

The Depiction of Women in Pauline Corpus and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*: Modern African Womanist Criticism

John Arierhi Ottuh
Obong University
(Nigeria)

Abstract:

Humanities scholars, especially those in African Biblical criticism have given much attention to themes arising from biblical and ecclesiastical boundaries in their critical variants. However, in spite of the impressive body of existing literature in this field, less has been done on the comparative study of biblical and African literature. Using the African method of biblical criticism (comparative and liberation hermeneutics), this study examines the depiction of women in Pauline corpus (New Testament literature) and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (African literature) by arguing that, although Paul's and Achebe's literary genres differ in this instance, similarities exist in their depiction of women in their socio-cultural milieus (first-century Greco-Roman and contemporary African societies). Gathering data from instances of selected modern African women who have locally and globally competed and achieved excellence and recognition, it critiques the negative depiction of women in Pauline corpus and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. This paper, therefore, contributes to scholarship in the comparative study of New Testament and African literature. It shows how the patriarchal societies of the first-century Greco-Roman and modern African world discriminate against women.

Keywords: Women, Womanist, Pauline Corpus, *Things Fall Apart*, New Testament Literature

Introduction

Existing literature has shown that discrimination or violence against women exists in every country of the world, though many countries have put up legal mechanisms to curb it in recent times (United Nations News, 2021). For instance, prior to the seventeenth century, agitation against masculinity and for gender egalitarianism in European societies had already surfaced (Polydourou, 2001, pp. 22-23). In Africa, the woman has often been excluded from the main streams of community discussions and leadership in all ramifications. Rather than allowing men and women to compete on an equal pedestal on the basis of competence, availability, intelligence, and character in the choice of leaders for example, it has been masculine in nature and practice. This is nothing but discrimination against women. Literary works have also corroborated this narrative. For instance, Ngaba (1995, p. 81) points out that in spite of laws in South Africa to curb discrimination against women, violence against women is still prevalent in the country. Another scholar writing from the viewpoint of South Africa, Penelope Andrews reveals that “although South African women have benefited from the global feminist endeavour, they have adopted the shape and substance of women's rights to accommodate conditions peculiar to South Africa” (Andrews, 1998, p. 307). Also, Ssenyonjo (2007, p. 39) shows how “African women are denied the equal enjoyment of their human rights, in particular by virtue of the lesser status ascribed to them by tradition and custom, or as a result of overt or covert discrimination.” Also, Balogun (2010, p. 21) shows how Yoruba proverbs show some elements of oppression and discrimination against women in their socio-cultural setting. Moreover, Mubangizi (2016, p. 68) says that gender inequality in Africa is entrenched in the socio-cultural system of the people, such that women are almost prohibited from having access or ownership to inheritance, formal employment, and education in some climes. This has brought some kind of untold hardship on most African women in the sense that they have been socially, economically and politically deprived, and impoverished (Lawson, Dubin & Mwambene, 2019, p. 3-4). Although previous literature has shown the existence of violence and discrimination against women, this paper in particular shows how New Testament and African literature depict women in their various socio-cultural milieus (ancient Greco-Roman and modern African-Nigeria).

This will further expose us to the discussion of how discrimination against women is present in the Bible as well as in Africa literary works. In both cultural milieus, women are seen as weaker persons and domestic administrators (οἰκονόμος). This is very glaring in Africa's cultural, political, and religious atmospheres when leadership positions are being considered for instance. In the Church, the woman cannot be allowed to head the denomination. For example, in the Roman Catholic Church among the ranks of leadership, while the male counterpart is called Reverend Father, the female is called Reverend Sister not reverend mother. In other Main Line Churches, no woman has ever emerged at the apex position of the Church leadership in Africa. They are always subordinates to their male counterparts. In the African political arena, most leaders at the apex position are males. Men occupy more political positions than women.

Chinua Achebe equally showed in his novel "Things Fall Apart" how the woman is considered as a weak and inferior person in Igbo society. Although, Achebe's depiction of the woman is rooted in Igbo culture, the picture is almost the same in all ethno-cultural milieus in Nigeria. Both Paul in the New Testament and Achebe in "Things Fall Apart", depict this philosophy in their write-ups. Therefore, this paper shows how Chinua Achebe in "Things Fall Apart" and Paul in New Testament literature depict women in their milieus. It argues that though the cultural setting and literary genres differ, similarity exists in the depiction of the woman in Achebe's and Paul's societies. As such, this essay answers the following questions. First, what literary genres are Achebe's "things fall apart" and Pauline's corpus situated? Second, how was the woman depicted in Things Fall Apart and Pauline Corpus? Third, how do modern African Womanists flaw Achebe's and Paul's depiction of women in "things fall apart" and Pauline's corpus?

Achebe's things fall apart and Pauline corpus' Literary Genres

The term genre is from a Latin root word *genrus*, meaning birth, a kind of or sort of. In classical history, the discussion of genre probably "began in ancient Greece with Aristotle....Many specific text genres have been recognized since Aristotle's days-fiction, essays, biography, newspaper stories, academic writing, and advertising, among others" (Beghtol, 2001:17). In modern scholarship, the concept of genre has gone beyond texts to dance, music, arts, and other non-verbal methods of human communication. Here in this essay,

we discuss the literary genres of the novel “things fall apart” and Pauline corpus in New Testament literature.

