacement, psychological trauma, starvation, disease, and death.

Out of all the atrocities mentioned above, sexual violence emerges as the most harrowing and degrading of women's experiences, leaving indelible scars on both individuals and communities (Azuike 7). Adichie's portrayal underscores the pervasive gendered violence of war, positioning women not merely as passive victims but as individuals navigating immense hardship in the pursuit of agency and survival.

There is no doubt that rape emerges as one of the most traumatizing and dehumanizing experiences endured by women in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Adichie exposes the pervasive sexual violence inflicted upon women by both foreign mercenaries and the Nigerian army during the Nigeria-Biafra War. White mercenaries, enlisted to support the Biafran cause, commit egregious acts of sexual violence, as illustrated in the following passage: "He [White mercenary] throws girls on their backs in the open where the men can see him and does them, all the time holding his bag of money in one hand" (Adichie 304). Similarly, the Nigerian army, predominantly composed of Hausa soldiers, from the north, whom the Biafran communities regard as vandals, perpetrates systemic rape against Biafran women. Anulika, Ugwu's sister, is a stark example of this brutality: "They forced themselves on her. Five of them" (Adichie 391).

Additionally, through the character of Mrs. Muokelu, Adichie sheds light on how figures like Special Julius, an army contractor, exploit and oppress women. Adichie further illustrates the widespread victimization of women in wartime. This pervasive sexual violence underscores the intersection of war, power, and gender,

positioning women as primary victims of both military aggression and societal subjugation. Women are therefore used as a sex bait.

5.2. Women as Sex Bait

During the Nigeria-Biafra War, women were often exploited as commodities. They are traded for food or other essential goods. As noted in the novel, "women were traded for food and other commodities. Starvation makes women the victims of war. Soldiers who have access to food use it to hold women to ransom, to tempt, and to subsequently rape them" (Anitha 2). This stark depiction illustrates how the scarcity of resources, during wartime, placed women in positions of extreme vulnerability.

Adichie's portrayal of minor female characters, such as Eberechi, further highlights the exploitation. While Olanna is used, by her father, as a sex object, during peacetime to secure a contract with the finance minister, Eberechi's exploitation happens to be more desperate and strategic during the war. Her parents, in an effort to secure food for the family and ensure that her brother gains a prominent position in the army, similarly use her as a means of leveraging power within the wartime context. The dynamic underscores the ways in which women, already marginalized by patriarchal structures, are further victimized in times of crisis, their roles reduced to instruments of survival and political maneuvering.

Adichie vividly illustrates the brutal exploitation of women during the war through the character of Eberechi. In one particularly harrowing scene, her parents use her as a form of barter to gain favor from a visiting army officer: "Her name was Eberechi. He had heard the neighbors talking about her; the story was that her parents had given her to a visiting army officer, as one would give kola nut to a guest. They had knocked on his door at night, opened it, and gently pushed her in. The next morning, the beaming officer thanked her beaming parents while Eberechi stood by" (Adichie 192).

The above passage highlights the commodification of women's bodies. The casual nature of the exchange, reminiscent of the ritualistic offering of kola nuts underscores the dehumanization of Eberechi who was reduced to a mere object in her parents' efforts to survive the war.

Amala, a young girl from Abba and a relative of Mama, is introduced in *Half of a Yellow Sun* as Mama's niece and, consequently, Odenigbo's cousin. Mama, who embodies traditional patriarchal values, insists that her son must marry a "convenient woman" which is a term she uses to describe a submissive, homebound wife who prioritizes domestic duties over education and professional ambitions. She explicitly rejects university-educated women, who are perceived as promiscuous and unfit for marriage: "These girls that go to university follow men around until their bodies are useless. Nobody knows if she can have children. Do you know? Does anyone know?" (Adichie 100). Her prejudices extend beyond gender roles to ethnic biases, as she expresses her disapproval of certain Igbo subgroups: "I do not mind where the woman my son will marry comes from. I am not like those mothers who want to find wives for their sons only from their own hamlet. But I do not want a Wawa woman, and none of those Imo or Aro women, of course; their dialects are so strange I wonder who told them that we are all the same Igbo people" (Adichie 100).