A great wall of difference exists between the literary genre of the novel “things fall apart” and New Testament literature particularly Pauline corpus. While the former falls within fiction, the latter falls within an epistolary genre (non-fiction; see, for instance, Goudsblom, 2000). “Things fall apart”, a novel written by Chinua Achebe is a fiction because it is an imaginary (works of the creative imagination) story that did not happen within time and space. Although, the things described by Achebe in things fall apart existed within time and space in Nigeria’s colonial historiography, the characters did not exist in real life situation. It was a story of how Igbo culture and indigenous religion thrived and flourished like the tree planted by the riverside before the advent of the colonial masters and missionaries who brought their culture and religion to Nigeria and destroyed the fabric of Igbo culture and traditional religion when it spread to the Igbo nation, such that what held the people together was irreparably torn apart; and as such the centre could no longer hold. While the same fate befell other ethnic nationalities like the Edos, Yorubas, Urhobos, Ibibio, Effik, and Hausas, Achebe weaved that of the Igbo experience in fiction with the literary structure that suggests real-life experience whereas such character as Okonkwo, Ikemefuna, Uchendu, Obierika or places like Umuofia and Umbata where metaphorically represented. Although the culture portrayed, the names and places exist in Igbo-land till date, Achebe represented them in a literary form. However, we must admit that the novel “things fall apart” is historically and realistically connected (see, for instance, Shroder, 1963:291,308). Then what kind of fiction can we categorize “things fall apart”? We can then agree, that it falls within the subgroup of narrative (historical) and didactic fictions. On the one hand, it is a narrative fiction because it is organized around issues such as events and characters represented in abstraction (see Rimmon-Kenan, 2003, pp. 1-29) and on the other hand didactic because it gives moral messages to the reader (See Orel, 1995; Black, Capps & Barnes, 2017, p. 2). For instance, Okonkwo was blamed by his friends for killing Ikemefuna, a boy who called him father. He was also blamed for being careless when he mistakenly killed a boy when his gun exploded. This shows that human life is sacred and as such there should be no excuse for taking such life unlawfully. Most importantly, Okonkwo’s show of strength led to his tragic flaws

(tragedy) instead of a heroic character in spite of all the potentials of a personality cult.

Just like any other literary works, New Testament literature also has its literary genres. There are four main literary genres that make up the canonical New Testament literature, namely; (i) gospels, exploring biography of Jesus Christ and his ministry, (ii) history (Acts' narratives), (iii) epistolary and (iv) apocalyptic literature. Pauline corpus in New Testament literature falls within epistolary genre. This has been proven by scholars by way of affirming that Paul's writing corresponds to first century Greco-Roman epistolary style of the time in the sense that Paul's pattern of written carried some earmarks or semblance of First Century Greco-Roman pattern of letter and as such modern scholars conveniently use "classical rhetoric and epistolography for the exegesis of St. Paul's letters" (Betz, 1975; Classen, 1992, pp. 320-321). Epistolary "developed and was cultivated as a literary type in the Greek rhetorical and philosophical schools of the late Classical and the Alexandrian and Roman periods" (McGuire, 1960, p. 148). Historians say that:

At the beginning of the Christian era, the letter was long and universally established in the Greco-Roman world as a routine means of public and private communication at all levels and as a literary form. Thus, we have official letters of kings and magistrates, private letters of various kinds ranging from the half-literate specimens found in the Egyptian papyri to the perfect examples of the genre contained in the Ciceronian corpus, letters employed as vehicles for philosophical exposition, literary criticism, and political propaganda, and, finally, invented correspondences serving one or more of the purposes mentioned, or simply to entertain (McGuire, 1960, p. 148).

A letter in Paul's days usually contains the followings: the writer's name and office; other identification (if any), the Reader's Name; and the writer's wish of some kind for the reader. One of the examples of the writer's wish is a farewell (Stowers, 1981, p. 20; cf. also 21, 73, 87, 88). Also, the epistles of Paul contain commendations (praise or honour), blame (shame), admonition, rebuke, farewell and benediction which are not also far from first century Greco-Roman epistolary style (Stowers, 1981, pp. 27, 125, 134, 146, 153).

Thirteen epistles are traditionally attributed to Paul in New Testament literature excluding Hebrews which is conspicuously anonymous and very contentious (see Szink, 2006). Contentiously, a lot of scholars agree that out of the thirteen epistles, seven (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon) are almost universally accepted

as authentic because they were written by Paul himself (Aune, 2010:9; Dunn 2003, p. 274). Arguably, scholars have also widely judged that Second Thesalonians, Colossians, Ephesians and the Pastorals (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) to be pseudepigraphical (written by unknown authors under Paul's name) or amanuensis, that is through the aid of secretaries (Ellis, 1961, pp. 49-57; Porter, 1995, pp. 105-106; Randolph, 2004). Unlike "things fall apart", Paul's epistles are non-fiction because they were written most especially to address a group of people particularly, the early Church community in first century Greco-Roman world. In these epistles, gender issues were also addressed. However, our concern in this essay is to show how Paul depicts women in his epistles.

Depiction of Women in Things Fall Apart and Pauline Corpus

Both in Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" and Pauline Corpus in New Testament literature, the depiction of the woman is similar. Here, I show how both literature though written within different cultural milieus depict the woman in their cultural literary understanding. For clarity of presentation, we share this section into two segments.

In the first segment, we discuss how Achebe in "Things Fall Apart" depicts women in an African Igbo (Nigerian) setting. First, the woman is pictured as a weaker humanity. In this understanding, the woman is seen as someone who is intellectually, economically, politically and physically weak. These understandings were captured in both Achebe's and Pauline writings. In Achebe's depiction in *Things Fall Apart*, the woman is intellectually weak that is why she cannot contribute meaningfully in community discussion where elders are sited to discuss political, economic and cultural matters. As such, there is no need to invite or allow her to be in such meetings even when she is elderly in age like her male counterparts. This understanding played out when Okonkwo asked his most senior wife to take custody of Ikemefuna for the community. Ikemefuna was a boy who was given to Umuofia along with a virgin as compensation for the murder of Ogbuefi Udo's wife by Mbaino's warriors when she went to their market. While the virgin was given to Udo as a replacement for his murdered wife, Ikemefuna was retained as community property. As such he was given to Okonkwo for interim custody (Achebe, 1958, chapter 2, pp. 9-11). When he finally brought Ikemefuna home and handed him over to the most senior wife for

custody he said to her with masculinity: “he belongs to the clan...so look after him. He is staying with us” (Achebe, 1958, p. 12). When she asked: “is he staying long with us? Do what you are told woman, Okonkwo thundered and stammered. When did you become one of the *ndichie* (elders) of Umuofia?” (Achebe, 1958, p. 12). For Okonkwo, a woman is not supposed to asked questions concerning the decisions of her husband or community *indichie*. By implication, in Umuofia culture, a woman has no right to query or contribute to her husband’s or *indichie* actions or discuss. The woman was also depicted as symbol of weakness by the use of the word *agbala* (untitled person). In Umuofia, a woman is not given a title no matter how hard working she may be. We can therefore say that *agbala* is a feminine attribute to a failed, lazy, coward and an untitled man like Okonkwo’s father, Unoka (Achebe, 1958, pp. 11, 21). Cowardice was seen as something synonymous with women-folks; hence, men who refused to follow the elders for the mission of sacrifice where Ikemefuna was going to be killed were regarded in sarcasm as cowards or effeminate men (Achebe, 1958, p. 47). When Okonkwo shivered and suffered guilt for killing Ikemefuna, he rather attributed such action to cowardice, a depiction that sees the woman as a coward and a weak humanity. He said to himself: “when did you become a shivering old woman, Okonkwo...you who are known in all the nine villages for your valour in war?...Okonkwo, you have become a woman indeed” (Achebe, 1958, p. 51). Achebe also depicted the disparity that exists between male and female in Umuofia when Okonkwo visited Nwakibie the wealthy man with palm wine, alligator pepper, cock and kola nut. In this visit in Nwakibie’s *obi* (hut), his two grown-up sons were allowed to sit with the elders (all men) but did not allow their mother or sisters to sit with them in the meeting at his *obi*. Nwakibie’s wives were only allowed to take palm wine and leave immediately afterwards (Achebe, 1958, pp. 15-16). Even in their economic life which was mainly agrarian, the woman was also depicted with weakness in terms of the type of crops (coco-yam, beans and cassava) she cultivates but the man who cultivates only yam is seen to be superior (Achebe, 1958, p. 18). Second, the woman is depicted as a domestically restricted humanity. No wonder Okonkwo could beat his wife violently and mercilessly just because she did not return home on time to prepare meal for him. He threw caution to the wind when he beats his wife during the week of peace, an action for which he was punished by the earth’s goddess priest (Achebe, 1958, pp. 23-24). He was not sanctioned for beating his wife but for doing it during the

sacred week meant to respect the deity of the land and their ancestors. If Okonkwo did not see his wife as someone who is exclusively saddled with domestic responsibilities, he would have gone to the kitchen to help himself out. For him, it must be the woman who should do that responsibility. In this understanding, both Chinua Achebe in things fall apart and Paul in the New Testament see the woman as someone prepared and trained for house chores.

Third, the woman is captured as a subordinate humanity. This was shown in Achebe's work in which the major character Okonkwo sanctions his son Nwoye's hesitance towards the summons of his mother and step mothers. Nwoye felt women should not be calling him too frequently to help in house chores. Okonkwo was pleased because he felt the son is becoming a man and he is taking his position as a superior person who will eventually rule over the women and the rest of his siblings upon his demise. Okonkwo "was always happy when he heard him (Nwoye) grumbling about women" a behaviour which was interpreted by his father Okonkwo as an indication that Nwoye would be able to control his women-folk in the future (Achebe, 1958, p. 42). As far as the cultural understanding of Umuofia community was concerned, "no matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule women and his children (and especially his women) he was not really a man" (Achebe, 1958, p. 42). He never corrected Nwoye's seeming unruly disposition over women including his biological mother. Rather, "Okonkwo encouraged the boys to sit with him in his *obi*, and he told them stories of the land especially masculine stories of violence and bloodshed (Achebe, 1958, p. 42). This shows clearly that in Umuofia women were seen as subordinate or inferior to men irrespective of their age and achievements. The inferiority accorded women in Okonkwo's community was further amplified in the mind of Nwoye when he regarded the tales of his own mother who was the narrator as foolish and that of the father as superior just because the father is a man (Achebe, 1958, p. 43). Even Nwoye sees himself as superior to his own mother just because the mother is a woman. Okonkwo even wished his daughter Ezinma was a boy, a wish that suggests the boy child is preferred to a female child (Achebe, 1958, pp. 51,53). Most observantly, the idea of a conquered humanity (women) is more glaring when the traditional laws of Umuofia does not give traditional title to women which was depicted with *Agbala* (Achebe, 1958, pp. 11,21). As such, no matter how hard working and result oriented a woman might be, even when she meets the major criteria

for receiving a title, the woman cannot be considered for any traditional title in the land.