Mama's view reflects the intersection of gender, tradition, and ethnic divisions within Igbo society. This illustrates how deeply ingrained cultural norms dictate both marital expectations and broader social hierarchies. For instance, Amala's characterization in *Half of a Yellow Sun* exemplifies the powerlessness of women within patriarchal structures. This mostly happens in rural settings where traditional expectations dictate their lives. When Olanna observes Amala, she sees "a plain village girl curled up on the bed as if she were cringing from one more furious blow from life" (Adichie 357). Amala's demeanor and her refusal to meet Odenigbo's gaze indicate not only fear but also an ingrained acceptance of her subjugation. Whether or not Mama explicitly instructed her to go to Odenigbo's room, Amala never considered the possibility of refusal. Her submission is framed within the larger sociocultural reality in which men, especially those with education and material wealth, hold unquestioned authority: "He was the master, he spoke English, he had a car. It was the way it should be" (Adichie 357).

The above passage highlights how power dynamics, reinforced by economic disparity and social conditioning, strip women of agency by leaving them unable to resist to situations that violate their autonomy. Furthermore, Mama expects Amala to bear a male child and entrust him to her by disregarding Amala's own desires. When Amala gives birth to a girl, she refuses to accept the child. The above tragic consequence of the societal devaluation of female children and the absence of personal choice in her situation. This rejection underscores the psychological toll of patriarchal oppression. Even motherhood, a

role traditionally assigned as a woman's primary purpose, is dictated by external forces. Ultimately, Amala's fate is determined not by her own will but by Mama. This illustrates how women in such structures are denied voice and control over their own bodies and futures. The new section brings onto surface the comparative analysis of the two novels.

6. Comparative Analysis of the Novels

6.1. Women as Victims of Patriarchy

Following the reading of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and through the lens of women's struggles and sociocultural positions, a comparative analysis of the two novels reveals significant points of convergence and divergence. Three key similarities emerge in the portrayal of women's experiences.

First, both novels depict women as victims of patriarchy, whether during peacetime, as explicit in *Things Fall Apart*, or in the midst of war, as illustrated in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Through their struggle against oppression, subjugation, rape, marginalization and dehumanization, women demonstrate not only their endurance but also their resilience. Their ability to adapt to the consequences of the war is evident in their proactive responses to these challenges. Second, in both narratives, women play a central role in the education and socialization of children, even though to the eyes of patriarchy the efforts are regarded as meaningless.

In her article, "The Role of Female Subaltern in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*", Amina avers:

The women used to successfully play the role of primary educator for their children, their caretaker and also assist their husbands in farming like a good companion and not like a hired labor. As an educator, the wives would teach the children through storytelling. They tell them moral stories to improve their manners and behavior, educate them, socialize with them, raise their curiosity to the social values and relationships and human conditions and human values. Okonkwo's wives would also do this practice on a regular basis (Amina 27).

In a similar vein, Charles in his article Adichie's "*Half of a Yellow Sun* and the Valorization of Womanhood" argues that Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* highlights the advantages of educated female characters, particularly through Olanna's character. He suggests that these women, in contrast to their uneducated counterparts, possess a greater capacity to adapt to the challenges of war, notably by educating children and fostering resilience in the face of adversity: "Her (Olanna's) education still puts her at advantage over her unschooled female counterparts concerning her being visionary as she looks beyond the raging war and organizes free school classes for the children at Akwakuma village to which she and Odenigbo's household have moved. The classes are her "noble win the war effort." (Charles 9).

Lastly, despite systemic oppression, women in both novels actively seek social and economic independence; thus, challenging traditional gender norms and asserting agency within their constrained environments. These parallels underscore the enduring nature of patriarchal oppression while also highlighting the resilience and evolving roles of women in different historical and sociopolitical contexts.

Although *Things Fall Apart* contains brief references to instances of war such as the killing of Ogbuefi Udo's wife in Mbaino and Okonkwo's recollections of past conflicts, including "the war against Isike" (Achebe 200) the novel is predominantly set in a period of relative peace. However, women in the narrative endure significant oppression, at the hands of their husbands, as exemplified by characters like Okonkwo and Uzowulu. Female characters are subjected to subjugation. Their suffering often extends beyond domestic violence to include deeply ingrained cultural practices such as the abandonment of twin infants in the Evil Forest. Moreover, women, in *Things Fall Apart*, are largely perceived as commodities. That is integral to a man's wealth rather than autonomous individuals. Okonkwo's treatment of women serves as a clear embodiment of this perception. The absence of affective relationships between men and women further reinforces the rigid patriarchal structure. Women are expected to accept and conform to their prescribed roles without resistance. Ultimately, Achebe's portrayal of Igbo society underscores the entrenchment of patriarchal ideologies that define and limit women's roles within the community.