Forth, the woman is depicted as man's property or inferior person. According to the customs of Umuofia people, a girl can only be accepted to have gotten married to a man after a reasonable and stipulated bride-price had been paid on her heard. This was demonstrated in Obierika's compound when he gave his daughter, Akueke's hand in marriage to a man for twenty five bags of cowries which were very expensive (Achebe, 1958, p. 58). The elders laughed at their neighbouring villages that made price-bride cheaper and murmured in disapproval over those neighbouring communities that have no well structured and stipulated amount to be paid by the suitor (*ogor*) like Umunso (Achebe, 1958, p. 58). This practice allows the man to take possession of the woman as one of his most valuable personal effects. As such, the man has exclusive authority over the woman just like Okonkwo has often demonstrated in the handling of his wives and children. In chapter ten of "Things Fall Apart," Achebe tries to change the narrative of seeing the woman as someone not regarded as man's property. If this was the true situation why did Okonkwo rule his family with iron hands? Why will Okonkwo almost kill one of his wives with his gun after much beating? Why did Okonkwo beat his other wife almost to pulp unhindered by the wives' families or even neighbours? What moral standing has Okonkwo to participate in the settlement of an issue of a husband's violence to his wife? While this narrative in chapter ten is contradictory, it is also clear that the intervention of men in the eradication of violence against women will go a long way to promote gender equality in African societies. This is rather apologetic in nature. However, everything about Okonkwo is masculinity and his relationship with his wives was that of master and subordinate, and superior and inferior, thereby depicting the woman as man's property. The only thing that could bring an end to the ownership of the woman by her husband is for the family of the woman to return her bride-price to the husband. That is why Okonkwo never came to terms with the word Nneka (mother is supreme), because all he knows is that the woman and the children belong to the man and as such, Okonkwo was not comfortable serving his exile in his maternal home-town (Achebe, 1958, pp. 106-107). Uchendu encouraged Okonkwo by educating him on the importance of mothers (women) in the family and society by showing him how mothers accommodate their children when fathers push them away, a scenario which has just happened to

Okonkwo. However, male superiority over female also surfaced in Okonkwo's mother land (Mbanta) when his uncle Uchendu's son was about to get married to his bride. Uchendu's eldest daughter Njide made the bride to swear in accordance with their customs if she is *virgo intacta*; but the groom Amikwu was not subjected to such interrogation (Achebe, 1958, p. 105). This scenario shows a clear case of gender inequality in Mbabta community. As far as Okonkwo was concerned, masculinity is strength and effeminacy is weakness. Nwoye is certainly a woman though a boy because "living fire begets cold, impotent ash" (Achebe, 1958:123,138). While Okonkwo represent the living fire, the cold and impotent ash represents Nwoye his son who has become a woman (weak).

In the second segment, we discuss how Paul depicts women in first century Greco-Roman setting in his epistles to the early Church community. Just like Achebe in "things fall apart", Paul depicted women as a subordinate humanity (Romans, 7:2-3; Ephesians, 5:21-24; 1 Timothy, 2:11). In Romans 7:2-3, Paul says: "Ἡ γὰρ ὑπανδρος γυνὴ τῷ ζῶντι ἀνδρὶ δέδετα νόμῳ· ἐὰν δὲ ἀποθάνῃ ὁ ἀνὴρ, κατήργηται ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου τοῦ ἀνδρός. Ἄρα οὖν ζῶντος τοῦ ἀνδρός μοιχαλὶς χρηματίζει, ἐὰν γένηται ἀνδρὶ ἐτέρῳ· ἐὰν δὲ ἀποθάνῃ ὁ ἀνὴρ, ἐλευθέρᾳ ἐστὶν ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου, τοῦ μὴ εἶναι αὐτὴν μοιχαλὶδα, γενομένην ἀνδρὶ ἐτέρῳ" (Greek NT: RP Byzantine Majority Text, 2005). In English, it reads: "Thus a married woman is bound by the law of the land to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress" (NRSV, 1989). This shows that the woman is more bound to the man than the man to her. The phrase δέδετα νόμῳ· (bound by law) shows it is a legal duty for a woman to be bound to her husband for life unless the man dies. Even if she left her husband while he is still alive she cannot have sex with another man. If she does, she will be regarded as μοιχαλὶς (an adulteress). This shows the far reaching extent a man owned a woman in Paul's first century Greco-Roman world. Moreover, in Ephesians, 5:21-24, Paul amplified the concept of man's superiority over a woman when he says: "ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ. Αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ὡς τῷ Κυρίῳ, ὅτι ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν κεφαλὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας, αὐτὸς σωτὴρ τοῦ σώματος. ἀλλὰ ὡς ἡ ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ, οὕτως καὶ αἱ

γυναῖκες τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἐν παντί” (Greek NT: Nestle 1904). It reads in English, thus: “wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands” (NRSV, 1989). Particularly, Paul uses the clause ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν κεφαλὴ τῆς γυναίκος (the husband is the head of the wife) in verse 23 to designate the position of the woman in marriage. To give the concept the seriousness of the matter, he equates the man’s headship to woman with Christ’s headship to the Church. The feminine noun κεφαλὴ (*kephale*) was used to show that the word was used in relation to women; meaning the man is a ruler or lord over the woman. Scholars have discussed from myriad shades of arguments. This is a venture we do not intend here. However, Desma Polydourou’s reading of Rachel Speght and John Milton in relation to paradise lost shows that even Milton’s women are not as free as his men (Polydourou, 2001, p. 22). Polydourou read Milton’s depiction of women into Paul’s notion of male superiority over female. The Eve Paul spoke about which appeared in the creation story in Genesis was a woman who lost her place of equality with her male counterpart in the Garden of Eden when she disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit. As far as Paul was concerned, the headship of the man over a woman is precipitated on two primordial bases. One of them is the creation tradition that says that man was created first before the woman. The other is the emanation of woman from man’s rib which made her wife to the man. The woman is therefore admonished that she has a duty to obey her husband. The woman’s duty is among others threefold; to bear legitimate children, to look after the home, and nurturing of family (*pietas familiae* [Cartwright, 2014]) and as such acknowledge her inferiority and carry herself as inferior (Keeble, 2002, p. 144). This gives a clear picture of man’s subjugation of the woman. This understanding is so glaring in 1 Timothy 2:11, where Paul says: “Τυνὴ ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ μαθάνετω ἐν πάσῃ ὑποταγῇ” (Greek NT: Nestle, 1904). It reads in English, thus: “let a woman learn in silence with full submission” (NRSV, 1989). Paul uses the Greek feminine noun ὑποταγή (*hypotagē*) to convey the message of the woman’s submission, subjection and obedience to man especially her husband (ἀνὴρ). On this, Paul in the New Testament and Achebe in “things fall apart did not differ. They both see women as inferior humanity.

Second, Paul depicts women as weaker and domestically restricted humanity. Particularly in 1 Timothy 2:11-14, Paul says: “Γυνὴ ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ μανθανέτω ἐν πάσῃ ὑποταγῇ· διδάσκειν δὲ γυναικὶ οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω, οὐδὲ αὐθεντεῖν ἄνδρος, ἀλλ’ εἶναι ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ. Ἀδὰμ γὰρ πρῶτος ἐπλάσθη, εἴτα Εὐα. καὶ Ἀδὰμ οὐκ ἠπατήθη, ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἐξαπατηθεῖσα ἐν παραβάσει γέγονεν” (Greek NT: Nestle 1904). In English, it reads: “Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor” (NRSV, 1989). In verse 12, it is implied that if a woman is allowed to teach (*διδάσκειν*), she will be wading authority over men (*αὐθεντεῖν ἄνδρος*). The Greek verb, *αὐθεντέω* (*authentēō*) in the present active indicative means “I domineer, govern, or have mastery over another.” In first century Greco-Roman society, women were not allowed into leadership position because they were seen as people who had weak judgement [*infirmitas consilii*], a thought expounded by Cicero later on (Cartwright, 2014). Moreover, women in ancient Roman societies “were closely identified with their perceived role in society-the duty of looking after the home and to nurture a family [*pietas familiae*]” (Cartwright, 2014). Although, the role of women in first century Greco-Roman society has been greatly contested in modern scholarship, there are evidence that classical figures like Plato submits that the woman is seen as a lesser man (Wieand, 1917, p. 379). In a parallel (similar) text, particularly in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Paul says: αἱ γυναῖκες ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις σιγάτωσαν· οὐ γὰρ ἐπιτρέπεται αὐταῖς λαλεῖν, ἀλλὰ ὑποτασσέσθωσαν, καθὼς καὶ ὁ νόμος λέγει. εἰ δέ τι μαθεῖν θέλουσιν, ἐν οἴκῳ τοὺς ἰδίους ἄνδρας ἐπερωτάτωσαν· αἰσχρὸν γάρ ἐστιν γυναικὶ λαλεῖν ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ” (Greek NT: Nestle 1904). In English, it reads thus: “women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church” (NRSV, 1989). In the above text, one of the major words that depicts the woman’s status as subjugated and domestically (*οἰκονόμος*) restricted person is *ὑποτάσσω* (*hupotassō*). In the context in which it was used, *ὑποτάσσω* means to place or rank under, to subject, to subject oneself to higher authority or to put oneself into subjugation. This concept of the woman submitting to her husband was also supported in classical cultures. For instance, “the notion of the wife’s submissive inferiority is there in