Similarly, *Half of a Yellow Sun* illustrates instances of women victims of patriarchal oppression, both before and during the war. Women are frequently objectified and instrumentalized to serve men's interests. This is made explicit in the experiences of Olanna and Anulika. While Olanna is expected to leverage her sexuality to secure business contracts for her father, Anulika is exploited to obtain food and employment opportunities for her brother. The war further exacerbates women's vulnerability. They become targets of sexual violence not only by Federal soldiers but also by Separatist soldiers and foreign mercenaries aligned with the Biafran cause.

Despite the thematic similarities related to the oppressions as expressed in *Things Fall Apart* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, women's responses to their subjugation differ significantly. In *Things Fall Apart*, women largely conform to their prescribed roles, seldom challenging the authority of men. Only few characters such as Ekwefi and Nneka exhibit subtle defiance. In contrast, the educated female characters, in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, actively resist male dominance, asserting their agency and challenging oppressive norms. Their education empowers them to navigate and ultimately overcome the hardships imposed on them by the patriarchal society. Having examined the position of women under patriarchy in both novels, the next section will explore women's role in the education and socialization of children as well.

6.2. Women as 'Teachers' of Children

Another significant commonality among female characters in *Things Fall Apart* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* is their role as educators, particularly in teaching children. In *Things Fall Apart*, education is primarily conducted through orality. That is storytelling, a traditional method of knowledge transmission. Children gather at night to listen to folk tales narrated by adults. This practice fosters both moral instruction and entertainment. The tales often feature human figures, animals, or stock characters set in imaginative worlds. Women's storytelling, in particular, focuses on animal and bird fables, as exemplified in the following tale: "Once upon a time," she began, "all the birds were invited to a feast in the sky. They were very happy and began to prepare themselves for the great day. They painted their bodies with red camwood and drew beautiful patterns on them with uli" (Achebe 104).

This traditional form of education is interactive rather than teacher-centered. This is because children also have the opportunity to recount the same or different tales. Within Okonkwo's household, for instance, storytelling is a communal activity: "Low voices, broken now and again by singing, reached Okonkwo from his wives' huts as each woman and her children told folk stories. Ekwefi and her daughter, Ezinma, sat on a mat on the floor. It was Ekwefi's turn to tell a story" (Achebe 96).

Women's role in storytelling is crucial. It provides an alternative form of education that contrasts with the male-dominated narratives centered on warfare and masculinity. This is evident in Nwoye's preference for his mother's stories, which emphasize wisdom and morality rather than violence: "Nwoye knew that it was right to be masculine and to be violent, but somehow, he still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell, and which she no doubt still told to her younger children stories of the tortoise and his wily ways, and of the bird Eneke-nti-oba who challenged the whole world to a wrestling contest and was finally thrown by the cat" (Achebe 53).

Similarly, in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, women assume the role of educators, but in a more formalized, westernized context. Characters such as Olanna and Mrs. Muokelu contribute to the war effort by organizing classes for Biafran children in refugee centers. The curriculum consists of four subjects: Igbo and English languages, Mathematics, and Civics. The primary aim of education, in this wartime setting, is to instill patriotism, cultivate historical awareness, and prepare children for their future roles in the society. While Igbo language is preserved, the other subjects are taught in English, reflecting the influence of Western education. This kind of education contrasts with the oral tradition in *Things Fall Apart* where knowledge is transmitted through storytelling. Women's role in educating children serves as a foundational element in shaping the society and fostering national development. As educators, they contribute both to cultural continuity and the intellectual and social empowerment of future generations. Alongside their educational contributions, women, in both novels, also navigate complex struggles for social and economic independence, an aspect that warrants further analysis.

6.3. Submissive Women Versus Independent Women

Feminist critics such as Linda Strong Leek, Emmerencia Sih Beh and Muhammad Shadab Ilyas argue that Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* portrays women as submissive figures whose rights and autonomy are largely disregarded. They are treated as mere extensions of their husbands' wealth and authority. Anne and

Rejulin (2) support as well that “women were always looked [upon] as submissive, meek [individuals] who were denied all rights. They faced the issue of identity as the society never gave them a stature they deserved.”