Aristotle and in the classical moralists” (Keeble, 2002, p. 144). It means Paul’s action has historical and cultural backing. For a woman to be subjugated or to remain perpetually under subjugation in the home, Church community and society show her weak status in the society. Such status puts the woman in position where she cannot even speak or fight for herself because it is masculine or patriarchal in nature and operation. Paul’s depiction of the woman here just like Achebe’s Umuofia in Africa shows that, he thinks of the woman as someone who is not capable of speaking well or leading like a man would do. The reason the woman would not speak in public especially among men as far as the culture of the people was concerned in first century Greco-Roman world was because it will be regarded as an insult or disgrace (αἰσχρός) to her husband in particular and men in general. Rather she was expected to express her opinion or questions to her husband at home (οἶκος) not in a public place like the Church (ἐκκλησίᾳ) or ὄχλος (crowd or public gathering). This shows that even in Paul’s writings the woman is seen as intellectually weak in the sense that she cannot contribute to religious or community discuss in the Church community or town or village square just like it was in Achebe’s Umuofia community. In fact, in both Pauline Roman and Achebe’s Umuofia settings, Christianity at the earliest stage (first century Christianity and in its cradle in Africa) was seen as a movement dominated by the weak such as children, slaves, the poor, women and outcasts [*osu*] (Witherington III, 1991, p. 213; Achebe, 1958, p. 125). In the novel, “Things Fall Apart”, Okonkwo sees everything associated with women as weak just as Paul depicts them as domestic people. However, when we read Paul’s stand about women in other of his writing, we are left with no option than to think that Paul seemed to be in dilemma between his believe in Galatians 3:27-29 where he admits egalitarian humanity and disrupting the culture of other people if he applies the same view in other places in the Roman province. One of the evidence of this dilemma lies within some of his exhortations that support obedience to Roman government (Romans 13) and slaves remaining in the socio-economic state they were before their conversion to Christianity as could be seen in first Corinthians 7:17-19 (Witherington III, 1991, p. 213). We can understand here, that Paul does not want to offend Roman authority. Paul took side with the existing culture of the people depending on the location of the Church community he addressed. His instruction of restricting the woman from leadership position in the Church

suggests an existing culture prior to his writing. So, a woman cannot be allowed to lead the Church community especially when men are involved.

Third, Paul depicts women as man's property or object (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5). In the Greek text, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 reads: "Τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ ἁγιασμὸς ὑμῶν, ἀπέχεσθαι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τῆς πορνείας· εἰδέναι ἕκαστον ὑμῶν τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σκεῦος κτᾶσθαι ἐν ἁγιασμῷ καὶ τιμῇ, μὴ ἐν πάθει ἐπιθυμίας, καθάπερ καὶ τὰ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ εἰδότα τὸν θεόν" (Greek NT: RP Byzantine Majority Text, 2005). The English version reads thus: "for this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication; that each one of you know how to control your own body in holiness and honour, not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God..." (NRSV, 1989). Although, this text is weaved within the context of sexual morality as it concerns Christianity, the term σκεῦος suggest an object own by someone. The word σκεῦος (*skeuos*) as used in the text means a vessel, implement, goods or household utensils. The New Revised Standard Version, wrongly translate the word σκεῦος as body (maybe genitals). The use of σκεῦος suggests that it is metaphorically used to represent the woman as object of sex owned by the man who marries her. According to Frederickson (2019, p. 244), 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5 "contains language about male sexual desire and woman as vessel that bears a striking resemblance to the philosophic discourse of the economy of sex" in its immediate setting. In verse 4, we understand the reading as: "every one of you should know how to possess his vessel (σκεῦος κτᾶσθαι) in satisfaction and honour" (Frederickson, 2019, p. 244). By this translation, it is very clear that the σκεῦος is philosophically used to mean the woman but this time around in the context of husband and wife. Just like Paul admonished in 1 Corinthians 7:2-3,9 to encourage those who cannot abstain from sex to get married and perform such act within marriage, this text (1 Thessalonians 4:4) also gives such an imagery but the woman seemed to be presented as the object of such satisfaction. Prior to Paul, a classical philosopher, Plato shows that the woman was man's property. Plato puts it thus: "*orthe paidon te kai ktesis kai chreia*-to possess and make use of children and women" (Frederickson, 2019:244). So, when Paul says: "possess his vessel, he reiterates centuries-old concept of women as containers and the binary opposition of male and female" (Frederickson, 2019, p. 244 citing Reeder 1995, p. 195-297). In another parallel reading in 1 Peter 3:7, the writer takes the understanding of the woman as a container a step further than Paul when he depicts the woman as a "weaker vessel"

(ἀσθενεστέρω κεύει). The woman is captured here as someone who may not be able to withstand pains and sexual desire as much as the man would. As such, the man must learn to satisfy her sexual desires adequately to avoid her fallen into lust. Here, the woman and her genital could be understood as container (receptacle) of the man's semen. Is this the understanding of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5? The answer may be yes to the extent that both Paul and Peter made use of the word σκεῦος but in different context. While the former used it as an object of chastity, the later used it in terms of care. In any case, Paul did not differ in the understanding of classical philosophers like Plato and Aristotle who showed the woman as man's possession in Greco-Roman antiquity. The depiction of the woman as man's property appears in both Paul's and Achebe's writings. For instance, Okonkwo's disposition to women and female children is very glaring in the way he treated his wives and female children in the novel.

African Womanist Criticism of the depiction of women in things fall apart and Pauline corpus

The need to explore instances of women's leadership in African context has in recent times shaped various initiatives;

such as the United Nations (UN) African Women Leaders Network, African Women in Science and Engineering, Leading Women of Africa, 2019 Forbes Women Africa Leading Women Summit, the African and European Union's recent "Women in Power" event (2018), the associated Declaration and Africa's Agenda 2063, the African Union's Women's Decade, Women and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the UN's Commission on the Status of Women (Poltera, 2019, p. 3).