In the novel, women are subjected to systemic oppression and subjugation. Notable instances of such treatment include Okonkwo's recurrent beatings of his wives and Uzowulu's abusive behavior toward his wife, Mgbafo. These examples underscore the deeply entrenched patriarchal structures that define gender relations in the Igbo society as depicted in the novel.

Although the women in *Things Fall Apart* largely accept their subordinate status and appear to lack agency, there are moments in the novel where female characters challenge their imposed submissiveness. For instance, Ekwefi defies societal expectations by leaving her first husband to be with Okonkwo and later asserts herself by resisting his violent tendencies. However, despite these individual acts of defiance, the broader societal framework in the novel reinforces rigid gender roles.

The above comment reflects the feminist critique of gendered expectations. Anne and Rejulin (2) note: “The assignment of gender roles subjugates women and [imposes] the pressure of ‘manliness’ on men. While women are expected to cook, clean, nurture, and sacrifice, men are taught to be the main earners of the family.” Achebe's depiction of gender roles in the novel thus underscores the systemic inequalities that define male and female experiences within the Igbo patriarchal society.

Similarly, in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Kainene actively participates in the male-dominated business environment of Port Harcourt. She engages with influential businessmen and asserting herself in competitive spaces as she seeks lucrative contracts. She assumes responsibility for managing her father's enterprises and even operates as a military contractor at times. During the war, Kainene utilizes her skills, financial resources, and connections within the military to establish a refugee camp. This demonstrates a commitment to humanitarian efforts and societal welfare. Her ability to achieve such remarkable feats is largely attributed to her education, financial independence, and strong personal agency.

Adichie's portrayal of Kainene and her twin sister Olanna challenges the conventional phallogocentric narrative that traditionally represents female characters as weak, submissive, and lacking autonomy. By depicting them as strong, resourceful, and independent women, Adichie subverts the gender norms prevalent in male-authored literary traditions. A comparative analysis of the representation of twin sisters in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* further highlights the evolving depiction of female agency in African literature.

6.4. Uneducated Women Versus Educated Women

In *Things Fall Apart*, women are portrayed as uneducated, primarily due to their lack of access to formal education within the Western framework. Consequently, female characters, in the novel, are largely depicted as illiterate, a factor that contributes to their systemic oppression and subjugation by male figures. This lack of education reinforces the deeply entrenched patriarchal structures that shape their existence. However, the historical and cultural context of the novel is crucial to understanding Achebe's portrayal of women.

Things Fall Apart provides an intricate depiction of Igbo traditions and societal norms during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As illustrated in the novel, the arrival of European colonizers brings new religious and educational opportunities, albeit limited, for Igbo women. Only few women joined the Christian church to gain access to Western education. Furthermore, the Igbo society as depicted in the novel is highly patriarchal. Achebe strives to authentically represent the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural dimensions of this traditional society.

Conversely, *Half of a Yellow Sun* presents a markedly different portrayal of women. It emphasizes the role of education in altering gender dynamics. The twin sisters, Olanna and Kainene, exemplify this transformation. They both pursued higher education at the University of London where Olanna earned a Master's degree in Sociology and Kainene in Business Administration. Their academic achievements grant them economic independence. Olanna secures a position as a lecturer at the University of Nigeria and Kainene manages their father's business in Port Harcourt. This financial autonomy enables them to challenge patriarchal norms more effectively than their less-educated counterparts. In many African societies, highly educated women are often subject to stereotypes, frequently perceived as defiant toward traditional gender roles and as undermining male authority. They are sometimes viewed as disregarding spousal obedience and asserting

equality with men. In contrast, uneducated women are more readily socialized into traditional roles, embracing their responsibilities as wives and mothers by adhering to household duties and child-rearing. The dichotomy between submissive and independent women necessitates a deeper analysis to understand the complexities of gender roles within the socio-cultural contexts.

7. Conclusion

Achebe and Adichie present both divergent yet complementary perspectives on women and patriarchy in the Igbo society by illustrating the enduring nature of gender hierarchies. This is made possible through tracing the evolving roles of women in the course of time. Their works expose the persistent struggles against patriarchal structures that highlight the growing agency of female characters within shifting sociocultural landscapes. By employing African feminism and new historicism approaches, the study contributes to the wider discourse on gender representation in African literature. It seeks to emphasize the capacity of literary texts to challenge prevailing ideologies and shape social consciousness.

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