Topmost in these initiatives, is the "recognition of the need to acknowledge and redress longstanding gender inequality and inequity, oppression of women, power imbalances, and patriarchal norms and systems" (Poltera, 2019, p. 3). This has intensely provoked womanist scholarship in recent times in which this present paper is not an exception. Here, drawing from the successes of some distinguished African women, we flaw Paul's and Achebe's depiction of the woman as a weaker humanity, domestically restricted humanity, conquered (subordinate) humanity, and man's property. As such, we present three of such African women.

The first to be discussed here is the iconic woman from Nigeria called Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. This name has become very popular in the world in recent time. Ngozi was born June 13, 1954 in Ogwashi Uku, in one the former Midwest province, formerly Bendel State; now Delta State, Nigeria. She attended Queen's School, Enugu; St. Anne's School, Molete, Ibadan; and the International School Ibadan. Her quest for further studies took her to the United States of America in 1973 as a teenager to study at Harvard University and graduated *magna cum laude* with an AB in Economics in 1976. In 1981, she bagged a Ph.D in regional economics and development from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with the thesis Credit policy, rural financial markets, and Nigeria's agricultural development (see Okonjo-Iweala, 1981). Consequently she received an international fellowship from the American Association of University Women (AAUW), which supported her doctoral studies. Currently, she is the Director-General of the World Trade Organization since March 1, 2021, making her the first woman and the first African to hold the highly exalted office. She also sits on the boards of Standard Chartered Bank, Twitter, Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, and the African Risk Capacity (ARC). Previously, she spent a 25-year career at the World Bank as a development economist, scaling the ranks to the number two position of managing director, operations (2007-2011). She also served two terms as finance minister of Nigeria (2003-2006, 2011-2015) under President Olusegun Obasanjo and President Goodluck Jonathan respectively. The achievement of Ngozi flaws any depiction or cultural beliefs that the woman is a subordinate or conquered humanity or weaker humanity or domestically restricted humanity because her testimonial has shown that the woman is strong, intelligent, vibrant and productive and can compete with her male counterparts on a level play ground. As such, she is not inferior to any man. She is intelligent and strong enough to lead the world economic affairs. This is a testimony to the reality that the female child is as important as the male ones. They deserve respect and quality education like their male counterparts.

The next African woman to be discussed here is Joyce Banda (nee Joyce Hilda Ntila). She was born on April 12, 1950 in Malemia, a village in the Zomba District of Nyasaland (now Malawi). She bagged a certificate from Cambridge School, a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Early Childhood Education from Columbus University through its distance education institution, a Bachelor of Social Studies in Gender Studies from Atlantic International

University through distance learning institution and a Diploma in Management of Non Government Organization from the International Labour Organization (ILO) Centre in Turin, Italy. Most importantly, she served as Malawi's fourth president (2012-2014), becoming the first woman to serve as head of state anywhere in Southern Africa. She was the second woman to become president of a country on the African continent. Previously, she has served as a Member of Parliament, Minister of Gender and Child Welfare (2004-2006), Foreign Minister (2006–2009) and vice-president between 2009 and 2012 (see Denzer, 2020). It is also evident here that Joyce Banda does not fall into any description of the African woman as a subordinate or conquered humanity or weaker humanity or domestically restricted humanity because her achievements just like Ngozi has shown that the woman is strong, intelligent, vibrant and productive and can compete with her male counterparts on a level play ground. It also shows that women can successfully lead the African continent into development.

Another African woman to be considered here is Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (nee Ellen Eugenia Johnson). She was born on October 29, 1938 in Monrovia to a Gola father and Kru-German mother. She had her education at the College of West Africa and completed her education in the United States, where she studied at Madison Business College and Harvard University. Afterwards, she returned to Liberia to work in William Tolbert's government as Deputy Minister of Finance from 1971 to 1974. She also served in the World Bank in the Caribbean and Latin America. Later on, she also served in Liberia as Minister of Finance (1979-1980). Most importantly, she served as the 24th President of Liberia from 2006 to 2018. By this record, Ellen was the first elected female head of state in Africa. Moreover, Ellen won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011, in recognition of her efforts to bring women into the peacekeeping process. She has received other numerous awards for her excellent leadership. In June 2016, Ellen was elected as the Chair of the Economic Community of West African States, making her the first woman to hold the position since it was created. Looking at Ellen's achievements in local and international scene, can she be described as inferior or weak or domestically restricted person? As the first woman to head Liberia as president and as someone who has served in various capacities in the World Bank and Economic Community of West African States, it means she is strong, intelligent and professionally productive. She has proven that she is not inferior to her male counterparts even in a patriarchal world.

Conclusion

This essay has shown that Pauline corpus in New Testament literature and Chinua Achebe in “Things Fall Apart” depict the women-folks in their socio-cultural milieus as weaker humanity, domestically restricted humanity, conquered (subordinate) humanity, and man’s property. It has also shown that in spite of the divergence that exists between Paul’s and Achebe’s literary genres, similarity exists in their depiction of women in their various societies. This essay has also shown that patriarchy and masculinity in ancient Greco-Roman and African societies discriminate against and deprive women of equal rights with their male counterparts. The essay has also shown from the achievements of distinguished African women that the depiction of the woman as a weak, subordinate and unintelligent, or incapable person is not her true representation. As such, societies that still think in the above direction need to have a rethink with the intention of giving men and women equal space or opportunities. All the women mentioned above cannot be seen to fit into such descriptions of weakness and low intelligence because they have competed with their male counterparts in local and international scenes and emerged successful. It is worthy of note here that the women mentioned in this essay are few among many which this piece of work could not accommodate due to space. Suffice it to say here that a lot of African women have proven indeed that what men can do, a woman can do even better. A lot of African women are still doing better in school, leadership, business, profession and even in the religious space better than their male counterparts when given a level play ground. While I do not advocate role-reversal, I advocate equal respect and opportunity for the African woman. We condemn violence against women and children in Africa and beyond irrespective of their cultures or traditions.

References:

- Achebe, Chinua. (1958). *Things Fall Apart*. Harlow: William Heinemann limited. Republished in 2008 by Pearson Education Limited.
- Andrews, Penelope E. (1998). "Striking the Rock: Confronting Gender Equality in South Africa", *Michigan Journal of Race and Law* 3 (307): 307-339.
- Aune, David E. (2010). *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.
- Balogun, Oladele A. (2010). "Proverbial Oppression of Women in Yoruba African Culture: A Philosophical Overview", *Thought and Practice* 2 (1): 21-36.
- Beghtol, C. (2001). "The Concept of Genre and Its Characteristics", *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* (Special Section): 17-19.
- Betz, H.D. (1975). "The Literary Composition and Function of Paul's Letter to the Galatians," *New Testament Studies* 21: 353-379.
- Black, J. E., Capps, S. C., & Barnes, J. L. (2017). "Fiction, Genre Exposure, and Moral Reality", *Psychology of Aesthetics Creativity and the Arts* 12 (3). DOI:10.1037/aca0000116.
- Cartwright, Mark. (2014). "The Role of Women in the Roman World", *World History Encyclopedia*. Available online at <https://www.ancient.eu/article/659/the-role-of-women-in-the-roman-world/> Accessed March 18, 2021.
- Classen, Joachim C. (1992). "St. Paul's Epistles and Ancient Greek and Roman Rhetoric", *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 10 (4): 319-344.
- David Lawson, D., Dubin, A. & Mwambene, L. (2019). *The Nordic African Institute's Policy note* 2: 3-7.
- Denzer, LaRay. (2020). "Joyce Banda", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 8 April. Available online at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Joyce-Banda>. Accessed March 19, 2021.
- Ellis, E.E. (1961). *Paul and his Recent Interpreters*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Frederickson, David E. (2019). "Hellenistic Philosophy and Culture", *The Oxford Handbook of New Testament, Gender, and Sexuality*, edited by Benjamin H. Dunning. New York: Oxford University Press, 239-256.
- Goudsblom, J. (2000). "Non-fiction as a literary genre", *Publishing Research Quarterly* 16:5-12. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-000-1001-9>.
- Keeble, N.H. (2002). *The Cultural Identity of Seventeenth-Century Woman: A Reader*. London and New York: Routledge.
- McGuire, Martin R. (1960). "Letters and Letter Carriers in Christian Antiquity", *The Classical World* 53(5): 148-153.
- Mubangizi, John C. (2016). "An African Perspective on Some Gender-Related Cultural Practices that Violate Human Rights and Perpetuate Women's Poverty", *Journal of Social Sciences* 47 (1): 68-78. DOI: 10.1080/09718923.2016.11893545.

- Ngaba, Sindiso. (1995). "Eliminating Discrimination against Women", *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 27 (Reproductive Rights): 81-89.
- Okonjo-Iweala, Ngozi. (1981). *Credit policy, rural financial markets, and Nigeria's agricultural development (Thesis)*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. hdl:1721.1/46400. OCLC 08096642.
- Orel, H. (1995). "Didactic Elements in the Historical Novel", in *The Historical Novel from Scott to Sabatini*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 28-36.
https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230371491_4.
- Poltera, Jacqui. (2019). "Exploring examples of women's leadership in African contexts, *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 33 (1):3-8. DOI: 10.1080/10130950.2019.1602977.
- Polydorou, Desma. (2001). "Gender and Spiritual Equality in Marriage: A Dialogic Reading of Rachel Speght and John Milton", *Milton Quarterly* 35 (1): 22-32.
- Porter, Stanley E. (1995). "Pauline Authorship and the Pastoral Epistles: Implications for Canon," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 5: 105-123.
- Randolph, Richards, E. (2004). *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection*. Downers Grove, IL; Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press.
- Reeder, E.E. ed., (1995). *Pandora: Women in Classical Greece*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Rimmon-Kenan, S. (2003). *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Shroder, Maurice Z. (1963). "The Novel as a Genre", *The Massachusetts Review* 4 (2): 291-308.
- Ssenyonjo, Manisuli. (2007). "Culture and the Human Rights of Women in Africa: Between Light and Shadow", *Journal of African Law* 51 (1): 39-67.
- Stowers, Stanley K. (1986). *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Szink, Terrence L. (2006). "Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews", in *How the New Testament Came to Be: The Thirty-fifth Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*, edited by Kent P. Jackson and Frank F. Judd Jr. Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), 243-259.
- United Nations News, (2021). Endemic violence against women 'cannot be stopped with a vaccine'—WHO chief. Available at <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086812>. Accessed March 14.
- Wieand, Helen E. (1917). "The Position of Women in the Late Roman Republic. Part I", *The Classical Journal* 12 (6): 378-392.
- Witherington III, Ben. (1991). *Women in the Earliest Churches*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.